

An Exploration of the Path for African American Women to  
and the Diversification of the Corporate Boardroom

Don Kirk Beatty

North Carolina A&T State University

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Major Professor: Dr. Geleana D. Alston

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North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University

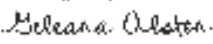
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Dr. Geleana D. Alston  
Major Professor

You Signed by  
  
11/16/2020 2:22 PM EST

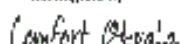
Dr. Yvonne O. Hunter-Johnson  
Committee Member

You Signed by  
  
11/16/2020 11:18 AM PST


Dr. Adelle Bish  
Committee Member

You Signed by  
  
11/17/2020 6:17 AM PST

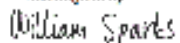
Dr. Kristen L. Rhinehardt  
Graduate Faculty Representative

You Signed by  
  
11/16/2020 11:32 AM PST


Dr. Comfort Okpala  
Co-chair

You Signed by  
  
11/16/2020 11:21 AM PST

Dr. Crystal Gathers-Whatley  
Committee Member

You Signed by  
  
11/17/2020 6:54 AM EST

Dr. William Sparks  
Committee Member

You Signed by  
  
11/17/2020 5:12 AM PST

Dr. Alisa Taliaferro  
Interim Department Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Clay S. Gloster, Jr.  
Dean, The Graduate College

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## Biographical Sketch

Born in Charlotte, NC, Don Kirk Beatty was raised in Lucia and attended Mount Holly primary and secondary schools. Kirk is the founder and CEO of Adroite established in 2019 and Datatech Information Services, Inc., established in 1996. From his undergraduate days at Duke Energy's McGuire Nuclear Station to his previous position with the now Ahold-Delhaize's Food Lion, Kirk was previously employed with Systems Associates, Inc./American Express Health Systems Group and Holly Farms/Tyson Foods. Kirk is a member of the 2016 cohort for the Leadership Studies doctoral program at North Carolina A&T State University. A graduate of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Kirk received his Master of Business Administration in International Business from UNC Charlotte's Belk College of Business as well as a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science. Kirk has served on various boards and committees and is currently serving as a board member and advisor for multiple organizations. Holding a commercial pilot certificate with instrument, single-engine, and multi-engine ratings as well as an advanced ground instructor certificate, Kirk is active in aviation and has volunteered as a pilot with Veteran's Airlift Command. Kirk has also volunteered as an IT Coach with Apparo and as a coach on various baseball teams in which his son played. Kirk's son is a graduate of East Carolina University with a Master of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Science in Biology. He is also the founder of ArboVe, LLC - a creator of high-protein, eco-friendly foods. Additionally, Kirk has a daughter who is a graduate of Western Carolina University with an undergraduate degree in Business Entrepreneurism and a cognate in photography. She is the founder of Mikayla Quinn Photography, currently leads Datatech's digital marketing offerings, and has plans to attend UNC Charlotte for her Master of Business Administration.

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wonderful wife, son, and daughter who have endured numerous hours of my Ph.D. journey. Without their unrelenting understanding and support, this work would not have been possible to complete at this time in our lives. This work is also dedicated to the incredible women of my family who have left an unshakable influence on my perspective of what women in leadership are all about. In addition to my wonderful wife and daughter these women are namely, but not limited to, my remarkable mother whose accomplishments originated from a platform of little opportunity. She has provided the example that with unrelenting ambition, goals, dedication, and the simple innate desire of self-improvement, one can realize prosperity and success despite life's initial offerings. My amazing mother-in-law, who repeatedly places those of her family and all whom she finds dear before her self-interest, including myself, merits the deepest gratefulness. Also, my wonderful grandmother deserves recognition. Her displays of unmeasurable love and compassion remain with me today. My two brothers likewise, warrant recognition - my older brother who saved me countless times in our youth and my younger brother who hopefully can say the same of his older brother. Additionally, I wish to dedicate this work to my extraordinary family, friends, and colleagues at large that have endured, supported, and encouraged my work. James (Jimmy) Sifford is also recognized for the leadership and impact that we all strive to possess. I wish to also dedicate this work to the everlasting memories of Mrs. Bert Furr, Mrs. Flora Flair, Mrs. Pauline McLean, Mrs. Rosie Lee Abernathy, Mrs. Maggie McDowell, and the many others unnamed who showered Gilbert's boy with love and compassion. Finally, I would be remiss not to make a dedication to and acknowledge the everlasting influence of my father himself, whose compassion and perspectives were well ahead of his time, and mine – I'll see you later.

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well as Dr. Ellen Van Velsor deserve recognition for helping a technical career and *decades beyond English grammar* doctoral student write as Mrs. Roberts, Mrs. Gault, Mrs. Belk, and Mrs. B. Hill first taught me to do. Mrs. Hill, I know I took the easy way in your class, but still thank you for holding me to the highest of standards. That commitment had a lasting influence.

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## Abstract

Women are the majority in the United States, approaching equal numbers to men in the workforce, and are the breadwinners in over 40% of homes controlling up to 80% of consumer purchasing power (Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann, & Josephson, 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018). Women outperform men in higher educational attainment at all levels (Aud et al., 2012; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Klettner, Clarke, & Boersma, 2016). The National Center for Educational Statistics finds women achieve 44% of the accounting and finance degrees (Aud et al., 2012; Fedaseyeu, Linck, & Wagner, 2018; Gray & Nowland, 2013; Nielsen & Huse, 2010, United States Department of Labor [USDOL], 2017). These degrees are among the desired expertise typically sought for the corporate boardroom (Aud et al., 2012; Fedaseyeu, Linck, & Wagner, 2018; Gray & Nowland, 2013; Nielsen & Huse, 2010). Despite these accomplishments, women are well underrepresented on corporate boards of directors, and African American women even more so (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Klettner et al., 2016; Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, & Bongiorno, 2011). With the traits of not only male, but also males of European descent, co-constructing the normal of the corporate boardroom, this study posits the European American leader's normal was obstructing the equitable representation of African American women in the traditionally European American male dominated boardroom space (Cook & Glass, 2014). This study investigates the experiences of directors for answers into why corporate boards lack the diversity of African American women. Pursuing phenomenological research, this study highlights how the European androcentric reality influenced and created an inequitable normal for the board environment. The implications are that board pipelines and directorships expand for a more inclusive, intentional selection process realizing equitable ethnic gender diversity on corporate boards.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background**

Women are the majority in the United States as demonstrated by Table 1.1. Women, furthermore, approach equal numbers to men in the workforce and are the breadwinners in over 40% of homes controlling up to 80% of consumer purchasing power (Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann, & Josephson, 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018). Table 1.2 illustrates that women outperform men in higher educational attainment for bachelor, master, and doctorate degrees (Aud et al., 2012; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Klettner, Clarke, & Boersma, 2016). Table 1.2, additionally, demonstrates that women achieve 44% of the accounting and finance degrees, credentials that are among the desired expertise typically sought for the corporate boardroom (Aud et al., 2012; Fedaseyeu, Linck, & Wagner, 2018; Gray & Nowland, 2013; Nielsen & Huse, 2010; United States Department of Labor [USDOL], 2017). Women, furthermore, have parity with men in managerial and professional positions (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Despite these accomplishments, the senior levels of corporate leadership are found lacking women, particularly in the positions of corporate board director and CEO, a position instrumental to corporate board directorships (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Klettner et al., 2016; Ryan, et al., 2011).

The notion of normal is commonly accepted as typical or otherwise what is expected (Harinen, 2017). The normal of the U.S. corporate boardroom, moreover, is co-constructed by the traits of being male and being of European descent (Cook & Glass, 2014). In the Fortune 500 and the S&P 500, women represent less than 25% of executive and senior-level positions that are imperative for the pipeline to the boardroom (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). This lack of

Table 1.1

*U.S. Census Bureau Population & U.S. Department of Labor, Labor Participation*

<b>2016 U.S. Population</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>% of Category</b>				
Male	159,079	49.00%					
Female	164,049	51.00%					
Total	323,128						
<b>18 Years and Older</b>							
Male	121,470	48.69%					
Female	128,015	51.31%					
Total	249,485						
<b>25 to 79 Years</b>							
Male	100,971	48.92%					
Female	105,422	51.08%					
Total	206,393						
				<b>2016 Board Seats to 2016 Population</b>	<b>2018 Board Seats to 2016 Population</b>	<b>2018 Labor Participation</b>	<b>2018 Board Seats to 2018 Labor Participation</b>
Total	323,128	100.00%					
White	248,503	76.91%				62.90%	
Non-Hispanic White	197,970	61.27%				62.30%	
Black or African American	43,001	13.31%				61.60%	
Non-His White to Black AA	4.60						
Male	159,079	49.23%	100.00%				
White	123,134	38.11%	77.40%	168.34%	161.06%	69.80%	87.93%
Non-Hispanic White	97,598	30.20%	61.35%	212.39%	203.20%	68.30%	89.86%
Black or African American	20,592	6.37%	12.94%	117.20%	120.71%	64.10%	12.00%
Female	164,049	50.77%	100.00%				
White	125,368	38.80%	76.42%	47.27%	49.36%	56.30%	34.01%
Non-Hispanic White	100,371	31.06%	61.18%	59.04%	61.65%	56.60%	33.83%
Black or African American	22,409	6.94%	13.66%	34.70%	49.56%	59.40%	5.79%
Non-His White to Black AA	4.48						

(ABD & Deloitte, 2019; USCB, 2017; USDL, 2017)

Table 1.2

*U.S. Department of Education, NCES 2017 Statistical Tables*

	Accounting				Finance				Combined	All Degrees			
	Bacr	Masr	PhD	Total	Bac	Mas	Phdl	Total	Total	Bac	Mas	Phd	Total
Total	55,951	21,353	43	77,347	43,129	7,301	54	50,484	127,831	2,079,853	818,629	183,333	3,081,815
Female	28,437	11,811	23	40,271	12,719	2,808	14	15,541	55,812	1,192,630	485,564	97,764	1,775,958
Female % of Total	51%	55%	53%	52%	29%	38%	26%	31%	44%	57%	59%	53%	58%
African American (AA)													
Total	4,108	1,431	4	5,543	2,081	331	2	2,414	7,957	192,910	83,412	13,105	289,427
AA Women (AAW) Total	2,381	957	4	3,342	837	135	1	973	4,315	123,681	58,390	8,652	190,723
AAW % of Total	4%	4%	9%	4.3%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3.38%	6%	7%	5%	6%
AAW % of Female	8%	8%	17%	8%	7%	5%	7%	6%	8%	10%	12%	9%	11%
AAW % of AA Total	58%	67%	100%	60%	40%	41%	50%	40%	54%	64%	70%	66%	66%
European American (EA)													
Total	33,060	10,910	16	43,986	26,311	2,123	21	28,455	72,441	1,212,759	405,895	100,668	1,719,322
EA Women (EAW) Total	15,470	5,078	11	20,559	6,619	502	5	7,126	27,685	684,875	251,632	53,780	990,287
EAW % of Total	28%	24%	26%	27%	15%	7%	9%	14%	22%	33%	31%	29%	32%
EAW % of Female	54%	43%	48%	51%	52%	18%	36%	46%	50%	57%	52%	55%	56%
EAW % of EA Total	47%	47%	69%	47%	25%	24%	24%	25%	38%	56%	62%	53%	58%
USCB EA to AA = 4.60													
USCB EAW to AAW = 4.48													
<b>After Equating AA to EA</b>													
African American (AA)													
Total	18,913	6,588	18	25,519	9,581	1,524	9	11,114	36,633	888,128	384,016	60,333	1,332,477
AA Women (AAW) Total	10,665	4,286	18	14,969	3,749	605	4	4,358	18,955	553,973	261,532	38,753	841,009
AAW % of Total	19%	20%	42%	19%	9%	8%	7%	9%	15%	27%	32%	21%	27%
AAW % of Female	38%	36%	78%	37%	29%	22%	29%	28%	34%	46%	54%	40%	47%
AAW % of AA Total	56%	65%	100%	59%	39%	40%	44%	39%	52%	62%	68%	64%	63%

(NCES, 2017; USCB, 2017)

representation in the corporate board pipeline partially explains why women occupy less than 20% of corporate board seats and why women with the indispensable corporate board credential of CEO do not exceed 5% (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Midcap and private businesses fair even less with women found in only 4.5% and 6% of executive leadership positions, respectively (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Furthermore, Table 1.3 illustrates that in 2016, the boards of the Fortune 100 comprised of African American women at 2.4%, Asian/Pacific Islander women at 1.1%, Hispanic/Latina women at 1.2%, and European American women at 18.3% for a total of 23% women (Alliance for Board Diversity & Deloitte [ABD & Deloitte], 2019). By 2018, Table 1.3 indicates that the representation was 3.4%, 1.4%, 0.9%, and 19.1% respectively for a total of 25% women, a mix of gains and losses (ABD & Deloitte, 2019). Finally, women are 30% less likely to be promoted from entry-level to management positions as compared to men, a crucial step on the path to the boardroom (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017).

Table 1.3

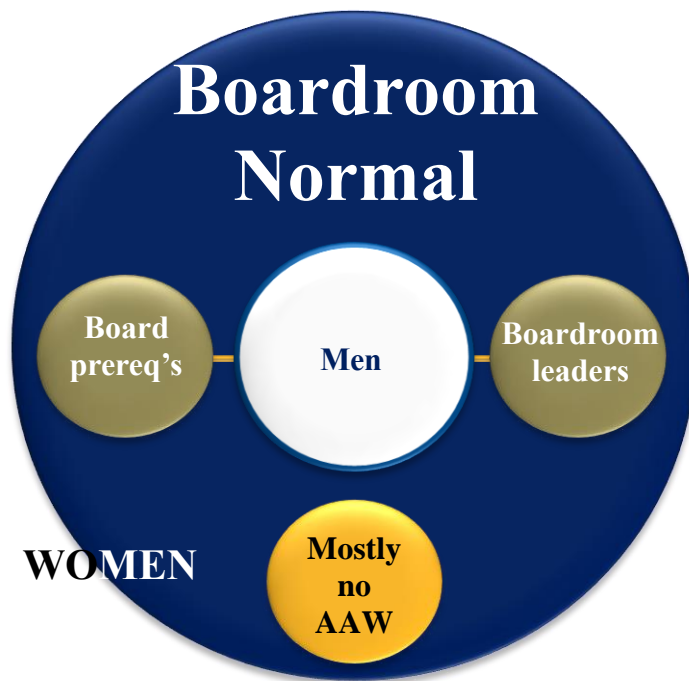
*2016 and 2018 Fortune 100 Board Seats by Ethnicity/Race and Gender*

	2016		2018		Change	
	Total	% of Total	Total	% of Total	Total	Change %
African American Men	90	7.5%	94	7.7%	4	4.4%
African American Women	29	2.4%	42	3.4%	13	44.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander Men	25	2.1%	29	2.4%	4	16.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander Women	13	1.1%	17	1.4%	4	30.8%
European American Men	773	64.1%	750	61.4%	-23	-3.0%
European American Women	221	18.3%	234	19.1%	13	5.9%
Hispanic/Latino Men	40	3.3%	43	3.5%	3	7.5%
Hispanic/Latina Women	14	1.2%	11	0.9%	-3	-21.4%
Other Men	0	0.0%	1	0.1%	1	n/a
Other Women	0	0.0%	1	0.1%	1	n/a
All Men	928	77.0%	917	75.0%	-11	-1.2%
All Women	277	23.0%	305	25.0%	28	10.1%
TOTAL	1205		1222		17	1.4%

(ABD & Deloitte, 2019)

Human nature is culturally influenced to see the world from one's normal and to build a world based on that standard (Alland, 1980). The notion of normal can be "rather sensitive to the context" (Harinen, 2017, p. 1314) or otherwise conform to culturally accepted norms where what is known about the majority culture is applied elsewhere (Greif & Sharpe, 2010). The more homophilous the world is, the more humanity will see and experience the world the same and have more in alignment with one another (Smith, 2014). One can seek to avoid bias, prejudice, and racism, yet be oblivious that their normal promotes these traits (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Collard, 2007; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). For those in the majority, when they walk out of their door at home into the world, more often than not, they walk into a world that is extremely similar to the home they just left, meaning most people are like them (Beaman, 2013; Roblain, Azzi, & Licata, 2016). Yes, there may be relatively few who are not the same, but this is the expected normal (Harinen, 2017). Until the paradigm for the person of the majority can experience the appropriate shift, their normal runs the risk of keeping them oblivious to the obvious of the minority (Collard, 2007; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). The obvious of the minority is that they and those who are like them are not in the C-suite. They are not in the boardroom (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Lindsay, 2015; Northouse, 2016; Olson, 2019; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Or, if they are, there is only one, maybe two, and in any case at most, only a few (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Ellwood & Garcia-Lacalle, 2015).

As illustrated in Figure 1.1, the European American leader's normal often finds the prerequisites for corporate board directorships to include the acquisition of social capital from both formal and informal networks resulting from executive positions. Despite the scholarly research advocating the moral argument for improving diversity on corporate boards, the normal of social networks leading to the boardroom consists primarily of men, and particularly men of



### Boardroom Normal

- Mostly EAM as represented by the words *boardroom normal* in white.
- Overwhelmingly EAM as the center of the boardroom universe as represented by the white circle and the word *men*.
- Board prerequisites tend to favor the EAM's normal further facilitating boardroom leaders who are European American as represented by the white text in the gray circles. The gray circles represent possible future change.
- If women are in the boardroom they are usually EAW with AAW remaining outside as represented by the black/white of the word *woman* and located lower.
- If AAW are present, perhaps one, maybe two, but mostly no AAW in the boardroom as represented by the gold circle.

Figure 1.1. Boardroom Normal

European descent (Gabaldon, P., De Anca, C., De Cabo, R. M., & Gimeno, R., 2016; Matsa & Miller, 2013; Nielsen & Huse, 2010; Perrault, 2015). This androcentric tendency, as well as the limitation of roles and responsibilities that women often find, impedes opportunities for women to assume executive positions facilitating corporate board directorships (Bradley-Geist & Ruscher, 2011). Women who reach corporate board of director positions hold more advanced degrees typically than their European American male counterparts, albeit often non-business related in non-traditional corporate board backgrounds (Nielsen & Huse, 2010). Women executives with business related advanced degrees often find career tracks leading to “soft managerial” (p. 19) positions in areas such as human resources (HR), corporate social responsibility (CSR), and marketing and advertising (Nielsen & Huse, 2010). Executive positions, moreover, are seldom obtained by women directors, and when women do hold these senior leadership positions, the positions are rarely in the corporate board desired areas of

accounting and finance despite the increasing numbers of women with accounting and finance expertise (Aud et al., 2012; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Klettner et al., 2016; Nielsen & Huse, 2010).

Also, impeding women's ascension to more prominent roles in corporate leadership are the dilemmas of the glass-ceiling, which for African American women is often found to be a concrete-ceiling, and the glass-cliff (Gabaldon et al., 2016; Murrell, Blake-Beard, Porter, & Perkins-Williamson, 2008; Northouse, 2016). The work of Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) discusses similarities with other research regarding how the glass-ceiling or the virtually impenetrable concrete-ceiling restricts the demand for women on boards further contributing to a minimal presence of women board directors (Gabaldon et al., 2016; Hill, Upadhyay, & Beekun, 2015; Murrell et al., 2008; Kulich, Trojanowski, Ryan, Haslam, & Renneboog, 2011; Newman, 2016). The study by Singh, Point, Moulin, and Davila (2015) furthermore finds social equality and fairness to be among the arguments put forth for the removal of the concrete and glass-ceilings. Many find it unacceptable that over half of the population remains mostly excluded from the boardrooms of the corporate world (Singh et al., 2015). These authors further add that many find the absence of women a waste of talent, realizing unequal outcomes for both women and men.

With a few women having succeeded in reaching the upper echelons of corporate leadership, women can break through the concrete or glass-ceilings only to be dangerously exposed on the glass-cliff realizing highly disappointing leadership experiences (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Haslam, Ryan, Kulich, Trojanowski, & Atkins, 2010; Kulich et al., 2011; Windscheid, Bowes-Sperry, Mazei, & Morner, 2017). Research by Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink, and Haslam (2014) into board appointments is among the studies that find male appointments are

typical when companies are running smoothly whereas female appointments tend to happen when companies are in some state of crisis, thus the glass-cliff phenomenon (Hunt-Earle, 2012; Ryan et al., 2011).

As the global economy continues the migration from predominantly manufacturing to services, organizations continue to implement and realize gender diversity in corporate leadership mainly as the result of socio-economic and political considerations (Caceres & Guzman, 2015; Pucheta-Martínez, Bel-Oms, & Olcina-Sempere, 2016). However, hurdles and barriers impeding gender equality at the most senior levels of organizations including the corporate boardroom are still prevalent (Clarke, 2011; Gabaldon et al., 2016). These obstacles remain despite the various stimulus for change, change that finds gender diversity established primarily through the mid-leadership career levels of organizations and a sampling of gains at the top (Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Gabaldon et al., 2016; Klettner et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2011; Wingfield & Alston, 2014). While the statistics can be quite discouraging for women, the dilemma can be far more discouraging for women of color, and particularly African American women (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Lindsay, 2015; Northouse, 2016; Olson, 2019; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). African American women are faced with distinctive trials, ultimately resulting in a unique matrix of oppression and domination (Collins, 2000; Thomas, 2004). Included are the intersecting challenges of race and gender as well as the trisection of race and gender in the United States, i.e. the unique challenges of being a Black woman in America (Collins, 2000; Thomas, 2004).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Women rarely advance to the position of corporate board director (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018). This is an unexpected correlation given the large representation of



women in higher education attainment, and there in the corporate board desired areas of accounting and finance, as well as the increasing representation of women in professional-level corporate leadership (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018). Thus, this bleak state of women in corporate board leadership is not because talent is lacking, but frequently the result of bias and rejection that may be, more often than not, unconscious and unintentional (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Collard, 2007; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). This is often the result of the gatekeeper's conscious or unconscious bias to keep the status quo, the leader's normal (Aud et al., 2012; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Collard, 2007; Kaiser & Spalding, 2015; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010).

Due to America's unique history, this dilemma for women in corporate board leadership is especially the case for African American women who often excel in the desired expertise and develop as the best talent (Aud et al., 2012; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Collins, 2000; Klettner et al., 2016; Thomas, 2004). However, because of the ordinary for the gender and ethnicity of the leaders that dominate corporate America, when they walk into their boardrooms and see one, maybe two, or no women of African descent, these leaders do not see a problem. Rather, they see their normal, and *this* is the problem (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Ellwood & Garcia-Lacalle, 2015). Thus, the resulting bias and rejection, even if unconscious and unintentional, of the European American leader's normal is obstructing the equitable representation of African American women in the traditionally European American male-dominated space of the corporate boardroom (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Collard, 2007; Kaiser & Spalding, 2015; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). Due to the normal of the European American leader, this leader may be oblivious to the discrimination (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Collard, 2007; Ellwood & Garcia-Lacalle, 2015; Marshall, 2002;

Steverson, 2010). Oblivious or not, there must be an awakening to realize equity on the path to and in the corporate boardroom because the notion of equity is woven into the purpose and fabric of America (Guy & McCandless, 2012).

### **1.3 Research Questions**

With corporate boards overwhelmingly comprised of men of European descent, boards fail to comprehensively understand and realize the benefits of African American women in the boardroom (Bradley-Geist & Ruscher, 2011; Ellwood & Garcia-Lacalle, 2015). Increased African American female participation on corporate boards is theorized to promote intra-board social psychological dynamics facilitating concerns and deliberations for more thorough and comprehensive corporate board considerations (Chen, Crossland, & Huang, 2016). These considerations will promote better insight into the African American woman's experience and that of her community (Chen et al., 2016). These considerations will provide a path to promote more exhaustive evaluations and proper oversight for proposed strategic actions (Gabaldon et al., 2016). The result is expected enhanced corporate performance, both internally and externally, promoting revenue generation and profits (Carter, D'Souza, Simkins, & Simpson, 2010; Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Cook & Glass, 2018). The increase in profits, furthermore, enables growth for shareholder value and provides more opportunities not only for the corporation and the corporate family, but also the African American woman, her community, and society in general (Carter et al., 2010; Klettner et al., 2016).

The central research question of this study explores: how do African American women, European American women, and European American men corporate board directors (directors of inquiry) perceive their awareness of race and gender concerning African American women achieving corporate board director opportunities?

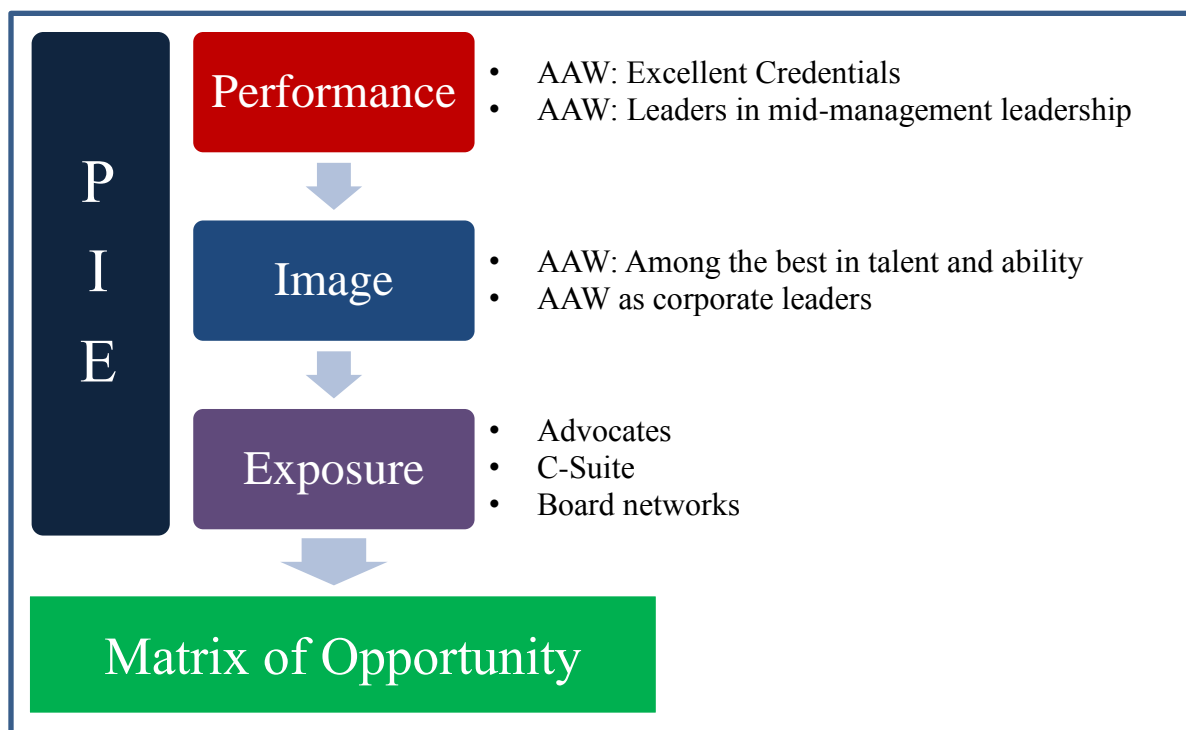
This study further explores the questions of:

1. How whiteness and maleness are perceived to influence corporate board director opportunities for African American women?
2. How the directors of inquiry influence the path of ascension to corporate board director opportunities for African American women?
3. What leadership strategies are employed by the directors of inquiry to support African American women achieving corporate board director opportunities?

#### **1.4 Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore the dynamics surrounding the path and obstacles to better enable the African American woman to translate her performance into a workplace image to gain the necessary exposure (PIE) to further facilitate a matrix of opportunity to realize her talents in the corporate boardroom as illustrated in Figure 1.2 (Coleman, 2010; Thierry, 2016; Weaver, 2015). Although diversity includes different nationalities, industries, gender, ethnicity, age, and can encompass a multitude of other traits and characteristics, this study focused on ethnic gender diversity in the corporate boardroom (Anderson, De Angelis, & Vad, 2018). More specifically, this study sought to explore the minimal to no presence of African American women on America's corporate boards (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Lindsay, 2015; Northouse, 2016; Olson, 2019; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The longstanding overwhelming presence in the corporate boardroom has been men of European descent (Clarke, 2011; De Klerk & Verreynne, 2017). Due to the customary for the European American male leader, this leader's normal may simply not appreciate the lack of diversity in the corporate boardroom as a matter demanding his attention (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Collard, 2007, Ellwood & Garcia-Lacalle, 2015; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). This lack of attention, among many criteria, demands an

awakening to realize equity in the corporate boardroom (Guy & McCandless, 2012; Nielsen & Huse, 2010).



*Figure 1.2. PIE*

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

Much of the research to date discusses the challenges of minorities, African Americans and women, but little research discusses explicitly the challenges of African American women (Peterson, Philpot, & O'Shaughnessy, 2007). The historical legacy and the psychology of oppression that permeate the current reality for African American women versus forgotten concepts of a forgone past, deserves investigation to better consider the African American woman's unique perspectives and circumstances (Collins, 2000; Thomas, 2004). This study additionally has the potential to offer clarity into the economic reasons promoting the presence of African American women in the corporate boardroom. These economic reasons may have more

financial consequences and organizational risks including lower market evaluations and less effective strategic decision-making if an organization does not include the diversity of African American women on their board, i.e. the business case for those who demand one (Barka & Dardour, 2015; Ellwood & Garcia-Lacalle, 2015; Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; Perrault, 2015; Singh et al., 2015).

In response to the need for new research, this study explores the obstacles to the equitable and sustainable presence for women of African descent in the corporate boardrooms of America. Corporate executive leadership is vital for African American women to have corporate board directorship opportunities (Nielsen & Huse, 2010). Thus, this study explores how the normal of the European American leader perpetuates an obliviousness to the undesired attributes that the leader may not own (Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Collard, 2007; De Klerk & Verreynne, 2017; Levitt, 2010; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). Moreover, participation in networks will assist African American women in developing the knowledge and skills to showcase ability better and increase job responsibilities, further facilitating the ascension to corporate board directorships (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Thus, explored by this study is how the European American androcentric normal perpetuates the exclusion from networks and the limitation of roles and responsibilities that often impede African American women from opportunities to realize the executive positions that facilitate corporate board directorships (Bradley-Geist & Ruscher, 2011).

Finally, the research by Chisholm-Burns et al. and Northouse (2017 and 2016) suggests studies to address the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender regarding access and achievement for women in leadership. Race and ethnicity are found to add a higher level of complexity and bias to gender and leadership, thus demanding more research to achieve equitable leadership opportunities (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Cook and Glass (2014) also

recommended studies to explore minority groups separately as career trajectories are found to vary in crucial ways with significant interactions based on race, ethnicity, and gender. African American women, in particular, occupy a unique place in American society facing challenges unknown to other groups (Collins, 2000; Peterson et al., 2007; Thomas, 2004). Thus, Cook and Glass (2014) promote research to address how minority women can overcome social class and racial bias for more equitable leadership opportunities. Therefore, to successfully explore the phenomenon, studies focused on African American women are a necessity to avoid bias favoring other ethnicities (Collins, 2000; Peterson et al., 2007; Thomas, 2004).

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

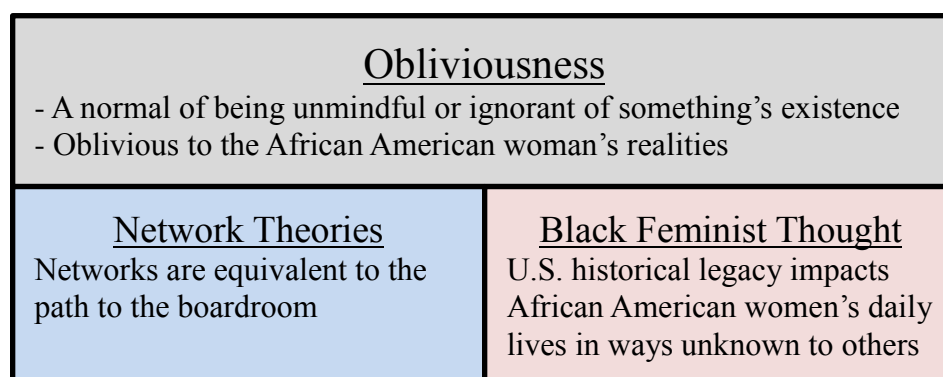
This study views the research problem through the lenses of obliviousness, networking theories, and Black feminist thought as illustrated in Figure 1.3. Steverson (2010) describes obliviousness as the state of being unmindful or unaware including ignorance or unconsciousness of something's existence. Obliviousness provides for the reality of ethnic groups that "have suffered alienation, exclusion, and disadvantage" (Collard, 2007, p. 740). This can extend to group obliviousness, where the group lacks awareness, such as the dominant or majority culture (Steverson, 2010). Marshall (2002) discusses how the dominant culture of the United States educational system and European Americans are oblivious to "the realities of race" (p. 10) and the implication of race. This obliviousness persists because "whiteness is perceived as ordinary" (p. 10) or normal with most European Americans "unaffected by and largely oblivious to the growing cultural diversity in the United States" (p. 12). Sholock (2012), also, notes in discussing systematic ignorance that normative whiteness affords "the privilege of remaining ignorant of racial realities" (p. 702). Collard (2007), moreover, highlights how the European American's dominant culture causes members of this group to be oblivious to the "cultural diversity that

characterizes the contemporary world” (p. 740). This obliviousness has, furthermore, “privileged mono-cultural, mainstream values which have meant indigenous and ethnic groups have suffered alienation, exclusion, and disadvantage” (p. 740). Additionally, Collard notes how those educated from a Western system of education are at risk to not recognize the richness and value of diversity.

In addition to the alienation, exclusion, and disadvantage developing from obliviousness, is the networking that is typically required to achieve corporate boardroom opportunities and the challenges related to the exclusion from valuable networks (Clarke, 2011; Collard, 2007; Klettner et al., 2016). Network theory addresses the “mechanisms and processes that interact with network structures to yield certain outcomes for individuals and groups” (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011, p. 1168). Social network theory, moreover, finds that “individuals with access to resources valuable to the organization are likely to have the best chance of entering the elite network” (p. 323) of the corporate boardroom (Terjesen, Sealy, & Singh, 2009). Network and social network theories speak to the networking and the development of networks that will ultimately facilitate and achieve the boardroom pipeline and director opportunities that otherwise are less available without the corporate board related networking (Calder, 2018; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Clarke, 2011; Daum & Yerger, 2018; De Klerk & Verreynne, 2017).

Finally, Black feminist thought speaks to the African American woman’s experiences throughout the United States history, whether from an ancestry of the Black Africans transported to America or among the Black Africans who have immigrated to America (Collins, 2000; Thomas, 2004). Thomas (2004) finds that African American women continue to be affected by a historical legacy enduring today in various forms as a psychology of oppression, facilitating a unique perspective regarding “womanhood, Blackness, and even personhood” (p. 287) not

known by other oppressed groups. Many African American women, unfortunately, do not find the effects of bias, racism, and oppression to be concepts of the distant past but rather reality permeating day-to-day activities from the home to work and throughout the institutions of daily life (Collins, 2000).



*Figure 1.3. Theoretical Framework*

In summary, obliviousness gives the frame of being unmindful, unaware, unconscious, or otherwise ignorant of something's existence (Steverson, 2010). This obliviousness includes how the dominant culture of the United States facilitates a European American normal that fails to recognize the value of diversity and is oblivious to the realities of the African American woman as being alienated, excluded, and disadvantaged (Collard, 2007; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). Network and social network theories provide the lens that despite obliviousness and the subsequent certainties, the dynamics of network structures yield desired outcomes facilitating organizational value to realize the opportunity to enter the elite networks of corporate board directors (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Terjesen et al., 2009). Network and social network theories, moreover, suggest that without the appropriate networks, one may not enter the corporate boardroom despite having the credentials and experience to do so (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Terjesen et al., 2009). Finally, Black feminist thought provides the view that the African American woman is impacted by the United States historical legacy of oppression that endures



today in various forms affecting the African American woman's day-to-day life in ways unknown to others (Collins, 2000, Thomas, 2004).

### **1.7 Research Design and Methodology**

Studies regarding the boardroom tend to be quantitative testing the relationship of diversity on boards and various measures of profitability and stock price performance (Dobbin & Jung, 2011; Kakabadse et al., 2015). The lack of clarity from quantitative research regarding board diversity and performance suggests a qualitative approach is needed for a more in-depth understanding of the dynamics, and particularly into whether diversity makes a difference in board effectiveness (Dobbin & Jung, 2011; Kakabadse et al., 2015). Qualitative research, moreover, is needed to explore the methodological limitations of previous quantitative studies to better address the lived realities of hidden meanings, silence, entrenched norms and values, and finally, the invisible boardroom power relations (Kakabadse et al., 2015). This research, thus, employs a phenomenological research design allowing the researcher to explore human life, obtaining elaborately detailed descriptions of lived experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Wilson, 2015).

Phenomenological research leverages interviews for rich, in-depth data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wilson, 2015). Where quantitative research seeks to transition the question of why "into a testable hypothesis that posits a cause-effect relationship using a variable language" (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 4), the qualitative phenomenological study leverages strong philosophical underpinnings to explore lived experiences to better comprehend the *why* from the perspectives of participants living the reality (Creswell, 2014; Wilson, 2015). Through participant interviews, these strong philosophical underpinnings will help to address the essence of the participants' experiences for rich, detailed descriptions of lived experiences (Creswell,

2014; Hesse-Biber, 2017; Wilson, 2015). While collecting the data, the researcher brings the advantage of being able to immediately respond and adapt to areas unanticipated as well as to verify the accuracy of interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

This research conducted interviews with both African American and European American women as well as European American men to address the equity, presence, power, and influence dynamics between African American women and European American men on the path to and in the corporate boardroom. This group of participants was selected for the study because the literature discussed European American men as the overwhelming majority with the most standing in the corporate boardroom (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Cook & Glass, 2014; Klettner et al., 2016; Ryan et al., 2011). Additionally, the literature notes that African American women are well underrepresented on today's boards in America competing with other women, and particularly European American women for the same limited seats evolving from the androcentric normal or governmental legislation calling for gender diversity (Calder, 2018; Mishra, 2019; Smith, Baskerville, Ladge, & Carlton, 2019). Moreover, this group of directors was well suited for phenomenological research, particularly because "phenomenology empowers people and promotes understanding of others by allowing the lived experience to be experienced vicariously" (Wilson, 2015, p. 41). Finally, this study focused on the African American woman's experiences separate from her peers to avoid obfuscation by other minorities and the inherent bias of the majority promoting inapplicability and insensitivity (Hill et al., 2015; Peterson et al., 2007; Shollock, 2012).

### **1.8 Limitations and Assumptions**

Research that employs a qualitative approach leverages one or more theories to explain, in broad terms, behavior, and attitudes through a theoretical lens or perspective shaping the types

of questions asked (Creswell, 2014). Additionally, this study was limited by the number of participants as well as the influences and experiences of each participant and therefore limiting the generalizability of the findings. In particular, this study has limitations related to the social dynamics impacting the participant pool and the individuals who agreed to participant.

Specifically, COVID-19 and the social reality of repeated deaths of American citizens at the hands of American police officers, and particularly the Black and White reality of who pulls the trigger and who dies, surfaced during the study and appeared to impact participant recruitment. Moreover, these two dynamics were referenced during the interviews, particularly the latter. This study was further limited by the time available to both the researcher and the participant. Finally, the study was delimited to the networking that facilitates the selection of corporate board directors.

## **1.9 Definitions of Key Terms**

*AAW*: acronym for African American woman/women.

*African American*: describes an American of African ancestry that identifies as being Black or African American.

*Boardroom Culture*: can vary by leader, organization, region, and other factors and represents assumptions, beliefs, norms, and values promoting a shared understanding among members (Anderson et al., 2018; Kakabadse et al., 201; Klettner et al., 2016).

*Coaching*: providing guidance and feedback of specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for a task, the performance of a job, or the execution of assignments (Bass & Bass, 2008).

*Concrete-ceiling*: refers to the all but impenetrable glass-ceiling specifically associated with African American women (Murrell et al., 2008).

*Critical Mass*: suggests a quantity of at least three or more are necessary to promote change (Cook & Glass, 2018).

*EAM*: acronym for European American man/men.

*EAW*: acronym for European American woman/women.

*European American*: describes one of European ancestry that identifies as being White, Caucasian, or European American.

*Executive Position*: refers to positions of director, vice-president, president, chief executive officer, and other C-level positions.

*Glass-ceiling*: refers to the invisible barrier constraining women from obtaining the topmost positions of leadership arising from gender discrimination and not explained by other job-related factors (Northouse, 2016; Newman, 2016).

*Glass-cliff*: refers to the predisposition to select women for senior positions in organizations undergoing a crisis, poor performance, or otherwise experiencing an increased risk of failure (Gabaldon et al., 2016; Haslam et al., 2010; Ryan et al., 2011).

*Group-fit*: director selection criteria that consider board compatibility for the benefit of the board for effective decision-making (Elms, Nicholson, & Pugliese, 2015).

*Groupthink*: excessive team cohesion limiting effectiveness resulting from the pressure for consensus overriding the motivation to consider alternative options. Often occurs when teams are selected mostly on group-fit with a lack of consideration given to role-fit and other diverse skills and qualifications (Elms et al., 2015).

*Mentee or Protégé*: one who receives the benefit of a mentor and a mentoring relationship, and whose career may be furthered in some way by a person of experience, prominence, or influence (Bass & Bass, 2008).

*Mentor*: often an immediate superior, though may also be one higher in an organization, and/or one with more experience and influence than the person being mentored, i.e. the protégé, and promotes the protégé's reputation (Bass & Bass, 2008).

*Mentoring*: providing advice and guidance regarding education, relationships, and career development (Bass & Bass, 2008).

*Minority*: one who identifies as female or ethnically diverse (Hill et al., 2015).

*Occupational Minorities*: racial and ethnic minorities and women (Cook & Glass, 2018).

*PIE*: an acronym for performance, image, and exposure (Coleman, 2010; Thierry, 2016; Weaver, 2015).

*Role-fit*: director selection criteria that consider board performance aligning skills and expertise to compliment the current needs of the board (Elms et al., 2015).

*Token*: describes how one or two women are insufficient to promote change (Cook & Glass, 2018).

*Whiteness*: a social construct associated to European Americans that includes ingrained behaviors of ethnocentric ignorance arising from “the privilege of remaining ignorant of racial realities” (Shollock, 2012, p. 702).

*Woman/Women of Color*: women who do not identify as being White, Caucasian or European American.

## **1.10 Summary**

Chapter 1 included a discussion of the background and the problem as well as presented the research questions. Also discussed is the purpose and significance of the study and the theoretical framework guiding the study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter 2 provides a review of the problem and research questions articulated in Chapter 1 followed by a review of the literature. The literature reviewed includes connections to the theoretical framework and discussion of subject matter areas that have been thoroughly addressed as well as topics that demand further investigation. Chapter 2 approaches the topic by reviewing the tenets of the theoretical framework used elsewhere in the literature as well as the topics of women and African American women in leadership. Chapter 2 also gives a brief history of corporate boards in the United States, diversity, population and labor participation rates, and government intervention in corporate board diversity. Following these sections is a discussion of the mechanics of the boardroom and several sections focusing more on boardroom diversity itself. Finally, the literature review concludes with a discussion of the benefits of board diversity and opportunities for future research.

#### **2.2 The Problem and Research Question**

Women in leadership have grown in raw numbers, however, numbers themselves do not equate to influence or more power (Moodley, Holt, Leke, & Desvaux, 2016). Features of being male, additionally a male of European descent, co-construct the *normal* of the corporate leader, a normal often leaving that leader blind to see beyond his expected (Collard, 2007; Cook & Glass, 2014; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). With the composition of corporate boards mostly European American males, theorize corporate boards lack the experience to comprehensively understand the challenges unique to the African American woman in ascending to the boardroom (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010; Thomas, 2004; Wingfield & Alston,

2014). Further theorize that corporate boards fail to realize the benefits that uniquely stem from the African American woman reaching the boardroom, and her achieving equitable and sustainable representation facilitating positions of influence when she is present (Coleman, 2010; Collins, 2000; Thierry, 2016; Thomas, 2004; Weaver, 2015).

Due to the bias and rejection of the European American leader's normal including the unconscious and unintentional, this normal obstructs the equitable representation of African American women in the traditionally European American male-dominated space of the corporate boardroom (Cook & Glass, 2014; De Klerk & Verreynne, 2017; Kaiser & Spalding, 2015; Levitt, 2010; Steverson, 2010). This leader, furthermore, may be oblivious to the obvious of the African American woman's everyday experiences which is the trisection of inequities of being a woman of African descent in America (Collard, 2007; Collins, 2000; Marshall, 2002; Thomas, 2004). This study, therefore, investigated how African American women, European American women, and European American men corporate board directors perceive their awareness of race and gender concerning African American women achieving corporate board director opportunities.

### **2.3 Tenets of the Theoretical Framework Used Elsewhere in the Literature**

Obliviousness appears in the literature in Havercroft and Owen's (2016) discussion of the Black Lives Matter movement as a racialized form of soul blindness. Haneman (2019) also uses obliviousness to frame a study of structural racism in homeownership tax subsidies where European American's are "heedless of structural inequities" realizing different and inequitable realities for persons of color. Louis, Michel, Deranek, and Louis (2018) also consider obliviousness in a study of cross-racial mentoring where European Americans "expressed feelings of obliviousness about racial inequities and realization about cultural biases they unknowingly possessed" (p. 213).

Network theory and the importance of networks are used by Li, Meyer, Zhang, and Ding (2018) in their study of international growth patterns for firms taking advantage of international investment opportunities. Closer to the subject of this study, Chanland and Murphy (2018) considered the role of networking and networks as well as the lack of access to informal networks to advance diverse talent into the corporate boardroom.

Finally, Agozino and Dastile (2019) discuss the importance of Black feminist thought to explain the specific experiences of Black women in their study, investigating the criminological discourses for people of African descent. They further discuss how Black women's experiences of womanhood are shaped by race, gender, and class that produce different realities and results. Wingfield (2019) also discussed how "researchers either excluded black women completely, viewed them as deviant, and/or justified the social conditions that shaped their lives" (p. 346-347). The author goes on to elaborate on how "researchers often failed to consider the ways that Black women suffered from unique forms of both racial and gendered disadvantage" (p. 347), the implications, and how Black women were impacted. Wingfield (2019) further notes that Black women's experiences must be accepted and centered to understand how "the ways various social, economic, political, and legal institutions shaped their lives" (p. 347).

## **2.4 Women and African American Women in Leadership**

The dilemma of and challenges to women in leadership are not solely United States concerns. O'Brien and Wegren (2015) studied the persistence of gender inequality and the underrepresentation of women in leadership in Russia. They found that both male and female respondents dismissed discrimination in place of cultural realities of traditional gender-based divisions of labor with all supporting more training to address the issue, and women more so. Smith (2015), also finds that in addition to glass-cliff related positions, women hold more



leadership positions in larger organizations as well as in lower ranking positions and in elected government positions.

Smith et al. (2019) specifically researched Black women in leadership. They found that Black women can be “visible in that they are different from most of their colleagues” (p. 1705) and also “can be simultaneously invisible - easily overlooked or disregarded - because they are non-prototypical members of their gender and racial identity groups” (p. 1705). They also found that Black women in executive leadership have largely been excluded from management research. Their findings highlight how “Black women executives operate as both intriguing and also threatening outsiders within their organizations” (p. 1731). In researching African American women in elected leadership positions, Kaba (2017) found that a number of factors explained the exclusion of African American women from leadership positions, but that all factors were connected in one way or another to race and gender. Finally, in an article discussing Black women reclaiming their time, resistance, and rising inequality, Wingfield (2019) speaks to how Black women “still deal with the effects of systemic gendered racism and its manifestations in workplaces, families, schools, and public life” (p. 355). Wingfield further speaks to how “Black women are leading the way... reshaping institutions to be more receptive to the multiracial demographics of twenty-first century America” (p. 355), but that “other groups have been slow to follow” (p. 355).

## **2.5 History of Corporate Boards in the U.S. and the State of Boardroom Diversity**

The concept of an elected board to manage a corporation has always existed in American corporate statutes (Gevurtz, 2004). This influence dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century and includes the first companies chartered to colonize and establish trade in North America (Gevurtz, 2004; Wright, Siegel, Keasey, & Filatotchev, 2013). Board governance, furthermore, has roots dating back to

the Middle Ages in Europe, seeking to address the challenge of large groups having direct control (Gevurtz, 2004). Corporate governance in its most basic form is about the difficulties that the principals of an organization face as they seek to “exercise power over their agents” (Clarke & Branson, 2012, p. 39); more specifically, the conflict that can exist between owners and managers (Wright et al., 2013).

Though there is much empirical research regarding the boardroom, due to the limited access for those who are not directors, clarity into the inner workings of corporate boardrooms and the implementation of governance is not as forthcoming (Abatecola, Farina, & Gordini, 2014; Kakabadse et al., 2015). Peter Browning Partners, LLC, is a firm specializing in corporate board consulting for the areas of board governance, performance and dynamics, and leadership transition and succession planning (Browning & Sparks, 2015). The authors note that Peter Browning is the founder and managing director with experience as a corporate board director for 13 public companies as of 2015, where two were also as CEO. William Sparks, the authors further state, is a managing partner at Peter Browning Partners, LLC, and is also the Dennis Thompson Chair of Leadership at the McColl School of Business at Queens University of Charlotte. In the book they co-authored, titled *The Director's Manual: A Framework for Board Governance*, Browning and Sparks (2015) identify three critical questions that a corporate board is responsible for:

1. Is the correct CEO at the helm?
2. Does the organization have the correct strategy?
3. Does the organization have a robust succession plan?

In addressing the above questions, corporate boards, in theory, contribute to performance and value creation with efficient decision-making (Clarke & Branson, 2012; Gevurtz, 2004). By

the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, many United States companies, however, had become owned by numerous shareholders geographically separated with different needs and goals (Clarke & Branson, 2012). Additionally, managers tended to lead expecting directors and shareholders to follow (Wright et al., 2013). This development realized corporate governance that had shifted from the power of owners to top management, having a substantial influence on corporate boards (Clarke & Branson, 2012). This intense influence eventually raised concerns at the legislative level. These authors further advised the remedy came in the form of the United States Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) formed in the 1930s to regulate corporate entities and the trading of equities. Still, corporate governance did not find an official reform agenda until the 1970s to be followed by the corporate scandals of the late 1990s and the global financial crisis of 2008 (Clarke & Branson, 2012; Wright et al., 2013). These developments further identified weaknesses in board governance resulting in regulation calling for changes in corporate board composition. The changes included the need for more outside directors and the issue of director homogeneity (Anonymous, 2018; Calder, 2018; Clarke & Branson, 2012; Mishra, 2019; O'Kelley, Goodman, & Martin, 2018). One may expect that both concerns would have led to a more rapid increase in ethnic gender diversity on boards, but those changes have been slow in coming (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Clarke & Branson, 2012; Cook & Glass, 2014). Yet there is little question regarding the value of having increased diversity and gender equality of women in the boardroom (Citrin & Swartz, 2018).

**2.5.1 Population and board diversity.** In an article discussing prevailing myths and the impact of corporate boards on diversity and structure, Brown (2015) explains that boards tend to instill only enough diversity to avoid criticism. The author further elaborates on how an overwhelming majority of the largest public companies only have some measure of diversity on

their boards, and often only with an “unofficial quota of one or two” (p. 168). Klettner et al. (2016), additionally, found the lack of diversity on corporate boards to be a global issue.

More specifically to the United States, Table 1.1 illustrates that women are 51% of the United States population. That holds true whether considering all women in the population or women of age 25 thru 79 with only a minute fraction representing the difference (U.S. Census Bureau [USCB], 2017). However, Table 1.3 illustrates that as of 2018, women are only 25% of the directors on the boards of the Fortune 100 companies, which is up 2% from 2016 (ABD & Deloitte, 2019).

With African American women, nearly 7% of the United States population (see Table 1.1), Smith et al. (2019) illustrate that only 1.3% of the S&P 500 senior management and executive roles are occupied by African American women. The authors further note that those numbers translate to only 2.2% of the seats on the boards of the Fortune 500 and no CEO positions in the S&P 500.

European American women also fight underrepresentation in the top echelons of corporate leadership. At 31% of the population (see Table 1.1), Smith et al. (2019) illustrate that European American women are 29% of senior and executive management, occupy 15.7% of the seats for the boards of the Fortune 500, and hold only 4.4% of CEO positions in the S&P 500.

In comparison to women, African American women specifically, men are 49% of the population and 75% of the directors on the boards of the Fortune 100 with the discrepancy growing larger when considering firms deeper into the Fortune list (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Olson, 2019; USCB, 2017). For example, Table 2.1 shows the data for a review of the board of directors found on company websites for the top and bottom 15 companies in the 2019 Fortune 1000. This review found that board size decreased by 20% and the total women on the boards

decreased by 48%. Additionally, European American women on the boards decreased by 50% and African American women on the boards decreased by 55%. This information, alongside the statistics of women comprising 51% of the population, however only 25% of the Fortune 100 board of directors as compared to men at 49% and 75%, respectively displays a gap in equity yet to be resolved.

**2.5.2 Population and board ethnic diversity.** To further consider the United States population and board diversity, European American women again are 31% of the United States population and 19% of the directors on the boards of the Fortune 100 (see Table 1.3) with that decreasing to 15.7% for the boards of the Fortune 500 as noted by Smith et al. (2019). The Fortune 100 board representation is up slightly less than 1% since 2016, or 62% of an entirely equitable representation of European American women on the boards of the Fortune 100 (calculated as Table 1.3 2018 percent of board seats divided by Table 1.1 2016 percent of the total population) (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; USCB, 2017). European American men, according to the information, are 30% of the United States population, 61% of Fortune 100 board directors, and 203% of a fully equitable representation of European American men on the boards of the Fortune 100. African American women are 7% of the United States population and only 3.4% of the directors on the boards of the Fortune 100 with that decreasing to only 2.2% for the boards of the Fortune 500 according to Smith et al. (2019). This presence on the boards of the Fortune 100 is up 1% from 2016, or 50% of a fully equitable representation of African American women on the boards of the Fortune 100 (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; USCB, 2017). This information further informs that African American men are 6%, 7.7%, and 121% respectively. Men in general and European American men in particular at 203% of representation, is visibly well exceeding the other categories discussed with African

Table 2.1

*2019 Fortune 1000 Board Seats & Diversity for the Top & Bottom 15 Companies*

<b>Company</b>	<b>Fortune Rank</b>	<b>Total Directors</b>	<b>EAW</b>	<b>AAW</b>	<b>Women Not EAW/AAW</b>	<b>Total Women</b>	<b>%Total Women</b>
Walmart	1	12	2	1		3	25%
Exxon Mobile	2	10	2	1		3	30%
Apple	3	7	1		1	2	29%
Berkshire Hathaway	4	7	1			1	14%
Amazon	5	10	3	1	1	5	50%
UnitedHealth Group	6	11	1	2		3	27%
McKesson	7	11	4			4	36%
CVS Health	8	16	3	1		4	25%
AT&T	9	13	3	1		4	31%
Amerisource Bergen	10	9	3			3	33%
Chevron	11	11	2	2		4	36%
Ford Motor	12	14	2		1	3	21%
General Motors	13	11	4	1		5	45%
Costco Wholesale	14	11	2			2	18%
Alphabet	15	10	1	1		2	20%
<b>Total F1000 Top 15</b>		<b>163</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>29%</b>
			<b>21%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>29%</b>	
AR Partners, LP	986	6				0	0%
NCI Building Sys	987	12	1			1	8%
Hilton Grand Vac	988	7	1	1		2	29%
Deluxe	989	10	1	1		2	20%
Stepan	990	7	1			1	14%
Hovnanian Enterprises	991	8	1			1	13%
Portland GE	992	12	2		1	3	25%
Herc Holdings	993	11	2			2	18%
HC2 Holdings	994	5				0	0%
Align Technology	995	11	1		1	2	18%
Spire	996	9	3	1		4	44%
Shutterfly	997	10	4			4	40%
NuStar Energy	998	9		1		1	11%
ManTech Intl	999	8		1		1	13%
Carvana	1000	6			1	1	17%
<b>Total F1000 Bottom 15</b>		<b>131</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>19%</b>
			<b>13%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>19%</b>	
<b>Delta Top &amp; Bottom 15</b>		<b>-32</b>	<b>-17</b>	<b>-6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-23</b>	
		<b>-20%</b>	<b>-50%</b>	<b>-55%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>-48%</b>	

AAW – African American Women

EAW – European American Women

Source: <https://fortune.com/fortune500/2019/search> for Fortune 1000 list and company websites for director information

American women being the most lacking (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; USDL, 2017).

**2.5.3 Diversity on boards and the labor force.** In their study of directors on the boards of French listed companies researching board interlocks, directors' profiles, and corporate social responsibility, Barka and Dardour (2015) discuss in their conclusions, as illustrated above, that measuring board diversity and diversity within boards is a difficult technical and conceptual challenge. Ideally, the diversity on boards should be similar to the diversity in the labor force (Klettner et al., 2016). Table 2.2 illustrates that the United States female and male labor force participation in 2016 was 57% and 69% respectively. African American women, African American men, European American women, and European American men participated at 59%, 61%, 56%, and 70% respectively (USDL, 2017). For the Fortune 100, Table 1.3, illustrates that as of 2018 women represented 25% of directors with men at 75% and African American women, African American men, European American women, and European American men represented 3.4%, 7.7%, 19%, and 61% respectively (ABD & Deloitte, 2019). Table 1.1 illustrates that in 2018 board participation as a percentage of labor force participation is 6%, 12%, 34%, and 90% respectively for African American women, African American men, European American women, and European American men (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; USDL, 2017). Obviously, European American men at 90% of board to labor force participation is well exceeding the other categories with African American women at 6% having the greatest inequity amongst the four categories discussed in this study. Finally, it is not so important what the percentage actually is, but that the percentage should be clustered together for all categories to have equity.

While women have made gains on corporate boards, and African American women benefited the most between 2016 and 2018 on the boards of the Fortune 100, women are still a

Table 2.2

*Civilian Labor Force Participation Rates for 1996, 2006, 2016, and Projected 2026*

Group	Participation Rate %			
	1996	2006	2016	2026
16 years and older	66.8	66.2	62.8	61.0
Men	74.9	73.5	69.2	66.2
Women	59.3	59.4	56.8	56.1
<b>Race:</b>				
Black	64.1	64.1	61.6	59.9
Men	68.7	67.0	64.1	61.1
Women	60.4	61.7	59.4	58.8
White	67.2	66.5	62.9	61.1
Men	75.8	74.3	69.8	66.8
Women	59.1	59.0	56.3	55.6

(USDL, 2017)

small disproportional percentage as compared to men, and African American women even more so (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; USCB, 2017). This trend is worldwide with women of African descent further being marginalized (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; Klettner et al., 2016; USCB, 2017). Gender diversity progress in the United States is discussed to mostly have ceased due to the overwhelming small number of corporate board director seats for women overall with an even smaller minority of women directors as corporate board chair, for example only 3% (Cook & Glass, 2018). While board diversity may be increasing overall, the number of different women on boards, and particularly African American women, may not be rising at the same rate due to directors serving on more than one board (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Olson, 2019). These findings further support the continuing need to examine external factors affecting women reaching the corporate boardroom, a challenge that transcends nations and continents as found by Heller and Gabaldon (2018).



**2.5.4 Global trends and governments.** Due to the transcending nature of corporate board gender diversity, governments are becoming more and more involved. Since Norway intervened in corporate board gender diversity in 2003 with a mandated quota of 40% women by 2008 for Norwegian companies, government interest has been realized worldwide with suggestions of best practices to mandated quotas (Ahern & Dittmar, 2012; Brieger, Francoeur, Welzel, & Ben-Amar, 2019; Chen et al., 2016; Klettner et al., 2016; Matsa & Miller, 2013). In the United States, California first took legislative action with a law requiring California-based companies to have approximately 40% of women directors, though not more than three, starting 2019 (Anonymous, 2018; Calder, 2018; O’Kelley et al., 2018). New Jersey and Illinois are considering statutes of their own with Illinois taking its legislation a step further by also considering ethnic diversity (Mishra, 2019).

Although the California legislation may face state and federal court challenges, in theory, the mandate is an effective tool seeking to improve gender diversity (Anonymous, 2018; Calder, 2018). Many qualified women do not have the necessary networks to penetrate the boardroom, noted Calder (2018). Quotas, however, have mostly been found helpful to women of elite status, but not women overall. Based on the results of the Norwegian quotas, doubts are raised whether the California law will change the trajectory of the majority of careers for women in a meaningful way and be sustainable. In their compilation of firm data regarding the Norway policy implementing gender quotas, Ahern and Dittmar (2012) found that the Norwegian quotas resulted in the market devaluation of firms, and even more so for firms that previously had no gender diversity. The authors also found how the Norwegian quotas forcing diversity resulted in younger, less experienced directors causing negative consequences with the cost born by the shareholders. Chen et al. (2016), furthermore, found that mandatory quotas are a contentious

topic with academic research finding ambiguous results regarding the benefits of gender diversity on corporate boards. Still, diversity on the board is being viewed as more and more a means to reduce new and emerging threats and better serve an increasingly diverse customer base (ABD & Deloitte, 2019).

## **2.6 Board Culture, Composition and Selection, and the CEO and Chair's Influence**

Culture, in general, represents a group with shared understanding allowing the group to act in a relative concerted way with one another (Klettner et al., 2016). Boardroom culture is mostly formal and unique in that interactions are traditionally cordial with unwritten rules influencing the overall director mindset regarding assumptions, beliefs, norms, and values (Anderson et al., 2018; Kakabadse et al., 2015). Board performance is naturally influenced by board culture, and the extent boards can be dynamic and performance oriented to meet shareholder demands (Anderson et al., 2018).

In a systematic review of various studies regarding women on boards, Gabaldon et al. (2016) sought to update findings with more recent studies to better understand the factors at work. The factors include culture ramifications that both promote and hinder women having access to boards. Kakabadse et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study of 30 companies throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ghana. The authors concluded that the appointment of more women to corporate boards promotes the culture change in the boardroom that is needed to realize increased gender diversity. However, Gabaldon et al. (2016) found research in this space to be fragmented in various silos demanding a more comprehensive view to overcome the barriers for different cultural environments. As boards consider calls for more diversity, these authors furthermore found, given the variety in boardroom culture, that there is

virtually no research to offer a clear understanding of how best to eliminate diversity barriers in the boardroom.

In the Kakabadse et al. (2015) study, they found that few women have reached the boardroom with those there enjoying the privilege and being very protective of the status. These authors suggest that part of the culture change required may be the consideration of the “continuity of a culture of privilege and power” (p. 277) to address “demography and representation” (p.277). While organizations have more pressure to appear unbiased than individuals typically do, Bradley-Geist and Ruscher (2011) note that the culture of an organization is essentially a product of its people. This product is driven by director composition and selection that has an underrepresentation of women as leaders in the corporate boardroom, and African American women even more so (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; Klettner et al., 2016).

**2.6.1 Board composition and selection.** Director composition and selection is a subject of limited investigation with a lack of clarity regarding “how boards approach director selection and what processes and mechanisms drive the selection activities” (Elms et al., 2015, p. 1322). Regulatory guidelines suggest the existence of a formal, rigorous, and transparent director selection process geared around identification, screening, selection, and appointment (Elms et al., 2015; Withers, Hillman, & Cannella, 2012). The authors further suggest this reality, however, reflects a more fluid informal process for identifying and evaluating candidates where biases can influence who sits in the boardroom and as importantly who does not.

In their exploratory study of role fit and group fit in director selection to better understand how and why new board members are recruited, Elms et al. (2015) found director selection and appointment processes to vary considerably amongst companies. They also found

the forces at work to be an important emerging area of research within corporate governance. Fedaseyeu et al. (2018), moreover, advise that a large body of evidence confirms the notion that boards require substantial expertise supporting the importance of director qualifications and skillsets for boards as well as directors individually. Seeking to further understand the various dynamics of board composition, Joh and Jung (2016) additionally investigated prestigious academic credentials as part of the diverse qualities desired for the boardroom. They found these credentials to be a source of competitive advantage for companies and imperative to the successful director in the boardroom. Elms et al. (2015), likewise, found where the needs of boards, including director knowledge requirements, performance considerations, current and forward-looking strategy, and life cycles affecting the organization fluctuate given both internal and external dynamics. Joh and Jung (2016) compliment that discovery in finding that the more challenging the environment, the stronger the relationship is to superior academic credentials. However, in more stable and predictable surroundings the authors suggest the tried and tested is available, leaving more exceptional intellectual ability not to be the must that other more challenging environments may demand.

Further considering director selection, the more fluid processes, Elms et al. (2015) note, allow for selection practices suggesting an irrational manner. With an emphasis on the need to identify the right directors, they advise that director selection must focus on “both individual technical capabilities and social compatibility” (p. 1312). Additionally, in unstable and unpredictable environments, Joh and Jung (2016) found superior academic credentials are desired. These credentials facilitate needed novel solutions. Elms et al. (2015) further found “director selection is crucial in ensuring boards are well equipped to perform their tasks” (p. 1325). They recommend that candidates must understand how boards operate, skills and

experiences must be the right fit, and candidates must be compatible with existing directors. According to Joh and Jung (2016), less than 50% of executives in listed firms are considered to have superior management and academic credentials that are valuable, rare, unique, and non-substitutable. Finally, Elms et al. (2015) found two key attributes drive appointments: a candidate's contribution to complementary skills and the ability to work well with the existing board members, i.e. role-fit and group-fit.

In their study to investigate director qualifications and the impacts on board roles, Fedaseyeu et al. (2018) compiled a sample database consisting of 13,239 outside directors in 1,777 firms from 2006 to 2010, realizing 56,356 director position-years. They discussed how CEO and executive management expertise is valuable in the boardroom as CEOs, and other executives have the knowledge fostering the ability to grasp firm challenges for healthier monitoring and advising. Elms et al. (2015) found, however, that too much cohesion on a board can limit board effectiveness evolving from challenges of groupthink. Thus, for the best board role-fit and group-fit, Elms et al. (2015) noted, the incumbent board configuration is the driving factor. An effective appointment, the authors found, often stems from boards that are positioned to engage incumbent board members to use their network sources to identify candidates who are the best role fit.

At the end of the day, Elms et al. (2015) advised director selection should consider the economic and social perspectives "to provide a more realistic view of director selection and the keys to director success" (p. 1323). Joh and Jung (2016) noted challenging environments that represent both opportunity and risk promote the diversity that can include African American women. However, they also realized companies that are achieving satisfactory results are often content with the status quo that commonly lacks this diversity. Elms et al. (2015), ultimately,

suggested that directors should possess the skills and experiences required of a director with knowledge of how boards operate, be a good role-fit with objectivity, and have good group-fit fostering subjectivity to facilitate further the ability to be socially compatible with sitting board members. However, a question that the authors leave unanswered is, “what impact does diversity or the mix of insiders to outsiders have on board dynamics?” (p. 1324). Ultimately, as Fedaseyeu et al. (2018) confirmed, markets prefer expert directors who can be independent and monitor the CEO. Being among the least represented in the boardroom today, and the least networked with current board directors, African American women can be expected to be well underrepresented when searching for candidates who are considered expert directors (ADB & Deloitte, 2019; Perrault, 2015).

Daum and Yerger (2018) inform the preference for director independence is likely a factor driving board composition and director selection trends to move past CEO or prior board experience as being the must they once were. Today first-time directors with non-traditional board credentials, yet still, the skills and expertise that the board needs are more acceptable. Also supporting the move beyond the traditional views of director selection is the literature review of Johnson, Schnatterly, and Hill (2013) that synthesizes various studies investigating director qualifications and the impacts on board roles. These authors found that the diversity in director demographics, human capital, and social capital characteristics to have essential influences on firm outcomes. However, with voting shareholders, and therefore nominating committees, often indifferent to the lack of board diversity, boards must be cognizant of the tendency to be too forward-looking seeking to only match board needs with director qualifications (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Brown, 2015; Daum & McCarthy, 2018). This indifference risks overlooking the

need and opportunity for the diversity that African American women can source (Kakabadse et al., 2015; Sholock, 2012; Steverson, 2010).

Key Influencers for Boardroom Diversity	
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>CEO</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- CEO preferences &amp; alignment with CEO strategy</li> <li>- Greater the difference → highly influenced by CEO</li> <li>- CEO nomination is crucial for the diversity of AAW</li> <li>- Greater CEO diversity → greater board diversity</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Chair</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chair preferences &amp; alignment with board needs</li> <li>- Facilitates director human &amp; social capital to flourish</li> <li>- Balances influence and power of CEO</li> <li>- Essential to the diversity of AAW in the boardroom</li> </ul>

*Figure 2.1. Key Influencers for Boardroom Diversity*

**2.6.2 CEO influence.** When recruiting new directors, the CEO is of particular influence (see Figure 2.1) in answering the critical question of what criteria do sitting directors find necessary (Elms et al., 2015; Fedaseyeu et al., 2018). Elms et al. (2015) discussed how the balance of power between the CEO and the board becomes imperative in new director selection. They suggest the CEO may have less concern for a director candidate's skills and abilities in place of the social and political dynamics favorable to the CEO.

Zhu and Chen (2015) found in a quantitative study of narcissism, director selection, and risk-taking on corporate boards that CEOs, by the mere nature of their power, can systematically select new directors. This is a dynamic not particularly favorable to the diversity of African American women due to the limited network connections and customarily demographic dissimilarities to most CEOs (Perrault, 2015). Barka and Dardour (2015), found that differentiating the recruitment base of boards to new profiles is highly crucial to counter the power of CEOs. These differences help to realize directors that are not identical, though risk directors being socially unacceptable to the CEO (Dang Nguyen, 2013; Zhu & Chen, 2015). When directors are not similar, not as aligned, and have more demographical differences, these

selections are found to be highly influenced by the CEO (Zhu & Chen, 2015). Given that Hill et al. (2015) found that African American women seldom occupied the CEO position, the nomination of African American women to the board by the CEO is a crucial mechanism to facilitate African American women board appointments (Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; Hill et al., 2015; Zhu & Chen, 2015).

Ng and Sears (2017) surveyed 278 firms to study the macro-level organizational determinants for women in leadership. Though women are significantly underrepresented throughout industry, they found that the presence of women in the CEO position influences women in management. Of course, the CEO is essentially a given to sit on the board; thus, a position instrumental in growing the presence of African American women in the boardroom (Browning & Sparks, 2015). To this point, a factor possibly working in the favor of the presence of African American women in the boardroom are Ng and Sears's (2017) finding of a positive relationship between women CEOs and women in the executive pipeline. Still, the announcements of female CEO positions result in more negative reactions, including poor stock price performance, suggesting stereotypic investor beliefs about female directors (Hill et al., 2015). The concerns raised by obliviousness and Black feminist thought suggest even more of an issue for African American women (Collard, 2007; Collins, 2000; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010; Thomas, 2004). Incumbent upon organizations, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) found, was the need to develop strategies and interventions to confront and resolve issues of bias. These authors found the issues to be overt, implicit, internal, and external to the organization demanding effective strategies for both positions on the board and the CEO role.

**2.6.3 Chair influence.** The board chair additionally has an imperative influence (see Figure 2.1) on director selection (Bezemer, Nicholson, & Pugliese, 2018; Kakabadse et al.,



2015). Some organizations separate the chair and CEO roles to keep the CEO power in check, and particularly regarding director selection (Elms et al., 2015). Bezemer et al. (2018) discuss how the most effective chairs seek to balance the influence and power of the CEO. These authors also note how the effective chair focuses on providing the structure for their board colleagues to execute the responsibilities of directors.

In their study, to better understand how chairs shape governance on a board, Bezemer et al. (2018) conducted interviews with directors and observed videotaped board meetings seeking to understand better how board chairs influence the boardroom. Their key finding demonstrates that the best chairs are enablers of equals more so than a persona of a strong and dominant leader. In performing the chair role, these authors, however, recognized the same agency risk found in powerful CEOs to similarly apply to powerful board chairs. Kakabadse et al. (2015), furthermore, coincide with Bezemer et al. (2018) to find that the influence of the board chair is paramount in board composition. Bezemer et al. (2018) concluded that the most effective chairs succeeded at their enabler role by allowing the human and social capital of their fellow directors to flourish, and thus the chair is essential to promoting the diversity of African American women in the boardroom.

In summary, given that corporate boards are often determined mostly from within closed networks where privilege of some magnitude often promotes board opportunities, boards must consider additional lenses to evaluate new directors for the most desired mix (Anderson et al., 2018; Garner, Kim, & Kim, 2017; Kakabadse et al., 2015). African American women striving to ascend to the board will want to understand the challenges of perceptions and merge with the culture being able to adjust to varying dynamics as necessary (Kakabadse et al., 2015). A critical mass of African American women may be required to shift the paradigm (Klettner et al., 2016).

However, a critical mass does not necessarily signal a march towards a culture change (Klettner et al., 2016). Nevertheless, as more African American women sit on boards, boards will more and more gravitate to embrace the normal for African American women (Kakabadse et al., 2015).

## **2.7 Board Decision-Making and Governance**

Corporate failures over the last 20 plus years and their ramifications have garnered interest in the topic of board decision-making and governance (Elms et al., 2015). A common assumption among persons responsible for director selection is that women lack the necessary competencies required to be effective in management that ultimately leads to the corporate boardroom (Ng & Sears, 2017). Kakabadse et al. (2015) are among those finding that group decision-making additionally suffers from impacts related to the minority in the group. These concerns can increase the misperception that women and African American women, in particular, bring less value as board members (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Northouse, 2016).

The risk aversion associated with women enables stronger trust in leadership and can influence more ethical behavior that encourages better information gathering (Isidro & Sobral, 2015; Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2016). Isidro and Sobral (2015) used a simultaneous equation model to study the influence of women in the boardroom and found women stimulate “stronger compliance with ethical principles” (p. 1). This resulted in a positive association with financial performance. Although women, in general, tend to exhibit more risk aversion than men, women in the boardroom, do not necessarily demonstrate this feature (Matsa & Miller, 2013). This suggests that risk aversion may not be the strongest factor influencing women’s corporate decision-making. Nevertheless, the recognition of difference itself will often stifle the

opportunity for women, particularly African American women, to participate in decision-making for the most powerful influence upon corporate governance (Kakabadse et al., 2015).

In the Kakabadse et al. (2015) study of companies throughout the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ghana referenced previously, among the findings is the importance of increasing the numbers of women directors. They also found companies lack a strategy for gender diverse boards. This realizes women directors who feel highly scrutinized and fearing marginalization. Kakabadse et al. (2015) discussed how women on corporate boards are entering a new culture with little familiarity leading to perceptions of ill-fit. These realizations are due to the low female representation that ultimately influences decision-making. As an extension of agency theory and decision-making to monitor the separation of firm ownership and control, Pucheta-Martínez et al. (2016) further found independent directors to improve board independence. This is accomplished, they ascertained, because independent directors are believed to be better monitors of firm management than inside directors. In further studying the effects of agency theory coupled with resource dependency theory, the researchers Toumi, Benkraiem, and Hamrouni (2016) performed a fixed-effect regression. They used data from French listed companies for the period 2008 to 2011 to investigate how gender diversity, education, and other variables impact corporate value creation. Their findings revealed that women, along with qualified management credentials and the independent director role, contribute to the decision making and governance. These findings give support for the demographic of gender diversity on corporate boards and by extension the ethnic gender diversity of African American women.

Pucheta-Martínez et al. (2016) conducted a study using univariate analysis and regression on a sample of data from nonfinancial companies listed on the Madrid Stock Exchange from

2004 to 2011. They note that “corporate governance is paying increasing attention to gender diversity” (p. 376) and concluded that women on boards increased transparency. Additionally, Kakabadse et al. (2015) and Matsu and Miller (2013) found women are seen to be stricter monitors of CEOs and more appropriate to challenge the status quo. With power and gender as a form of cultural capital, this is used to justify a feminist perspective of equality and access to corporate governance. Pucheta-Martínez et al. (2016) found, also, that gender diversity regarding board structure and composition is of growing importance for achieving accountability and transparency in corporate governance. The ethnic diversity available with African American women can further add to the diversity of gender for corporate governance (Booth-Bell, 2018; Isidro & Sobral, 2015; Pucheta-Martínez et al., 2016; Toumi et al., 2016). However, Kakabadse et al. (2015) recognized that the double minority of ethnicity and gender associated with African American women could be acknowledged more for difference than contributions and ability (Cook & Glass, 2014; Hill et al., 2015; Lindsay, 2015).

## **2.8 Board Networks**

The similar nature of boards is a factor perpetuating the phenomenon of boards of directors consisting mostly of males of European descent (Gray & Nowland, 2013; Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; Perrault, 2015). In their study discussing the obstacles for women, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) illustrate how the demands of the woman’s normal facilitate fewer opportunities to develop networks, whether formal or informal, and both internal or external to their organization. The challenges include a woman’s limited opportunities in network development due to her normal further realizing restricted availability to attend professional events, occasions where networking often takes place. Brown (2015) further discussed how the nature of boards and their resulting networks facilitate a corporate elite cohesion containing key

organizational actors. These members include chairs, CEOs, and other directors with director interlocks to other boards (Perrault, 2015). Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017), furthermore, identified commonly found gender-biases and a woman's typical lack of advocates and sponsors to be additional barriers. These factors obstruct the necessary development of networks and introductions to decision-makers that are found vital to further facilitate director opportunities. The above dynamics realize climates that by the default of their normal, tend to exclude minorities from networks of importance further realizing obstacles for the diversity of African American women (Gray & Nowland, 2013; Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; Kakabadse et al., 2015).

Perrault (2015) conducted a qualitative study leveraging semi-structured interviews for 34 participants. The study consisted mostly of an even distribution of male and female board members, corporate officers, shareholders, director recruiters, and shareholder activists. Perrault (2015) sought to increase the validity of the findings by triangulating the empirical data obtained from the interviews with information available from prominent industry governance agencies, including the Securities and Exchange Commission. The findings denounced homophilous boards as lacking legitimacy. Singh et al. (2015), additionally, conducted a study using numerical and qualitative biographical data of women directors on French boards. The findings that the assets developed from academic excellence and career expertise as CEO or board chair, including the networks involved with these assets, support a Perrault (2015) finding. The finding discussed how the reality of women with less experience as directors are found to be less connected, not as interlocked, and not afforded access to director networks. This perpetuates new director appointments trending to promote successive directors akin to being invited to an exclusive club or social network. Perrault (2015), likewise, discussed how the network of male directors tends to prevent women from being considered for board directorships due to the

absence of women in the androcentric networks. These findings further suggest a hurdle for the diversity of African American women (Perrault, 2015; Singh et al., 2015).

In summary, a reason for the more prevalent absence of women in executive leadership ultimately leading to the corporate boardroom stems from their lack of network connections and finding themselves among the out-group (Gabaldon et al., 2016; Garner et al., 2017; Kakabadse et al., 2015). As director interlocks contain more African American women, Perrault (2015) expects more of this talent to be invited to the *exclusive club* of directorships. Reflecting on the importance and influence of networks, human nature shows a preference to associate with others who are similar (Smith, 2014). Due to the networking and preference for those in the network that will inevitably follow, this can be expected to realize departing directors replaced by others in the network (Perrault, 2015). This preference, also, tends to realize leaders often selected in the image of those making the selection (Northouse, 2016; Zhu & Chen, 2015). If leaders are predominately men of European descent, Smith (2014) notes the phenomenon of homophily where “we are typically attracted to others that resemble us” (p. 481). This tendency will promote men of European descent and leave fewer opportunities for women, and even less for African American women considering the challenges of networks, obliviousness, and Black feminist thought (Collard, 2007; Collins, 2000; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010; Thomas 2004). As a result, the collective presence of women of power and status can be expected to influence the socialization processes of individual women further facilitating contemporaneous networks with others of high status and power (Newman, 2016). Networking, therefore, is essential to encourage and support African American women in obtaining board opportunities (De Klerk & Verreynne, 2017; Singh et al., 2015).

## **2.9 Biases, Stereotypes, and Other Diversity Barriers for the Boardroom**

Education was once believed to be the equalizer propelling more women to senior leadership roles (Aud et al., 2012; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Women's outstanding educational achievements, exceeding men, have not realized similar success in eliminating barriers (Aud et al., 2012; Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Klettner et al., 2016). Gabaldon et al. (2016) found little research to understand how to be most efficient in eliminating the barriers for women's ascension to the boardroom while Heller and Gabaldon (2018) found the issue to extend beyond borders. African American women, in particular, find many barriers to advance into senior leadership positions that are often minimally considered and poorly understood (Collins, 2000; Cook & Glass, 2014; Heller & Gabaldon, 2018; Moodley et al., 2016; Steverson, 2010).

Pucheta-Martínez et al. (2016) found board composition has the opportunity to take advantage of members drawn from outside of the firm and traditional networks to facilitate independence. They suggest that academic and professional qualifications as well as the related experience must be leveraged. Additionally, Guest (2019) utilized a logit model analysis of a data sample of 14,947 unique outside directors researching board ethnic diversity and outcomes. He further found that to achieve progress addressing the ethnic gender imbalance represented by the lack of African American women in the boardroom, organizations need the ethnic gender diversity of African American women as a top priority. Guest (2019) further noted that this must not be the sole focus of the CEO, but underscored by the board as a whole (Moodley et al., 2016).

Kakabadse et al. (2015), also found that it is critical to women obtaining more corporate board seats, and by extension African American women, to commit to being prepared for

opportunities. These opportunities include taking advantage of effective networks, gaining sound education and expertise, and leveraging the innate ability to listen and learn. Taking advantage of these opportunities is positioned to become more and more critical. To this point, Windscheid et al. (2017) found, given the competition for labor, organizations will focus on attracting the best talent for long-term success. Nevertheless, CEOs, chief human resources officers, and corporate board directors indicate that recruitment for diversity tends to follow the traditional recruitment paths (Citrin & Swartz, 2018). Furthermore, these typical routes often reflect consistent statements of talent lacking, and particularly for changing business models (Citrin & Swartz, 2018). Cook and Glass (2014, 2018) found minorities seeking the boardroom have experienced others to find them less capable and qualified for a directorship. Barka and Dardour (2015) further found that to integrate more diversity, board recruiting should open boards to new profiles in order to better meet stakeholder expectations.

Further considering the challenge for new profiles, Wingfield and Alston (2014), in their exploration of organizational hierarchies, found racial minorities are mostly scattered throughout mid-management roles and overrepresented in the bottom tier of organizations. These authors are further echoed by Northouse (2016), in finding that the resulting structural and organizational patterns of the majority present challenges to the presence of African American women in the boardroom. Klettner et al. (2016), also, collected data regarding women in leadership and the woman's path to the boardroom. They found that the issue is not so much a limitation of opportunity at the senior ranks of organizations but the lack of opportunity at the mid-level career positions in the pipeline for women in leadership. Barriers and obstructions include work-life balance and work culture issues such as unconscious biases, gender stereotypes, childbearing and family demands, the lack of mentors and sponsors, as well as other inequities and barriers to



equality (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Klettner et al., 2016; Northouse, 2016).

Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) are among the researchers discussing how inequities and barriers can cause women, specifically African American women, to doubt their ability or personality for leadership. These doubts further lead to the avoidance of leadership opportunities that can lead to the CEO and other key decision-making roles (Citrin & Swartz, 2018; Collins, 2000; Gabaldon et al., 2016; Thomas, 2004). Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) found this avoidance is related mainly to the pervasiveness of gender biases and stereotypes in organizations contributing to women avoiding career risks. Women are often marginalized which diminishes a woman's self-confidence (Debebe, 2017; Wingfield & Alston, 2014). This can further realize gender barriers to advancement where women aspire less for senior and executive leadership opportunities (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; De Klerk & Verreynne, 2017).

Heller and Gabaldon (2018) are echoed by DeKlerk and Verreynne (2017) in their discovery of barriers for women in corporate board leadership. These obstructions include organizational and societal structures that are seldom gender-neutral, reflecting hostile obstacles to women gaining organizational influence and executive leadership positions. For African American women, these challenges can be compounded due to the perceived difference by those with the dominant presence in corporate leadership (Collins, 2000; Steverson, 2010; Thomas, 2004). Barriers to women ascending to senior and executive leadership positions can further minimize women participating in formal leadership training foiling the development of a *leadership mentality* in women (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017). Kossek and Buzzanell (2018), found that "it is never enough for women to be competent, agentic leaders, and perform well in work- and personal-life domains" (p. 820). They also note, that women "require advocacy,

sponsorship, and efforts to determine how to develop equal playing fields” (p. 820). These initiatives pose even more significant challenges for African American women given obliviousness and Black feminist thought (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Collins, 2000; Steverson, 2010; Thomas, 2004).

Kaiser and Spalding (2015) performed a study generating findings similar to Dezső, Ross, and Uribe (2016). These findings discussed how women in corporate leadership may influence other women to likewise ascend, and by extension, African American women on corporate boards may influence other African American women’s ascension to the boardroom. In their quantitative study examining the *queen bee* phenomenon and whether women who succeed in male-dominated domains help other women, Kaiser and Spalding (2015) align with Dezső et al. (2016). They find that strongly identified women tend to effectively promote the advancement of other women, though weakly recognized women can be a hindrance. Kossek and Buzzanell (2018) further added that organizations must move away from practices that undermine women’s success and agency. The authors note the glass-ceiling and for some the concrete-ceiling, prevent women from succeeding. When they do achieve senior executive positions, the extremely risky opportunities that are available ultimately set women up to fail in leadership; the latter being the glass-cliff (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018).

Cook and Glass (2018) conducted a study analyzing Fortune 500 CEO transitions over a period of 15 years. Using conditional logistic regression and ANOVA, they searched for factors impacting the promotion probabilities and leadership tenure of occupational minority CEOs, a category that includes African American women. Cook and Glass (2018) found that occupational minorities are more likely than European American men to be promoted to CEO replacing European American men when firms are underperforming which is consistent with the glass-cliff

theory. Bruckmüller et al. (2014) found that the glass-cliff's negative perceptions of investor devaluation to be more psychological. These negative perceptions and realities of CEOs likely contributed to the fact that 1,033 newly appointed directors to the boards of the Fortune 500, the overwhelming majority were men, specifically 80% were of European descent (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Olson, 2019). Conversely, underperforming firms during the tenure of occupational minority CEOs more often than not realize European American men being promoted to CEO. Cook and Glass (2014) explain this observation to be termed the *savior effect*. Finally, to illustrate the importance of the CEO to diversity in the boardroom, Dezső et al. (2016) found, in their study of implicit quotas, for women in top management that the likelihood of another woman being selected diminishes, with one exception. The exception is diversity in the position of CEO. A CEO of diversity does not have the same negative influence on others of similar demographics joining the top leadership of the organization (Dezső et al., 2016). Thus, the CEO can play a pivotal role in influencing the greater presence of African American women in the corporate boardroom (Dezső et al., 2016).

As a select number of women increasingly achieve leadership positions in organizations, Bruckmüller et al. (2014) found the ongoing challenge of the glass-cliff phenomenon to still be valid. Hunt-Earle (2012) in a quantitative analysis of interview data investigating the recruitment of women into leadership roles, found the phenomenon “widely established and accepted” (p. 44). However, with the validity of the glass-cliff phenomenon debated, Bruckmüller et al. (2014) noted that policies to address the dilemma must address the stereotypic normalization of leadership as androcentric while discussing female leaders themselves as a unique category to women. The authors refute the acceptance that leadership is always about ethnicity and gender when considering African American women but for men, leadership is synonymous.

Nevertheless, Bruckmüller et al. (2014) found that organizations must be more sensitive to unconscious biases and avoid barriers for women. The visibility offered by glass-cliff situations may, in fact, result in positive recognition and ultimately welcomed by African American women.

Seeking clarity to the dilemma of women ascending to the corporate boardroom, Chen et al. (2016) utilized the lens of social identity theory to study how firm-level strategic action varied due to women board directors. They predicted that gender diversity would have negative influences on strategic acquisitions. They realized strong support for their hypothesis with findings centering on the growth of female board representation that ultimately reduced decision comprehensiveness. Cook and Glass (2018), also, found where diversity simulates inefficient board functioning due to more significant board conflict and competition, resulting in decreased cooperation, morale, and ultimately diminished performance. Chen et al. (2016), likewise, found the complex and conflicting effects of board dynamics to affect performance in both positive and negative ways; dynamics that can further promote or hinder the diversity of African American women.

Further in search of the origins of gender inequality in the boardroom, Ahern and Dittmar (2012) explored Norway's approach to the challenge for greater diversity in the boardroom with legislation dictating gender diversity. They found market devaluations with the most considerable depreciation experienced by firms that previously had no gender diversity (Kakabadse et al., 2015). This aligns with the perceptions that gender diversity on corporate boards causes organizations with well-governed boards to be negatively impacted, realizing adverse impacts on firm value and decreased profitability (Garner et al., 2017; Matsa & Miller, 2013). The Bruckmüller et al. (2014) study of the glass-ceiling phenomenon additionally

discussed the undesired valuations to suggest sexist and discriminatory attitudes to gender diversity. Bruckmüller et al. (2014) discuss that accountancy-based measures of performance do not show a correlation with the appointment of women to corporate boards while the more subjective accomplishment measures such as stock performance reflect a negative correlation.

The Ahern and Dittmar (2012) findings also align with the tendency for androcentric homophilous boards to typically receive greater valuations than those with gender diversity (Kakabadse et al., 2015). They found the outcome consistent with the idea that the composition of boards is to maximize firm value. Further addressing the androcentric weight on corporate board composition, Heller and Gabaldon (2018) found that neither the presence of women in the labor market nor their qualifications were determining factors for women reaching the boardroom. Interestingly, public policy guaranteeing protections for women, and professional career development were influential. However, Ahern and Dittmar (2012) noted that firms with gender diversity at the time of the Norwegian policy change experienced less devaluation as compared to firms with no gender diversity. They surmised that the devaluation may more accurately reflect the negatives of gender bias and discrimination to the initial inclusion of women in power (Bruckmüller et al., 2014; Hogue, 2016). Cultural dynamics and power distances, in addition to masculinity portrayed in positions of power, were also found to prevent greater gender diversity on boards (Heller & Gabaldon, 2018). Thus, while gains can be found, Ahern and Dittmar (2012) and Heller and Gabaldon (2018) demonstrated the under-representation of women on corporate boards is a global issue with similar dynamics despite the geographical distances (Klettner et al., 2016).

Further considering the global view, Heller and Gabaldon (2018) explored the economic, regulatory, and cultural dynamics impacting women's ascension to corporate boards in Latin

America. They concluded that the woman's presence on corporate boards is limited worldwide. For example, in 2013 only 8.4% of corporate boards globally included the diversity of women with that rising rather minimally to 12.7% by 2018. Ahern and Dittmar (2012), moreover, suggested that devaluations related to gender diversity to possibly be indicative of the markets' disdain for government intervention and the unknowns of government policy mandates. They nevertheless found that quotas forcing diversity resulting in younger, less experienced directors are consistent with actions of boards that have fewer effective monitors and advisors. In other words, diversity just for the sake of diversity can have negative consequences. Thus, the debate focusing on how board diversity should consider qualities that make for good directors to most ensure the best results for the firm; all factors to be mindful of for increasing the diversity of African American women on corporate boards (Ahern & Dittmar, 2012; Johnson et al., 2013).

In summary, Klettner et al. (2016) found the sourcing for the boardroom must expand beyond executive levels and traditional backgrounds which are well underrepresented by the diversity of African American women. Ellwood and Garcia-Lacalle (2015), moreover, found the bias to appoint directors with accounting, finance, and audit expertise, the traditional backgrounds found in the corporate boardroom. These backgrounds, however, run counter to the diversity of credentials that have a higher representation of African American women. Although mandatory governmental quotas are finding a footing in some jurisdictions realizing change in boardroom diversity quicker, Klettner et al. (2016) concluded that closely monitored voluntary targets are more likely to address the cultural, strategic, and organizational change needed (Anonymous, 2018; Calder, 2018; Mishra, 2019; O'Kelley et al., 2018). This change can be expected to promote more effective cultural and practical changes for a greater sustainable representation of African American women in the corporate boardroom (Klettner et al., 2016).

## **2.10 The Benefits of Gender Diversity on Corporate Boards**

Agency theory and the Higgs Report both suggest that more women should be included on corporate boards as demographic diversity increases board effectiveness, a concept to furthermore extend specifically to African American women (Booth-Bell, 2018; Isidro & Sobral, 2015). Toumi et al. (2016) supported this suggestion in finding that gender diversity drives firm value by promoting market awareness and understanding. Perrault (2015), additionally, found women on boards promote shareholder trust, further enhancing perceptions of board legitimacy and trustworthiness. These developments result in discussion from leaders about benefits of gender diversity and the advancement for women (Citrin & Swartz, 2018).

Kakabadse et al. (2015) found that diverse boards promote more open dialog with better consideration of the stakeholder. This open dialog realizes an awareness of new issues and perspectives fostering the innovation and creativity that ultimately expands the content of boardroom discussions and debate (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Kakabadse et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2015). Kakabadse et al. (2015), have discussed how women's collaborative leadership style is a crucial benefit for the presence of women on boards. Women take advantage of leveraging their listening skills, corralling support, and facilitating win-win solutions for the benefit of those they represent, benefits that should not dismiss the diversity of African American women (Collard, 2007; Kakabadse et al., 2015; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). Along this line of thought, Hill et al. (2015), performed a longitudinal study investigating whether female and ethnically diverse CEOs endure or benefit from their minority status. The authors noted how the most valuable natural resources are diverse knowledge, ability, and skills. They, furthermore, suggested that these valuable natural resources are immediately available with ethnically diverse talent. Kakabadse et al. (2015) also found diversity and, by extension, the ethnic gender diversity of

African American women to furthermore reduce groupthink and provide increased access to a range of resources.

In a multivariate analysis, researching the economics of director heterogeneity, Anderson et al. (2018) recognized the importance and benefits of increasing perspectives for more robust discussions and deliberations for improved outcomes. Gender diversity, therefore, is found to bring added value to firms through different knowledge, ability, skills, and experiences to include the multiplicity of African American women (Johnson et al., 2013; Singh et al., 2015). This added value further facilitates enhanced decision-making to achieve peak performance and thus much of the business case for gender and ethnic gender diversity on corporate boards (Singh et al., 2015). While peak performance is often the goal yet achieved, Anderson et al. (2018) are among those promoting diversity to be a pivotal component to reach that goal (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Citrin & Swartz, 2018). Anderson et al. (2018) further found the better performance of increased diversity realizes a surge in demand among investors for diversity in the corporate boardroom and particularly gender diversity. Gender diversity stimulates creativity for more innovative and productive problem solving. This also facilitates organizational ethics and drives financial performance. Finally, this gender diversity includes the ethnicity of African American women (Anderson et al., 2018; Booth-Bell, 2018; Cook & Glass, 2018).

With African American women among the minority in the boardroom making up over half of the pool of human capital available to organizations, they are not only among the options to facilitate better decision-making but are also among the alternatives to provide access to essential constituencies in the external environment (Toumi et al., 2016). African American women on boards provide positive signals to the labor and product markets addressing different environmental dependencies, including diversity in cultural, political, and societal views (Chen



et al., 2016). Resource dependence theory suggests African American women bring the benefit of their diversity for a more *outside of the box*, robust information enabling divergent thinking in decision-making (Booth-Bell, 2018; Chen et al., 2016; Isidro & Sobral, 2015; Toumi et al., 2016). However, before diversity can be fully realized, Schmidt, MacWilliams, and Neal-Boylan (2017) noted that those in power must practice inclusion by “addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all... through increasing participation... and reducing exclusion” (Stadler-Heer, 2019, p. 219). Inclusion, as Stadler-Heer (2019) further articulates, “involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision” (p. 219). This offers those with the most power the opportunity to ultimately realize equitable diversity with inclusion. With diversity in human capital and the external environmental connections that come, both resource dependency theory and human capital theory support African American women’s ability to enable transformations for positive effects on firm performance (Booth-Bell, 2018; Isidro & Sobral, 2015; Toumi et al., 2016). Yet, before the benefits from the diversity of African American women can be fully realized, inclusion in the boardroom pipeline leadership positions is essential (Schmidt et al., 2017; Stadler-Heer, 2019).

## **2.11 Opportunities for Future Research**

As noted in the discussion regarding the significance for the study, Peterson et al. (2007) found there was a need to specifically research African American women separately from other minorities. This need was due to the unique social and background realities distinguishing that the dynamics of race and gender are two major sociological factors to consider. Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) and Northouse (2016) aligned with Peterson et al. (2007) in suggesting that future research include the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender as related to the access and achievement levels of women in regard to leadership positions. Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017)

found race and ethnicity in leadership added a greater level of complexity and bias to the challenge of gender and leadership. This demands a more in-depth look to understand and appreciate the obstacles and opportunities for more equitable leadership. Cook and Glass (2014), correspondingly, found that future research should study minorities in the workforce separately from each other, as research suggests that career trajectories vary in fundamental ways with meaningful interactions based on race, ethnicity, and gender, resulting in significant implications. As minorities are further considered, future research should address the conditions women, as tokens, can better influence organizational outcomes. Research particularly should investigate how minority women can overcome social class and racial bias (Cook & Glass, 2018).

Studies are suggested to better understand processes and perhaps consider stakeholders to help women achieve their goals. This could occur by assisting African American women in identifying and developing talent to realize the fullest benefits of board diversity; using obliviousness and Black feminist thought as supporting theories (Collard, 2007; Collins, 2000; Marshall, 2002; Kakabadse et al., 2015; Steverson, 2010; Thomas, 2004). Lawson and Lips (2014) suggest future research to investigate what portrayal of successful women may encourage or discourage other women. Regarding future research, the *climbing and kicking* phenomenon investigates the physiological threat associated with inadequately identified women in their advancement in male-dominated spaces (Kaiser & Spalding, 2015). Considering the context of demographics and representation changes, few women have succeeded in achieving corporate's top positions. Those that do, may be protective of the privilege perpetuating the European male's culture of privilege and power. (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Kakabadse et al., 2015).

The opportunity exists to research the mentoring and coaching that can improve boardroom ascension and performance for women (Gabaldon et al., 2016; Kakabadse et al., 2015). Additionally, Chen et al. (2016) recommended studying how the rise of female board representation can result in a reduction in both decision comprehensiveness and board oversight. They further recommended studies to better understand the intra-board social psychological processes. These authors promoted researching the possibilities of increases in coordination costs while simultaneously reducing the board cohesiveness that occurs when African American women are included in board composition.

Kakabadse et al. (2015) found gaps in understanding board diversity regarding the diversity of women directors in dealing with “hidden meanings, silence, embedded norms and values, and invisible power relations in the boardroom” (p. 411). Elms et al. (2015), likewise, noted that few studies have researched the dynamics of the boardroom. Therefore, future studies should incorporate board dynamics, the influences of diversity on these dynamics, and particularly the impact of group-fit in board effectiveness. This includes factors contributing to or detracting from effective group-fit in a board context. Multiple studies suggest implementing boardroom education requirements (Gabaldon et al., 2016; Kakabadse et al., 2015). The importance of networks and the challenges of obliviousness and Black feminist thought further support focusing on African American women for this research (Collard, 2007; Collins, 2000; Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010; Thomas, 2004).

Finally, when researching for literature on the topics of inclusion and diversity in the corporate boardroom, most studies tend to refer to quantity and diversity as compared to inclusion and diversity. For example, in a study of inclusion for women on corporate boards, Dewally, Flaherty, and Tomasi (2017) discussed the matter in terms of numbers. They added to

the literature that finds women on boards are growing as boards expand but are not increasing by replacing men. Heemskerk and Fennema (2014) discussed the democratization of the corporate boardroom and the diversity of insights as the number of women in the boardroom grows. Schmidt et al. (2017), however, discuss inclusion as facilitating a sense of respect where one feels valued for who they are and supported by leaders and colleagues. Stadler-Heer (2019) discussed inclusion as incorporating changes to “content, approaches, structures, and strategies” (p. 219) that provides a vision for all persons. Thus absent is the research of boardroom inclusion in terms of valuing diverse directors such as African American women for what they add as individuals versus more simply what they add to the total count of board diversity in terms of demographics.

## **2.12 Summary**

Chapter 2 provided a review of the problem and research questions followed by a review of the literature. This review included the theoretical framework and discussion of subject matter areas that have been thoroughly addressed plus those demanding further investigation. This chapter reviewed the tenets of the theoretical framework used elsewhere in the literature as well as a brief discussion of the topics of women and African American women in leadership. A brief history of corporate boards in the United States, diversity, population and labor participation rates, and government intervention in corporate board diversity were also presented. The mechanics of the boardroom and several sections focusing more on boardroom diversity itself were also offered. Finally, the literature reviewed concluded with a discussion of opportunities to facilitate board diversity and future research.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design that leveraged participant interviews coupled with strong philosophical underpinnings to address the essence of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Chapter 3 describes the qualitative phenomenological research design of this study as it addressed the participants' lived experiences for both the pathway to the boardroom as well as the board experience itself. This chapter will also elaborate on the qualitative phenomenological approach for the study, the researcher's role, data collection and analysis, and the interview process and questions as well as the study's trustworthiness and credibility.

#### **3.2 Rational for Qualitative Research**

Creswell (2014) describes qualitative research as an approach addressing social or human problems. The qualitative approach is a desired approach for this study due to the inquiry and exploratory nature of the qualitative study which is to understand the problem by focusing on the participants' perspectives and lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research, furthermore, is ideal to address new topics with limited published research (De Klerk & Verreynne, 2017). Given this point, while there is an abundance of research exploring various perspectives of board diversity, there is minimal research specifically focusing on ethnic gender diversity and even less regarding the diversity of African American women (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Gabaldon et al., 2016; Northouse, 2016; Peterson et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2019).

De Klerk and Verreynne (2017) argue that in exploring new ideas, management research clearly establishes the need for qualitative research to investigate underexplored areas as a

compliment to quantitative research. These authors are joined by Creswell (2014) in discussing that the researcher, moreover, addresses social settings seeking to understand the phenomenon through the exploration of how one or more persons ascribe to the problem. The exploration of the problem utilizes open-ended questions to allow the participants to fully express their views (Creswell, 2014; De Klerk & Verreynne, 2017). The problem, as noted by the authors, is further explored by taking the opportunity to collect the data in the participant's setting to observe the participants discuss the dynamics of their experiences and allow for rich descriptions to emerge. These authors further highlight the data analysis makes use of themes and the researcher's interpretations of the unique situations of those involved. Qualitative research, moreover, leverages an inductive style where the individual meaning is the focus further seeking to understand complex situations with a variety of subjective meanings (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2017).

Jaye (2002) elaborates on the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research as the various "meanings and patterns, inconsistencies and conflicts in people's thoughts and behaviours" (p. 560). Throughout the qualitative process, informs Hesse-Biber (2017) and Jaye (2002), the research is centrally placed by the researcher who ultimately seeks to understand *meaning*. Furthermore, the researcher must leverage reflexivity as well as be cognizant of how their experiences and biases impact the study, noted the authors. Jaye (2002) elaborates that the interpretive nature of qualitative research requires the researcher to acknowledge interpretation of "the meanings, values, experiences, opinions and behaviours of other people" (p. 560). The researcher must, additionally, manage the high degree of subjectivity to ensure validity and reliability using techniques such as triangulation, participant feedback, and peer review (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Jaye, 2002). Finally, Jaye (2002) discusses that qualitative research is often

underpinned by a constructivist paradigm supporting the view that the world and its facts are “fundamentally interpreted and constructed by individuals within social groups” (p. 560).

### **3.3 Strategy for Inquiry**

This research used a phenomenological strategy for inquiry. Phenomenology is a complex philosophical tradition leveraging an interpretive method of inquiry. It seeks to understand the human experience by empowering and promoting understanding through vicarious lived experiences (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Wilson, 2015; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that philosophical perspectives “provide the foundation for phenomenological studies” (p. 315). Through this process, the researcher seeks to suspend any preconceptions allowing the participants’ essence of the experience to emerge. The “researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by the participants” (Creswell, 2014, p. 14). Phenomenology, furthermore, is anchored by setting aside any preconceived ideas (*epoché*) to clearly observe phenomena allowing the true meaning to naturally emerge (Creswell, 2014; Husserl, 2004; Wilson, 2015). The German philosopher and mathematician Edmund Husserl declared that phenomenology requires the researcher to be reflexive and remain free from all assumptions (Husserl, 2004).

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is credited as the founder of phenomenology, a rigorously descriptive (*eidetic*) approach to inquiry (Finlay, 2009; Husserl, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Hesse-Biber (2017) found Husserl to be “interested in human consciousness as the way to understand social reality” (p. 25). Husserl found that “consciousness was the condition of all human experience” (p. 173) and sought to explain how to avoid personal biases that otherwise prevent the ability to achieve the state of pure consciousness (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Husserl found humans to freely influence their environment and strived to learn how individuals

consciously experienced their reality (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). He believed that one-on-one interaction between the researcher and the person of inquiry is required to grasp the essence of lived experiences (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). This essence is grasped by attentive listening and observation, realizing an engagement with the participant that creates a more sophisticated description of the lived experience than previously understood.

Some scholars distinguish phenomenology as being descriptive or interpretative (Finlay, 2009). Husserl inspired descriptive phenomenology focused on revealing the “essential general meaning structures of a phenomenon” (p. 10) from the richness and complexity of what is given to the researcher minimizing intuitive validations (Finlay, 2009). Descriptive phenomenology, moreover, strives to “uncover and describe the essence of the phenomenon” (Priest, 2004, p. 6). On the other hand, Hermeneutic philosophers explain interpretive phenomenology as inclusive to the phenomenological method to uncover veiled meaning (Finlay, 2009; Priest, 2004). Interpretive phenomenology, furthermore, experiences the phenomenon as “something that has already been interpreted” (Finlay, 2009, p. 11). Phenomenology can, therefore, be found to encompass “description and interpretation as a continuum where specific work may be more or less interpretive” (Finlay, 2009, p. 11).

Phenomenology employs bracketing to consciously prevent the researcher’s prior knowledge and personal biases from having influence on the description of phenomenon (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). According to Wojnar and Swanson (2007), bracketing is accomplished by removing the phenomenon from the world in which it exists, inspecting and dissecting the phenomenon to unravel the complexities, and suspending all preconceptions confronting the phenomenon on its own terms as the researcher listens to, analyzes, and understands the stories of the participants. While some scholars have suggested that the



researcher should avoid in-depth literature reviews prior to investigation to prevent biases from developing, other scholars find the literature review itself can help to neutralize biases (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

Finlay (2009) describes phenomenology as “rigorously *descriptive*, uses the phenomenological *reductions*, explores the *intentional* relationship between person and situations, and discloses the *essences*, or structures, of meaning immanent in human experiences through the use of imaginative variation” (p. 7). Finlay (2009) ultimately finds that:

phenomenological research is phenomenological when it involves both rich description of the lifeworld or lived experience, and where the researcher has adopted a special, open phenomenological attitude which, at least initially, refrains from importing external frameworks and sets aside judgements about the realness of the phenomenon (p. 8).

Through interviews, the phenomenological strategy provides the opportunity to explore and analyze the phenomenon of interest through questions asked of participants. Leveraging one or more theories to explain, in broad terms, behavior and attitudes through a theoretical lens or perspective shaping the types of questions employed (Creswell, 2014). Husserl (2004) brings to our attention that phenomenology “bears on our own empirical existence as well as on that of other beings” (p. 189). The researcher must, therefore, be aware of their own biases in understanding and describing the lived experiences of others meaning “what is most essential to the matter is retained” (Husserl 2004, p. 195). Husserl (2004), additionally, notes that ambiguity “is the source whence the knowledge of *eternal truths* draws its sustenance” (p. 201) and stands on a foundation as solid as that of the mathematical sciences. Wojnar and Swanson (2007) determined that the ultimate test for a quality phenomenological investigation is when the

participants themselves find that “the investigator’s universal description of the phenomenon captured their personal experiences” (p. 174).

### 3.4 Researcher Role

I identified and conducted interviews with participants who are members of corporate boards of directors. This helped me to better understand the African American woman’s journey, challenges, and opportunities for this path. While collecting the data I brought the advantages of being able to immediately respond and adapt to areas unanticipated as well as to verify the accuracy of interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I paid particular attention to convey that the participants’ views were important, valuable, and useful. Creswell (2014) and Creswell and Poth (2018) inform to clarify the following information: the participant interview protocols, location for interviews, what specific activities will occur, and other information of importance. These authors further discuss the importance for the investigator to remain true to the information that surfaces. Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed reflexivity for one to engage in self-understanding regarding personally held biases, values, and experiences to position themselves in their writing. Bracketing or suspending preconceived ideas further prevents biases and personal experiences from interfering, allowing the researcher to describe the phenomenon as truthfully as possible (Van Manen, 1997).

I am a European American male in my mid-50s. I was cognizant of the expected demographic similarity with the male participants of the study as well as the expected contrast of gender, race, and ethnicity with the female participants of the study. In particular, I remained cognizant of the potential *insider* status with the male participants due to the similarities of gender, race, ethnicity and even possibly age (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Conversely, I also remained cognizant of the potential *outsider* status with the female participants due to the difference of

demographics (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Also, I was aware of the potential *outsider* status with all of the participants due to not having achieved the status of corporate board director for a publicly traded organization (Hesse-Biber, 2017). In particular, I remained conscious of the potential for unanticipated developments and hesitation on the part of participants to share their experiences whether due to similarities or dissimilarities (Hesse-Biber, 2017). Dobson (2012) and Enck (2018) noted how one can further provide empowerment through the art of authentic listening. Hesse-Biber (2017) supported this position stating that “having outsider status can actually be an advantage” (p. 133) as the researcher looks to learn from their participants and their participants’ unique view of a given issue.

### **3.5 Study Participants**

Hesse-Biber (2017) informs that “qualitative research is concerned with in-depth understanding, usually working with small samples” (p. 54). Giorgi (as cited in Finlay, 2009) recommends a sample size of at least three participants for phenomenological research. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommend five to 25 individuals for a phenomenological study. I recruited four African American women, four European American women, and four European American men for a total of 12 participants. The preliminary questionnaire found in Appendix A was used to capture descriptive information for each participant including the following participant qualifying criteria:

1. Must be a current or former member of one or more corporate boards of directors;
2. Qualifying board of director experience must have been:
  - a. within the last five years
  - b. for organizations listed on a publicly traded stock exchange

3. Qualifying board of director experience in order of preference:

- a. board chair
- b. CEO
- c. nominating committee
- d. other board expertise

The preliminary questionnaire also includes a critical incident question asking the participant to elaborate on how they suspect that they individually, and the board, would respond to the incident and why.

### **3.6 Data Collection**

Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggested four methods of data gathering for qualitative research: (a) setting participation, (b) direct observation, (c) in-depth interviews, and (d) analyzing documents and material culture. I purposefully selected participants for interviews to discover emerging themes regarding the corporate board of directors' experiences for insight into how ethnicity and gender have an impact (Creswell, 2014). To this point, I identified potential participants from persons who exist in my professional network. After receiving IRB approval and the university stamped forms, I approached the identified participants through one of the various means of communication that exists between me and the participants. Upon receiving confirmation of the willingness to join the study, I followed up with a formal invitation to participate and an informed consent (see Appendix C). I continued this process until the desired quantity and mix of participants were achieved.

Creswell and Poth (2018) inform that qualitative research leverages the researcher as the key data collection instrument for the examination of materials, observation of behavior, and participant interviews. These authors further discuss that the qualitative researcher employs

open-ended questions and avoids the use of questionnaires or other tools and instruments developed by other researchers. After obtaining consent, participants were asked to respond to semi-structured, open-ended questions based on their lived experiences seeking to remain on topic, though loosely allowing the individual participants “latitude and freedom to talk about what is of interest or importance to them” (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 112). Therefore, the primary data collection for this study stemmed from individual, person-to-person, virtual interviews using the virtual meeting recording technology to assist in data collection for a more thorough analysis at a later time (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2017). I also used a backup recorder to ensure that the interview was fully captured. Additionally, I observed and took field notes as well as reviewed the participant profiles available through the professional social network medium LinkedIn and the preliminary questionnaire (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

During the interview process, discussion regarding a given question ceased when the participant had no additional perspectives to provide for the question (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2017). I paid particular attention to allow the data to emerge to capture the participants’ complete and full responses which facilitated one to fully realize the essence of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2017). This approach allowed the participants to discuss their experiences from what they found important and relevant (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2017). During the interviews, I took field notes to capture expressions, gestures, and other notes of interest that may indicate a particular insight to later consider when analyzing the data (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2017). While collecting the data, I brought the advantages of being able to immediately respond and adapt to areas unanticipated as well as to verify the accuracy of interpretation (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The data collected from the interviews were analyzed, coded, and categorized after which themes emerged

(Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2017). The data was securely stored on a password protected computer with access restricted only to me.

**3.6.1 Interview process and protocol.** Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss that qualitative research leverages the natural setting with data collected from the site “where participants experience the issue or problem under study” (p. 43). They further inform that qualitative research avoids the contrived environment of a laboratory setting. I scheduled a time to meet each participant for an individual, person-to-person, interview at a location of the participant’s preference. Given the social distance practices due to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), the interviews were conducted via the virtual meeting technologies of WebEx and Zoom at the participant’s convenience and availability. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Semi-structured, open ended questions were utilized to allow the participants to answer the questions freely. Follow up questions were used for deeper insight as needed. The interview questions were grouped into topics with each topic containing probing questions. The list of questions from the preliminary questionnaire and the interview included questions pertaining to the participants’ background through their current status in order to develop a complete participant profile. The interview protocol and questions are found in Appendix B.

**3.6.2 Enhanced Critical Incident Technique.** I utilized the Enhanced Critical Incident Technique (ECIT) research method as the guiding principles for the study (Butterfield, Borgen, Maglio, & Amundson, 2009). Flanagan (as cited in Butterfield et al., 2009) describes the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) has having the five key steps of:

1. Determine the aim of the study;
2. Plan and setting specifications for the study;
3. Collect the data;

4. Analyze the data;
5. Interpret and report the findings;

Interpretation of the findings involves understanding the frame of reference, forming categories, and to what degree the data is reported (Butterfield et al., 2009). Additionally, by enhancing Flanagan's CIT, and thus ECIT note the authors, the inclusion of contextual questions (i.e. the preliminary questionnaire), questions regarding wish list (WL) items, and nine credibility checks are also used to boost the study's integrity. WL items "are those people, supports, information, programs, so on, that were not present at the time of the participant's experience, but that those involved believed would have been helpful in the situation being studied" (p. 267). The authors further discuss extracting WL items during the analysis of the data. The nine credibility checks are discussed with the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

Creswell (2014) stated that phenomenological research leverages significant statements and their analysis, generation of components with meaning, and description that captures the spirit of the phenomenon. Data analysis leverages themes and the researcher's interpretations of meaning with qualitative research leveraging an inductive style where the individual meaning was the focus further seeking to understand complex situations. Creswell and Poth (2018) further discuss the qualitative researcher will review and organize the data collected into themes in order to make sense of the data. Per the authors, I constructed patterns and themes from the bottom up working back and forth between the data collected and themes constructed until a comprehensive set of themes were established. The authors further highlight that the investigator will leverage a

holistic data analysis through descriptions of the case and themes developed. Therefore, I followed Creswell (2014) recommendations as described below:

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis – this included interview transcription, scanning data, recording field notes, and sorting and arranging the data as appropriate.
2. Read or look at the data – this step provided the opportunity to reflect upon the data seeking a general sense of the information to garner the data's overall meaning. For example, the extraction of the tone and the general ideas the participants are conveying. Additionally, during this step, I took the opportunity to ascertain the overall depth, credibility, and use of the data. Not often, but at times some of the participants' elaboration moved outside the realm of the study and this data was not of further use. However, the overwhelming majority of the data was appropriate to continue analysis with the remaining steps.
3. Code the data – I bracketed chunks of the data gathered during data collection and organize into categories using a term or short phrase to identify.
4. Generate a description of the setting or people and categories or themes for analysis – I leveraged this step to generate themes and categorize the data to ultimately identify the major findings and voice the various perspectives found during the study.
5. Determine how the qualitative narrative will represent the description and themes – I utilized this step to discuss the findings via a narrative of the themes and subthemes identified.
6. Interpret the findings and results – I discussed the findings in terms of their alignment to the research questions, the theoretical framework, and strategies for diversity in the



corporate boardroom. I, moreover, included a discussion of identified wish list items, recommendations for future research, and my conclusions. I ended the discussion of the findings with a self-reflection having completed the study.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Hesse-Biber (2017) stated transparency illustrating the analysis of research promotes trustworthiness and credibility with the reader. To that point, Creswell (2014) recommended using multiple validation approaches to enhance the ability of the researcher to determine the validity of the findings and facilitate convincing the reader. The strategy for validity and reliability included clarification of the researcher bias and engaging in reflexivity, seek participant feedback and collaboration, and generating rich, thick descriptions of the findings where a peer review of the research process is sought (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hesse-Biber, 2017). Creswell (2014) furthermore recommended using multiple validation approaches to enhance the researcher's ability to determine the validity of the findings and facilitate convincing the reader. I, therefore, leveraged the following validation strategies as informed by Creswell (2014):

1. Triangulated different data sources of information to build coherent justification of themes with data sources determined based on the themes that emerge. I took this opportunity to utilize data collected from the interviews as well as the preliminary questionnaire and participant professional profile information available to the public.
2. Determined accuracy with member checking by reviewing the themes that emerge with the participants. Correspondence with the participants took place sharing the themes identified offering them the opportunity to provide feedback as they found appropriate.

3. Described the findings with rich, thick content. I took this opportunity to describe the interviews by giving voice to the participant's comments, insights, and positions.
4. Discussed and clarified researcher bias. I discussed my bias before closing this section.

I, furthermore, leveraged the following nine credibility checks that Butterfield et al. (2009) incorporate for ECIT:

1. Audiotaping interviews. All interviews were recorded by means of the virtual meeting technology using video and sound as well as a personal audio recorder that was used for backup. On one occasion the backup recording had to be used for transcription due to an issue with the virtual meeting technology. On another occasion the participant was traveling and the virtual meeting technology could not capture the interview sufficiently. I, again, resorted to the backup recording for this transcription.
2. Interview fidelity using a third party to verify the study protocols are followed. I used this opportunity to discuss the interview protocol with two colleagues who also gave their opinion and insight for some of the remaining steps.
3. Independent extraction of WL items where someone other than the researcher reviews the WL items for significance. My colleagues who were briefed on the study protocol were also invited to give their opinion of the WL items identified.
4. Exhaustiveness where no new WL items are identified.
5. Report participating rates of WL items (see Table 5.2).
6. Having someone other than the researcher independently judge the categorization of WL items. Again, my colleagues who were briefed on the study protocol were also invited to give their opinion for this step.

7. Use a second interview to cross-check with the participants and review the researcher interpretations. Participants were invited to a second interview as they found necessary to discuss their review of the transcript and other topics of importance to them.
8. Utilize experts with knowledge of the subject matter being researched to review the categorization of the data for usefulness, new information, and accuracy. Here, also, I leveraged my colleagues to give their opinion of how I analyzed the data for accuracy, etc.
9. Review the underlying assumptions of the study and emergent categories for theoretical alignment with the study. I completed this step as I discussed the alignment of the findings with the theoretical framework in Chapter Five.

As discussed previously, Wojnar and Swanson (2007) advises phenomenology employs bracketing to guard against the researcher's prior knowledge and personal biases from influencing the description of the phenomenon. Bracketing, the authors inform, encompasses extracting the phenomenon from its world, unraveling its complexities, and suspending all preconceptions to confront the phenomenon on its own terms. To accomplish bracketing I remained open-minded where I further listened intently, analyzed carefully, and strived to understand the participants' stories as lived and described by the participants themselves (Hesse-Biber, 2017; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

In qualitative research where the researcher is the primary data collection instrument, identifying personal values, assumptions, and biases at the beginning of the study is paramount (Creswell, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2017). To this point I have a constructivist worldview that is formed in the belief that one creates their own realities, and one's reality is based on their

perspectives, influences, and the world they live in (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miller, 2004). Even though, life experience allowed the recognition that though one may live in the same physical world as another, and thus the assumption that the same reality is experienced, realities can vary drastically. Consequently, today to better understand the other person's reality, the critical theory paradigm of the social, political, and cultural reality is often found to be in play for me (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Nolan, 2013). Additionally, I am more apt to consider the social issues of the day such as empowerment, inequality, and other concerns where one becomes interested in addressing inequities of gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc., hence to some extent I am also influenced by the participatory paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If a label is desired, the constructivist worldview is perhaps the tightest fit. But the recognition must be afforded that as we form our own realities, we are heavily influenced and impacted by the realities of the social, political, and cultural of critical theory as well as the intersectionality of race, class, gender, and other factors of the participatory that make us unique but one in a group at the same time.

I have a daughter who is the stimulus for this focus on women in leadership. Additionally, I very much desire my daughter to have the same opportunities as my son and others without being negatively affected by gender or other traits. Furthermore, I find that the women of my family including my wife, mother, aunts, grandmother and my grandmother's sisters and sisters-in-law who make up my great aunts have worked much harder in many cases to realize their success, were and are all very capable women, some who received advanced degrees and training beyond the levels that the men in the family achieved, and who at times had to stand in the shadow cast by men as a result of tradition and society. I, moreover, have female friends and colleagues who have elaborated on experiences where they feel they have been negatively affected by their gender and race. My family and community history, from

immigrating to America in the early 1700s to current day, also has instances of biases involving race and gender as if woven into the fabric of life, this fabric facilitating a complex dynamic of the desired and undesired elements of human nature and society. Finally, there is a business motivation that I find to address the subject matter of this research.

### **3.9 Summary**

Chapter 3 discussed the qualitative phenomenological research design to address the lived experiences of both African American and European American members of boards of directors in regards to their experiences for both the pathway to boards as well as the board experience itself. This chapter elaborated regarding the qualitative research methodology and the phenomenological approach for the study, the researcher's role, data collection and analysis, and the interview process as well as the trustworthiness and credibility for the study.

## CHAPTER 4

### Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the dynamics surrounding the path and obstacles to better enable the African American woman to translate her *performance* into a workplace *image* to gain the necessary *exposure* (PIE) to further facilitate a matrix of opportunity to realize her talents in the corporate boardroom (Coleman, 2010; Thierry, 2016; Weaver, 2015). This study, therefore, sought insights into the challenges and opportunities for African American women to gain access to the corporate boardroom. These insights were pursued by presenting the same bank of interview questions to a group of corporate board directors, individually, for organizations listed on publicly traded stock exchanges. The assembly of corporate board directors was comprised of an equal representation of African American women, European American women, and European American men offering all the opportunity to elaborate upon their corporate board experiences, and particularly as those experiences relate to African American women reaching the corporate boardroom. This chapter presents the findings for the research questions that emerged from data gathered from the study participants and additional data sources. This chapter is organized first with an overview of the themes that emerged, a presentation of the participant profiles, and finally an elaboration on the themes and subthemes.

#### 4.1 Emerging Themes

The study participants were asked open-ended questions allowing elaboration as they wished regarding the questions asked. The responses ranged from short, simple replies to elaborate descriptions and stories depending on both the question asked and the participant. A question that invoked a short, simple reply by one participant may invoke an elaborate description by another, and vice versa. Responses varied by a multitude of factors including

gender, race, years of experience as a corporate board director, the companies served as a board director, and the number of boards served on. Table 4.1 presents the themes and subthemes that emerged along with the applicability to the participants as recorded during data analysis. As Table 4.1 shows, the themes of *Boardroom Composition Drivers*, *Diversity Drivers*, and *Gender Dynamics* emerged with their associated subthemes. These themes and subthemes are later discussed with rich, thick descriptions based on the participant interviews and their description of experiences.

Table 4.1

*Emerging Themes and Subthemes*

Participant	Boardroom Composition Drivers			Diversity Drivers			Gender Dynamics	
	(A)	(B)	(C)	(D)	(E)	(F)	(G)	(H)
Faith	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Hope	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Grace	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Joy	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Emma	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kelly	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Angie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jaimie	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Victor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Olin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Leon	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Carlin	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

(A): Influencers

(B): Skills vs Needs

(C): Networks &amp; Networking

(D): Business Case

(E): Board Intentionality

(F): Diversity Drives Diversity

(G): Dynamics for Women

(H): Dynamics for AAW

## 4.2 Participant Profiles

Twelve corporate board directors were individually interviewed for this study. This group of participants comprised of four African American women directors, four European American women directors, and four European American men directors. Inclusionary criteria required at a minimum that each participant currently serves, or has served within the last five years, on one or

more corporate boards of directors for organizations listed on a publicly-traded stock exchange. All participants are currently serving as directors on one or more corporate boards. Though there was no required director expertise, the sought expertise in order of preference was board chair, CEO, experience on a nominating committee, or other board expertise. While all directors are believed to reside within the United States, there was no specific geographical region that was sought for either participants or the companies that they serve on the board for. Additionally, there was no specific industry that was sought for the study nor were there criteria such as Fortune rank, market cap, number of employees, stock exchange, or other company-specific criteria used to select participants.

Table 4.2

*Summary of Participant Recruitment*

Participant	Research's Professional Network	Recommend by Researcher's Professional Network	Recommended by Participant
Faith	X		
Hope	X		
Grace			Leon
Joy	X		
Emma		X	
Kelly		X	
Angie		X	
Jaimie		X	
Victor	X		
Olin	X		
Leon	X		
Carlin			Olin

To arrive at the 12 corporate board directors who participated in the study the protocol used the invitation to participate shown in Appendix C.1. The researcher's professional network realized six participants. Four participants were recommended by a colleague of the researcher's



professional network. Two participants were recommended by directors who participated in the study. See Table 4.2 for a summary of the participant recruitment.

Participants were assured that I would demonstrate anonymity and confidentiality to protect their identities. Therefore, participants are identified using pseudonyms stemming mostly from names originating from my family members of various generations. The inspirational names Faith, Hope, Grace, and Joy represent the four African American women directors of the study. Emma, Kelly, Angie, and Jaimie represent the four European American women directors in the study. Victor, Olin, Leon, and Carlin represent the four European American men directors.

### **4.3 Theme of Boardroom Composition Drivers**

The corporate board director selection process varied amongst the participants. The participants also expanded upon how the process can vary by board. Victor in particular spoke of how no two boards are identical where “what works for one board may not work for another.” Hope further said the selection process “just depends on the skills of the current board and the skills of the candidate” coupled with the company’s strategy over its foreseeable horizon. Among the dynamics involved are the board and company culture and how the candidate may or may not be a fit. Additional considerations can include the quality of questions the candidate may ask and if the candidate demonstrates knowledge of board governance versus company operations. Finally, concerns about disrupting the chemistry amongst directors as well as a host of other considerations are all a part of the dynamics for the corporate board director selection process.

**4.3.1 Influencers.** The participant interviews identified *influencers* in the director selection process among the various participant experiences. These influencers along with several additional factors driving corporate board composition are further discussed below.

**4.3.1.1 Nomination and governance.** The nomination and governance (nom/gov) committee was generally found as driving the process led by the nom/gov chair. Depending on the board and the particular time for the company, the CEO and board chair will have varying influence in the director selection process. In other words, what a board does during one director selection event may vary from the next event based on factors particular to the company and time in question. When new candidates are considered, the current directors on the board will submit their candidate recommendations. One participant noted that management may also be given the opportunity to make recommendations. Additionally, outside search firms may be invited to assist. Their role in the director selection process and the specific instructions will vary amongst companies and again, the particular time for the company.

Participants commented about diversity driving richer dialog and how the diversity of expertise, gender, and ethnicity is important to allow the board composition to align with the customer base. Boards, additionally, may have diversity policies requiring a diverse slate and that lens may include various characteristics including age. Three participants specifically discussed that their nom/gov committee would be intentional in advising search firms to include diversity. While diversity itself is not always defined for a search, Grace explained that as the nom/gov chair she would explicitly require African American candidates. Carlin, additionally, advised his board's process would require search firms to also include African American women along with Hispanic women and men candidates.

Jaimie explained that "the best way to get on a corporate board is through the people who make the decisions." Among some of the first to influence those decisions are the nom/gov committee chair and the CEO, who Jaimie found to be the key decision-makers for board opportunities. Additionally, the nom/gov committee decides who makes the shortlist for the

board as a whole to review. Depending on the board and the particular time for the company, the board chair, along with the CEO, will also have varying influence on what candidates make the shortlist. One seeking a board opportunity must find a way to get to know these decision-makers as these directors have to know a potential candidate as well as the candidate's skillsets before deciding on recommendations. As Grace commented, "very few people will recommend or select someone they don't know or that does not come recommended." To understand how a candidate can aid the board, obviously intentional networking is required by all parties.

In deciding who makes the shortlist, all participants discussed their board going forward would use a skills matrix in some fashion, whether formally or otherwise. Considerations for the skills matrix include the overall demographics of the board as well as skills that candidates possess with a particular focus on those skills that the board does not currently have. Board strategy and the current horizon will also help to identify gaps that are essential to be closed. In short, needs and skills based on business objectives and strategy are the driving considerations. As Hope elaborated, the focus is on "board composition and the special skills that a person may bring to the table that they don't already have" where *they* are the board in question. Diversity considerations such as ethnicity and gender are less of a factor unless specifically identified as a need for a gap that must be filled.

**4.3.1.2 Most influential factors for the first-time director.** One's network was found to be a significant influential factor for the first-time director. While credentials are established to be extremely important, Faith elaborated that "the opportunities that I have gotten have been because I was introduced to people who then recommended me for another opportunity." Joy noted also that "you have to be part of the right network so you get the call." Accomplishments, credentials, and networks are all dynamics to be mindful of with networking repeatedly

characterized as *hard work*, particularly for those with a full-time job due to the time commitment required to successfully network. However, networks were also found by some participants as becoming somewhat less influential, although still important.

The participants agreed that board composition and how a candidate's skills matched up to the gaps in needs to be of keen influence. Skills for the gaps in needs are highly influential, particularly contemporary skills such as cybersecurity and other expertise in the digital space. Digital skills mainly were recognized as becoming more and more of high importance with expertise noted as often found in the *younger generation*. Carlin further said that "for a new director it's somebody coming in that does not replicate what's already on the board."

Intellectual maturity, also, is found imperative as is the need for new directors to "feel comfortable sharing their perspective even if they are the lone voice in the room," shared Olin. The first-time director also wants to ensure they clearly communicate an understanding of the difference in roles and responsibility between management and the board of directors.

**4.3.1.3 Most advantageous career path to the boardroom.** When considering the most advantageous career path to the corporate boardroom, the discussion ranged from the often sought CEO expertise to financial, accounting, and operations expertise commonly found in CFOs and COOs. Expertise in mergers and acquisitions to the areas of human resources, marketing, and the technology and digital space commonly found in the various roles of the C-suite and senior VPs positions were also considerations. To that point, Leon commented that while there are the typical paths as articulated above, in regards to the most advantageous career path he said "I don't think there is one." Jaimie echoed that sentiment in sharing that no matter who they are and what demographic, "you need to have a breadth of business knowledge and a breadth of business experiences."

Joy discussed the need to rise through the ranks to obtain an executive-level status, and there a P&L role. She elaborated that "if you don't have board experience, you need to have proven corporate experience." Grace summed it up well when she said in regards to credentials and network that "one cannot work without the other." In short, networks, including search firms in the network, will get one considered for the board but expertise, credentials, and other considerations will get the seat. The importance of which skill sets, credentials, and other considerations are all based on current board composition and the identified needs and gaps.

**4.3.1.4 Role of the board chair & the CEO.** Both the board chair and the CEO were described to play very instrumental roles in corporate board composition and start the diversity conversation. Faith, however, felt greater importance to be that the CEO recognized diversity to be significant. She felt that the CEO sets the tone for diversity and inclusion to be imperative to the organization. The CEO also was distinguished as the driving influence given the CEO's *frontline* position. Joy noted that she obtained her board seat because a CEO, and there a European American male, "called and said I think it should be you." Diversity in the boardroom, a participant articulated, should begin with a policy regarding diversity recruitment overall for the company and the CEO demanding that board recruitment also complies with the policy.

Talent and board director cultivation were described to be an important part of both the CEO and the board chair's responsibility. Joy elaborated that "if you're thinking about board director cultivation then you've got to be thinking about diversity and equity." Leon found that the CEO and the chair had "better be in lockstep with each other and that they have the same priorities and purpose." The chair was described as having the responsibility to ensure that blatant or hidden resistance to diverse candidates is not a factor as well as drive the importance for diversity to have a voice in the boardroom. Carlin, however, felt the chair instead of the CEO

set the tone for establishing the need for gender diversity on the board. To safeguard that all voices are heard, Carlin went further to say that the board chair has the responsibility to ensure that "women on the board are considered equals and in all ways are peers with the men on the board" avoiding any tendency to otherwise discount the women's contributions. The CEO can be the most helpful for diversity in the boardroom, Carlin commented, by addressing the pipeline and ensuring that future board candidates get the cross-experience necessary to make for better board candidates.

Participants found the tone of the chair and the CEO to be of critical importance in expressing and demonstrating intentionality given their key influence on the candidate pool. Hope advised that both the chair and the CEO must not only help surface opportunities but also encourage and "challenge the composition of the board." She also found they must "be savvy to understand the benefits of having diverse women on boards." Kelly, additionally, shared that for a board considering an African American woman, "if you don't have the support of the chair and the CEO, it's not going to happen. They have got to see that this is important."

Jaimie put it more bluntly in saying that the board chair and the CEO "have got to have some guts. They've got to go and say I want an African American woman on my board. They've got to make it as a mandate." She further elaborated that in using search firms African American women "won't be part of the slate unless you tell the headhunter to do it."

While Victor agreed that the chair and the CEO can be very influential, he went further suggesting that the board as a whole is the dominant factor influencing board composition and diversity. Olin echoed that position saying "we're all just part of the process." Olin, also, recognized that the board chair, CEO, and the chair of the nom/gov committee would be the

group "refining the criteria, have the conversations with the recruiter, reviewing the initial slate, and then conducting the rounds of interviews."

**4.3.1.5 Influence of African American women directors.** Regarding the influence of African American women in corporate board composition, Joy shared that "I actually don't know yet that it has been." She further elaborated that "there is just not enough of us to have the kind of impact and scale that you would see among White men who have great networks." Grace aligned with Joy and suggested that "if African American women had influence we would see different compositions in the world than we do today." Hope, also, noted that "anytime something is by itself it has less power" and she found that women in general had less influence than men.

Faith recognized that African Americans were "probably the ones most likely to bring other African Americans to boards." Kelly echoed that sentiment in saying "I would think that an African American on a board would be very focused on diversity and working to help increase diversity for boards." To that point, Joy commented that any leverage that she has she continues to promote diversity. She also commented that the African American woman's voice has the potential in some circumstances "to be more influential because there're so few."

Both female and male participants expressed similar sentiments regarding the challenges for gender diversity in the boardroom with some noting that the problem is typically a candidate pool issue. However, two of the male participants commented that they did not see any difference in influence for African American women as compared to other directors. African American women directors, they voiced, are part of the conversation regarding what a board is looking for in the next director.

**4.3.1.6 Influence of European American women directors.** Faith noted that she felt European American women were an asset for gender diversity. She further commented that European American women “have a vested interest in seeing more women on boards and they tend more to nominate or look for fellow women that they can bring to the board.” Grace, also, recognized the open-mindedness of European American women to other women board candidates and acknowledged the added burden for women, due to gender, to ensure that any recommendation will not fail. Thus, Grace found European American women to be “much more cautious in whom and what they recommend.”

Joy expressed a similar sentiment when she questioned how comfortable women are in recruiting other women. She further questioned whether “White women sitting on boards have created more opportunities for White women or women of color to get to board levels?” She felt the opportunities only presented themselves for European American women to have an impact when “White men say so.” Joy further acknowledged that “White women can be influencers” but she doubted whether “they are in positions with the right leverage to scale their impact.” Aligning that women have less influence than men on boards, Hope quantified the European American woman’s influence, in her opinion, to be six on a scale of zero (lowest) to 10.

The European American women participants generally aligned in finding that the European American woman’s influence tends to be less due to fewer numbers. Nevertheless, they found the influence to be increasing and having more importance with a keen focus to promote more diverse boards. Jaimie added that the influence depends on the woman. She further elaborated that “women in the past, both in corporate management and at the board level, have some sort of attitude that I made it on my own. I’m not going to help any other woman,” i.e.



the *Queen Bee* dynamic that Faith acknowledged. However, Jaimie recognized that sentiment is changing and she has assisted other women in reaching the boardroom.

Many of the men participants found no difference for women in the boardroom. They shared that women directors take part in the conversations having equal opportunity and thus similar influence to European American men in director selection. European American women, however, were found to promote change and to be a positive influence not only for European American women but diversity overall on boards.

**4.3.1.7 Influence of European American men directors.** The general consensus was the influence of European American men directors is of premier importance because they are the dominant group typically present on corporate boards. Joy found European American men to “influence everything in corporate America” because, as she simply stated, “they’re the ones in power.” Joy further elaborated that “White women or Black women get to the top because White men say so.” She noted, also, that “the people I interviewed with at the time were all White men. So I’m here in my board seat because White men said so. They own the power structure.”

Faith shared that European American men directors “influence not only by their network and the people they bring in but the culture they create.” To illuminate that point more Faith additionally stated:

I think the culture in the boardroom is really important and I think that White males, for as long as they are the majority in the boardroom, they are going to be the ones that dictate that. What’s interesting is when they open the door to somebody else, if they are willing to change their approach, and willing to see their culture shift a little to something more inclusive, they're in a good place.

Leon also found European American men directors to be highly influential and indicated that when handled appropriately he expected the influence of European American men to be positive. Emma felt that “there are more men showing up who I think never really had a problem having more women on the board. It just never occurred to them to ask for one.”

Hope further quantified European American men’s influence as 10 on a scale of zero to 10. To that point, Joy elaborated that “a White male picked me, and honestly it was a non-event.” Otherwise, Joy shared, that she and many other African American women would not be exposed to corporate board opportunities if not for the influence of European American men directors and European American men board influencers. She further added that “we need to demystify the process and the concept for Black women.”

European American men directors were found by most participants to be the primary influence and dominant in the corporate boardroom because of their numbers on boards. This also was seen to promote European American men as board committee chairs, which by itself drives influence. Nevertheless, some participants recognized the continued march for gender diversity to realize a shift. Also, what was understood to be recognition of the momentum for social change given the death of George Floyd and the ensuing demonstrations, several participants noted that the world was unsettled and changing. Joy, in particular, commented that since George Floyd “there has been a surge in demand for Black female directors, in particular.”

However, all participants didn’t align with the consensus on the European American man’s influence in the boardroom finding that there is no difference. Olin, in particular, commented that “once you’re a director you have the same standing as any other director, without regard to ethnicity, gender, background – you’ve got an equal vote to everybody else.”

**4.3.1.8 Influence of directors overall.** Faith commented that each director must look at their networks and if their networks don't have women or African American women, and the proposed slate of new director candidates is not diverse, then each director must be courageous enough to bring that realization to the forefront. Hope added that the role of all directors is similar to that of the chair and the CEO in that the board as a whole decides if they want to bring a woman of color to the board. She further added that the board has "a more impactful role together than the chair does alone when it comes to bringing diverse board members" to the boardroom. Victor aligned with that sentiment in noting that the process is collaborative and where directors are influential is their network. In the examples that he shared about bringing on new candidates, Victor noted that rather than the CEO, his fellow directors brought forward the new talent. Joy shared, additionally, how the influence of the other directors on the board was "absolutely critical" because they also, she said, "have to say yes."

Grace discussed a European American male board colleague that remarked how he would be highly disappointed if their board did not retain the current gender component of at least 44% women. She further explained that there was a good opportunity that her board could increase the representation of women. Moreover, she elaborated that a European American male's overt support facilitated other European American men directors to be more accepting of gender diversity. Although some of the participants alluded that all directors have the same influence, Grace went further to say that "most European American males have a great deal of influence on other European American males, and if they make up the majority of the board they have a great deal of influence on the outcome."

While participants commented that the other directors must be open to the concept of increased diversity, Emma observed that European American men directors who have daughters

were much more open to women board members. She described it to be similar to one having an epiphany. She further commented, "before it was like we've been doing it the same way and it works fine so let's just not change it, and there was no reason to." Kelly, also, commented on how she found the role of other directors to be critical as if there is one director, and particularly on a small board, that is strongly opposed to new diversity, she said "I think it is going to be hard." Angie added that "it's really all about breaking paradigms" and that "we really take our role as directors very, very seriously and the importance of embracing diversity." She further added that "all of the directors have a role. They've got to take it seriously that they're accountable for ensuring that the board is equipped to make the best decisions for the company and diversity is part of that." Jaimie suggested that "it's becoming on all of the board members to bring to light good candidates." Leon went on to say that "once they're selected, the other directors have a role in making sure that new director is comfortable in the group."

**4.3.1.9 Influence of critical mass.** In discussing the influence of critical mass and the number to achieve critical mass, all participants commented in some fashion how critical mass was somewhat board-specific given the size of the board. Hope noted that "one is too few, two they play off of each other" but that three or four promote the sense of a critical mass. For smaller boards the consensus was at least two and as boards grew in size at least three. Two of the women participants were after 50 percent parity, although one, in particular, commented that 30 percent was more practical. Kelly felt "the number where it doesn't appear to be a quota."

Faith stated that the more women there are in the boardroom the more comfortable men will be with women at the table. She further expected that once the conversation moves beyond gender and diversity that the focus is on the best director. She also suggested that even though

there may be a critical mass of women that “those women will also share different perspectives. We’re not all going to think alike. We’re not all going to have the same approach.”

Hope described how a critical mass of women on the board is highly influential. Women as board members, she further added, have visibility and the presence to not only influence the rank and file employee but also the company’s senior leadership team. She alluded, also, that a critical mass will enhance networks and provides more opportunities for women. Kelly aligned with that sentiment in saying that “the more you have of men, women, African Americans, anything, you’re going to find there is more opportunity for them.” Hope, additionally, articulated that women board members are one of many role models in corporate America that are speaking and influencing other women to join boards.

Grace commented that she was not necessarily interested in a given number, although she recognized the difficulty “to do anything without numbers.” She centered her rationale on the reasoning that “numbers then become an out for saying you only got that because we needed to fulfill a number.” She found a higher importance as a board in being representative of “customers, community, and your strategic goals.” Though she was not comfortable focusing on whether or not a board had a critical mass, Grace noted that “definitely there is something wrong if all you have is European American males” on the board.

Joy discussed how critical mass, what she felt to be 30 percent, perhaps 40 percent of women have “real opportunity for impact because the more of us there are the broader the network is and the more comfort” exists amongst other directors. She further elaborated that with critical mass, ideally, there will have “been enough male directors who’ve seen women in action and can vouch for what contributions women make to boards.”

Angie explained that when you're the sole woman on a board that there is more difficulty to impress upon your fellow European American male counterparts the value of diversity. She went on to say where there are two or three there will be more awareness. She further agreed with her fellow participants that "the more women you have the more opportunities are opened up for other women." Angie, additionally, felt that successful women in the boardroom, and African American women specifically, abates male board members' resistance to the same diversity facilitating a better opportunity for men board members to grasp the benefit generated with diversity. To that point, Jaimie found that the more women there are in a boardroom that "those White males that make up the rest of the board, they now feel comfortable. They know it's ok to have another woman."

While Jaimie recognized that a critical mass is a factor, she found the reality of the status lacking nationwide. She agreed that three women on a board are the tipping point to reap the benefits of gender diversity. She also anticipated that a critical mass would realize women that are less concerned about being "on their best behavior," who are not worried about saying something wrong, and who also are not worried about being engaged verbally. With three or more Jaimie found that women will feel comfortable to voice their positions and add value by doing what's right and what's needed.

Olin agreed with the sentiment above where a greater population in the boardroom would promote more of the same. Carlin, additionally, stated that a critical mass of women is important to achieve "the broad range of experience" and eliminate "the excuse of I can't find somebody that meets my criteria." Carlin, also, recognized that for African American women achieving critical mass with that demographic alone will be difficult due to being a subset of women within America.

**4.3.2 Importance of networks and networking.** In general, the participants found network and networking to be important, but of course to varying degrees. Networks were described to be *number 1*, critical, vital, and of the utmost importance, particularly for first-time board members. Networks “will get the door opened for someone to talk to you,” Angie elaborated. Although networks alone do not assure a board position, Faith said “I don’t think you get a board seat without a healthy network.” Hope, additionally, expressed “having a network allows you to be in places that you’ve never gone to; know people that you’ve never met,” which can be of supreme importance as board opportunities are often word of mouth, even when search firms are involved.

Jaimie commented “the best way to get on a corporate board is through the people who make the decisions who are the CEO and the chair of the nominating and governance committee,” thus these directors are vital for one’s network. Grace, also, commented that one doesn’t increase their network by only associating with people like oneself but rather by expanding one’s own personal diversity. She finds that to be imperative having a distinctly positive impact on her opportunities. Networks were also found to bring trust which is critical for one’s board network. Recruiters, furthermore, are found important for one’s network because if not personally known associates helping one navigate the board opportunities, participants suggested search firms are factors. Participants, moreover, discussed how one may be invited to a board and never realize they were being considered until contacted to interview, thus who one knows and, as importantly, who someone is known by are paramount.

Participants commented on how women don’t network as well, tend to downplay networking, or don’t work as hard developing their networks leaving men more accomplished in this space. The observation was made that women trying to reach the boardroom tend to be busy

with a heavy focus on doing their current jobs, thus fall short of maintaining successful networks. Victor noted “everybody’s got to learn how to network” and is not alone in commenting that networking is difficult and hard work. Jaimie, moreover, shared that networking has “to be very purposeful” and aligned with her colleagues in saying that many do not know how to network well. She advised that people have to “walk the talk” and “bring your A-game.” In being purposeful, Jaimie advised creating a plan with the intent to network with individuals that have board influence. These individuals will also include regulators and auditors for publicly traded companies. Of course, she recommended that one’s network include the key actors previously identified: CEOs, chairs of nom/gov committees, and directors on nom/gov committees.

Sponsors and advocates, or champions, for one’s network, were, additionally, found by all participants to be important. Many participants concurred with Hope’s assessment that “board members trust board members. So if you’re on a board, and you sponsor or advocate for somebody, chances are that person will be highly regarded and highly considered.” Directors or others with credibility and legitimacy can have the utmost influence when they vouch for a board candidate. Thus, sponsors and advocates are critical for one’s strategic plan for boardroom access. Of course, Hope shared that just because someone is highly recommended that “it is not a done deal because they have to fit the culture, their experience has to match the gaps.”

Olin noted though networks are important, he found one’s network becoming less important going forward. He anchored this position with the premise that to achieve diversity of thought in a boardroom if one looks only to their network they will surround themselves with people who think the same. Thus, Olin believed that “you’ve got to use different channels, sources, methods, to surface candidates with diverse backgrounds, thoughts, gender, (and)



ethnicity.” Leon added that “I think networks are important once you define the network more narrowly as knowing people within a certain scope that meets certain qualifications that we’re looking for.” He further added “we specifically don’t just go looking for somebody who somebody knows that had a successful career. If they don’t fill a void for us then network isn’t really that much at all.”

**4.3.3 Skills versus needs.** In some fashion, whether a formal or informal process, all participants referenced a skills matrix and a candidate’s skills, credentials, and other demographics compared to the current board strategy and the identified gaps in needs as being of the utmost importance in selecting a new director. Table 4.3 identifies the skill, credential, or areas of expertise that were often noted during data analysis of the participant interviews. CEO and Chief Financial Officer/CFO were the most referenced executive credentials.

Table 4.3

*Skills, Credentials, & Areas of Expertise Discussed During Participant Interviews*

<b>Skill/Credential/Area of Expertise</b>
Chair of Board of Directors
Chair of Nom/Gov Committee
Chief Executive Officer / CEO
Chief Accounting Officer / CAO
Chief Diversity Officer / CDO
Chief Financial Officer / CFO
Chief Human Resource Officer / CHRO
Chief Information Officer / CIO
Chief Marketing Officer / CMO
Chief Operations Officer / COO
Certified Public Accountant / CPA
C-suite
Cyber / Cybersecurity / Digital
Finance / Financial Expert / Accounting
Human Capital / Human Resources
M&A / Mergers & Acquisitions
Senior VP / VP

Faith noticed that “a lot of boards that are looking for board members will, as their first choice, say they want a sitting or former CEO or CFO.” She additionally shared that because the reality for publicly traded companies, or companies of a certain size, is that women are less likely have the C-suite opportunities, and African American women even less, that it stands to reason that African American women are being excluded simply from the lack of pipeline and promotion opportunities. She further noted that it takes a savvy board with a savvy nominating and search process to look below the C-suite to find someone well suited for the board. She was among the participants that found, given there are fewer women who are CFO and CEO, or that reach the C-suite in general, that there are fewer women considered for board directorships realizing more males in the boardroom.

Emerging from the interviews was the recognition of the enormous competition for talent amongst companies. Furthermore, given the current dynamics of the “gig economy and the millennials” where there is a high turnover in talent and staying at a company for one’s career is less likely, Hope found that having a human resource expert in talent acquisition and management is a growing skill for the boardroom. She also shared that a customer experience officer to “focus on driving customer stickiness and customer eccentricity” can be relevant expertise for the boardroom. Hope explained that what one may call “fairness or equitable distribution of talent” does not have a place in the boardroom because selecting a board member is about the business and its strategy and objectives. Thus, she ultimately felt that the candidate’s skillset and board needs are the driving consideration for who that next board director should be.

Emma discussed that for women seeking a board opportunity that “it matters what your credentials look like. It matters what your expertise is. It matters what you did in your past.” She elaborated that when a board comes to her looking for female talent of a specific C-suite

credential such as CFO or CEO they will often say a woman could not be found. She noted, "that's because when you look at statistics in the Fortune 500 companies when you look at what the percentage of women is, it is 4.7%." She went on to say that "there are more men named John who are CEO in Fortune 500 companies than there are women." Thus, finding a woman with C-suite credentials, particularly CEO, is difficult. Emma, however, suggested boards should focus less on the title and "go look for somebody based on the skillset," and an abundance of board-ready women will be found. She further placed responsibility on women themselves to demonstrate an executive presence by learning how to speak with an "executive vernacular" eliminating barriers to entry for male board members "because I am speaking your language."

Kelly explained that the largest obstacle that she created for herself was not preparing earlier in her career before looking to land a board opportunity. She recognized after the fact the hard work to build a network and talk to people about board opportunities. She explained that early in the process one should determine the skills that they have and that they are missing because skills are of the utmost importance for the boardroom.

Olin, also, advised board composition "never starts with gender or color. It starts with skills and capabilities," and using a skills matrix to identify the skills and capabilities needed for the board at that given point in time. He further added that "certainly you want to cast a wide net and make sure you've got gender and race diversity as part of that process but you don't start with diversity." He went on to say that "ideally you like to have it all but it doesn't always work out that way" as your fiduciary responsibility to shareholders has the board starting with "skills and qualifications."

Leon agreed in saying that for new director candidates "the most important factors for us are do their skillsets match the skillsets we're looking for." Leon further noted that having a

CEO, CFO, and other experts can be important but ultimately the question is "what skillsets do we need on the board that we don't think we have adequate or that we're going to be retiring in a year or two? How do we go about finding someone with those skill sets?" He went on to say knowing someone can get you "in the front door but if you don't make either a good impression or you don't have the right skillsets or you don't seem to have the right mindset for the board," that open door isn't going to be of any use.

#### **4.4 Theme of Diversity Drivers**

Faith commented that "a welcoming boardroom is likely representing a company that values its human capital and values the contribution that everybody's going to make." Faith went on to say that this type of company should excel in their ability to develop and promote talent regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender.

Although mixed feelings emerged regarding the role of legislation, this reality was discussed as being a driver to some extent for corporate board diversity. Organizations such as Institutional Shareholder Services (ISS) and other entities that have an interest in corporate board diversity influence companies to disclose not only gender but also the ethnicity of corporate board directors, thus to some extent drivers for diversity. Participants, also, recognize the gap in the board's current configuration as compared to the needs to carry out the organization's current strategy to heavily influence corporate board composition and drive diversity.

Various organizations such as the National Association of Corporate Directors (NACD), university programs, and other initiatives that teach about the experience of being a director further promote the ascension of women to the boardroom. Hope, moreover, put the responsibility on those looking for new director candidates to know the candidates and "go where they are." To help solve this opportunity, firms exist that specialize in finding diverse

candidates. Emma commented, "we're seeing more organizations being formed around how to get more women on boards."

Finally, Grace and Kelly, in particular, recognized that the reality of COVID is teaching that the connectivity tools of the modern era have reduced, if not eliminated in many cases, the necessity to be *in the office* without the flexibility to be elsewhere. This reality, furthermore, is found to promote opportunities for women due to the dynamics and needed suppleness that are more unique to women. For example, Grace commented that "women will have less of a need to make sure they leave work in time enough to pick up the kids."

**4.4.1 Business case.** When asked about the business case for gender diversity in the boardroom, Faith stated that the woman's "approach to strategy, to risk, to how you advise, how you develop human capital is different." The interviews elevated how women bring a level of empathy to the boardroom that men lack facilitating collaboration rather than detrimental competitiveness. Faith, also, finds that men can exhibit their best behavior in the presence of a woman and has been thanked by a board colleague "for the calming influence" that she brings to the space. Hope, additionally, shared that "women understand and think more holistically," are more thoughtful, and women's decision-making realizes fewer risks promoting higher market cap for companies. In short, she said the business case is a stronger corporate performance with board diversity.

Grace further noted that the business case for women in the boardroom is the avoidance of groupthink. She commented:

Talk about diversity, diversity of thought, just having women, African Americans, Latinos, Asians, you're going to have a diversity of thought. It doesn't mean that diversity has to be a White male that came from Colorado versus one that came from New York.

Diversity of thought often is passed to a select group of people in terms of ethnicity. It's going to be outside of that to get true diversity of thought.

The interviews highlighted the consensus, particularly among the women participants, that an abundance of data exists to support differences in risk appetite and better decision-making for diverse boards. Participants discussed the business case to include how diversity enriches and enhances strategy formulation. This also facilitates a broader array of perspectives and decision-making leading to healthier outcomes. Moreover, the different lens that the diversity of women offers a board was elaborated upon. Emma said, "I can have the same background as my male counterpart, but the way we look at things can be very different."

Women are found to be planners and take a broader, more long-term view where a woman's relational nature gives the advantage to have more empathy and a better understanding of the workforce. Also discussed was how women realize better compliance and fewer instances of fraud. Ultimately, Emma found results reinforce the position that "more women on boards improve the return on investment or the return for the company, and that's the proof in the pudding," she said. Jaimie felt that the case is "overwhelming of having a woman on the board, whether she's Black or White, is going to be better for the shareholders."

With women comprising over half of the population in the United States, Victor elaborated that this is "an untapped population of highly experienced people." He further aligned with the comments above by sharing that women provide the "benefit of a different perspective and view." He also found, however, that the discussion of women in the boardroom and how women think "to be a little sexist." Victor said, "quite frankly these are highly accomplished individuals; they happen to be women and they just bring that skill set into the boardroom and their experiences to the conversation."

Olin articulated the reason for women in the boardroom “is diversity of thought and experience. You can’t replace someone else’s experiences in the workplace and their path to where they have got. There is really no argument against in my opinion.” Also finding the business case for women in the boardroom to be compelling, Leon additionally discussed the cooperation amongst women to be better setting a completely different tone allowing his fellow board members to “come down to more of a logic level instead of an emotional level.” He further added that “I think what that does for a board is makes the thought process and evaluation process more thorough.”

In agreeing that the business case for women in the boardroom is for the *thought*, Carlin, additionally, shared “we in business are serving multitudes of women, different ethnicities, and we don’t know how to do that right if we don’t have the input on how people think, how people interpret, how people act.” Carlin, also, said “we need that representation in order to make the right decisions. It’s just basic business.”

**4.4.2 Board intentionality.** The conversations with the various participants identified the need for board intentionality regarding diversity. Hope noted that “the board needs to show interest.” Faith further commented:

I think that when European (American) males can appreciate that race is an important additional layer, that gender is important. Some companies will say we only consider gender. We don't care about race. Sometimes those companies are global companies who are more focused on what the requirements may be in Europe, for example. I think the whole George Floyd murder and where we are in the United States right now is putting a laser focus on race as being important again because I believe that initially when diversity was an issue, it was African Americans who were at the forefront of making that

important. They made some strides and then diversity and inclusion expanded, which is good because you want to have a lot of different qualities, but I think African Americans have gotten kind of lost in the shuffle. So when you look at a company like JP Morgan Chase and Jamie Diamond being very specific, very intentional about African American leadership, it's important to go back and capture that because I think that was being lost. Now we have an opportunity to regain some ground there and I just think that the African American voice, it's important. It's distinct and it's important, as important as any other voice or other group sitting at the table.

Grace added that “we have work to do with respect to below the board – executive levels, leadership council, and so on – we have work to do.” She further said organizations have to, despite any reluctance, “create optics on true metrics because that begins to become intentional.” Joy also noted, like anything in business, boards and companies have to establish targets and have a vision that commits to diversity within a given timeframe. Grace went on to say that “you want to be very careful. It should not be goals and it should not be affirmative action.” She further recommends creating the pipeline where employees can have opportunities and be promoted to avoid someone being at a company for years and never considered for opportunities that lead to the boardroom.

Although she thinks the issue can be company-specific, Kelly found diversity is influenced largely by a societal effort that insists on workforce diversity extending beyond the more entry-level positions throughout to the top-levels of organizations. She further explained that “I think the best strategies come from the boards themselves. That would be when a board acknowledges that they need diversity. They need to have that diversity in a variety of ways.”



Angie elaborated that “we really take our role as directors very, very seriously, and the importance of embracing diversity.” She further alluded that all directors are accountable to ensure the best board decision-making capability and diversity plays an integral role in facilitating that capability. Victor, moreover, advised that “any strategy needs to be incorporated into the board selection process at the director level.” Leon explained diversifying his organization's board:

Once we began to transition the board, we had to focus on can we find the candidates who have diversity elements to them and are going to be great board members. I do think if you’re coming from an all-White male board you’ve got to be honest about it and say we’re going to have to focus more on diversity. Once you get to a diversity balanced board two things happen. You don’t have to necessarily recruit so much on specific diversity, and that’s partly because better candidates come to you because they know of your work and they know diversity is a key element and they know that a lot of the diverse board members have excelled.

**4.4.2.1 Strategies.** Discussing strategies to influence board diversity, Faith said “I think companies have to be intentional, have to broaden their networks, (and) have to connect with organizations that are bringing together cohorts of board-ready women.” This is needed she said so that predominately all-male boards without women in their networks that are looking for women can connect with an organization to help them source the need. Faith further added that “it’s being willing to look beyond your network and find organizations that can help you do that.”

Joy found the strategy to influence more board diversity is essentially the same as any other corporate strategy. “You have to articulate a need or an objective or a mission; a vision

around it like you do with anything else when you're trying to make money and be really tactical about how," she commented. She further elaborated that the formula is known and that is to build a pipeline with training, development, and sponsors. She went on to say this is fairly straightforward in that the first need is the simple desire and commitment.

Carlin aligned with Joy in sharing that "the key strategy is filling the pipeline" and there ensuring women are able to connect to and obtain experience with other companies. He also said another strategy, particularly given the growth of European American women at the executive levels that could be on boards, is to specifically include women in the board selection and nomination process. Carlin recognized, also, that boards will need different strategies to achieve successful board diversity. One of those strategies, as Leon noted, is the importance of integrating a new director into the board and how the successful onboarding of new board members is every board member's responsibility.

**4.4.2.2 Recommendations.** Networking was described as imperative for all, including those seeking board talent. Recommendations to influence diversity in the boardroom, as Grace advised, is networking that "would be to look outside the norm, to be more open to opportunities to get to know women. Look for more opportunities to get to know African Americans." Among these opportunities are organizations and events more specific to the African American woman and her community. For instance, Grace commented, a chair or CEO might want to go to "a Historically Black College and University and get to know people there."

Information regarding the penetration of diversity into boardrooms to know if progress is being made for diversity overall was recognized as being insufficient. Data were discussed as existing for women, but not diversity more granular than women, thus metrics to gauge the success of board intentionality for diversity is appropriate to accumulate.

Leon recommended the need to make diversity “imperative and a priority of the board.” Further recommended is to have the topic of diversity discussed across board members. Carlin, also, said he found awareness for the value that women and African American women offer in the diversity of thought and experience as key.

Also discussed was the need for constant communication in board meetings to facilitate boards having the conversation of what voices are missing, even when a search is not underway. The interviews recognized not having the voice itself as a deficiency and, ideally, will illuminate the need for the awareness to ask what would be different if the voice was present, a thought to have more central for the next board director selection. The constant conversation was acknowledged to help drive the ultimate end game for diversity, overtly or otherwise.

**4.4.3 Diversity drives diversity.** The notion that diversity drives diversity emerged often during the participant interviews. Faith said, “I think the more women that sit at the table the more men are comfortable with women at the table.” Hope recognized that board diversity drives diversity in the senior leadership team including the CEO and throughout the organization helping to realize not just diversity, but also inclusion. As indicated earlier, the importance of a critical mass of women on the board was, additionally, recognized to be highly influential in driving diversity. Critical mass, the interviews gave insight into, facilitates the emergence of role models further influencing women to join boards, companies, and seek senior leadership team opportunities. A critical mass, Hope said, “is only going to develop greater networks and greater opportunities for women,” thus further promoting the diversity materializing from the critical mass to drive additional diversity.

#### 4.5 Theme of Gender Dynamics

The interviews identified gender dynamics that come into play for diversity in the boardroom. Among these is how women are not always the most supportive of other each other, the women participants in particular noted. Women sometimes were described to be of no value and viewed more like enemies. Emma explained that there can be a “competition that’s among women,” though she feels this is changing. Nevertheless, Emma spoke of how trust among women can be an issue.

Angie elaborated, also, that there “is a pipeline issue that many women haven’t been CEO” and the aperture for women must be broadened. Mindfulness was reasoned to be needed for circumstances with barriers preventing women from realizing C-suite opportunities. Jaimie added that “you have to be out there, doing good work, and letting people know you did the good work.” Otherwise, one is unknown and the board network is unaware of their excellent credentials. Jaimie further said that a woman has to be visible and known out in the community which may require doing “a lot of freebees” such as speaking and mentoring. For example, she commented how she ensures to accept phone calls offering advice and counsel. She went on to say that “you’ve got to volunteer. You’ve got to raise your hand. You’ll do the work even though you’re not getting numerated for it.” She maintained also that men find the same need, but there is greater importance for women for the visibility to get known.

Joy elaborated on how she finds that “White men consistently have to be the ones to advocate for diversity and equity.” She further clarified that when European American women promote gender diversity or African American women advocate for diversity of “gender and race it starts to feel very personal and maybe even self-serving,” thus she felt European American men driving diversity in the boardroom to be imperative.

**4.5.1 Dynamics for all women on the board path.** The interviews revealed commonalities hindering the diversity of women in the boardroom irrespective of ethnicity. Faith elaborated that “I think men can sometimes look for a particular type of woman.” Gender stereotypes, thus, were found to be detrimental challenging women's value-add while overcoming the mindset of *the woman's place*. Faith recalled a conversation for a board opportunity suggesting female directors felt the need to act as if they were the smartest person in the room and talked too much or talked over others. She elaborated on how she could understand the challenge from a woman's perspective “because sometimes you feel like you have to prove yourself because you're in this room.” This conversation illuminated how the men speaking to her didn't care for a woman being forward. Additionally, men directors can promote the perception that they want a woman board member who can adapt to being the only one, or one of a few, and make measured contributions acceptable to the European American men in the room. This sentiment hinders women and is a pervasive stereotype permeating corporate America.

Faith commented on how a woman's normal influences her ability to develop networks where she found “we're moving into a new normal in many respects. Women may find opportunities to network just based on their children and where their children might be at any given time.” Women must be willing to expand and meet people in new spaces the interviews revealed. Not only must a woman look for the formal networking opportunities, but also the informal opportunities more available to her normal that surrounds the family and spouse's activities and network.

A woman's network, or the lack thereof, was discussed to be a challenge as people know and interact with those that are more similar. Faith suggested that the names that first come to mind when considering the next director, “if you're a White man will probably be other White

men and maybe secondarily men of color.” Additional iterations may be necessary to consider women. Additionally, the interviews revealed that women may not be considered until someone specifically calls out the lack of women on the board. Because of legislation in the United States and Europe, more interest in gender diversity on corporate boards exists today. Nevertheless, the interviews revealed that board members are naturally inclined to recommend those closest to them in their network and because boards are predominately men, those recommendations are often not women.

Hope added that a hindrance to gender diversity is “just the habit where people hire who they know. They hire who they like. They hire who they’re comfortable with.” Additionally, *the mystery* surrounding board membership is recognized to be a hindrance for women as well as the lack of access to role models or other women corporate board members. The lack of awareness for women of open board opportunities was also found to be a difficulty.

The reality of quotas forced by legislation was discussed as a hindrance too. Legislative forced diversity was revealed as a concern due to the restriction on choice and the concern of negative outcomes arising from candidates selected who are not ready. Also discussed was the perception that some European American men needed something that essentially certifies a woman to be their equal and to be board-ready.

The glass-ceiling, also, was raised as an issue where women rise to a certain level and plateau, while men go on to realize promotions and new opportunities. Emma further added that because there are fewer roles at the board level “it comes back to who do I know, who do I trust, and who am I going to bring into the job that I know is going to feel comfortable to me.” Because companies that are looking for board candidates often don’t know the woman candidate, credentials, and experience are a particular significance for women candidates. Emma went on to

say that women have to make this work and women need positive board outcomes, outcomes that will take time to achieve.

Kelly found that the biggest issue “is getting more and more women into the C-suite and into the top-level positions in corporations.” Many boards were recognized to prefer new board members to have expertise such as CEO or CFO, and women are often unlikely to have reached these positions, particularly for publicly traded organizations. “It’s just hard to get considered when you don’t have that kind of experience,” said Angie.

Women, additionally, were discussed to drop out of the workforce. Family situations and the lack of support from organizations were discussed as part of the dilemma. Kelly elaborated that “as a country we’ve done a really poor job. How do you handle raising a family with working and having a high-level career?”

Women were also discussed to require sponsorship to achieve the top board pipeline positions. Hope further said women “need to know the role of the board. They need to be in those pipeline level roles.” Though diversity was discussed to be a company-specific issue, Kelly felt that society needed to drive change for a diverse workforce from entry-level to the top of organizations.

Women, as well, were recognized to interview differently which can raise doubts. The recommendation was made for women to focus on interview skills to communicate confidence that they have the relevant skillset and ability necessary for the boardroom. Also discussed was the pool of available candidates and the need to realize broader diversity in the C-suites across America. Olin commented that “it is an ongoing progression to cultivate and develop all leaders.” Leon commented that “for years a lot of corporations didn’t afford women the right kind of opportunity so they couldn’t get the experience.”

Recognized also was board recruiting firms' role in obstructing women from corporate board opportunities. Board recruiters, Leon suggested, have the challenge of networks as well that are just "who they (know) and who they placed last so that's oftentimes a White male." Leon continued that a large factor "is just an old historical reticence that mostly a bunch of White guys on boards."

Also recognized as a hindrance for some women is confidence, or rather a lack thereof. A woman coming to a board that is well-functioning, collaborative, and deep into the strategy of the firm that has various communication conventions were discussed to potentially be intimidating for both men and women, but particularly women. Joy commented that "I think even where there is demand I think there is some self-selection and opting out because women, Black women don't feel ready."

The current male dominance and resistance to change were recognized as a burden for women as well as the lack of using outside search firms, which all feed back to one's network. European American men directors were also found to often push for no change or little change whether consciously or unconsciously. Carlin elaborated that "to change the system you need advocacy. You need advocates."

Conversations participants had with women also illuminated the constant fight for their voices to be heard and their thoughts and ideas to be respected and accepted. After women colleagues voiced this reality, Carlin recognized much more often how his male colleagues in meetings overpowered and interrupted women more than men. He, furthermore, suggested that this kind of experience adversely impacts a woman's ability to network because they feel their voices aren't heard. He, also, went on to say, women, therefore, are "not thought of as highly or as often when opportunities come up so they're fighting an uphill battle."



**4.5.2 Dynamics specific to the African American woman's board path.** During the interviews, comments emerged elaborating how there was no difference for African American women as compared to others. Grace finds, however, that there's a view "in society that African Americans don't perform as well, and so it doesn't matter if you're White or Black, there's a *Black tax* put on choosing an African American candidate on the person that chose them and the person that is selected." Grace, additionally, spoke to how "diversity expanded to include everyone but White male" and "code word for we don't really have to hire African Americans." This section further brings light to those cases that run contrary to the idea that African American women experience little if any, difference.

**4.5.2.1 Networks.** Considering the networks of European American men directors as compared to African American women, interviews noted that some of the challenges are that the African American woman's networks are less expansive. Joy, also, found responsibility to be with European American men directors and corporate board influencers "to diversify their networks because it is easy to go to the people that you know that look like you that have similar life experiences." Faith, additionally, commented that the challenge is greater for African American women because as a European American man "you may know a White woman that you work with. You may not have worked with any African American women." Hope felt similar in that she recognized European American women and men associate with and hire those known to them and that is not necessarily African American women. Thus, European American men who are corporate board directors or influencers must be more intentional to bring diversity to their networks, the interviews revealed.

In being more deliberate, Grace noticed that when she is at corporate board related conferences that "I don't really have European American males or females purposely say I'd like

to meet you.” Her experience has largely found interactions to mostly be superficial. She shared that invitations to connect over dinners at corporate board networking conferences are seldom if any. She commented that “you usually don’t get invited. It just doesn’t happen.”

Grace went on to elaborate that network and credentials are particularly important for African Americans because “if one selects African Americans they have to be confident they can perform.” Interviews, moreover, discussed network and credentials as going hand-in-hand in that African American women have to have the correct network to get the call. Grace, additionally, shared her concern about how the media portrayal of African American women “continues to be *angry Black women*” to the extent that even she would be wary of those women. While she thought in today’s world people, overall, would be more open to African American women, she found the media and, likewise, the politician’s portrayal of African American women to be negative and destroying that opportunity. Networks were discussed to have the opportunity to be very instrumental in combating the *angry Black woman* mentality.

Boards were discussed to have the necessity to be intentional to find African American women. Joy added that “sometimes it takes women and certainly people of color just a little longer to build up all the prerequisite skills and capabilities” to be noticed. To be a board that leads, Joy felt that boards have to “focus on potential” and be open to give women who do not have every experience an opportunity. She further commented that “I think that happens with White men all the time.” Emma, additionally, found African American women are hidden and difficult to find for boards. She suggested that African American women “network with White men” to improve their board opportunities.

The interviews, also, revealed how diversity beyond women is often not a consideration thus the diversity of African American women for the board is not contemplated. Absent is the

thought of ethnic diversity unless specific to a particular need and further expected to add unique value. The interviews, additionally, suggested a plethora of companies have absolutely no gender diversity on their boards. Emma discussed how many companies are “basically getting into the first ask, which is we need a woman, and they call it diversity but that's kind of code for a woman” rather than the diversity that includes ethnicity. Emma expressed a sentiment similar to Hope when she commented that only recently have boards “been more attuned to diversity of gender and recognizing that it may be beneficial to have women on their board,” thus the ethnic gender diversity of African American women is not in the mindset.

African American women and women of any race were also recognized during the interviews to not have spent the time needed to develop their networks. Specific to African American women, the discussions highlighted how African American women don’t have in their network the decision-makers for board candidates. Victor alluded to this in comments about how women's groups by themselves “isn't going to do it” if they do not include corporate board directors and influencers. He further commented, “you’ve got to get connected to other directors.” Jaimie, likewise, said women need to start helping each other. She said there is a mindset danger that “I made it and I’m not going to help anybody else.” A hesitation with African American board members was further discussed in promoting other African Americans out of a concern for the suspicion that the only reason for the recommendation is because of the same ethnicity or ethnicity and gender.

Although African American women were discussed as being more prepared than most others that are recommended by recruiters or other board influencers, the participant interviews surfaced an unaware bias towards African American women leaving them unknown to those influencing board selections. Jaimie explained for her to find an African American woman she

“had to really get aggressive,” which inhibits the diversity of African American women in the corporate boardroom. The interviews uncovered that if the African American woman is not being intentional to be known, many corporate board decision-makers will not be aware of her because they do not operate in the same circles. As a result, Jaimie suggested that until you have someone that is influencing board candidates that is enlightened enough to say “we want diversity, ethnic diversity on our board; you’re not even going to look at those candidates.”

In discussing the importance of sponsors and advocates for one’s network, Hope noted that “it’s perhaps even more important to know that there is a person of color being recommended by a sponsor.” She further commented on how a sponsor with a corporate board influence advocating for someone would receive more favorable consideration than someone coming through a search firm. Joy commented, also, that virtually the only way for an African American woman to get to the boardroom is by way of a sponsor or advocate being in one’s network. She further said someone essentially has to “handpick you and say I want it to be you.”

**4.5.2.2 Career pipelines and the glass-ceiling.** African American women were discussed as often excluded from opportunities before they are within sight due to the dynamics of networks and career pipelines. The pipeline to senior positions was found to essentially be nonexistent for African American women and opportunity is further recognized to be severely restricted without a pipeline. Although Joy felt that “Black women who are heavily credentialed have an advantage,” even the most successful and credentialed African American woman will hit the *glass-ceiling* before reaching the C-suite, the interviews explained. Thus, African American women were found to often not get the calls for boardroom opportunities.

The dilemma of the pipeline and cultivation of African American women talent was discussed as an important need for better diversity of African American women in the corporate

boardroom. Joy explained that “by the time somebody is ready for that right board experience they needed to have been thinking about it a couple of years ago.” Thus, she questioned, how do we cultivate “Black women to take on bigger roles in companies” that ultimately provided a path to the corporate boardroom? Additionally, she asked, “how do you really prepare and cultivate great female board prospects?”

Carlin recognized the necessity to look into how to drive the pipeline to afford “women in the pipeline the right experience so that they will be seen as valuable candidates for board membership.” He, additionally, elaborated that “there needs to be a greater emphasis on the pipeline for African American women because there are not as many in the pipeline.” Angie suggested that “if we solve the pipeline, that’s going to open the doors to board service a whole lot more quickly.” Otherwise, the participants suggested the same people will realize the board seats rather than expanding the opportunities for African American women.

**4.5.2.3 Diverse slate, benefits of, and difficulties for African American women.** Faith shared that “I think African American women are probably the key to getting as many African American women on boards or other women of color on boards as you can get.” The interviews further recognized the nonexistence of organizations that solely focused on African American women for the boardroom. Participants, likewise, suggested that when seeking diversity one has to be specific as African American women can be lost in the term *women* by itself with organizations often comprised of more European American women due to population dynamics.

Hope elaborated that an African American “will ask about a diverse slate. I don’t know if a person in the majority will be as quick to ask for a diverse slate.” She too found the necessity to incentivized search firms to ensure a diverse slate is presented. These actions were found to help bring awareness to the rest of the board regarding the need to consider diversity and inclusion for

not only the company but also the board. Though Hope didn't think the impact on a company by a woman was race dependent, she did recognize that as an African American woman she had an advantage for her board to understand the mindset of another woman of color as their customer. She elaborated that being an African American woman board member “brings her knowledge, her experiences, and her perspective.” Kelly discussed, also, that African American women brought “more diversity, more diverse discussions, and input.” She, likewise, found that the diversity of African American women promotes “a variety of experiences and viewpoints that help you as a group come to a better decision.”

African American women, additionally, were discussed as being disadvantaged by the same issues if not more than European American women. One example noted was how childcare is extremely expensive and mostly unaffordable. Kelly, moreover, took the position that until gender issues are successfully addressed “it’s going to be harder and harder to get (women) high enough up the career chain.”

Joy discussed how she encourages other African American women “to be thoughtful and deliberate about seeking out board opportunities” and she found African American women “can bring tremendous value,” particularly younger African American women. The interviews revealed, also, how many African American women have chosen to be entrepreneurs running smaller companies. However the boardroom, Joy noted, demands talent that is “proven” to know how to “grow a P&L and understand the levers of a P&L from a topline and cost perspective,” a skillset and expertise discussed as not commonly found among African American women. Nevertheless, the P&L roles, Joy felt, are “precisely what boards, particularly Fortune 1000 boards are looking for.”

**4.5.2.4 Legislation and the diversity of African American women.** Interviews shared that European American women represent and open the conversation to the diversity of women. Hope said, "I don't know if they would bring up African American women, but I believe that the Caucasian women would talk about the need for more women on boards." Interviews, likewise, spoke about legislation and how people will think more in terms of women in general, which by default are European American women and not African American women. For example, Hope added that as a European American man "who you first think about promoting may not be an African American woman. You may think about someone who looks like your mother, your sister, your wife if you're a White male on a board."

Faith, furthermore, noted that for companies, particularly global companies, the heavy focus on gender diversity rather than ethnic gender diversity may be influenced by the legislative requirements over more recent years. Joy recognized, however, a detriment to the pursuit for the diversity of African American women in the corporate boardroom "is when there is emphasis on race and gender there is sometimes a misconception that the only reason why women are sitting there is because standards had to be lowered to bring women and people of color, Black women into board roles." She further noted that "there are remarkable people of color, Black women who just aren't given opportunities. I think it's about cultivating them."

**4.5.2.5 EAM directors' influence on the board path for AAW.** Joy shared that European American men can influence the diversity of African American women in the boardroom "positively if they perceive the value and can with conviction articulate the need and the opportunity." In simple terms, Joy said that African American women "get there because White males decide that we do." She further said "100% it's in their hands," speaking of European American men, because, as she elaborated, "they are the ones that have the leverage and the

power..., the ultimate influencers.” Given that European American men are the majority on most boards, Faith also found them to “have credibility with their male peers so people will give you a chance if you’ve been nominated by a White male.” Faith further commented that it is vital when European American men directors can appreciate both gender and race as important in the boardroom.

The events surrounding George Floyd were found to again have raised race as being important. Interviews went on to say how important it is for companies to be very specific and very intentional regarding African American leadership. Before the events surrounding George Floyd, discussions raised that European American men directors were generally found not to be open to African American women for the corporate boardroom and had no interest to promote, although this was recognized to not be every European American male director. For European American men directors to promote African American women, Grace felt the men would need to do “research so that they are comfortable with African American women in terms of historically positive images.” But most European American men, she elaborated, will not do that. She further said European American men often “only see what’s provided to them in media and social media and those are usually not positive images.” The interviews further recognized how effort is necessary to be best informed about diversity of African American women. Also noted is the unlikelihood of any public discouragement for more African American women in the boardroom but actions furthering opportunity can be absent or possibly run counter.

Angie found at the very least European American men are becoming less resistant and more open to diversity because they “have more experiences working with women.” Carlin noted also that resistance of European American men directors toward diversity is “more subconsciously than consciously.” Angie further acknowledged European American men are in



cases becoming “advocates for diversity in the boardroom.” In speaking to the matter from a woman’s standpoint, since European American men are the decision-makers in many cases, Jaimie asked whether or not European American men wanted “the same environment 20 years from now for (their) daughters” where board opportunities remain out of reach. Jaimie also explained that networks are part of the issue where European American men directors “don’t know qualified females or ethnic candidates. They’re not in their book or circle of business acquaintance.” She went on to say that until there are enlightened CEOs, whether male, female, or someone of color or perhaps a chair of a nom/gov committee to say we want diversity and there ethnic diversity on our board, “you’re not even going to look at those candidates.”

Jaimie noticed that if European American men are chairing the nom/gov committee she further recognized that “they’re going to look for White men. It’s unaware bias.” She acknowledged that some of the bias is “purposeful and some is they don’t know qualified females or ethnic candidates.” Ethnic diverse females were further recognized to often not be in the European American male’s network. Until a company has an enlightened CEO, the interviews found that regardless of gender or ethnicity, to call for diversity, particularly ethnic diversity on the board, those candidates aren’t going to get a look. Jaimie said “I think it’s just that there’s White males running the process and they don’t know of anybody that is in their circle that would be qualified” even though there may be multitudes of women. She found European American men could simply be oblivious to the talent surrounding them and their networks can be “narrow unless you just really have an enlightened CEO,” which she said does exist. She further noted that “there are chairs of boards that are enlightened, that are males, even old White males that are enlightened because they’ve got daughters and want them to have opportunities.”

**4.5.2.6 EAW directors' influence on the board path for AAW.** European American women influence the business case for African American women, the interview found, when ethnicity is not a negative factor in European American women's support of other women for the corporate board. Faith elaborated that when racial diversity is found lacking how European American women will "promote African American women as much as other White women." She further commented on how she has "found that White women can also be instrumental in introducing once they're sitting on their boards" and found colleagues "to be very generous in that regard." Carlin agreed that he found European American women to be "strong advocates and will push for change." Kelly recognized, also, that "the more women you have on the board the more likely you are to add more women, and that increases the opportunities for African American women."

Grace saw European American women have a similar challenge as she found for European American men "in that they don't know or have African American women as more than superficial" in their networks. A remedy for the matter, she explained, is for African American women to reach out to European American corporate board directors at networking opportunities seeking to drive a stronger and deeper connection. Joy, similarly, found that the successful European American women in the boardroom can influence by example revealing "something about women's capacity to serve as excellence in these roles." She went on to say that "if White women were the original experiment then they've laid the groundwork hopefully for there to be greater legitimacy in the role Black women can play in board roles." She further elaborated that by their presence in the boardroom, and by using their voice, European American women can influence the path and the business case for African American women to the corporate boardroom.

Emma shared the value of African American women is that “I think it is actually adding that other cultural background.” She further recognized that most on boards do not have that value or perspective resulting in a very large blind spot. She additionally elaborated that in decision-making “it isn’t just with yourself that you’re considering. It’s with all of these invested parties that you have to be representing.” However, Kelly finds that with the focus on gender diversity coupled with the larger pool of European American women, these dynamics diminish the priority for African American women in the boardroom.

**4.5.2.7 AAW directors’ influence on the board path for AAW.** Though Angie found African American women directors’ influence in corporate board composition to be minimal due to their limited numbers on boards and in the C-suite, African American women, nevertheless, influence the business case for other African American women “by being supportive if they see opportunities (and) to let them know,” shared Grace. Moreover, once African American women “get in the door we have an opportunity, and quite frankly as far as I am concerned, an obligation to refer the people that we know because that diversifies the pool that you’re looking at,” elaborated Faith. Furthering that point, Grace recognized the effort must go beyond “just letting someone know about the opportunity. It's making the introduction and sitting and saying this is who I know" and sharing your knowledge of the candidate. Grace, also, said the advocate needs to do the “heavy lifting” versus something more superficial such as sending “a quick email” with a resume, i.e. being “intentional and purposeful.”

Joy noted that a development since George Floyd is that she now often receives calls asking about other women that she knows, thus she is creating a “repository of Black women in my network who could be board ready.” She, furthermore, elaborated on how she has started to have conversations with these women because most have not considered corporate board

opportunities and aren't familiar with the opportunity and benefits. Joy, likewise, commented that ethnic gender diversity for African American women "is probably already top of mind when you've got African American female leaders in these organizations" in the roles of board chair or CEO. She also acknowledged the limitation, however, because "there're so few of us we can't have an impact until some momentum and scale." Nevertheless, Joy found that "by being a good example and using our voice to ensure we recruit other Black women and leverage our networks to do so" she felt African American women can influence the path and business case for other African American women to reach the corporate boardroom.

**4.5.2.8 Additional considerations regarding the board path of AAW.** Faith said, "I continue to go back to how do we find the next level of African American female executives who are board ready, but for whatever reason will not be the CEO or CFO?" Olin acknowledged broader representation in the C-suite is "first and foremost how you get better, diverse candidates across the board with regard to ethnicity and gender." Faith recognized, also, that African American women were more encumbered than European American women to have this particular expertise. Faith further explained that African American women "are not at the C-suite but just beneath the C-suite," or perhaps further into the corporate hierarchy.

Interviews recognized that companies can be solely focused on gender and dismiss race or ethnicity. Emma added that when a new element surfaces which includes "color or somebody with a completely different background and culture, it feels different and there's skepticism." Emma further discussed concerns of group fit and recognized not only the gender difference but also "the cultural difference of the Black person's background," and that can be an inhibiting factor for some.

Faith said, “we’ve got to be able to peel back and go down another layer or two to find the people who show promise to be on boards and make contributions for the future,” which she realized maybe a younger generation due to the influences of today’s technology. Olin aligned in asking “how can you go deep into an organization and identify somebody that might be relevant three levels lower than the CEO?” He also acknowledged that after someone further down in the hierarchy is identified, “what would your onboarding program be?”

An additional question that Hope raised is “does inclusion versus diversity play a role in the composition of the board and the effectiveness of the board of the new diverse member,” particularly as inclusion and diversity “relates to African American women and boards?” As an example, Hope questioned, “will an African American woman be listened to in an inclusive board more than just a diverse board?” She further suggested the question should be asked what is necessary for “an African American woman to feel that their board is inclusive and diverse versus just diverse?” Hope, similarly, noted that in reaching a critical mass of women on a board the board may not feel the need for more gender diversity. If the board does, she acknowledged that diversity may run the array of ethnicities versus a focus on African American women.

Interviews recognized the need to inquire with European American men regarding the impediments and solutions to bring African American women to boards. Emma, likewise, questioned how are we helping African American women to “understand what it is to be on a board?” Additionally, the discussions raised the question of how African American women are developed and supported to ascend to the boardroom.

Grace, moreover, voiced the experience that as an African American woman that she had to work harder and expressed how her recommendations or comments were often discounted until repeated by a European American male as his comments. She, moreover, shared an

experience at an NACD conference where a search firm representative commented that “people say they want diversity, but they don’t really want African American candidates.” This representative further asked, “who are we to not give our clients what they want?”

Although Leon commented that he didn’t think matters differed for African American women, he recognized the “nationwide protest where systemic racism is pretty hard to ignore.” He, similarly, accepted that one would “be pretty naive to think there isn’t some systemic racism involved.” How then, he questioned, does “the board chair, CEO, and the governance chair determine to deal with that?” He further suggested that perhaps “you’ve got to put double emphasis, laser focus on African American women that you’re looking for and bring them into the board.”

Olin summarized that he thought it was largely understood that “we’re better when we have diversity of thought. We’re better when we have different perspectives and we discuss and debate in the boardroom.” Olin added, “that’s kind of first and foremost how you get better, diverse candidates across the board with regard to ethnicity and gender.”

#### **4.6 Summary**

This chapter presented the findings that evolved from the participant's interviews for the study questions and discussed the themes and subthemes that emerged. The findings, furthermore, provided insights into the challenges and opportunities for African American women to have access to the corporate boardroom.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion and Future Research

This study explored the dynamics surrounding the path and obstacles to better enable the African American woman to translate her *performance* into a workplace *image* to gain the necessary *exposure* (PIE) to further facilitate a matrix of opportunity to realize her talents in the corporate boardroom (Coleman, 2010; Thierry, 2016; Weaver, 2015). While diversity involves a variety of characteristics and considerations, this study focused specifically on the opportunity to explore the nominal to no presence of African American women in America's corporate boardrooms (ABD & Deloitte, 2019; Lindsay, 2015; Northouse, 2016; Olson, 2019; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

While there is an abundance of empirical literature discussing corporate board composition and diversity, much of the diversity considerations are met with either African American men or European American women. There is minimal research specifically exploring ethnic gender diversity and even less regarding the diversity of African American women (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Gabaldon et al., 2016; Northouse, 2016; Peterson et al., 2007; Smith et al., 2019).

For this study, I collected and analyzed data for insights into the challenges and opportunities for African American women to gain access to the corporate boardroom. These insights were obtained by presenting the same interview questions to a group of corporate board directors, individually, for organizations whose stock is traded on public exchanges. The corporate board directors interviewed consisted of an equal representation of African American women, European American women, and European American men. This chapter discusses the findings and presents the conclusions that emerged from this study. Victor, the first participant to

be interviewed, expressed a comment that remained fitting throughout the dissertation, and particularly given the two-world influencing events included in Table 5.1's dates of significance:

The focus is on women and with that brings along women of color... I tell anyone (that) I'm talking with, as a woman I say there's never been a better time if you're interested in joining a board, and network because the wind's behind the sails.

Table 5.1

*Dates of Significance during the Dissertation*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
03/12/2020	First Steep Market Decline from COVID-19
04/14/2020	IRB Approval
-interviews-	Victor, Olin, Emma, Hope, Kelly
05/25/2020	George Floyd's Death
-interviews-	Leon, Angie, Grace, Faith, Jaimie, Carlin, Joy
08/01/2020	Commence Completion of Chapters 4 & 5

While the events arising from COVID-19 had no direct relation to the research questions, the consequences resulting from George Floyd's death did. In particular, Grace, Faith, and Joy as well as Leon and Carlin either directly referenced George Floyd or recognized the events post George Floyd had generated dynamics of importance for corporate boardrooms. Specifically, race and gender in general, and particularly regarding African American women, were found to be elevated topics of importance for consideration in corporate boardrooms. Faith commented that "the whole George Floyd murder and where we are in the United States right now is putting a laser focus on race as being important again." Joy, also, shared that "since the George Floyd murder there has been a surge in demand for Black female directors, in particular." Grace, likewise, recognized how European American men in the boardroom may have a different *calculus* for boardroom needs post George Floyd. Thus, COVID-19, to the extent the participants referenced the increased demands on corporate boards to address the fallout, and the



ramifications of the George Floyd tragedy, essentially back-to-back seismic events that engulfed not only the nation but the world, these events demonstrate how crucial excellent corporate governance is. Corporate governance, of course, must have its fingers on the pulse of stakeholders, stakeholders that include the consumer as well as the many other parties invested in and/or impacted by the organization. This corporate governance is, furthermore, impacted by how the research questions of this study are addressed or ignored.

### **5.1 Alignment of Findings with Research Questions**

The central research question of this study explored *how do African American women, European American women, and European American men corporate board directors (directors of inquiry) perceive their awareness of race and gender with regard to African American women achieving corporate board director opportunities?*

This study further explored the questions of:

1. How whiteness and maleness are perceived to influence corporate board director opportunities for African American women?
2. How the directors of inquiry influence the path of ascension to corporate board director opportunities for African American women?
3. What leadership strategies are employed by the directors of inquiry to support African American women achieving corporate board director opportunities?

Exploring the central research question, the African American women participants, obviously, were all very aware of the role the intersecting challenges of race and gender play in corporate board opportunities. They recognize the challenge for the pipeline. They identify with doing the work and obtaining the skills and the credentials but not being rewarded with the positions and titles. African American women, also, recognize how much of their *normal*, their

typical, does not find them in the presence of crucial corporate board influencers and decision-makers, i.e. European American men.

The European American women participants related to the gender dynamics and obstacles for corporate board opportunities. They also recognize, if in no other way, that race comes into play because they are aware African American women are not present in the corporate boardroom circles that European American women navigate, or not present at significant levels. As Emma alluded, “they’re hidden,” referring to African American women.

The European American men participants presented a variety of perspectives on the role that race and gender play in one achieving corporate board opportunities. This array of perspectives ran from *it’s the same process for all*, which clearly it is regarding the mechanics of the process, to the recognition that race and gender can obstruct opportunity.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by illuminating the varying lived experiences of corporate board directors from *it is the same process for all* to how that *same process* can present obstacles. These barriers often stem from the simple realities of being oblivious to the obstacles because one does not have the lived experience of another, or only a superficial exposure to the other person’s reality, versus an intimate realism.

This study further contributes to the body of knowledge by revealing how contemporary corporate board directors have to be more intentional to seek out diversity where it currently exists. That diversity is often found outside of today’s corporate boardroom pipeline and outside of the normal boardroom networks. Present-day corporate boardroom directors, particularly those in the majority, must seek diversity where it is and go to where diversity finds comfort to navigate and network. Of course, this is not a requirement to find board-ready talent as this talent is abundant in the plethora of men ready to step into the boardroom, and particularly that of

European American men. Thus, the existence of this talent is not in question. However, to find the board-ready talent to fit the gaps may require the search process to seek diversity where it calls home, and that home may reveal locations where the corporate board director and the search otherwise would not be.

This study further illuminates how African American women who desire boardroom opportunities must expand their networks. Trust is indispensable in the corporate boardroom and networks promote trust. Perhaps due to the intuitiveness for the necessity of trust, the literature review did not specifically identify the importance of trust to obtain corporate board opportunities. Directors, however, trust their boardroom colleagues, thus, the African American woman considering a corporate board career must build trust with boardroom influencers. Trust, furthermore, will facilitate directors in the corporate boardroom to be able to comfortably recommend her with confidence, and as importantly, vote for her to have the seat.

What may not be as obvious is the boardroom networks must also ensure the necessary diversity exists for the next pandemic or social dynamic that thrust immediate and profound change upon the world requiring the nimblest of responses. Of course, a board that has been forward looking staying abreast of their stakeholders and the constant flux will not be caught unprepared. Nevertheless, to find diverse board-ready talent such as the expertise of African American women, the current directors, search firms, and other boardroom composition influencers must be willing to expand their view of where board-ready talent exists, the titles achieved or lack thereof, and where this talent exists in organizations and the array of expertise.

**5.1.1 Research question 1.** *How whiteness and maleness are perceived to influence corporate board director opportunities for African American women?* Although the corporate board director selection process varies from company to company and from recruiting event to

event, and whether a search firm is used or not, the process is heavily influenced by the current board directors and their networks for recommendations. To narrow the slate the nom/gov chair and committee is heavily involved, and so also is the board chair and CEO depending on the board, and again the recruiting event and the specific time in the life of the organization. Of course, once the slate is narrowed the entire board votes on the slate of candidates. As most corporate boards in America are predominately European American males, and there the nom/gov chair, board chair, and CEO are also often the same, the European American male and his normal obviously will have a substantial influence on new directors.

**5.1.1.1 Contributions to the body of knowledge.** Elms et al. (2015) suggested a lack of clarity regarding “how boards approach director selection and what process and mechanisms drive the selection activities” (p. 1322). The literature review, furthermore, found the regulatory guidelines to suggest a formal, rigorous, and transparent process while reality suggested the opposite where biases can influence who does and who does not sit in the corporate boardroom. This study found the latter to be true but the process to be rather clear in several key areas.

For one, while the process can vary as participant after participant shared where Victor elaborated that “no two boards are the same so what works for one board may not work for another,” this study clearly found the nom/gov committee, and there the nom/gov chair, to be a key player in the director selection process. The literature review discussed in this research did not identify the nom/gov component’s premier role. Also, depending on the company and the current time in the life of the company, the CEO and the board chair will have varying influence and are two other critical figures in the director selection process. The literature review did speak to the importance of the CEO and the board chair.

Secondly, the matter of skills versus needs was the consistent theme across the participant's descriptions driving the director selection process. While network may get one considered, how a candidate's skills and credentials match up to the current needs and gaps on the board ultimately will drive the director selection.

Thirdly, because of the dominance of the European American male demographic sitting on corporate boards today, this director essentially determines who will and who will not reach the corporate boardroom, as Joy noted. Of course, this is not to suggest that a different demographic in the boardroom cannot also influence, but the group with the largest presence by the law of numbers obviously enjoys the opportunity to have the driving influence. On most corporate boards in America, this demographic is that of the European American male.

Finally, this study found that corporate board directors take their role as directors and their responsibility for the most efficient and beneficial board composition very seriously. They are, furthermore, focused on filling the opening with the director that best fits the current needs of the board to achieve preeminent outcomes for the organization. What remains uncertain is exactly what drives a corporate board director to reach their conclusion in the director selection decision-making process. This, of course, is where the various dynamics of the human condition come into play, one's lived experience, and furthermore how they interpret their lived experience. Nevertheless, as Joy so clearly said, European American men influence everything in the boardroom because they are the ones in power. Of course, there is a litany of events throughout history that has made this the current-day reality. Still, for most corporate boards in America, it suffices to say that "White women or Black women get to the top because White men say so," as Joy elaborated. Thus, in the simplest of statements, this is the essence of the influence of whiteness and maleness in the process.

**5.1.2 Research question 2.** *How the directors of inquiry influence the path of ascension to corporate board director opportunities for African American women?* As more and more African American women reach the boardroom, their networks will drive boardroom opportunities for African American women in general, as well as other demographics, given that the increase in African American women is important for the corporate board. This will not be a nefarious attempt to infiltrate the boardroom but rather simply increasing the aperture to the great African American women talent that is readily available, as Angie suggested. Also, as Joy discussed, “opportunity begets opportunity and when you’re successful in those opportunities it creates more opportunity.” Joy furthermore elaborated “this is about access to opportunity and Black women being positioned for the next great opportunity that creates the next great opportunity.”

European American women will continue offering opportunity for women in general by their presence. Additionally, European American women recognize that many facets are necessary for boards to best serve the company as they realize that diversity amongst gender is a necessary component in addition to just *the right thing to do*.

*The right thing to do* is not lost upon the European American male as the men in this study shared. More and more European American men directors and, additionally, more and more corporate boards recognize the enriching diversity that is often underrepresented on boards today. These directors, furthermore, embrace their responsibility to address that deficiency when the gap in board needs offers the opportunity. Of course, as Joy finds, much of what is taking place is “because corporate America (has) decided they have to diversify” due to the social dynamics of the day. These social dynamics can realize a “backlash” driving companies to reach the conclusion that “they want to be on the right side of history” to protect brand and profits, as

Joy also elaborated. Regardless of the motivation, change is upon us and the European American male will be a driver of, or barrier to, this change due to his overwhelming presence and influence in today's boardrooms and the corporate board director selection process.

**5.1.2.1 Contributions to the body of knowledge.** Among the contributions regarding the influence of current directors today is the need for the African American woman to be intentional in her networking. She must network, and as Emma noted, she must “network with White men” who are corporate boardroom influencers. Again, not to imply that other demographics can't be of exquisite value, but more a realization for the influence of numbers that currently involve the European American male demographic in most corporate boardrooms.

Also, African American women must be intentional to network outside of what may be their comfort zone. Grace spoke to this need in saying “you don't increase your network by only being with and hanging around people like you. You increase your network by expanding your view..., your own personal diversity.” In doing so African American women must network with corporate board directors and influencers including the essential decision-makers for new candidate considerations. In other words, “put a strategic plan together,” as Jaimie recommended. At the top of that plan should be the nom/gov chair and committee members along with the board chair and CEO, and finally, the other directors on the board sought as opportunity permits. These positions are likely to be occupied by the European American male, but as boards continue to diversify, diversity will make a path to these positions too. Thus, be intentional in one's network to create a strategic plan, and a robust plan at that, honing that plan for the board or boards sought.

Of course, there is often more than one part to the equation and the solution. Thus, as the African American woman must be intentional in her networking, also must her colleagues of all

demographics on corporate boards, and particularly European American men. This, again, is simply because of the European American male's numbers and influence on today's boards. Thus, to best meet the needs and gaps of a board including a robust succession plan, those proposing candidates and ultimately making the selection have to have the broadest network possible to meet this responsibility. This is a requirement to adequately fulfill the responsibilities as sitting directors on their boards as well as for their organizations. If the largest demographic is the European American male, to realize the best result this demographic must be willing to participate and passionately network outside of his normal, be curious, and go where he previously did not consider, i.e. new venues once unknown to him. How does he learn of these new venues? Ask the African American women in his organization, if they don't otherwise exist in his network.

**5.1.3 Research question 3.** *What leadership strategies are employed by the directors of inquiry to support African American women achieving corporate board director opportunities?*

Jaimie discussed how she willingly provides "freebees," performs "a lot of speaking," mentors people, and she always takes phone calls giving advice and counsel. Thus, following this lead is the simple strategy for corporate board directors to network with those seeking the boardroom allowing African American women to grow their networks and knowledge of corporate board dynamics.

Another strategy is for the key corporate board candidate decision-makers, non/gov chairs and/or committee members, and other board influencers including the board chair and the CEO to go where African American women are, as Hope explained. Additionally, these critical corporate board influencers must seek out organizations that give African American women visibility, as Grace shared. Several of the participants, moreover, all find in some fashion the



need to demand search firms include the diversity of African American women in the candidates that search firms ultimately recommend. Of course, Angie also suggested the board embrace and own the organization's diversity policy that must include the diversity of African American women.

Several of the participants also discussed the importance of the network and the pipeline for the diversity of African American women along with the critical need to network and show one's value to the board. Victor took the matter a step further and voiced that a diversity strategy has to be incorporated into the board director selection process itself. Additionally, Olin found the necessity for African American women to insure that they have, and are communicating, their skills and credentials that are beneficial to the boardroom. Kelly, likewise, recognized the need for women-on-boards groups to help facilitate introductions to board influencers as well as the role of the investor community in the diversity of African American women. Finally, Joy called out the need to be specific and incorporate the desired diversity into the corporate strategy and acknowledge the need, specifically, for the diversity of African American women, as Kelly concluded.

**5.1.3.1 Contributions to the body of knowledge.** The contribution surfacing from this question is the importance for diversity to be in the corporate strategy, and additionally the importance of a robust succession plan. As Browning and Sparks (2015) note in their book *The Director's Manual: A Framework for Board Governance*, are the three critical questions that a corporate board is responsible for: 1) is the correct CEO at the helm? 2) Does the organization have the correct strategy? 3) Does the organization have a robust succession plan? The correct corporate strategy regarding diversity has to be part of a robust succession plan. Otherwise, the

succession plan is inadequate, the CEO does not have the best strategy, and therefore the board may not have the right CEO.

## **5.2 Alignment of Findings to the Theoretical Framework**

This study approached the research problem through the lenses of obliviousness, networking theories, and Black feminist thought.

**5.2.1 Obliviousness.** This perspective of the theoretical framework speaks to the normal of being unmindful or ignorant of something's existence, and specifically to the realities of the African American woman (Marshall, 2002; Steverson, 2010). Several times throughout the interviews, across all participants, when asked how the question at hand differed for African American women, the answer would emerge something to the effect of *it doesn't. It's the same for all. I don't know that it does*. Of course, for some participants after initially taking this position, difference to some extent would arise as they elaborated. Nevertheless, if the African American women participants are saying that it's the same, then why is that not the case?

As I listened to the replies and analyzed the data, what I find is the mechanics of the process discussed are the same. The process to get a seat in the corporate boardroom today is about one's skills and credentials and how those attributes fit the current needs and gaps for the board in question. These needs and gap are heavily based on where the board finds itself in today's world and its strategy moving forward. One's corporate board network, of course, is part of the process too. This is where things are the same regardless of who you are. The directors making these decisions take this responsibility extremely seriously. I further find they give their level best to do the finest job possible in making their choice for who should fill the open seat, or the seat coming open.

Where obliviousness comes into play is the array of the varying dynamics that keeps corporate board directors and influencers unaware of the following:

1. What are the full array of needs, skills, and gaps including the ethnic gender diversity of African American women or others?
2. What board directors and influencers must do, where they must look, when the talent identified is not in their networks, particularly the talent of African American women?
3. What must take place to ensure the pipeline exists to support a succession plan that is truly robust enough?

Regarding the first question, much of the conversations with the participants discussed how the skills matrix, the board needs identified, and furthermore the gap in needs being met drive corporate board director selections. Obliviousness raises the question to what extent diversity is recognized as a need, moreover gender diversity, and finally the ethnic gender diversity of African American women? The interviews post the George Floyd tragedy with African American women participants, in particular, and also European American men participants, to some extent, recognized a need in the space of the diversity of African American women. This research illuminates that obliviousness played a role in not seeing this need prior to the George Floyd tragedy. Furthermore, realizing this need post George Floyd supports obliviousness, indeed, being a factor.

As I address the second question with regard to obliviousness, the interviews uncovered that the African American corporate board female talent was found to be *hidden* and there is less of a focus on ethnicity in the pursuit of diversity, particularly ethnic gender diversity. Often during the interviews comments were made to the lack of individuals and organizations having

African American women in the necessary corporate board related networking. Because of the normal of the predominate corporate board influencer, whether a corporate board director or others involved in corporate board director sourcing, in other words European American men, the absence of African American women in their networks likely is not readily first of mind, thus obliviousness again at work.

In response to the third question as relative to obliviousness, the lack of African American women in the pipeline to the corporate boardroom to ensure a robust succession plan for the corporate board is a factor of varying dynamics. Based on the findings, some influence is associated with networking and some is associated with the glass-ceiling phenomenon. Some impact, additionally, is the funneling of African American women to non-corporate board pipeline career-tracks and opportunities. Responsibility of some magnitude, likewise, lies with African American women themselves in that “they need to know the role of the board. They need to be in those pipeline level roles,” as Hope shared. Obliviousness, however, is at work when “there’s no pipeline for senior positions for African American women,” as Grace recognized. The fact that Joy shared that she is “getting more calls from recruiters saying who do you know because we need to fill the pipeline of Black women” suggests that until more recent events, in other words the developments following the George Floyd tragedy, recruiters and other corporate board influencers were oblivious to the lack of, and therefore the need for, African American female corporate board talent in the pipeline to the corporate boardroom. Without this talent, a succession plan to address the varying needs of corporate boards at different times in an organization’s life is insufficient, and thus is lacking in robustness.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, will corporate board directors and influencers even recognize the need for the diverse talent of African American women? For those who say

yes, the following question should be contemplated: were their boards scrambling to find this talent after Memorial Day 2020, as some of the participants suggested has taken place?

**5.2.2 Networking.** Network and social network theories address the networking and the development of networks that promote a robust boardroom pipeline and facilitate director opportunities to achieve corporate board opportunities (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011; Terjesen et al., 2009). Moreover, the importance of networks and networking permeated the responses and discussion throughout the interviews, both for those seeking board opportunities as well as those in the boardroom seeking the best talent to fit the needs and gaps. For the latter, however, the responsibility that sitting directors be more intentional to expand their networks beyond their traditional spaces wasn't as obvious. This speaks somewhat to the whiteness and maleness that drives obliviousness as referenced above in the obliviousness discussion. Even for the limited comments referring to the importance of networks as diminishing to some degree, the importance of networks itself isn't diminishing as the importance for board seekers to expand their networks beyond the traditional board composition influencers such as board directors and those in that director's network. The additional board influencers include search firms and persons associated with search firms.

Networks were found to be a dynamic that needs cultivating, and a responsibility of both the director prospect as well as the corporate board planning for an opening yet unknown or yet unrealized. Faith shared:

So it's not just the immediate need but who do we know that we're grooming that we'd like to have on our board someday? I think when people are active about that, when you have a broader group of people who are going to be considered, then that helps.

Hope recognized networks to be “super important for both me as a candidate and for the board in doing their research about me as a candidate.” Women, also, were recognized to have less of a network as compared to men, and African American women were identified during the interviews to be even more at a disadvantage in networks. Thus, networks and networking is equivalent to a bi-directional multi-lane highway exposing the variety of talent to the corporate boardroom and facilitating the corporate boardroom access to the same. If any given party does not maximize their opportunity to network and develop robust networks, then they are at a disadvantage, and in some cases a severe disadvantage, of their ultimate end goal, whether the corporate board or the corporate board seeker.

**5.2.3 Black feminist thought.** Black feminist thought addresses the African American woman’s American experience that finds her realizing bias, racism, and a unique oppression inundating her day-to-day activities from home to work and throughout the institutions of everyday life (Collins, 2000, Thomas, 2004). The negatives of Black feminist thought articulated immediately above were not in any way found to be expressed as any participant’s intention or the intention of their board of director selection process. However, the realities of those negatives are evident in the pipeline to the boardroom and permeate the two frames of obliviousness and networks.

Speaking more to the realities of Black feminist thought, there was the recognition that the African American woman had to be *unicorn like* at times to make her presence in the boardroom *feel right* to those selecting candidates and ultimately members in the boardroom. In this same vein was the experience of at best the bias, and at worst racism, of a) the deficiency in the pipeline for African American women to the boardroom, b) an *anything but Black* sentiment, c) a *Black tax*, d) the *angry Black woman*, and e) a simple absence of influence that emerged

from the interviews for the African American woman's reality. Likely related to these realities is the recognition for the importance of inclusiveness in addition to just diversity in the corporate boardroom. Hope, additionally, elaborated about how a growing presence of African American women on boards creates the *heroes* showing the possibility to "those little girls out there that one day will want to run America" and counter the realities of Black feminist thought.

### **5.3 Strategies for the Diversification of Boardrooms with Intention to Increase the Representation of African American Women**

The following outlines and informs the development of opportunities to influence diversity on corporate boards and particularly the diversity of African American women. Implementing these approaches provides for the opportunity to impact corporate strategy, process, and practice realizing the increase in the representation of African American women in America's corporate boardrooms

**5.3.1 Corporate board education programs.** Corporate board education program do exist and several can be found at the website Boardrooms (<http://boardrooms.com/>). However, more colleges and universities that have business programs, and there those institutions more centered on women, and more specifically HBCUs and other institutions focused on African American women, have the prospect to develop corporate board education programs for all levels of higher education. Also, this opportunity extends to the companies themselves for their internal employee development programs.

**5.3.2 Corporate board certification programs.** Corporate board certification programs also exist including those that focus more on women such as Ace Board Training for Women (<https://www.acellc.consulting/>). These organizations have the opening to focus on African American women to ensure African American women are participating with visibility and are

not “hidden,” as Emma noted. Again, companies themselves have the opportunity to participate in the certification process by providing a path by way of their internal employee development programs.

**5.3.3 Corporate board organizations.** Corporate board organizations that focus on providing more visibility and networking opportunities for women also exists such as theBoardlist (<https://site.theboardlist.com/>), Him For Her (<https://www.himforher.org/>), and Women Corporate Directors (<https://www.womencorporatedirectors.org/>). Similar to theBoardlist LinkedIn post titled *Meet 25 Amazing Women of Color for Your Board*, these organizations and others, additionally, have the opportunity to focus on African American women to assist in providing visibility to this talent and promote the necessary corporate board contacts. Akin to the above two opportunities, companies also have the opportunity to coordinate their internal employee development programs with these organizations for this advancement.

**5.3.4 Metrics.** Grace commented that organizations have to “create optics on true metrics because that begins to become intentional.” Thus boards, as well as their organizations, should maintain metrics that demonstrate the various facets of diversity, and particularly diversity that promotes a robust succession plan.

## **5.4 Wish List Items**

To reiterate from Chapter 3, wish list items “are those people, supports, information, programs, so on, that were not present at the time of the participant’s experience, but that those involved believed would have been helpful in the situation being studied” (Butterfield et al., 2009, p. 267). Wish list items were extracted during the data analysis. The top three wish list items are presented in Table 5.2. The wish list items comprise of *strong board networks*,



*ensuring a diverse slate of board candidates, and having senior leadership team and C-suite expertise.* A brief discussion of each wish list item is found below the table.

Table 5.2

*Wish List Items*

Participant	Strong Board Networks	Ensuring a Diverse Slate of Board Candidates	Having SLT & C-suite Expertise
Faith	X	X	X
Hope	X	X	X
Grace	X	X	X
Joy	X		X
Emma	X	X	X
Kelly	X	X	X
Angie	X	X	X
Jaimie	X	X	X
Victor	X	X	X
Olin	X		X
Leon	X	X	X
Carlin	X		X

**5.4.1 Strong board networks.** With the strong emphasis on networks and networking discussed throughout the interviews, and thus the necessity of *trust* amongst colleagues, the wish for African American women to have strong board networks is not surprising to have emerged. Victor shared “you’ve got to get connected to other directors” as he commented about recruiting an African American woman for a board. While this can, at first thought, find the responsibility to be on African American women to have the strong networks for the boardroom, also is the responsibility for corporate boards to have strong networks for board-ready talent. As Faith shared, “I think you have to be more deliberate about African American women.” Grace, additionally, expressed how European American men “influence the path to opportunities by recommending those they know in their network” and furthermore “the probability of them

knowing African American women in their network well enough to feel comfortable recommending them is pretty remote,” thus the trust dynamic.

Further illuminating the benefit of having European American men strengthen their networks with African American women talent, Emma shared “they were teaching me all of these steps along the way and so when the first call came to invite me, it seemed normal to me.” Here the *normal* was the boardroom vernacular and the boardroom environment itself and *they* were her European American male mentors. She further shared that “they knew what I was capable of. They knew my background. They felt completely comfortable with me and they trusted me.” Finally, Emma elaborated that “it matters who you’re connected to.” The importance of who one is connected to, obviously, is a two-way street.

Leon also discussed the importance of strong board networks to be among directors as well as those African American women seeking the boardroom. He shared “we have one Black female director... She can bring people to us. She knows what we’re looking for and can spot early on somebody who can fulfill those needs.”

**5.4.2 Diverse slate.** The discussion of strong board networks leads into the wish for a diverse slate that includes African American women. Emma shared that a benefit of a diverse slate that includes African American women is “the addition of the value of the cultural background” and how they represent an integral part of the investors that the directors are representing in the boardroom. This further facilitates the board to “represent their stakeholder population.” Angie, also, commented how she found “boards demanding search companies bring a diverse slate,” which stimulates search companies to seek out and understand women and ethnic minorities. She found this to be important and further expressed that data exists supporting the notion of a diverse slate. She shared that a diverse board containing ethnic diversity

contributes to value by realizing a different appetite for risk stimulating greater financial success. Thus, she said, “the business case is out there.” Finally, Leon discussed how a diverse slate brings talent and how, if the board integrates properly with the right board and committee positions, this talent can excel for the benefit of the organization.

**5.4.3 Senior leadership team & C-suite expertise.** Having senior leadership team and C-suite expertise emerging as a wish list item for more African American women to have is not surprising giving the repeated references to having strong board networks and CEO visibility. As Hope articulated, women almost have to be seen as having a higher degree of capability and experience. “You have to have been in the C-suite. You have to have, I think, proven a little bit more than a man may have to,” she shared. Olin, likewise, agreed that having a presence in the C-suite and positions reporting to the CEO are instrumental for African American women as it is for any candidate.

## **5.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies can focus more specifically on the following opportunities to further drive diversity and, specifically, the diversity of African American women to U.S. corporate boardrooms:

1. How do organizations recruit and retain diverse talent as well as find diverse talent deep in the organization for corporate board prospects and what is the onboarding process for this talent?
2. How does inclusion versus diversity in the boardroom influence board composition and the effectiveness of the board when the new diverse members are brought to the board?

3. What are the specific impediments and solutions to increased corporate board diversity?
4. What are the best practices to prepare and cultivate board talent and how does this vary by gender and race/ethnicity?
5. How do board interviews and outcomes vary by gender and race/ethnicity?
6. Further explore the path to the boardroom to better understand the influence of networks and potential areas to better recruit for corporate board pipeline positions.

Future studies may also want to be cognizant of the differences in demographics for participants as compared to the researcher(s) and have co-researchers who can ease any hesitation for participants to join the study. For example, for this study a total of 85 invitations were sent before arriving at the 12 directors who did participate. Forty-four invitations were sent to African American women directors, 25 invitations were sent to European American women directors, and 16 invitations were sent to European American men directors. While this study does not have data to determine why invitations were not accepted, my demographics as compared to the study participants coupled with a lack of familiarity with me are reasonable contributing factors to consideration for any hesitation.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Elaborating more about Browning and Sparks' (2015) three critical questions that are the responsibility of a corporate board, the correct strategy (question 2) will include aspects of a robust succession plan (question 3). The right CEO (question 1) that Browning and Sparks (2015) refer to will also be heavily interested in the right strategy to promote a succession capability that further provides for a pipeline to real opportunity for all diversity. Otherwise, the succession planning will be inadequate feeding a less effective strategy. That successful

succession plan includes a pipeline that provides opportunity and visibility to the organization's broad talent as well as to ensure the talent of the African American woman. This pipeline must extend deep into the organization as well as external to the organization feeding inward. Without a deep, expansive, inclusive pipeline an organization risks not having the talent required to fill the gaps in need at any given time. For example, the George Floyd death sparked a movement that obviously, given the demonstrations, has been primed for years. How many organizations were left unprepared to address the gap on the board, a gap that after George Floyd was so obvious and expansive, because their pipeline did not adequately include African American women?

Additionally, boards must be intentional themselves to ensure diversity that includes African American women and not just diversity of everything but African American women as Grace recognized. Faith also commented that "I think companies have to be intentional, have to broaden their networks, (and) have to connect with organizations that are bringing together cohorts of board-ready women." Hope, also, observed she didn't find fairness or an equitable distribution of talent to have a place in the corporate boardroom. She further elaborated that "it's about the business objectives. It's about what are the skills that a person has." Grace, additionally, shared "one of the things that I was taught is not to be a victim and not to look for blame." With these perspectives included in the backdrop, to change the reality for African American women in the American corporate boardroom, the following elaborates more about what is required.

**5.6.1 Robust succession plan.** Corporate boards must ensure a robust succession plan that includes the diversity of African American women to address the need for anticipated and unanticipated contingencies such as what the corporate world found after the George Floyd

tragedy. To safeguard a robust succession plan, boards must be intentional to ensure their organization provides for a pipeline that is inclusive of all diversity, and particularly the diversity of African American women. To guarantee the pipeline is expansive and inclusive, boards have the necessity to embrace the insights and the perspectives of African American women regarding the status of the pipeline. To further ensure the healthy status of the pipeline, boards have a duty to go to where the African American woman is today, particularly if she is not present in the pipeline or is hidden and hard to find. African American women talent in organizations can advise where these locations are as well as others focused on the diversity of African American women in corporate boardrooms.

**5.6.2 The capital of the European American male.** For African American women, perhaps not fair, perhaps not right, and in the world after George Floyd perhaps not preferred, but the simple fact of the matter is “people will give you a chance if you’ve been nominated by a White male,” Faith commented. On a scale of one to 10 “their influence is a 10,” said Hope. “Very few African Americans would join basic business organizations unless they were minority oriented... You increase your network by not putting yourself in a single bubble,” advised Grace. Joy further commented that “White women or Black women get to the top because White men say so... I’m here in my board seat because White men said so. They own the power structure.” Emma asked the question of “who is going to get me where I want to go?” The answer, she elaborated, is “the people who have the power and the money, and they sit at the very top, the CEOs and the board members.” Moreover she shared “those are the guys that make the decisions, and they’re White guys. So I have to show up at places where they are.” Kelly, additionally, commented that “European American men clearly dominate.” Furthermore,

“they’re hugely influential because they are the majority,” said Angie. Additionally, “they have a huge influence because there are more White men on boards,” said Jaimie.

As African American women seek to be intentional, perfect networking, and persevere to grow the presence and influence of African American women in America’s corporate boardrooms, Grace provides insight for the journey:

As people we have to be very careful because if you look for it, you will see racism everywhere, but everything does not have to deal with racism. Sometimes what you’re getting is true caring... So we have to be careful as people that we don’t take and consider everything that happens to us, racist, because that is a very dangerous slope.

Given the above comments from the women in this study, despite one’s desires and motivations post George Floyd, African American women must be intentional to network and profoundly include in their network the key demographic of the American corporate boardroom that will occupy this crucial position for the foreseeable future - European American men. Also note the plural *men*. Again, perhaps not desired, particularly post George Floyd, but one is not enough, two is better, three is making progress. Moreover, the African American woman must have a multitude of European American men board influencers in her network because European American men are the demographic of multitude for America’s corporate boards, said the women in this study, and a statement repeated often. Again, this is not to imply that other corporate board directors and influencers aren’t important, but for the board one is seeking a seat on, who are the essential players? If this is European American men, then European American men it is. If this is another demographic, then certainly don’t dismiss that demographic. At the end of the day, be intentional, and intentionality is appropriate for those seeking to occupy a seat in the corporate boardroom and, likewise, those currently with seats in the corporate boardroom.

**5.6.3 Skills and credentials to match board needs and gaps.** While networks remain most influential for someone having access to corporate board opportunities and the capital of the European American male is crucial due to his numbers on boards, credentials and skills meeting the current needs and gaps of the board will realize the seat. Boards that have awareness, likewise, will recognize diversity to include gender diversity as a need. These same boards must also recognize that ethnic gender diversity is part of that need, and there specifically the diversity of African American women, particularly for America. Finally, these same boards must recognize the propensity for the board and their networks to be influenced by obliviousness and the challenges of Black feminist thought that has plagued the United States since its founding days.

## **5.7 Self-Reflection**

“It’s the people Dad. It’s the people.” An observation my Mikayla Quinn voiced several times as I took her on an eight-day Harley ride, cross-country - her first. She was 16 years of age at the time. The journey started from our home in the countryside of North Carolina, a track north, west of New York City, where we eventually hugged the coast line north of Boston to Eastport, Maine. We returned home across the northern part of the New England states into western New York, south through Pennsylvania, and ultimately back to the Rowan County countryside. Mikayla Quinn was making a reference to the incredible, but different and welcoming people we met on our journey. These encounters included the couple who joined us, by chance, for dinner at the bar in some little New England coastal town to the *rough-looking* guy who gave us a *thumbs-up* as we waited our turn at a stoplight in another town. We never knew where we were eating, where we would spend the night, but we experienced the journey of a lifetime because we were *open to exploring and embracing the new to us, the different.*



As I take a moment to reflect upon my Ph.D. journey, my first thoughts go back to the admissions interview in January 2016. This was a group interview for six of us in the 2016 cohort with program professors. The comment was made that to do a dissertation, passion for the topic was essential. In searching for that passion I realized the disadvantage my wonderful Mikayla Quinn faced, simply due to her gender, in the androcentric world we so often find ourselves living. This is not to imply the same world is easy for my son, but definitely different. Of course, this is the same quandary that all the women of our family and elsewhere faced and face. Thus, I pursued women in leadership for my doctoral studies to possibly have a positive influence on the current state of affairs for not only my daughter and the women in my family, but for the women who call me a friend and colleague.

I obviously chose the woman's limited presence in the corporate boardroom for my dissertation path. As I learned more, however, the more I realized the need and challenge transcend the women of my family to a higher, more ethical, more moral place. Furthermore, an epiphany for me during my Ph.D. journey - the other person's lived experience, whether a woman, whether a man, regardless of race, gender, or other distinguishing factors that make us unique - our lived experience makes us who we are and gives our reality its solid foundation.

As I take a moment to further reflect upon this study, I found the literature to discuss Black women, in particular, to repeatedly experience bias, prejudice, oppression, racism, and other negatives in their personal and professional pursuits, i.e. the Black feminist thought. Even Grace who cautioned us that "as people we have to be very careful because if you look for it, you will see racism everywhere, but everything does not have to deal with racism," she also voiced the realities of Black feminist thought. However, this is not my world, not my *truth* as an European American male. Nevertheless, I finally understood that this was their experience, the

Black women in America and elsewhere, their reality, and whether I ascribed to that reality or not, their reality was real for them, their everyday. Thus, if I wanted to understand, wanted to make a difference for the Black woman who calls me a friend and colleague, then I would have to be open-minded enough to better understand her world, the Black woman's *normal* - those wonderful friends and colleagues of mine - their every day.

While I have all but summited this pinnacle of education, for years I have comprehended that at the end of the day, the more that I learn, the more that I really didn't know, and still don't know. Thus, the simple takeaway from this dissertation: embrace difference, embrace diversity for the *new* - the yet to be experienced and learned - that enhances our lives, our organizations, our countries, our world. Embrace the incredible *opportunity* that *diversity* offers us *all*.



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## *Appendix A*

### *Preliminary Questionnaire*

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) What is your age?
- 3) What is your gender and race/ethnicity?
- 4) How many years of experience do you have as a corporate board director for one or more organizations listed on a publicly traded stock exchange?
- 5) Do you currently serve on a corporate board of directors?
- 6) If you do not currently serve on a corporate board of directors, how many years have elapsed since you last served?
- 7) How many Fortune 100 companies have you served as a corporate board director?
- 8) How many non-Fortune 100 companies have you served as a corporate board director?
- 9) How many corporate boards have you served as chair?
- 10) How many corporate boards have you served as CEO?
- 11) How many corporate boards have you served on as a member of the nominating committee?
- 12) What senior corporate positions have you served in, e.g. vice president, C-suite, etc.?
- 13) What are your educational credentials?

- 14) What other credentials do you have that you find significant?
- 15) Critical Incident: Your board of directors has a seat coming open. Female and male candidates meeting all academic and professional criteria have been identified. Role-fit and group-fit considerations are also equally satisfied by all candidates. The following demographics are also equally represented among both female and male candidates:
- i) African American/Black
  - ii) Asian American
  - iii) European American/White
  - iv) Hispanic/Latino American
- a) Who do you vote for, and why?
- b) Who do you anticipate your board will select, and why?

## *Appendix B*

### *Interview Protocol*

#### **B.1 Basic Information about the Interview**

- Date & Time of Interview \_\_\_\_\_
- Place: Kirk Beatty WebEx/Zoom Meeting Room
- Interviewer: Don Kirk Beatty
- Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_
- Recording device: Sony ICD-PX370 Audio Recorder & WebEx/Zoom

#### **B.2 Introduction**

- For this interview I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies program at North Carolina A&T State University and this interview is for my dissertation study.
- For the purpose of collecting the data I will record this interview and take notes.
- For this interview you are being asked for your insights and perspectives based on your lived experiences and there are no right or wrong answers. Please also feel free to take all the time that you feel is needed to answer any given question.
- The purpose of this study is to explore the dynamics surrounding the path and obstacles to better enable the African American woman to translate her *performance* into a workplace *image* to gain the necessary *exposure* (PIE) to further facilitate a matrix of opportunity to realize her talents in the corporate boardroom.
- Confirm/get informed consent signature
- Clarify terms: AA/Black and EA/White
- Ask if interviewee has questions

#### **B.3 Interview Content Questions**

AAW: African American/Black Woman, EAW/M: European American/White Woman/Man

- 1) Please discuss the corporate board director selection process.
  - a) How does this differ when considering AAW?
- 2) Please discuss the most influential factors influencing corporate board opportunities for the first-time director (e.g. credentials, network, board composition, etc.).
  - a) How does this differ when considering women directors?
  - b) How does this differ when considering AAW directors?

- 3) Please share what you find to be the most advantageous career path to the corporate boardroom to be a director.
  - a) How does this differ for women as compared to men?
  - b) How does this differ for AAW as compared to others?
  - c) How is the path to corporate board opportunities influenced by:
    - i) AAW directors?
    - ii) EAW directors?
    - iii) EAM directors?
- 4) Please discuss the importance of networks for corporate board opportunities.
  - a) How does this differ when considering AAW?
- 5) Please discuss the importance of sponsors and advocates for corporate board opportunities.
  - a) How does this differ when considering AAW?
- 6) Please discuss what you find equity in corporate board representation to mean.
  - a) How does this differ when considering women?
  - b) How does this differ when considering AAW?
  - c) What is equity in regards to EAM?

- 7) Please share what you find the influence of EAM directors to be in corporate board composition.
  - a) How does this differ when considering women for the board as compared to men?
  - b) How does this differ when considering AAW for the board as compared to others?
- 8) Please share what you find the influence of EAW directors to be in corporate board composition.
  - a) How does this differ when considering women for the board as compared to men?
  - b) How does this differ when considering AAW for the board as compared to others?
- 9) Please share what you find the influence of AAW directors to be in corporate board composition.
  - a) How does this differ when considering women for the board as compared to men?
  - b) How does this differ when considering AAW for the board as compared to others?
- 10) Please discuss the influences promoting and/or hindering women on corporate boards.
  - a) How does this differ when considering AAW?
- 11) Please discuss strategies to influence the diversity of women on corporate boards.
  - a) How does this differ when considering AAW?



12) Please discuss the role of the chair and CEO regarding the diversity of women on corporate boards.

a) How does this differ when considering AAW directors?

b) How does this differ when considering AAW chairs and CEOs?

13) Please discuss the role of other directors regarding the diversity of women on boards.

a) How does this differ when considering AAW directors?

14) Please discuss the role networks play in the pipeline and selection to the corporate board.

a) How does this differ for women as compared to men?

b) How does this differ for AAW as compared to others?

15) Please discuss your recommendations to best influence the diversity of women in the corporate boardroom.

a) How does this differ for AAW?

#### **B.4 Reserve Questions – Time Permitting**

16) Please discuss the business case for and/or against women in the corporate boardroom.

a) How does this differ when considering AAW?

b) How do EAM influence the business case for:

i) Women?

ii) AAW?

- c) How do EAW influence the business case for:
  - i) Women?

- ii) AAW?

- d) How do AAW influence the business case for:
  - i) Women?

- ii) AAW?

17) Please discuss how a critical mass of women influences corporate board opportunities for other women.

- a) How does this differ when considering AAW?

- b) Please discuss the number you feel is necessary to achieve critical mass.

- i) How does this differ when considering AAW?

18) Please discuss how the woman's normal influences her ability to develop the necessary networks to facilitate board opportunities.

- a) How does this differ when considering AAW?

## **B.5 Closing Instructions**

19) What other questions should be asked regarding the diversity of AAW and corporate boards?

- Thank you for participating today.

## *Appendix C*

### *Invitation to Participate and Informed Consent*

#### **C.1 Invitation to Participate**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

I hope this finds you well.

I am in the dissertation stage of the Leadership Studies doctoral program at North Carolina A&T State University. As my final deliverable I am conducting a qualitative phenomenological study regarding gender diversity in the corporate boardroom. Your insights, I am confident, would be very valuable and imperative to the findings. As such I would like to extend this invitation for you to participate. Should you accept, the following will transpire next:

- 1) At your convenience you are welcomed to reach me on my mobile at 704-202-9335 or contact me via email at dkbeatty@aggies.ncat.edu to discuss more.
- 2) I will follow up via email providing:
  - a) an informed consent letter addressing your participation with the option to withdraw at any time for any reason, the study purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality;
  - b) a preliminary questionnaire including questions to formally confirm that you meet the criteria for the study;
    - i) Note: my sending this invitation indicates that I am confident that you meet the study's criteria.
- 3) The above email will also invite you to propose the time and place at your convenience to meet for an in-person interview or, given the current virus concerns, a virtual interview. A virtual interview can be via WebEx, Zoom, or other remote meeting technology
  - a) Please expect the interview to take between 60 to 90 minutes.
  - b) I will provide a list of questions prior to the interview for your preparation.
- 4) We convene for the interview.
- 5) When available after the interview I will provide a transcript for your review to confirm that I have accurately captured your replies and if necessary schedule a second interview to discuss the transcript as you may desire.
  - a) If you find the transcript has accurately captured your replies and you feel no further discussion is necessary, your indication to such will satisfy the second interview.
  - b) If necessary the second interview can be in-person, phone, or virtual.

Thank you, and I look forward to your reply,

## **C.2 Informed Consent**

### **NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL STATE UNIVERSITY** **INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH INTERVIEW**



Study Title: An Exploration of the Path for African American Women to and the Diversification of the Corporate Boardroom

Principal Investigator: Don Kirk Beatty

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Geleana D. Alston

#### **Purpose of the Research**

You are being asked to be interviewed in a research study regarding gender diversity in the corporate boardroom. The purpose of this research is to explore the path for African American women to and the diversification of the corporate boardroom. You have been asked to participate because you are a current or former corporate board director.

#### **Procedures**

If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in an interview which will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. If there is a need to follow up after the interview, you may be contacted again. The interview will be conducted at a location that you choose. If an in-person interview is not available the interview can be by a remote meeting technology such as Zoom, WebEx, or other similar technology. You will be asked several questions regarding your perspectives and experiences pertaining to the corporate boardroom and particularly regarding African American (Black) women, European American (White) women, and European American men. With your permission, I will audio record the interview in order to accurately capture what is said. The recording will be transcribed, but your name will not be included in the transcription. The recording and transcription will be kept on a password-protected computer only accessible to the principal investigator. Additionally, as soon as possible after the dissertation is completed, the audio recordings will be destroyed. Transcriptions must be kept three years after the close of the study, and will be destroyed as soon as possible after this period. Reports of study findings will not include any identifying information.

#### **Risks**

Risks are not anticipated from your participation in this research.

#### **Benefits**

Benefits may include new insights regarding corporate board inclusion and diversity and overall corporate board functionality.

#### **Confidentiality**

All information collected in this study will be kept completely confidential to the extent permitted by law. Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. The data that you give will be used for a qualitative phenomenological study to meet the dissertation requirement for the Leadership Studies doctoral program at NC A&T State University, and may be used as the basis for articles or presentations



**NORTH CAROLINA AGRICULTURAL AND TECHNICAL STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH INTERVIEW**

in the future. Your name or information that would identify you in audio recordings, publications, or presentations will not be used.

**Participation/Withdrawal**

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, before, during, or after the interview. You may also skip any question during the interview, but continue to participate in the rest of the study.

**Contact**

If you have questions or concerns about this research, please contact Kirk Beatty, 704-202-9335 (m) or dkbeatty@aggies.ncat.edu. You may also contact the faculty member supervising this work: Dr. Geleana D. Alston, 336-285-2150, gdalston@ncat.edu.

If you have any study-related concerns or any questions about your rights as a research study participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance and Ethics at North Carolina A&T State University at (336) 285-3183 or email rescomp@ncat.edu.

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information and have received answers to all my questions. I am at least 18 years old and voluntarily consent to take part in this research study and to have this interview audio recorded.

Participant's Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

