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ETHICAL DECISION MAKING:  
THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADERS  
IN WESTERN KENTUCKY

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

By  
Greta Greenwade Jones

December 2015

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING:  
THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN LEADERS  
IN WESTERN KENTUCKY

Date Recommended 11-5-15

*Randall Capps*

Dr. Randall Capps, Director of Dissertation

*Anthony R. Sanders*

Dr. Anthony R. Sanders

*Alma J. Hall*

Dr. Alma J. Hall

*E. J. A.* 11/24/15

Dean, Graduate School

Date

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work in memory of the following great cloud of witnesses:

Helen Joiner Greenwade, my beloved mother whose ethical values and behaviors embodied the epitome of Jesus Christ, her personal Savior. Her eldest grandchild, Willie Snell, passionately stated that she was dealt a complicated hand; however, through her faith and dependence on God, she lovingly played that hand... Well done! Also, I'm grateful to my father, Rev. Fred Greenwade, Sr., for his influence in my life.

Theodore "Rat" Joiner, my maternal grandfather, who always found ways to take lemons and make lemonade. I often think of his resolve throughout the changes, challenges, and celebrations of my life, and I have also tried to take my lemons and make peach flavored lemonade out of them!

Gloria Greenwade Snell, my beloved oldest sibling who always encouraged me and who also told me that I could be President of the United States. I truly miss her and the long daily telephone conversations we had. And finally, to my ancestors, both known and unknown. The following excerpt from Maya Angelou's 1994 poem, *Still I Rise*, appropriately expresses my thoughts:

Out of the huts of history's shame, I rise  
Up from a past that's rooted in pain, I rise  
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,  
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.  
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear, I rise  
Bringing the gift that my ancestors gave,  
I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise, I rise, I rise!

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

My sincere appreciation also goes to the following individuals:

To my family and especially my daughters, Brandy and Jerrece, I thank God for His divine providence in placing us in the same family. Uncle Wesley, I am grateful and blessed by the practical and spiritual guidance you provide.

Gwen Parker, you have been a wonderful, supportive friend. I truly appreciate all the fellowship meals we enjoyed. They often provided the respite from research I so desperately needed at times. Thank you for being a friend!

Regina Kelly, Karen Howell, Andrea Perkins, Gwen Mills, Sarah Allen, and my sorority sisters of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, I am grateful to God for strategically placing each of you in my life. Also to Pastor C. E. Timberlake and First Street Missionary Baptist Church, Hopkinsville, Kentucky the spiritual enrichment I receive is invaluable.

To Gaye Jolly Pearl, for the professional and compassionate assistance you have provided for me while progressing through the Doctoral Program and to officials at Western Kentucky University for the privilege of completing this degree.

Wymond Baker, Ronald Parham, and Charles Turner, from the beginning of this doctoral journey you all believed in me and started calling me Dr. Jones. Your confidence in me helped to provide the motivation I needed on those many occasions when I wanted to quit and give up on my dream, Thank you!

James Foster, we have overcome many challenges, and you have truly been the wind beneath my wings. Your unwavering love and support have been instrumental in my completing the Doctoral Program. I am thankful for you and I love you!

To my spiritual mentor, the below excerpt from Patricia Watkins' 2009 poem, *The Jewel of my Crown*, expresses my gratitude for the guidance:

There is a wise old woman, who is known near and far. She is the type of person who helps you discover who you are. Basking in her presence, you'll soon be upward bound, she is the jewel of my crown. I'll tell you who this lady is; her name is Mrs. Sam Ella Brown.

Finally, to this great dissertation committee of professional scholars:

Dr. Randall Capps, my chairperson, who has been with me since the inception of this wonderful and challenging educational journey. I gained a great deal of knowledge in your leadership classes and will be forever grateful to you for providing me with exciting learning opportunities to travel abroad to Malaysia and France. While in France, I visited Paris and later named my Yorkie, Paris Frances.

Dr. Anthony Sanders, your persistence in helping me focus on the common thread that ran through my study helped me continuously adjust and refocus on the research. I truly appreciate you for the many ways you always inspired me both scholarly and spiritually.

Dr. Alma Hall, thank you for never allowing me to settle into mediocracy. As I endeavored to make the study participants' voices heard, you truly helped me discover my own voice. Often, your excitement for this research reignited my passion and desire to forge on and make a notable contribution to the body of knowledge regarding the phenomenon of this study.

## CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	ix
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	x
<b>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Significance of the Study .....	3
Methodological Approach .....	5
Delimitations of the Study .....	6
Limitations of the Study .....	7
Interview Questions .....	7
Summary .....	8
<b>CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	10
Introduction .....	10
Descriptions of Leadership and Leaders .....	13
Leadership and Power .....	19
Ethics and Decision Making .....	22
Ethical/Moral Philosophy Perspectives .....	31
Diversity and Corporate Boards in America .....	32
The African American Woman – A Historical Perspective .....	35
Leadership and the African American Woman .....	38
Summary .....	49
<b>CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY</b> .....	52
Restatement of the Problem and Purpose .....	52

Interview Questions .....	54
Description of the Research Design.....	55
Participants and the Selection Process .....	55
Procedures and Data Collection.....	56
Data Analysis Strategy.....	57
Methodological Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations .....	58
Ethical Considerations .....	58
Veracity of the Data .....	59
Summary .....	59
<b>CHAPTER IV: RESULTS .....</b>	<b>61</b>
Introduction.....	61
Data Analyses and Findings.....	63
Section I – Participants’ Demographic Information .....	67
Section II – Significant Statements from Interview Questions 1, 4, and 5.....	69
Section III – Significant Statements from Interview Questions 2 and 3.....	85
Section IV – Significant Statements from Interview Question 6.....	96
Summary .....	105
<b>CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>106</b>
Introduction.....	106
Summary of Findings.....	106
Age .....	107
Ethnicity .....	107
Marital Status .....	107



Number of Dependents .....	108
Education Level .....	108
Occupation (Employment Sector).....	108
Years of Leadership Experience .....	108
Themes .....	109
Theme 1: Professing Christian.....	109
Theme 2: Ethical Foundation from Parents and/or Grandparents .....	110
Theme 3: Mentorship.....	110
Theme 4: Values have not Changed throughout Career .....	110
Theme 5: Must Prove Myself as an African American .....	111
Theme 6: Must Work Harder than White Workers .....	111
Theme 7: Few or No Other Minorities in Leadership in My Agency .....	112
Summary of Themes .....	113
Limitations of the Study.....	115
Discussion .....	116
Implications and Suggestions for Further Research .....	121
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	123
<b>APPENDIX A: Correspondence to Participants</b> .....	132
<b>APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Document</b> .....	133
<b>APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol</b> .....	135

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participants' Demographics .....	65
Table 2. Themes Derived from Participant Interviews .....	66

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Greta Greenwade Jones

December 2015

136 Pages

Directed by: Randall Capps, Anthony Sanders, and Alma Hall

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Western Kentucky University

The purpose of the phenomenological qualitative study was to determine the way in which 10 African American women leaders in organizations in Western Kentucky made difficult decisions based on their ethical values. African American. The constructs reviewed in the study include ethics, decision making, leadership, and African American women. Empirical Phenomenology was used as the methodological approach for this qualitative study in order to understand the lived experiences that shaped the ethical values in the workplaces among the women. According to the findings, the seven overarching themes that emerged from the participant narratives are: (1) professing Christian, (2) ethical foundation from parents and/or grandparents, (3) mentorship, (4) values have not changed throughout career, (5) must prove myself as an African American, (6) must work harder than White workers, and (7) few or no other minorities in leadership in my agency.

Due to the limited research available regarding American women, recommendations are made for further research on various topics regarding African American women, as well as women from other ethnic groups.

## **CHAPTER I: STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

### **Introduction**

Leadership is said to be a fundamental element of the human condition; therefore, wherever people exist, leadership exists (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). Leaders should be ethical people with high moral codes who also are effective in their ability to lead and influence groups of individuals to achieve common goals. The dictionary provides a vague definition of “leadership” as the office or position of a leader (Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, *n.d.*). Fitch (2009) described leadership as a moral activity built upon virtues with one such virtue being responsibility. According to Fitch, responsibility refers to the general sense of expectations in a given role one will perform as a morally responsible agent. Additionally, responsibility means the decisions will not be arbitrary but will involve due deliberation of the circumstances and the values that apply to the situation, as well as the care of persons involved.

Conversely, Ciulla (2003) indicated that the quality of leadership depends upon the ethics of the means and ends of a leader’s actions. Consider Robin Hood and the unethical manner in which he stole from the wealthy and gave the plunder to the poor. If Robin Hood is considered to be a leader, does the means he used (taking from the rich) justify the ends (giving to the poor)? One may question whether Robin Hood’s moral code was operable when he made conscious decisions of stealing from a prosperous group in order to help impoverished citizens. The poor in this situation may have viewed him as a good-hearted and effective leader, while others, specifically the rich, may not have viewed him as a leader at all; on the contrary, they may have considered him a criminal.

Further, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, former President Jimmy Carter possessed great personal integrity; however, during his presidency he was considered by many to be ineffective and, therefore, a poor leader. After his presidency, he embarked on other leadership endeavors in which he experienced measured success (Ciulla, 2003). Of late, another former President, Bill Clinton demonstrated reckless, unethical behavior in his extra-marital affair with Monica Lewinsky (Hackman & Johnson, 2009).

Ciulla (2003) questioned characteristics that constitute a good leader. He further investigated whether or not a leader could be both ethical and effective simultaneously. A review of numerous resources on leaders and leadership has revealed a great number of characteristics that personify noble or ideal leaders. The context in which the leader operates often denotes the differences in typical characteristics that which may be deemed ideal leadership; e.g., relative to a religious leader, kindness and consideration may be favorable attributes, whereas a military leader's prevailing characteristics may include toughness, firmness, and courage. According to "Leadership is not management" (2010), the list describing good leaders includes resilience, passionate, trustworthy, and forward thinking; it also refers to management as the hardware and leadership as software. Hackman and Johnson (2009) contended that the list of adjectives to describe aspects of leaders and leadership is infinite, yet some descriptors are consistent regardless of the leader's setting. They conducted a study of 15,000 managers and listed descriptive words and phrases that highlighted the many attributes of leaders. Words such as honesty, forward looking, inspiring, and competent emerged high on the list. Integrity and exercise of good judgment in decision making ranked high on the list as well.

The *Merriam-Webster* online-dictionary (*n.d.*) defined “ethics” as the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty an obligation. Fitch (2009) explained ethics as the philosophical study of morality. Further research on ethics has sought to explain the reason individuals behave in a manner consistent with generally accepted norms of morality, as well as the reason they sometimes violate those norms (Colquitt, LePine, & Wesson, 2009). The ethical behavior of the leader of any organization has considerable impact on the ethical behavior of others in the group, as leaders set the moral tone in the work environment. Effective, ethical leaders represent a critical force for successful organizations and are necessary for creating and maintaining vital and viable organizations (Bennis & Nanus, 2007).

### **Significance of the Study**

A comprehensive review of journal articles, dissertations, and other relevant published literature on topics such as ethics, leadership, decision making, and African American women has, yielded a plethora of related research; however, no studies were found that explored the lived experiences of African American women leaders in Western Kentucky to determine the way in which they make ethical decisions in their workplaces (Ciulla, 2003; Colquitt et al., 2009; Ferrell, Fraedrich, & Ferrell, 2002; Fitch, 2009; Hackman & Johnson, 2009; Seltzer, 2009). Additionally, Seltzer (2009) observed and confirmed that the limited studies and gaps in research specifically excluded the ethical views of African American women. Seltzer included in his definition of African American women that they are Americans of African ancestry who have faced adversity and race-based stereotypes in their struggle to advance culturally, socially, economically, and politically. Sanders (2005) investigated perceptions of efficacy pertaining to

Kentucky school-based council members and whether differences exist between minority and non-minority members regarding their personal council experiences. In the study, Sanders defined the term “minority” as people of color known as Black or African American and focused his research on that ethnic group. Similarly, for the purpose of this phenomenological inquiry, African American women are the primary focus of the study, and no other minority group or gender is examined or discussed in any great detail.

According to a 2014 report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), women’s participation in labor force activities has greatly expanded since the end of World War II. In addition, among women ages 25 to 64 in the labor force, the proportion who held a college degree more than tripled from 1970 to 2012. In 2014, the annual averages of employed women in the United States in management, professional, and related occupations consisted of 42.6% White, 34.3% Black or African American, 46.8% Asian, and 25.9% Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. As more women obtain key leadership positions that require added decision making, the ethics issues become more pertinent (Albosta, 2000). The number of women in prison who were sentenced to more than one year increased by 1,900 offenders (up 2%) in 2014 from 104,300 in 2013 to 106,200 in 2014 (U. S. Bureau of Justice Statistics [BJS]).

This study outlines ethical themes and patterns in ethical decision making that emerged from narratives of the participants through collection and analysis of information from a diverse group of African American women in various leadership positions in organizations in Western Kentucky (Seltzer, 2009). The study also contributes to the current knowledge base of ethical decision making, as it provides a link between theory and practice that could assist leaders in any field in terms of ethical

decision making (Fitch, 2009). The study is important to the body of knowledge as a result of a comprehensive investigation of existing sources, because limited data were found to review. Data from the study will be available for future researchers seeking information on the topic. The study is expected to contribute to the body of existing knowledge of ethical decision making as it examines a group of participants who have not traditionally been researched in this manner. This qualitative study not only adds to the existing body of literature, but it provides specific outcomes that give a voice to this underrepresented group of African American women (Creswell, 2013).

The manner in which a leader acts and thinks influences individuals internal and external to the organization. In order to effectively lead the organization, the leader must make decisions and model behaviors that are ethical in nature. While leadership and ethics could be considered topics of a subjective nature, Fitch (2009) insisted that they are relevant issues of importance in every organization. In this phenomenological qualitative study, the lived experiences or practices of African American women who are leaders of their respective organizations are explored and highlighted to determine the way in which they make ethical decisions (Bruno, 2004). The various agencies that employ these women leaders are located within the western region of Kentucky.

### **Methodological Approach**

The phenomenon for this study is “*ethical decision making*,” and the exploration was conducted with a heterogeneous group of 10 African American women employed in leadership positions within organizations in Western Kentucky who have experienced this phenomenon in their work environment (Creswell, 2013). The participants were



asked to describe difficult decisions they encountered over the course of their careers and whether their ethical or organizations' values impacted the outcomes of those decisions.

Empirical Phenomenology is the methodological approach for this qualitative study. This framework was chosen because it focuses less on the researcher's interpretations and more on understanding the essence of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). This holistic approach searches for essence and meaning in the personal accounts of stories shared by participants as they provide personal descriptions of their ethical decision making. The open-ended interview questions reflect the interest of the researcher, who views the participants' experiences and behaviors pertaining to ethical decision making practices as inseparable (Moustakas, 1994). The use of Empirical Phenomenology provides a concrete focus on which to build a solid and coherent study. The use of this theoretical framework increases the probability of the research making a contribution to the field involving ethical decision making (Bryant, 2004).

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations of the study include the following:

1. The participants' perceptions of their behavior in the decision-making process are explored through interviews and discussions based on ethical dilemmas they have encountered, rather than through the researcher's observations of their actual behaviors (Bruno, 2004).
2. Participants could be overly concerned with the researcher's personal opinion of them if they have had instances in which they did not feel they acted

ethically in specific decision-making situations. This could create transparency issues in providing complete and honest responses.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations of the study include the following:

1. Ethics and leadership are subjective constructs with many definitions based on a review of literature (Fitch, 2009).
2. A limited amount of research information was available for review in terms of the particular population of African American women in leadership positions in organizations in Kentucky as a whole and Western Kentucky specifically. The limited population does not provide a complete picture of African American women in leadership positions in Western Kentucky. The information collected may not be true for other African American women leaders in Western Kentucky or other geographical areas, and the results may not be representative elsewhere (Fitch, 2009).

### **Interview Questions**

This study addresses the central research question: How do African American women who hold leadership positions in organizations in Western Kentucky describe their ethical decision-making experiences? Exploratory research questions consist of the following:

1. Tell me about some difficult decisions you have made over the course of your career?
2. Can you tell me about some of your ethical values?
  - a. What are the foundations of those beliefs?

- b. Have your values changed throughout your career?
3. What are some of your organization's values?
4. Earlier you described several difficult decisions you have made. Discuss whether your decisions were influenced by your personal values or by your organization's values.
5. Did any of those decisions compromise your values in order to avoid negative consequences?
  - a. Have you had other times in which you were tempted to compromise your values?
  - b. What was the outcome?
6. Please share anything else that would help me to better understand your ethical decision-making process as a leader?

The following demographic information will be collected and recorded in participant narratives: age range, race/ethnicity, marital status, number of dependents, highest level of education completed, occupation, and years in position. To assure participants' information is kept confidential and data does not identify them, they will be asked to read and sign an Informed Consent Form.

### **Summary**

According to Fitch (2009), leadership and ethics are considered subjective in nature. A stroll through any bookstore or an Internet search of the term "leadership" yields an abundance of sources describing various descriptions of the term. Leaders are said to influence groups of people to achieve common goals. Despite the subjectivity of the word, leaders who maintain high moral values and ethics are vital to any organization

(Hall, 2009). Ongoing and challenging issues and problems faced by organizations are not resolved without effective leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Fitch posited that ethics deals with the philosophical study of morality. Ethical leaders are necessary in order to create and maintain vital and viable organizations. Due to the impact of leaders on organizations, the leaders' behavior, whether ethical or immoral, can greatly influence the behaviors of individuals and groups within the work environment (Bennis & Nanus, 2007).

Decision making is an integral part of leaders' responsibilities. Their ethical decisions are likely to mirror the overall character and philosophies of the organization. Adherence to agency procedures and principles does not necessarily produce straightforward answers to ethical dilemmas. As the leader's actions can have profound and far reaching influences on individuals associated with the organization, it is imperative that the leader make decisions and model behaviors that are ethical in nature (Fitch, 2009).

An examination of relevant literature on African American women revealed no studies that have explored the ethical decision-making practices of African American women leaders in Western Kentucky. In a study conducted by Seltzer (2009), limited studies and gaps in research were noted regarding the ethical views of African American women. As a result, this study examines a group who has not traditionally been studied in this manner and, therefore adds to the existing body of literature by providing specific outcomes that give a voice to this underrepresented group (Creswell, 2013).

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines relevant literature in order to interpret the constructs of leadership, ethics, and decision making relative to the daily responsibilities of the African American women leaders who are the focus of the study. An inspection of resources on the aforementioned topics as a whole yielded an abundance of related research; however, no studies were found that explored the lived experiences of African American women leaders in Western Kentucky to determine the way in which they make ethical decisions in their workplaces. Current research reviewed for this study has explored the phenomenon of ethical decision making, and the data collected through participant interviews adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding ethics, leadership, decision-making, and African American women. The cohesiveness and interconnectedness among the leadership, ethics, and decision-making constructs are sustained throughout the study (Devore, 2006).

Daily headline news reveals that organizational leaders are facing numerous major challenges such as corporate malfeasance. Incidences of moral dilemmas have grown to epic proportions. Public trust is undermined by some leaders who lack integrity and are without a solid sense of ethical veracity (Bennis, 1994). Scandals involving the unethical behaviors of various leaders in business and corporate cultures can undermine public trust. Incidents such as financial kickbacks, conflict of interests, fraudulent acts, gross negligence, or violation of company policies are frequently reported in the media (Fitch, 2009). On a daily basis, leaders are bombarded with situations and circumstances that require them to make numerous decisions. Leaders of all types of organizations

encounter a variety of challenging situations within their agencies that require them to address a plethora of moral dilemmas. No leader is exempt from dealing with a barrage of ethical issues in the work environment.

Regardless of the extent to which a leader deliberates and considers various situational aspects, the final decision often is not cheerfully accepted by all concerned parties. While leaders must consider subordinates and superiors, it is imperative that they also consider how their personal beliefs and values impact personal decision making. Leaders who maintain high moral values and ethics are vital to any organization (Hall, 2009). Sergiovanni (1992) indicated that leaders likely have to find a resolution to address competing imperatives such as the managerial and the moral. Present problems are not solved without successful organizations, and these organizations cannot be successful without effective leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 2007). Chang (2013) contended that the greatness of some organizations can be attributed to loyal and bold teams, not always due to one exceptional leader. Furthermore, resilience can come from individuals throughout the agency as opposed to only one man or woman who serves as the official leader.

Historically, the preponderance of work in the field of leadership has not addressed gender as an important concern or considered the experiences of women framing the research (Fine, 2009). However, women have been at the forefront in history and have made noteworthy contributions in organizations throughout the United States. The experiences of countless courageous women leaders and their decisive actions in various settings have helped to create and enhance their respective communities. Christensen (2005) identified beneficial value in studying the manner in which women

leaders reason and persistently and logically set goals to identify and solve problems in order to right organizational and societal ills.

Sandberg (2013) asserted that women's voices continue to be unequally heard in many decisions affecting their lives, as evidenced by the fact that, after 30 years of women comprising 50% of college graduates in America, the majority of government and industry leadership positions are held by men. Hall (1992) conducted a study of images and stories of women in leadership. Among other issues, the study probed into factors involving the decision-making practices of women, as well as how they enacted societal changes. Hall affirmed that an understanding of the role of images involving present and future women leaders would be worthy of examination. These leaders encounter a myriad of organizational situations in which they make decisions; therefore, in order to gain a broader perspective of their decision making practices, attention should be given to the voices of women in leadership positions. According to Fine (2009), women's voices and experiences have traditionally been excluded from the academic dialogue on leadership. Conversely, the absence or fragmentary input of women insofar as their ongoing contributions to the study of leadership negatively impacts historical data available for review.

Gilligan (1982) explored the early adult years of college students' identity and moral development and correlated their life choices regarding their view of the morality of their experiences and the moral conflicts they encountered. In another study, Gilligan interviewed 29 pregnant women who were considering abortion. The premise of that study involved the relationship between experience and thought and the role of conflict in development. Gilligan noted that both studies expanded the usual design of research on

moral judgment. Rather than focusing on resolving problems presented to them, participants were asked to define moral problems and experiences they construed as moral conflicts in their lives. In summary, Gilligan indicated that research on women's experiences could provide a basis to generate new theories by incorporating views from the lives of both genders.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited sexual discrimination in employment. The integral contributions women have made to the American workforce have consequently gained respect and attention. Despite decades of increasing representation of women in the workforce, they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. As a result, Fine (2009) conducted a narrative survey that included 15 women leaders. The survey explored the women leaders' broad conversational representations of leadership, and the narratives revealed two themes that created a moral dialogue of leadership: making a positive contribution to the world, and behaving ethically. According to Fine, the findings suggested purpose and scene should be added to the dimensions of leadership, and the dimensions should be subject to ethical consideration. The study also suggested a model of leader ethics should be developed based on a feminist ethic of care.

### **Descriptions of Leadership and Leaders**

An Internet search of the topics of leadership and leaders yielded an abundance of entries that described many characteristics of the terms. Both individuals and management scholars have their own perceptions and theories associated with leadership. In essence, leadership alludes to control, influence, ability, and authority and is a way of focusing and motivating a group of individuals to achieve organizational objectives.



Leadership also involves being responsible for the group as a whole. Equally as important, the leader can positively or negatively impact the performance, accomplishments, satisfaction, and motivation of a group by offering rewards or punishments for performance (“Rules in leadership,” 2003).

Leaders should be a key source of ethical guidance for employees. Yet, little empirical research focuses on an ethical dimension of leadership. We propose social learning theory as a theoretical basis for understanding ethical leadership and offer a constitutive definition of the ethical leadership construct. In seven interlocking studies, we investigate the viability and importance of this construct. We develop and test a new instrument to measure ethical leadership, examine the proposed connections of ethical leadership with other constructs in a nomological network, and demonstrate its predictive validity for important employee outcomes. Specifically, ethical leadership is related to consideration behavior, honesty, trust in the leader, interactional fairness, socialized charismatic leadership (as measured by the idealized influence dimension of transformational leadership), and abusive supervision, but is not subsumed by any of these. Finally, ethical leadership predicts outcomes such as perceived effectiveness of leaders, followers' job satisfaction and dedication, and their willingness to report problems to management.

(Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005, p. 117)

Due to the idiosyncratic manner in which leader, leadership, and ethics have been described by various researchers and authors, several descriptive words and phrases are

identified to define characteristics of these terms (Fitch 2009). Leaders are said to influence groups of individuals to achieve common goals. They also are expected to make positive contributions through teamwork and open communication with subordinates (Fine, 2009). Conversely, Archard (2013) viewed leadership as a learned experience that involves an active process of working with others. Focus group discussions were conducted that revealed participants' views of leadership as the positive influence over others in which the leader often inspires others while leading by example. Leaders' perceptions and actions typically have a positive or negative affect on individuals internally and externally associated with an organization. Hackman and Johnson (2009) insisted that a means to observe the unique characteristics of leadership is to observe others' definitions of the word. They cited scholar James Macgregor Burns and stated that he is attributed with founding contemporary leadership studies. They classified the conceptions of leadership into four primary themes: First, leadership is about the individual. One of the oldest methods of conceptualizing leadership focuses on the leaders' traits and attributes. Second, leadership is about the way in which one acts and involves the exercise of influence and power. Third, leadership is about the focus of the importance on the followers. The leader encourages change in order to meet the group's needs and to facilitate the attainment of the group's objectives. Last, leadership is about the manner in which one works with others and emphasizes collaboration between leaders and followers by establishing partnerships to attain mutual goals.

Although some scholars have considered leadership and management to be synonymous, Hackman and Johnson (2009) declared that leading is significantly different than managing. Employees can serve in a transitory leadership role without being in a

managerial position. Similarly, managers at times may act as leaders in order to guide employees in accomplishing certain tasks. The primary focus of leaders and managers helps to distinguish the two. The crucial difference, according to Bennis and Nanus (2007), is that management involves bringing about or having charge or responsibility, whereas leadership involves guiding or directing. From the activities standpoint, management is said to involve vision and judgment (effectiveness), and leadership involves mastering routines (efficiency). “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing” (Bennis & Nanus, 2007, p. 20).

Countless others have defined leadership; e.g., Fitch (2009) described leadership as a moral activity built upon virtues, with one such virtue being responsibility. Responsibility refers to the general sense of expectations that one, in a given role will perform as a morally responsible individual. Additionally, relative to responsibility, the decisions are not arbitrary but involve due deliberation of the circumstances and the values that apply to the situation, as well as the care of individuals involved. Conversely, Ciulla (2003) indicated that the quality of leadership depends upon the ethics of the means and the ends of a leader’s actions. Despite the subjectivity of the word, Hall (2009) posited that leaders that maintain high moral values and ethics are vital to any organization. Bennis and Nanus (2007) emphasized that the constant and challenging issues organizations undergo are solved with the resolve of effective leadership.

History has recorded the effective management and leadership abilities of both men and women; however, Geddes (1988) commented that the perception of effective leadership has been associated with masculine characteristics. Moreover, women leaders who adopt a typical masculine style are viewed negatively. Three gender speech styles

were investigated and characterized: stereotypical masculine (powerful), stereotypical feminine (powerless), or mixed gender (a blend of stereotypical masculine and stereotypical feminine). The study examined the perceived effects (relative effectiveness) of gender stereotypical speech styles when used by male and female managers to communicate with subordinates.

Varying ideas exist about leadership in corporate circles. The debate includes whether leadership should be delegated to one individual or distributed among members of the team. Traditionally, a permanent team leader is appointed by more senior levels of management or elected by the group; however, this technique assumes that one individual has the strengths required to effectively lead a team. Consequently, debate has occurred that highly effective teams do not have permanent leaders but allow different members to provide occasional leadership, thus taking charge in areas in which they have strengths (“Rules in leadership,” 2003). This approach eliminates the problem of leaders being isolated from their group and could be effective when continuity and focus of the group is retained. An alternative conciliation may consist of a permanent leader with the flexibility to delegate responsibility for individual tasks but also allows team members to assume appropriate leadership roles when possible (“Rules in leadership,” 2003). The list of leaders’ main attributes includes the ability to set directions, to build a high-performance team-based approach in dealing with situations, to operate with integrity, and to produce quality results. As leaders operate within various cultures around the world, leadership styles likely differ according to geography; thereby, leadership styles are required to be situational (“Leadership style has”, 2012).

In tough economic times, companies appear to focus on mere organizational survival rather than to invest effort in the area of leadership development for employees. Excellent leadership ensures survival and guarantees that the company emerges stronger after a recession period. Organizations benefit from leaders who can transcend the survival driven fear of the moment and can focus on the higher success and transformational needs of their employees, clients, and other stakeholders. Recent research has established a direct link between employees' emotional engagement and performance (“Leadership is not management,” 2010).

Colquitt et al. (2009) discussed the way leaders motivate subordinates to perform beyond expectations by explaining the nature of transformational leadership as a more motivational approach involving inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision. They noted that positive transformation occurs when employees focus on the collective good of the team more than their own self-interest when performing work related tasks. The motivational type of leader also serves as a role model and helps followers view problems from fresh perspectives while developing their own potential. Former President Dwight D. Eisenhower defined leadership as the leader’s ability to decide the tasks that must be completed and to motivate followers to complete those tasks. Similarly, former President Harry S. Truman noted that a good leader has the ability to motivate followers to complete unwanted duties while actually enjoying the process. These two ways of viewing leadership exemplify the transformational manner in which leaders motivate followers to do their jobs and how they view their work in general (Colquitt et al., 2009).

White (2007) posited that leaders possess innate qualities. Young managers or leaders may have difficulty determining and developing their leadership style, which is

thought to be the case particularly for young women leaders early in their careers when they must navigate that which leadership experts define as a double bind. The double bind indicates that they may be perceived as not acting very feminine enough if they assert themselves, which could trigger a backlash or if they act in a stereotypically feminine way, they generally are not considered to be strong leaders. One often learns leadership styles by observing the way in which other leaders function. A major challenge for women leaders is to find other women to serve as role models, as fewer female leaders exist, particularly in executive positions. Experts have suggested offering support to women, to include joining professional associations or community organizations that could allow them to observe and to test new leadership styles away from their work environments. Earnest mentors can play an essential role in providing feedback on leadership techniques. Leaders, however, should be aware that asking subordinates for feedback may be perceived by some as an indication the leaders are insecure or unsure of themselves. A young female leader could have a male mentor but should be aware that males are not likely to be as mindful of the unique challenges, encountered by young women.

### **Leadership and Power**

Influence is the essence of leadership; therefore, the effectiveness of leaders depends upon their influence over peers, subordinates, and superiors (Yukl, 2006). According to Yukl (2006), an individual influences another when the motives and perceptions of the other are affected by the actions of the initiator. The leader's ethical behavior is a significant factor due to the power differential that exists between the leader and the followers (Crall, 2010). Leadership cannot exist without power, as leaders

influence the behavior of followers. Consequently, in order to be classified as leadership, power must be used in pursuit of group goals (Hackman & Johnson, 2009).

French and Raven (1959) discussed social power and its basis, or the relationship between the social agent (another person, role, norm, or part of a group) and the individual who is the source of that power. They stated that the processes of power are prevalent, multifaceted, and often disguised in our society and the phenomena of power and influence involve a dyadic relationship between two agents, which may be considered from two points of view. First, what determines the behavior of the individual who exerts the power? Second, what determines the reactions of the recipient of the power? Although French and Raven acknowledged many possible distinguishable bases of power, they defined five that appeared common and important: (1) reward, (2) coercive, (3) legitimate, (4) referent, and (5) expert power.

1. Reward power – based on one’s perception that another has the ability to reward him or her, and the strength of this power increases with the magnitude of the rewards an agent is perceived to be able to mediate for him or her. The range of reward power is specific to that which an individual providing the reward can motivate the individual to conform in order to receive the reward. An example of reward power includes a supervisor using piece work as an incentive to increase production at a factory.
2. Coercive power – based on a one’s perception that another individual has the ability to mediate punishment for him or her. It is similar to reward power, as it involves one’s ability to influence or manipulate another by threatening some form of punishment if the other fails to conform to the directive. An

example of coercive power could involve a subordinate being fired if he or she falls below a given level of production.

3. Legitimate power – power that stems from internalized values in an individual that dictates another person has a legitimate right to influence him or her and the obligation to accept the influence. Some basis for legitimate power includes cultural values, the acceptance of the social structure, and designation by a legitimizing agent. The areas in which legitimate power may be exercised generally are specified along with the designation of that power; e.g., for instance job descriptions convey expected duties for the employee and also indicate to whom the employee is to report.
4. Referent power – based on one’s identification with the agent, i.e., the feeling of oneness or the desire for such identify. A mentee may be attracted to a mentor and have a desire to become closely associated with that person by joining the same group, social circle, etc. If the mentor is aware of the mentee’s desire, referent power may be exercised over the mentee, although the mentee, although is unaware that it is occurring.
5. Expert power – based on the perception that an individual has some special knowledge or expertise in relation to his or her personal knowledge or against an absolute standard. Examples of expert power include relationships between an attorney and client, a teacher and student, or a parent and child.

The definition of leadership by Colquitt et al. (2009) involved leaders using their influence to direct the followers’ activities in achieving organizational objectives through the use of power. They also described power as the ability to influence the behavior of



others, and in turn, resist unwanted influence from others. Power is directly associated with leadership, as leaders must have a degree of power over subordinates in order to effectively direct their activities in accomplishing organizational goals (Yukl, 2006).

Sorting out the relationship between power and leadership can be confusing. Is using power the same as exerting leadership? Does having power automatically make you a leader? Power and leadership are obviously independent; however, they are not interchangeable. While power can exist without leadership, leadership cannot exist without power. (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 136)

### **Ethics and Decision Making**

According to Fitch (2009), both leadership and ethics are relevant issues of great significance to organizations. In 2008 Jessiman insisted that a solid, comprehensive definition of the general topic of ethics remains elusive and remains a work in progress; however, Jessiman contended that questions about that which constitutes right or wrong actions and the individual entitled to determine it, makes ethics a formidable discussion arena. Some of the earliest writings in Western civilization sought to discover the way in which people live in society and that which governed human interaction. Scholars have studied moral and ethical considerations since Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (348-322 B.C.) (Hall, 2009).

The term *ethics* has many nuances and its definition involves an inquiry into the nature of morality, moral judgments, or rules of conduct. Additionally, ethics has been referred to as the study and philosophy of human conduct relative to what is considered right and wrong (Ferrell et al., 2002). Colquitt et al. (2009) described ethics as the degree to which an individual's behaviors are in accordance with generally accepted moral

norms and cited ethical ideologies as principles used during an ethical decision-making process. Effective leaders are paramount to the overall success of an organization and, as a result of their actions, can have serious implications for subordinates, managers, and all parties associated with the organization. The leader's ethical behavior is particularly significant due to the numerous responsibilities associated with the position (Bernard & Goodyear, 2008). Ethical decisions made by leaders are likely to mirror the overall character and philosophies of the organization. Adherence to agency procedures and principles does not necessarily produce straightforward answers to ethical dilemmas. Therefore, such rules and principles should, at most, be used as guidelines for the interpretation of ethical questions (Botes, 2000). Bernard and Goodyear (2008) posited the process involved in ethical decision making requires more than an individual applying and adhering to a routine set of rules.

Ongoing business scandals reported by media sources have asserted pressure on organizational leaders to ethically perform their job responsibilities. The work behaviors and attitudes of agency employees are affected by leaders who express their ethical identity (Hartog & Belschak, 2012). As a result, behaving ethically is more crucial to leaders due to their credibility in leading, influencing, and directing the activities of followers and other stakeholders at all levels within an organization (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Hartog, & Folger, 2010). Messick and Bazerman (1996) also discussed the many difficult and potentially explosive situations faced by leaders as they make decisions for their organizations. Unethical business decisions may stem from tendencies that foster poor decision making from an ethical or rational perspective more so than the result of trade-offs related to ethics, profits, or from being insensitive to the welfare of

others. In their article, they focused on three types of theories that help leaders to understand how to make better, more ethical decisions: theories about the world, about others and about oneself.

Theories about the world refer to the beliefs regarding how the world works and the impact of decisions on the world. Theories about others include organized beliefs about how one is different from others. Theories about oneself as a unique individual may lead to underestimating exposure to risk, to taking undue credit for successes, or to concluding one's theory of the world is correct. The authors cited that leaders can improve their ethical decision making by basing decisions on data rather than guesses. At times leaders make decisions on an intuitive basis, although steps can be taken to prevent the biases from distorting those judgements by asking self-directed, thought-provoking questions or playing the devil's advocate in scrutinizing a decision for false assumptions and optimistic projections (Messick & Bazerman, 1996.)

As the leader's actions can have profound and far reaching influences on those associated with the organization, it is imperative that, the leader make decisions and model behaviors that are ethical in nature. DeVore (2006) speculated that, as ethical leadership is beneficial to an organization and there appears to be pervasive perceptions that many leaders lack moral principles, an obvious gap exists between the two. DeVore suggested it would be most beneficial to organizations to close the gap. Colquitt et al. (2009) asserted that ethics seeks to explain human behavior based on generally accepted norms of morality, and reflects the degree to which the behaviors of an individual in authority are in accordance with commonly recognized standards, and the reason individuals sometimes violate those norms. According to Colquitt et al. (2009), moral

awareness is the first step to explaining the reason an authority acts ethically. They avowed that moral awareness occurs when an authority recognizes that a moral issue exists or that an ethical standard is relevant to particular situations. Moral intent reflects the proper degree of commitment of the authority in a situation. This is realized when the authority recognizes the existence of a moral issue and can cognitively choose the proper course of action to act ethically.

Consequently, ethical behavior may be a function of several dimensions of an organization's system: the corporate culture, employees' significant family members and friends, and the personal values of groups and individual members of the organization (Ferrell et al., 2002). Employees assume a degree of ethical responsibility by agreeing in general to abide by the rules and standard operating procedures of the organization. The employees' significant others have been found to be the most influential variable impacting the employees' ethical decision-making processes. If the organizational culture is sullied, employees may be more likely to succumb to work environment pressures rather than to be led by their own moral codes of ethics, thereby rationalizing their decisions by maintaining that they are simply agents of the organization. Thus, understanding the influence of the corporate culture, employee's significant others, and individual and group members' personal value systems helps to explain the reason unethical decisions may be made in business.

Decision making is an integral part of the leader's responsibilities. Decision making is multifaceted and involves decisions involving that which is considered right and wrong relative to what is valued most by the leader and other stakeholders (Archard, 2013). Lin and Jung (2008) used the terms utilitarianism and relativism to describe

collective decision making. Utilitarianism involves actions that lead to the greatest good for the greatest number of individuals and relativism is the extent to which an action is considered acceptable in a particular culture. Actions accomplished for relativistic reasons are those in which certain rules may not appear to be universal, whereas rules that may be acceptable in one culture may not be considered acceptable in another.

According to Colquitt et al. (2009), decisions, ethical or otherwise, made by leaders likely represent the overall organizational philosophies. Leaders who consistently make solid ethical decisions and who model behaviors that are ethical in nature have profound and far reaching influences on individuals associated with the organization. The most important element of a leader's decision-making style involves whether the leaders decide most things for themselves and primarily from their perspective, or whether they involve others in the process. The autocratic style leader makes decisions alone without asking for input or suggestions from employees or team members. The consultative style leader consults individual employees or a group before making a final decision regarding a problem. The facilitative style leader strives to ensure his or her opinion receives the same weight as the opinions of others relative to the issue, but rather, seeks consensus on solutions to problems from the team as a whole. Finally, the delegative style leader provides individual employees or a group of employees with the responsibility and authority to make decisions within set parameters.

Valentine, Godkin, and Vitton (2012) conducted a study with over 200 individuals who were employed in various organizations located in south central United States. The purpose of the study was to explore the degree to which beliefs about corporate ethics are positively related to ethical decision making, operationalized as

ethical issues recognition, ethical judgment, and ethical intention. The participants completed a self-report survey that contained different ethics measures. The findings indicated that perceptions of corporate ethical values are positively related to the different positively interrelated steps of ethical reasoning in decision making. The study also recommended that leaders develop organizational ethics in an attempt to prompt employees to engage in more ethical reasoning when making decisions.

Croxford (2010) and other researchers have conducted studies regarding the abstract factors of ethical decision making. In Croxford's study, Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive development theory was referenced. Ferrell et al. (2002) also outlined Kohlberg's model of cognitive moral development and noted it as a well-accepted model that describes the stages through which individuals progress in their development of moral thought. According to Kohlberg (as cited in Ferrell et al., 2002) individuals develop through the following six stages:

1. The stage of punishment and obedience in which an individual defines right as literal obedience to rules and authority. Right and wrong are not associated with any higher order or philosophy, but rather with one who possesses power.
2. The stage of individual instrumental purpose and exchange in which one defines right as that which serves one's own needs.
3. The state of mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships, and conformity in which one emphasizes others rather than self.
4. The state of social system and conscience maintenance in which an individual determines that which is right or wrong, rather than by considering only

specific individuals but by considering his or her duty to society, respect for authority, and maintaining the social order.

5. The stage of prior rights, social contract, or utility in which one is concerned with upholding the basic rights, values, and legal contracts of society.
6. The stage of universal ethical principles in which one believes that “right” is determined by universal ethical principles everyone should follow.

Croxford (2010) commented on the way Rest (1986) built upon Kohlberg’s theory. Rest’s model of moral action described the ethical reasoning process and identified four components within ethical decision making. Each component involves a psychological process, as well as outcomes that lead to an individual’s ethical action. Rest’s four-component model assumed that, in order for moral behavior to occur, individuals must have performed the following four basic psychological processes:

1. The person must have made some sort of interpretation of the particular situation in terms of what actions were possible, who would be effected by each course of action, (including themselves), and how the parties would regard such effects on their welfare.
2. The person must have been able to make a judgment about which course of action was morally right, fair or just, or morally good, thereby labeling one possible course of action as what a person ought or morally ought to do in that situation.
3. The person must give priority to moral values above other personal values such that a decision is made with the intent to do what is morally right.

4. The person must have sufficient perseverance, ego strength, and implementation skills to be able to follow through on his or her intentions to behave morally and overcome obstacles. (Croxford, 2010, p. 36)

In Croxford's (2010) study, normative and positive business ethics were discussed as two overarching Ethical Decision Making Models found in ethics literature. Normative business ethics models stipulate rules regarding decisions that should occur in organizations and prescribe the manner in which ideal ethical decisions can be made, while positive business ethics models describe that which actually occurs in organizations. Croxford identified a diverse group of researchers and their seminal ethical decision-making models noted that in-depth examination of the various models revealed many similarities. All of the models outlined multiple stages of the ethical decision-making process. These stages include the recognition of an ethical dilemma; moral reasoning; and determination of other possibilities, prioritizing the moral values, and the translation of objectives into ethical/unethical outcomes giving consideration to potential consequences when judging ethical dilemmas.

The professionalism of the leader is closely associated with the adherence of the leader's ethical standards when making decisions. Research has indicated that leaders generally agree with and refrain from many unethical behaviors such as sexism, discriminatory practices, and avoiding an intimate relationship with a subordinate (Crall, 2011). Ethical breaches in the leader's conduct can and do occur when inappropriate boundaries are crossed (Wall, 2009). The effects of the leader's unethical or unprofessional behavior on followers were addressed in a 2009 study conducted by Wall,



in which, 41 participants were asked whether they had experiences when they regarded the supervisor's practices as unethical. The participants also were asked whether the leader's perceived unethical practices had an impact on the supervision process by negatively affecting motivation and trust in the work relationship or willingness to disclose information to that supervisor.

Of the 41 participants who had reported at least one ethical practice or guideline had not been adhered to by their supervisor or leader, 31 (76%) indicated that their supervisor's behavior had affected their trust in the supervisor, while 30 (73%) reported that the supervisory alliance had been negatively impacted. Twenty-two (54%) of the 41 participants who reported ethical non-adherence, indicated that they were less willing to disclose information in supervision because of the breach. Nine (22%) respondents reported that their supervisor's unethical or unprofessional behavior had negatively affected their motivation to be in the field of psychology and/or the quality of their client care. Fourteen (34%) of the 41 participants who reported unethical behavior indicated that their emotional well-being had been negatively affected. (Wall, 2009. p. 28)

On a daily bases and throughout the workday leaders must make various decisions, some of which are minor and others major in nature. According to Fitch (2009), different models help to determine how decision making occurs and indicate that decisions are made on the basis of rationality or maximizing of a preferred value over all others. Fitch noted bounded rationality or satisficing as another model of decision making. In the bounded rationality model, a decision is made based upon a minimum

number of possibilities, and the individual(s) making the decision settles for an acceptable answer considered good enough; however, rather than manipulating all attributes of all available options, an elimination of aspects of the model may be utilized. This approach to decision making involves the creation of specific criteria and the elimination all other options not meeting that criteria (Fitch, 2009). Upon identification of a moral issue, movement must occur toward a remedy to resolve the problem must occur. The movement would include both description and prescription, which involves describing an objective state of affairs and an attempt to prescribe specific steps to resolve the problem or issue. Deliberation occurs between the two steps of description and prescription; according to Fitch, the deliberation typically involves ethical analysis or moral reasoning.

### **Ethical/Moral Philosophy Perspectives**

Ferrell et al. (2002) indicated many complex moral philosophies that could be used to understand the ethical decision-making process, and no one correct way exists to resolve ethical issues related to business matters. Two major ethical theories frame the reference for considering moral issues or dilemmas (Fitch, 2009). Ethical theories involve the leaders' actions and who they are as individuals. Two broad domains of ethical theories focus on the behavior or conduct of the leader: deontological and teleological. According to Ferrell et al., teleological theories stipulate that the acts are morally right or acceptable if they produce a desired result, such as realization of self-interest or utility. Likewise, deontological theories focus on the preservation of individual rights and on the intentions associated with a particular behavior, rather than on its consequences.

## **Diversity and Corporate Boards in America**

During the past century, America has progressed in its development regarding the meaning of a truly free and open democratic society. Ethnic, gender, and religious differences among citizens increasingly can be viewed as an asset rather than a problem to be solved. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s brought this nation closer to an understanding and appreciation of its human potential. As a result of the ongoing increase of ethnic populations into the mainstream of American society, diversity must now include an appreciation for various lifestyle differences. Current leaders are faced with challenges of bringing about true unification and maintenance in the area of diversity. Resolutions to diversity issues do not simply involve avoiding discriminatory practices, but also proactively involving various ethnic groups in all areas of society (Daresh, 2007).

An article written by Mays (2015) entitled, “Black Enterprise Releases Top 40 Best Companies for Diversity,” was featured in the December 2014/January 2015 issue of *Black Enterprise* magazine. Mays commented that Earl “Butch” Graves, Jr, *Black Enterprise*’s President and CEO, declared companies should willingly embrace the inclusion of the abundant talent of African American executives. Further, Mays claimed many companies do not make diversity a priority, although a report published by the Nielson Company projected the buying power of African Americans to exceed \$1 trillion in the year 2015.

Diversity appears not to be a priority in hiring African American workers in leadership positions or for agencies to include them on corporate boards in many American companies. According to another article dated August 4, 2014, in *Black*

*Enterprise* magazine, of the 250 largest public companies in America, 74 had no African American directors. In that article, Earl “Butch” Graves, Jr., *Black Enterprise*’s President and CEO commented that despite the surplus of African American executives who have sterling professional credentials and reputations, an overwhelming number of boards of publicly traded companies continue to exclude them on boards. Additionally, Graves, Jr., stated the evidence that African Americans are locked out of many corporate boardrooms is further indication that Caucasian males desire to maintain certain privileges and dominances. Graves, Jr., indicated a function of corporate directors involves the governance of executives and senior management often responsible for the corporation’s hiring and promotion practices. If there is no representation of African Americans on certain boards, it increases the likelihood that they will not be given fair consideration when that company selects senior managers and chief administrative officers (“Black Enterprise Publishes,” 2014). The article also included a report from the Alliance of Board Diversity that claimed White men in 2012 held 75% of board seats on the 500 largest publicly traded companies, versus 5.5% of African American men and 1.9% for African American women.

Graves, Sr., published a 2014 article entitled, “Black Directors: Be Prepared to Walk in Harm’s Way,” Graves, Sr., the publisher and founder of *Black Enterprise*, proclaimed he was prepared to walk in harm’s way in order to create opportunities for other African Americans to succeed in business. To the African American men and women serving on corporate boards, Graves, Sr., reminded them that they are not in those positions because major corporations ran out of smart white people. He stated that African Americans who hold leadership positions and who possess influence have a

responsibility to mentor and to help other African Americans succeed in business. He added that, while a challenge exists for corporations to include more African Americans on their boards, the other part of the challenge involves encouraging and ensuring those African Americans serving on boards make a difference rather than simply holding a seat.

Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (2011) conducted a study of 74 women and People of Color who have served in chief power positions in the United States. The purpose of their study was to better understand diversity in chief corporate offices (CEOs) of large corporations. The past 15 years have witnessed an emergence of more than 74 new CEOs, and this increase adds a new dimension to diversity studies in the corporate world. Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (2011) boldly asserted:

White males who dominate corporate boards might feel pressure to include at least one women, African American, or member of another previously underrepresented group in their midst, or even believe they might be useful as tokens, buffers, or political ambassadors. But we don't think they would appoint a woman, and African American, a Latino, or an Asian American as the CEO of one of the corporations they direct if they thought such a choice would jeopardize profit margins. (p. 105)

Sheryl Sandberg is among the world's most prominent women. Her credits include chief operating officer of Facebook, *Fortune's* list of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Business, and *Time's* Most Influential People in the world. She attributes a great deal of the success women enjoy today to women of the Civil Rights era in which many of those women leaders fought for rights that are seemingly now taken for granted by the current generation. As a result, women in America and the developed world are in

an immensely better position today than ever before. Sandberg encouraged women to aggressively pursue their goals by seeking challenges and taking risks. Historically, negative images and beliefs have continued to influence the treatment of African American women leaders in today's work environment. Although diversity programs abound, African American women leaders continue to experience limited advancement to senior levels within the corporate organizations in America (Jordan, 2011).

Zweigenhaft and Domhoff (2011) contended that the incorporation of diversity into the corporate structure and the corporate culture implies that African American women and other nationalities of women leaders are in the pipeline for upward mobility through the educational system and the corporations to fill positions in upper management. Arguably, despite the encouraging data, African American women continue to encounter a myriad of obstacles upon entering the corporate world. According to Jordan (2011), leaders in corporations must jump higher hurdles in order to achieve executive positions; however, African American women continue to be invisible in many corporations.

### **The African American Woman – A Historical Perspective**

Booker (2010) reported that Bettye Collier-Thomas, a Temple University historian, decided to systematically research women and their various movements in order to better understand their connectedness. Several years were spent researching and collecting data from the Association of Colored Women. This organization came before the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and was the first national Black organization of that dimension founded in 1896. Collier-Thomas desired to be educated regarding the issues Black women were dealing with, and she set up

biographical files to collect and analyze data on that particular group of women. Booker remarked that Collier-Thomas expressed love for Black women leaders, such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, and she systematically researched other Black women as separate studies were unavailable on that population of women. According to Booker, Collier-Thomas spent a decade researching issues related to women prior to writing "Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African American Women and Religion." The book explored the threads that were woven through 200 years of the Black women's experiences pertaining to their faith as well as social and political activism in America. The book also detailed and demonstrated the extraordinary resilience of Black women during the centuries of American growth and change. Further, Booker claimed that Collier-Thomas posited the book addressed issues beginning with slavery and bringing the reader up to the 21st century, and it also intersected with all issues and events between the period of slavery and the present.

Another notable woman, Nannie Helen Burroughs, is a nationally known figure among Black and White leaders. She was an architect of the Woman's Convention of the National Baptist Convention and in 1958 anticipated the collapse of Jim Crow segregation and expressed concern about the fate of African Americans in America. According to Booker (2010), relative to the Black women's agenda, Burroughs passionately declared that Black people must have Jesus, jobs, and justice. Following more than half a century of organizing and struggling against racism and sexism in American, Burroughs said she knew Black Americans would need more than religion to survive and to advance socially, economically, and politically.

Black church women created national organizations such as the National Association of Colored Women, the National League of Colored Republican Women and the National Council of Negro Women (Booker, 2010). These women also worked in the interracial movement and in White-led Christian groups such as the Young Women's Christian Association and Church Women United. While religion has been a guiding force in the lives of many African Americans, it has been vitally important for a great deal of African American women. Collier-Thomas' book, "Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African-American Women and Religion" explored the ways in which women coped with sexism in Black churches, racism in mostly White denominations, and issues of sex and sexuality that have at times created tension and divisions within institutions (Booker, 2010).

In the 1960s amid the controversy of the intense civil rights struggle, women were traditionally expected to follow rather than be leaders. However, in the intervening years, the agenda to advance the leadership of women has changed a great deal (James-Johnson, 2003). A Special Report examined the plight and frustrations of African American women leaders and noted the renewal of key sections of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, was named The Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act. Despite the heroic contributions made by civil rights African American women pioneers, the report noted that African American women indicated they struggled for opportunities to demonstrate their leadership abilities. Their struggle was due in part to the pervasive deep-seated sexist attitudes of that period and, although women are more prominent in various leadership roles, they find their struggle is not over. Edney reported in 2006 that Dorothy Height, President emeritus of the



National Council of Negro Women, stated some men have not yet accepted the fact that women are resolute in their determination to enjoy equality in America.

The male/female tension over sharing leadership has been traced back to slavery in which both African American men and women were employed on plantations. While working for slave owners, African American women often were raped and occasionally lynched; however, they faced fewer hardships than African American men. While men experienced a difficult time being respected by slave owners and people in general of that era, the fault was not that of the African American women, many of whom worked quietly behind the scenes. Edney (2006) commented that, as a result of the tension created between African American men and women, women need to strive to overcome the perception that they have to remain in the background and do all the work. Negative thoughts, beliefs, and images have had an influence on the way in which African American women, including those in executive positions, have been treated in today's work environment. While diversity programs in the workplace abound, African American women continue to experience limited advancement to senior-level positions, within the corporate organizations in the United States (Jordan, 2011).

### **Leadership and the African American Woman**

African American women are underrepresented in leadership positions within organizations throughout the United States. A study was conducted by Jackson (2012) to determine the extent to which self-efficacy influences the advancement potential of African American women in leadership positions at Fortune 500 companies. The results indicated that African American women are highly successful and able to overcome obstacles in their work environments, despite persistent challenges that prevent them

from advancing into upper-level leadership positions. Historically, the lives of professional Black women in America have been understudied and their contributions as leaders often undervalued. In order observed to bring attention to the plight of this situation, the League of Black Women (LBW) conducted a nationwide survey between 2005 and 2007 entitled, "LBW Having Our Say: Fostering the Leadership Potential of Black Women in America Survey." The purpose of the survey was to identify challenges faced by African American women as they strive to fulfill their leadership potential and economic equality for themselves, their families, and their communities ("Uncovering the leadership," 2007).

Through the League of Black Women's survey, African American women reported their optimism in obtaining leadership positions; however, they believed this goal attainment involves more than hard work and positive thinking. The report suggested corporations strive to ensure African American women have the necessary tools to advance in their careers which can be accomplished by identifying African American women with high potential and designing distinctive and targeted strategies to aid in their development and advancement. Additionally, due to the underrepresentation of African American women as contemporary role models, companies must understand the real-time experiences and provide effective assistance to this group who aspires to obtain corporate leadership positions ("Uncovering the leadership," 2007).

According to the survey, nearly 80% of professional African American women cited race bias as a concern in reaching their goals and excelling in leadership positions. Also, negative views about ethnicity and others' negative views of them in the workplace affect interactions with potential stakeholders who could influence their career

advancement. Additionally, the report noted the threat of corporate downsizing, mergers, and acquisitions that create issues causing retention rates to decrease among African American women in mid and lower-level leadership positions. Nevertheless, despite the overlapping obstacles encountered by African American women as they ascend the corporate ladder, the League of Black Women believed corporations can empower Black women to use their strengths and leadership abilities to increase company performance, expansion, and growth. The report included an assessment of the key barriers to leadership potential among African Americans and recommendations on the means for corporations to remove those barriers and support retention. It also detailed the personal accounts of professional African American women's desires for promotion into leadership positions despite the obstacles they face. Finally, only 20% of African American women reported they were "very satisfied" with their lives overall. They also reported pervasive degrees of frustration as they actively seek ways to advance their careers ("Uncovering the leadership," 2007).

In another study, King and Ferguson (2001) met with 13 African American professional women from Ohio and Michigan. The women were gathered in a cabin and the researchers interacted with them through a process referred to as Deep Talk. The researchers developed methods for African American women to examine and sort through the meaning of their experiences in the context of their individual and collective identities and incorporated the metaphor of "charting ourselves" to discuss the processes and methods that encouraged Deep Talk. Research from the Deep Talk session identified issues that African American women encountered in their personal, professional, and communal lives. The women indicated a major challenge in their work environments was

the need to fulfill multiple expectations from work, family, and community. In terms of community, African American women have a bicultural or at times polyculture need to fulfill expectations within the African American community and the larger society; efforts to respond to both of these cultures often interfere with family and professional commitments and can jeopardize their health and well-being. Not only did the Deep Talk session identify problems, it also made the issues more concrete by providing details from the women's own perspectives. Due to their marginalized status, many African American professional women have had to develop effective support systems to help work through psychological injury, to cultivate community within and across their immediate work contexts, and to develop strategies for social change within their professional occupations. Unfortunately, as the number of African American women leaders increases, the stress also increases.

Some of the most commonly documented stressors include (1) the isolation black women experience in dominant culture organizations; (2) the high visibility black women experience due to their race and gender and their subsequent need to make choices about public association; (3) the need to invest in alliance-building with the power elite; (4) the personal overload stemming from participation in two or more cultures (e.g., racial/ethnic culture, dominant culture); (5) the conflicts stemming from pressures to fulfill race and gender-role expectations in contexts that have conflicting norms and values; (6) the ambiguity of being in a non-traditional profession, or of having a level of authority beyond that which is customarily expected for black women. This list is not exhaustive of the

pressures that black professional women experience. (King & Ferguson, 2001)

Due to the limited data regarding the African American women leaders, Randleman (2007) conducted a study to assess their leadership style and the impact of other social factors on leadership development. In-depth interviews were conducted with 13 African American women who were recognized as leaders by others. The study sought to gather information from the participants regarding their preparation, motivation, and stamina in the development of leadership skills and leadership roles in society, and to provide guidelines for other Black women interested in leadership development. The study revealed persistent themes including a deep spiritual awareness; support of family, church, and community; need for role models and mentors; strong educational foundation; establishment of goals and action plan for achievement; and a positive sense of self. A particular factor that distinguished African American women as leaders was the evolution of their leadership ability to quietly find satisfactory solutions to a myriad of problems for the good of many others.

Saulsberry (2012) said African American women's voices were not being heard in places such as the home, the workplace, the school, and even at church in part due to American stereotypes and myths that unjustly define them. Saulsberry conducted a study focused on the development of African American women voices pertaining to their sense of self on speaking up and being heard in educational leadership. The conceptual framework described African American women voices as developed in familial, religious, professional, and academic contexts and further revealed they continually think, respond, and regularly adjust their voice to suit every situation they encounter.

Saulsberry noted that in order for African American women to be heard and respected, they must identify and be cognizant of their audience and adjust their voice accordingly.

Are African American women in a separate category from White men and women and other African American men when relative to leadership? According to Mikulak (2012), a new study published in *Psychological Science* examined the assertiveness of Black women in the workplace. Mikulak indicated the study was co-authored by Robert W. Livingston of Northwestern University, Ashleigh Shelby Rosette of Duke University, and Ella F. Washington of Northwestern. The authors found that, rather than being viewed as a combination of African American men and Caucasian women, African American women also appear to be expected to act assertively. Likewise, Rosette explained that prevailing cultural norms indicate the expectation of men to occupy dominant roles, while typically prescribing more communal roles to women. In terms of a prototypical leader, the study reported previous research has shown that, when thinking about ideal leaders, Caucasian men most often are thought of as fitting the profile. In both experimental research and in studies of real-life settings, women were perceived in a negative light if they conducted themselves contrary to the prototypical roles of being more dominant and less communal. The article further alluded to the fact that considerable research has examined this gender-based effect; however, little research has reviewed gender in conjunction with race. It was assumed by the researchers that African American women were perceived to be viewed in the same light as White women (Mikulak, 2003).

The Livingston, Rosette, and Washington studies were inspired in part by a newspaper article regarding Ursula Burns, CEO of XEROX, and the way in which she

became the first African American woman to head a Fortune 500 company (Mikulak, 2012). In the article, Livingston indicated that many of Burns' behaviors appeared to be assertive and dominant, and she was not shy or docile. The study consisted of paring fictitious photographs of officials at a Fortune 500 company with a scenario in which the leader was meeting with a subordinate who exhibited poor performance. In the situation, dominant leaders were assertive and demanded action, while communal leaders encouraged the subordinate and communicated with compassion. The extent to which the leader handled the situation and employees' admiration of the leaders were among the considerations used by participants in rating the leaders. Although participants were negative about assertive African American men and Caucasian women, African American women had as much latitude as Caucasian men as far as being assertive. As a result of the latitude given to African American women, study findings revealed they appeared to occupy a unique space and actually were a separate leadership category. However, it was noted that although a role is prescribed to women in general, it does not indicate it will be prescribed for African American women.

Accordingly, Mikulak (2012) revealed that, although African American women leaders are more likely to be perceived as similar to Caucasian men rather than Caucasian women, they continue to experience racism while serving in leadership positions. While African American women leaders' assertiveness can be an asset on the job, their leadership ability more often is questioned when they make mistakes, and any mistake could be viewed as evidence that the woman is unsuited for the leadership role. It is extremely difficult for African American women to climb the corporate ladder due to the likelihood of African American women leaders being penalized for mistakes. This also

was suspected as a reason that fewer African American women than Caucasian men and women are leading Fortune 500 companies.

Walker (2007), asserted that African American women report seeking opportunities to obtain leadership positions; however, they believe hard work and positive thinking insufficient in reaching their goals. In order to provide necessary tools to ensure the advancement of African American women leaders with high potential are provided opportunities for success, corporations should design distinctive and targeted strategies. To combat and address these issues, such as the limited number of African American women as contemporary role models, The League of Black Women recommended corporate leaders promote the concepts of engagement, cohesion, and bicultural leadership to support development and retention. Engagement could be used to allow African American women to identify their needs, and the company could use creative methods to attend to those needs. Through this interaction, a culture of inclusion might be fostered, and policies and practices could be implemented to provide communal support within and beyond the workplace. Relative to cohesion, programs might be implemented to include coaching, mentoring, and networking opportunities. Part of the intent of such retention programs would serve to help companies appreciate cultural and style differences of African American women employees. Bicultural leadership could assist African American women in recognizing their distinctive leadership skills and also may be used to help in overcoming negative stereotypes. Companies could recognize and terminate business practices that guide African American women leaders with great potential into positions with limited advancement opportunities.



The Walker (2007) study revealed that African American women blamed negative perceptions about race as a barrier that affects reaching career objectives, and the negative views of others in their work environments jeopardize chances for excelling in leadership positions. Approximately 80% of the survey participants indicated their effectiveness as leaders is impacted by race biases, which negatively impacts their interactions with those who could be instrumental in helping to advance their careers. The report also suggested that African American women who were stalled in mid and lower-level positions are more likely to be affected by corporate downsizing, mergers, and acquisitions that play an integral role in the decline of retention rates of this group.

While many African American women have achieved positions of power and wealth, the "Women's Voices" data and other studies confirm significant income gaps. The average annual earnings of a large percentage of African American women is lower than the earnings of African American men, as well as Caucasian men and women. (Scruggs-Leftwich, 2001).

Throughout history, many African American women have paid their dues to climb career ladders and have emerged to head major subsidiaries of Fortune 500 companies. Among the Black women who have made major contributions are Deborah Steward Coleman, president and CEO of AutoAlliance International, owned by Ford Motor Co.; Paula A. Sneed, president of the e-commerce and communications divisions of Kraft Foods; Marie C. Johns, president of Verizon, Washington, D.C.; Brenda J. Gaines, president of Citicorp Diners Club of North America; and Gabriella E. Morris, president, Prudential Foundation, Stacey H. Davis, president,

Fannie Mae Foundation; Maxine B. Baker, president and CEO, Freddie Mac Foundation; Ingrid Saunders Jones, chairwoman, Coca-Cola Foundation; Pamela Thomas-Graham, president and CEO of CNBC; and Dr. Bonnie Guiton-Hill, president of the Times Mirror Foundation. (Scruggs-Leftwich, 2001)

The list of African American women who have obtained corporate leadership positions is impressive; however, their achievements do not prove that African American women no longer face the double bias of racism and sexism (Scruggs-Leftwich, 2001). While African American women have achieved notable success in leadership endeavors on the national and international levels, many African American women leaders in Kentucky have accomplished remarkable achievements and received national prominence. Willa Beatrice Brown-Chappell, Georgia Davis Powers, and Arlivia Gamble Swann are prominent African American women from Kentucky. Jean Hampton made headlines and history as the first African American woman to be elected in 2015 as Lt. Governor of Kentucky.

Brown-Chappell was born in Glasgow, Kentucky, in an era harsh for both women and African Americans. In 1937 she became the first African American woman to be licensed as a private pilot and in 1943, she was the first woman in the United States to possess both a mechanic's license and a commercial license in aviation. She and her husband operated the first flight school owned and operated by African Americans. They trained more than 200 aviators who went on to become the legendary Tuskegee airmen who served during World War II (Perry, 2007).

Georgia Davis Powers was the only Black woman to serve in the Kentucky Senate. Powers recalled the January morning in 1968 when she arrived for the first time at the state capitol to be sworn in as a freshman legislator during the opening of the General Assembly. Powers said she sat down after she was sworn in and looked around at her fellow 37 White male senators and realized she was the only woman and the only Black senator. Powers went on to champion bills for the Open Housing Law, Displaced Homemaker Legislation, and Prohibition of Employment Discrimination. In 1995 Powers commented that women, in spite of important contributions in the battle for Civil Rights, continued to be relegated to the background of the male dominated movement (Powers, 1995).

Arlivia Gamble Swann has achieved national prominence as Vice President of State Farm Insurance. Gamble-Swann indicated that continuous learning is a behavior she believed will continue to enhance corporate and other careers. Her daily Bible reading grounds her with core values and leadership principals and gives her peace. She also regularly reads books on leadership or self-improvement. Gamble Swann completed John Maxwell's Certification Program for which she serves as a seminar facilitator for various groups. Regarding qualities women should possess in order to be viewed as an effective leader among her male contemporaries, Gamble Swann commented, "Just be the best you, not the best woman leader or black leader. A good leader is a good leader" (personal communication, October 6, 2015).

Despite of past and present ongoing challenges faced by African American women leaders, Morial (2011) declared that new generations of these leaders are making their voices heard as they pick up the gauntlet and make great strides in leadership

positions. According to Morial, Andrea Dew Steele, founder of Emerge America, a nonprofit devoted to training more women for elective office, despite obstacles feeling they are not as qualified as men or have the same networks, and although African American women have a myriad of persistent family issues, they are fearlessly breaking through barriers to become successful leaders.

### **Summary**

This chapter reviewed the constructs and applicable literature related to leaders, leadership, ethics, decision-making, and African American women. The focus of this study involved the review of difficult decision-making experiences relative to the ethical beliefs of African American women leaders in Western Kentucky. According to research, in general, African American women are an underrepresented group; available research has revealed limited studies and gaps relative to their ethical views (Ciulla, 2003; Colquitt et al., 2009; Ferrell et al., 2002; Fitch, 2009; Hackman & Johnson, 2009; Seltzer, 2009).

Leadership involves control, influence, ability, authority, and responsibility. Influence is believed to be the essence of leadership and, therefore, leadership cannot exist without power because the leader has the ability to influence the behavior of the follower. The list of leader characteristics is as varied as those providing the descriptions; however, many lists include honesty, inspiring, competent, and the ability to influence others to achieve common goals. Leaders are thought to be the primary source of ethical guidance for employees; they exercise good judgment in decision making and operate with integrity (Archard, 2013; Brown et al., 2005; Crall, 2010; Fitch, 2009; Hackman & Johnson, 2009; Hall, 2009; “Rules in Leadership,” 2003; Yukl, 2006).

Power is an integral part of leadership, according to Hackman and Johnson (2009). Five common and important bases of social power were discussed in this chapter and examples of each were provided. The five bases of power are: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent power, and expert power. The leader's use of power may be in direct relation to the situation they are addressing. Leaders use power to influence or direct the activities of followers in the pursuit of achieving common goals (Colquitt et al., 2009; French & Raven, 1956; Hackman & Johnson, 2009).

Leadership and ethics are relevant issues of great significance to every organization. An effective leader is paramount to the overall success of an organization and, as a result, the leader's ethical behavior is particularly significant due to the numerous responsibilities associated with the position. Ethics has many nuances; however, it has been referred to as the study and philosophy of human conduct relative to that which is considered right and wrong and involves the degree to which an individual's behaviors are in accordance with generally accepted moral norms. Ethical ideologies have been cited as principles used by individuals during ethical decision-making processes. The ethical behavior of leaders is crucial due to their credibility in leading, influencing, and directing the activities of followers and other stakeholders at all levels within an organization. As the leader's actions can have profound and far reaching influences on individuals associated with the organization, it is imperative that the leader make decisions and model behaviors that are ethical in nature.

Decision making is multifaceted part of the leaders' responsibilities. Decisions, ethical or otherwise, made by leaders likely represent the overall organizational philosophies. Those who consistently make solid ethical decisions and

who model ethical behaviors can profoundly influence individuals associated with organizations. The most important element of a leader's decision-making style involves whether the leader decides most things for themselves primarily from a personal perspective or whether others are involved in the process (Bernard & Goodyear, 2008; Colquitt et al., 2009; Ferrell et al., 2002; Fitch, 2009; Jessiman, 2008; Piccolo et al., 2010).

The review in this chapter of diversity and corporate boards in America discussed the manner in which current leaders face the challenges of bringing about true unification and maintenance in the area of diversity. The topic of diversity is important due of the ongoing increase of ethnic populations into the mainstream of American society and must now include an appreciation for various lifestyle differences. Resolutions to diversity issues include policies and procedures in the work environment that stress the avoidance of discriminatory practices. They also involve the inclusion of men and women from various ethnic groups in all areas of society (Daresh, 2007; Graves, Sr., 2014; Jordan, 2011; Zweigenhaft & Domhoff, 2011). The chapter concluded with a historical perspective of African American women and their leadership experiences, including foundational information dating back to slavery and to the present.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

### **Restatement of the Problem and Purpose**

Leadership and ethics are considered subjective in nature (Fitch, 2009). Likewise, Northouse (2007) indicated the term leadership has different meanings for different people. His definition of leadership included the ability to influence a group of people and the attainment of common goals. Despite the subjectivity of the word leader, Hall (2009) declared leaders who maintain high moral values and ethics are vital to any organization. Ongoing and challenging issues and problems faced by organizations will not be resolved without effective leadership (Bennis & Nanus, 2007).

Ethical theory provides a system that guides individuals in decision making about that which is considered right and wrong in given situations. Ethics is central to leadership due to the nature of the process that involves engaging and influencing followers to achieve common objectives. Effective leaders find a resolution to address competing imperatives such as the managerial and the moral. Leaders of profit and non-profit organizations must address an abundance of moral dilemmas as they deal with a variety of challenging work related situations (Northouse, 2007). Decision making is an integral part of leaders' responsibilities. Ethical decisions are likely to mirror the overall character and philosophies of the organization. As the leader's actions can have profound and far reaching influences on those associated with the organization, it is imperative that the leader make decisions and model behaviors that are ethical in nature (Fitch, 2009).

An examination of relevant literature on African American women revealed no studies that have explored the ethical decision-making practices of African American women leaders in Western Kentucky. Similarly, Seltzer (2009) observed limited studies

and gaps in research pertaining to ethical viewpoints of African American women. As women climb the ladder into key decision-making positions, issues of ethics become more relevant (Albosta, 2000). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the way in which African American women leaders in organizations in Western Kentucky describe their ethical decision-making practices. A review of literature revealed African American women have not traditionally been studied in this manner and, therefore, data collected from the study were added to the existing body of literature by providing specific outcomes that give a voice to this underrepresented group of individuals (Creswell, 2013).

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretative/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (Creswell, 2013, p. 44)



## Interview Questions

This study outlined the way African American women leaders made difficult decisions relative to their ethical values. Exploratory research questions consisted of the following:

1. Tell me about some difficult decisions you have made over the course of your career?
2. Can you tell me about some of your ethical values?
  - a. What are the foundations of those beliefs?
  - b. Have your values changed throughout your career?
3. What are some of your organization's values?
4. Earlier you described several difficult decisions you have made. Discuss whether your decisions were influenced by your personal values or by your organization's values.
5. Did any of those decisions compromise your values in order to avoid negative consequences?
  - a. Have you had other times in which you were tempted to compromise your values?
  - b. What was the outcome?
6. Please share anything else that would help me to better understand your ethical decision-making process as a leader.

Demographic information was collected and used for descriptive purposes, which consisted of: age range, race/ethnicity, marital status, number of dependents, highest level of education completed, occupation, and years in the leadership position (Crall, 2011).

Participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent Form in which they were informed that their information would be confidential and data would be reported in such a way that individuals are not identified.

### **Description of the Research Design**

The phenomenon explored was “ethical decision making,” and the research was conducted with a heterogeneous group of 10 African American women employed in leadership positions within organizations in Western Kentucky who had experienced this phenomenon in their work environments (Creswell, 2013). Empirical Phenomenology was the theoretical foundation for this qualitative study. This framework was chosen as it focuses less on the researcher’s interpretations and more on understanding the essence of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). This holistic approach searches for essence and meaning in the personal accounts of stories shared by participants as they provide descriptions of ethical decision making. The open-ended interview questions reflected the interest of the researcher, who viewed the participants’ experiences and behaviors pertaining to ethical decision making practices as inseparable (Moustakas, 1994). The use of this theoretical framework increased the probability that the study would make a contribution to the field involving ethical decision making (Bryant, 2004).

### **Participants and Selection Process**

The participants consisted of 10 African American women employed in leadership positions within diverse organizations in Western Kentucky. All had experienced the phenomenon of ethical decision making in their work environments (Creswell, 2013). Study participants were identified by sources that included contacts made to various community leaders of public and private organizations requesting names

of leaders; the Commonwealth of Kentucky's website also was reviewed for women serving in Kentucky. Criteria for participants included African American women who had experienced ethical decision making while serving in leadership positions in organizations in Western Kentucky. Purposeful sampling was used to select the participants, who were chosen because they had stories to share about their lived experiences with the phenomenon of ethical decision making in their leadership positions (Creswell, 2013). Participants were initially contacted by telephone, after which they were e-mailed a confirmation letter. During the introductory telephone conversation and in the follow-up correspondence, the purpose of the project was explained; the procedures to be used; the method for collection, analysis, and storage; as well as the method to maintain confidentiality. They also were informed of the potential benefits and possible risks of participation in the study and encouraged to ask questions in order to better understand the project. An Informed Consent Form was included with the introductory letter.

### **Procedures and Data Collection**

Upon approval from the University's Institutional Review Board, preliminary telephone calls were made to the proposed participants. The Letter of Participant Solicitation (Appendix A) and an Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) were sent to each participant via e-mail. Appointments were scheduled in order to conduct interviews which were approximately two hours in length and conducted in person at a mutual location agreed upon by the researcher and the participant. Follow-up interviews were needed to clarify particular responses for some participants. The investigator recorded participant responses without paraphrasing, summarizing, or omitting any information

(Fowler, 2009). Interview questions were asked exactly as written on the Interview Protocol – Conversation Guide with no variation in wording (Appendix C). As open-ended questions were utilized, some participants were probed for additional information on incomplete answers. Probing occurred by repeating the question or asking the participant if she had anything else to add to the response or by asking for clarification on all applicable responses (Fowler, 2009).

With participants' permission, interviews were recorded on a hand-held recorder in order for the investigator to review and accurately transcribe responses. The investigator transcribed responses and e-mailed transcripts to participants to review for authenticity and validity, thereby allowing them to make changes as they deemed necessary (Seltzer, 2009). During data collection, the researchers' experiences with the phenomenon were bracketed in order to objectively conduct interviews. Data were stored on internal and external media storage units. The computer used for recording and storing data had protected passwords known only by the researcher. Printed and electronic data were secured in a locked location in order to be protected from damage and in a location easily known and accessed by the researcher (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis Strategy**

Data analysis began with a review of interview transcriptions and highlighting significant statements, sentences, or quotes that provided an understanding of the participants' experiences with the phenomenon of ethical decision-making. The significant statements were developed into themes for textual descriptions of the participants' experiences. The textual descriptions were used to write a structural description that connected the settings influencing the participants' experiences. From the

textural and structural descriptions, the researcher wrote an essential composite description that presented the “*essence*” of the ethical decision-making phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

### **Methodological Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

Each participant was assumed to have answered all questions honestly. Potential delimitations of the study involved descriptions of their behavior in decision making-processes, rather than through the researcher’s observations of their actual behaviors (Bruno, 2004). Possible participant bias could have occurred if they were overly concerned with the researcher’s personal opinion of them based on how they responded to the questions.

Likewise, the study’s potential limitations included the minimal amount of research information available regarding the African American women in leadership positions in organizations in Kentucky as a whole. Therefore, only women who served in leadership positions in the western region of Kentucky were represented in this study. Another limitation related to the subjective nature of the terms *ethics* and *leadership*, which have many definitions based on a review of literature (Fitch, 2009).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Institutional Research Board (IRB) at the researcher’s affiliated institution (Crall, 2011). During the initial contact with participants, the researcher explained the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. Some survey participants were anticipated to experience some minor psychological discomforts when answering survey questions related to their ethical behaviors and their related

emotional experiences (Crall, 2011). The Informed Consent document was reviewed to ensure the integrity of research intent, and standards and a follow-up letter that included the Informed Consent form were sent to participants. Individuals were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and their refusal to participate would have no effect on any future services they may be entitled to receive from the university. They also were reminded that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

### **Veracity of the Data**

Individuals were assured their identity would remain confidential throughout the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants, and data were reported in a manner to maintain confidentiality from individuals who read the study (Rico, 2009).

### **Summary**

Chapter III began an outline of the purpose to examine the ethical-decision making experiences of 10 African American women who research has shown have not traditionally been studied in this manner. The participants were asked to describe difficult decisions they encountered over the course of their careers and whether their ethical or organization's values impacted the outcomes of those decisions. All had been in leadership positions within organizations in Western Kentucky and had experienced this phenomenon of ethical decision making in their work environments (Creswell, 2013).

The constructs in this study included ethics, decision making, and leadership. The research design was Empirical Phenomenology. Also included in this chapter were detailed descriptions of the participant selection process, procedures, data collection, and

analysis. The chapter also addressed the delimitations, limitations, ethical considerations, and veracity of the data.

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

An analysis was conducted of the lived experiences related to difficult decisions revealed by a group of 10 African American women through in-depth interviews (Hall, 1992). The purpose of the phenomenological qualitative study was to determine the way in which African American women leaders in organizations in Western Kentucky made difficult decisions based on their ethical values. Empirical Phenomenology was the methodological approach utilized for this study. This framework was chosen because it focuses less on the researcher's interpretations and more on understanding the essence of the lived experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Due to the personal nature of some of the participant narratives, some responses were grouped in order to further maintain confidentiality. Purposeful sampling was used to select the 10 individuals who participated in the study, chosen because they had stories to tell about their lived experiences with the phenomenon of ethical decision making in their leadership positions (Creswell, 2013).

Upon approval of the study from the Institutional Review Board of Western Kentucky University, an initial introductory telephone call was made to each participant to explain the purpose of the project; the procedures to be used; data collection, analysis, and storage; as well as the method to maintain confidentiality. Participants were also informed of the potential benefits and possible risks of participation and were encouraged to ask questions in order to better understand the project. After the initial telephone conversations, a follow-up email that included the Informed Consent was sent to each participant (Appendix A). At the beginning of each face-to-face interview, the researcher



reiterated the purpose of the study and participants signed the Informed Consent Form and received a signed copy (Appendix B).

Ten face-to-face interviews were held with the participants from August 17, 2015, through September 3, 2015 at locations agreed upon by the interviewer and individual participants. The sessions were audio taped, with the participant's permission, and each interview was approximately two hours in length. Responses were used for the purpose of answering the central research question (Seltzer, 2009): How do African American women who hold leadership positions in organizations in Western Kentucky describe their ethical decision-making experiences? Exploratory research questions consisted of the following:

1. Tell me about some difficult decisions you have made over the course of your career.
2. Can you tell me about some of your ethical values?
  - a. What are the foundations of those beliefs?
  - b. Have your values changed throughout our career?
3. What are some of your organization's values?
4. Earlier you described several difficult decisions you have made. Discuss whether your decisions were influenced more by your personal values or organizations' values.
5. Did any of those decisions compromise your values in order to avoid negative consequences?
  - a. Have you had other times in which you were tempted to compromise your values?

- b. What was the outcome?
6. Please share anything else that would help me to better understand your ethical decision-making process as a leader.

Each interview was transcribed verbatim. The researcher encouraged participant validation by sending transcribed interviews to each participant, allowing the individual to review the data and provide feedback on the researcher's interpretation of responses (Anderson, 2010). Some participants made changes to their personal transcripts and emailed them back to the researcher. Transcripts, audio-tapes, and other information were secured in a locked file cabinet under the direct care of the researcher. The data were analyzed and the results included the participants' experiences with difficult decisions and the impact of their ethical values on their decisions in the work environment. Demographic information was collected, and common themes were derived from the narratives. Pseudonyms were used to identify the 10 participants in order to maintain confidentiality. This chapter includes a description of the findings derived from the qualitative study. Due to the personal nature of some of the participants' responses, some difficult ethical decisions discussed during interviews have been excluded from the analyses (Bruno, 2004); otherwise, the analyses and evaluation of the findings follow (Seltzer 2009).

### **Data Analyses and Findings**

Data analysis began with a review of narratives and extrapolating significant statements and quotes to determine the way participants made difficult decisions based on their ethical values. Thematic clusters of meaning were gleaned from the significant statements and used to write textual and structural descriptions that connected participant

experiences and the settings that influenced them. From the textural and structural descriptions, a summary description presented the “*essence*” or culminating aspect of the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

The findings revealed a variety of perceptions of difficult decisions related to the ethical values relative to decision making. The themes represented perspectives shared by the participants relative to the six open-ended interview questions, as outlined on the Interview Protocol – Conversation Guide (Appendix C) used to record responses during individual interviews (Seltzer, 2009). All participants had been in leadership positions in organizations in Western Kentucky. Demographic information such as age range, race/ethnic, marital status, number of dependents, highest level of education completed, occupation, and years in leadership was collected for research purposes and is contained in each participant profile.

Participants were asked to indicate their ages from the following choices: 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55 or 55, and older. Of the 10 participants, one was 26-35 years of age, four were 46-55 years old, and the remaining five were 55 or older. All identified their ethnicity as African American. The marital status included three that were single, five were married, and two were widowed. For number of dependents, one had two, one had three, and the other eight had no dependents. Dependents were defined as young, adolescent, or college-age children for whom participants were financially responsible. Education levels included one associate’s degree, four bachelor’s degrees; two master’s degrees, including one who was completing her dissertation for a doctoral degree; and the remaining three had doctoral degrees. Of the 10, seven were employed in public sector organizations, two in corporate sector organizations, and one in a not-for-profit

organization. Due to the small number of participants and the relatively small geographic region from which the sample was taken, participants' specific job titles are not listed in order to further maintain anonymity. Years in leadership experience included two with less than 10 years, three with 15, two with 20-25 and the remaining three participants with 36-45 years of leadership experience (Table 1).

Table 1

*Participant's Demographics*

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Number of Dependents	Level of Education	Occupation (Employment Sector)	Years in Leadership
Deborah	46-55	Married	None	Doctorate	Public	2- current position
Elizabeth	46-55	Single	None	Bachelor's	Public	25
Esther	55+	Married	None	Bachelor's	Corporate	40
Martha	55+	Married	None	Master's	Public	20
Mary	46-55	Married	2	Doctorate	Public	15
Miriam	55+	Single	None	Bachelor's	Public	15
Naomi	46-55	Single	None	Bachelor's	Public	15
Noah	55+	Widowed	None	Doctorate	Not for Profit	36
Ruth	55+	Widowed	None	Associate's	Corporate	45
Sarah	26-35	Married	3	Master's	Public	8

Overarching themes were derived from the six open-ended interview questions. Creswell (2013) and Weiss (1998) indicated that analysis of data includes identifying five to eight categories or general themes. Coding is the practice of gleaning information from participant interviews and slotting it into a set of themes that capture the essence of their meaning (Weiss, 1998). Categories and coding of data from interviews revealed seven themes that were coded based on participants' difficult decision-making experiences related to their ethical values: (1) professing Christian, (2) ethical foundation from parents and/or grandparents, (3) mentorship, (4) values have not changed throughout

career, (5) must prove myself as an African American, (6) must work harder than White workers, and (7) few or no other minorities in leadership in my agency, see (Table 2).

Throughout the data analysis process, the researcher routinely reviewed and compared narratives and quotes and used inductive reasoning to combine some themes (Seltzer, 2009).

Table 2

*Themes Derived from Participant Interviews*

Themes (Subject or Code Words)	Participants									
	Deborah	Elizabeth	Esther	Martha	Mary	Miriam	Naomi	Noah	Ruth	Sarah
Professing Christian	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ethical foundation from parents/grandparents	X	X	X	X	X	N/A	X	X	X	X
Mentorship	X	X	X	X	N/A	X	X	X	X	N/A
Values have not changed throughout career	No	No	N/A	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Must prove myself as an African American	N/A	X	X	X	X	X	X	N/A	X	N/A
Must work harder than White workers	N/A	X	N/A	X	X	X	X	N/A	X	N/A
Few or no other minorities in leadership in my agency	N/A	N/A	X	X	X	X	X	N/A	N/A	X

Note: X indicates participants' response to an interview question coincided with the theme. N/A indicates no indication of the theme mentioned in participants' responses.

Participant profiles contained a brief description of demographic information. Due to the personal nature, some information was excluded from narratives. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned that represented women whose

names appear in the Holy Bible. The pseudonyms were: Deborah, Elizabeth, Esther, Martha, Mary, Miriam, Naomi, Noah, Ruth, and Sarah.

The findings from interviews are outlined the following sections of this chapter:

Section I – Participants’ demographic information

Section II – Significant statements from interview questions 1, 4, and 5

Section III – Significant statements from interview questions 2 and 3

Section IV – Significant statements from interview question 6

Section V – Summary

### **Section I – Participants’ Demographic Information**

Deborah preferred her ethnicity to be identified as Black and was within the age category of 46-55 years. She was married and had no dependents. She had a Doctorate and was employed in a private sector organization with two years of leadership experience.

Elizabeth had no preference for her ethnicity being identified as African American or Black and was within the age category of 40-50 years. She was single and had no dependents. She had a Bachelor’s degree and was currently employed in two public sector organizations with 25 years of leadership experience.

Esther preferred her ethnicity to be identified as Black and was within the age category of over 55 years. She was married and had no dependents but stated she had two adult children. She had a Bachelor of Science degree and had been employed by in both the private and public sectors with 25 years of leadership experience.

Martha had no preference for her ethnicity being identified as African American or Black and was within the age category of over 55 years. She was married and had no

dependents. She had a Master's degree and was employed in a private sector organization with 20 years of leadership experience.

Mary preferred her ethnicity to be identified as African American and was within the age category of 46-55 years. She was married and had two dependents. She has a Doctorate degree and was employed in a public sector organization with 15 years of leadership experience.

Miriam preferred her ethnicity to be identified as Black and was within the age category of over 55 years. She was single and had no dependents. She had a Bachelor's degree and was employed in a public sector organization with 15 years of leadership experience.

Naomi preferred her ethnicity to be identified as Black and was within the age category of 46-55 years. She was single and had no dependents. She had a Bachelor's degree and was employed in a public sector organization with 15 years of leadership experience.

Noah noted not applicable for ethnicity and was within the age category of over 55 years. She was widowed and had no dependents. She had a Doctorate degree and was employed in a public sector organization with 36 years of leadership experience.

Ruth preferred her ethnicity to be identified as Black and was within the age category of over 55 years. She was widowed and had no dependents. She had an Associate's degree and was employed in a private sector organization with 45 years of leadership experience.

Sarah preferred her ethnicity to be identified as African American and was within the age category of 26-35 years. She was married and had three dependents. She had a

Master's degree and was employed in a private sector organization with eight years of leadership experience.

## **Section II – Significant Statements from Interview Questions 1, 4, and 5**

1. Tell me about some difficult decision you have made over the course of your career?
4. Earlier you described several difficult decisions you have made. Discuss whether your decisions were influenced by your personal values or organization's values.
5. Did any of those decisions compromise your values in order to avoid negative consequences?
  - a. Have you had other times in which you were tempted to compromise your values?
  - b. What was the outcome?

The participants' responses follow.

Deborah believed that leadership involves making difficult decisions and taking responsibility for the results of those decisions. In one story she revealed her struggle with those who looked like her:

People who look like me: I've been faced with making some tough decisions and had to consider whether to base my decision on doing something for someone because you looked like me, or whether to base the decision on ultimately what was best or the institution. I struggled with the question,

“Am I letting my people down? Am I acting white? Am I not down with



the cause?” I asked myself, “Do I struggle with being black and what can I do to help my people?”

Deborah resolved the situation by stating:

I still must be true to my ethical values and the good of the organization and not make personal but professional decisions where the organization is involved.

Deborah shared another difficult decision that involved meeting with her department unit’s leadership team:

My whole job as a leader in this agency is that of problem solver. I think the problem solving aspect (the difficult piece) was one reason I fought leadership for a long. I wrestle with always making “the” right decisions. I think some of it comes from my childhood when my mom would often question my decisions. For example, she sent me to the grocery store to get a medium can of beans. There were no medium cans of beans, so I bought two small cans. She would always say well, why didn’t you do this or that? She didn’t realize what her questioning did to me, but after a few times of your mom (the person who knows better than you) questioning and stating that perhaps the other choice would have been a better choice that shaped my ability to make decisions. As a result of those experiences, I question every decision I make. I ask if this is “the” best decision, I don’t want to err because erring did not feel good. I did not have the approval of my mom. I did not make the best decision that pleased my mom. So in making decisions today, I ponder if it is the best

decision so whoever is involved can be pleased with me. That's a problem, because people are not always going to be pleased with my decision, just as my mom wasn't always pleased. We are two different human beings and we are looking at things from different perspectives.

Deborah stated that until just recently, her difficult decisions were influenced more by her personal values than her organization's values. She had been making her decisions in line with her beliefs and values. "I am learning that I have been hired to do a job and a part of that job is to carry out the policies and procedures of my organization. There are decisions that I must make because of my organization's values, but the ways I communicate them most certainly are influenced by my personal values."

Elizabeth shared a story in which she served as a recording secretary for an organization. On an occasion after she had taken minutes for a meeting, someone in leadership asked her to exclude certain information in the minutes. A leader in that organization had been accused of mismanaging agency funds:

I had worked closely with him in the past so it was difficult for me to take a stand, but in the end, I did the ethical thing and shared the information.

In the end, I was glad I shared the information. Because I shared the information, the information I shared helped to clear the person that was being accused.

Elizabeth indicated her decision to disclose information in the meeting minutes was based on her personal values of honesty and helping individuals in trouble. She felt good about herself for sharing that information. She continued by saying that in that situation, she could have compromised her values in order to avoid the negative consequences:

I wrestled with the decision of whether to disclose the information or not.

I thought, “Am I going to be honest and share what I have knowing the other person’s reputation would be damaged.” I didn’t stand for his behalf to share the good things about him. I didn’t share as much as I could have.

I regret that!

Elizabeth elected not to share other difficult decisions she had made. Regarding other times in which she was tempted to compromise her values, Elizabeth responded, “Yes,” and added that she thinks each of us on a daily basis is tempted by many decisions:

On my job, I work at a flex schedule and if I’m not careful, I could take advantage by not arriving to work or to and from lunch on time.

For the overall outcomes of any decision, she might have been tempted to compromise her values to avoid negative consequences. She was conscious about being accountable in all areas of her life and that, most of all, she was mindful of her accountability to God, who blessed her with a job, and she takes those responsibilities seriously.

Esther shared a difficult decision that involved an employee who regularly violated the agency’s computer use policy by using the computer for personal use during the work day:

I often reminded employees of the company computer use policy and asked that comply with the policy. I also reminded employees that I had the ability to access their computer usage information if necessary. Once an employee spent a great portion of the workday searching and applying for other jobs during the workday. My employees were all younger than I was and they thought I was not computer savvy enough to access

information from their work computers. My difficult decision in that on-going abuse of the computer use policy involved whether to let the employee know that I was aware of her blatant misuse of the computer and also whether to reprimand her for her actions.

Esther resolved the situation by deducting the earnings for one day from the employee's paycheck. The employee protested the deduction in her pay, and Esther informed her she had documentation evidence of the violation and would provide it if the employee wanted to view it. Esther said shortly after the abuse of the company computer incident and deducted pay, the employee resigned from the agency. Her decision to deduct the employee's pay involved her belief that one should earn a full day's wage for a full day's work. She stated that the particular employee consistently violated both her personal and the organizational values. Another difficult decision Ester shared involved reporting a customer for a fraudulent act:

We had a customer who reported a house fire at the home. I was questioned by an official for an insurance company and asked if I believed what the customer had stated. I stated that I didn't know if the customer's account of what happened was true or not. Even though the customer was a good customer but to this day, I believe the customer set the house on fire to collect insurance money. I reported this to the authorities and was asked why I felt they committed arson, and I let them know I had been given some information that I couldn't prove and because of some disturbing things the customer had said to me there were red flags to indicate some unscrupulous act had occurred. I reported the customer

because I felt that was the right thing to do. Partly as a result of my report, the company investigated the situation and did not pay the claim.

Esther commented that her personal Christian values impacted her decision more than her organization's values:

I operated the business not solely based on what the company wanted or required me to do but based on my own values as well.

She indicated there were no instances in which she was tempted to compromise her values in order to avoid negative consequences.

Martha shared a story of attending leadership, board, or triage meetings for her job:

Many times you might be the only African American in the room or maybe you and one other African American in attendance. So I'm sitting there being me because I don't know how to be anyone else. At times when I would answer questions, address situations, etc. I would be perceived as the angry Black woman or be looked at as if I'm "acting Black" – what does that really mean? I'm a professional woman and I know how to be professional but I also have to be me. I was just being myself and responding in a manner based on my responses to the discussion. Do I know argue over that, discredit that, uphold that, or do I just leave it alone. That's a difficult decision.

In another difficult decision, Martha shared a story in which she was employed as an instructor:

In teaching school, a lot of times one of the most difficult decisions have

to do with grades. Grades aren't always black and white and tests are not always great examples of a student's knowledge base. When a student has a border-line grade (within 2-3 points) between a letter grade of C or D, etc., it's very difficult to decide whether to add points so they could receive good grade, especially if it made the difference in a passing grade or not. If the student attended classes and worked hard every day and completed assignments to the best of their ability, I wouldn't have a problem adding a few points to their grade to help them. But, if they had shown little initiative throughout the semester, never came to class on time, missed a lot of days, then whatever grade they earned would be the final grade they would receive.

Martha said her decision regarding student grades was influenced more by her personal values than the values of the organization; however:

I'll say in general 55% of my decisions are based on my personal beliefs and 45% are based on organizational values. I'm giving a little edge there because I have to believe in what I'm doing. When I'm hired into an organization, I realize that organization has its own values, but I can't follow the values of the organization if I don't believe in them. In my decision making, I'm going to think about what is the just, fair, equitable, and honest thing to do and if that outweighs the organizational values then I need to talk to a colleague or supervisor or someone to let them know that I can't do that because I don't believe that's right.

She had not been tempted to compromise her values in order to avoid negative

consequences in any of her decision-making situations.

Mary indicated her most difficult decision as a leader involved terminating an employee:

With the economy being like it is, I hated to lay anybody off, especially with the job market being like it is – unstable. That decision was hard for me because economically, I knew the person had a family and relied the income and insurance the job provided. As much as this decision affected me personally, I made the decision and terminated the person from an organizational standpoint – it was not a personal decision. The person just did not fit with the organization and allowing them to remain would jeopardize other employees and the organization as a whole.

Mary did not have any other difficult decisions that she wanted to share. Mary stated her decision was influenced more by her organizations' values:

In the difficult decision involving terminating an employee and other decisions as well, I don't make those decisions from a personal standpoint. There's really no room for personal decisions on this job. I follow organizational policies without deviating, this avoids lawsuits.

Regarding whether her decision compromised her values in order to avoid negative consequences in the termination of the employee, she was not tempted to compromise for any reason; however, she wanted to offer some other job duties so the individual could keep her job. She concluded by indicating she ultimately based her decision on the facts. She noted there have been other times when she was tempted to compromise her values

especially, when someone else's livelihood was at stake. The outcome resulted in the termination of the staff because she would not put other staff in jeopardy.

Miriam shared a story about the dismissal of an employee:

I laid out an important strategy prior to the task. The employee's immediate supervisor recommended the employee be dismissed prior to the end of the six month probationary period; however, I was given the task of speaking to the employee regarding the situation. She was upset at the news and lashed out at me. I felt this wasn't fair to me – two other people recommended her dismissal. While talking to her, I remained professional.

She elected not to share any other difficult decisions. Miriam commented that her decision was influenced more by her organization's values:

The co-worker in that situation caused clients to lose needed services.

She was hired to do a job and she failed to consistently perform her job duties. We have deadlines and we must get and stay organized in order to meet those deadlines.

Regarding whether she was tempted to compromise her values in order to avoid negative consequences, she wanted to tell the co-worker that the decision to dismiss her was not made by her but by two others, although she did not reveal that information to the co-worker. Miriam also stated she could not recall other times when she was tempted to compromise her values.

Naomi shared a story regarding the termination of an employee:



Within the first year of my new role as supervisor, I discovered that a subordinate, who had been a friend, had been falsifying time and attendance on her timesheets. I was required to report that and request major disciplinary action against the subordinate and that was very difficult because she was a friend. I gathered the documentation, which was left in plain sight, and began to investigate the situation. I then turned my evidence over to superiors to justify why I was requesting a major disciplinary action and the employee decided to resign the position rather than be terminated. Again, I knew as a supervisor, I would have to make some tough decisions, but never thought it would involve having to recommend the dismissal of that person. My decision in the co-worker who cheated on her timesheets involved both my personal and organizations' values. I don't regret my decision of turning the falsified timesheets over to superiors. We both were hurt by the situation. It was a business and ethical decision. I feel when you're in a leadership position, subordinates typically know you and the agency's core values and know what they are supposed to do and not do. When they violate those values, then they should be able to accept the consequences that come with their unethical choices. In that situation, I followed the guidelines set forth in the agency's standard operating procedures. Sometimes it has meant not hiring someone or not allowing them to remain employed for my agency past probation period because of a number of reasons.

Regarding whether her decisions were influenced by your personal values or organization's values:

My decision in the co-worker who cheated on her timesheets involved both my personal and organizations' values. An employee should not call in sick then report to their outside/secondary job. They're paid from the primary job to be at home sick and the secondary job may be a conflict of interest. They could be dealing with same clients or sensitive situations, as well as the co-worker committed a dishonest act of lying to the supervisor in order to go to another job!

Naomi responded to the question regarding whether her decision compromised her values in order to avoid negative consequences by commenting:

In the situation with the co-worker who falsified her timesheet, I did not compromise my values in dealing with that situation. If I had not followed through with my investigation and reporting, that would have compromised my integrity. All you have is your word, so it's important to maintain your integrity.

Regarding whether there were other times in which she was were tempted to compromise her values:

Yes, I have been tempted to compromise my values; however, I did not because of the teachings I had as a child, my dedication to my agency's standard operating procedures, and my personal value system. I will not violate my values. I have been tempted to compromise when I knew someone would get in trouble for their actions, then I realized policies and procedures are in place, and need to be followed to guide staff and also

protect them and the agency so remembering this helped me to now compromise a values.

As far as the outcome:

Some co-workers have looked unfavorably on me for my ethical stances; however, I believe rules and regulations should not be deliberately broken. As long as I am doing my job to be best of my abilities, I can live with my decisions, even if others don't agree.

Noah shared a story in which she discharged an employee:

I'm strict on attendance and punctuality. I had a worker who reported to work late on several occasions. I discharged her and told her to appeal my decision. I told her I had to do what the policy said, but I'd go to bat for her in getting her job back. There are all kinds of ways to approach difficult decisions. As a supervisor, sometimes you have to make decisions then depend on policies and procedures. You have to consider the human factor (humanism). I was concerned about doing the right thing to cultivate a good an employee. In spite of everything, she had good leadership potential.

Another difficult decision shared by Noah was a story that involved an injury to a customer and subsequently being asked to falsify agency records regarding the incident:

The situation was investigated and during the investigation, an administration asked me and another employee to go back and rewrite documentation. The other employee stayed over and wrote two or three

weeks' worth of notes. I told her not to do it and reminded her that she would be jeopardizing her career if she did. But I wouldn't do it, so the supervisor had someone else to do it. As a matter of principle, you do the right thing. You still have your integrity and somebody is going to listen to right. Don't ever put yourself in a position to compromise your values. God rewards faithfulness with favor.

Regarding whether her decision was influenced by her personal values or organization's values:

I don't believe you can separate the two. Whatever your personal values are, they will be the same in the secular or work environment.

She stated she had not compromised her values in order to avoid negative consequences:

You have to be willing to defend that in which you believe. I'm a firm believer, you stand for what you know is right. You might not know what the outcome is going to be, but the outcome is going to be right in God's sight. God sees the situation and He is only going to do good things for you. It's not like microwave quick, some things require long suffering.

Ruth shared a story regarding a vendor:

There was a vendor I had who I contacted to make changes to an order.

The representative treated me very unprofessionally and would not honor my request. After the exchange, I thought if they don't care about me and my business any more than that, I would sever the business relationship – that is just what I did. Afterwards, a representative from that business came to see me to apologize and wanted me to allow them to be a vendor

again. I accepted the apology and told him that I would not be doing business with them anymore. The representative then offered me a check that had a large sum of money. I looked at the check then gave it back to him and said “No thank you.” He was surprised at my actions and told me I could use the money any way I wished. I still refused the check and the offer to allow them to be a vendor for my business again. Although I accepted the apology, I did not want to give them the opportunity to mistreat me again.

Although I could have accepted the apology and the check, I held true to my ethical beliefs and values which include: Not being easily persuaded, everything is not about money – there are other important things to consider in decisions, and not compromising my beliefs for money (not allowing someone to buy my allegiance – it always comes back on you later).

Another difficult decision Ruth made involved securing a bank loan:

One of the toughest dilemmas I’ve faced was back in the early 1980s when I applied for a bank loan to put a roof on my business: I guess I stood the test of time, “Oh God.” I went to a bank down town to obtain a bank loan in order put a new roof on the business. The bank officer, I guess, didn’t believe in women, especially black women borrowing money, especially \$8,000. I never will forget what he said, “We can’t loan your kind that kind of money!” Your kind, he said, I’ll never forget the words he used. I didn’t lower my dignity or fall into the stereotype of cursing and getting up and

walking out. I held my tongue and listened to what he said and then I got up and walked over to another loan officer. She said, is something wrong, you look worried? I said yes, I just had an encounter with that other loan officer and I want to know if there is someone else, even the bank president that I can speak to. I have a business and need to put a new roof on it. She went and got another loan officer and I told her what happened. They processed my loan application and gave me the loan. Before I left that bank, that man came and apologized to me. Because of the respect and concern she showed me, we are still friends to this day. In spite of how unkind and unprofessional he treated me, because of my values, I refused to act ugly in return. It was a real challenge because I have never been talked to in such a disrespectful way. My experiences as an African American leader have been very challenging, but overall it's been a good journey.

Ruth stated she was not willing to compromise her values in order to avoid negative consequences and although there have been times in which she was tempted to do so, she remained true to her ethical beliefs.

Sarah shared some difficult decisions regarding the hiring of employees:  
As an agency leader, I am faced with difficult decisions daily. A number of which require using our ethics and/or values. Some of the difficult decisions I have had to make mostly deal with corrective actions or terminations. We are often forced to make decisions based on investigation results. Sometimes it is difficult with just "he said, she said" to determine who is telling the truth. Those decisions are extremely

difficult especially when it relates to someone's livelihood. Other decisions we make involve the hiring and recruiting of employees. We have to determine based on an interview or resume whether or not someone is fit for a job. This can become difficult because we cannot use factors such as age, race, disability, socioeconomic background, or other protected categories to determine whether or not to move forward with an applicant. While one would prefer to say those things do not matter that is not entirely true because our personal experiences cause us to put some people into varying categories. What we cannot do is allow those factors to be the determining factor on whether or not we move forward with an applicant. The human resources department staff are people managers and decisions are made daily to support management and the human commodities that are required to run the business.

Sarah said her decision was influenced by both her personal beliefs and the organization's values:

As a leader, I am governed by the core values and mission of the organization for which I work. One of those values is to conduct myself in an ethical manner. While the organization plays a major role in how I conduct myself I am also governed or influenced by my personal values. I will not be forced or coerced into doing things that I believe are unethical.

Regarding whether she compromised her values in order to avoid negative consequences:

I believe that we often do what is necessary to avoid negative consequences for ourselves. While accountability is a core value of mine I

do realize that being held accountable is not a comfortable place to be. No one wants to be held accountable and sometimes we adjust our values accordingly. In leadership though we must try to remain consistent and like my mom used to say what's good for one is the same for others. Leaders we are often held to a higher standard and we are watched by others to ensure that we are following the rules. So while I do not want to be held accountable or deal with negative consequences those are the results of my actions and I have to accept them.

Sarah said she definitely had moments in which she was tempted to compromise her values; however, after considering the consequences, she still acted ethically.

### **Section III – Significant Statements from Interview Questions 2 and 3**

2. Can you tell me about some of your ethical values?
  - a. What are the foundations of those beliefs?
  - b. Have our values changed throughout your career?
3. What are some of your organization's values?

Deborah gave the following response regarding her ethical values:

I'm a born again believer in Jesus Christ. I try to follow Jesus' teachings.

I believe in the Golden Rule: Treat people the way you want to be treated

- Love neighbor as self.

She said her ethical foundation was derived from her mother, maternal grandmother, and grandfather. Regarding whether her values had changed throughout her career:

I don't know if my values have changed, but I certainly have. I am more pliable and less rigid. I am a little more patient. I am a little more open to



differences of opinion and the fact that perhaps there really is another way to look at an issue. I truly try to think about the human being behind the data.

Deborah comments about her organizations' values include:

The core value is respect, without it - no trust and no relationship.

We also value service to internal and external customers. If we have these values in place and follow them, everything falls into place.

Elizabeth stated her ethical values consist of honesty, dependability, and helping others:

The ethical value I value most is honesty, being honest in relationships and on the job in job duties. Honesty is especially important for leaders.

Dependability, can you depend on the other person to do what they say?

Your (my) name is important. I also think genuinely helping others and mentorship is very important.

Her grandmother and mother were the foundation for ethical foundation:

My grandmother was a strong, devout Christian. She would talk to our whole family about the importance of the family's name. My mother was also instrumental in my moral foundation. She had a strong ethical foundation as a result of my grandmother and she in turn taught me those values. Also, I was raised in the church. We were required to attend church every Sunday and that's what helped shape me and helped me to have my strong Christian background.

Regarding whether her values had changed throughout her career:

My values have been pretty consistent throughout my career and have become even more important as I get older. Not only is important that I represent my family's name well, it's more important that I serve as a great example in representing my heavenly Father's name.

Elizabeth's comments about her organization's values included:

Accountability – You can't do things any kind of a way and think every will be alright. As leaders, we must be accountable to those we lead. When I'm held accountable, I feel a lot more responsible for the work I'm called to do. The Bible tells us, "To whom much is given, much is required."

When I live by those guidelines, it takes me to another standard of living.

Esther's ethical values included honesty and overall treating individuals the way she desired to be treated. Her strong ethical foundation came from my father and mother.

Regarding whether her values had changed throughout her career, she said her values had not changed throughout her career. Esther's organizational values are basically the same as her personal values: treating customers with honest, fair, and just treatment. She wanted both she and her employees to treat customers the way they wanted to be treated.

Martha's ethical values included equality and honesty:

I believe in honesty. I think you should be very honest and fair with people that you work with. People don't always like honesty. Just because it's true or honest don't make it easy to accept. You can be tactful but I still say be honest and be fair with the people you work with and work for. I also believe everybody deserves a second or third chance when possible.

For some violations, second and third chances are not going to be possible. But if it is something that a person can be given another chance, I believe people should be given another opportunity whenever possible. I don't believe in just throwing people away because they might have done something wrong.

Martha passionately stated that, her ethical values were derived from the upbringing she received from her parents:

My religious beliefs and life experiences all impact my beliefs. My experiences as an African American woman over all the bridges, tunnels, mountains, and valleys have gotten me to this point in my life.

She said her values had changed throughout her career:

I have truly mellowed out since I first began my career. I was harder on myself, those that I worked with, and those who worked for me. I've learned to lighten up some when dealing with life's issues and also to accept people the way they are. I think mentoring others or having a mentor is a very important in helping get successfully advancing in life.

We must pass on what we know so others can benefit and help even more people. We must support and help each other, that's how we move forward and get better.

Martha mentioned her organization's values included being concerned with every consumer, every day. She said workers definitely believed in and lived by that adage.

Mary stated that some of her ethical or moral values included not stealing and following the Golden Rule, or to do unto others as you would have them do to you. She

said she was a very honest person who did things to the letter, by the book. She also mentioned she could lose her job if she did not follow policies and procedures. Mary said her grandmother raised her, so most of her moral beliefs came from her:

Back in the time period she grew up in things were very hard. She worked hard most of her life and had to do extra work to get by. She would say, “You can’t half-step and be successful. She instilled in me that as an African American, I would have to work extra harder than Caucasian co-workers. She saw what her children were capable of achieving and she did not want them being subject to mediocracy. She said, “Don’t think you can do what they (Caucasians) do and get the same result, you must work harder. That is true – I know this!

Mary said her values have not changed throughout her career:

I have always believed in going the extra mile, demanding excellence, and working hard in order to succeed, those beliefs haven’t changed at all.

Mary indicated that some of her organization’s values included remaining ethical at all times when dealing with clientele, being on time to work, being available to serve the clients’ needs, no slacking in following the rules or relative to outstanding job performance, and following agency policies and procedures.

Miriam indicated her strongest values were associated with being a Christian:

My strongest belief – I am a Christian and I strive to be Christ-like, and I also try to treat people like I want to be treated. I demonstrate my beliefs on my job. The majority of my co-workers are professing Christians. If I’m having a bad day, I feel comfortable asking a co-worker to pray for

me. I really value my work place. We can openly show our devotion to our beliefs.

I have a strong work ethic and won't compromise my values. I believe in reporting to work on time and staying over if I need to meet a deadline until the job is done. Because of my high work ethics, if I had a subordinate who had lower standards, we would have to at least meet in the middle. My work standards are tied to my upbringing.

She said her foundations are rooted in her family relationships:

Family is very important to me – we have close relationships with each other. By the time I was age 13, my parents were deceased, and I just don't remember a lot about them. My oldest sister who was 24 years old at that time and already had a family, but she took me and our other three siblings into their home. She taught us how important family and education is.

I have a mentor who I have sought counsel from throughout my career. I was recommended for my current job by my mentor. I try to mentor other individuals. We have several African American employees and I feel somewhat responsible to share things that I think will help them on the job.

Miriam expressed that she felt her values had not changed throughout her career.

Naomi shared that some of her ethical values included the right and wrong values she was taught as a child which were: don't take anything that doesn't belong to you,

treat others as you want to be treated, and if you find something that doesn't belong to you, return it or turn it in to someone in authority:

I do take the values I learned from my parents and church extremely seriously. Also, while in college I took an ethics course and it was very beneficial and that class actually reinforced my parents' and church's' teachings, and my own thoughts regarding ethics. She said her mother and sister were the primary foundations for her beliefs:

My mother taught me my primary values. I believe children learn their primary attitudes and actions from home or whoever is responsible for their upbringing. My grandparents were deceased when I was a young child. Also, my older sister played a significant role in shaping my ethical views. The mothers in my church were mentors to us, they were instrumental in teaching me morals. They would take the girls aside and teach us how to conduct ourselves as ladies. It's important for young people to have responsible mentors and for adults to have good mentors to.

She added that overall her values have not changed throughout her career:

However, some things have changed. Sometimes it's difficult to be nice to some people because they will take advantage of you if you let them. You don't have to be mean and nasty, but you can be firm. I've learned this lesson the hard way by being hurt, then I've had to rethink how to maintain my values while being assertive.

Naomi commented that some of her organization's values included performing job duties to the best of their abilities, following established procedures, not falsifying documents or records, treating clients with dignity, respect, and let them know they have self-worth.

Regarding whether Naomi's decision involving the co-worker who falsified her timesheets, she said her decision was influenced both her personal and organization's values against stealing and lying. She also said she did not compromise her values in dealing with that situation, and she would have compromised her integrity if she had not followed through with her investigation and reporting. She said it was important to maintain both her word and her integrity, which were both very important to her.

Regarding whether there were other times in which she was tempted to compromise her values:

Yes, I have been tempted to compromise my values; however, I did not because of the teachings I had as a child, my dedication to my agency's standard operating procedures, and my personal value system. I will not violate my values. I have been tempted to compromise when I knew someone would get in trouble for their actions, then I realized policies and procedures are in place, and need to be followed to guide staff and also protect them and the agency so remembering this helped me to now compromise a values.

Regarding the outcome of making the decision to terminate the employee who falsified her timesheets:

Some co-workers have looked unfavorably on me for my ethical stances;

however, I believe rules and regulations should not be deliberately broken.

As long as I am doing my job to the best of my abilities, I can live with my decisions, even if others don't agree.

Noah revealed the following regarding some of her ethical values:

I am a woman of deep faith. For any person to be successful, they have to know what they believe in, what is acceptable and unacceptable for them.

They must stand on those beliefs even if no one agrees with them, they have to stand and always be prepared to accept the consequences of their actions whether positive or negative. Everybody is not going to be accepting of what you believe.

She said the foundations of those beliefs were her parents. She said her family were people of faith and she not only heard their teachings, but she witnessed their acting upon their faith:

I think one of the biggest problems I've experienced in leadership positions is that so many people whether they are Black or White don't have a foundational ground in their upbringing and if anything destroys us as a nation – faulty parenting would be the problem.

Regarding whether her values have changed throughout her career:

No they have not changed. I have mellowed in my presentation or how I present myself and the information. Sometimes we can be so strong in our beliefs, and we may have to soften them.

Noah said her organization's values included equality, fairness, justice, honesty, and above all love. Regarding whether Noah's decision was influenced more by your



personal values or organization's values, she stated she did believe the two could be separated:

Whatever your personal values are, they will be the same in the secular or work environment.

Noah's decision did not compromise her values in order to avoid negative consequences. She passionately commented that individuals must be willing to stand for and defend that which they believe is right, even if the outcome is unknown. She believed the outcome will be right in God's sight and further commented:

God sees the situation and He is only going to do good things for you.

It's not like microwave quick, some things require long suffering.

Ruth shared the following regarding her ethical values:

I have strong Christian values. Being raised in a Christian home there were a lot of dos and don'ts. Grandmamma and granddaddy's ethics and there was just some thing's that you just didn't do. My maternal granddaddy would always say, "You can't build a house without a foundation and the foundation has to be firm and stable." You have to start with the foundation and work your way up. Big papa would always say, "You never see anybody go to the top without starting from the bottom." I had a lot of encouraging words from my grandparents.

She said the foundation of those beliefs were her parents and maternal and paternal grandparents. She also said they provided the groundwork for her solid foundation for her values and beliefs. Regarding whether her values changed throughout our career, she said:

I am more confident and depend strongly on my values and my attitude towards adhering to those values which are now more firmly stated and help guide me in my career.

Ruth reported the following regarding her organization's values:

Dependable, trustworthy, honesty, very courteous, respectable, first impression could be your last impression, neat and clean, wear a smile, be friendly. Treat customers with kindness and fair treatment. The mission statement for the business is absolutely based on my personal ethical beliefs. Me and a staff member developed and wrote the Business' Mission Statement. It's framed in the hall entrance of the business.

Ruth commented that her organization's values included being dependable, trustworthy, honest, very courteous, respectable, dressing neatly, and being friendly and smiling throughout the workday. She said her decision was influenced more by her personal rather than organizational values. She also noted that, in the difficult decision regarding whether to terminate services from the disrespectful vendor, she did not compromise her values in order to avoid negative consequences; however, there had been other times when she was tempted to compromise her values. Ruth elected not to share any experiences due to of the personal nature of the difficult decisions.

Sarah remarked that ethical values included being truthful at all times, treating others with dignity and respect, and providing people with opportunities to be successful.

Regarding the foundation of those beliefs:

My parents were the foundation for my ethical beliefs. These values come from my religious upbringing and from my belief that everyone should be

given the opportunity to be successful. From a young child I was raised in the church and always taught to love people with the love of God. So while it may become difficult it is something that I try to live by. My belief that all should have the opportunity to be successful comes from what I have seen in the African American community and how some are held back for some of the same reasons that I mentioned in question number one. I used to hear my parents say lots of times that black people have to work harder than White people to get ahead. I don't think this has been especially true for me as a Black woman but I do think it is true for Black men.

In question number one, Sarah talked about dealing with difficult decisions that dealt mostly with corrective actions or terminations. Her decisions were based on investigation results, and sometimes it was difficult to determine the truth when one worker's account differed from another worker's account in a situation. Regarding whether her values have changed throughout our career, Sarah said:

I would like to think that my values have not changed throughout my career however that would be naïve of me. As you learn more, grow more, and become wiser your views of life change. You gain more life experience and you do not see things through the narrow glass that you looked through in times past.

#### **Section IV – Significant Statements from Interview Question 6**

6. Please share anything else that would help me to better understand your ethical decision-making process as a leader?

Deborah shared her struggles with being identified as a leader:

There are things that I have wrestled with in this whole leadership process.

This goes back to never really seeing myself or feeling like a leader

because

I, in my mind did not possess the traits that I thought a leader had and even though I have participated in numerous leadership preparation programs. To me the great man theory of leadership involves someone who is a visionary, smart, a problem solver and I didn't see those attributes within myself. It's really embarrassing and shameful - I heard that I was a leader, but I didn't embrace it. The mind is so powerful you can see something different than what you're thinking, but because it's your thought, that what sticks. That was a part of what I had wrestled with for the longest. I kept thinking, "I'm not a leader, so why do people keep saying I am a leader. The whole thing is, I kept finding myself in leadership positions. I've had to deal with my own insecurities. I got so tickled once and said, "Lord, I don't understand why I keep landing here because I am not a leader. A minister in my church preached a message, "The Fundamentals of Faith." Out of everything he said, here's what stuck with me, "Truth over Fact" In fact, I made it my password. The facts may say that I am not the most intelligent individual in the whole organization. The facts may say that I don't have all the answers. The facts may say this or that – that is a fact! But, the truth, which I know to be the Word of God- the truth is that, "Greater than He that is in me, so whatever fact I don't

know, whatever vision I don't see, the all-knowing, all-powerful God does. The truth is if I acknowledge Him in all my ways, he will direct my paths. He is only a whisper away. I can't tell you the times I have been in meetings and sometimes things are said and I say to myself, "Lord if you don't reveal the answers to me, give me the answers, I have no clue what to do.

Deborah concluded her interview with the following three statements:

I believe one has to be true to self. Locate people for mentorship, formal or informal mentors, as long as the person can relate to your issues and challenges you face. I still contact my former supervisor for support. From a Christian perspective – Take everything to the Lord in prayer, and it'll be alright!

Elizabeth commented:

I recall my parents and my brother saying when I was young that Black people have to prove ourselves to show we are just as good as any other race of people. I do actually recognize and believe we, Black people, have to prove ourselves before we are accepted. Maintaining our ethical beliefs is very important – especially as women I haven't experienced this but I know women who said they have sometimes been asked for sexual favors in order to advance to other levels in their employment, even in the church. I have advanced in my career, but not without a struggle,

Esther remarked:

Throughout my career, I've served on various community boards. On one particular board I'm the first Black person to serve in the top leadership

position. There is a great need for more diversity (Black people) on boards of directors. I am usually the only Black person in the room at many meetings. I rarely see Black people in high positions of authority throughout the local community or in other regions where I visit, work, or serve. While serving on boards, I try to be steadfast in my duties and represent myself and others in an ethical manner. When I attend board and any other meetings, I feel I represent black people. I sometimes feel I have to prove myself (justify my existence for being a member) and show also that I can make valuable contributions and I have pertinent input to add to the discussions. I also believe that mentorship is vital to helping others (especially the younger generation to be successful). I mentored a young lady who is now 30 years old and doing great.

Martha stated:

I had a White supervisor for many years that I would talk to. She told me was going to mark me down on my performance evaluation because she said I didn't bond with other co-workers. She said I was standing off to myself. I said to her, "Have you ever thought, about the fact that they are not bonding with me." Have you ever thought about the fact that I'm the only Black woman on the team? She never understood that feeling that I had so as a result of that, I did what I had to do and I'm not sure she always agreed with it. I'm a business woman and I go to meetings to handle business and if that makes me standoffish, then so be it.

Everybody's opinion of a leader is different. If you don't fit the mode,

you're labeled as not being a team player and your evaluations will reflect that. So I have to think when making decisions, do I stay true to myself in order to fit in with someone else's opinion of what they think I should be or represent or do I lose myself? I refuse to lose myself. So there have been times when I had to move forward and go to a different employer and job. As I've said, when making difficult decisions, I have to be true to myself. When I'm treated in ways by other races because of who I am, I hesitate to call it discrimination. I prefer to call it being culturally misunderstood. I don't think the problem happens with just having White supervisors. They just sometimes don't get us. When it comes to Black and White people, sometimes I just think we're apples and oranges. They are not going to understand us – they just don't get us! The part that they don't get or don't understand, that's the part they are going to try to get rid of so if that is discrimination, then I have felt it throughout my career. I think we'll always have to work harder than they do. I have tried to prove that I'm as good as they are when it comes to being a professional and effectively doing my job but I don't think I can ever measure up to them or be good enough in their eyes. Education at least helps to level the playing field some. I think of acculturation (which we decided a long time ago, wasn't going to work.) Back in slavery times, African were brought to America and told to forget who they used to be, take on my way and become like me. You can't take my cultural upbringing and tell me to lose all of that because you are the leader and I have to be like you to fit in. So





to try to mold me to become like (I guess the typical white leader) and if you don't get there, your evaluations are going to reflect it.

Mary noted:

As an African American woman, I don't believe my African American counterparts have things that they have to deal with on the job as difficult as I do. I think it goes back to the Bible where women were subservient and were not really in the workforce. I work in a male-dominated job and there's just a lot of men who don't think of women as their equal. I think some of them still think that a woman's place is in the home. Some men don't feel I 'am qualified as the male staff. I still have staff who question my judgements, because I am a woman, and even a high ranking officials find fault in almost everything I do, job related. Because of this, I feel I have to work harder than my male counterparts, Black and White. When I first started and even after earning a Ph.D., I had a White supervisor to discount it and not show me the level of respect I deserved. I really had to work hard to prove myself and earn many folks respect. I was told, "I'm not going to call you doctor, your name is Mary. For a long time, I was the only African American staff for the agency, now there are three of us. There were many times that I was the only African American in many of the work meetings I attended. Things are a little different now, we have a woman in our top leadership position, and our American Correctional Accreditation requires agencies have so many African Americans in leadership.

Miriam commented:

I have not experienced any particular work environment challenges related to my color. I'm a hard worker. Every promotion I received, my supervisor recommended me for it. I'm seen as a person who can be depended on to do my job – to do a full days' work for a days' pay. I work over as often as needed to get the job done. I'm usually the only African American in most of my meetings and I feel I'm respected because of the work I do and what I contribute to the organization. We have a high standard of performance to meet from top management down to my staff. When it comes to my job duties, I don't make hasty decisions. I want to be fair to all persons involved. I don't view all circumstances as black or white; I realize there may be a grey area as well. Before I make decisions, I weigh the possibilities.

I've been the type of employee that wanted to learn all I could on the job. Before I retire, I would like to mentor other African American workers to be successful in the organization – I won't be here forever!

Naomi stated:

When I accepted the leadership position as supervisor, I knew I would have to make some tough decisions. When I was promoted to supervisor, it was not a smooth transition. Some of former peers had difficulty viewing me as the supervisor. They wanted to view me as just another co-worker. I think it's challenging being an African American woman leader because I feel I often have to justify my actions. Example, I began working here in

1991. Up until last year, I was the only African American supervisor in my department. Because I am direct and to the point, superiors and subordinates think I'm mean. I've been called a bully. If I give a directive to a subordinate to perform a certain task, per policy, I expect them to do it. I don't deviate from agency policy. I feel that at least 45% of the challenging personnel issues I face are because of my ethnicity or my skin color. As far as I have observed, these challenging issues involve black and white people are across the board. I hate to say it (No I don't hate to say it.) It's been my experience that some black people don't want another black person telling them what to do and most white people don't want a black person telling them what to do. As African American women leaders, I feel we're behind in score by three. There's the white man, white woman, black woman, then black man. I can only imagine how Barack Obama, the President of the United States is being treated; although it plays out in the media often. In my agency, currently there are no black men in leadership positions and I've been here for 24 years. In my whole career there have not been any African American men in a leadership positions and there have been only four African American woman leaders in my region that I'm aware of and I've been all over the state.

Noah said:

The way African American women are viewed as leaders in the Black community is a problem and especially in the church. I believe 90% of our battles are internal (within the race) not with White people. People

categorize other people. Remember, no matter how much we achieve, we are debtors to our past (to someone in our past). Role models are important. The most effective role models I've had in my life were my mother and my oldest sister. My oldest sister was four years older than I was and just the fact that she was going to college was unheard of in the community in which we came from. I think that mentors will show only certain parts of their life because they want you to get the good parts and do the right thing in your life. No matter how much we've achieved in life, all of us are debtors to our past. All of us owe somebody something. If it's nothing but a word of encouragement or a saying they have imparted to us that make us think in the decision making process before we do it.

Ruth remarked:

My advice to other leaders would be to stay focused on their family, church, and career. Trust God! Ask themselves why they chose to be in the role they're in. Always remain positive although they will encounter many negative people. Take the words, "give up" out of their vocabulary. I would remind them that with proper preparation, they can do whatever tasks necessary. You can do it, you're not in your situation alone seek resources from family and community whenever they need to. It is important that black people help other black people to succeed. I am sponsoring a young woman who is currently in college. When I first started my business, I barely had resources such as money, assets, or inventory. Another black business owner helped me greatly. I'll never

forget his kindness and support and I feel it is vitally important that each of us reach back and try to help another black person who is trying to make something of him or herself. A challenge in being an African American woman is the feeling or pressure to continuously prove yourself as confident, worthy and capable in a leadership role. However, I will remain steadfast and stand upon the principles and values I have learned and still apply today with a much stronger conviction.

Sarah stated:

As a leader, and specifically an African American female leader I have to be extremely wise and my decisions have to be well thought out. There are so many who wait for people in a position such as mine to make drastic mistakes that would cost the company money. With every decision I continue to stand behind my personal values and ethics. I am willing to stand behind my decisions 100% and I am always prepared to support those decisions with the necessary data or study.

### **Summary**

Data compiled from participant interviews were presented in this chapter. Demographic information from each participant also was included. The purpose of the phenomenological qualitative study was outlined, along with the methodological approach. Seven overarching themes were identified from participant narratives, and the data analysis included a breakdown of sections that included the participant response to applicable interview questions. Chapter V contains a summary findings and discussion, as well as recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine a group of 10 African American women leaders in organizations in Western Kentucky to determine the way difficult decisions were made relative to their ethical values. The literature review consisted of the constructs of leadership, ethics, decision making, and African American women. Studies were found on all constructs; however, no studies were found that explored the lived experiences of African American women leaders in Western Kentucky to determine the manner in which they made ethical decisions in their workplaces. Seltzer (2009) observed that limited studies and gaps in research exist regarding the ethical views of African American women. The current study, while not exhaustive, examined a group who had not traditionally been studied in this manner. This research provided an opportunity for this underrepresented group of African American women to have a voice (Creswell, 2013).

### **Summary of Findings**

The following interview questions were addressed:

1. Tell me about some difficult decisions you have made over the course of your career.
2. Can you tell me about some of your ethical values?
  - a. What are the foundations of those beliefs?
  - b. Have your values changed throughout your career?
3. What are some of your organization's values?

4. Earlier you described several difficult decisions you have made. Discuss whether your decisions were influenced more by your personal values or your organization's values.
5. Did any of those decisions compromise your values in order to avoid negative consequences?
  - a. Have you had other times in which you were tempted to compromise your values?
  - b. What was the outcome?
6. Please share anything else that would help me to better understand your ethical decision making process as a leaders.

The following participant demographic information also was recorded and included: age range, race/ethnicity, marital status, number of dependents, highest level of education completed, occupation, and years in position.

### **Age**

Of the ten participants, one was 26-35 years old (Sarah); four were 46-55 years old (Deborah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Naomi); and the remaining five were 55 years or older (Esther, Martha, Miriam, Noah, and Ruth).

### **Ethnicity**

All participants were African American.

### **Marital Status**

Three of the participants were single (Elizabeth, Miriam, and Naomi); five were married (Deborah, Esther, Martha, Mary, and Sarah); and two were widowed (Noah and Ruth).

### **Number of Dependents**

One participant had two dependents (Mary); one had three (Sarah); and the other eight had no dependents.

### **Education Level**

One participant had an associate's degree (Ruth); four had bachelor's degrees (Elizabeth, Esther, Miriam, and Naomi); two had master's degrees (Sarah and Martha) one was completing her dissertation for her doctoral degree (Martha); and the remaining three had doctoral degrees (Deborah, Mary, and Noah).

### **Occupation (Employment Sector)**

Six participants were employed in public sector organizations (Deborah, Elizabeth, Martha, Mary, Miriam, and Naomi); three were employed in corporate sector organizations (Ester, Ruth, and Sarah); and one participant was employed in a not-for-profit organization (Noah).

### **Years of Leadership Experience**

Two participants had less than 10 years' experience (Deborah and Sarah); three had 15 years (Mary, Miriam, and Naomi); two had 20-25 years (Martha and Elizabeth); and the remaining three had between 36-45 years of leadership experience (Esther, Noah, and Ruth).

The study established internal validity by ensuring that participants' lived experiences were chronicled and transcribed correctly, and emerging themes were identified (Seltzer, 2009). In order to verify the validity of the interview data, transcribed interviews were emailed to participants that encouraged them to review and make



changes prior to the analysis and recording of data. Some participants made minor changes and emailed updated transcripts back to the researcher.

Responses to six open-ended interview questions were used to identify seven overarching themes. The data analysis process involved a constant review and comparison of the responses. Thematic clusters were gleaned from significant statements and quotes from the narratives. The themes included stories about the way in which participants made difficult decisions based on their ethical values, as well as whether those decisions compromised their values in order to avoid negative consequences. Themes also included participants' ethical values and the foundations of those beliefs, as well as whether their values changed throughout their career. Finally, participants were asked to share anything else that would help the researcher to better understand their ethical decision-making process as leaders.

The transcripts from the participant interviews were analyzed and the following seven overarching themes were derived from the data.

## **Themes**

### **Theme 1: Professing Christian**

All participants acknowledged being a Christian, or they passionately stated they believed in God and/or Jesus Christ as their personal Savior; as such, they practiced and obeyed His teachings as indicated in the Holy Bible. Excerpts and/or statements used to express their belief in God and/or Jesus included: "I'm a born again believer in Jesus Christ" (Deborah), "my strong Christian background" (Elizabeth), "my religious beliefs" (Esther), "I am a believer in Jesus Christ, a practicing Christian" (Martha), "following the Golden Rule" (Mary), "I am a Christian" (Miriam), "I take values I learned in church

extremely serious” (Naomi), “I am a woman of deep faith” (Noah), “I have strong Christian values” (Ruth), and “my religious upbringing” (Sarah).

### **Theme 2: Ethical Foundation from Parents and/or Grandparents**

Nine participants stated their ethical foundation was derived from parents and/or grandparents: Deborah, Elizabeth, Esther, Martha, Mary, Naomi, Noah, Ruth, and Sarah.

### **Theme 3: Mentorship**

Eight participants expressed mentorship as being important. Their statements included: “It’s important to locate people for mentorship” (Deborah), “Mentorship is very important” (Elizabeth), “I also believe that mentorship is vital to helping others” (Esther), “I think mentoring others or having a mentor is very important in helping to successfully advance in life” (Martha), “I have a mentor and I try to mentor other individuals” (Miriam), “It’s important for young people to have responsible mentors and for adults to have good mentors too” (Naomi), “Role models are important. I think mentors will show only certain parts of their life because they want you to get the good parts and do the right thing in your life” (Noah), “It is important that black people help other black people to succeed. I am sponsoring a young lady who is currently in college. I have strong Christian values” (Ruth).

### **Theme 4: Values have not Changed throughout Career**

Seven participants asserted their values had not changed throughout their careers: Deborah, Elizabeth, Mary, Miriam, Naomi, Noah, and Sarah.

### **Theme 5: Must Prove Myself as an African American**

Six participants believed they had or have had to prove themselves as an African Americans. Their statements included: “I do actually recognize and believe that we (Black people) have to prove ourselves before we are accepted” (Elizabeth), “I have to prove or justify my existence for being a member and show that I can make valuable contribution and that I have pertinent input to add to discussions” (Esther), “I have tried to prove that I’m as good as they are when it comes to being a professional and effectively doing my job but I don’t think I can ever measure up to them or be good enough in their eyes. Education at least helps to level the playing field some” (Martha), “I really had to work hard to prove myself and earn many folks respect” (Mary), “I think it’s challenging being an African American woman leader because I feel I often have to justify my actions” (Naomi), “A challenge in being an African American woman is the feeling of pressure to continuously prove myself as confident, worthy and capable in a leadership role” (Ruth).

### **Theme 6: Must Work Harder than White Workers**

Seven participants stated that while growing up they were told and/or they believed that Black people have to work harder than White people. “I recall my parents saying when I was young that Black people have to work harder and prove ourselves to show we are just as good as any other race of people. I do actually recognize and believe that we, (Black people) have to prove ourselves before we are accepted” (Elizabeth), “I think we’ll (Black people) always have to work harder than they (White people) do” (Martha), “My grandmother instilled in me that as an African American, I would have to work extra harder than Caucasian co-workers. She saw what her children were capable of

achieving and she did not want them being subject to mediocracy. She said, “Don’t think you can do what they, Caucasians, do and get the same result, you must work harder. That is true, I know this!” (Mary), “As a minority, I felt I had to work twice as hard as others on my job. Growing up, I was taught that I had to work twice as hard as others worked, because of my color” (Miriam), “I remember hearing growing up that as a Black person; I would have to work harder than other races” (Naomi), “My parents used to always say, Black people have to work harder than White people in order to get ahead. I truly believe this. I’ve worked in places and seen White people give 80% and get a pat on the back and Blacks had to give 150% without any recognition or praise” (Ruth), “I used to hear my parents say lots of times that black people have to work harder than White people to get ahead. I don’t think this has been especially true for me as a Black woman but I do think it is true for Black men” (Sarah).

#### **Theme 7: Few or No Other Minorities in Leadership in my Agency**

Six participants described being the only one or one of few minorities in leadership positions within their agencies. “I am usually the only Black person in the room at many meetings. I rarely see Black people in high positions of authority throughout the local community or in other regions where I visit, work, or serve” (Esther), “Have you ever thought about the fact that I’m the only Black woman on the team?” (Martha), “For a long time, I was the only African American staff for the agency, now there are three of us” (Mary) “I’m usually the only African American in most of my meetings” (Miriam) “In my whole career, 24 years, there have not been any African American men in leadership positions and there have been only four African American women leaders in my region that I’m aware of and I’ve been all over the state” (Naomi),

“There are very few African Americans in leadership positions in my agency anyway”  
(Sarah).

### **Summary of Themes**

While sharing stories during the interviews, two participants became emotional and wept when reflecting on their difficult experiences. On several occasions, some participants asked that the recording be stopped to allow them a chance to verbalize. They would say, “I don’t want you to use what I’m telling you right now, but I need to say this.” After they shared the very emotional or personal experience, they would say, “You can turn the tape back on now.” It was as if some participants were transported back to the actual event, conversation, or setting in which the experience occurred.

All participants expressed their belief in God and Jesus Christ. They emphasized that, as children, their value systems came primarily from parents and grandparents. They also strongly affirmed that their beliefs in God and/or Jesus Christ were imperative to their values. All talked about regularly attending church, and most remarked that church attendance was mandatory in their families. Only one participant indicated she was not required to attend church but affirmed the atmosphere of faith her parents created in their home and community caused her to desire to attend church. While most of the participants acknowledged parents and/or grandparents for their primary value system, two cited their sisters as being instrumental in their ethical foundations. Some were visibly emotional as they shared stories related to their ethical foundations; this was especially evident when their stories involved a deceased individual.

Mentorship was mentioned as being important for eight participants. They primarily spoke about the importance of mentors for adults in general. When discussing

the importance of mentorship and role models for children, they often described their parents and grandparents as the primary source for those interactions. White (2007) noted it was a major challenge for women leaders to find role models or mentors and often there are fewer female leaders, particularly in executive positions. Randleman (2007) conducted a study of 13 African American women leaders to assess their leadership style and the impact of other social factors on leadership development. That study revealed persistent themes, including a deep spiritual awareness; support of family, church, and community; need for role models and mentors; strong educational foundation; establishment of goals and action plan for achievement; and a positive sense of self. In discussing communal support programs for African American women leaders, Walker (2007) suggested that programs such as coaching, mentoring, and networking could be implemented.

The majority of participants stressed that their values had not changed throughout their careers. Some commented they had become more open to differences of opinions, mellowed in the presentation of dealing with others, and they emphasized as they aged their values had become more important. Participants who contended that their values had changed during their career mentioned that unpleasant circumstances in dealing with people through the years had caused them to change in the way they deal with people.

At some point during most of the interviews, many participants commented that there were few or no other minorities in leadership in their agencies. Some noted that African Americans are capable of effectively performing job duties. Most mentioned that, as children, they remembered hearing that Black people have to work harder than White

people, and that was part of the reason they felt they had to prove their worth and ability relative to their positions.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Some of the limitations for this study included:

1. The researcher assumed the participants answered the interview questions honestly.
2. The study was limited to African American women in Western Kentucky; therefore, no other groups of women were included in the study.
3. Given the intentional focus of African American women in Western Kentucky in this phenomenological study, the findings should not be generalized to African Americans in other geographical regions (Seltzer, 2009).
4. The limited population of this study did not provide for a complete picture of African American women in leadership positions in Western Kentucky. The data may not be true for other African American women leaders in Western Kentucky or other geographical areas, and the results of the study may not be representative elsewhere (Fitch, 2009).
5. The limited amount of research information available for review in terms of the particular population of African American women in leadership positions in organizations in Kentucky as a whole and Western Kentucky specifically.

## **Discussion**

This study explored and highlighted the lived experiences of a group of 10 African American women leaders to determine the manner in which they made difficult workplace decisions based on their ethical values (Bruno, 2004). The phenomenological study sought to determine the essence of the participants' thoughts and feelings based on their lived experiences associated with their values.

The women leaders were employed in various public and private organizations in Western Kentucky. Their ages ranged from 26-35 to over 55, and they had from two to 45 years of leadership experience. Information was collected and analyzed that was gleaned through individual interviews with participants. The philosophical discussions explored individuals' difficult decisions to determine whether they shared common themes with others as a result of their experiences. Phenomenology was selected as the methodological approach, as it focuses more on the participants' experiences and less on those of the researcher. The researcher identified with the phenomenon of ethical decision-making as a result of difficult decisions experienced in the workplace and excluded personal experiences associated with the research topic in order to objectively focus on the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). While stories shared by participants could be considered subjective based on their personal points of views, they were necessary for this underrepresented group of voices that continue to not be heard (Sandberg, 2013). Research has revealed limited studies and gaps in research relative to the ethical views of African American women; therefore, their lived experiences pertaining to leadership, ethical values, and decision making have not traditionally been



recorded (Ciulla, 2003; Colquitt et. al., 2009; Ferrell et al., 2002; Fitch, 2009; Hackman & Johnson, 2009; Seltzer, 2009).

A search of the constructs of leaders and leadership yielded an abundance of authors and an assortment of descriptive terms and phrases in their definitions of the words. Leadership alluded to control, influence, ability, and authority. Leadership was said to be a moral activity that included responsibility or the expectations one performs as a morally responsible individual. Influence was believed to be the essence of leadership; therefore, one influences another when the motives and perceptions of the individual targeted are affected by the actions of the initiator. Leadership cannot exist without power, as the leader has the ability to influence the behavior of the follower or person seeking knowledge. Attributes of leaders included honesty, inspiring, competent, exercising good judgment in decision making, and operating with integrity (Archard, 2013; Crall, 2010; Fitch, 2009; Hackman & Johnson, 2009; Hall, 2009, "Rules in Leadership," 2003; Yukl, 2006).

With the variety of societal definitions of leader and leadership, the researcher was interested in determining whether leadership was perceived in the same manner by the participants, as well as in some African American communities. As organizational and community leaders were contacted for suggestions of women's names to be included in the study, African American male leaders in one city had a difficult time recommending names of women. As a result of that situation, the researcher had concerns as to the way African American women leaders perceive themselves as well as other African Americans. One participant stated that, up to a point in her career, she had not

considered herself a leader because she felt she did not possess leadership traits such as being a visionary, smart, and a problem solver.

In some African American communities, there are opinion or unofficial leaders who do not have titles, such as officers or managers in organizations, and their leadership roles may not have necessarily aligned with the definitions of some experts. During the era of the 1960s and 1970s, many African American men and women were considered and respected as the sages of that age. These leaders often were older individuals who were uneducated; however, many in the community consulted them for advice on personal and professional matters. The opinion leaders always provided their unsolicited comments on various subjects that they believed would help others to progress throughout life. One maternal grandfather who had no formal education told his granddaughter, “Girl, get yourself some dirt.” His statement was the equivalent to, “Granddaughter, one of the ways in which to build wealth is to purchase property.” Another unofficial leader who was considered by many as a spiritual advisor was fond of saying, “Stay below what you know,” which translated that, regardless of the extent of education and knowledge one obtains, they should remain humble and never treat others in a condescending manner.

Many leaders in the African American community often were considered those who held volunteer leadership positions within the local churches. Those positions consisted of deacons and trustees who were in the inner circle in terms of advising and assisting the pastor and other ministers. Other leaders were the officers in church auxiliaries, such as pastors’ aides, Sunday school superintendents, and choirs. One particular group of church leaders included the mothers or older women in the church.

These women usually were quick to correct the behavior of the young people in the church. Sometimes that correction was private and other times it was public; however, due to the respect the elders garnered, church members heeded their advice and adjusted behaviors based on that interaction. Throughout history, the numbers of African American leaders in many organizations have been minimal, so the African American church remains an integral place in which many are afforded the opportunity to serve in leadership capacities and, therefore, utilize their leadership abilities. Due to the ongoing advice and involvement in the lives of many youth and adolescents, the opinion and unofficial leaders were often considered mentors and undoubtedly have influenced the behaviors of contemporary leaders.

Mentorship emerged as one of the themes for this study. Eight participants indicated mentorship as important, and some indicated they are or have been mentors to others, as well as having personal mentors. None indicated they had other women they considered to be mentors in the workplaces. White (2007) noted that a major challenge for women leaders in locating mentors is a result of the lack of women leaders in the contemporary work environment. The Randleman (2007) study of the leadership styles and the impact of other social factors on leadership development of African American women leaders revealed persistent themes that included a deep spiritual awareness, and a need for role models and mentors.

While interviewing participants and analyzing their narratives, this researcher consciously reviewed information to determine whether their age or years of leadership experience played a significant role in responses to interview questions. Based on the participants' age ranges of 25 to 35 years and over 55, no generational differences were

observed in the way participants addressed difficult decisions. Likewise, no notable differences were detected in the way participants addressed difficult decisions based on their leadership experience ranging from two to over 46 years.

Christianity, as defined by the participants, involved their belief in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior; as such, they practiced and obeyed His teachings as indicated in the Holy Bible. All participants indicated they are Christians and relied heavily on their religious beliefs to help them deal with difficult decision-making situations in their personal and professional lives. Their responses to most questions were reflective in one form or another of their Christian values. They shared their personal struggles of being African American woman leaders; however, the researcher sensed that several participants refrained from being completely transparent, perhaps due to confidentiality concerns. In attempts to ease participant concerns, the researcher reassured participants that identities would be concealed and they would have an opportunity to review and amend any of their information prior to it being represented in the study. This assurance appeared to put them more at ease and allowed the line of communication to flow freely. Upon determining the geographic region of the study and the relatively small sample size, the researcher realized that confidentiality concerns could be an issue for some participants.

In the data analysis process, significant statements made by participants' were examined and coded into segments that were used to develop the seven themes. Creswell (2013) indicated codes can represent information that the researcher expects to find prior to the study, or surprising information the researcher did not expect. In interview question number four that asked whether participants' difficult decisions were influenced by their

personal values or the organization's values, responses were as follows: Four said "No," three said "Yes," and the remaining three indicated "Both." Based on the strong ethical beliefs observed throughout the interviews, the outcome for question four was unanticipated. The researcher assumed the majority of the participants' overall responses would have been "Both" or "No." After reviewing and coding responses to question four, the researcher initially included "difficult decisions influenced more by personal than organizational values" as a theme; however, it was excluded because the four participants who responded "Both" could have been categorized with the three who responded "Yes," and they could have been included with the four who said "No." Significant statements were included as themes if six or more of the participants made the same or similar statements. In coding responses for question four regarding participants' difficult decisions being influenced more by their personal values or the organization's values, if mixed responses were coded in the "No" category, this statement would not have qualified as a theme.

As mentioned in the significance of the study, many researchers have confirmed the limited studies and gaps in research regarding African American women leaders regarding ethics, decision making, leadership, and various other topics. The researcher believes this study has made a significant contribution to the existing limited body of knowledge; however, it is imperative that ongoing further research include the stories and voices of African American women and women from other ethnicities.

### **Implications and Suggestions for Further Research**

1. As all participants in this study were African American women leaders from Western Kentucky, future research is recommended that includes a correlation

between African American women leaders in rural and metropolitan areas to determine whether notable differences exist in the way in which they make difficult decisions based on their values.

2. Future researchers might conduct a study contrasting African American women leaders with younger generations (under 40 years of age) to older generations (over 55 years of age) to determine notable differences in the way they make difficult decisions related to their values.
3. A correlation among women from different ethnic groups could be concluded to determine distinguishable leadership characteristics related to their ethical decision-making practices.
4. Further exploratory study could be conducted on the challenges encountered by African American women leaders compared to African American men.

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## APPENDIX A: Correspondence to Participants

***Greta Greenwade Jones***

Address

Telephone Numbers

Date

Participant Name

Address

Dear Participant,

As a reminder of our conversation on tonight, I am a doctoral candidate at Western Kentucky University, and I am conducting research regarding the ethical decision making practices of African American women leaders in Western Kentucky.

I have examined relevant literature on topics such as ethics, leadership, decision making, African American women and women in general. My exploration yielded a plethora of related research; however no studies were found that explored the lived experiences of African American women who hold leadership positions Western Kentucky to determine how they make ethical decisions as leaders. I am now at the point in my research where I need input regarding ethical decision making practices from women such as yourself.

My interview, will include six primary interview questions one of which involves examples of difficult decisions you have faced in our career and how your personal ethical beliefs impacted your decision making process in those situations.

The enclosed consent form serves to assure you of my research intent and standards. Please sign one form and return to me and keep the other for your records.

If you have additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at the telephone numbers above. Again, I appreciate your willingness to participate in this research and look forward the vital contribution your information will add to the body of knowledge.

Best Regards,

*Greta G. Jones*

Attachments: Informed Consent

P.S. Per our conversation: I look forward to meeting with you to conduct your interview as follows:

Date:

Time:

Place:



## **APPENDIX B: Informed Consent Document**

Project Title: Ethical Decision-Making:  
The Lived Experiences of African American Women Leaders in Kentucky

Investigator: Greta G. Jones, Telephone numbers included

You are being asked to participate in a project conducted through Western Kentucky University. The University requires that you give your signed agreement to participate in this project.

The investigator will explain to you in detail the purpose of the project, the procedures to be used, and the potential benefits and possible risks of participation. You may ask her any questions to help you better understand the project. A basic explanation of the project is written below. Please read this explanation and discuss with the researcher any questions you may have.

If you then decide to participate in the project, please sign on the last page of this form in the presence of the person who explained the project to you. You should be given a copy of this form to keep.

The study will outline ethical themes and patterns in ethical decision making that emerge from the narratives of the participants by collecting and analyzing information from a diverse group of African American women in various leadership positions in diverse organizations in Western Kentucky.

The study is being done to satisfy the requirement for a doctoral dissertation and to explore what participants have experienced in terms of ethical decision making and how they have experienced this phenomenon.

Data collection will be conducted through recorded, personal in-depth, structured interviews which may include the use of Skype with ten African American women leaders. Data analysis will follow systematic procedures that move from narrow units of analysis such as significant statements, to broader units such as the meaning of units, and conclude with detailed descriptions that summarize two elements of what and how the women practiced ethical decision making. Data analyses steps will include extrapolating significant statements, sentences, and quotes, etc. to determine how the women made ethical decisions. Thematic clusters of meaning will be gleaned from significant statements which in turn, will be used to write textual descriptions of what the participants experienced. The themes will also be used to write structural descriptions of the context of the settings that influenced how the women made ethical decisions. From the structural and textual descriptions, the researcher will then write an essential exhaustive description that presents the essence of the phenomenon. This description will focus on the common ethical decision making experiences of the women in order to convey an overall essence of their experiences.

There are no foreseeable discomforts or risks your participation in this research study.

Benefits for your participation in this research study include the contribution of your personal ethical decision making experiences being added to the body of knowledge regarding this phenomena as well as being an integral part of a study which gives a voice to the underrepresented group of participants who have not traditionally been studied in this manner which.

Officials at Western Kentucky University and my doctoral committee may inspect data collected. In all other respects; however, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law.

Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate in this study will have no effect on any future services you may be entitled to from the University. Anyone who agrees to participate in this study is free to withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

---

Witness

---

Date

**APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol  
Conversation Guide**

Project Title: Ethical Decision-Making:  
The Lived Experiences of African American Women Leaders in Western Kentucky

Interviewer: Greta G. Jones, 270-305-1738-cellular & 270-887-4040-home

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time of interview: \_\_\_\_\_  
Place/Setting: \_\_\_\_\_ Verify Contact Info \_\_\_\_\_

Project Description: The study will outline ethical themes and patterns in ethical decision making that emerge from the narratives of the participants by collecting and analyzing information from a diverse group of African American women in various leadership positions diverse organizations in Western Kentucky. (Seltzer, 2009).

**Central Research Question: How do African American women who hold leadership positions in Western Kentucky describe their ethical decision making experiences?**

Operational definitions:

**Ethics**- behaviors or judgments considered right or wrong according to ones' own beliefs no matter the culture or society (Howard & Korver, 2008).

**Leader/Leadership** - Use of power and influence to direct the activities of followers toward goal achievement (Colquitt, LePine, & Wesson, 2009)

1. Tell me about some difficult decisions you have made over the course of your career?
2. Can you tell me about some of your ethical values?
  - a. What are the foundations of those beliefs?
  - b. Have your values changed throughout our career?
3. What are some of your organizations' values?
4. Earlier you described several difficult decisions you have made.  
Discuss whether your decisions were influenced by your personal values or organization's values
5. Did any of those decisions compromise your values in order to avoid negative consequences?
  - a. Have you had other times where you were tempted to compromise your values?
  - b. What was the outcome?
6. Please share anything else that would help me to better understand your ethical decision making process as a leader.

The following demographic information is necessary for research purposes. Please be assured that this information and all your responses on this instrument will be kept confidential. Data will be reported in such a way that individuals will not be identified.

Age Range    \_\_\_18-25    \_\_\_26-35    \_\_\_36-45    \_\_\_46-55    \_\_\_55+  
Race/ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_  
Marital Status    \_\_\_ Single    \_\_\_ Married    \_\_\_ Divorced  
Number of Dependents \_\_\_\_\_  
Highest level of education completed \_\_\_\_\_  
Occupation    \_\_\_\_\_ Years in leadership \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for participating in this Research.  
Your name will not be disclosed & identifying information will be held in confidence.  
Future follow-up interviews may be necessary in order to clarify responses.*