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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctor of Education Program

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The Impact and Influence Mentoring has on African-American Leaders in Nonprofits

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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Transformational Leadership

William Boozang, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Abstract

This dissertation in transformational leadership demonstrates and characterizes research that support minority leaders seeking leadership roles within the nonprofit sector across New York state. This study gathered and learned varied perspectives and experiences of mentor relationships by interviewing people of color, primarily mature, African-American leaders from nonprofit organizations in New York state. The primary goal of this study was to determine trends and test the assumption whether mentor relationships would affect and influence African-Americans seeking executive level nonprofit leadership. The phenomenological design used for this study included face-to-face interviews and demographic surveys from individuals who participated in the study. This study contributes to the study of transformational leadership in that it provides future leaders lived experiences of how mentor relationships encouraged, motivated, and build other leaders over time. Results of the study show that mentor relationships have a significant impact and influence on job attainment, continued growth and development in the workplace, and changes the narrative for people of color, namely African-Americans.

Keywords: nonprofits, African-Americans, mentor relationships, qualitative study, transformational leadership, phenomenology

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my grandmothers, the late Chaddie (Goose) Sales, the late Mayrine (Grandma) Collins, and Ardis (Gran) Damon, who always expressed the value of education and the importance of having strong, positive role models and mentors.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

After spending more than a decade working in mission-driven nonprofits, it became clear to this researcher that senior and executive leadership lacks diversity; namely African-Americans. Robbins developed a learning brief to discuss the leadership gap among nonprofits across regions in New York state. In developing his briefing Robbins (2018) focused his study on total number of nonprofits across eight counties, per capita within the counties, number of directors to retire within five years, and the number of people of color that are executive directors. “In the brief, Robbins (2018) presented data on the characteristics of the leadership of more than 3,900 nonprofits in New York state. The findings show that African-Americans led 23.5% of nonprofits, while Caucasians led 76.5%.” There were no leaders from other ethnic backgrounds identified in the study. Yeager and Nafukho note that workplace diversity matters in order to increase job performance, business development, and increase overall equity and inclusion (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012). A deficit in the number of African-Americans in nonprofit leadership persists across New York state and is easily noticeable by staff and stakeholders. Nonprofit leadership requires a set of observational leadership skills and competencies. The opportunity of mentor and mentee relationships is important, for it provides a connection between a hiring team and a person seeking a leadership role (Aulgur, 2016). For these reasons, it is important that diversity in nonprofit leadership remains the topic of conversation until changes happen (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012).

Diversity is understood as an individual’s unique and recognizable qualities, differences, and perspectives about life. Diversity in the workplace is seen through ethnicity, sexual orientation, education, and experience (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012). In many instances, an absence

of an African-American is conspicuous in most nonprofit organizations. For many nonprofits, it is important to have a diverse workforce expanding representation of all people to ensure that diversity, inclusion, and equity is apparent. This is a critical component when it comes to advertising, recruiting, hiring, and retaining African-Americans for leadership roles. A goal of diversity in the workplace is to establish and foster an inclusive environment in a way that minorities feel more welcomed and nurtured (Awbrey, 2007).

Many nonprofits struggle with developing and maintaining diverse leadership; it is important they consider adjusting and changing their trends in order to remain viable in poverty-stricken communities where most of their population receiving services are African-Americans (Medina, 2017). Myers (2004) asserted that, “developing resourceful human beings in managing change creatively to help organizations focus and learn for current and future actions” (p. 639) would bring about positive social change. As such, nonprofit organizations should rethink their resources and work toward increasing their diversity pipeline.

The role of privilege relative to race continues to exist in most cultures, especially within the workplace. Ethnic privilege is “unearned advantages that are highly valued but restricted to certain groups” (National Association of School Psychologists, 2016, p. 2). Ethnic privilege in the workforce continues to remain in the workplace and throughout cultures, which has contributed to a low percentage of people of color in nonprofit leadership roles. This is a societal privilege that benefits non-minorities in the workplace and other areas of life (Ariss, 2014). This type of privilege is noticeable in leadership and management of people in the workplace, therefore, practices of diversity in recruitment, hiring, and relationships are important. This qualitative phenomenological study addressed the absence of African-Americans in nonprofit leadership and discusses the potential impact and influence mentor relationships may realize on

individuals and their career trajectories. Moreover, this study gained insight on the important factors mentoring has on the recruitment, hiring, and retention of current and future African-American leaders in nonprofit leadership.

Background, Context, and Conceptual Framework

Across New York state, several cities including Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Albany are among the poorest and most violent in America (Rey, 2016). Data reflect that in these cities a family of four has a household income of \$24,300 a year or less within these metropolitan cities. Among the highest number of people living in poorer households are African-Americans, who overall make up more than 54% of individuals in poverty (U.S. Census data, 2017). Given these numbers there is a cadre of nonprofits across New York state that offer barrier-breaking services to those that live at or below the poverty line. In 2016, there was a combined revenue of \$2.56 billion dollars given to more than 300 organizations in New York state (Rey, 2016). Of the 300 nonprofits, a vast majority of them work with individuals who need comprehensive health and human services providing food, shelter, clothing, education, after school programs, and Head Start.

According to Akram (2014), a theoretical framework is important to develop and use in order to overcome knowledge gaps relative to the lack of African-Americans in most organizations that are led by and employ a majority of White people. For this reason, this study used Bandura's social learning theory to describe the role of mentoring and being an example for learners by behaviors through a cognitive process (Bandura, 1977). This theory is not purely based off behavior; rather, it is a cognitive process (Bandura, 1977). A cognitive process is the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge through thoughts, senses, and/or experiences (Bandura, 1977). Some researchers, like Hill and Curry-Stevens (2017), suggested that this

provides a theoretical foundation for mentoring and works to develop ways for people to learn and address other needs. Reed (2011) indicated that the social learning theory connects the cultural environment, learning processes, and social behaviors as a bridge to support strategies and ideas. Thereby, individuals can become empowered, leaders become more effective, and best practices can become the new standard operating procedures. This form of leadership development increases the critical focus of improving diversity in the workplace and allows a person of color the opportunity to lead successfully.

Statement of the Problem

This study addressed several ways to reduce and close the African-American leadership gap in executive nonprofit leadership within New York state. A reason that contributes to this growing problem is that boards of directors do not properly recruit, interview, or hire African-Americans; therefore, the pool of applicants is not diverse (Aulgur, 2016). In nonprofits, executive leaders are tasked to drive and deliver on its mission, vision, purpose, and performance of an organization. Therefore, an organization will continue to struggle with overall organizational effectiveness and gaps within the labor force because diversity is important to its labor pool and overall productivity (Aulgur, 2016). Moreover, diversity, especially at a leadership level, provides and supports personal impact of its employees and establishes ways to further attract, develop, and retain men and women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Awbrey, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the absence of African-American in leadership roles within nonprofit organizations and determine whether mentor relationships impacted and

influenced those that have risen to the top in leadership positions such as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), President, or Executive Director.

Research Questions

The lack of African-American in nonprofit leadership continues to remain an issue in the 21st century. This study explored reasons why mentor relationships impact and influence African-Americans seeking an executive position in nonprofit leadership. In addition, this study provided focus on the impact nurturing mentor relationships and the efficacy of the bridge leadership approach. This qualitative phenomenological study addressed the following questions:

1. What are some recruitment, hiring, and retention practices to support African-Americans seeking executive level nonprofit leadership position?
2. What attributes of a mentor might influence a nonprofit leader's choice of a mentor relationship?
3. What personal and background lived experiences are relevant to an African-American in pursuit of a nonprofit executive leadership role?

This study examined the influence and impact of mentor relationships of African-Americans in nonprofit leadership roles and whether the mentor relationship will support their recruitment, hiring, and retention. The findings provide insight that can inform the development and implementation of mentor programs for nonprofit leaders across New York state.

Significance of the Study

This study explored the impact and influence mentor relationships have on African-Americans who currently serve as leaders of nonprofit organizations. The results of this study provided insight that made the development and implementation of mentoring programs more attractive for boards of directors within nonprofits relative to executive level, C-suite, and other

leadership positions. Information about leadership may help board of directors' better respond to the need for more African-Americans in nonprofit leadership. According to the literature, diversity within the workplace allows organizations to tap into unmet talent and addresses the lack of African-American and diverse practices within organizations through its understanding of management issues (Brady, 1996). Most individuals would consider diversity in the workplace as a competitive advantage. A competitive advantage can be described as a company that, or person who outperforms their rivals or peers relative to performance metrics, goals and outcomes or within its strategic plan (Amadeo, 2019).

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were provided:

Diversity. Diversity includes important and interrelated dimensions of human identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, nationality, sexual orientation and ability (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012).

African-American. African American is an ethnic group of Americans with total or partial ancestry from any of the Black racial groups of African descent (Lynch, 2019). This term is used interchangeably with Black.

Nonprofit organization. Nonprofit organization means an organization that does not work for a profit but generates revenue to cover operational and programmatic costs (Hill & Curry-Stevens, 2017).

Mentor. A mentor is considered a wise, trusted counselor or teacher (Friday & Friday, 2002) or, a challenger, cheerleader, a coach (Rashid, 2017).

Mentee. A mentee is described as a person who is advised, trained, or counseled by a mentor (Friday & Friday, 2002).

Formal mentoring. Formal mentoring is the most common mentor choice that takes place in the workplace. This style of mentoring allows the mentor and mentee to meet face-to-face over an extended period. This style of mentoring is more formal with stated goals and objectives.

Informal mentoring. Informal mentoring is a more organic mentor mentee relationship between two individuals. This style of mentoring may happen inside or outside the workplace. Often this style of mentoring is less formal and sets achievable goals and outcomes overtime.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions. Assumptions refer to aspects of a study beyond the researcher's control (Simon, 2011). For this reason, it was assumed that the expected participants agreed that an African-American mentor helped their lived experiences as seasoned leaders and that a mentor helped them get their current, or, one of their past leadership positions. The researcher invited 10 nonprofit executive leaders across New York state to participate in the study. No leaders were offered an incentive to participate in this study, it was assumed they would accept the invitation offered to further support the growth and hiring of more African-American women and men in nonprofit leadership.

Delimitations. Delimitations entail the choices the researcher made in the scope of the study and the opportunities yielded by the study (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, delimitations define the boundaries of a research study, including, the problem, sampling, instrumentation, and reflexivity (Herr & Anderson, 2015, Stringer, 2014). This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to allow the researcher to investigate the lived experiences of African-American women and men in nonprofit leadership roles and explore how mentoring relationships influenced their career advancement. The researcher utilized a convenience sample of current

executive-level nonminority and minority leaders in New York state, with whom the researcher had rapport and a relationship within this geographic area. To ensure process validity and triangulation of results, the study included face-to-face interviews and demographic surveys from individuals who participated in the study (Herr & Anderson, 2015; Stringer, 2014).

Based off the study and research methods, participants shared and disclosed that the problem statement and topic of this researcher were evident in nonprofits across the nation, and particularly in New York state. The participants' perspectives and lived experiences captured the gaps in African-Americans in executive leadership and what must be done to support their recruitment, hiring, and retention in leadership roles. To arrive at this, the researcher used the reflexivity process for validity of this study to learn the behaviors, trends, and themes. This process of reflexivity involves a researcher's reflection and/or self-evaluation of how findings were collected, summarized, and communicated (Harding, 2013; Stringer, 2014).

Limitations. Limitations refer to aspects of a research study beyond the researcher's control (Simon, 2011). Limitations are often unforeseeable and not controllable. Moreover, a qualitative, grounded research study included buy-in from some leaders across New York state, time barriers for face-to-face interviewing, and completing surveys in a timely manner, and participant-observations in their work environment. Over the course of this 10-week study, several nonprofit leaders' working schedules were packed with scheduled and unscheduled meetings, staff performance concerns, and reporting for quarterly reports to board members. For these reasons, the researcher considered these barriers of their professional experiences under the given conditions (Simon, 2011).

Another limitation for this study was the setting and population. Because this study focused on African-Americans in nonprofit leadership roles, few nonprofit organizations had an

African-American as president, CEO, or executive director, which limited the number of subjects available to participate in this research. Moreover, several African-Americans were invited to participate in the research component, yet, a limited number agreed.

Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter 1 introduced the nature of this study focusing on the absence of African-Americans in nonprofit leadership and how a mentor relationship may have an impact and influence in their career trajectory. It was defined and explained reasons why mentor relationships are key components to ensure African-Americans have a chance at executive level leadership in nonprofits. In this study, the researcher investigated and examined the organizational effectiveness of diversity in the workplace and how productivity and results are heightened when leadership is diverse and offers different perspectives (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Leadership requires an individual to have a set of identifiable skills and abilities and use them toward the advancement of a department, team, or an organization (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). More importantly, leadership requires diversity in order to establish positive norms and best practices that lead toward quality performance and commitment. In fact, diversity plays an integral role relative to leadership. Diversity emerges when differences in race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and experience are represented within a workplace (Martin, 2014). For leaders to build relationships, develop trust and transparency and establish diversity one must learn it starts with recruitment, hiring, and retention of qualified African-American in leadership positions. A diverse workplace allows for differences of opinion, increased tendency of organizational personnel, and helps individuals to overcome differences based on shared experience (Martin, 2014).

For these reasons, it is important to establish a mentor relationship to offer leadership development to African-Americans seeking executive level positions nonprofit organizations. In order to establish an argument and address the root cause of the absence of African-Americans in executive level leadership positions, it is important that nonprofit organizations discuss and work toward change management in nonprofits. It is important to recruit, advertise, interview, hire, and mentor African-American aspiring for nonprofit leadership. In addition, mentor relationships encourage transformative leadership practices for individuals that participate in a professional development initiative such as mentoring. Mentoring relationships connect a mentee with networks, seeks to establish professional consultations, and helps improve the overall workplace culture and morale within nonprofit organizations.

Conceptual Framework

Despite growth and development of activities, recruitment strategies, and impact hiring it remains a struggle to find African-Americans in executive level leadership positions in most nonprofits across the United States, and in New York state. Much of this has to do with workplace culture and environment that is established from a board level down to staff. A way to support the effort to retain and keep African-American in executive level positions is to consider mentorship. Mentoring is the process whereby a more experienced person helps a less experienced person develop capacity and greater competence (Murray, 2001). With the support and expertise of mentors, it is chiefly important that the individual mentor works within the same or near the same professional arena, including nonprofits. There are several types of mentor relationships: formal, informal, one-to-one, group, and personal or professional (Friday & Friday, 2002). For this study, formal and informal mentoring focused on the impacts and influences a person of color in advancing into an executive leadership role in nonprofits. Formal mentoring is a more structured approach within the workplace while informal learning is a more organic partnership with less structure and stated goals.

In order to share supports and barrier-breaking ideas it is best to employ the conceptual framework of nurturing mentor relationships. A positive and healthy way to ensure African-Americans in nonprofit leadership positions are considered and prepared it is chiefly important that they develop a relationship with seasoned, professional leaders in the community. The personal impact a nurturing mentor relationship has on the success of an individual and work culture allows for a more positive and high-performance team dynamic within peers and leaders (Awbrey, 2007). Awbrey (2007) further supported this notion of nurturing mentor relationships with an expectation and understanding of global economy. The global economy of organizations

ought to be tailored with the need and assumption that they attract, develop, retain, and mentor men and women of diverse race and ethnic backgrounds (Awbrey, 2007).

Social learning theory describes the role of modeling and being an example for learners by behaviors through a cognitive process (Bandura, 1977). This theory is not purely based off behavior; rather, it is a cognitive process. Some researchers like Hill and Curry-Stevens (2017) suggested that social learning theory provides a theoretical foundation for mentoring and works to develop ways for people to learn and address other needs. Reed (2011) indicated that social learning theory connects the cultural environment with training new strategies and ideas. Therefore, individuals are empowered, leaders become more effective, and best practices become the new standard operating procedures.

The process of a mentor relationship considers the development of an established relationship. For this to take place, mentors and mentees participate in a process called informal learning in the workplace. Informal learning is characterized by unplanned, incidental, and integrated daily work activities (Berg & Chyung, 2008). This method of learning engages the mentor and mentee and it offers the essential elements of behaviors, decisions, and communication that come with a leadership position. Bandura (1977) advised that this shift in learning influences the responsiveness of people as well as builds capacity based on behaviors through a cognitive process approach.

Because mentoring is an organic experience between a mentor and mentee, it is important for an individual to understand why formal and informal learning integral parts of the process are. Social learning theory is one way to establish a set of observable behaviors, influential models, and work to reinforce external and internal professional behaviors (Hill & Curry-Stevens, 2017). Mentoring builds relationships between people with like minds and similar

interests. Working in tandem with social learning theory, a mentor relationship helps individuals become successful through cultural differences, competencies in the workplace, and shared behaviors (Blechman, 1991). Moreover, the social learning theory approach hones in on social experiences from an observer's standpoint. In summary, the social learning theory is an important part of the process in mentoring African-Americans seeking leadership roles within nonprofits as they seek to grow and improve communities all while learning identifiable behaviors.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

African-Americans in leadership positions is not a widely researched topic; therefore, this study explored literature that focused on strategies to improve this phenomenon. Most of the research addressed mentor relationships in connection to leadership roles in nonprofits. The methodology used in this study was used to support how impactful and influence mentor relationships would increase diversity in leadership roles in nonprofit organizations.

African-American leaders in nonprofits. Less than 10% of African-American professionals work in nonprofit industries, including philanthropy (Medina, 2017). There is limited research on trends in the professional nonprofit sector of African-Americans working in leadership positions in nonprofits today and for this reason it is important for nonprofits to dive deeper into this growing issue. Lindsey (2003) asserted that as early as the 1970s and 1980s African-Americans began gaining access to the nonprofit workforce as professional staff. Therefore, there is a need to find creative ways to help encourage and increase diversity for nonprofit organizations that otherwise continue to do business as usual.

African-Americans in leadership is a fundamental concept for Black communities. There is a sense of pride when an African-American is leading a nonprofit that works to fight for

relevant issues easily noticed in a Black community such as poverty, discrimination, health disparities, social isolationism, and education. For these reasons, a leader's race ought to reflect the culture and climate of the communities they lead, and the needs and aspirations reflect the aspirations of the community (Dorsey, 2006).

A contributing factor to the absence of African-American leaders in nonprofits is the idea of a "glass ceiling." The glass ceiling is described as a barrier within a hierarchy that prevents minorities from obtaining upper-level management and leadership positions (Merriam-Webster, 2018). Although this continues to be an issue, leaders like Jacqueline McLeod, who created her own position in a nonprofit by establishing a program in the health industry through a college program at Long Island University, Rise to the Top (Williams, 2004). Sheena Wright, the President/CEO of the United Way of New York City, has also succeeded despite being a woman and an African-American. Wright has been in this role since 2012 and continues to improve the conditions of her community and works to reduce racial and ethnic barriers in nonprofits.

For months, the former President/CEO of the United Way in Cincinnati, Michael Johnson, worked in a hostile work environment that was fueled by subtle threats and racial biases between him and the Board President (Curnutte, 2018). Johnson expressed that he worked for more than 20 years as a nonprofit executive, receiving outstanding reviews, however, the disrespect, micromanaging, and racial concerns eventually led his resignation from United Way. Because of Mr. Johnson's years of excellence service in leadership, he was welcomed back by Boys & Girls Club of Dane County as CEO (Pasque, 2018).

Sara Taylor, inspiring leader situated in Rochester, New York (Taylor, 2018) expressed that "I have watched African-American female leaders leave this community based on an inability to secure executive leadership roles that would allow them to continue to grow and

impact the Rochester Community” (p. 4). There continues to be an absence of African-American leaders in nonprofits because they are not given a chance to demonstrate success, which impedes growth and development. Many African-Americans, both female and male, deal with the same fate as Taylor. In a quest to rebrand and rebuild herself, she hired an executive coach and obtained a mentor (Taylor, 2018). Because of her mentorship, Taylor was able to secure another leadership position outside of her community.

While nonminorities lead many nonprofits there is room and opportunity for African-Americans to take the lead also. Because of the work being done by some of the people in nonprofit leadership, the glass ceiling continues to break. The glass ceiling is a barrier that is not expected to be broken by African-Americans and women; however, once it is broken it is demonstrated as a mark of courage and ability (O’Connell, 2010). The perception of the glass ceiling for most individuals is that they must work harder, do twice as much as a nonminority, and always remain as the status quo (O’Connell, 2010). Much of the success of said African-Americans might stem from formal and informal mentor relationships.

Access to leadership opportunities. Many African-American leaders across New York state are in middle- and senior- level leadership positions while very few are executive leaders within nonprofit organizations. Improving the access that would allow more African-Americans to lead organizations can happen through mentoring, leadership development, and improved board diversity across organizations. Mentor relationships increase job attainment for current and future leaders. Although it is lonely at the top for today’s African-American leaders of nonprofits, it does not have to be.

To improve the access and opportunity for African-Americans in nonprofits, leaders must understand the development activities that are required to build job satisfaction, job assignments,

and growth within their roles presently (De Janasz & Peiperl, 2015). Most importantly, those aspiring to become nonprofit leaders are encouraged to connect with mentors early on in their careers to grow into the intended benefits that mentorship brings, gain awareness of their networks, and find ways to pave the way up to leadership roles (De Janasz & Peiperl, 2015).

This level of access for an African-American is pivotal for it increases the chances of obtaining a leadership role with nonprofits across New York state. To improve the level of access for leadership opportunities the community is expected to raise awareness through conversations with local elected officials, current nonprofit leaders, as well as, work toward promoting equity through embracing diversity. A great way in embracing diversity happens from a holistic approach that includes board leadership training, improve overall hiring practices across organizations, and encourage mentor relationships (De Janasz & Peiperl, 2015).

Racial leadership gap. Across New York state, it is easy to see there is a disparity of African-Americans leading nonprofits. For instance, a cursory review of website data for national nonprofits reveal that leadership positions are occupied by nonminorities, in contrast to a similar review of New York state nonprofits' website data, where there is an underrepresentation of minorities. This gives some evidence for thinking there is a racial leadership gap. This is supported by the work of Sherbin and Rashid (2017), who found that for quite some time the nation's workforce people have noticed and recognized stark gaps in leadership. Part of the problem that is identifiable is that most organizations lump terms like *diversity* and *inclusion* together and leave it there, rather than using these terms to reduce the gap and increase diversity leadership efforts. It is easy to calculate the diversity within an organization; however, the quality of diversity efforts to reduce the racial leadership gap remains commonplace (Sherbin & Rashid, 2017).

There is a new narrative that established six key statements that are important to understand about nonprofit racial leadership gap (Thomas-Breitfeld & Kunreuther, 2017). Each of the statements point toward the ways to improve the racial leadership gap. These six statements are:

1. It is not about differences in background and qualifications.
2. It is not about lack of aspirations.
3. It is not about skills and preparation.
4. It is an uneven playing field.
5. It is the frustration of representing.
6. It is not personal, it is the system. (p. 2)

The six statements above pinpoint the fact that people of color are equally qualified and ready to take on leadership roles as Whites, however, continue to face the unspoken and unconscious biases that prevent promotion, promise, and potential in nonprofit leadership (Thomas-Breitfeld & Kunreuther, 2017). The racial leadership gap remains a hot topic within nonprofits across New York state so much that they created a *Community Conversation for Leaders of Color*. A local foundation created space to allow people of color convene and share concerns, recommendations, and ways to bridge the racial leadership gap and establish avenues to improve these stark contrasts.

Although the United States has become increasingly diverse in the last 15 years, it remains 20% behind when it comes to people of color in executive level leadership roles (Suarez, 2017). The *Daring to Lead* reports from 2006 and 2011 illustrate that more than 3,000 nonprofits found that 82% of their executive leadership were White (Suarez, 2017). Because of alarming statistics such as this demonstrate a generational leadership gap in this sector and that programs

need to take place to reduce these racial barriers. Studies show that Black-led organizations struggle more than White-led counterparts (Turner, Brown, & Woodland, 2016).

This is more than a notion of color; rather, it is more about how the community engages with African-American leaders when it comes to funding and resources. With knowledge that less than 20% of the executive leaders in nonprofits are Black, it is important to share that their organizations have fewer cash reserves and more dependent on government funds (Madlock-Turner et al., 2017). This article further shared that “African-American led nonprofits are operating in relative isolation and lack the social capital necessary” (Madlock-Turner et al., 2017). Because of this, the pool of African-American talent decreases, which leads to a shortage of qualified and competent leaders. For these reasons, it is important for mentor relationships be established and nurtured.

Diversity in the workplace. Diversity in the workplace often supports the success and improves the performance in most organizational settings. Diversity is demonstrated by recognizing diverse cultures, financial status, age, work experience, educational background, and color (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012). Wingfield (2018) asserted that there are few Black professional men in leadership workspaces. Because of this, these men cannot develop a network with their peers and it often discourages them from seeking higher positions and wages. This idea of being in the racial minority seems to disrupt organizational performance, growth opportunities, and interrelated and connected work environments (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012). Diversity in the workplace does have an impact on teamwork, buy-in, engagement, and motivation in the workplace.

Cultural diversity has become a topic in today’s workforce; it still seems to be a distant, achievable goal (Martin, 2014). Diversity in an environment allows individuals to have varying

opinions, a sense of belonging, and develops a positive, effective work culture (Martin, 2014). Lankau (2013) asserted that, “managers and employees may not really understand the importance of leveraging diversity, nor take the time to develop skills needed to contribute to inclusive work environments” (p. 20). For organizations, namely mission-driven nonprofits, to understand and leverage diversity it is expected that managers and employees alike understand diversity is more than a notion, rather, it is a quality of good practice. Lankau (2013) further supported this claim of diversity by sharing that “best places to work for minorities are those that have a commitment to diversity from the high-ranking executives” (p. 20). To comply with such efforts, it is incumbent upon leadership to recruit, interview, hire, train, and retain African-American in leadership positions. By doing so will reinforce the importance of diversity across the organization, empower and embrace difference, and work to eliminate racial biases among current and future people of color, namely African-Americans.

Racially just workplace. The holistic approach to improving the racial leadership gap is one of many key ingredients to increase African-Americans in leadership roles within nonprofit organizations. Although there are several diversity efforts in organizations, yet, they continue to fail Black employees, in turn, those in leadership remains low or nonexistent (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). Pioneers like Booker T. Washington, an educator, activist, and presidential advisor, fought alongside other freedom writers for equal rights and economic opportunities (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). People fought for equality and inclusion for African-Americans in the workplace and hoped it would be much easier toward success; unfortunately, this is not the case.

There was progress to help increase the number of African-Americans in leadership roles; however, the number of opportunities remain low. Across organizations, African-Americans still face obstacles toward promotion and advancement within the workplace compared to Whites and

nonminorities (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). To ensure organizations are working toward a more racially just workplace it is important that they intentionally push for minority recruitment, pay for antibias training, and offer mentorship opportunities to non-White employees for critical leadership roles (Roberts & Mayo, 2019). Roberts and Mayo (2019) asserted, “just 8% of managers and 3.8% of CEOs are Black.” In the Fortune 500 companies, there are currently only three Black chief executives, down from a high of 12 in 2002” (p. 12). Because of this, African-Americans continue to struggle for advancement and promotion within the workplace.

Cost of code switching. African-Americans in critical leadership roles in nonprofits remain non-existent. In order to improve these numbers, an increased awareness of developing a racially just environment, understanding the broad issues of diversity, equity and inclusion, it is important that nonprofits consider how to improve the work culture. Research proved that mentor relationships and bridge leadership are ways to improve this leadership gap; however, Black leaders seemingly still struggle and feel inauthentic at work. Roberts and Mayo (2019) wrote “in a survey of 2,226 workers in various industries and corporate settings, African-Americans create these facades more frequently than other minority groups do and feel the inauthenticity more deeply” (p. 17). Most African-Americans will leave an organization because they feel they are changing their culture and behavior to fit in at work. Because of this, mentor relationships are important in the workplace to offer African-Americans the opportunity to have a safe space to be themselves while being guided by a trusted advisor.

Code switching is a considered a casual behavior change wherein Black people have to systemically strategize how to navigate interracial interactions in order to survive in the workplace (McCluney, Robotham, Lee, Smith & Durkee, 2019). Across organizations that lack diversity, African-Americans easily feel left out, inauthentic, and struggle to thrive and continue

toward success; therefore, they have to adjust their style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression to optimize their comfort when working with others (McCluney et al., 2019). This may be an uncomfortable situation to be in; however, it is necessary in order to fit in to help improve the racial leadership gap within nonprofits.

Given that mentor relationships are one key indicator to help promote and advance the opportunity for an African-American seeking a leadership role, code switching becomes a present factor. Unfortunately, Black employees that seek leadership roles and promotional opportunities will avoid conforming to the Black stereotype and try to fit in with nonminorities (McCluney et al., 2019). This is one of the downsides to code-switching for it removes the ability for a person to be authentic and remain true to themselves, rather, it appeals to the hiring committee and they are perceived more culturally sound than if they were to be their authentic self.

Work of diversity and inclusion. In most organizations, top, talented African-Americans exist within the labor pool; however, they are rarely given the chance to display their skills and are promoted. Because the pool of African-Americans leaders in nonprofit organizations remain low, it is important for nonprofits to consider diversity and inclusion efforts within the workplace. A way to ensure nonprofit leaders are working toward improving diversity and inclusion is to provide incentives when such efforts are met and exceeded. By doing so encourages teams to incorporate these efforts within their department. Companies are encouraged to consider adding systems and programs to their best practices to help identify, attract, and hire Black talent, especially senior and critical leadership roles (Gavett & Gavett, 2019). Cohen and Gavett (2019) asserted, “creating a work environment in which Black employees can thrive requires deliberate, sustained efforts” (p. 3).

Most nonprofit sectors have implemented diversity programs and recruited to hire chief diversity officers to help reduce racial inequality; however, that is as far as it has gotten for many organizations. The intended role for a chief diversity officer is to improve the learning environment and workplace culture in the space of diversity, equity, and inclusion (Wood, 2008). Moreover, the role creates a place to build and sustain diversity training, increase access, equity, and multiculturalism to ensure there is inclusion for all employees (Wood, 2008). Although such efforts are often thwarted and removed from its intended purpose, Ray (2019) described, “Many attempts to intervene in racial inequality assume that discrimination is a rare event, intentional actions of bad (or at least unenlightened) actors” (p. 12). In organizations, it became clear that trying to build the minority pool of applicants is a one-and-done deal, however, it required more than just meeting a quota, rather, make opportunities more appealing and accessible for African-Americans. To help combat this phenomena Ray (2019) encouraged organizations to reconsider how organizations create and distribute resources for all races that will help considerably improve racial inequalities in the workplace.

A paradigm shift of workplace culture is tough to manage for organizations; it requires dedicated, involved, and transformational people to lead the charge. In most organizations, a top down approach is often the way organizations are led through change; unfortunately, improving diversity and inclusion efforts requires buy-in and an inclusive approach from critical leaders to help lead such change. To maintain and establish growth opportunities for African-Americans in the workplace such diversity and inclusion efforts are helpful in a behavior change. It is ideal to coordinate efforts of training through identifying impact through feedback surveys, regular check-ins with employees, and observing the critical elements that helps gain access of leadership opportunities for African-Americans (Ray, 2019).

With an increase of established professional development opportunities and frequent check-ins with employees helps determine whether this a diversity effort, paradigm shift has changed the narrative in increasing the talent pipeline of Black workers (Cohen & Gavett, 2019). This is a complex problem across nonprofit organizations and has embedded years of power and privilege in the workplace without African-Americans in mind (Cohen & Gavett, 2019). The absence of African-Americans in leadership positions is a historical issue and more organizations are working toward improving these issues; slowly, but steadily. Some organizations started creating more systems like professional development opportunities, check-ins, antibias training, and other diversity efforts to shift and shape the workplace culture. To summarize, organizations must be concerned with cultures in the workplace and create a safe place for employees to be curious and discovery a way to learn about themselves and others (Cohen & Gavett, 2019).

Diversity training in the workplace. Because cultural diversity in the workplace remains a hot topic, it is important for nonprofit organizations to take heed and find additional ways to support incoming and future African-American leaders. Although diversity training is commonplace for most nonprofits, it begs employees to take heed and make change yet does not provide an employee with the strategies to make the changes necessary to bring forth diversity within the workplace. To ensure African-American leaders can lead an organization, it would be best for organizations to use perspective-taking and goal-setting exercises (Lindsey, King, Membere, & Cheung, 2017). The perspective-taking exercise is when a team member mentally walks in one or more of their peer's shoes to see how it feels to be them. In addition, the goal-setting activity allows the organization to add diversity efforts into their job performance objectives.

These experiences helped several organizations re-establish diversity efforts in a way that has improved and increased workplace productivity and challenge the norms. Lindsey, King, Membere, and Cheung (2017) asserted that “distinct challenges a marginalized minority might face can improve pro-diversity attitudes and behavioral intentions toward these groups” (p. 1). These activities allow for everyone an opportunity to grow from and grow into a new way of thinking with fresh perspective to improve overall performance and staff morale within an organization, thus allowing an African-American an opportunity to have a seat at the leadership table. The article shared that these exercises eventually produced great behavioral and support outcomes with a reduction in less mistreatment toward marginalized minorities (Lindsey et al., 2017). These are two exercises that would not only improve overall performance; they would also support the refreshed narrative for an African-American in the workplace.

Rewriting the narrative of leadership. For decades, nonminorities managed and led organizations across the nation that prohibited other races from highlighting their skills and abilities to lead. For this reason, the lack of diversity continues to be a topic of debate. Medina (2017) studied race within nonprofits and asserted that 87% of executive directors or presidents were White while African-Americans make up 6% of the labor pool. Dismal numbers like this further supported the purpose of this study and the importance to rewrite the narrative of leadership for African-Americans.

In order to rewrite the story and increase African-Americans in nonprofit leadership, the systems in place should be addressed to improve the recruitment, interviewing, hiring, and retaining of African-Americans in executive level positions. One way to improve the story and promote diversity is to create a culture of change needed to advance people of color leadership in the nonprofit sector (Thomas-Breitfeld & Kunreuther, 2017). The story may further be expanded

and shared through board of directors in a manner to address the issue of race/race equality for current and potential leaders and ensure there is alignment and commitment from everyone. Finally, it is important to develop ways that stop people from presuming that there are not enough qualified people of color candidates, rather, organizations must work to improve said assumptions and be honest with the true reasons why people of color are not considered qualified, talented candidates.

To rewrite the narrative for African-Americans seeking leadership positions in nonprofits, organizations should work within the community to develop safe and welcoming spaces. Doing this will help address the problem of the underrepresentation of minorities within leadership, promote social equity across New York state, and strengthen the access to leadership opportunities for African-Americans. This study sought to understand how this might be occurring through the role of mentorship relationships that encourage and promote diversity. The findings will show that mentorship relationships are essential in the growth, development, and promotion of African-Americans seeking executive-level leadership roles in nonprofits.

Practices that promote diversity. There are many ways to combat and promote diversity in nonprofit organizations. One way this can be done is through the development and implementation of a theoretical framework that tackles Whiteness in organizations and management. Ariss (2014) asserted, “understanding Whiteness entails addressing the issues of privilege and looking toward achieving social justice” (p. 362). This is achieved through deconstructing privilege and focus on ways to tackle discrimination in the workplace while promoting diversity within its workforce. Although this is not a practice that promotes diversity, it does however offer a valid reason why diversity and its inclusivity are important in nonprofit

organizations and leadership. The framework that was established in this article offered ways to examine ethnic privilege and disadvantages it has in the context of employment.

In order to promote diversity and establish buy-in from teams and leadership, it is important for nonprofit organizations to develop strategies and frameworks that focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Generally, organizations have human resource departments that are equipped to offer diversity training and seminars; however, it goes beyond that. There is a real danger to workplaces that do not offer such efforts and in many cases, organizations become perfunctory in their quest to promote diversity (Williams-Gardner, 2009). When an employee finds work activities, seminars, professional developments as something more than a notion or “must do,” they become more involved in spreading cheer and diversity efforts (Williams-Gardner, 2009).

Many workplaces work to establish diversity programs and build frameworks to promote diversity practices. Bierema (2010) expressed “diversity practices are more widely valued and implemented in practice” (p. 566). Programs that are generally implemented are diversity training, professional development workshops, and lunch and learn; however, these initiatives can only be as good as the person implemented such practices. Although these are positive gains toward successful promotion and implementation of diversity, it has its challenges. When nonprofits do not have a diverse workforce, pool of employees, or worse yet leadership, it tends to stifle the work that facilitators educate and preach about (Bierema, 2010). Knowing that diversity plays a key role in the growth, attainment, and success within a nonprofit, it is imperative individuals work to promote and establish behaviors and practices that promote diversity within the work environment. If such behaviors are not successfully discussed and implemented, it will eventually stunt the progress and growth within our changing workplace

environment and landscape. Hill and Curry-Stevens (2017) stressed that organizational leadership change and racial equity will remain a growing concern within the United States.

Prioritizing diversity as a best practice. Most nonprofits in New York state suffer from lack of diversity in their workforce, especially with supervisors, managers, senior, and executive leaders. Because of this, it is important for organizations to prioritize diversity as a best practice. One of several ways to make this happen is to foster diversity across the organization from staff, stakeholders, vendors, and partners that are supported throughout the community (Medina, 2017). By doing so, a nonprofit organization can create clear career pathways, proactively identify high-potential talent within their workforce, and foster a culture of inclusion (Medina, 2017). These best practices not only improve staff morale within an organization, they also reduce visible racial disparities and help attract and recruit diverse talent.

Although it may be somewhat tough to implement and manage diverse efforts many organizations developed diversity kits to help reduce the confusion with such implementation ideas. Take for instance Bravelly (2019), who created actionable ways to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Here is a list of these efforts: (a) assess the situation and be honest with yourself, (b) create a work environment that works for everyone, (c) acknowledge and understand unconscious bias, (d) eliminate bias from job descriptions, (e) have multiple viewpoints in every room, (f) employee resource groups, (g) connect DE&I to your mission, (h) focus on individuals, (i) build diverse talent networks, and (j) encourage communication around working styles. Not only are these actionable steps necessary, they too are key when it encourages practices to promote diversity. Moreover, they are not one-and-done efforts, rather, they are considerations that are necessary to take by everyone with an authentic approach organization-wide (Bravelly, 2019).

Diversity in recruitment. Marketing and recruitment are intentional strategies needed to attract and retain African-Americans for executive level leadership roles. Most nonprofit organizations lack diversity in their hiring teams, and this often poses a threat to hiring qualified minority candidates. As shared by Lankau (2013) many organizations experience “diversity fatigue” (p. 20). According to Lankau (2013) diversity fatigue is the experience of disappointing results from the diversity recruitment, hiring, and other initiatives set forth by an organization. To further this idea of diversity fatigue, many organizations function without and choose to continue this poor practice until there is an outcry from the community, social justice advocates, or individuals within the organization (Lankau, 2013). Given this inertia, diversity fatigue continues to pose a threat to the recruitment and hiring practices of African-Americans in mission-driven nonprofits. To ensure recruitment efforts are adhered to and supported, hiring leaders and managers must work to develop, cultivate, and sustain internal and external fundamental steps and activities toward diversity, equity, and inclusive workplaces (Westover, 2010).

Leadership is an important factor for the success of any nonprofit (Palumbo, 2016). The number of African-Americans in leadership positions in nonprofits continues to remain at a dismal level, and hence, overall diversity in these organizations remain low. Given the fact that leadership is important in nonprofits, the recruitment of African-American should change to increase the number of people in leadership. Bierema (2010) offered that some Human Resource departments often neglect and omit fundamental diversity issues, which ultimately threatens diversity in workplaces.

Diversity in hiring. The hiring processes and practices that are employed by organizations vary based on locale, need, size, experience, and education. Over time, many

leaders have learned that it also has to do with whom you know, rather than what you know. This concept disqualifies many people, such as African-Americans, from being hired and retained at mission-driven nonprofits across the globe, but specifically in New York state. As with many things, racial equity remains a growing concern within the United States, which has emerged out of the turbulent history of systemic racism (Hill & Stevens-Curry, 2017). Hill and Stevens-Curry (2017) defined racial equity as “closing the gap so that race does not determine a person’s livelihood or success” (p. 25). Often racial equity diminishes the hiring practices of individuals and plays a role in the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of said committees. From this article, it is apparent that change is necessary to ensure adequate and equitable hiring African-Americans in leadership positions across New York state.

A question of color. Most hiring teams typically use the standard platforms, such as social media, organization website, local newspaper ads, LinkedIn, and Indeed.com. However, African-Americans are often not privy to this type of hiring. The previous section shared that most nonprofits use the old form of hiring of “who you know, rather than what you know.” Because of this, racial diversity in leadership remains at an all-time low. More than two decades have passed since affirmative action became law. Affirmative action is “the practice or policy of favoring individuals belonging to groups known to have been discriminated against previously” (Merriam-Webster, 2019). Although the affirmative action law passed more than 20 years ago, many African-Americans continue to struggle with closed doors, no room at the table, and sometimes not given a fighting chance for executive leadership role within nonprofits. For these reasons, many organizations continue to struggle to increase the number of African-Americans in management and the lack of diversity remains dismal.

As one may imagine, the most senior leader is responsible for the culture, policies, performance of the organization and team, along with the increased diversity throughout. Oftentimes, when the leader is not a person of color, the ideal of diversity is then placed on the bottom of the priority list. In their article, “A Question of Color, A Debate on Race in the U.S. Workplace,” Thomas and Wetlaufer (2014) pointed out several African-American and other minorities in leadership and how they struggled to not only fit in, but also improve their diversity efforts within their organizations. Thomas and Wetlaufer (2014) explained that “there has been progress, most participants agreed, but . . . they also agreed that most White Americans still consider effective or intelligent people of color to be an anomaly” (p. 1). Moreover, there continues to be a small increase of people of color in the workplace in leadership, yet most insiders believe it is because of Affirmative Action and not because of intellect and competence (Thomas & Wetlaufer, 2014). For this to improve within nonprofits there needs to be a strategy to help improve the likelihood for African-Americans to have the opportunity to prove themselves.

What is Mentoring?

A mentor is considered a wise, trusted counselor or teacher (Friday & Friday, 2002). Mentors are individuals who people look up to for guidance, support, and constructive feedback. Professional mentors are necessary for they provide coaching through communication, collaboration, and face-to-face interactions. Moreover, mentoring is used as a professional development tool and may be offered to newer staff within an organization (Friday & Friday, 2002). Mentoring allows people to collaborate up with like abilities, skills, and desires toward advancement within their professional arenas. The concept of mentoring is a form of leadership

development with a focus of equipping people with skills, tools, and strategies to be effective within their role (Bolman & Gallos, 2011).

Mentoring, along with its many benefits, is considered to be a strategy for teaching, coaching, strengthening character, improving racial harmony, promoting social change and status, and ensuring the quality for all (Berg, 2008). Given that organizations seek to develop the learning organization concept, mentoring programs are important programs to help develop future leaders, namely African-Americans.

Demystifying mentoring. Many people would consider a mentor as an older, more seasoned adult helping a younger, less experienced adult help someone else. In many instances, this may be true, however, the last several decades this idea of mentoring has changed (Gallo, 2017). Gallo (2017) highlighted three myths of mentoring that are important to consider: Myth 1—you must find one perfect mentor; Myth 2—mentoring is a formal long-term relationship; and Myth 3—mentoring is for junior people. Although Myth 1 may sound true, it is not. Most people have many advisors or guides they may reach out to for assistance and sound advice and it may come from as few as one person but usually comes from more than one. In short, mentoring is best described as a developmental network. Relative to Myth 2, mentoring does not have to be a long drawn out appointment or session, it can be for an hour or more, and last from six months to six years. Gallo (2017) pointed out that mentoring might be considered as something you have access to when you need it. Finally, Myth 3 declares that mentoring is for junior people, however, mentoring is for anyone that may be interested in improving personal or professional growth, growing their network, and/or helping them land their next professional career opportunity.

Why mentoring? Because of the professional development acumen mentoring exhibits, most nonprofits have developed strategies to implement for senior leaders to promote its competitive edge as well as increase diversity (Friday & Friday, 2002). The word *mentor* implies a relationship between people, one more experienced, while the other seeking guidance, coaching, and critic for professional or personal development (Summers-Ewing, 1994). At present, mentoring is a popular means of orienting people into new roles, building relationships, and ensuring key performance indicators are not being overlooked. In nonprofits, mentoring is slowly becoming systematic, comprehensive, and available to people who wish to engage in it (Summers-Ewing, 1994).

Mentoring develops and establishes a strong relationship and connectedness between a mentor and mentee in the development of skills and traits that are measurable and observable (Dalakoura, 2010). Researchers like Dalakoura (2010) made it clear that leadership development works together with nurturing mentor relationships with an increasingly critical and strategic imperative for organizations. Given that mentoring helps promote diversity in the workplace, it is also a key indicator of whether an organization is employing strategic management processes (Friday & Friday, 2002).

Benefits of mentoring. In the study on the formal process of mentoring to promote diversity, Friday and Friday (2002) defines a mentor as a “wise and trusted counselor of teacher” (p. 154). Myers (2004) adds insight that when you develop managers through learning opportunities, such as mentoring, builds continuous development and knowledge to support nonprofit leadership and diversity efforts. Friday and Friday (2002) assert that in order to establish and develop a formal mentoring program there is a guidance process to promote and ensure fidelity and efficacy. Knowing that mentoring is considered an important career

development tool, it is important to know the reasons why. Friday and Friday (2002) shared that mentoring may:

- Support corporate diversity initiatives.
- Communicate corporate values and behaviors.
- Enhance corporate recruitment and retention efforts.
- Provide employees with a sense of belonging and engagement.
- Enhances decision-making and problem solving. (p. 878)

These benefits of a mentoring program for nonprofit leaders are key reasons to develop and establish a mentoring program that has strategies, processes, and performance indicators to determine its efficacy and utility. Kantor (2016) asserted that mentor relationships in the workplace promote growth, reduce turnover, and blesses the overall employee work culture. Moreover, Kantor (2016) advised an additional benefit of mentoring in the workplace is that it reduces time, money, and it is budget-friendly. Given the several benefits workplace mentoring has for the staff and organization it is an important concept to consider, especially for African-American seeking nonprofit leadership.

Mentoring benefits people through networking, building a diverse portfolio, and works to establish and sustain relationships between a mentor and mentee. For instance, the United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey created a nonprofit partnership that focused on networking and mentorship. This program created to allow Black nonprofit leaders to spend 5 months in a professional development program to inspire leaderships in a way that builds a global village (Madlock-Turner et al., 2017). During the program graduation ceremony, Woodland shared “when it comes to diverse leadership, mentorship, and building social capital

are two of the most critical factors that ensure our society has the broadest array of talent in positions of influence shaping our global village” (Madlock-Turner et al., 2017).

Goals of mentoring. With knowledge of the benefits mentoring has for individuals, it is also important to learn some of the goals of mentoring. Mentoring is defined as “a mutually agreed upon and beneficial relationship which involves a more experienced person helping a less experienced person to identify and achieve their goals” (Kiernan, 1998, p. 1). Most people seek out mentors for support, knowledge of subject matter, guidance, and someone to be developed by with their genuine interest at heart. In most organizations, a mentor and mentee relationship does not happen unless asked by one seeking the relationship. For these reasons, it is advantageous for nonprofit organization to incorporate mentor programs.

For individuals seeking a mentor relationship in a professional setting it is only right to learn what are some of the goals that will come from said partnership (Driver, 2019). Steps to achieve your standards can include, but are not limited to:

1. Identify your goals: decide what you want to accomplish and share with mentor.
2. Get to know your mentor: work together and collaborate to build an organic experience.
3. Follow up be consistent and follow through with goals and objectives.
4. Be prepared: remain proactive, eager to learn, and take an interest in those around you.

Each of the above-mentioned standards are only as good or, as important to the mentor and mentee as it is with an organization. The goal of mentor relationships is to not only foster relationships between professionals, it also contributes to the overall workplace and improves the

likelihood to increase workplace diversity and promote more African-Americans to leadership roles.

Because the goal of mentoring is to foster relationships between professionals, it is also important that the mentor and mentee understand that it is a learning partnership. Zachary (2012) reported that “mentor and mentee work together to achieve specific, mutually defined goals that focus on developing the mentee’s skills, abilities, knowledge, and thinking; it is in every way a learning partnership” (p. 3). For the mentor and mentee, this partnership creates important goals for both to look forward to and factors in accountability and responsibility.

The goals of mentoring seem mutually beneficial to all persons involved, which in turn helps create a transformational learning process. All these goals shared within this section encourage relationship building, collaboration, learning, partnership, and create mutually agreed upon markers of success (Zachary, 2012). For these reasons, mentoring is a great way to improve and increase an African-Americans competitive advantage as mid-level employees pursue executive-level nonprofit leadership.

Mentoring is a competitive advantage. A competitive advantage is what is used to make an entity’s or person’s good or service superior of others (Amadeo, 2019). Mentoring, as a competitive advantage is beneficial for a person of color for it is a strategy used to improve performance competencies, increase networks and connections, and provide outcomes with the output given by a mentor. In the article, Amadeo (2019) noted that the three determinants are important to improve one’s competitive edge are benefit, target market, and competition.

Moreover, a mentor relationship increases the overall performance of a mentee and improves workplace culture and diversity in the areas of personal development and team consensus, manages complexity, provides greater and clearer communication, promotes critical

thinking, initiates action and manages risks (Mears & Susemichel, 2000). These programs and core competencies for an African-American are important for leadership development and knowledge management. Most organizations that seek to hire talented people search for individuals with some of these competencies; therefore, speaking to these skills from a mentor standpoint on behalf of a mentee increases their opportunity to gain a nonprofit leadership position. In many instances, the mentor relationship explicitly works through some of these behaviors in a formal or informal manner, which, in most cases, increases the mentees' competitive advantage. Most of these areas shared above provide additional project management, and technical and leadership skills an organization seeks out when searching for quality candidates for executive leadership roles.

Mentoring is formal learning. Bandura (1977) asserted that social learning theory is a cognitive process that establishes behavior and norms that focus on learning and its process, which provides a theoretical foundation of mentoring. Most notably, social learning theory, like mentoring, helps people examine their biases to help build up a labor force in leadership for African-Americans (Kantor, 2017). Many definitions of mentoring indicate that a mentor should promote professional development and personal development to a mentee through a set of mentoring essential functions (Kantor, 2017). Some of these functions are to encourage interventions for current leadership, educate Human Resource departments, encourage training and professional development, and understand the overall process and purpose of nurturing mentor relationships (Berg & Chyung, 2008).

Senge (1990) credited the notion that a learning organization is characterized when “people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where

people are continually learning together” (p. 3). Most learning organizations work to create a culture shift to create and retain buy-in, shared expectations, and focus the environmental factors that may otherwise thwart growth and development (Senge, 1990). This idea of formal learning encourages interactive activities, full engagement through communication, advertisements, and personal relationships established through face-to-face interactions.

Levels of competence as a mentor in learning. The role of a mentor is to guide, advise, and promote success to a mentee. This form of learning has several levels of competence: Level 1: Unconsciously incompetent, Level 2: Consciously incompetent, Level 3: Consciously competent, and Level 4: Unconsciously competent (Zachary, 2012). These four levels of learning aid to make informed decisions in how mentor work with a mentee. Level 1 of competence demonstrates the amount of support a mentee requires to offer learning and engagement while the mentee is unaware of the things they do not know, on the contrary, assume they know something and it is wrong (Zachary, 2012). This level of competence provides the mentor and mentee a starting point for their relationship together. At Level 2, a mentee recognizes they are aware of what they do not know and may articulate their gaps and lack of knowledge, while the mentor focuses on encouraging the mentee to make mistakes and grow into new knowledge and ways of thinking (Zachary, 2012). These two competences are important for they are more of a building block toward greater success for a mentee, namely, African-Americans seeking nonprofit leadership.

The final two levels of competence relative to formal learning demonstrate a deeper learning of information through process mapping, skills attainment, and increased confidence from the mentee while the mentor offers feedback and encourages practice (Zachary, 2012). Finally, Level 4 is where most mentees make it a habit of using knowledge and skills learned

from a mentor and that is when a mentor would support and encourage venturing out and applying for positions across organizations (Zachary, 2012). Because mentoring is a way of learning, it is important to know that it helps generate positive mentor relationships.

Mentoring relationships. Jacobi (1991) provided five common elements organizations might conceptualize and implement to support this notion of nurturing mentoring relationships to support and help African-Americans seeking nonprofit executive leadership:

1. Mentor relationships are designed to support a mentee in achieving long-term goals and objectives,
2. Mentor and mentee relationships capture areas both personally and professionally through engaging and active dialogue and activities,
3. Mentor and mentee relationships are considered a reciprocal concept, and everyone wins in the end,
4. To ensure mentor relationships are beneficial, the mentor must have greater influence professionally, along with achievement and success,
5. Finally, understand that mentoring is a developmental interaction and may be a coach, action leader, cheerleader, and tutor. (p. 513)

Mentoring relationships develop, equip, and prepare people to have a brighter future based on positive, healthy interactions from seasoned leaders (Williams, 2004). In addition, mentoring relationships are often used to bridge and close gaps of lack of experience that often disqualifies a person of color from being attractive during the higher process. This is because mentors are also considered bridge leaders.

Generally, relationships are built on trust and a mentor relationship is no different. Most mentor–mentee relationships require honesty, genuineness, and respect. Zachary (2012) believed

that “effective mentors are emotionally intelligent and foster emotional intelligence in their mentees” (p. 8). Much of this happens organically through time and effort from the mentor and mentee. As such, it continues to empower an African-American as they seek advanced professional opportunities in leadership within nonprofits.

Finally, mentor relationships, in most cases, can be mutually agreed upon relationships. The role of mentor is one that adds value to a mentee’s professional and personal toolkit. The mentor provides substance to situations and guidance during problems. Furthermore, the mentor ensures the mentee learners throughout the process. For a current and future African-American in nonprofit leadership this may be an increasingly positive relationship for one may tap into their network. For these reasons, mentor relationships are sure ways to impact and influence an African-American that would lead to many professional career advancements and opportunities.

Mentor Programs

For decades, mentor programs were established to help individuals grow and mature in personal and professional pursuits. Much like mentor relationships, programs are necessary to help African-Americans increase their career trajectory in nonprofit leaderships. Many programs similar to 100 Black Men of America, Inc., National Urban League Young Professionals, Blacks in Government, and National Bar Association were created professional networks to help minorities gain access to organizations within their particular fields wherein they would otherwise have a tough time navigating. Many programs shared are helpful to African-Americans in the workplace.

100 Black Men of America, Inc. This is a mission-driven nonprofit that seeks to improve the quality of life within urban communities via enhancing educational and economic opportunities for all African-Americans (100 Black Men, n.d.). For the last four decades, this

nonprofit worked to serve as a conduit for leadership to improve the diverse talents and to create space where individuals become motivated to achieve self-sufficiency through economic and social avenues across the communities they seek to serve. Moreover, they established worldwide mentor toolkits and programs to help support African-Americans in the arenas of education, empowerment, and leadership development (100 Black Men, n.d.).

100 Black Men administrators established a successful blueprint for mentoring and developing people into future leaders. From this blueprint, they created partnerships with varied foundations, higher education institutions, and other connections within their local jurisdictions. Their peer-to-peer and group mentor programs may be inclusive to middle and high school students, it does in fact, support a best practice for professional nonprofits as well. Through this model, 100 Black Men of America, Inc. (n.d.) created a unique inclusive educational model to offer online mentor training and virtual mentee curriculum. In addition, their leadership development approach effectively bridges the gap between current talent pipeline for young professionals and offer technical assistance and training to its members. Programs such as this are important for African-Americans seeking leadership roles across nonprofits, for its aides them with technical and analytical skills and competences that are required for the workforce today.

National Urban League Young Professionals (NULYP). There was a need for mentor programs to equip African-Americans for leadership across the nation to lead nonprofits in urban areas. The National Urban League Young Professionals started in the 1980s to prepare the next generation of leaders for the civil rights movements that later allowed additional programs, activities, and groups that included mentoring programs (Youth Mentoring, 2019). Currently, NULYP has over 62 chapters and 5,500 members supporting efforts of African-Americans in

leadership through mentor programs. Because of their effort, it was the goal for NULYP to recruit new members in urban communities to lead affiliate programs. These affiliate programs established to equip and empower young leaders to through mentor programs.

NULYP mentoring program is a process that matches young people with caring, responsible adults to encourage, motivate, and guide them toward success (Youth Mentoring, 2019). It shared that the mentor programs developed to improve the well-being of the young adult by offering a successful role model that was there to support their efforts academically, socially, personally, and professionally (Youth Mentoring, 2019). Most of the mentor/mentee relationships were informal, yet, they ensured the process offered high-quality mentor matches with some local nonprofits and companies within the local areas.

Blacks in Government. Another mentor program that works to establish and increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations across the nation is Blacks in Government. This program established in the 1970s to support the growth and development of Black civil service employees and became an incorporated nonprofit organization in 1976 (BIG, n.d.). Blacks in Government, as known as, BIG worked for years to improve opportunities for Blacks in the government sector and to increase equity and access to jobs, education, advancement, housing, and health services (BIG, n.d.).

For these reasons, BIG (n.d.) created several goals and objectives to eliminate practices of racism and racial discrimination against Blacks in government, promote professionalism among Blacks in government, and developed and promoted programs that would enhance ethnic pride and educational opportunities for Blacks in government. Although this program did not openly share, they are a mentor program; however, they shared the tenets of a mentor/mentee relationship based off their stated goals and objectives from their website. As shared earlier in

this, mentoring is merely being an example for learners via behaviors they observe and see through a more trusted person (Bandura, 1977). This approach to mentoring shared by BIG (n.d.) is a more informal way to build a relationship between a mentor and mentee. The BIG (n.d.) program asserted that the reasons for joining their program is that it will increase networking opportunities; they will be an advocate for change, support professional development opportunities, and will keep members informed.

National Bar Association. African-American professional groups were helpful in identifying Black peers who work in various professional settings. These groups provide association through joining a cadre of supporters in many areas that supported advocacy, created opportunities, and provided context of what it means to be Black in your professional field. The National Bar Association is one of the oldest professional groups with over 20,000 members including lawyers, judges, educators, and law students. Today, the National Bar Association has several chapters across the nation that are used to help encouraged minority lawyers through conferences, mentoring, support, and other professional development opportunities.

This study shared the importance whether mentor relationships would affect and improve the dismal numbers of African-Americans in nonprofit leadership. With formal and informal programs implemented in different professional settings afforded the opportunity for African-Americans for decades. As such, mentor programs, groups, and relationships remain a priority to help close the racial leadership gap in nonprofit leadership. As shared, bridge leadership has helped African-Americans find gainful, important leadership roles through the help and support of nonminorities.

Mentor programs helped African-Americans across varied industries to not only increase the racial make-up within an organization and company; it has also helped open doors and other

opportunities for African-Americans today. Programs similar to 100 Black Men of America, Inc., National Urban League Young Professionals, Blacks in Government, and National Bar Association are a very few selected for this study, however, there are several other programs around to help bridge the racial leadership gap and increase the opportunities for other African-Americans seeking leadership roles in organizations that would otherwise not hire them.

Bridge Leadership

To have someone bridge the opportunity gap to allow someone who would not otherwise be noticed is what it means for a person to be a *bridge leader*. Dr. Clarence Williams (2004) developed the idea of “bridge leadership.” He coined the definition as “nonminorities, faculty members or administrators, who work to “bridge” cultural, racial, and ethnic divisions, and to help transform their universities or colleges into more welcoming, nurturing environment for minorities” (Williams, 2004). The idea of bridge leadership is often used in higher education; however, it may be used and considered in nonprofit organizations as well. One chief role for a bridge leader is to offer a minority, namely, person of color, a leg up when it comes to seeking a new job, needing support with a decision, or someone to provide networking opportunities to their peers and counterparts.

Bridge leadership uses activities, criteria, and standards to move minorities along their way in higher education in the areas of academic attainment, support to address problems, as well as tension that often arises because of skin color (Williams, 2004). Bridge leadership promotes to minorities seeking career and academic advancement the idea of the importance of nurturing mentor relationships for African-Americans and their under-representation in nonprofit leadership. Mentor relationships, like bridge leaders, frame important ideas and concepts to

develop someone into becoming a leadership candidate who is more attractive and reputable, and it gives the mentee the opportunity to tap into a cadre of high-powered professional people.

In summary, bridge leadership works to examine more creative and thoughtful ways to build, sustain, embrace, and foster diversity within the workforce of nonprofit organizations. It is noteworthy to know that bridge leaders help create and build personal relationships with individuals who are goal-oriented and understand the value of networking (Moore et al., 2017). For most individuals, leadership is identified by the skills you display in the workplace, for others it is what you share with people and they work to tap in and improve said skills and competencies. Therefore, bridge leadership is important; it helps improve behaviors, supports communication, and in the end promotes collaboration that often turns into advanced professional career opportunities.

Cross-silo leadership. Typically, bridge leadership happens outside of an organization, however, there may be ways wherein this may happen within an organization and may be considered cross-silo leadership. In the article “Cross-Silo Leadership,” Casciaro, Edmondson, and Jang (2019) illustrated additional ways leaders may learn fresh perspectives from nonminority peers within the workplace. They declared that “employees can reach outside their silos to find colleagues with complementary expertise, learn more, sell more, and gain skills faster” (p. 1). By doing so will break down barriers, improve overall job satisfaction, and most importantly, build sustaining relationships that would later support promotion and growth within an organization. Most mentors are outside organizations, however, when one may find a qualified, capable, and interested mentor within the organization is just as important.

Casciaro et al. (2019) expressed ways to initiate and improve ways to encourage cross-silo leadership. The best ways to introduce and use this are: (a) develop and deploy cultural

brokers, (b) encourage people to ask the right questions, (c) get people to see the world through others' eyes, and (d) broaden your employees' vision. These four important indicators help people within the organization gain a sense of growth and development, while deepening their resolve as a mentee with senior leaders, or at times with their peers.

This literature review presented articles that illustrates the lack of African-American leaders across nonprofits, whether mentor relationships would impact and influence individuals seeking leadership roles, and how bridge leadership is one way to connect a minority with a non-minority for improving racial disparities within the workplace. Given this is an important topic to consider there were other articles that would support more solutions to help increase leadership diversity in nonprofit organizations.

Review of Methodological Issues

Researchers have used qualitative and quantitative methods to determine what strategies to use to increase diversity in the workplace and reduce the racial leadership gap African-Americans face in nonprofits. Studies that were previously conducted focused on ways to improve the racial leadership gap; however, few determined what are ways to support this phenomenon. Mentor relationships and bridge leadership are two methods used to help improve these odds, yet, it was difficult to find research that would marry the two methodologies. It is clear from a review of literature that there remains a goal of executive leadership and African-Americans across New York state.

Qualitative research. It has been shared that diversity in the workplace helps reduce the racial leadership gap (Brady, 1996). For organizations to reduce the underlying biases, improve diversity efforts, and encourage more African-Americans to apply for leadership roles, it is important to support career advancement in the workplace. The qualitative study shared in the

last five years many African-Americans leave their communities to find leadership roles in other areas because they remain stagnant or the inability to secure work (Taylor, 2018).

Qualitative research studies focus on asking open-ended questions to gain the unique viewpoints, along with, making sense of their historical and/or social perspectives about a subject matter (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research studies generate meaning and sense of pursuing prolonged human engagement and analyzing language and experience. Such methods can be used to explore the issues which Taylor (2018) noted, that is, that leaders in nonprofits should take a stand for racial equality.

Quantitative research. Breitfeld and Kunreuther (2017) surveyed more than 4,000 nonprofits across the United States and determined that people of color in leadership roles remained under 20%. In this quantitative approach, Breitfeld and Kunreuther (2017) discovered that 79% of those surveyed agreed that one of the biggest problems in nonprofit leadership is that it is not racially diverse and that the racial leadership gap persists. Moreover, from the responses collected from the 4,000 nonprofit leaders, Breitfeld and Kunreuther (2017) noticed that background and education were not hindrances for African-Americans seeking leadership roles. In fact, 39% of African-Americans and 42% of Whites have a bachelor's degree. While there is no significantly different in education, it is noticeably that African-Americans are still not hired or even encouraged to apply for a leadership role in a nonprofit.

Breitfeld and Kunreuther's (2017) survey study exposed that 50% of African-Americans are more interested in taking a leadership role compared to the 40% of Whites that are not as interested in a leadership role within a nonprofit. This finding illustrates that an African-American is more interested and eager to take on a leadership role; however, to be sought after remains the problem. The article "Race to Lead" (2017) shared that the data demonstrated the

key areas reasons why there is a racial leadership gap, also suggested what may done to help improve this gap. In summation, the track record at work showed a 4% difference and education/background showed a 1% difference, while race/ethnicity showed the biggest gap spanning more than 25% for African-Americans and Whites for career advancement.

Synthesis of Research findings.

There is research regarding mentor and mentee relationships, however, there is limited research that highlights African-American mentor relationships with an emphasis on nonprofit leadership. The literature about this topic may be dissected into several categories such as diversity in the workplace, recruiting efforts, hiring, retention, mentor relationships, and bridge leadership. Many of these ideas and concepts worked to build collaboration diversify workplace environments, and knowledge skill gaps.

Nonprofit organizations provide positive impact in communities across the United States. Most notable national nonprofits that work to fight poverty, offer barrier-breaking programs and services such as the United Way, Catholic Charities, the Urban League, and the Center for Employment Opportunities. Many of the named mission-driven nonprofits are led and managed by nonminority people. Brady (1996) shared the notion that nonprofits across the U.S. need to redefine diversity and their practices in order to achieve greater results and outcomes for the organizations and the people they serve.

The emphasis around diversity is a phenomenon in the 21st century, more time should be spent on developing organizations, and equipping boards to recruit, hire, and retain African-Americans in nonprofit leadership. Bridge leaders and nurturing mentor relationships are just two methods that will have a greater impact within an organization. The idea of diversity in the

workplace is a paradigm shift in order to expand its reach beyond people and human resources that may be in place (Brady, 1996).

After reviewing literature about this topic of mentor relationships there are a few ideas the present study addressed and why mentoring is important. First, to have diverse organizations, it is imperative that boards of directors successfully market, recruit, interview, and hire African-Americans for executive level positions. By doing so, it will more than likely increase overall organizational performance (Buse, 2016). Next, in order to have successful, positive, and healthy nurturing mentor and mentee relationships, it is imperative to develop mutual and equal expectations and standards to ensure the relationship works out. Finally, organizations must understand that bridge leaders are not minorities that work with minorities in developing and equipping them to become more sought after based on experience and using a nonminorities' networks of professional peers.

Critique of Previous Research

The racial leadership gap in organizations across New York state is real and research students of African-Americans in nonprofit leadership is limited. According to Lankau (2013), most organizations experience diversity fatigue, which is an experience that results in dismal numbers in recruitment, hiring, and other diversity initiatives within the workplace, including African-Americans leaders. For these reasons, there remains an absence of African-Americans in leadership positions in nonprofits and this issue remains a critical topic in need of additional research. As previously mentioned most nonprofit organizations are led by nonminorities and this decreases the opportunity for others to take lead (Westover, 2010). Because it is important for workplaces to demonstrate diverse efforts within its labor pool, it is equally important for nonprofits to increase the diversity in their leadership pool as well. The researcher reviewed in

this chapter has demonstrated that there are benefits in diversity efforts across organizations. However, there is literature that describes that overrepresentation of Whites in organizations is due to relational factors and not solely based off education and experience (Ariss, 2014). This does juxtapose the essentiality of incorporating diversity in the workplace. Because of this, diversity efforts are a strategic management practice to help promote equity, improve workplace morale, and increase racial disparities.

While literature like Westover (2010) and Lankau (2013) shared the importance of diversity in the workplace and how it will increase morale, there still is the notion that diversity does not matter. Research similar to Palumbo (2016), Hills and Stevens-Curry (2017) provided and offered insights on ways to improve workplace diversity and how to close the leadership gap. However, there remains limited literature and research to support more ways to improve and affect leadership opportunities for African-Americans in the nonprofit sector. Most research is concentrated on transformational leadership efforts, mentor relationships, and ways to improve employee buy-in, however, there is little to discuss how to improve diversity and reduce the racial leadership gap. In the article, Williams (2017) asserted that Black people have always been denied housing, bank loans, jobs, and promotions, although this is true, the article did not offer data to support the findings. People similar to Williams (2017) and Taylor (2018) have experienced discrimination in the workplace because of their color; however, there is limited literature to share this data from qualitative and quantitative research approaches.

Chapter 2 Summary

Mentor relationships are important in developing and preparing African-Americans in becoming more attractive and employable for nonprofit leadership. For this reason, the researcher focused on phenomenology for it allowed me to interview, observe, and take notes

that have allowed me to make more informed decisions and further study about the idea and concept of nurturing mentor relationships. Given this process, the nonprofit executive leaders provided valuable information that focused on leadership practices, diversity in the workplace, and cultivating relationships with African-Americans to help them move up the leadership ladder in nonprofit leadership (Williams-Gardner, 2009).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Nonprofit leadership in New York state continues to demonstrate a lack of African-Americans presence. Research shared in Chapter 2 demonstrated that a person of color (Robbins, 2018) leads nationwide 23.5% of nonprofits. Nonminorities lead 76.5% of nonprofits. Several studies showed that across the nation people of color, namely African-Americans, remained less than 20% of executive director/CEO roles in the last 15 years, even as the country has become more diverse (Robbins, 2018). The researcher looked at phenomenon of nonprofit leadership across New York state through a conceptual framework of a phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach study is designed to explore how mentoring relationships are important to the success for many people of color in leadership roles. For these reasons, it is important that diversity in nonprofit leadership remains the topic of research until changes happen (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012).

This chapter presents the research questions for the present study, the reason for the purpose and design of this study, its population, and its sampling method. Moreover, the instrumentation, tools, and data analysis with procedures are explained in detail. Finally, the validity, ethical considerations, and researcher positionality are also addressed. This chapter within this study provides value to the importance of nurturing mentor relationships for African-Americans seeking nonprofit executive leadership positions.

Phenomenology Theory and Qualitative Research

Why choose qualitative methodology and use phenomenology? Quantitative research examines a statistical significance of results through effect sizes and confidence intervals (Creswell, 2013). Moreover, quantitative research works to establish a relationship among variables being tested by the investigator (Creswell, 2013). Mixed methods research involves

data collection and mixing it with both quantitative and qualitative research. Mixed methods are designed to combine its research method through convergent, explanatory sequential, and exploratory sequential (Creswell, 2014). Both mixed methods and quantitative research is time consuming, thus the researcher chose to focus his research using a qualitative study, phenomenology research design.

Phenomenological research design allows for data collection and data analysis to occur during the same span of time. The primary data collection method for phenomenology is the participant interview, which is then analyzed through a qualitative analysis process that can involve open, axial, and selective coding stages. The ongoing coding process can provide the researcher with insights that can inform later interviewing stages (Gibbs, Clarke, Taylor, Silven & Lewins, 2011). The primary data collection in the phenomenology approach happens in open, axial, and selective coding stages, which provides the researcher ease in interviewing participants (Gibbs, Clarke, Taylor, Silven & Lewins, 2011). Moreover, phenomenology approach provided the researcher with the ability to make observations rather than generate abstract ideas (Gibbs et al., 2011). In this study, the researcher carefully constructed questions to elicit participant responses, through which they openly shared their thoughts, experiences, and ideas regarding mentor relationships and whether they supported or hindered their growth and development professionally and personally. The combination of a demographic survey and face-to-face interviews provided rich and substantive data that allowed the researcher to answer the research questions.

This qualitative phenomenological study allowed for exploration and understanding in a manner for an individual or in groups relative to social and human problems learn best practices of how to improve social ills in cultures and workplace climates (Creswell, 2014). Through

crafted questions, the research subjects expressed their thoughts, concerns, and experiences through interviews. Interviews and demographic surveys are commonly used in qualitative studies (Bryce, 2011; Creswell, 2014).

Research Questions

This study explored issues related to whether mentor relationships would have an impact on African-Americans seeking an executive position in nonprofit leadership. In addition, it provided a focus on the impact of nurturing mentor relationships and the efficacy of the bridge leadership approach. This phenomenological, qualitative research study addressed the following questions:

1. What are some recruitment, hiring, and retention practices to support African-Americans seeking executive level nonprofit leadership position?
2. What attributes of a mentor might influence a nonprofit leader's choice of a mentor relationship?
3. What personal and background lived experiences are relevant to an African-American in pursuit of a nonprofit executive leadership role?

Although there is limited research focusing on African-American leaders in nonprofit leadership, this study answered questions related to the impact and importance of mentor relationships in the lived experiences of participants.

Purpose and Design of the Study

This study explored the practice of mentorship and the potential impact and influence on ascending leadership roles for African-American leaders. Moreover, this chapter provides a qualitative approach to the data pertaining to a phenomenon around executive level leadership

and the absence of African-Americans in these roles (Ariss, 2014). In addition, the design of this study aimed to support nonprofits across New York state and other urban cities across the nation.

To address this purpose, a phenomenology study was conducted to understand the lived experiences of African-Americans seeking nonprofit executive leadership. Phenomenology is an approach that seeks to ascertain the central meaning or essence of the lived experience of a group of people who have shared life experiences (Gibbs et al., 2011). The phenomenology research method enabled the researcher to seek out, conceptualize social patterns, and establish a structural basis relative to the study through a process of constant comparison (Scott, 2009). This established research method offers the researcher an exploration through collecting useful data that seeks to merge preconceived ideas to drive the research in a new and fruitful direction (Gibbs et al., 2011). Phenomenological theory is a preferred method that provided the researcher a framework to help understand and discover the building blocks of the qualities necessary for mentorship relationships through lived experiences of participants (Charmaz, 2014). Moreover, a phenomenological theory framework developed through the contextual influences provided by participants, including time and culture (Charmaz, 2014).

This study used a phenomenological approach as the primary method of qualitative data analysis (Urquhart, 2013). This research design was aimed at generating or discovering a theory, focuses on how people interact with a phenomenon. The data analysis is systemic and begins as soon as data is ready and may be reported in a narrative framework (Urquhart, 2013).

Phenomenological approach merges the data collection and analysis that allowed the research to balance between the attempts to ground the analysis through the data and establishes an explanation of a phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This theory research method allowed the researcher to use research questions, data collection, analysis, and establish a comparative study

between the phenomena versus the traditional approach of hiring an African-American for nonprofit leadership. Phenomenological approach qualitative research helped address the challenges confronted and strategies used by mature African-Americans in leadership roles remain relevant and impactful within their organizations.

Research Population and Sampling Method

The population for this research consisted of African-Americans who lead nonprofit organizations in New York state. For the scope and nature of this study, 10 leaders were recruited, but only six agreed to participate. The six participants ranged in diverse positions in nonprofits throughout New York state with an overall operating budget of \$5 million or more, where the leader supervised more than 10 direct reports, and led several departments. A purposeful sampling method was used to recruit the six participants for this research study. Purposeful sampling is described as choosing a subject based on characteristics of a population and setting that will add value to the expansion of a developing phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Across the United States, 42% of nonprofit organizations surveyed are led by female executive directors, 87% of all executive directors or presidents are White, and there is a minimal representation of African-Americans at 6% (Medina 2017). Nonminorities, lead most nonprofits in New York state with limited African-Americans in leadership positions such as president, CEO, and/or executive director (Robbins, 2018).

Six African-Americans leading nonprofit organizations served as the primary participants in this study. There was a mixture of male and female participants. Participants represented the African-American and Latino race. Participants reported that they held a master's degree or higher in organizational leadership, social work, or business management. All the respondents reported that they had more than 10 years of experience working under nonminorities which

helped them hone skills, qualities, and competencies needed to successfully manage a large nonprofit in New York state. Finally, participants had, on average, between 15–40 years of experience in nonprofit work with 10–30 years in a middle or higher-level leadership positions.

Sampling is an important part of this research study. Sampling is defined as “the act, process, or technique of selecting a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population” (Merriam-Webster, 2018). For this study, the researcher used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants with shared experiences being a minority in nonprofit leadership. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling strategy that allows the researcher to rely on their own judgment when determining persons to engage with a study (Morse, 2011). For this study, purposive sampling was used in order to establish a sample size that offered a non-probability on selected participants. Purposive sampling provided the researcher the ability to use a non-probability sample size based off the characteristics of a population and the objective of this study (Creswell, 2013). This was done by researching and exploring websites of nonprofits across New York state where African-American leaders were in top leadership roles. Once the researcher identified named nonprofits, an introductory email was crafted to seek whether individuals would be interested or not. Once a baseline set of participants was established, the researcher spent time cultivating relationships for this study. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to use and obtain data that comes from a real-world context and provided a credible message (Frankel & Devers, 2000). The power of this sampling method was expected to help in the selection of information-rich participants who could offer in-depth insight regarding issues as a successful African-American leaders.

This method was useful in finding successful African-Americans in selected nonprofits leadership roles in New York state. The search focused on personal lived experiences as well as professional pursuits. The researcher noticed while interviewing African-Americans who faced barriers, namely discrimination because of their race as a professional seeking a leadership role. This study provided insight and strategies into overcoming perceived barriers for their current or past leadership roles.

Instrumentation

In order to provide substantial evidence to support this research, the researcher conducted in-person interviews as well as a participant profile (Creswell, 2013). This data collection allowed the researcher to explore the lived experiences of African-American nonprofit leaders and through the analysis of the data to understand how their mentor relationships supported their advancement. Through this phenomenological research design, the researcher was successful in data collection, analysis, and understanding the lived experiences associated with the research problem (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to discover, develop and verify themes based on the data collected to understand the ways that mentoring relationships influence the lived experiences of persons of color and enhance the likelihood of being promoted and offered a leadership position (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Interviews. Creswell (2009) asserted that the phenomenological approach is “a systematic qualitative research method emphasizing generation of theory from data in the process of conducting research” (p. 13). Part of the data collection happened during interviews. The researcher structured face-to-face interviews for this study. Before the interviews, the researcher shared a participant demographic questionnaire with each participant (see Appendix D). This demographic questionnaire helped the researcher obtain valid information to help

during the data collection stage. The interview process allowed the researcher and participants to engage in a one-on-one dialogue and help determine how and potentially why they were hired as a person of color in a leadership role (see Appendix B).

The face-to-face interviews were built around a core set of questions used to elicit real-world feedback from African-Americans in nonprofit leadership. To ensure active engagement from the six participants, an introductory letter provided details on the purpose of the study and the reason for the interview. Once a verbal or written response was given, each participant selected the best time and date for him or her to be interviewed. To respect each leader's time, interviews were limited to 90 minutes or less. Most interviews were conducted at their office, conference room, or a local restaurant in their community in New York state. To ensure accuracy, each interview was recorded and transcribed using an online audio transcription service from Rev.com.

The phenomenological approach provided the researcher an understanding of phenomena under investigation (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). The primary data in this qualitative research came from spending time interviewing participants to express their thoughts, experiences, and highlights of issues and concerns around the research topic (Creswell, 2013; Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). In addition, questions were clearly written in a way to elicit relevant feedback related to the objectives of the research (Hatch, 2002).

The in-depth interviewing method allowed the researcher to probe for underlying factors that led to their leadership role, relationships that helped them achieve this success, and barriers that dealt with to get them where they are today. The purpose of asking these questions was to: (a) to identify any ambiguities or vagueness in the recruitment, marketing, and/or advertising for

leadership roles, and (b) to determine whether mentor relationships support the hiring a person of color.

Participant profile. The recruited respondents came from diverse backgrounds. In order to determine the participant pool, the researcher shared a demographic survey prior to each interview. The same participants who would be interviewed face-to-face were asked to complete the profile demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D). The questionnaire asked about basic demographics, professional experience, and experience with or without a mentor relationship. Using the participant profile supported the researcher during the data analysis stage of the research study (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Data Collection

Some approaches to data collection for a qualitative research design are observations, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach involved the identification and integration of the varied categories through data to determine the meaning of what had been collected (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). Urquhart (2013) identified methods used for a phenomenological approach study to include ethnographies. An ethnography is a scientific description of people and culture through its customs, habits, and mutual differences (Urquhart, 2013). This method was helpful during the data collection phase and after the data collection section. All the data collection occurred after Concordia University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study protocol and participants had signed an informed consent form (see Appendix C).

Although this researcher may have known participants by name and face, confidentiality was ensured throughout this study. Initially participants received an email (see Appendix A) to express an interest in having them participate in this study. This process occurred after

Concordia University IRB approved the research protocol. The researcher redacted personally identifying information of participants from study documents and data sets to preserve the privacy of each participant.

Data Analysis

When interviews happened, the researcher reviewed all responses to questions several times before constructing an analysis matrix for general responses or repeated responses by the participant. Next, the responses were sorted and grouped by research questions, perceived barriers, and noted factors that were themed based off terms and phrases. Each interview and demographic questionnaire received a specialized code for each participant, noting when a second or third theme referenced; it made in a response category from the analysis matrix.

Coding data is a detailed process that helps shape the research of study. For this reason, open coding is the primary strength in a phenomenological study (Urquhart, 2013). In addition, coding is an iterative and reflective process that involved open, axial, and selective types of coding. Open coding allowed the researcher to establish and determine themes of inclusiveness and worked to pull information together; in short, generating a category of information. Another method of coding that was presented for the research was selective coding. Selective coding categorizes one selection and positions it within another category.

The data analysis and data collection phase happened at the same time (Charmaz, 2008). Moreover, a constant comparison method was used as a basis in data collection to compare common themes (Harding, 2013). For this reason, the researcher hoped to uncover themes and trends. Building upon data collection, analysis of the research questions, review of the coded interviews, and demographic questionnaires provided significant criteria that allowed the researcher to determine the utility of mentor relationships (Creswell, 2013).

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

Limitations. Limitations in a qualitative study may come from the open-ended questions for the participant controls the content of the data. By this, the researcher may not be able to verify results from a participant (Creswell, 2014). Another limitation that was noticed with a phenomenological, qualitative study is that it is difficult to determine the quality and quantity of information shared from participants (Creswell, 2014). Because of this, other limitations to be considered are the outside influences that the researcher may not be able to control. The phenomenology theory limitations include the schedule of interviews with each participant, determining the best place for the interview and its last-minute changes, as well as being truthful about certain topics that came up during the interview.

Delimitations. To establish and work on the delimitations in this phenomenology theory study, the researcher worked with the choices and boundaries of its participants to maintain the integrity of the process and provide validity checks throughout. Two of the boundaries that were selected for this study were sampling method and instrumentation (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008). This process asks the researcher to further collect data considering the categories that emerged and check the emerging theory against the reality of the claim (Charmaz & Henwood, 2008).

Validation. Validation is the credibility and dependability of a study (Creswell, 2013). In this phenomenology theory research study, validation was ensured from the researcher and participants during the study. This happened in order to achieve the goals addressed that will lead to a resolution of the research purposes.

Credibility. To ensure this dissertation was credible, the researcher followed principles described by Yin (2018). Yin (2018) proposed “four principles of data collection” are necessary to ensure the research is credible and valid. One of the principles expressed that multiple sources

of data is necessary. For this study, the researcher used several referred sources and met with a diverse group of leaders to help gather data and information relative to this study. Moreover, the data supported the participant's perspective to ensure it was described truthfully during the face-to-face interviews.

Dependability. Another principle transcribed by Yin (2018) is ensure the researcher maintains a chain of evidence to support claims by participants and the truthfulness of information in the study. In the text, Yin (2018) expressed this principle helps the audience follow information gathered from findings, the research question, or, both. Because data collection is important to this research, the researcher asked follow up questions during the face-to-face interview and phone conference where needed.

Overall Observation

This phenomenological study explored the limitations African-American have relative to leadership roles within nonprofit organizations. Most nonprofit leaders who participated and were interviewed determined that they received current or past position by knowing someone on the board of directors or the previous leader. Because of this, mentor relationships through the bridge leadership concept are important for African-Americans to have a fighting chance in nonprofit leadership. The researcher attempted to uncover several reasons why this phenomenon is the issue, however, reluctance by several participants to discuss issues, is okay, but does not help get to the root of this matter.

Expected Findings

This phenomenological study contributed to existing research findings on the importance that mentoring plays in selecting a person of color for leadership positions in nonprofit organizations. Leadership and diversity are important for they provide work environments

different perspectives and increased work productivity across the organization (Martin, 2014). In New York state, most executive level leaders are nonminorities that in turn reduced the likelihood for a person of color to be considered for a role. Based on research and information from the literature review, the researcher identified the results and expected areas to uncover from beginning to end through each method of data collection and analysis. The methods that were used for this study were interviews and demographic questionnaires.

Ethical Concerns

At present, the researcher is an African-American who works for a national nonprofit in a middle level role within the organization. One goal for the researcher is to obtain a senior to executive level role within nonprofit management. Although this research study is to determine the influence and impact mentoring has on the career path for future African-American leaders, the researcher will remain unbiased and seeks to separate professional and personal gain. For this reason, the researcher, at the start of each interview reviewed the consent form and if the participant agreed they signed, dated, and returned to the researcher. All documents were kept in a file folder kept in a secure location at the home of the researcher throughout the data collection phase.

Bracketing is a process where one creates a distance from preconceived ideas and assumptions through dialogue, journaling, or bracketing mind map (Bertelsen, 2005). One's personal experiences cannot be fully set aside during the investigative stage of a qualitative study. For this not to happen the researcher incorporated bracketing. Bracketing is an important idea to alleviate bias control with the researcher conducting this study.

Research institutions, like Concordia University have established protocols to ensure research is conducted ethically (Stringer, 2014). For this reason, the ethical issues included an

assessment of potential conflict of interest and the researcher's position in this study.

Confidentiality was upheld by assigning each participant and his or her organization an alias.

Ethical Issues

Prior to conducting this study, the researcher obtained approval from Concordia University's Institutional Review Board. Permission was granted from the six participants who were in executive leadership in New York state nonprofits. More importantly, the informed consent form provided a clean and crisp summary of the phenomenological theory, qualitative research study (Creswell, 2013; Stringer, 2014). Participants were explored and researched by using their agencies' websites, networking sites, and eventually through an introductory email with next steps, once they agreed to participate in the study. Interviews were audio-recorded using the researcher's phone to help with quality of responses when transcribing the results. Participant confidentiality and protection of personally identifiable information was maintained in all documentation (Creswell, 2013).

Researcher's Position

The researcher crafted interview questions that were conducted and responses transcribed that would reveal the lived experiences of African-American nonprofit leaders regarding how mentor relationships impacted and influenced their career trajectory. Participating leaders had the opportunity to choose a date and time for each interview. The researcher was not an executive leader; however, through the knowledge of the research setting and related experience, participants were able to view this as credible toward research. For this, participants were expected to respond openly during the interview (Creswell, 2013).

The intent of this research study was to determine if and how they lived experiences of mentoring relationships had an impact in hiring a person of color for an executive level

leadership role within a nonprofit organization. In the literature review, it was clear that mentor relationships with the conceptual framework of social learning theory helped develop African-Americans to become more attractive to boards of directors when searching for leadership.

Chapter 3 Summary

In Chapter 3, the researcher presented the phenomenological methodology along with instrumentation, data collection procedures, and data analysis process for phenomenology theory study (Creswell, 2013). This chapter presented the data collection methods that were used to understand the lived experiences of African-American leaders and their mentoring relationships. The researcher presented research questions, the purpose and design for this phenomenological study, along with the population, and sampling method. Finally, the validity, ethical considerations, and researcher positionality also were addressed. In summary, the method used in this phenomenological study involved face-to-face interviews with current executive leaders in New York state. The findings from the research questions and methodology used for this study, and the results from the interviews and participant profiles with an analysis are captured in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences to determine whether mentors would affect and influence African-Americans for leadership roles in nonprofit leadership across New York state. Workplace diversity is important and improves job performance and satisfaction, business development, and overall equity and inclusion (Yeager & Nafukho, 2012). Many nonprofit organizations lack African-Americans in leadership; therefore, the absence of African-Americans in nonprofit leadership persists across New York state.

In this chapter, the results yielded from the data analysis are provided and discussed in order to draw relevant conclusions on African-American mentor relationships, namely from those that have risen to the top in leadership positions such as chief executive officer, president, or executive director. The following research questions guided this analysis and the accompanying results:

1. What are some recruitment, hiring, and retention practices to support African-Americans seeking executive level nonprofit leadership position?
2. What attributes of a mentor might influence a nonprofit leader's choice of a mentor relationship?
3. What personal and background lived experiences are relevant to an African-American in pursuit of a nonprofit executive leadership role?

The researcher's position as a middle-level leader aspiring to become a senior or executive leader with nonprofit offers an additional perspective on interpreting the data and describing participants lived experiences as a professional. The researcher hoped that this research and exploration of this study increased the likelihood for an African-American to obtain

a senior or executive level leadership position within nonprofits across New York state. Moreover, this research will demonstrate the importance of mentor relationships and how it helped increase that likelihood that more African-American women and men will rise to executive positions in nonprofit organizations.

Description of the Sample

An invitation was sent to each of the 10 executive level nonprofit leaders within the New York state. Six of the 10 nonprofit executives agreed to participate in this phenomenology theory study. The researcher used pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities. In this study, nonprofit leaders who had more than 10 years of experience were considered mature or seasoned leaders. All six of the leaders had more than 10 years of experience in an executive leadership role. Of the six nonprofit leaders that agreed to participate in the survey, three are in senior management leadership roles, while the other three serves as President/CEO of one of New York state's largest nonprofits relative to employees, resources, and affect within the community. An overview of the sample provided in Table 1. Moreover, this table with illustrate of the six participants two were not African-American, yet, Hispanic descent. Due to the lack of African-American leaders within nonprofits, along with some uninterested participants, it was tough for the researcher to find additional African-Americans for this study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Category	Description
Gender	Four males and two female participants
Ethnicity	Four African-American, one Hispanic, and one Latina
Role	Three executives, three senior management
Years in Role	Five participants greater than 10 years, on participant less than 10 years

John leads one of New York state’s nonprofits to support children and families across the state. In this capacity, John worked for years to ensure staff and stakeholders as he worked to transform this mission-driven organization. John worked with his team to bring this organization to where it sits today. For seven years, John has been at the helm leading this organization along with chairing boards of some of New York states’ largest foundations. In addition, John worked for several political leaders in another state before relocating to New York several years ago.

Roger, a seasoned leader has worked in several positions before landing his current role as a senior officer for one of the nation’s largest nonprofits. Roger has worked for his current nonprofit organization for nearly 36 years. His nonprofit organization serves several counties in the capacity of offering family’s relief from devastating natural disasters. For most of his adult life, Roger has served in the capacity of volunteer positions. In most of these other positions, Roger would be the only African-American, at times, the first of his kind to serve in said roles. Because of this, Roger looked to non-minority leaders to help him grow into these roles and helped him gain access and skills to further his love for volunteering throughout New York state. These positions proved important in consideration of his broader background.

Sal relocated to New York state within the last several years to assume his current role as senior leader at a large nonprofit in New York state. His perspective as a newcomer to this region is important for this study. Sal's organization provides individuals the opportunity to advance their education and career by offering skilled training, certificate and degree programs across two major industry sectors. Because of these reasons, it is important to learn more from Sal's experience as a transplant to New York state. Also to engage with and learn how his mentors helped him grow into his current role.

Rachel, a seasoned leader has worked for several nonprofits across New York state for the last 15 years. Rachel currently leads her nonprofit organization's community initiatives to advance education, racial and ethnic equity, and arts within New York state. Rachel was a senior leader for nonprofits in many capacities during her professional career. Because of this, Rachel had firsthand experience what is required to lead and transform nonprofit organizations. Rachel does come with a varied perspective to nonprofit leadership given she has worked for several in different capacities.

Steven moved up in rank within his current national nonprofit organization. He has worked with them for the last 12 years. At present, Steven is the vice president and executive director for a nonprofit organization in New York state. Steven assumed this role less than a year ago as the founding Executive Director where he had to recruit, hire, and train a team. Within his capacity, he manages a team of 10 plus middle and senior level administrators, as well as a host of volunteer service members working cross New York.

Brittany, a seasoned leader at one of the largest foundations in New York continues to leave an impression and impact within the community. The foundation Brittany leads works closely with community stakeholders to educate others around racial, equity, and inclusion,

while offering monetary resources around education, environment, and arts and culture. Brittany arrived to the United States back in 1968 with her parents, siblings, and grandparents. For decades, Brittany worked hard to build her voice within the community that allowed her to lead several nonprofit boards before joining her current organization in 2005. In just 2 short years, Brittany was named President and CEO and has been in this role for more than 12 years.

Research Methodology and Analysis

This phenomenology theory study was designed to determine whether mentoring impacts and influences African-American leaders in their current or past roles. A phenomenology theory study is a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the construction of theory through gathering and analysis of data (Gibbs et al., 2011). A phenomenology theory allowed the researcher to collect data and analyze it in a manner to generate abstract ideas, determine trends and themes, and explore for understanding of an individual or groups relative to social and human problems (Creswell, 2014). For these reasons, this study focused on insights and understanding from the lived experiences of mature and seasoned African-American leaders within nonprofits across New York state.

The researcher used the primary data analysis in phenomenology, which employed open, axial, and selective coding stages, which provides the researcher, ease in interpreting interviews (Gibbs et al., 2011). Open coding allowed the researcher to establish and determine themes of inclusiveness and work to pull information together; in short, generating a category of information (Urquhart, 2013). Axial coding is the detailed process that helps shape and define the research by breaking down themes and using a combination of inductive and deductive thinking (Urquhart, 2013). Finally, selective coding helps categorize one selection and positions it within another category where applicable. The goal for this methodology is for the researcher

to analyze data in order to uncover themes, compare themes, and determine whether a mentorship impacts and influences African-Americans in nonprofit leadership.

With the understanding that phenomenological research comes from spending time interviewing participants and investigating phenomena, the researcher analyzed this data through coding information. Coding is the process that helps sift through the data to help identify themes. Much of this study hinged on a small number of people who were interviewed based on a set of criteria, or purposeful sampling. Because of purposeful sampling, the researcher was able to choose subjects based on characteristics of a population and setting that would add value to the understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Interview analysis process. Before the researcher facilitated face-to-face interviews with leaders across New York, time was spent researching and exploring nonprofits that met the criteria for this study, which organizations were led by African-Americans, and how their position would help this study. After learning which nonprofits leaders would support this study, an introductory email was sent out to inquiry whether they would be interested. After gathering several acceptance emails, the researcher scheduled face-to-face interviews.

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with participants at each leaders' nonprofit organization. The participants appeared comfortable during the interview because of a previously established rapport. When a relationship has been developed between the researcher and participant, their interviews are more apt to provide useful data (Harding, 2013). The researcher ensured to be careful and remain neutral during each interview to reduce and limited biases in reaction or analysis while maintaining a positive and professional rapport before, during, and after interviews (Harding, 2013).

The analysis of the interviews was followed by the constant comparative method protocol identified by Harding (2013). This method primarily used for analyzing data in order to develop a phenomenology theory. At the start of each interview, the researcher gave participants a short summary of the research study, provided an approved, stamped consent form, and was asked if they would agree to being recorded. Once each participant agreed to the terms, the interview commenced. After each interview, the researcher uploaded the recording to Rev.com, an online transcription service to transcribe each interview. Once transcriptions were complete for interview, the researcher read thoroughly all data to ensure validity and accuracy of written notes and those transcribed using rev.com. The research used each research question with the corresponding interview questions to organize thoughts from each participant. This was done by annotating each response to the corresponding research question by using the abbreviation RQ (Research Question) followed by numbers 1, 2, or 3. After annotations were made for each interview transcription, the researchers used the constant comparative method to extract words, phrases, and ideas that were common to participants. Through the constant comparative method, specific words and phrases identified as codes, which led to identification of three themes: (a) lack of advertising for executive-level roles; (b) mentors are formal and informal consultants, and; (c) attributes such as gender, age, and race were not applicable.

To remain consistent with the research method of phenomenology, the researcher coded the data using open coding to allow themes and key words to emerge from the text. The researcher used a secure Google sheet as a tool to manually code and organize the data, kept journals of often-used words and phrases, and the use of the transcriptions. This method of manual coding helped form a time of reflection between the researcher and each participant.

Consequently, a richer interpretation of the lived experience occurred and their knowledge of mentors within their professional journeys.

Phenomenological description and member checking. Once the data was coded, the researcher reviewed written notes from each face-to-face interview and compared them to the transcriptions to determine themes and patterns of phrases of their experience as a mature executive level nonprofit leader and whether mentor relationships impacted or influenced their journey in becoming a nonprofit leader. Senior and executive level leaders were intentionally asked similar questions during their interviews. The researcher tailored the interview questions to the appropriate audience, yet the essential questions remained while adding follow-up questions for more clarity. By reading and reviewing the responses to the standard questions and comparing answers, a comprehensive and interesting description of mentoring and its effects through lived experiences emerged. For these reasons, the researcher noticed similarities and contrasts with the term “mentor,” the lack of advertising to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion for their given organizations, and attributes such as race, gender, or age were not applicable.

The researcher gained insight during this project through the phenomenological approach. This approach was established through a series of steps to collect, engage, and analyze data to determine the outcome. The data was evaluated and processed in a manner to construct themes; namely, in face-to-face interviews with participants. The themes that the researcher gleaned from the research subjects added value to this study. Phenomenology involves reading and rereading data from a textual basis to discover themes and determined their interrelatedness to the research questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The data collected does not have to be merely textual; it comes in other forms through behaviors, field notes, and face-to-face

conversations. For the purpose of this study, participants were asked to respond to a demographic survey and meet in person to answer questions that helped the researcher make informed responses toward central themes. Much of the data collection from a coding perspective required the researcher to label variables and determine correct categories in order to help with themes. Once these themes were established from the coding, the researcher reviewed transcripts from each interview and connected frequently used words in tandem with the study's three research questions.

Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to learn whether mentor relationships would influence and impact African-Americans seeking executive level leadership roles within nonprofits. There were several themes that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts and demographic questionnaire each participant completed. Each participating leader shared the importance of this topic and how mentor relationships helped them in the past and at present. From their lived experiences and influence within New York, along with guided questions three themes were present, (a) lack of advertising for executive level roles; (b) mentors are formal and informal consultants; and (c) attributes such as gender, age, and race were not applicable.

From the questionnaire demographics, the researcher discovered that each participant had several years of experience as an executive leader in several nonprofits across New York state and in a few instances across the nation. Each participant shared with the researcher her or his own journey which led them to their current roles within their given nonprofit organization. The interviewees advised that several people over an average of 20 years helped them in some capacity to become who they are presently. Most of the individuals offered the researcher

insights around the lack of diversity within their organizations and ways they are working toward increasing their leadership workforce.

Presentation of the Data and Results

The experiences from each of the seasoned, mature leaders allowed the researcher to determine and establish themes that were emergent from the face-to-face interviews. Because this is a phenomenology theory study, the researcher learned social patterns and structures that provided insight around mentor relationships, the recruitment and advertising process for positions within an organization, and attributes that were noticed over their professional careers. Each of these emerged themes provided substantial support to this study's research questions:

1. What are some recruitment, hiring, and retention practices to support African-Americans seeking executive level nonprofit leadership position?
2. What attributes of a mentor might influence a nonprofit leader's choice of a mentor relationship?
3. What personal and background lived experiences are relevant to an African-American in pursuit of a nonprofit executive leadership role?

From the face-to-face interviews and transcriptions, the researcher was able to understand the phenomena associated with this phenomenology theory study.

Detailed below are the lived experiences of participating nonprofit leaders across different industry sectors in New York. Because the seasoned leaders offered a different lived experience than their peers, it was important for the researcher to identify themes using open and axial coding. The researcher arrived at several themes to support this study through the phenomenology theory design. The three themes identified were lack of advertising, mentors are formal consultants and guides, and gender, age, and race do not matter. During this coding

process, the researcher coded segments of the text with the terms advertising, cheerleader, nonminority, race, and relationship. Each term that was coded represents a theme that was shared above.

Advertising. The leaders who were interviewed expressed that recruitment, hiring, and retention practices are lacking within their organizations. One of the leaders described a process and program they implemented to attract more African-Americans within his nonprofit organization. Steven shared that “there is little representation of supervisors when I think of people of color” and he noted that “the population we service is diverse and so should our middle and senior managers.” There is a great need for more diversity within the workplace, especially at a senior and executive leadership level. Several leaders emphasized that boards of directors and hiring managers hire people with “familiarity and relationship” to members on the team. Several leaders spoke to the fact that they work with at-risk, underserved, and impoverished people within the community and expressed to the researcher that diversity within their organizations, specifically leadership, are lacking and needs to be changed.

Advertising is one of several ways to attract quality, diverse candidates for the workforce. One leader shared that their organization used standard forms of advertising including, but not limited to the Chronicle of Philanthropy, Business First, LinkedIn, and Indeed. In their experience, this participant shared that although she went through the standard way of applying for her present role, she was “was encouraged by close friends to apply for each role I assumed.” Although advertising can be a formal way to attract candidates for leadership roles, it became apparent during several face-to-face interviews that the lack of diversity from an advertising perspective was lacking, and in the interviewing process. One leader noted that, “it is one thing to be at the table but have influence and go through whatever you need to go through to grow.”

This leader observed a majority nonminority interviewing panel. In order to ensure recruitment efforts are adhered to and supported, hiring leaders and managers must work to develop, cultivate, and sustain internal and external fundamental steps and activities toward diversity, equity, and inclusive workplaces (Westover, 2010).

Advertising to recruit, market, and attract quality people is important in order to increase and improve diversity efforts within leadership roles in nonprofit organizations. As one seasoned leader shared, “our organization has a deep commitment to diversifying our workforce” and established a “recruitment policy where hiring managers must shake trees to get to nontraditional applicants.” By doing so the organization will have strong applicants to increase diversity among their team(s). While another leader shared that their organization has a “strong focus on strategies that are thoughtful and intentional to recruit diverse backgrounds with shared experiences related to the communities we serve.” Because it is important for organizations to advertise to improve their likelihood of hiring quality, diverse candidates it is equally important to train teams to know what to look for also. In one nonprofit, the leadership team works to “invest in staff and the board of directors with the ability and commitment toward equity and inclusion.” When asked for clarity around this topic, the leader advised they created training days for the board members and staff and continues to update and refresh their recruitment policy.

The culture of an organization plays an important role in retaining key staff, especially African-Americans within the workplace. Too often organizations struggle with finding talented people, and another concern is keeping them. Nonprofit organizations typically lack inspiration, innovation, and collaboration within organizations that in turn reduces the number of likely talented candidates. Therefore, advertising does play an integral role relative to finding top,

talented, and diverse people. In its definition, ‘advertising’ means to actively produce and draw the attention of people through social media or other public mediums (Merriam-Webster, 2019).

During Steven’s interview, he shared that his organization created a space for men of color to support one another to support staff mentoring and retention. With this small strategy, Steven’s organization created a welcoming space that moves the nonprofit forward in hiring talented African-Americans for leadership positions. Terms such as *mentoring* and *creating a welcoming space* are buzzwords to use in an organization’s job posting.

Brittany concluded that her nonprofit organization continues to have a deep commitment to diversifying its workforce to balance out race, gender, and ethnicity. Although this practice was instituted more than five years ago, it has been tough finding top talent. Gartner (2019) described that data alone does not improve workplace culture and diversity; rather it provides a false comfort. Too often nonprofits struggle with finding top talent for they focus on the wrong parts of the job, which tends to reduce buy-in, decrease diversity, and decrease overall morale.

Brittany did share that there is a small number of people of color in the labor pool, however, she encourages and expects her hiring teams to diversify the talent pool by tapping into one of the 21 colleges and universities across New York. She also works with her board and invests her time into teaching them about abilities and commitment equity and inclusion has on organizations and, in turn, within the communities they seek to serve. Because this strategy is a top down leadership approach from a person of color, many nonprofits are not as fortunate as Brittany’s.

Mentors as formal consultants and guides. Several participating leaders agreed about the importance of mentor relationships and how it helped them in the past and at present. Steven shared that mentor relationships are “the best way to make sure real representation is

happening.” Rachel noted that when you seek out and find a mentor you ought to “make the most of every opportunity, especially relationships and networking. You call always call a mentor for advice and direction.” Mentoring is the process whereby a more experienced person helps a less experience person develops capacity and greater competence (Murray, 2001). Most participating leaders defined a mentor differently. Roger expressed a mentor was a “consultant, a person to call up and seek advice from when situations arise” while another shared “my mentor is also my professional influencer.” Brittany exclaimed that a mentor is “a cheerleader, one that reaffirms what I already know, while helping me share in my excitement for my future.” No matter the description or characterization of a mentor, the leaders determined that seasoned, quality individuals are important to use for guidance, support, and coaching.

A majority of participants described mentor relationships helped them gain access to different positions, organizations, and helped them solve complex problems. In fact, mentors are considered consultants and guides and most of the leaders shared they confided in former supervisors and other community leaders. During Sal’s interview, he offered that a former supervisor pushed him several times to seek out and apply for leadership opportunities much larger than the one he sat in. Not only did this take him by surprise, it motivated Sal to find additional advanced professional opportunities. Moreover, Sal remembered clearly, what was shared with him, “my boss told me you will be a president somewhere, someday” and right now, this participant is sitting at the helm of a large New York employee development organization.

Mentors are agents of change for mentees. Most mentors are used to bounce ideas off, work through personal and professional conflicts, and help maintain integrity in unforeseen situations. During this interview, Roger made notice how his supervisor and mentor coached him through a tough problem. He described the ethical relationship dilemma and how his mentor

coached him through this complex problem. He recalled that she would ask questions, offer feedback, and helped him determine next steps to remedy said complex problem. Situations as if the one above allowed Roger to behave in a vulnerable manner, which led him to a promotion that otherwise would not have happened if he never consulted with his mentor.

During the interview, all six leaders who were interviewed shared in the affirmative the importance of mentor/mentee relationships and several of their mentors were more like colleagues, bosses, and even superiors that “helped share my perspective in society” and offered “me the influence to be who I am and where I am today.” Mentor relationships are not necessarily packaged the same way for everyone, and each person’s relationship with a mentor is guided by their current professional life situation. Steven advised that, “there is so much unrealized potential within the community and organizations are leaving so much talent on the table” and that “mentors help mobilize the potential of people and work to pay it forward.” Having a mentor in the workplace provide an extra layer of support.

Many of the interviewees acclaimed the importance of mentors in their roles as effective change agents argue for the importance of mentor relationships. This study sought after reasons why mentor relationships are key for African-Americans in pursuit of leadership positions in nonprofits. Without fail, most leaders determined that they would not be in their present role had it not been for non-minority leaders. These leaders were guides and mentors, but they also offered a different perspective around board leadership, workplace culture, and complex problems.

During several interviews’ participants made it clear that these mentor relationships were more of a free consultant experience. Roger exclaimed that his mentor would “view my mistakes different than a boss and would use them as a growth opportunity.” Sal highlighted that his

mentor would always push him to fail so that he can grow into the leader he is expected to be. With rich experiences like Roger and Sal supports the idea that mentor relationships are consultants and guides and help direct the path of leaders as the move toward advance professional leadership experiences. While much information can be shared from these interviews, what is important to take away is how mentor relationships helped guide these leaders now and in the future.

Leadership with nonprofits may be a challenge for many people; it becomes more challenging for African-Americans. More than half of the participants expressed the significance of their mentor relationships and how it helped them discover new perspectives in leading teams, managing their boards, along with being supported through cultural context that informs diversity efforts organization-wide. Unfortunately, this does not trickle down to front-line staff as much. Brittany noted that she gives generous time to encourage and build future leaders and that is because she was mentored and guided by women during her two decades in leadership.

Table 2 lists responses to the following question: What factors influence a mentor/mentee relationship?

Table 2

Responses of Leaders

Researcher	What factors influence a mentor/mentee relationship?
Rachel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual respect and understanding • A mentor should have a willingness to communicate and share what they know, be respectful, approachable, have objectivity, fairness, openness to learning, compassion, genuineness and be able to provide guidance and constructive feedback
John	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual respect for dignity of life • Empowerment and vulnerability • Color of skin is not lost on me
Roger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honesty, integrity, verbal and unwritten bond toward success • Mentor has a natural and innate drive and the mentee should want to ride their coattails
Sal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Someone that aligns with my values • A person that is a winner, for people like doing business with a winner
Steven	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honest, empathetic, accountable, cheerleader • Ability to see one another as a person • Finding the joy of being around one another
Brittany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authentic and caring relationships • Helps think through things and does not necessarily tell you what to do, rather, guide you toward resolutions • Partner in solutions and works through challenges • Cheerleader

The table illustrates responses of each participant relative to what factors influence a mentor/mentee relationship. Each of these responses helped support research question 2: What attributes of the mentor might influence a nonprofit leader’s choice of a mentor relationship?

This research question tested assumptions around this study focusing on mentor relationships through the responses of each leader. This question may be broken into two sections: attributes and influence. An attribute is a characteristic or quality of a person; in essence, something that makes one attracted to another. Most leaders expressed during their

interview many positive qualities that they wished to see in a mentor. Throughout the interviews, leaders like John and Brittany asserted that, mentors are authentic, caring, respectful, and ones that align with deep respect for humanity. While Sal and Rachel stated that mentors should support and help connect the dots, being a content expert, or being someone that is open. As you may see these four leaders shared different attributes of a mentor, yet they all pointed to their influence.

Gender, age, and race does not matter. People are working in spaces across New York where race, gender, and age are tough topics to discuss with peers, which is why mentoring helps soften the discussion. Mentor relationships encourage diversity, support inclusion, and promote equity. Boulding (2018) expressed that “we are reckoning with difficult and emotional issues in our society – sexual harassment, racism, and deep political divides that don’t get checked at the door” (p. 1). Although this is an alarming statement, it is important for African-American leaders to have someone to discuss some of these tough conversations within order for them to obtain executive leadership positions in nonprofits in New York.

Mentoring is an organic experience between a mentor and mentee. It is equally important for each person to understand that formal and informal mentoring is not only a learning experience, but also an integral part of the process of leadership. The leaders made it clear from their responses that age, race, and gender are not factors of importance when choosing a formal or informal mentor. Because mentoring is a personal journey it may somehow become difficult for someone to manage this, however, during the interviews many participants advised how less difficult it was to seek mentors and work with them in varied capacities. Sal, Brittany, and Rachel approached their mentor experiences to gain self-awareness, understand career journeys, and a way to increase perspectives from a professional, unbiased way. On the other hand, John,

Roger, and Steven considered the mentor journey to help improve their overall experience within nonprofits. Regardless of their journey, each leader offered these perspectives aside from considering gender, race, and age. Although it did come up that it does play a position to two of the six participants, it was not a deciding factor for the others.

In the 21st century, people are working to reduce and even eliminate biases regarding gender. For several leaders' gender does not matter, while others believe it does. Roger responded and shared, "you do not shit and eat in the same place" to me "you should be mentored by your own gender; it is just the right thing to do." Moreover, Steven expressed, "it matters a lot" and "in order to break through organizations and succeed you need someone that understands you." Sal maintained, "male or female does not matter—they both offer different perspectives and can help in any situation."

Diversity, equity, and inclusion remain an important topic and best practice in nonprofits throughout New York. A participant within this study leads the charge for racial equity at her organization's roundtable. He offered the idea that "our organization is really trying to make ways to service all people within the community as much as possible" and that "people within urban communities need to experience people that look like them, similarly, there should be more Black leaders in schools that can point to strong mentor relationships." John advised during his interview that, "the idea of racial equity is a framework we must use to affect change in the workplace," and further asserted that "diversity is critically important in the workforce and organizations will have a tough time succeeding which is why we must celebrate the notion of diversity." While John stated, "Be open!" and to "deal with the realities and assist where you need to be assisted." Steven exclaimed that "identity is important" and "the society we live in is founded on White supremacy and patriotism," therefore, "race and gender does matter."

In order to improve the lack of African-Americans in nonprofit leadership, there must be an increase in the number of mentor relationships. Throughout the interviews, many leaders described mentor relationships to change the narrative for current and future African-Americans. Diversity is an important factor in organizations today; however, many nonprofits struggle with finding ways to increase these numbers. To empower and embrace diversity efforts across in New York, participants like Sal need nonminorities to become their professional influences and speak on their behalf to their networks. Sal disclosed that his former boss recognized his skills and talent so much so that she recommended him to attend The Academy at the Aspen Institute. According to Sal, this middle-aged White female told him to not allow things to define him, rather he should define them. Statements such as this motivated Sal to grow into more challenging leadership roles just like the one he is in currently.

To learn that gender, age, and race do not necessarily play a role in the attainment of mentorship, it is important that African-Americans remain mindful of the leaders they seek to work with and keep. Roger never realized how his former referee supervisor or former boss in his current role would leave a profound impression on his professional and personal life. He attributes much of his success to a White man and woman who helped him learn what he needed to for him to get to where he is. Brittany, a Latina-American who grew up in an inner-city area in Western New York spoke of being mentored by several influential White women over the span of several decades. Women in power and influence encouraged Brittany to join boards and apply for leadership roles she would otherwise not apply for and remain current on leadership practices and ideas as a minority leader.

Chapter 4 Summary

Each face-to-face interview conducted with the six seasoned, executive level leaders in nonprofit organizations across New York allowed for the researcher to gain deeper insights, themed experiences, and learned whether mentor relationships influence or impact African-American leaders seeking executive level nonprofit leadership. The conceptual framework of this study, phenomenology theory used a three-step process of open, axial, and selective coding to analyze the participants' responses and used to establish themes and generate lived experience responses to the three research questions that guided this study. The results of this study are keen and help to address the gap of diversity that exists in nonprofit organizations across New York, and they will help inform other literature around this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This study provided current and future African-American nonprofit leaders to speak about the benefits of mentor and mentee relationships in the workplace. This study involved interviewing seasoned and mature leaders to obtain their perspective of reasons on why there is an absence of African-Americans in executive level leadership positions in nonprofits across New York. Six seasoned nonprofit leaders who possess more than 10 years in senior and executive level positions have participated in this study and responded to questions relevant to the research questions of this study. The researcher collected and analyzed data from face-to-face interviews and demographic surveys with the leaders until themes were recognized and interpreted.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the main parts of this research study, discuss the meaning of results, establish connections between the themes and results of whether mentor relationship impact and influence future African-American leaders in nonprofit executive leadership, and how the results are informed by literature.

Summary of the Results

The results of this study relate directly to the three research questions:

1. What are some recruitment, hiring, and retention practices to support African-Americans seeking executive level nonprofit leadership position?
2. What attributes of a mentor might influence a nonprofit leader's choice of a mentor relationship?
3. What personal and background lived experiences are relevant to an African-American in pursuit of a nonprofit executive leadership role?

Moreover, face-to-face interviews with seasoned and matured leaders helped the researcher make an informed decision in the determination of mentor relationships. Literature presented in Chapter 2 demonstrated mentoring may be considered a form of professional development and helps an individual gain additional skills, abilities, competencies, and work toward advancement in a job (Friday & Friday, 2002). Likewise, mentor relationships are suggested practices to help diversify the workforce and promote growth, reduce employee turnover, and improve the overall workplace culture through diverse hiring efforts (Kantor, 2017).

Charmaz (2014) asserted that a phenomenology theory aids researchers and provides them focus and flexibility. The researcher in this study practiced both focus and flexibility across the research process to help determine and establish themes relative to the impact and influence mentor relationships have on African-American leaders in nonprofit organizations. For this qualitative study, the researchers used a phenomenological design and interviewed seasoned, mature leaders with an average of 20 years of executive level leadership roles within nonprofits across New York. The data from the interviews and participant demographic survey were analyzed in an open, axial, and selective coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

From this study, three major findings worked in tandem with the research questions. The three themes that emerged were: lack of quality advertising; mentors serve as formal consultants and guides; and gender, age, and race does not matter. Mentor relationships work to establish strong and lasting relationships; they also work to connect people, passion, and persistence on the job within nonprofit organizations. Throughout this study and the data collection phase, it became apparent that building and sustaining mentor relationships are chief especially for African-Americans seeking nonprofit leadership positions. Most participants agreed that mentors guide, offer support, and help leaders solve complete problems. Because race, gender, and age

does not matter, literature speaks to the idea of bridge leadership. Williams (2004) shared that “nonminorities work with minorities to bridge cultural, racial, and ethnic divides by offering their network to African-Americans.”

Discussion of the Results

The chief role of mentor relationships is to connect people in a way that would be mutually beneficial for all parties, namely, mentor and mentee. A mentor is considered a wise, trusted counselor or teacher that behaves as a challenger, cheerleader, and/or coach (Friday and Friday, 2002, Rashid, 2017), while a mentee is a person who is advised, trained, or counseled by a mentor (Friday, 2002). Mentor relationships often stem from organic relationships and grow into influential formal and informal learning opportunities for adults in the workplace (Hill & Curry-Stevens, 2017). The researcher designed this study based off the elements of mentor and mentee relationships, and gathered perspectives and lived experience from seasoned, mature leaders across several nonprofits in New York state.

The components that were in the initial focus of this research study included social learning theory, mentoring, and an emphasis of bridge leadership; however, themes emerged during the data collection and analysis stage that helped bring clarity and structure to this research study. The themes that emerged were lack of quality advertising, gender, age, and race do not matter, and mentors serve as formal consultants and guides. Because of the conceptual framework and themes of this study, the researcher was able to connect them.

Lack of quality advertising. Several times throughout the data, collection phase participants expressed that advertising was one of the biggest challenges that may prohibit an African-American seeking a leadership role with New York. Steven made this clear that organizations across New York are not people centric, nor do they create a space for African-

Americans time to apply for positions before promoting a friend, or, friend of the family. When situations like this occurred during the interview, the researcher knew that advertising does play a role in the lack of African-American leaders in nonprofit leadership.

Advertising is a key component to improve and diversify the talent pipeline for most organizations today. During the data collection phase, the researcher learned that most organizations lacked a robust advertising component to their hiring practices and that, therefore, thwarted the ability for most African-Americans to apply, let alone interview for an executive leadership role. The social learning theory connects the cultural environment of people and their communities. Unfortunately, most individuals within said communities lack the opportunity to apply for a role because leadership opportunities were limited.

Social learning theory describes the role of modeling and being an example for learners (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, this theory connects the cultural environment through training of new strategies and ideas to become better leaders and thinkers. Social learning theory is based on behaviors through a cognitive process and is, thus, connected to mentoring. This theory emerged and was noticed in this study based on responses from the participants. During the face-to-face interviews, each participant spoke to the idea of mentors being trained and trusted consultants they may tap into for assistance.

To know that the lack of advertising and the social learning theory are connected, it would be ideal for nonprofit agencies learn and develop ways to incorporate diversity hiring practices. These practices would improve the talent pipeline, increase overall staff morale, and would strengthen opportunities for African-Americans to apply, interview, be hired, and retain their positions.

Mentors serve as formal guides and consultants. The several themes that emerged from this study allowed the researcher to understand what is important to seasoned, mature leaders and what they feel is appropriate for future executive leaders to know. These themes and concepts proved to be important indicators for mentor relationships for they help increase the likelihood of an African-American woman or man's opportunity to take the helm of a nonprofit organization. Moreover, it proved to benefit leaders in several aspects of their leadership journey.

To understand the importance of mentor relationships was one key finding throughout the data collection and analysis phase, also a theme played out throughout this study. Mentor relationships were established and maintained, in many instances for several decades. Most of the leaders that interviewed are current mentors to future leaders in New York and for two others across the nation. Mentors that serve as formal guides and consultants are nimble as leaders across any organization for, they have diverse perspectives and established newer ideas around hiring practices, advertising, along with, how to create and strengthen opportunities for African-Americans seeking nonprofit leadership.

Age, gender, and race does not matter. To find the pool of talented, diverse applicants for any role, it is important to embrace diversity holistically. The idea of age, gender, and race came up several times during each participant interview; however, the researcher learned that none of these characteristics mattered to most participants. Because of this bridge leadership and organic mentor relationships are important and help move African-Americans further and forward in their quest in finding and landing executive level leadership roles in nonprofits in New York.

The concept of mentor relationships included bridge leadership, which was apparent during interviews with participants. The researcher asked: "What factors influence a

mentor/mentee relationship?” and “What are some key attributes a mentor might have to offer leadership and coaching of an African-American seeking an executive level leadership role?” Although the participant responses varied, one central theme was that mentors help navigate barriers and tough situations leaders face and a different perspective helps solve problems. Findings from the seasoned, mature leaders’ perspectives showed mentor relationships impact and influence a person and their growth and development as a future executive leader within nonprofit organizations.

A common theme among the participating leaders was that offering mentor relationships would allow future leaders the opportunity to gain deeper awareness of self, ability to navigate the political arenas that accompany such roles, and that said relationships not only would make one vulnerable, but also empower the mentee at the same time. These attributes and factors allow future executive leaders the perspective and bandwidth necessary to help increase African-American presence within nonprofits across New York. Race to Lead (2017) asserted that 9% of executive leaders were in the process of leaving their role and 75% anticipated leaving within five years. Because of these alarming numbers, mentor relationships are impactful for they help increase retention, job satisfaction, and overall job performance. Although gender, race, and age does not play a part in mentoring, self-awareness, self-direction, and emotional intelligence does. Characteristics like the above may be beneficial in the successfulness of mentor relationships; it would also improve and strengthen emerging top leadership talent within New York.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

In Chapter 2, the researcher discussed the idea of bridge leadership. The idea of bridge leadership happens when “nonminorities, faculty members or administrators, work to ‘bridge’ cultural, racial, and ethnic divisions, and to help transform their universities or colleges into more welcoming, nurturing environment for minorities” (Williams, 2004). Although bridge leadership may work for some, it seems that it may not work for others. A general theme relative to gender, race, and age is that mentoring was present for each leader. Although many people are color and race blind, mentoring is one way to help close that gap. A participant asserted, “race should matter, gender should too, in a good way, it helps with the addictive experiences.” In short, “to function in the nation, we need to embrace racial equity which is the right and smart thing to do.” Moreover, “we cannot get to tomorrow without any of this.”

Social learning theory, mentor relationships, and bridge leadership were apparent and illustrated in this study, and directly related to the literature that was reviewed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation as it applies to whether mentor relationships would impact and influence African-Americans seeking executive leadership roles within nonprofits. The following points are connections between reviewed literature and the central themes that emerged within this study relative to mentor relationships.

Social learning theory. Social learning theory connects the cultural environment through training opportunities, new strategies and ideas, and best practices based off noted behaviors (Reed, 2011). In addition, Reed (2011) indicated that the social learning theory connects the cultural environment with training new strategies and ideas. Therefore, individuals are empowered, leaders become more effective, and best practices become the new standard operating procedures. This theory works to model behaviors through a cognitive process and

helps influence and reinforces good behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Much of mentoring happens by watching the behavior of someone, and social learning theory helps establish a more formal process and idea for a mentee to work through. Because mentoring promotes personal and professional development, social learning theory provides more of a theoretical foundation for said relationships.

Moreover, the social learning theory enhances the behavior of people based on the environment through the process of observational learning (Bandura, 1977). Most nonprofit organizations struggle with tapping into talented individuals because of their lack of networking or wanting to hire African-Americans. This did come up during the data collection phase and most participants agreed that nonprofits typically only work from the point of doing what was already being done.

Throughout this study, participants expressed in unique ways how they would tap into the behaviors and ideas of former bosses, consultants, and leaders. Many leaders in this study agreed that building and sustaining mentor relationships helped them deploy agreed upon skills and traits for the workforce. One participant shared “my former boss taught me to consider the moral goodness of people versus the value impact of people.” This statement proved that the value of a relationship is predicated upon how you perceive them.

Mentoring. Mentoring relationships often develop future leaders and equip them with established norms on the job, expectations to consider, and understand what is required to be successful in the workplace (Kiernan, 1998). In addition, mentors are also teachers. A teacher is one that guides, teaches a lesson, and works to improve behaviors and performance. As such, mentors are individuals from whom mentees seek out additional information to help solve problems, reduce stress, and increase the size of one’s network. Finklestein (2018) speaks to

ways that mentoring is a lot like one-on-one tutoring to emphasize on-going, personalized instruction to foster and hone in on competencies, compliance, and develop ways to master skills through action. Although mentoring is about building relationships with more seasoned people, Roger explained that mentoring is all about the mission and walking in authority and using “time, practice, and development” to become better faster. John affirmed that his previous mentors helped empower him while encouraging him not to get lost in the color of his skin. Without the support of mentor relationships for people like Roger and John, they would be in a different space professionally and personally.

For many leaders, mentor relationships have lasted more than two decades and have helped them in many capacities. Brittany, for instance, shared that she reached out to her mentor for their current role. Not only did they call for advice on whether to interview for the role, but also asked for comments to help in the event they would be offered the position. Furthermore, Brittany noted, “someone you can have candid and confidential conversations is helpful, especially learning the political landscape.” Brittany continued to express that “although I did not have a lot of mentoring through my personal life, my style as a leader allowed me to get to where I am today.”

Leaders in this study found that mentoring or being mentored are important for the growth of a leader's competencies, as well as the increase of African-Americans within nonprofit leadership. According to the leaders in the study, the board of directors are more likely inclined to give someone a chance when someone else recommends them. In order to have a seat at the table and given an opportunity most leaders agreed that they needed someone nonminority help them get there. When interviewing Roger, he asserted, “my former boss, she was White, encouraged me to stay true to myself, challenge the norm, and learn the business side of the

organization.” Comments like this statement were loud and clear throughout the study and ensured that mentor relationships are relevant, real, and right for future African-American leaders seeking executive level leadership within nonprofits.

In the study, leaders asserted that those African-Americans leading some of New York’s largest nonprofits were self-created and are an anomaly because of their relentless personality and ideas in serving nonprofits where a vast majority of the constituents and board of directors were also minority. Although this is abnormal for most nonprofits, it is important to share that diversity, equity, and visibility of African-Americans in most nonprofits are limited, but there are somewhere minorities are considered the majority. When the researcher attempted to reach out to those nonprofits, there was no response to gain more awareness of their practices of diversity within their organizations.

Bridge leadership. Bridge leadership is a relatively new idea that describes the relationship between a minority and non-minority and how this relationship would increase the likelihood of helping them grow in personal and professional pursuits. In the case of an African-American seeking an executive leadership role, most times, it is important to be supported by a nonminority, especially for relatively large nonprofits across New York state. This idea of bridge leadership helps improve and increase diversity within the workplace, in addition to helping people obtain positions they otherwise not be hired for.

Not only is bridge leadership a key component to the results of this study, so is cross-silo leadership. This idea of leadership is more commonplace within organizations that seek to promote from within. One of six participants interviewed advised that their organization prides itself off promoting from within, however, continues to struggle to find diverse talented leaders.

Limitations

Three limitations were acknowledged in this study, including: (a) poor buy-in during the pre-study phase, (b) limited number of nonprofit African-American leaders who met the study criteria, and (c) two nonprofits, which after several attempts never responded to the request to have leaders participate in this study.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

The implications in this study were geared to help African-Americans seeking nonprofit leadership roles. Because relational experiences are important in the workplace, they are equally essential for a minority seeking a promotion or an executive level role. Throughout this study, the researcher worked to share how mentor relationships and/or bridge leadership are viable options to help reduce the racial leadership gap and afford an African-American the opportunity in nonprofit leadership.

The results of this phenomenological study indicated that mentor relationships affected and influenced African-American leaders in nonprofit organizations, along with, the support from nonminorities. The central themes discussed in this study were developed around the research design, research questions, and conceptual framework. Because of this study, readers have the ability and opportunity to seek out trusted, wise mentors to help them seek out their next leadership opportunity in a nonprofit organization.

The results from this study showed that strengthening trusted mentor relationships, leaders would build a stronger case in their quest for leadership positions within nonprofits now and in the future. The study helped demonstrate and determine that meaningful, trusted, and strategic relationships throughout one's professional career are important factors that helped several leaders gain their current and, in some instances, their past roles. For these reasons, it

became clear that mentors, formal and informal, are important ways to increase minority presence within executive level roles within nonprofit organizations. From the face-to-face interviews, most leaders described how mentor relationships helped them land their current or past leadership positions. This study confirmed that organizations should consider implementing professional mentor relationships part of on-boarding or, as professional development opportunities for aspiring African-American leaders.

Research on organizational effectiveness and diversity across nonprofits are inconsistent, however, one clearly defined theme is that both are important and necessary for nonprofits to remain on the cutting edge and increase diversity on its workforce. Another implication would be for nonprofits to consider reshaping policies around their advertising, recruitment, hiring efforts, and implementing diversity programs. Bierema (2010) expressed that “diversity programs are more widely valued and implemented in practice” (p. 566). For this reason, it is recommended that nonprofits that lack diversity efforts or may not attract African-Americans they work to implement and sustain diversity programs to support their growing workforces.

Finally, the researcher found through the *Daring to Lead* (2017) survey more than 3,000 nonprofits and learned that 82% led by Whites. In addition, the survey illustrated that African-Americans remain under 20% as leaders over nonprofits. This racial leadership gap remains throughout the United States. In New York state more than 3,000 nonprofits comprise of small, medium, and large-sized organizations that work with varied people through a myriad of programs and services. The participants in this study understood the importance of genuine and organic professional relationships and how to tap into resources to gain access to roles they would otherwise not be afforded the opportunity. The data shared throughout this study relate and compare to the conceptual framework derived from the social learning theory, mentor

relationships, and bridge leadership. These three dynamics play a key role in diversity efforts in workplaces leadership roles across nonprofit organizations.

Recommendations for Further Research

The phenomenological study was designed to determine whether mentor relationships would have an influence and impact on nonprofit leadership. Throughout this study, seasoned and mature leaders provided their perspectives on mentor relationships, diversity within their organizations, and what attributes and factors contribute to a successful career in nonprofit leadership. The researcher considered the perspectives from leaders within the community that helped shape the central themes and conceptual framework that guided this research study. Adding such perspectives helped establish next steps.

Leaders from varied nonprofit organizations that help at-risk populations and some of the communities' most vulnerable individuals were targeted for this study. Further research would deepen and strengthen this study by gathering perspectives from a larger pool of seasoned, mature African-American leaders in other inner-city communities in metropolitan areas across the nation. In addition, increasing the sample size by reducing the financial threshold the researcher used for this study would open the sample size a bit, not by much, given there is still a limited number of African-Americans leading nonprofits in New York state.

Further study would also help develop a successful and robust mentor program wherein boards of directors, search firms, and nonprofits may adopt to help attract, recruit, hire, and retain an educated, qualified, and experienced African-American to take the lead over a nonprofit organization. To ensure this mentor program is valid, it would be ideal to pilot the program with one or more nonprofits alluded to within this study. This would encourage and empower future

leaders within the community to work with individuals that understand the racial leadership gap within New York.

Conclusion

Diversity, the racial leadership gap, and struggling to find top talented minorities continue to remain problematic across nonprofits. This study sought to inform the audience that mentoring relationships are key ways to improve the lack of minorities in executive leadership roles. Of the six seasoned, mature leaders interviewed in this study, each showed a unique perspective of how mentor relationships helped them in their pursuit and aspiration to lead organizations and transform their hiring practices. In each instance, these organizations attempted to establish a diversity, equity, and inclusion platform, however, did not move the diversity needle as much as one would have hoped. To these reasons, the study of mentor relationships was an important factor and determine whether it increased African-Americans in the labor market pool across New York state.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether mentor relationships had an impact and influence on African-Americans in seeking nonprofit leadership roles. The research questions for this study allowed the researcher to interview leaders in New York state and determine what factors and attributes are essential for mentor relationships. From the data collection and analysis stage, it became clear that mentor relationships do have a large impact on the recruitment, hiring, and retention of an African-American in nonprofits in New York state. The difficulty behind this is that most nonprofits continue to struggle to find talented people to fill leadership positions.

Social learning theory, mentor relationships, and bridge leadership were the conceptual framework that helped address the importance of increasing the racial leadership gap that is seen

across New York state. The leaders in this study conveyed that there is a lack of diversity, absence of African-American presence in leadership, and most nonprofits would benefit from a diverse perspective. Where leaders' attitudes agreed around mentor relationships happened when asked if gender, race, and age mattered. For the most part, they agreed and said no, none of those demographics matter; what does matter is the lived experiences and trust that is built between one another.

Finally, this phenomenological study allowed the research to provide insight around the lived experiences of the participants' mentor relationships and its efficacy for future nonprofit leaders within New York. In addition, it allowed the researcher to learn more ways to improve the racial leadership gap and the importance mentor relationships improved and increased advanced professional leadership opportunities for many leaders across New York state. In closing, mentor relationships for current and future African-Americans is an important aspect to help break the glass ceiling and improve overall org wide performance, diversity efforts, and leadership capacity for employees within the organization.

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Appendix A: Initial Email to Gauge Interest

Good Day _____,

I am a doctoral candidate at Concordia University–Portland completing my Ed.D. in Transformational Leadership. To complete my degree requirements, I am working on my dissertation titled: *The Impact and Influence Mentoring has on African-American Leaders in Nonprofits*.

For this study, I plan to interview six or more African-Americans who are in an executive level leadership position with a nonprofit in New York.

I respectfully request that you consider being a participant in this study. I estimate this entire research collection phase will not take more than 1 hour of your time for I know you are busy.

If you are willing and interested please reply to this email no later than February 12, 2019. Should you have questions, or need clarity of any kind you may reach me at [redacted].

Thank you for your assistance in this important endeavor

Sincerely,

Mr. Gary Damon, Jr., MA

Appendix B: Interview Questions for Current Leader(s)

1. What is your present position?
 - a. How long have you served in this role?
 - b. Prior to this role, what other positions did you hold?
 - c. What personal rewards (if any) did/have you experienced in the pursuit of your current role?
2. What ways does the organization recruit, market, and/or advertise for leadership roles?
3. In your estimation do you feel this organization has a diverse leadership team? Please explain. If not, in what ways are you working to improve/increase this?
4. Was there a time you mess up and felt like you failed? Was there a mentor that offered coaching, or support?
5. When interviewing for this role did you receive any pointers from a mentor? Was there ever a time you applied for and landed a job, but you were not 100% qualified to do it? Do you think a mentor relationship is helpful in this case?
6. What is your leadership style? Approach? Which leadership skills were the most difficult to develop? Is this seen in your daily interactions with your direct reports?
7. As a professional do you feel it is important to have a mentor? Please explain. Did you have a mentor? If so, type of relationship? Do you remain in contact with them?
8. What factors influence a mentor/mentee relationship?
9. Do you feel a mentor relationship is important for minorities for them to obtain an executive leadership position? Please explain why or why not?
10. Do you feel that having a mentor increases the likelihood of an organization to interview and hire a person of color? Please explain.

11. What are some key attributes a mentor might have to offer leadership support and coaching of a person of color seeking an executive level leadership role?
12. Do you think mentor relationships are critical for an executive role in nonprofits? Would gender matter? Would race matter? Would age matter?
13. Looking at several nonprofits in New York state and noticing a dearth of African-American why do you think that is?
14. What attributes or factors contribute to a hiring committee choose a person of color? What personal characteristics about yourself are you most proud of?
15. How did you get to your current role?
16. If you could speak to a person of color aspiring for a President/CEO of a nonprofit, what advice would you give?

Appendix C: Consent Form

Research Study Title: The Impact and Influence Mentoring has on African-American Leaders in Nonprofits

Principal Investigator: Gary Damon, Jr.

Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland

Faculty Advisor: Dr. William Boozang

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this study is to explore the practice of mentorship, and the potential impact and influence on ascending leadership roles for African-American leaders. I expect approximately six or more executive level nonprofit leaders that are considered African-American. No one will be paid to be in the study. I will begin enrollment on January 7, 2019 and end enrollment on January 11, 2019.

To be in the study, you will:

1. Be interviewed to learn more about your professional journey as a person of color in nonprofit leadership (1–2 hours)
2. Allow the researcher to spend time interviewing two or more board members that recruited you for this role (1 hour)
3. Allow the researcher to review your hiring policies for senior leadership positions (3–5 hours)

Doing these things should take less than 10 hours of your time.

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than what you experience on a day to day basis in the nonprofit setting. However, I will protect all information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption. When I look at these data, none of these data will have your name or identifying information. I will assign a pseudonym to you. I will not identify you in any publication or report. Your information will always be kept private and then all study documents will be destroyed three years after I conclude this study.

Benefits:

Information you provide will help contribute to existing research about the benefits of mentor relationships. Moreover, your participation in this study adds value to the body of research focusing on increasing the presence of African-American in nonprofit leadership.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to the principal investigator, Gary Damon, Jr. My doctoral studies chair's name is Dr. Bill Boozang. He supervises me at Concordia University. You may contact him at bboozang@cu-portland.edu. If you wish to talk with a participant advocate other than my chair, or me you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obranche@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____ Participant Name	_____ Date
_____ Participant Signature	_____ Date
_____ Investigator Name	_____ Date
_____ Investigator Signature	_____ Date

Appendix D: Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Please provide the following information about yourself. This information will be used to describe general background information of participants in this study. Pseudonym names or special coding will be used in this study and will not allow individuals to be identified.

Indicate your current age:

- 18–24
- 25–30
- 31–40
- 41–50
- 51–60
- 61+

Indicate your highest level of education:

- High School diploma
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Doctoral degree
- Other

Indicate your current marital status:

- Single
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Partnered
- Other

Indicate your years of experience as an executive leader

- 0–5
- 6–10
- 10–15
- 15–20
- 20+

When you first were hired as an executive leader did you have a mentor? Yes or No

If yes to question 5: please explain how the mentor helped you attain that role.

If no, what factors led the board in hiring you for that role?

Appendix E: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Gary L. Damon, Jr.

Digital Signature

Gary L. Damon, Jr.

Name (Typed)

October 18, 2019

Date