

Challenges, Barriers, and the Underrepresentation of Black Women in Sustainable Global World Environment

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Abstract: *Women make up at least 50.8% of the United States population, and 46.8% are in the professional workforce per Census Quick Facts from 2016. United States Department of Labor, n.d.). Despite making up half of the United States population, women only represent 26% of managing roles in the workforce. In the 2019 study, “Women in the Workplace 2019”, McKinsey & Company found women to still lag in corporate America in areas of salary gaps, promotions due to the broken rung, glass ceilings, lack of training and development, among other gender and racial barriers. Workplace Fairness”, a broken rung is a missing step in the “corporate ladder”, which prevents women in entry-level roles from being promoted into management. The broken rung is the more significant barrier for Black women navigating the workplace. To successfully navigate the workplace and ascend into management roles, Black women saw the need to use perseverance strategies due to underrepresentation and the influence of race and traditional privileged gendered roles. The study’s outcome addresses the challenges, barriers, and perseverance strategies Black women used to ascend into management roles. Mentorship and sponsorship are critical for helping Black women to advance within the workplace. The research study may be significant to Black women managers and future leaders. Without the critical influence of a mentor or sponsor, the Black woman will remain underrepresented in management positions. Further exploration of specific perseverance strategies and how they may have been demonstrated in their collegiate programs to prepare Black women for their professional careers.*

Keywords: challenges, barriers, underrepresentation, black women, sustainable world.

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Introduction

Research suggests that Black women experience a more significant burden of unconscious biases and racial microaggressions than their White counterparts (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2011). Findings also suggest that Black women lack the necessary resources for opportunity equity within a corporate environment, such as managerial support and access to informal networks to secure higher roles (Lean In, 2020). But most important to this study was the impact that intersectionality of gender and race have on the ability of Black women to progress in corporate America. Existing scholarship suggests that having a “quota” to fill the rank with more Black women may be intimidating (Jenkins, 2020). Although the quota has been a measure for most companies, Black women have only been idle bodies in positions to fulfil compliance, and once the quota for race becomes a metric, leaders tend to shy away from the true intentions of diversity and inclusion (Greenfield, 2020). To alleviate the underrepresentation of Black women in managerial roles, it will take more than companies making a statement condemning racism and racial inequality (Greenfield, 2020) if the focus is genuinely on diversity and inclusion. To peel the layers back off of the multiple barriers of power is to finally address the intersectionality of gender and race and integrate quotas that may be beneficial for Black women (Hughes, 2011).

For example, quotas may work if programs are available to groom Black women for higher roles within corporate America if fears are not realized, if no stigmas exist, and if there are no pipeline problems, such as access to informal networks (He & Kaplan, 2017). Informal networks have been essential for gaining social handshakes that can be used for career success and social support (Alan & Sözen, 2017). Defined as an invisible social structure, informal networks are natural-ready contact systems in that women are not privileged (Linehan & Scullion, 2008). Women also struggle to advance into managerial roles due to the “broken rung” known for preventing women from leaping into management and beyond (Crager, 2020). Black women have additional barriers that affect the rate at which they ascend into management roles, and many of these barriers stem from the history of the Black woman (Hall, Everett & Hamilton-Mason, 2012).

Literature Review

Intersectionality of Gender and Race. The authors explored the impact of the intersectionality of gender and race and perseverance. Black women have experienced this in their journey to management. Intersectionality of gender and race may be reflected in the experiences and perceptions of minority social identities of Black women whom previous scholars believe experience more significant challenges than their White female counterparts while advancing professionally in corporate America (Elliott & Smith, 2004). Intersectionality has been rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory and shaped as a heuristic and analytical tool to encourage social movement and advocacy on the vulnerabilities of Black women (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, Tomlinson (2014). Crenshaw (1989) found that the analysis of Black women has been distorted where sexism and racism intersect and noted that Black women had been excluded from the discourse of feminist theory and antiracist policies. Although Mumby (1993) suggested that feminist theory is transformative, Crenshaw (1989) noted that transformation is not inevitable for Black and White women alone due to a discrete set of experiences. Black women have been the quintessential intersectional subjects in scholarship, but no conclusions have been reached on eradicating deeply rooted oppression (Nash, 2008).

There is still much work to do for such eradication. Among women of colour, Giddings (1984) exposed the racial division of oppression and suppression, including the understanding that White women tend to follow in tandem, sharing the same experiences as Black women only to betray later the Black woman where the road splits. Dorothy Height, leading president of the National Council of Negro Women for 40 years, pointed out the separation describing women getting suffrage, but suffrage did not come for Black women and Black people until after multiple lynchings, the civil rights movement, and Voting Rights Act (Giddings, 1984). hooks (1987) contended that in the 19th century, the women’s rights movement could have provided Black women with a forum to address their plights, but the privilege of White women prevented such opportunity. Until the history of Black women is discussed in totality, the road to being represented in the full analysis of women may not be complete. In agreeance with Crenshaw, Carastathis

(2016) urged for analytic clarity and contextual rigor of Black feminism, which must be retraced to enact the radical potential to actualize coalitions. Even with analytical clarity, the core of the oppression of Black women is perpetuated by White privilege or the caste system (Bhopal, 2019; Wilkerson, 2020). Wilkerson (2020) noted that the caste system was created as an American innovation and used for the benefit of the elites while enforced by the poorer members of the dominant caste who required the submission of Black slaves to the will of White people. In the research, experiences that stem from slavery appeared as a perpetuating stigma of advancing in the workplace. Despite this perpetuating stigma, Black women continue to cope with the new dynamics of gender and racism in their journey (Davis, 2004; Thomas, 2004). St. Jean and Feagin (1998) noted that Black women face “double-jeopardy” and Landau (1995) noted a “triple jeopardy” with having to deal and cope with the blended characteristics of gender and racism, which may trigger a single and collective reaction by White people (Brown & Kasztelnik, 2020).

Similarly, Kendi (2019) noted racist policies produce inequities between racial groups and that the White woman's resistance to Black feminism and theories of intersectionality is self-destructive, which prevents an understanding of oppression. These texts together highlight the impact of White people, whether inflicting or reacting, due to inequities of gendered racism, particularly against Black women (St. Jean & Feagin, 1998; Kendi, 2019). Discussions of racism are generally dismissed in everyday conversations as if racism does not exist, and as long as there is denial, there lacks any possibility of awareness (Simon, 2020). Essed (1991) noted if there is no knowledge of racism, the reality of racism is not easily understood. How can one be an antiracist if they are unwilling to understand what racism means for those impacted? Kendi (2019) noted that being an antiracist goes against the natural and obvious flow of the United States' history. Di'Angelo (2018) stated that White people see their existence and White privilege as racial comfort and are less tolerant of racial stress, and also highlighted the lack of information about what racism means or how it works. Rather than addressing the root of racism and oppression, White people continue to dismiss racism and suggest that Black people “get over it”. However, the impact of systemic racism today still threatens the lives of Black people and, specifically, Black women progressing in corporate environments (Oluo, 2019).

Black Feminism. Intersectionality of gender and race is situated within the course of a Black feminist when in the nineteenth century, Black women resisted the double-tasked whips and stings of prejudice related to sex and race (Carastathis, 2016). Feminism is used in the context of equality for women. When used with intersectionality, it is a legal disadvantage for Black women, highlighting Black feminists set forth a problematic consequence of systemic treatment based on gender and race (Crenshaw, 1989). The feminist movement began during the women's right to vote era and was led by Susan B. Anthony and Participant 9 Cady Stanton. Hooks (1987) described feminism as advocating women's rights and equality of the sexes. Hooks (2000) also noted feminism as a movement that does not imply men as the enemy but as an end to sexism, sexual exploitation, and oppression. Hooks (1987) purported sexism and racism as an oppressive force in the lives of Black women and highlights the overlap of being “Black” and “woman”, which she describes as Black feminism, a systemic devaluation of Black womanhood as a direct consequence of racism. Henry (2021) asserted that whiteness is central to the constructs of Black feminism and intersectionality and points out that Black women's lived experiences are not determined by one system of oppression but by capitalism and racism, which leads to a structural disadvantage for Black women. Carastathis (2016) argued that Black feminism and intersectionality are used as objectifying proxies for Black women, which can be erased because intersectionality is often used specifically in one conceptual arena, the Black woman's plight (Chukwu & Kasztelnik, 2021).

On the other hand, Mowatt, French, and Malebranche (2013) purported that Black women should augment the feminist discourse. Meaning that more insight into the effects of gender and racial biases should be exposed. Nash (2008) contended that intersectionality serves theoretical and political purposes for feminist and anti-racist scholarship and uses feminist and anti-racist scholarship to combat feminist hierarchy, hegemony, and exclusivity. Feminism, however, falls short on inclusion alone and forms a disconnect where feminism claims to speak for (all) women yet gives inattention to racial, ethnic, class, and sexual differences, where Black women need attention placed on defending their virtue (Nash, 2008; Hooks, 1987). Leaning on Mumby's (1993) statement, “At its best, feminist theory is transformative.”, leaves out the discourse of Black women as suggested by Crenshaw (1989). hooks (2000) believed that the focus of feminism is solely on ending sexist oppression. Sexist oppression is vastly experienced by Black women who are confronted with the struggle within the relationship between individuals and society or social structures (Alinia, 2015). The same social structures label and racial stereotype Black women by the hypervisibility of their bodies (Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013). Racial stereotypes are projected thoughts and beliefs one racial group holds over members

of another (Torres & Charles, 2004: 116). Mowatt, French, and Malebranche (2013) drew their research through an interdisciplinary lens, proposing two concepts for Black feminists' analysis to enhance feminist leisure scholarship. Black women are represented in an abnormal stereotypical manner and are invisible concerning systemic oppression that besets Black women and hypervisibility (Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013). Similarly, hooks (1987) noted that White women excluded and ignored the contributions of Black women in feminist ideology. Mowatt, French, and Malebranche (2013) unpacked the intersectional experiences of gender and race, explicitly impacting Black women to demonstrate the need for intersections between Black feminism and leisure studies. Mowatt, French, and Malebranche (2013) purported that systemic oppression beset Black women regarding lack of equal access and participation, resulting in their invisibility. Black women are invisible through the consequences of systemic sexism and racism. Mowatt, French, and Malebranche (2013) attempted not to emphasize the Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a default approach to examine race while providing insight into Black Feminism and continued to describe how Black women use leisure for gain.

Mowatt, French, and Malebranche (2013) defined leisure as establishing sites where power is erected and exercised in various ways to enforce gender-based and racially oppressive relations that are features of other societal institutions. More insight is necessary to integrate the Black feminism framework into scholarship, which may give an increased voice and representation of Black women's overall experiences (Mowatt, French, and Malebranche, 2013). Mowatt, French, and Malebranche (2013) noted that Black feminists sought an opportunity to develop antiracist and antisexist politics specifically. The feminist movement highlighted similar interests of White women; however, it failed to address the realities of Black women regarding overt and covert racism and classism. White feminists were not dependable allies for Black women, as White working-class women could discriminate against them (Giddings, 1996).

Similarly, Crenshaw (1989) suggested that the discussions of White feminists have consistently been ill-fitted for the Black woman's circumstances and deny the specificity of Black women's lives. For Black women, overt and covert racism is just one aspect of their realities. Black women experience sexism by Black men, racism by White women, and blatant sexism and racism by White men, which pushes the limits beyond the acts of oppression (Hooks, 1987). The experiences of sexism and racism are where Black feminism comes into play to critique systems of institutional, structural, and cultural oppression to highlight the experiences of Black women in an analysis of the intersectionality of gender and race (Mowatt, French, & Malebranche (2013). Hooks (1987) purported that White women barred Black women from having an equal voice in the feminist movement, but for Black women, Black feminism encourages scholarship that transcends privileged theories rooted in racism and sexism. Mowatt, French, and Malebranche (2013) noted that systemic oppression occurs in multiple ways for Black women. For example, Black women are overrepresented in health disparities as well as lack of promotions in the workplace, and because of this overrepresentation, Black women exist in a state of systemic invisibility or problematic visibility, such as sexist oppression (Hooks, 1987; Mowatt, French, & Malebranche, 2013). Much focus is placed on the contrasting differences between Black and White women and among Black men, and less on the lived realities of Black women and how they navigate the workplace (Matos & Kasztelnik, 2023).

The intersectionality of gender and race adds additional hardship to pursuing managerial roles for Black women in the workplace (Carastathis, 2016). Research on Black women is integrated within feminist literature, which does not contribute to understanding the intersectionality of gender and race that Black women face in their professional development (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Concepts explored include Black women's strategies for motivation and perseverance as they pursue managerial roles in corporate America. The approach provides a structural view of how the strategies are related to perseverance and reducing the impact of gender and racial biases. This qualitative study uses a descriptive research design to gain an abysmal understanding of the journey of Black women managers in corporate America. The findings of this research aimed to advance the knowledge on the intersectionality of gender and race and perseverance as it relates to the grit and passion for long-term goals regardless of initial failures or adversity (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), and to contribute to the original qualitative data to this study's conceptual framework. Further research and application of the strategies Black women use to persevere offer ways Black women can navigate the work environment while in pursuit of managerial roles in corporate America.

Despite the challenges experienced, Black women continue to ascend into management roles and beyond within corporate America by leveraging their strengths (Johns, 2013; Giddings, 1984). Anderson, Lepper, and Ross (1980) explained that only a specific personal impression within one's domain might persevere beyond the complete invalidation of the evidence of the source of an initial reaction. King (2014) pointed

out that courage and wisdom as the possessions and exercises of intellectual virtues that perseverance needs as a critical component for personal development and fulfilment. Much remains unknown about the experiences and psychological state of Black women who persevere beyond challenges (Hall, Hamilton-Mason & Everett, 2012; Thomas, 2004). While gender and racial biases against Black women have been studied extensively in the literature, there is a gap in research that focuses on the journey and psychological state that allows Black women to remain persistent in their quest for career advancement in corporate America (Thomas, 2004).

Passion and Perseverance. Resilience and perseverance have long been idealized as the virtue of Black women who may cope with disproportionate demands from a history of racism and sexism. A study by Sisco (2020) found that practising resilience and perseverance for Black women relied heavily on safeguarding their narratives to avoid being misrepresented, misunderstood, and misidentified by stereotypes imposed upon them. However, safeguarding may not work for every Black woman as everyone's grit and commitment levels differ (Gross, 2014). Duckworth and Gross (2014) conducted a study and developed a tool to gauge the level of resilience and passion using a Grit-S scale by using questionnaires. In their study, Duckworth and Gross (2014) found that self-control is required to adjudicate between lower-level goals and actions they soon regret being successful. Duckworth and Gross (2014) also found that grit is equivalent to maintaining allegiance towards higher-level goals with rapid succession over a long period. Duckworth (2016) later used the Grit Scale to measure the extent to which people approach life using a battery of personality questionnaires. In her findings, Duckworth (2016) found that while some people may have great skills to reach a level of grit, others may need to contort themselves to reach the same set of skills equally. The roadmap to success is investing effort into improving skills and achievement using those skills (Duckworth, 2016). Grit was introduced by Duckworth (2016) as a predictor of who makes it and who does not, which has two components of passion and perseverance.

Duckworth (2016) describes both components; 1) passion refers to caring about goals in an abiding, loyal, and steady way which begins with enjoying doing things, and 2) perseverance is referred to as discipline and improving upon things you did yesterday, and you become gritty whereas you avoid complacency. With perseverance, one devotes their time and seeks purpose in becoming full-hearted, which leads to challenge that exceeds skill practice and mastery and does whatever it takes to improve (Duckworth, 2016). Nelson, Cardemil, and Adeoye (2016) provided depth into the perseverance of Black women and used the term “strong” to pull on the characteristics of Black women and their desire to move beyond stereotypes rooted in the slavery era. Nelson, Cardemil, and Adeoye (2016) highlighted that strength was an integral part of the identity of the Black woman. Similarly, Duckworth (2016) noted that culture and identity are critical to understanding how people with grit live. For Black women, adversity through their historical representations of enslavement has been the grit that continues to help Black women persist against the odds (Duckworth, 2016; Nelson, Cardemil & Adeoye, 2016). Another aspect of understanding Black women is to look at the childhood of Black girls to determine how they learn perseverance. French, Lewis, and Neville (2012) attempted to introduce perseverance and intersectionality as one dependent on the other for Black women and girls. Like Nelson, Cardemil, and Adeoye (2016), and drawing on French, Lewis, and Neville's (2012) analysis, a strength-based perspective was used in the study of resiliency against gender and racial oppression and grooming Black girls to reach resiliency at an early age was explored.

The Black culture has been rooted in religion. Mendenhall, Bowman, and Zhang (2012) purported that Black women use religious beliefs and family connectedness to cope with the realities of gendered-racial oppression. When perseverance is mentioned in the study, we apply the concept to Black women pursuing management roles after numerous rejections and underrepresentation (Merriman, 2017). For Black women, rejection leads to alternatives, such as remaining in the same job, legal redress for non-promotion, or securing another position outside their current organization (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2010). Despite numerous rejections, Black women stay the course (Merriman, 2017). Black women cope with the stresses of rejection in the workplace, pushing them to persevere to prove that they can achieve, attain, and accomplish anything set before them (Hall, Everett, & Hamilton-Mason, 2010). While there has been little research on gaining insight into persistence, efforts will be taken to understand the resilience and perseverance of Black women in their pursuit and journey of managerial positions (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Coping is consistently used to describe the psyche of Black women as they continue navigating stressful workplace circumstances (Bonanno, 2004; Everett, Hall, & Hamilton-Mason, 2012; Masten, 2015). Racism and sexism have been the biggest stressors for Black women in every capacity (Everett, Hall, & Hamilton-Mason, 2010). A study that does not highlight the challenges and barriers of Black women may

render inadequate, as knowing the history of Black women, knowledge of racism, understanding of racial comfort and privilege, and racial discussions may alleviate the harsh experiences and realities of Black women in the workplace (Mitchell, 2003; Essed, 1991; DiAngelo, 2018; Olou, 2019). Roberts, Mayo, Ely, and Thomas (2018) conducted a study encompassing beating the odds as a Black woman leader and asserted that just the experience of being Black in America creates a sense of resilience, courage, and pride. They studied the careers of 2300 alums of African descent from the Harvard Business School. Of that group, 532 Black women who graduated from 1977 to 2015 were identified, and 67 attained leadership roles in corporations and service firms. Roberts, Mayo, Ely, and Thomas (2018) conducted in-depth interviews with 30 of the 67 Black women to understand how they succeeded in the obtention of leadership roles and how resilience played a part. Through this study, Roberts, Mayo, Ely, and Thomas (2018) found a vast struggle to advance women in underrepresented groups due to this group's need to model their development strategies using their paths to success. In the study, the struggle came into play when the same experiences did not inform their counterparts of the underrepresented group (Roberts, Mayo, Ely, and Thomas, 2018). Black women continue beating the odds and successfully overcoming impeding barriers such as lack of support, lack of access to resources, and excessive gender and racial biases in the workplace (Alter, 2017; Gee & Peck, 2018; Siple, Hopson, Sobehart, & Turocy, 2018; Loutfi, 2019; McFeeters, 2019).

Challenges, Barriers, and the Underrepresentation of Black Women in Sustainable Global World Environment. An underrepresentation disparity continues for Black women and their journey to managing and leading roles in corporate America (Johns, 2013). Despite the challenges and barriers, Black women continue to make great strides (LeanIn, n.d.). Studies have not specifically addressed the experiences on the journey of Black women, such as the daily stressors of unconscious biases that impacts their ability to grow beyond support and analytical roles within an organization (Everett, Hall, and Hamilton-Mason, (2010). To date, there have only been two Black women to ever serve as CEO of major corporations since the inception of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission founded in 1965; Ursula Burns, CEO of Xerox (2019), and Rosalind Brewer, CEO of Sam's Club (2016). Ursula Burns, the first Black woman to run a Fortune 500 company, stated that 20 years is how long it takes to grow an entry-level employee, or even longer for those seeking specialty programs like STEM or professional services, and while Black women are graduating from college in high numbers, they tend to land in support positions, rather than coming out of the education system that gets them through to the C-suite (McGirt, 2017). Burns have been openly vocal about her frustration with corporations making excuses for not hiring Blacks (Alcorn, 2020). The Wells Fargo CEO, Charles Scharf, stated a limited pool of Black talent is preventing diversity (Shaban, 2020). The thought process of today's corporate environment leans on racial comfort and privilege, preventing Black women from reaching new heights in the workplace (DiAngelo, 2018). Oluo (2019) purported that a lack of racial discussions plays a part in misunderstanding Black women, slowing their professional progression. Similarly, Cohen and Huffman (2007) purported that the underrepresentation of Blacks is significant when underrepresentation operates in a high-proportion Black labor market.

The challenges and barriers are unique to Black women's pursuit and journey in corporate America. Several challenges prevent Black women from being ushered to the top. For example, Elliott and Smith (2001), purported that bottom-up pressure has been found regarding race or ethnicity. Black women are barred from participation in society due to dual minority status and the rampant forms of discrimination (Turner, 1997), and remain in competition with White women, White men, and Black men due to sexism and racism. Because of discrimination, Black women are forced with the psychological burden of living with false images and struggling to live and work for a purpose and a positive sense of identity, all while aspiring to control their lives (Turner, 1997).

Oppression. The term oppression, explicitly reserved for Black people, has been defined by the dominant white majority as superior and a way to prevent Blacks from freely expressing their wills and needs (Maynard, 2018). Oppression is defined by Hanna, Talley, and Guindon (2000) as the privilege of dominant groups of people rendering systematic subjugation of unjust and harsh power over subordinate groups of people, specifically Blacks. St. Jean and Feagin (1998) described oppression as a multifaceted burden for Black women, with a core of cultural devaluation and an invisible face leading to the “misrecognition” of humanity. Hill-Collins (2000) contended that oppression works together to produce injustices beyond one fundamental type of system. If one fundamental type of oppression system existed, race, ethnicity, and class inequalities would be ignored for women and even more so for Black women. Thompson and Campling (2003) suggested that oppression arises because of unfair discrimination. Crenshaw (1989), on the other hand, noted that discrimination flows in more than one direction for Black women where race and sex discrimination intersect

(Crenshaw, 1989). Discrimination must be tackled first before intersectionality can be addressed, and the oppressor must acknowledge and comprehend the current state of Black activism against gender and racial discrimination (Soave, 2019).

Potapchuk, Leiderman, Bivens, and Major (2005) purported that systemic oppression is not simply a problem of individuals; systemic oppression is structural internalized racism that Black people confront regularly. Internalized racism is described by Potapchuk et al. (2005) as a negative consequence of racism in the lives of Black people that White people choose to ignore, like their whiteness (Brown, 2018). DiAngelo (2018) purported that race has been a Black cultural issue that does not concern White people. Accountability is reduced when racism is not acknowledged by those who use it as oppression, as well as any possibility of developing strategies that may eradicate the acts of racism (McIntosh, 1990). Patterson (1973) similarly purported that if the oppressor has not acknowledged the inequality of the oppressed, empathy and respect cannot be honoured toward Black women who continue to seek assistance and equality from their oppressors. While Black women have been continuously ignored, silenced, and discriminated against, intersectionality has been used to bring balance to analyze and acknowledge the experiences of covert and overt racism (Bhopal, 2020). Women constitute almost half of the United States labor force, yet discrimination remains at the forefront of their positions, salaries, and advancements (Beck & Davis, 2005).

Unconscious Biases. The rise of racial discrimination lawsuits may have reduced blatant racism; however, blatant racism has turned into a modern subliminal type of discrimination and prejudice termed implicit bias or, as described in the study, unconscious or racial bias (Hamilton & Dovidio, 2015; Dobbin, Kalev & Harvard Business Review, 2016). Unconscious bias is a common stereotypical idea in American culture that informs our behavior without conscious mind approval (Mattingly, 2018). Shannon (2006) described unconscious bias as an unconscious habit that limits the destructive habits of White people's privilege to operate undetected. Sullivan (2006) described unconscious biases as a habitual and problematic ignorance that benefits and supports the continued domination of White people, which cannot be resolved unless unconscious biases are acknowledged. While unconscious biases are typically revealed verbally, DiAngelo (2012) purported that it is easy to say that we all have stereotypical appointments, and Wheeler (2015) purported that we all have some unconscious behavior or bias in the way we react and respond to people and specific situations. While this may hold some merit, Blacks are significantly impacted in various ways, such as being overly disciplined, overlooked, and altogether disregarded (Staats et al., 2017). Duster (2008) purported that dominant groups have negatively associated with minority groups, leading to subtle discrimination without awareness. Unconscious biases result from how Black women have been historically perceived and unconsciously stereotyped.

Methodology & Stereotypes

It would be remiss not to discuss the experiences and impact of stereotypes on the lives of Black women. Racial stereotypes have pervaded American culture and negatively influenced the perception of Black women in society and the workplace. Hill-Collins (2000) defined stereotype as controlling the image and perpetuating the oppression of Black women. Similarly, Harris-Perry (2011) purported that stereotypes are considered a blatantly negative and insulting tool to control the narrative image of a particular group. Stereotyping of Black women has permeated throughout slavery. For example, during slavery, sexual and labor exploitation of Black women swayed how society viewed them by their physical features, such as appearing physically strong and masculine, unvirtuous, and lascivious (Newsome, 2003; Davis, 1981). Slave masters enforced stereotypes of Black women by inciting racism and segregating Blacks by skin tone, a form of microaggressions and colourism among Blacks, which also dictated activity under the caste system for many years (Giddings, 1996; Gilmore, 1996; Reece, 2018).

Since every company is different, eliminating the barriers to advancement for Black women is complicated, and each scenario must be carefully evaluated (The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Frye (2018) purported that though Black women have had the highest labor force participation rates among all women, there remains a lack of attention to understanding why disparities persist for Black women who must perform ten times more than their white counterparts to advance or obtain equal pay. Atop of disparities, Black women face unconscious and subtle biases that make their journey far more unique than their White counterparts, perpetuating the Black woman's underrepresentation in managerial and leading roles (Frye, 2018).

Support and Resources

Informal networks have been significant for gaining social handshakes that can be used for career success and social support (Alan & Sözen, 2017). Lack of access to informal networks remains a barrier for Black women when attempting to advance in the workplace (Combs, 2003; Linehan & Scullion, 2008). The lack of access to informal networks, lack of access perpetuates the underrepresentation of Black women in management positions, maintaining inequality in the workplace (Commission for Employment Equity, 2016; Bierema, 2005; Mengel, 2015). Horak, Afiouni, Bian, Ledeneva, Muratbekova-Touron, and Fey (2020) described an informal network as a group from which individuals may uniquely benefit. To uniquely benefit means the more access someone has to an informal network, the more access to resources they can expect. The Black woman, on the other hand, may ascend into management or maybe pursue management and is forced into the out-group status (Combs, 2003). Combs (2003) described two types of group statuses related to informal networks; 1) *in-groups*, which refers to individuals having access to the benefits of inclusion, and 2) *out-groups*, which refers specifically to the exclusion of Black women associated knowledge and information exchange. To be a part of the in-groups of informal networks suggests that individuals will have access to transactional content, such as opportunities for exchanging information, collaboration, developing alliances, acquisition of tacit knowledge, visibility, and support in the workplace (Combs, 2003; Linehan & Scullion, 2008; Horak et al., 2020). Formal and diverse networks have been created to provide inclusion on the organizational level to promote good bureaucrat (Horak et al., 2020). An institution has transparency, accountability, and disclosure with principles of good governance. Dennissen, Benschop, and van den Brink (2019) described three levels of diverse networks the *individual level*, the *group member level*, and the *organizational level*. The *individual level* contributes to an individual's career development; the *group member level* contributes to community building, and the *organizational level* works at total inclusion and full participation for members (Dennissen, Benschop & van den Brink, 2019).

Although informal networks can lead to career advancement, Black women tend not to integrate themselves as some informal networks are engulfed in collusion, cliques, and other negative phenomena (Horak et al., 2020). McGuire (2002) argued that informal networks consist of unspoken rules, which serve as a breeding ground for gender inequality and resistance to change. To McGuire's (2002) point, Mehra, Kilduff, and Brass (1998) suggested friendship networks exist in place of informal networks, are built based on exclusionary pressures, and only include same-race networks. Friendship networks perpetuate the underrepresentation of Black women in the workplace (Mehra, Kilduff & Brass, 1998). An aspect of informal networks automatically excludes Black women due to identity shifts and similarities (Combs, 2003). Black women struggle with trying to fit in and are continuously stereotyped by dominant groups to disempower and craft mistaken ideas about Black women, such as "mammy," "Jezebel," "the welfare queen," and the angry and argumentative "sapphire" (Nelson, Cardemil and Adeoye, 2016). Although the onus is on Black women regarding progressing in the workplace, the dominant group in organizations often wonders what will happen to them if inclusion is enforced and Black women propel themselves into management and other leading roles (Giscombe & Mattis, 2002).

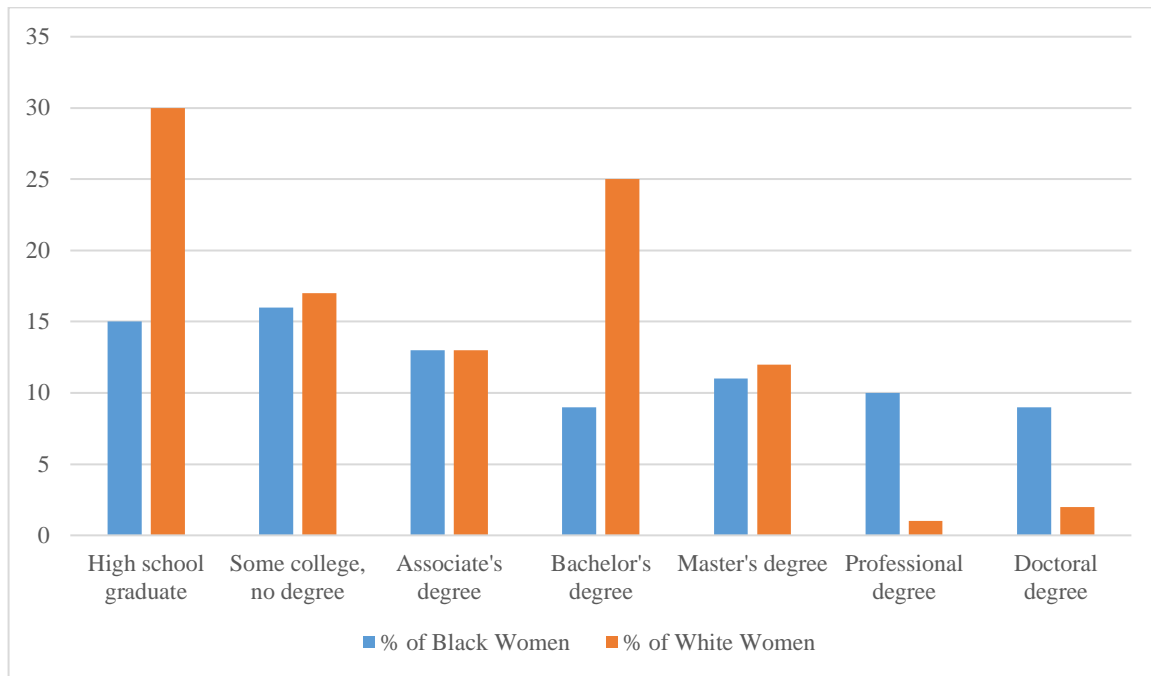


Figure 2. Educational Attainment Comparison of Black and White Women in the 2019 U.S. Census

Source: U.S. Census 2019

Training. Although Black women are attaining professional and doctoral degrees (Figure 2) at a higher rate than any other demographic, they tend to rely more on non-academic training programs to enhance their professional skills for the workplace (Caputo & Cianni, 1997). Training only supported Black women's roles in the workplace and served little value in advancing or portability (Caputo & Cianni, 1997). Black women feel more accomplished by earning and owning their career advancement and avoid integrating themselves into informal networks to push them through the ranks (Horak et al., 2020). There is no immediate if any, career return for Black women who invests in their professional development, with the current rate of underrepresentation (Smith & Joseph, 2010). Black women continue to earn less than any other group and have far less access to opportunities than their white counterparts (Katz, 2020). Chaudhary (2019) contended that despite accomplishments, Black women are less likely to be promoted, less likely to receive support from managers, less likely for managers to promote their achievements, and more likely to experience everyday unconscious biases.

In 2018, the National Geospatial-Intelligence (NGA), a federal agency, conducted a diversity and inclusion study of Black promotion and admitted that Blacks were not promoted at the rate Whites were promoted, even after being adequately trained. In the survey, Blacks' promotion rate trended lower than Whites for four consecutive years. Black promotion trended lower because of an early bottleneck where the pathway to advancement limited the pool of Black candidates that could compete for higher Bands and Senior roles (National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, 2018). The study also found that not all employees were given the same access to career development programs to ensure the advancement of Blacks. Additionally, unconscious biases in supervision were found to be another root cause in the study. The barriers that impacted the promotion of Blacks included the relationship with supervisors, feedback, networking and mentoring, development opportunities, leadership roles, and promotion readiness ratings (National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, 2018). The study noted Blacks worked extremely hard to attain promotion. However, it never came to fruition. The inability to achieve promotion is the same for Black women in corporate environments. Black women are required to perform ten times as hard to obtain the feedback necessary for constructive criticism from performance reviews (Brancaccio, 2017). At this point, mentors and sponsors can fill the gap. NGA noted that an enhanced network and mentorship are needed to promote black advancement and be inclusive.

Conclusion

Mentoring and Sponsorship

Mentorship and sponsorship are critical for helping Black women to advance within the workplace (Barrett, Gardner, and Pearson, 2014). Mentoring has been long recognized as an essential tool for career development (Hunt & Michael, 1983) and a critical component for developing talent (Dirsmith & Covaleski, 1985). Over time, mentoring and mentorship have taken on various interpretations and definitions (Kram, 1985). Bowen (1985) defined mentorship as an acknowledged reciprocal, one-to-one relationship between a more experienced and less experienced individual lasting over an extended period for personal and professional development. Wong and Premkumar (2007) defined mentorship as a learning process that is helpful, personal, and one which reciprocates while building emotional support.

Similarly, Haggard, Dougherty, Turban, and Wilbanks (2011) defined mentoring/mentorship as a type of developmental relationship that shares similar characteristics with other developmental interpersonal relationships that offer reciprocation and mutuality. Black women lack a mutually beneficial relationship with more experienced individuals willing to help them develop professionally and navigate the workplace to advance their careers. For Black women, mentoring can help foster career development and combat inequalities often experienced throughout their journey in the workplace (Knorr, 2005). NGA suggested educating the workforce on the value and importance of building and maintaining networks, recognizing that professional networking is a legitimate work activity, and encouraging maintaining a diverse and inclusive network. Suggesting and promoting diversity and inclusion is merely enough without accountability. Leaders tend to shy away from the true intentions of diversity and inclusion, leaving Black women, the underrepresented group, without promoting ability (Greenfield, 2020). It is practical to have people willing to help you navigate the workplace and someone who can speak about you to others. This person is called a sponsor, a person not related to the act of mentoring (Helms, Arfken, & Bellar, 2016). Friday, Friday & Green (2004) defined a sponsorship as an individual who speaks about, promotes and nominates a person as a form of instrumental career support.

Similarly, Helms, Arken, and Bellar (2016) defined sponsorship as an influential leader who introduces a protegee to other leaders who may have the potential to advance a career. For mentoring and sponsorship to work in their favor, Black women must be able to contribute to the bottom line of the business (Brancaccio, 2017). Anne Mulcahy, the first woman CEO of Xerox, saw dedication when she sponsored her successor Ursula Burns for Xerox by grooming her for several years to ascend into the CEO position. Ursula Burns was the first Black woman to be CEO of a Fortune 500 U.S. company (Mulcahy, 2010). Without the critical influence of a mentor or sponsor, the Black woman will remain underrepresented in management positions. When Black women have greater insight into the skills of executives, they have the information required to help them progress in their careers (Korn Ferry Institute, 2013).

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