BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

by

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Abstract

Barriers to Mentoring Women of Color for Corporate Leadership: Implications for Organizations

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Mentoring as a human capital development initiative is critical to leadership development for organizational sustainment. Previous research has identified that barriers to mentoring relationships for women of color in organizations exist, confirmed by the finding that a factor in barriers to corporate promotion for women is a lack of mentoring. This dissertation explores the implications that barriers to workplace mentoring relationships may have for organizations from the perspective of women of color. Findings suggest that barriers to mentoring relationships experienced and perceived by women of color have evolved in presentation or diminished since those found by previous research. This research also identified new barriers to mentoring relationships including those attributable to the misunderstanding and underutilization of human capital. Among the practical recommendations is that organizations should consider fostering a climate of mentoring as an approach to diversity and inclusion initiatives, as well as full employee engagement. Recommendations for future study include a similar study with a focus on a single firm or on other women of color.
Key Words

Mentoring, Human Capital, Women of Color, Leadership, Fortune 500,
Organizational Culture
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Dedication

This is dedicated to all the colored girls moving toward the end of their rainbow in search of that pot of gold. Search no more for it is, and always has been, within you, within me, and within all of us just waiting to be spent and shared.

Release it and reinvest its returns.

Also dedicated to my mother, Daphney. This belongs to you. I love you to the moon and back.
Chapter 1. Introduction

The presence of American women of color in top leadership positions of Fortune 500 companies is severely underrepresented. These women encompass various races and ethnicities that have been minoritized or marginalized in the United States. The population of the Fortune 500 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) has only become slightly more diverse, representative of their 28 million employees (McGirt, 2017a), and the society as a whole, since Marion Sandler and Katharine Graham became the first two female Fortune 500 CEOs (with their husbands) over 40 years ago. Fortune 500 companies, incorporated and operating within the US, are a substantial economic force. They represent two-thirds of the United States gross domestic product with a combined revenue of $12 trillion, after-tax profits to the tune of $890 billion, and a market value of $19 trillion (“Fortune 500 Companies 2017: Who Made the List,” 2017). With only 6.4% of those seated at the heads of the Fortune 500 boardroom tables being women as of 2017 (McGirt, 2017a), only four since Sandler and Graham have been women of color. Canadian-American of Asian descent Andrea Jung who served as CEO of Avon from 1999 to 2012 (Kowitt, 2012), is now CEO of non-profit Grameen America (Orwig, 2018). Ursula Burns of African-American descent served as CEO of Xerox from 2009 to 2017 (Tank, 2017), and was brought in as Chairman of the Supervisory Board for a global communication and technology company, VEON, headquartered in Amsterdam, to oversee its digital
evolution and divestiture from partnered company, Telenor (Auchard, 2017). Indian-American Indra Nooyi was appointed CEO of Pepsico in 2006 and successfully served that post until 2018 (BW Online Bureau, 2018; Catalyst, 2015; PepsiCo, n.d.). Finally, in 2018, Cuban-American Geisha Williams was added to the list as CEO of Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) (Johnson & Fancher, 2017; Williams, 2017) making her the first Latina Fortune 500 CEO (McGirt, 2017a). Shortfalls in attainment of diversity seem to plague organizational leaders such that corporations are willing to spend millions to attract and retain more women and minorities (Wingfield, 2015) amidst pressure by investors to do so (Green & Chasan, 2017). Efforts to ensure diversity at all levels of the workforce have been inconsistent, may have even decreased representation of women of color at senior leadership levels, and appear to feel threatening to Caucasian males (Dover, Major, & Kaiser, 2016; Emerson, 2017) who continue to make up over 60% of top leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies (Alliance For Board Diversity, 2012; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Addressing this lack of diversity in corporate leadership positions, and agreeing that diversity and inclusion in decision-making positions are good for business, the CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion was launched in 2017 by over 100 CEOs, with each signing the pledge shown in Figure 1 (“CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion,” 2017).
What benefits can companies and organizational leaders expect from advancing diversity and inclusion with respect to women of color at senior leadership levels? What are the factors that prevent companies and organizational leaders from realizing their diversity and inclusion goals? There is an extensive agreement within the research that diversity and inclusion, as a collective unit, are good for business. However, advancing diversity and inclusion for its own sake has no significant benefit at all to a firm’s competitive advantage. When leveraged, diversity brings with it heterogeneity in human capital which can be converted to sustained competitive advantage (Nyberg, Moliterno, Hale, & Lepak, 2014; Wright, McMahan, &
McWillams, 1994). For companies to benefit from the human capital of their heterogeneous and diverse workforce, and develop a variant set of effective leaders, diversity must be intentionally incorporated into their decision-making processes (Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle, & Yee, 2018; Larson, 2017). To do so, companies must have a culture conducive to the full engagement of their diverse human capital (Page, 2017). The CEOs mentioned above were each cultivated for their positions via the development of tacit personal learning provided by mentoring relationships. Lankau and Scandura (2002) identified that organizations could effectively use formal or informal mentoring as a tool for developing leaders with the right knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Ursula Burns, Indra Nooyi, and Geisha Williams were each mentored, thereby building industry and firm-specific human capital (knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics such as credibility) through inclusion in profit and loss decision-making activities where they invested that human capital towards the success of their organizations (Catalyst, 2017; Johnson & Fancher, 2017; Kingsland, 2015; MilestoneVideoNY, 2013; Williams, 2017).

The incubation period for attaining CEO status is over a decade, during which potential CEO candidates gain firm-specific financial acumen, organizational and cultural knowledge, and board experience (Fisher, 2015; Savitz, 2011). Executive level mentors within the organization encourage potential CEO candidates to take on unfamiliar jobs and steer them into challenging developmental opportunities through
which they can gain the exposure and the firm knowledge required to lead the organization effectively. Unfortunately, executive-level mentors will more often than not be male and tend to focus more on men as their protégés (Eby, Allen, Hoffman, Baranik, Sauer, Baldwin, Morrison, Kinkade, Maher, Curtis, & Evans, 2013; Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Lankau, Riordan, & Thomas, 2005; Lim, Clarke, Ross, & Wells, 2015; Mitchell, Eby, & Ragins, 2015). In so doing, they leave the skills, capabilities, and experiences of over half the workforce untapped (Sandberg, 2013). As a result, few women, and even fewer women of color are included in or developed for engagement at the strategic levels of companies, or in the C-Suite which is comprised of the CEO and direct reports who are responsible for company operations and profitability (Krivkovich, Robinson, Starikova, Valentino, & Yee, 2017). Organizations, like Xerox and Pepsico, who have had women of color achieve C-Suite access, mentored these women to their positions. Corporate leaders invested in their human capital and ensured that these women of color had the necessary acknowledgement, encouragement, and developmental opportunities to gain and demonstrate firm-specific knowledge and experience (Catalyst, 2013; Halpern, 2017; Kingsland, 2015; MilestoneVideoNY, 2013; Ward, 2017). This human capital growth enabled and empowered Indra Nooyi and Ursula Burns to lead their respective organizations when appointed to do so. Women of color should not have to focus on finding a mentor to have their human capital fully utilized by the company. “Excel and you will get a
mentor” suggests Sheryl Sandberg (2013). However, the lack of mentorship continues to be a pervasive barrier to achievement for women of color (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013).

Where there is a disparity in the upward mobility and engagement of minorities in the business sector, an imbalance in mentoring relationships is often a factor (Moultrie-Ohens, 2017; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Mentoring is an imperative for diversity, inclusion, and engagement to be profitable and effective for all levels of the workplace from marketing teams to the heads of boardroom tables. Particularly for women of color, mentoring relationships have been critical for their advancement to, and engagement at, the executive levels of organizations (Flowers, 2016; Giscombe, 2012) and organizational leaders may assume that mentoring is freely available and happening. However, most of these women are not being mentored by the executives of their own organization, instead forming networks of mentors at lower levels, with peers at the same level or outside the organization altogether (Flowers, 2016).

By not ensuring that mentoring is readily available and open to these women by the higher-level executives within the organization, companies are underutilizing the human capital that already exists in their workforce (Page, 2017). Corporate leaders are not placing women in the corporate pipeline where they could develop crucial knowledge about the finance, strategic direction, and executive-level culture of
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the organization, and women are also not contributing to these factors in meaningful ways (Thomas, Cooper, Konar, Rooney, Finch, Yee, Krivkovich, Starikova, Robinson, Valentino, 2017). In effect, corporate leaders may be discounting and leaving their talent on the table or giving it away to other companies, like their current or future competitors. The groundbreaking “Corporate Leavers Survey 2007” found that corporate attrition due to factors such as a lack of inclusion had a significant impact upwards of $65 billion annually (Level Playing Field, 2007). This study explored this phenomenon from the perspective of the women of color who may be affected by perceived barriers to mentoring relationships that would enable the company to fully benefit from the inclusion and engagement of their human capital.

**Background**

Research on mentorship has focused primarily on its benefits to the protégé, with some studies identifying benefits to the mentor and the organization, as well as some negative factors of mentoring relationships such as codependency, collusion, and sabotage (Ragins & Kram, 2007a; Scandura, 1998). Several studies focusing on organizational outcomes found that mentoring programs can address critical gaps that exist in executive and leadership development (Donohue, 2009; Emelo, 2012; Reiter, 2009; Young, 2015). Two studies by Ragins and Cotton (1996) and Jeffcoat (2008), identified organizational barriers to mentoring relationships faced by women. However, only Jeffcoat (2008) included women of color as participants. No studies
have been found to address the effects perceived barriers might have on organizational
goals to incorporate diversity and inclusion, and employee engagement from the
perspective of the woman of color employed by the organization.

Statement of the Problem

Ragins (1997b) predicted that mentoring relationships would need to become
more diverse with regard to race, ethnicity, and gender with the increase of workforce
diversity projected in 2005. Unfortunately, with a continuation of workplace
discrimination, however subtle, actual, indirect, or perceived disparity in corporate
leadership demographic representation persistently lingers, and mentoring
relationships with women of color continue to languish (Bova, 2000; Dreher & Cox,
1996; Jeffcoat, 2008; Moultrie-Ohens, 2017) preventing increased diversity at the

![Figure 2 100 Best Companies for Women's Leadership Development: Factors, DiversityWoman.com (2015)](image)
 mentorship programs” is the factor that contributes the most to women’s leadership development as analyzed from the list of the ‘100 Best Companies for Women’s Leadership Development’ from DiversityWoman.com (2015). Several reports point to mentoring and its functions as one of the most important means of developing and engaging women leaders around the world (McKinsey & Company, 2010; Pew Research Center, 2015). As such, it is imperative that the causes and nature of these barriers be better understood to achieve the diversity in mentoring relationships predicted by Ragins.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine how barriers to mentoring relationships experienced by women of color may affect organizational performance from a human capital perspective. This phenomenological qualitative study describes the experiences of nine women of color who were employed in corporations, using semi-structured interviews that explored their perspectives on the effects barriers to mentoring relationships had on organizational performance. Maximizing organizational performance requires feedback from employees regarding their reaction to performance management practices and managerial effectiveness in developing talent which is formed from the interpretation of an experience and expected outcomes (Lawler III, 2009). Phenomenology and thematic analysis give rise to meaningful constructs that may emerge from the study of the lived experiences (Van Manen,
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2016) of the participants, obtained through observation, examining records, written reports, or interviews as data (Stake, 2010).

The purpose of qualitative studies is not to reach a general understanding, but to understand a particular situation through the study of these personal experiences (Stake, 2010). As such, the typical sample size is from 5 to 25 individuals, all of whom have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014). Personal contacts and referrals were used to obtain study participants. In addition, requests were distributed via social media. Interested members were asked to complete a consent form prior to scheduling an interview. The interviews were either conducted via an online video conference method, in person at the location of the participant’s organization, at a location mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher, or by telephone. The data collected from this study may be used to influence the construction of effective mentoring programs that will prepare women of color for future corporate leadership. Bringing awareness to the lack of women of color in leadership positions may also assist companies in the development of programs and policies to assist management in recognizing women of color with leadership and management potential.

Research Questions

This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to determine how barriers to mentoring relationships experienced by women of color may affect
organizational performance from a human capital perspective. The following research questions evolved from a review and examination of existing literature on mentoring women of color.

Q1. What are the perceptions of women of color regarding the impact that barriers to mentoring relationships have on the organization?

Q2. What are the perceptions and lived experiences of women of color regarding human capital development practices within the organization?

Q3. What are the implications for organizations regarding barriers to mentoring relationships faced by women of color in corporate leadership?

Definition of Terms

Diversity: A collective mixture characterized by differences and similarities that are applied in pursuit of organizational objectives (Hubbard, 2004, p. 8).

Diversity Management: The process of planning for, organizing, directing, and supporting those collective mixtures in a way that adds a measurable difference to organizational performance (Hubbard, 2004, p. 8).

Employee Engagement: An attitude regarding one’s work within one’s organization, comprised of a perception of psychological empowerment; feelings of vigor, absorption, and dedication; and motivation to act, both within and extra-role, in the service of the organization’s goals (Witemeyer, 2013).
**Formal Mentoring:** A developmental relationship between mentors and protégés that is intentionally structured and managed by the organization for the purpose of protégé development and advancement (Laiho & Brandt, 2012; Ragins, Cotton, & Miller, 2000; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003).

**Human Capital:** The collective skills, knowledge, or other intangible assets of individuals that can be used to create economic value for the individuals, their employers, or their community (Becker, 1994; Mincer, 1957; Schultz, Beebout, & Schultz, 1973)

**Human Capital Resource:** The individual and unit-level capacities based on individuals’ knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics that are accessible to and may be leveraged for competitive advantage (Becker, 1994, 2002; Ployhart, Nyberg, Reilly, & Maltarich, 2014; Wang & Barney, 2006).

**Informal Mentoring:** An organically evolving developmental relationship between a mentor and protégé initiated for the purpose of protégé development and advancement (Kram, 1983) to the benefit of the organization (Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

**Mentor:** An individual with advanced experience and knowledge who is committed to providing upward mobility and career support to their protégés (Kram, 1988).

**Organizational Culture:** A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which
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has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 2010).

*Organizational Socialization:* The process by which an individual gains the knowledge, jargon, social skills, and values to conform to the norms and roles required for integration into the work environment. In this way, the new employee 'learns the ropes' by becoming sensitive to the formal and informal power structure and the explicit and implicit rules of behavior (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

*Protégé:* An individual receiving career and psychosocial support via the developmental relationship established with a mentor for the purpose of protégé development and career advancement (Auster, 1984).

*Workforce Diversity:* Group and situational identities of the organization’s employees such as gender, race, and ethnicity, among other demographic descriptors (Hubbard, 2004).

*Women of Color:* Women of various races and ethnicities that have been minoritized or marginalized in the United States to include, but not limited to, African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, Indian American (technically Asian), Native American, etc. Blacks, Latinas, Asians, and American Indians are considered women of color because of their non-White or mixed racial backgrounds (Ortiz, 1994).
Significance of the Study

There is a paucity of research on mentoring leaders (Stead, 2005). Efforts to engage a diversified workforce and to ensure diversity at all levels of the workforce have been inconsistent as evidenced by the dearth of diversity at the highest levels (Thomas et al., 2017). Efforts to diversify have even been reported to have the unintended effect of alienating white men (McDonald, Keeves, & Westphal, 2018), who continue to make up 60% of top leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies, and actually reducing the representation of minority women (Dover et al., 2016). Mentoring relationships influence and are influenced by both the individuals involved as well as the organizational culture (Hester & Setzer, 2013). Organizations currently face challenges that affect employee retention, employee engagement, organizational learning, and diversity, which can be addressed through culture-transforming high-quality formal mentorship programs (Ragins, 2016). An organizational culture that fosters an informal mentoring mindset can also be instrumental in increasing organizational learning, diversity, and inclusion (Wilcox, 2009), and thereby engagement. Organizational cultures that support unconscious bias may present unseen challenges to women of color, thereby impacting the effectiveness of potential cross-demographic mentors (Johnson & Smith, 2017; McDonald et al., 2018; Smith & Johnson, 2017), hinder the initiation and cultivation of mentoring relationships (Jeffcoat, 2008; Kram, 1983; Ragins & Cotton, 1996), and result in barriers to
mentoring relationships. These barriers prevent women of color from rising to their highest potential and also block companies from strategically engaging that talent for significant impact towards optimal performance and productivity of the organization (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins, 1989; Thomas et al., 2017). This study is important to the body of knowledge because executives may continue to overlook qualified women of color to fill upper management positions. Identifying the lived experiences and themes of minority women in the workforce may help executives in understanding minority women and the barriers to mentoring relationships they face within the organization. The findings of this research may help expand the body of research on mentoring. This research may also provide a better understanding of the experiences, issues, complexities, and challenges faced by women of color in the workplace.

Organization

There are five chapters that comprise this dissertation in total. Chapter 1 is the introduction. Chapter 2 consists of the review of the literature, Chapter 3 describes the methodology, and findings are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation with recommendations, implications for practice, and suggestions for future research.

Summary

The present study builds upon previous work, which determined and described the barriers to mentoring relationships experienced by Caucasian women and women
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of color at the management and executive levels (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins, 1989; Ragins & Cotton, 1991, 1996; Tassie & Givens, 2016). In the last three decades, mentorship has been highly researched (Janssen, van Vuuren, & de Jong, 2016; Neely, Cotton, & Neely, 2017). The benefits of mentorship for the individuals involved are undisputed. However, not all people who want to be mentored actually receive these mentoring opportunities (Thomas et al., 2017). Some are hindered from experiencing such relationships (Jeffcoat, 2008). While barriers based on gender and race/ethnicity have been independently researched, few recent studies have been done regarding barriers to mentoring relationships that involve the complexity of the interaction between gender, race, and ethnicity, how that affects the organization, and what can be done about it.

Less than 1% of all Fortune 500 CEOs are women of color (Catalyst, 2015, 2016, 2017). The adage, “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire” is applicable here. The smoke, in this context, is the lack of diversity in senior-level positions. The fire represents barriers to mentoring relationships faced by women of color in organizations. Just as the key to extinguishing a fire is determining whether it is a grease fire or a combustible fire, the key to a company mitigating barriers to mentoring relationships may be in understanding the nature and roots of these barriers. Mentoring relationships can become more accessible and more effective in organizations by understanding how, and why, it is not. Studying the barriers to
mentoring relationships in the lives of minority women provides the information necessary to gain a deeper understanding of productive solutions.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

At the close of 2017, only twenty-four (4.8%) of those seated at the heads of Fortune 500 boardroom tables were women (Fortune Editors, 2017) representing a 25% decrease, down from 32 the previous year (Zarya, 2018). With the recent departures of Xerox CEO, African-American Ursula Burns (Auchard, 2017) and Pepsico CEO Indra Nooyi (BW Online Bureau, 2018), exactly one is a woman of color – Cuban immigrant Geisha Williams, CEO of PG&E, appointed in 2017 (Johnson & Fancher, 2017; Williams, 2017). The twenty-four female CEOs are predominantly White with no American-born women of color among them.

Identifying a lack of diversity in the workplace and in reaching an agreement that diversity and inclusion are good for business, the CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion was launched in 2017 by over 100 CEOs (“CEO Action for Diversity & Inclusion,” 2017). Each CEO signed a pledge to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace (see Figure 1). However, some may not think that there is a problem with the lack of diversity, particularly gender-related, on corporate boards (Thomas et al., 2017). Thurmond (2009) found that the firm performance was unaffected by the presence of women. Further, a 2016 study concluded that female board presence would be detrimental to a firm’s financial performance based on the analysis of ten previous studies on gender diversity and firm financial performance (Mogbogu, 2016), although eight out of the ten studies showed positive or no financial impact. While
Mogbogu’s (2016) study referenced human capital theory in support of board diversity, this was not factored into the analysis. Additionally, employers must look beyond the human capital to human resource management practices that activate human capital (Dunford, Snell, & Wright, 2001; Wright & McMahan, 2011). Mentoring is one such practice (Dziczkowski, 2013; Stead, 2005).

Xerox, home to the first African American female CEO, is one among several companies that considered mentoring to be a huge success in developing leaders and partnered with business mentoring program vendors to implement and manage their formal mentoring programs (Schooley, 2010). For diversity and inclusion to be fully integrated into the workplace from the marketing teams to the heads of boardroom tables, mentoring relationships are an imperative (Reiter, 2009). Research has indicated, however, that where there is a disparity in upward mobility in the business sector, an imbalance in mentoring relationships is often a factor (Moultrie-Ohens, 2017; Ragins, 1989). Moreover, where there is human capital left unengaged, there is productivity, profits, and potential competitive advantage left on the table (Wang & Barney, 2006).

What follows is a review of the preceding and current works that relate to the body of literature on human capital; strategic human resource management (SHRM) practices; mentoring and diversity; and, women of color in corporate leadership.
Human Capital

The concept of human capital contributing to economic wealth dates back to Adam Smith in his “Wealth of Nations” book published in 1776 (Mincer, 1957; Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011; Rajan & Zingales, 1998; Teixeira, 2006; Weiss, 2015). Smith described four types of capital existing within a society, the fourth of which is “the acquired and useful abilities of all the inhabitants and members of the society” gained through education, study, or apprenticeship (Smith & McCulloch, 1838, p. 122), which is a mentoring framework (Boeh, 2016; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2001). The useful abilities described by Smith are a part of the individual’s fortune, and as such contributes to the fortune of the representative society (Smith & McCulloch, 1838). This talent is comprised of an individual’s knowledge, which as identified by Frederick Taylor (1914) is what makes one worker more productive at a given task than another or what makes a worker more productive at one task over another. Human capital is defined as the collective skills, knowledge, or other intangible assets of individuals that can be used to create economic value for the individuals, their employers, or their community (Becker, 1985, 1993, 1994).

In this age of knowledge (Drucker, 1999), human capital is vital. Based on the strength of that assertion, Becker (1994, 2002) accurately predicted that the stock market crash of 1987 would have minimal duration and effect to the overall economy since it was mostly comprised of human capital returns, the variance of which is
independent of financial returns. Fundamentally, Becker (2002) asserted that while the market crash may temporarily affect the financial status of the market, it does not affect the productive capability of the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics involved in profit generation. Within three months, the market was mainly restored with little more than a data point left to record the 1987 crash in economic history (Becker, 2002). That is the power of human capital.

Becker’s book, *Human Capital*, was initially suspect among US social science theorists who held concerns about capital exploitation of labor (Becker, 1994). One question of the day was, “If capital exploits labor, does human capital exploit labor too – in other words, do some workers exploit other workers?” (Becker, 1994, p. 16).

Fundamentally, human capital is considered the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that make up the talent an individual brings into the organization for productive capability (Becker, 1994; Ployhart et al., 2014). In accordance with human capital theory, this resource can only be fully realized with the cooperation of the individual. Actions taken to motivate, monitor, retain, and engage this resource are considered human capital investments made by the company in anticipation of future returns. The human capital of a firm is increasingly being associated with its ability to perform and compete. Resource-based theorists recognize that human capital is one of the most important sources of competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Barney & Wright, 1998). Looking through this resource-
based perspective, human capital is an individual-level resource that is valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (Shaw, Park, & Kim, 2013). In team-based environments, human capital becomes unit-level by synergizing on the diversity of the team, and capitalizing on that human capital has been shown to be profitable (Hunt et al., 2018). Companies that rank in the top quartile in racial and ethnic diversity outperform competitors by an average of 30% (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015). Conversely, the relationship between diversity and profitability presented in these studies implies if companies in the bottom quartile are statistically less likely to achieve above-average gains due to their more homogeneous unit-level human capital.

Wang and Barney (2006) indicate that human capital is not controllable by the firm. Human capital is the resource that an employee willingly invests in the firm thereby contributing to the firm’s competitive advantage (Wang & Barney, 2006). This human capital is systematically coordinated in profit generating activities for the firm (Wang & Barney, 2006). However, researchers have found that financial compensation may not be enough to maintain optimal human capital investment levels (Wang & Barney, 2006) and that there may be agency costs associated with such investment (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Agency costs may stem from incongruity in human capital returns due to delegation of decision-making authority (Eisenhardt, 1999; Holmstrom & Costa, 1986) or loss of human capital due to turnover, lack of engagement, or other factors contributing to a loss of productivity. Further, ownership
theory of the firm differentiates managerial human capital as internal ownership to explain managerial human capital investment behavior (Jensen & Meckling, 1976).

Human capital investment has not always been a welcome topic of study (Becker, 1993). When this topic was just emerging in the 1960s, Schultz (1961) identified negative sentiment towards looking at human beings as capital goods to be invested, except in slavery. However, not considering human resources as a form of productive capital in which investments can be made reduces labor considerations to numerical measures (Schultz et al., 1961). People become reduced to numbers with little consideration of the uniqueness each brings to the organization and their contributions to the bottom-line.

Investments in human capital consist of formal education and training, distance and online learning, and on-the-job training (Becker, 1993, 2002). Formal education and training providing credentials such as degrees and certificates, have been the most focused upon source of human capital investment (Becker, 2002). However, human capital investment, or the lack thereof, begins with family influence and capabilities (Becker, 1994), and as such, credential disparities may emerge in the workforce (O’Neill, 1990). Those from families in lower economic classes may find themselves ill-prepared, financially and functionally, to attain college credentials (Mincer & Polachek, 1974) in an effort to increase foundational human capital going into the workforce.
Human capital management is critical to corporate success and increased market price to book value ratio, as recognized by the increased investments companies have made in human capital (Becker, 2002) and increased focus on credentialism. Becker (1994) held concerns about credentialism as it does nothing to identify any ability to meet customer needs, interact workgroups, or navigate organizational politics, suggesting a form of pre-industrial apprenticeship as a much cheaper and more efficient way to socialize new employees into the organization. Ployhart et al. (2014) suggest that in making human capital investment decisions, firms can focus on human capital resources which are firm-specific and contribute to the economic outcome, and can be efficiently targeted through mentoring.

Intellectual capital as conceptualized by Iacob and Andrei (2011) consists of human capital, organizational capital, and social capital. Particularly in a knowledge-based economy, it is the leveraging of human capital through organizational and social capital that gives an organization its competitive advantage (Iacob & Andrei, 2011). Human Capital Theory (HCT) holds that employees must willingly invest their skills, knowledge, and abilities in support of organizational goals. The organization cannot extract human capital without consideration to its holder (Becker, 1994). Therefore, the human capital resource is uncontrollable by the organization. At best, the organization influences its engagement through its leadership, organizational climate, and human resource management practices, such as mentoring relationships.
The Human Capital Framework

University of Chicago economists T.W. Schultz, Jacob Mincer, and Gary Becker first planted the seeds of Human Capital Theory (HCT) research in the 1960s (Teixeira, 2006). Becker’s 1964 book, *Human Capital*, would go through three editions before taking its root thirty years later with over 35,000 citations (Becker, 1994; Weiss, 2015). Becker (1994, 2002) considers human capital – the collective knowledge, information, skills, ideas, and health of an individual – to be the most significant form of capital. Broad agreement with this definition exists in strategy and human resource management literature with divergence between individual-level and unit-level perspectives (Ployhart et al., 2014). Combining the individual and unit level perspectives, Ployhart et al. (2014) developed a human capital construct that unified the concept (Figure 3).

The Human Capital Resource (HCR) framework (1) distinguishes between, and links individual and unit-level human capital resources, (2) defines and structuralizes human capital resources, and (3) clarifies the function of human capital resources by relating them to performance outcomes (Ployhart et al., 2014). Keeping with the fundamentals of Human Capital Theory, the HCR framework has at its base
Socialization is the process by which an individual acquires skills, behaviors, culture, the individual as a product of their unique socialization (Ployhart et al., 2014).

Figure 3 Human Capital Resource construct by Ployhart et al., 2014, reprinted with permission from Sage Publications for Dissertations

Note: Each construct to the right is a subset of the construct to the left. The arrows define the boundaries between each subset. Text within the figure refers to each construct’s definition.
language, character, and values (Grusec & Hastings, 2015; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Primary sources of the socialization process include family, friends, formal educational institutions, religious entities, and the workplace (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). As people go through life, they will go through several successive socialization processes (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). An individual’s personality, culture, perspectives, and viewpoints are all developed through the socialization process (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). What people believe about themselves and others, and how they interact with others, is due to their unique socialization process (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). Their work ethic and how they interact with and influence others is a product of their socialization (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). Workplace onboarding to initiate, inculcate, and develop a new employee is a socialization process (Filstad, 2011; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) as is mentoring (Allen, Eby, Chao, & Bauer, 2017). Each time an individual goes through a socialization process, knowledge is gained that builds upon, refutes, or modifies previous knowledge thereby influencing future behavior (Grusec & Hastings, 2015). The attributes gained cannot be separated from the individual and forms the basis of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that an individual brings with them into the workplace (Becker, 1994). As an individual evolves in the workplace, firm-specific knowledge is added to the mix (Lankau & Scandura, 2002; Penrose, 1959; Polanyi, 1962; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Through formal training and education, on-the-job training,
mentoring, and experience, the individual comes to know and understand the processes, the customers, the people, and the organizational culture with whom they interact gaining familiarity (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Added to the already existing knowledge from prior experience, education, and training, it is both explicit knowledge, gained through study of documented organizational material, and tacit firm-specific knowledge transferred by experience, observation, or vicariously through the experience of others in the organization (Batistic, 2017; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Polanyi, 1958; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). These efforts in gaining this knowledge can be considered an employee investment in the organization (Schultz et al., 1961; Wang & Barney, 2006). Employee firm-specific investments can include employee knowledge about firm operations, the firm’s key suppliers and customers, and knowledge about how to effectively interact with coworkers (Schultz et al., 1961; Wang & Barney, 2006). The individual’s KSAOs, however gained, which are relevant to the efficient and effective achievement of organizational goals and realization of firm profit, are considered human capital (Becker, 1993; Schultz et al., 1973). Abilities to motivate and lead others in support of organizational goals are also included in human capital (Becker, 1985, 1993, 2002). Being obsessively organized and asocial, for example, may characterize the human capital critically needed for an over-night restocking clerk. Where human capital is not efficiently and effectively
aligned with, and utilized to fulfill organizational needs, the organization suffers (Wang & Barney, 2006).

When individual human capital is intra- or interpersonally combined in projects, teams, or workgroups to fulfill unit-level objectives, it becomes a valuable firm resource (Porter, 1991). In accordance with resource-based theory (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984), those resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, non-substitutable (VRIN) and are strategically aligned with firm attributes including physical capital and business strategy provide a competitive advantage. The effectiveness, and therefore value, of human capital is business strategy dependent (Mailath, Nocke, & Postlewaite, 2004). Theoretically, managerial human capital is perceived as more valuable because it includes firm- and strategy-specific knowledge and experience, presumably in alignment with future business direction. Therefore, those in a management capacity are paid more, and are given more decision-making responsibilities (Kreuter & Lezin, 2002) and exposure to a firm’s core profit and loss resources. The more aligned human capital investment is with future business direction, the more valuable and there more it is considered a strategic resource (Ployhart et al., 2014). The very construct and idiosyncrasy of human capital make it rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, as it is individual-specific and can be combined with other individual human capital and the firm-level aggregate of human capital, or firm-level human assets (Foss, 2011), in countless ways. The very fact that human
capital cannot be separated from the individual nor imitated or substituted (Wang & Barney, 2006) makes inclusion, engagement, and desirability of women of color a corporate imperative at every level as the workforce and customer base become more diverse (Aleman, 2012; Riley, Michael, & Mahoney, 2017).

The individual(s) involved in human capital combinations must be willing and motivated to share, build, and invest in their human capital by engaging in work activities that contribute to the production of rents or profits. In accordance with the Coasean transaction theory, the individual does so in exchange for some mix of financial and non-financial incentives, protections, and reassurances (Coase, 1937; Wang & Barney, 2006). However, individuals may hold back from fully engaging their human capital for fear of firm-level opportunistic behavior such as exploitation without a perceived balance of compensation or protection (Wang & Barney, 2006) which can be costly to the firm (Shaw et al., 2013). Indeed, this is implicated in Gallup studies on workforce engagement which found that only 33% of the United States workforce is fully engaged costing approximately $483 billion to $605 billion in lost productivity annually (Gallup, 2017). This lack of engagement translates into a lack of employee investment of their human capital.

Since 2015, the annual LeanIn and McKinsey & Company Women in the Workplace study reports on the state of women in corporate America (Thomas et al., 2017). The 2017 report indicates that fewer women are being hired, promoted, and
placed in opportunities with profit and loss responsibilities from entry level throughout their tenure, which diminishes their chances of reaching CEO status (Thomas et al., 2017). Reflecting this, only two of Fortune 500 CEOs in 2017 were women of color (Catalyst, 2017), and that reduced to one a year later. The Catalyst (2017) report reflects that more than half of college graduates are women, yet fewer are being hired, which indicates a devaluation of their pre-market human capital. Once employed, women, particularly women of color, are not intentionally developed with career opportunities that prepare them for CEO selection (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013; Thomas et al., 2017). The most underrepresented group in the corporate pipeline is women of color (Thomas et al., 2017). Organizations are missing out on the unique human capital of this group: women of color are all but missing from the picture. Unfortunately, as reported in research, the male dominated corporate leadership does not recognize this void (Thomas et al., 2017).

**Leveraging Human Capital**

Hitt, Bierman, Shimizu, and Kochhar (2001) in their study of 93 law firms found that leveraging human capital has a positive effect on firm performance as well as a moderating effect between strategy and performance. Hatch and Dyer (2004) suggest that firm performance can be enhanced and competitive advantage strengthened, by leveraging existing human capital as well as, and more importantly, building more firm-specific human capital through internal learning programs and
ensuring effective use. Further, Kor and Leblebici (2005) found that employers who invested in developing firm-specific human capital in their employees could leverage higher levels of expert human capital. As argued by Wang and Barney (2006), to fully exploit a firm’s core resources in creating competitive advantage, employees must understand the nature of these core resources, develop a working knowledge on how they can be used in conceiving and implementing strategy (Hitt et al., 2001), and how those resources can be protected and nurtured over time. Unfortunately for women of color, opportunities for gaining this knowledge throughout their tenure is increasingly slim (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013). Carmeli and Schaubroeck (2007) found that only when top managers perceived human capital as distinctively valuable was it effectively applied and strongly associated with performance. Women of color are the most underrepresented group in the corporate pipeline (Thomas et al., 2017). This requires investments of high firm-specific human capital which can only be gained tacitly from within the firm through on-the-job knowledge, other knowledge transferring practices, and key career assignments (Miller & Katz, 2002; Riley et al., 2017).

**Diversity in Human Capital**

The intuitive argument is that having the human capital which women of color can bring is good because it adds diversity, which increases firm performance (Hunt et al., 2018). However, diversity for diversity’s sake is inconclusive. In order for
diversity to matter there must be inclusion (Miller & Katz, 2002). Diversity antagonists will point to studies that indicate a negative diversity to firm performance relationship as proof that there is nothing to see here (Mogbogu, 2016). Other researchers argue that these studies failed to apply the Harrison and Klein (2007) typology, therefore, there was no theoretically derived conceptualizations of diversity on which to base their claim. Harrison and Klein (2007) posit that diversity can only be measured in relation to the whole in three ways: by separation, by variety, and by disparity. The human capital of women of color in corporate leadership positions represents diversity in terms of variety as this demographic pulls from pools of information and resources different from the majority of corporate leaders. This differing perspective, namely from women of color, offers the leadership team as a whole a broader understanding of the task, thereby leading to a better decision-making process and increased team performance (Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, & Briggs, 2011). Additionally, depending on the team dynamics, these women may also offer other patterns of differences to the landscape of the organization in terms of separation (e.g. values, attitudes, or beliefs) or variation (e.g. hierarchical privilege or the lack thereof) (Bell et al., 2011). Applying Harrison and Klein (2007) typology, Han, Han, and Brass (2014) found that human capital represented by knowledge can affect innovation in a service organization. Their research suggests that variable knowledge – the fruit of human capital – fosters social capital which enables teams to build
corporate knowledge and also amplifies the team’s access to resources through external relationships (Han et al., 2014).

**The Gender Wage Gap**

Women have been subject to a wage gap since becoming a part of the workforce (Mincer, 1957). Mincer and Polacheck (1974) found that women of their day tended to have intermittent work experience, periods of non-market participation, and decreased investment in human capital due to marriage and family obligations. Employers invested less in the human capital of these women in the form of a lower wage scale and less investment in developing their human capital (Mincer & Polachek, 1974). Wages for women of color were found to be on the lowest end of that scale (Mincer & Polachek, 1974). Unfortunately, thirty years later, according to a Pew Research Center

![Women of Color had lower hourly earnings than all other groups in 2015](image)

*Figure 4 Women of Color earn less than all other groups, Patten (2016)*
survey, the practice continues even though work tenure and education levels have increased (Pew Research Center, 2015). Figure 4 shows that the human capital for women of color, particularly, Black and Hispanic women, continues to be perceived as lower in value as indicated by the persistent wage gap, even when controlling for education (Patten, 2016).

**Human Capital Investment**

An analysis of the 2017 Diverse Intelligence Nielsen series shows that over half of all women of color have attained some level of college education and the trend is rising with close parity to the overall average of all women (The Nielsen Company, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).
2017a, 2017b, 2017c). Investment in human capital through formal education by women of color is on the rise. Figure 5 shows that the trend of attaining higher levels of education is increasing at a faster rate over time. From 2005 to 2010, the number of women of color who completed undergraduate programs or who had attended college rose by 5%. By 2015, that rate of increase was 10%. The number of women stopping at high-school and not going on to college is also dropping fast, indicating that women of color are more likely than not to have attended college. This is illustrated in Table 1 with more women going beyond high-school to attend college (28%) and slightly more (30%) going on to earn a Bachelor, Master, or Doctoral degree. This data was compiled from three Nielsen studies that focused independently on Asian-American, African-American, and Hispanic-American women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDUCATION LEVEL</th>
<th>WOMEN OF COLOR</th>
<th>ALL WOMEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GRADUATE DEGREE</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BACHELOR’S DEGREE</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOME COLLEGE/ASSOCIATE DEGREE</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESS THAN HIGH SCHOOL</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women of color are entering the workforce with solid human capital to invest in the right company. In fact, more women are graduating from college and earning
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Associate and Bachelor degrees than men (Bauman & Ryan, 2015; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Breaking down the National Center for Education Statistics (2017) data by gender and race, women of color (61%) continue to demonstrate a stronger commitment to developing their human capital through formal education and being prepared for the workforce. These statistics are displayed in Figure 6. Regardless of this preparedness, persistent wage gaps indicate that organizations are missing this fact (Broyles & Fenner, 2010; Patten, 2016; Polachek, 2004; Reid, 1998).

**Figure 6 Female - Male Graduate Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics (2017)**

**Human Capital and Mentoring**

Ployhart et al. (2014) suggest that in making human capital investment decisions, firms can focus on human capital resources, which are firm-specific and
contribute to the economic outcome. The psychosocial and career functions of mentoring transfer firm-specific tacit knowledge to the protégé (Kram, 1988). Mentoring has emerged as an immensely effective means of growing managerial and leadership abilities in human capital development but can take significant time, effort, and commitment (Dziczkowski, 2013). An analysis of business mentoring programs found that mentoring builds human capital in the areas of leadership capacity for both the mentor and the protégé heading toward management (Schooley, 2010). Schooley (2010) points out that as mentors share their experiences, give advice, suggest readings, courses, or challenging opportunities, they grow their own leadership skills and human capital in the process. With mentoring, people have stronger organizational commitment through the increased job-related human interaction thereby reducing turnover, training, and succession costs (Schooley, 2010).

**Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM)**

Broadly speaking, organizations exist to apply bundled resources towards the attainment of relevant outcomes (Barney, 1991; Rumelt, 1984; Wernerfelt, 1984). One type of resource is the human capital resource described above (Becker, 1993, 2002; Mincer, 1957; Nyberg et al., 2014; Penrose, 1959; Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011; Schultz et al., 1973; Wang & Barney, 2006). Strategic human resource management (SHRM) is concerned with the management, motivation, recruitment, and retention of human capital resources in alignment with organizational goals (Alcázar, Fernández,
& Gardey, 2013; Delery & Roumpi, 2017; Dunford et al., 2001; Kamoche, 1996; Lengnick-Hall, Lengnick-Hall, Andrade, & Drake, 2009; Lepak & Snell, 1999; Nyberg et al., 2014; Wright & McMahan, 2011).

With the advent of SHRM in 1990, academic focus shifted from ensuring employees had the ability and motivation to achieve organizational goals to human capital contributions, strategic capabilities, and competitive advantage (Delery & Roumpi, 2017; Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009). Early researchers established that Human Resources (HR) had a role in driving organizational performance and as such, direct participation in effective strategic management with four strategic responsibilities, namely (1) equity and human relations, (2) competitive performance, (3) innovation and flexibility, and (4) interunit integration (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2009). Building on this, Wright and McMahan (1992) defined Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) as “the pattern of planned human resource deployments and activities intended to enable an organization to achieve its goals” (p. 298) with a human capital perspective. Researchers quickly linked human resource management and human resource systems to competitive advantage via the resource-based view of the firm (Lado & Wilson, 1994; Wright et al., 1994). However, Kamoche (1996) advised that human resource capabilities can only be linked to competitive advantage through core competencies and suggested future research on perceived human capital worth and effort-reward balance. Barney and Wright (1998) suggest that the role of Human
Resources, as a strategic partner, is to recruit human resources with rare inimitable human capital, and to implement effective organizational systems which maximize human capital contribution. This essentially makes a case for diversity. By definition, human capital is rare if it is not frequently found. Currently, women of color are scarcely found at executive leadership levels, therefore, their perspectives, are rarely heard in those circles, and sustaining competitive advantage demands their rare perspectives as a part of the collective contribution.

Strategic Human Resource Management practices that promote a stable relationship, strong norms, and specified roles create an organizational characteristic that facilitates successful collective action within a firm (Leana & Van Buren, 1999). HR practices can be instrumental in creating an organizational climate where collaboration is key (Wilcox, 2009). Collins and Clark (2003) found that network-building employment practices, such as mentoring, encourage the development of workplace relationships, which, for top management team networks, mediate between HR practices and firm performance.

**High-Performance Work Systems (HPWS)**

The literature on mentoring as a human resource practice is thin (Laiho & Brandt, 2012). That which exists, however, maintains that human capital can only provide competitive advantage through human resource practices, particularly high-performance work practices, to guide and drive it (Nobrega, 2014). High-performance
work systems have been positively linked to labor productivity, firm productivity, and firm performance (Evans & Davis, 2005; Huselid, 1995). Literature on high-performance work practices has illuminated five key elements – employee training (Becker, 1985), employee empowerment, performance-based compensation, competency-based appraisal, and merit promotions (Nobrega, 2014). Employee training, employee empowerment, and merit promotions are three key areas which can be directly addressed by the career and psychosocial functions of mentoring.

Mentoring

In 2009, Ragins and Kram published a comprehensive review of research, theory, and practice, on mentoring in the workplace. Mentoring is a developmental relationship, embodying both male and female attributes, that “transcends time, gender, and culture” (p. 4) between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced protégé, with a primary focus on career development and growth via the execution of career functions and psychosocial functions which make up the construct of mentoring (Kram, 1983, 1988).

Career functions provide opportunities for advancement and transfer of technical knowledge, and build the technical skills necessary to take advantage of opportunities and psychosocial functions which enhance the protégé’s self-efficacy and aids in molding a protégé’s identity (Kram, 1983, 1988). These functions also provide the psychological safety needed to take interpersonal risks, namely extending
trust, working with new teams or people, and suspending judgment (Chen, Liao, & Wen, 2014; Ragins, 2016). Additionally, psychosocial functions help the protégé fit better into the organization through the transfer of tacit knowledge that helps navigate organizational culture and re-socialize the protégé for a more cohesive organizational fit (Kram, 1983). Barriers may prevent some of these functions from being enacted where, for example, those acting as mentors may be willing to sponsor, but not coach, befriend, or counsel (Allen, 2003).

Most research has found positive relationships between mentoring and career outcomes for both the protégé and the mentor, as well as the organization. Laiho and Brandt (2012) found that 49% of medium- and large-sized firms participating in their study used mentoring as a formal human resource practice. The most important benefit was found to be the transfer of tacit knowledge. However, participants also found mentoring to be time-consuming, and they had initiation difficulty due to challenges in mentor-protégé matching (Laiho & Brandt, 2012). Other research has identified that mentoring relationships exist on a continuum of quality and can be dysfunctional, potentially involving outcomes of harassment, exploitation, or sabotage (Ragins & Kram, 2007a; Ragins & Scandura, 1999; Scandura, 1998). Most mentoring problems stemmed from differences in values, personalities, and workstyles, which may be inherent in cross-demographic mentoring relationships where the mentor and protégé differ in terms of identity (Eby, 2007; Esnard et al., 2015; Leck & Orser, 2013;
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Ragins & Kram, 2007; Thomas, 2001). Organizations that offer less support for mentoring have more frequently reported relationship problems and may have protégé outcomes of psychological withdrawal, attrition, stress, organizational dissatisfaction, and increased intentions to quit (Ragins, Ehrhardt, Lyness, Murphy, & Capman, 2017). This may be self-inflicted, however, as research has found that organizational mentors may be unconsciously biased in their selection of protégés with anticipation of dysfunction and concerns of the relationship being “more trouble than it was worth” (Ragins & Cotton, 1999, p. 10) if they pick wrong, particularly if they do not have a history of being mentored. Organizational leaders who harbor these concerns and cherry-pick their mentoring relationships can create environmental conditions that negatively impact the nature and potential of mentoring relationships in the workplace (Kram & Ragins, 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007a) and in effect pose barriers to mentoring relationships for, and the upward mobility of, minority women. From here, research on mentoring has proceeded to focus on high-quality connections and the conditions that foster high quality mentoring episodes which form the bedrock of high-quality mentoring relationships, which may be hierarchical, peer dyadic, group, in the form of a network (Ragins & Kram, 2007a), or virtual (Headlam-Wells, Gosland, & Craig, 2005). This body of work has led to a recognition that the unique human capital developmental needs of the protégé must be considered as the mentoring relationships they are involved in evolve.
Mentor from the Odyssey of Homer

The roots of mentoring stem from *The Odyssey* of Homer Greek mythology. The image of “Mentor” is that of an older man, who is tasked to look after and guide the household and son, Telemachus, of his friend Odysseus, who is away on a mission. In the fable, the Goddess Athene makes several attempts to redirect a heedless Telemachus against the pending danger that Athene sees. However, it is not until Athene takes the form of the elder man (Mentor) and speaks through him that Telemachus follows and takes appropriate actions, leading him away from danger toward honorable success (Lang, 2012). The irony of *The Odyssey* is that the characteristics that have come to be thought of for a mentor actually stem from the actions of a woman, a goddess of Greek legend, Athene, daughter of Zeus, who needed to appear in the form of a man that the young protégé, Telemachus, would follow.

The Mentoring Relationship

Protégés, like Telemachus, may not recognize a mentor without some connection, likeness, or familiarity. A lack of similarity may present a barrier that prevents the mentoring relationship from fully initiating and impact progression through the phases identified in Kathy E. Kram’s (1983) seminal work, *Phases of the Mentor Relationship*. During the course of a mentoring relationship, the mentor is found to provide two main functions: Career-related functions and psychosocial
functions, as shown in Figure 7. These functions develop different aspects and address different needs of the protégé. Career functions, such as coaching work toward developing the skill and abilities of the protégé and meet individual achievement needs. Psychosocial functions, such as counseling develop emotional intelligence and address needs of belonging and affiliation.

The seminal work of Kram (1983) identified mentoring as a developmental relationship that enhances the career and psychosocial development of both the mentor and protégé. Career functions include sponsorship, coaching, protection, exposure and visibility, and challenging work assignments necessary for career advancement. Psychosocial functions, which enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity, and
effectiveness, include role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship. Organizational knowledge and culture are often transferred through career functions (Kram, 1983). This view of mentoring is considered a career oversight model. The personal empowerment model of mentoring as defined by Clutterbuck and Ragins (2002) indicates that sponsorship, challenging assignments, protection, and fostering visibility are the responsibilities of the first line supervisor, not the mentor. For maximum effectiveness, the mentor should focus on coaching and provide all psychosocial support functions (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002).

For the purposes of this study, a developmental relationship can only be identified as mentoring if it contains both career and psychosocial functions (Benishenk, Bieschke, Park, & Slattery, 2004). In the process, the mentor gains recognition and respect from peers and superiors for developing talent, fulfilling the love, esteem, and self-actualization values on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Kram, 1983). Fletcher and Ragins (2007) indicate that the transfer of career and psychosocial functions happen in individual mentoring episodes, however, there is no given number of mentoring episodes that constitute a mentoring relationship. A mentoring episode is a single social interaction that is growth-fostering for both the protégé and the mentor (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007).

Early research on mentoring relationships included samples with little diversity in terms of race or ethnicity (Jeffcoat, 2008; Kram, 1983; Ragins & Cotton, 1996;
Several studies indicated that the initiation and development of mentoring relationships might be negatively impacted by race and ethnicity (Thomas, 1989, 1990, 1993) and gender (Ragins, 1989; Ragins & Cotton, 1991, 1996; Ragins & Winkel, 2011). Cross-gender and cross-race developmental relationships tend not to progress to mentoring relationships where the parties differ in their strategy for dealing with gender- or race-related issues (Thomas, 1993). Additionally, where cross-race and cross-gender developmental relationships did progress to mentoring relationships that were diversified by that nature, the ties that bound were found to be weaker because same-race mentoring relationships were found to provide significantly more psychosocial support (Dreher, 1996). The work of Ragins (1997a, 1997b, 2007) indicated that women of color were more likely to be involved in diversified mentoring relationships and that these relationships were different in nature from homogeneous mentoring relationships. In diversified mentoring relationships, the mentor and protégé differ in terms of group memberships associated with power differentials in organizations based on dimensions of diversity such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, or sexual orientation (Ragins, 1997b; Ragins & Sundstrom,

*Figure 8 Phases of a mentoring relationship in the workplace, Kram (1983)*
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1989). Ragins (1997b) suggests that the power, or lack thereof, associated with minority group membership may affect behavioral and perceptual processes involved in the development of mentoring relationships.

In the seminal research on mentoring relationships, Kram (1983) identifies four phases of mentoring relationship development, shown in Figure 8, which evolve from workplace interactions such as a direct hire interview, common work tasks, or direct supervision. The initiation stage is the most vulnerable to being negatively impacted by barriers to mentoring relationships (Jeffcoat, 2008; Kram, 1983; Ragins & Cotton, 1996) due to organizational, interpersonal, and individual factors (Ragins, 1997a). While developmental relationships may run through the same phases, as does any relationship, the barriers presented at initiation can limit or stunt the relationship (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins, 1997a; Ragins & Cotton, 1991).

Ragins (1997a) indicates that barriers negatively affecting diversified mentoring relationships that may involve women of color can occur at the organizational level, interpersonal level, or individual level. Organizational factors include structural integration, management systems, and homogeneous vs. diverse organizational culture (Ragins, 1997a). The structural integration of an organization reflects how well women of color are assimilated into the fabric of an organization at all levels, or not (Ragins, 1997a; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Structural segregation results in a lack of inclusion in the power pockets that are reflected and imprinted in
the glass and concrete ceilings which prevent women of color and others from gaining access to power positions. Management systems refer to the continuum between hierarchical and collaborative work systems. Ragins (1997a) indicates that mentoring relationships in hierarchical systems will be more diversified than those in collaborative work systems. Relationships in collaborative environments that span organizational departments and ranks may offer women of color increased access to other women of color mentors. Interpersonal factors of perceived similarity and attraction, as well as similar perceptions of power and group relationships (Ragins, 1997b) may facilitate such mentoring relationships. However, these mentors have less power to affect the protégé’s development in her immediate work environment (Blake-Beard, Murrell, & Thomas, 2006; Thomas, 1990). Individual factors which involve the respective skills, attitudes, and backgrounds of the mentor and protégé can influence the launch and development of a mentoring relationship through the interplay of ingroups and outgroups of leadership (Ragins, 1997b; Schriesheim, Cogliser, Castro, & Cogliser, 1999) thereby creating a more effective mentoring relationship.

**Barriers to Mentoring Relationships**

Much of the prevailing research has identified many benefits that mentoring relationships offer the individual as well as the organization, most notably career progression and increased diversity (Lim et al., 2015; Ragins, 1997b, 2016). The
presumptions of some researchers appear to be that mentoring relationships are readily available and easily accessible to everyone and anyone seeking upward mobility (Allen, 2003; Eller, Lev, & Feurer, 2014; Hegstad, 1999; Hegstad & Wentling, 2004; McPhaul, 2009; Srivasatava, 2011). Unfortunately, there is a perceived lack of mentoring relationships available for women of color (Jeffcoat, 2008; McDonald et al., 2018). This perception is backed by the Ragins and Cotton (1991) study, which indicated that women experience five types of barriers to mentoring relationships in the workplace and validated by the Jeffcoat (2008) study which confirmed three of these barriers for women of color. To wit, barrier types may reflect ineffective perceptions of either the mentor or the protégé, or of both, but often impact upon the initiation phase of a mentoring relationship (Scandura & Williams, 2001). Benishek et al. (2004) also suggested that women of color may experience a lack of role models and support, in addition to other concerns that can complicate identifying and establishing a mentoring relationship. Table 2 lists the types of barriers experienced by women in the Ragins and Cotton (1991) study and compared with those validated in the Jeffcoat (2008) study. Ultimately, mentoring relationships are characterized by
trust based on honesty, respect, and confidentiality (Leck & Orser, 2013; Ragins, 2016; Ragins et al., 2017). Anything that threatens the road to trust can present a barrier to mentoring relationships. The barriers found by Ragins and Cotton (1991) are expanded upon below.

**Lack of Access**

Before a mentoring relationship can be initiated, the parties must first think it possible (Ghosh, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2015). This is the essence inherent in the ‘lack of access’ barrier to mentoring relationships (Lim et al., 2015). The glass, or concrete ceiling, indicates a perception of impacted or impenetrable access (Powell & Butterfield, 1994). An environment where women of color are not represented among the population of potential mentors may present challenges to the perception of a place

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of Access</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misinterpretation of approach</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disapproval of others</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of initiating</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unwilling mentors</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Table 2 Barriers to mentoring relationships, Ragins and Cotton (1991); Jeffcoat (2008)
BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

for them (Moss, 2000; Ruderman et al., 1996; Strickling-Bullock, 2000). Additionally, Thomas’ (1986, 1989, 1990) work found that inconsistent attitudes about diversity stifle developmental relationships which then fall far short of mentorship and, at best, only serve a subset of career functions such as sponsorship with little, if any, psychosocial support.

In the workplace, the ‘lack of access’ barrier can be experienced overtly or quite subtly because organizational systems, circumstances, and cultures may contribute to the presence of this barrier for women of color (Ragins, 1997a). Seminal work by Kram (1983) indicated limitations in cross-sex and cross-race developmental relationships that may result in barriers, but particularly, as a point of entry, a lack of access. Kram (1983) suggested that organizational factors could inhibit access to mentoring relationships. Ragins (1997b) argues that structural segregation, negative stereotypes, attributes, and perceptions of competence, combined with increased visibility and negative workgroup interactions restrict access to mentoring relationships. Men may exist in and perpetuate a culture of being afraid to be alone with women, effectively quarantining and blocking her from gaining access to the initiation and cultivation of developmental relationships (Johnson & Smith, 2017). A lack of diversity in the body of organizational leadership adds to lack of access since most mentors will tend to select protégés based on similarities and attraction (Chao, 1997). Additionally, stereotypical behaviors and unconscious bias may hold women in
positions of dependency or limit exposure to challenging and developmental opportunities and positions (Smith & Johnson, 2017) that continue to minimize their competence and appeal to potential mentors.

**Misinterpretation of Approach**

Kram (1983) implied that developmental relationships involving women as mentees often lacked the psychosocial function of role modeling. Thus, for most women of color, finding individuals with whom they can identify may be challenging in corporate leadership environments that continue to lack diversity. Other implications were concerns about one’s public image or perceived intimacy where attempts to initiate a developmental relationship might be misconstrued as a sexual advance (Kram, 1983). These factors caused individuals to avoid interaction that could have provided the career and psychosocial support needed for advancement (Johnson & Smith, 2017).

**Approval of Others**

The individual perspectives and behaviors of people impact the organizational culture therein so the disapproval of others, whether lateral, superior, or subordinate, can block the initiation of a mentoring relationship (Ragins, 1997a). Diversified mentoring relationships where the mentor and protégé differ in demographic composition (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, sexual orientation, etc.) tend to be more visible than homogeneous mentoring relationships and may garner
attention from others (Ragins, 1997a). As indicated in previous paragraphs, from the outset of mentoring research, one implication was that the concern of public image presented a challenge to the development of mentoring relationships. Ragins (Ragins, 1997a) noted that individuals outside of the mentoring relationship might influence its development and outcome.

_Fear of Initiation_

While fear of initiation was not a factor found in Jeffcoat’s (2008) study, Ragins and Cotton (1991) did find it among participants who were mostly Caucasian. Research by Ragins (1997a) suggests that mentors and protégés are reciprocally attracted to someone who reminds them of themselves; a person in whom they can see a reflection of themselves whether in appearance or personality. With an underrepresentation of women of color at the top of organizational ladders with whom they can identify, women of color may experience interpersonal discomfort and perceived risk in initiating mentoring relationships (Ragins, 1997a). Thomas (1989, 1990) found that disparity in approach to racial differences constrained social interaction and the potential for mentoring relationships.

_Mentor Willingness_

Mentoring willingness was also not found to be a barrier that affected women of color in Jeffcoat’s (2008) study. Additionally, research shows that people are willing to serve as a mentor, but they may fall short of full mentoring relationships by
enacting social scripts stemming from their socialization that may define gender roles in conflict with organizational roles (Smith & Johnson, 2017). Gender and race relations may be topics too sensitive for mentors to broach, possibly rendering them unwilling to initiate a relationship with someone with whom they find little surface connections (Ragins, 1997a). Even in a group of women, diverse in race and ethnicity, there may be some difficulty in moving beyond the sensitive nature of race relations rooted in historical power structures and sources of marginalization to deepen mentoring relationships (Esnard et al., 2015; Ragins, 1997b). These barriers may leave women of color in fragmented developmental relationships where psychosocial support is sought and provided outside the immediate work environment. Additionally, there may be other factors that render women of color less likely to trust, confide in, and interact with others forming an impediment to genuine and deeper social ties towards mentoring relationships (Esnard et al., 2015). Trust is the fuel that facilitates those ties, and there may be any number of things that undermine the extension of trust from one person to another.

*Sponsorship vs. Mentorship*

Sponsorship is yet another key component of fostering mentoring relationships where the mentor extends public support to the protégé for advancement, key developmental positions, awards, or recognition (Kram, 1983). Acting as a sponsor, the mentor may leverage their social and political power in support of the protégé’s
advancement while providing protection and advocacy for the protégé where needed (Thomas, 1990). During this pivotal juncture, sponsors are required to place their own reputation on the line for the benefit of the protégé. This places them at risk and may impact a sponsor’s willingness to engage in, continue, or deepen a relationship with a protégé thereby blocking other mentoring functions (Ragins & Kram, 2007; Thomas, 1990). Figure 9 illustrates how sponsorship lies on a continuum from temporary to long-term and sustained without the psychosocial quality of mentoring relationships (Thomas, 1986). Temporary sponsorship may occur one time and be very unidirectional and one-dimensional, however, the sponsor has the power of access and influence to extend entry or favor to the protégé while the protégé may be oblivious of the sponsor’s actions (Thomas, 1986). There may be interpersonal interaction, but the
relationship does not go beyond the workplace, if it exists at all and there is little, if any, development or learning on the part of the protégé from this type of superficial engagement. However, sustained sponsorships denote the potential for an on-going relationship (Thomas, 1986). The protégé may or may not be aware of the sponsor’s actions. If the protégé is aware of the sponsor’s actions, he or she may even feel obligated or beholden to the sponsor, as the sponsor’s actions have power based on position, longevity, or seniority in the organization (Ragins, 1997a) and while the sponsor may be willing to advocate for the protégé, this advocacy may not go beyond the workplace into social settings (Ragins & Kram, 2007a). With sponsorship, development is focused on career skills often through placement in key positions (Thomas, 1986) whereas other facets of mentorship lie in the psychosocial functions where the protégé’s personal development takes place (Kram, 1983). Mentorship is high in mutual trust, and respect, in both career and social dimensions and it is these types of relationships where people move beyond surface level dimensions of diversity to character, personality, and the potential for like-mindedness (Chao, 1997; Kram, 1983).

Thomas (1986, 1990) conducted a case study in one organization involving 486 developmental relationships to determine the impact of race and found significant barriers to mentoring relationships across racial lines. The demographics of organizational leaders who served as sponsors or mentors were primarily White men
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(63%). Most White men had developmental relationships with other White men
(91%) with very few (8%) involved in cross-race or cross-gender developmental
relationships and none being mentored or sponsored by Black women. In contrast,
Black women were more likely to engage in cross-race or cross-gender developmental
relationships (73%). However, this study identified a potentially negative impact on
the quality of developmental relationships across racial lines, particularly in the
psychosocial dimension which builds protégé confidence, feelings of acceptance, and
organizational cohesion. For those protégés in cross-race developmental relationships,
psychosocial functions are often fulfilled by people outside their workgroup, company,
industry, or peers with whom they could identify and envision as a role-model.
Unfortunately, these external mentors have limited impact on career functions,
particularly sponsorship, due to a disconnect and lack of power and influence in the
specific industry, organization, or workgroup of the protégé. Further analysis of this
population indicated that there were some cross-race relationships that could evolve
into a full mentorship while others stalled at sponsorship, largely ignoring other
mentoring functions, particularly the psychosocial aspects. The difference was in the
perspective of diversity management. One school of thought denies and suppresses
differences, and the other deals with differences directly and intentionally (Thomas,
1986, 1993). If the potential mentor and protégé were like-minded on either
perspective, the relationship could evolve to incorporate the full qualities of
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mentorship. Where they differed, the relationship could only achieve sponsorship at best (Thomas, 1986, 1993). These differences present barriers that minimize trust and commitment between and among people in an organization, and therefore to mentoring relationships.

**High-Quality Mentoring and Employee Engagement**

Not all mentoring relationships are found equal. Thomas (2001) found that mentors of minority employees do their protégés a better service when they understand, openly acknowledge, and discuss racial differences and potential obstacles, and by being conscious and intentional about providing psychosocial support. The execution of psychosocial functions depends on the quality of emotional bonds and psychological attachments in a relationship (Ragins & Kram, 2007b). Mentoring relationships are found to exist along a continuum from low quality to high quality (Kram & Ragins, 2007). High-quality mentoring communicates value to a protégé and garners organizational commitment.

Relational mentoring is defined as an interdependent and generative developmental relationship that promotes mutual growth, learning, and development within the career context (Ragins, 1997a; Ragins & Verbos, 2007). High-quality
mentoring relationships are built over time upon high-quality mentoring episodes marked by growth-fostering interactions for both the mentor and protégé (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007). Mutual growth-fostering interactions are marked by fluid and multidirectional conditions where both the mentor and the protégé offer authenticity, vulnerability, and empowerment requiring of each relational skills such as empathy, listening, relational competence, and emotional intelligence.

The emotional attachment, caregiving, and care receiving inherent in relational mentoring make it an anchoring relationship (Ragins & Verbos, 2007). Ragins et al. (2017), found that employees who witnessed or knew about racial discrimination at work were less committed to their organization, even if not directly involved unless they were in high-quality mentoring relationships because of its anchoring feature. Research by Ragins and Verbos (2007) also indicated that high-quality mentoring relationships are expected to reinforce interconnection and interpersonal security.

How do high-quality mentoring relationships relate to employee engagement? Through more than 30 years of qualitative and quantitative research, Gallup social scientists developed the Gallup Workplace Audit (GWA) Q12® instrument to assess employee engagement which, in the last 19 years, has been administered to more than 7 million employees in 112 different countries (Harter et al., 2006). An analysis of this instrument revealed several areas that relate to the characteristics found in high-quality mentoring relationships (Ragins, 2016). Figure 10 illustrates characteristics or
types of support provided by high-quality mentors which relate to $Q^{12\circledast}$ employee engagement factors. High-quality mentorship in the workplace may positively influence employee engagement, thereby increasing organizational productivity and profitability (Asplund & Blacksmith, 2011; Clifton, 2003; Ragins, 2016) mostly through psychosocial functions. When mentors sponsor protégés into challenging and developmental positions, they are giving them the opportunity to do what they do best. Mentors also recognize and share the good work protégés are doing in ways that are meaningful to them. Mentoring relationships are personal in nature, providing protégés with care, concern, support, and guidance towards achieving their goals and

Figure 10 High-quality mentor characteristics reflected in GWA $Q^{12\circledast}$ employee engagement factor, Gallup (2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High quality mentors</th>
<th>Employee Engagement</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Help protege get into roles where they can most fully utilize their inherent talents</td>
<td>Q03: Opportunity to do what I do best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognize and share protege's good work in ways that are meaningful to the protege</td>
<td>Q04: Recognition for good work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Care about their protege</td>
<td>Q05: Someone at work cares about me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages protege development</td>
<td>Q06: Encourages my development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values protege opinions and input</td>
<td>Q07: My opinions count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed to quality and serving as a role model</td>
<td>Q08: Company mission/purpose makes me feel my job is important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops into strong friendship with protege</td>
<td>Q09: Associates committed to quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss protege progress</td>
<td>Q10: Best friend at work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides opportunities for protege to learn and grow</td>
<td>Q11: Someone at work has talked to me about my progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Q12: I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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often becoming close friendships. This can only be done if the mentor cares about the opinions of the protégé. Protégé development is central in both career and psychosocial functions. As role models, mentors must be committed to quality in order to contribute to the success and effective development of their protégés.

A diverse workforce introduces the availability of heterogeneous human capital resources. These resources must be leveraged through inclusion and engagement in order to contribute to competitive advantage. Employee engagement is strongly linked to positive organizational performance (Markos & Sridevi, 2010; Sange & Srivasatava, 2012) and effective managerial engagement boosts employee engagement through mentoring relationships (Madan & Srivastava, 2016). The relationship between mentoring and diversity, inclusion, and engagement is illustrated in Figure 11.

This yields the following equation:

\[ \text{Productivity} = \text{Mentorship} \times (\text{Engagement} + \text{Diversity} + \text{Inclusion}) \]

**Mentoring and Diversity**

Diversity and inclusion are exponentially powered by mentoring and engagement (Lean In & McKinsey & Company, 2016). Where diversity issues are

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*Figure 11 Productivity model: Mentorship at the intersection of Engagement, Diversity, and Inclusion, Markos & Sridevi (2010); Sange & Srivasatava (2012); Madan & Srivastava (2016)*
present in the form of discrimination or microaggressions, the psychosocial functions of mentoring (Kram, 1988) are shown to be the key to mediating the resulting emotional conflict that deters from progress and promoting the task focus that improves performance. Where such issues are not present, performance improvement stemming from the constructive use of diversity through inclusion and engagement is described by Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin (1999) as the diversity Black Box. Mentoring lives in this Black Box and pulls together the diversity, inclusion, and engagement to deliver improved performance. Women of color are the fastest growing demographic in the workforce and fully represents the United States demographic at the lower levels, but not at the senior leadership levels (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013). Diversity and inclusion programs with the intent of equalizing this representation gap have not been successful in doing so. However, companies continue to spend millions of dollars on this initiative (Wingfield, 2015). Mentoring has been consistently, but weakly, considered as a tool for diversity and inclusion and has also been linked to improved human capital engagement, provided women of color have access to it (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002). Unfortunately, barriers to mentoring relationships have been identified for women of color in the workplace (Jeffcoat, 2008) and continue to persist as indicated by repeated reports of a lack of mentoring (Ahmad & Iverson, 2013; Liggins-Moore, 2016; Wells, 2017). Organizational culture, which may include formal mentoring programs, may benefit from the feedback and
perceptions women of color can offer through the opportunity to understand diversity in action (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002).

**Diversity and Inclusion**

Diversity metrics measure organizational factors like demographics, organizational culture, accountability, productivity/profitability, benchmarking, and programmatic measures (Wheeler, 1998). Human resource policies seeking workforce diversity that is representative of the overall society have not been effective (Shen, Chanda, D’Netto, & Monga, 2009). Women of color with their different experiences, perspectives, and approaches need to be strategically recruited and included in the workplace (Lean In & McKinsey & Company, 2016; Thomas et al., 2017). Organizational leaders and executives must be accountable to diversity and inclusion initiatives in order for them to be effective (Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). Without employee engagement, however, diversity and inclusion does not yield the cognitive diversity needed to effectuate the diversity bonus that garners increased profit and productivity (Page, 2017). Figure 12 depicts mentoring as a platform upon which diversity, inclusion, and engagement combine to produce the cognitive diversity
The Diversity Bonus: Inclusion and Engagement

Page (2017) indicates that employee integration is key to the inclusion piece of the diversity equation. Reduced turnover ensures that organizational knowledge is not only retained, but also provides the potential for it to be built and shared through enhanced communication which is also a benefit of mentoring (Berry, 2010; L. T. de T. Eby et al., 2013; Park, Newman, Zhang, Wu, & Hooke, 2016; Shaw et al., 2013). Additional organizational outcomes from mentoring include employee development (Kram & Isabella, 1985), managerial succession (Peet, 2012), increased productivity (Liu, Liu, Kwan, & Mao, 2009; Nan, Hui, Yang, & Lizhi, 2013; Ragins, 2016), and organizational socialization (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007; Wilson & Elman, 1990). In the same way that diversity is activated by inclusion, inclusion is activated by
engagement (Page, 2017). Both inclusion and engagement work together towards the investment of human capital which activates cognitive diversity. Mentoring is the key that weds the partnership of inclusion and engagement with the mentor or leader focusing on inclusion and the protégé on engagement (Madan & Srivastava, 2016). This was demonstrated in IBM’s approach to mentoring as relayed in the book, *Intelligent Mentoring: How IBM Creates Value through People, Knowledge, and Relationships*, which found clear relationships between IBM’s implementation of a diverse mentoring portfolio and employee engagement (Murrell, Forte-Trammell, & Bing, 2009).

**Leader/Manager Development**

Researchers suggest that leadership is not about any one individual person, but rather about what is needed for increased performance of the team or the organization (Chambers, Foulon, Handfield-Jones, Hankin, & Michaels III, 1998). The leader identification development model depicted in Figure 13 identifies six stages of identifying a leader (Komives, Longerbeam, Owen, Mainella, & Osteen, 2006; Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Unleashing human potential is a function of helping individuals better understand themselves, their talents, and their limitations, which can be accomplished through the career and psychosocial functions of high-quality mentoring relationships (Kram, 1988). Additionally, the execution of talent is about ensuring the right person is in the right
job (Bipp, 2010). Jim Collins, author of *From Good to Great* (2001), explains that the difference between good organizations and great organizations is the ability to hire the right people and put them in the right positions that maximize the organizational performance impact of engaging their specific human capital.

Komives et al. (2006, 2005) found that mentoring was an important influence in transitioning through the stages by exposing and developing their protégé’s talents, skills, knowledge, and abilities which comprise their human capital. Mentors also identify key developmental opportunities that can benefit from the protégé’s human capital (Kammeyer-Mueller & Judge, 2008; Komives et al., 2006, 2005; Wells, 2017).
The protégé, encouraged, emboldened, and empowered by the mentor, engages her full self into her workgroups (Komives et al., 2006; Madan & Srivastava, 2016). In this way, the two primary functions of mentoring work in concert with both the mentor and protégé to activate the benefits of diversity, inclusion, and engagement.

**Women of Color in Corporate Leadership**

Most of the research that includes women of color in the workforce has women and minorities broadly included, or each independently, largely ignoring the complex challenges brought about by the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and gender, with the exception of studies involving African American or Black women. While some women of color have experienced some success since entering the corporate workforce, it has not been without challenges (Catalyst, 2003a; Jordan, 2011; Liggins-Moore, 2016; Zweigenhaft, 2011) which makes mentoring all the more crucial. A 1991 news article reported on a Department of Labor study commissioned by the Bush administration that analyzed corporate prejudices in nine companies found that women and minorities were “blocked by subtle corporate practices” that excluded them from mentoring, fast-track promotions, and key decision-making, developmental, and visible opportunities (Los Angeles Times, 1991). Martinez (1997) noted that forward-thinking companies are investing in mentoring programs that help women and minorities flourish to retain high performers, develop future leaders, and secure a competitive workforce. She suggests that the most important issue to focus on for
existing talent is mentoring (Martinez, 1997). Highlighting companies Pitney Bowes and Knight-Ridder as examples, mentoring helps remove institutional gender and racial barriers, enabling women and minorities to “perform at their maximum level, improving company-wide performance” ultimately increasing profits (Martinez, 1997). Martinez (1997) cited a 1996 Catalyst study, which reported that senior-level female executives were leaving their corporate jobs not because they were exiting the workforce, but rather to pursue opportunities where they would be valued in other companies or in starting their own businesses. A second study by Catalyst (2003b) found that there had been few changes. Companies continued to devalue and minimize female human capital in profit and loss areas by excluding them from line positions that would provide that exposure and experience (Catalyst, 2003b). Giscombe and Mattis (2002) conducted a multiphase, large-scale study on women of color in corporate management, finding a considerable discrepancy between stated diversity policies and their effectiveness as perceived by women of color who theoretically should benefit from them. Hiring objectives and stated business imperatives for diversity did lead to an increasingly diverse workforce at lower levels of organizations, but not at the higher levels (Alliance For Board Diversity, 2012). The study found that sexist and racist organizational cultures drove out senior-level women of color, and low levels of structural integration kept women of color in staff positions devoid of profit and loss responsibilities which signal value and capability
for entry into CEO pipelines (Giscombe & Mattis, 2002). Oblivious to the multi-
marginalization experienced by women of color in terms of gender, race, and ethnicity, corporations sent women of color opposing messages about their value in the corporate environment (Giscombe & Mattis, 2002). Women of color did not fit into the corporate mold and some corporate leaders thought women of color were too aggressive and “tried too hard” while others advised that they were not aggressive enough (Giscombe & Mattis, 2002). Giscombe and Mattis (2002) suggested that the business case for diversity, while clear, is insufficient. Progress will require attention to performance management, succession planning, and managerial accountability as well as addressing stereotypes and preconceptions that drive exclusionary behavior and negative attitudes towards women of color (Giscombe & Mattis, 2002). While the article has a short section on mentoring, it does not go far enough in extolling the benefits of mentoring to address these issues.

The glass ceiling is described as the lack of upward mobility among women and minorities in organizations (Corsun & Costen, 2001). Corsun and Costen (2001) noted that people affected by the glass ceiling were subject to the self-aggrandizing power differentials and disparities by those in power. These disparities are unlikely to change without a changed perspective on the value of the human capital brought by women and minorities. They argue that unrealized value exists in women and minorities in being able to build bridges to otherwise disconnected networks (Corsun...


Women of color have connections and other factors within their human capital that can expand the network and corporate reach. Corsun and Costin (2001) suggest, however, that the realization of this human capital will only come about with market or external legislative pressures augmenting internal pressure to change the inclination of White men to preserve their power. Jordan (2011) suggests that Black women corporate executives can help save corporate fees associated with race and gender lawsuits by proactively introducing policies, procedures, and monitoring systems that oppose systems, organizational cultures, and messaging that can create inequality thereby reducing the number of Equal Employment Opportunity claims. These power differentials also transform into negative corporate discourse regarding race and gender for many Black women corporate executives (Jordan, 2011). In the meantime, however, women of color along with most corporate employees remain unengaged (Gallup, 2017) and White men will increasingly feel threatened (Dover et al., 2016).

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) (2016) report on barriers and bias found that women of color had limited access to social networks which would help them engage and share information about jobs, promotions, professional advice, resources, and expertise. Because lives outside of work may not overlap with influential executives and managers, women of color are often overlooked in opportunities to engage their human capital (AAUW, 2016). The study
defined a stereotype as a cognitive shortcut that categorizes people on the basis of primary demographics such as race, gender, or ethnicity, and bias was described as a semi-permanent belief based on repeated exposure to stereotypes (AAUW, 2016).

Wallace (2016) completed a quantitative dissertation study surveying 100 female managers about their experience, or lack thereof, with effective mentoring relationships. Using the social exchange theory upon which the psychosocial and career functions of mentoring hinge, Wallace examined the underlying mechanisms of mentoring for women, however with a participant pool that was 82% Caucasian, did not examine factors that may have related to race or ethnicity, or the intersectionality of race and ethnicity with gender.

More Barriers

Wells (2017) found in her dissertation study that while African American women are qualified for leadership positions, barriers to mentoring and challenges related to perceptions of their race and gender hinder placement at senior executive levels. Education alone, the foundation of human capital was insufficient; mentoring would be needed to dispel rigid preconceived notions of their character and negative stereotypes held by organizational leaders and those in powerful positions (Wells, 2017). Wells found that African American women were repeatedly subject to bias and being stereotyped as angry and socially uncontrollable, undermining the perception of them as executive-level leaders and resulting in missed opportunities. Additionally,
BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

pop culture repeatedly reinforced a strong negative image of African American women further separating them from any images at the corporate executive level (Wells, 2017).

Eagly and Karau’s (2002) role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders suggest that women leaders are seen as less capable, potentially undermining their performance. Wells found that when incongruity exists, where African American women are in leadership roles typically filled by men, their capabilities are constantly in question and must be repeatedly proven even in the face of persistently outstanding performance. To thwart this stereotype threat, Wells (2017) strongly advocates for African American women mentoring African American women, however, there are not enough African American women in executive-level corporate positions to be mentors. Wells (2017) focused on African American women in Jackson, Mississippi, and recommended future research on mentoring for women of color in other areas of the United States. A lack of mentoring was one of three major factors hindering the progress of these women to executive level positions (Wells, 2017).

Hekman, Johnson, Foo, and Yang (2017) found that raters penalized and judged women of color as less competent when they engaged in diversity-valuing behaviors. Several studies show that women and women of color experience a lack of mentoring (Lattimore, 2014; Wells, 2017). To address barriers such as gender discrimination, Lattimore (2014) suggests that organizations should acknowledge that
men and women have different styles of mentoring and ensure that genuine mentoring takes place, particularly since mentoring has been shown to increase perceived organizational support.

**Otherness…Another Barrier?**

Do the words of former First Lady Michelle Obama seem odd or ring true for you? In the business environment, Ozbilgin and Woodward (2004) describe otherness as the feeling or experience of being an outsider or excluded from a group centering around a conceptual ideal or norm. The more different one is from the norm, the more otherness is felt.

As a social construct, otherness may be described as a feeling of incompetence or inferiority. Itwaru’s (1978) study of the colonized people of the West Indies implies a distance between the less empowered colonized and the more powerful colonizer based on the feeling of otherness. Thorpe-Moscon and Pollack (2014) describe otherness as “being different or having characteristics [like race/ethnicity or gender] that set you apart from the dominant group or groups in a given context” (p. 2). The characteristics of the dominant group become normative, and otherness is exemplified by requiring a defining descriptor in the language. For example, Mark Zuckerberg is

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*My experiences...have made me far more aware of my “Blackness” than ever before. I have found that...no matter how liberal and open-minded some ... try to be toward me, I sometimes feel like a visitor...as if I really don’t belong.*

-Michelle Obama
simply a CEO where Ursula Burns is an African American, female CEO. Ultimately the feeling of otherness is based on power, or the lack thereof.

The existence of otherness in an organization manifests itself in a lack of diversity that blocks significant segments of the total talent pool from being mentored by senior executives who do not look like them, and subsequently from contributing at the senior levels of an organization. Ravello (2016) reports that some Black women in predominantly White institutions feel “proud but endangered as Blacks, privileged but subordinated as women, and resilient but double burdened as Black women.” The feeling of otherness for an individual may result in the perception of a lack of access to the most desirable jobs or to mentors, and limitations to aspirations and future possibilities, as well as limited power. In their research, Ozbilgin and Woodward (2004) found that some men thought they were protecting women by denying them certain opportunities, which only served to damage their career development. Other research indicates that women of color face additional challenges to mentorship due the combination of ethnicity, race and gender, and the feeling or experience of otherness (Thorpe-Moscon & Pollack, 2014). While those with a sense
of otherness may have just as many mentors as anyone else, their mentors lack the clout to be really effective in providing career functions such as sponsorship (Thorpe-Moscon & Pollack, 2014; Travis, Thorpe-Moscon, & McCluney, 2016). These feelings have been persistent and pervasive and can lead to diminished thoughts of what is possible (Thorpe-Moscon & Pollack, 2014). Michelle Obama, writing about it in her undergraduate thesis said: “I sometimes feel like a visitor … as if I really don't belong” (Robinson, 1985, p. 2).

This feeling of otherness may result from a worldview of multiculturalism versus color-blindness, where “individuals seek to maintain a positive sense of racial identity and connectedness while adopting aspects of the dominant culture that enable them to be effective” in dissonance with their work experiences (Thomas, 1993, p. 178). Individuals report feeling excluded, and more likely to feel otherness when they feel devalued, dismissed, or when the unique attributes they bring to the table are ignored (Nugent, Pollack, & Travis, 2016). Black women who were leaders in academia and business reported experiences of being invisible, voiceless, discriminated, isolated, undermined, treated unfairly, oppressed, challenged and demoted (Davis, 2012). In mentoring, Thomas (1993) found that African American protégés who initially chose liberal assimilationist eventually transitioned to a multiculturalism worldview, which may contribute to a feeling of otherness. This study indicates that there was an initial focus on making the majority [White mentors]
feel comfortable with their [African-American protégé] existence. Another study of a cross-racial and cross-gender mentoring relationship indicated that feelings of otherness may result in caution and self-doubt during the initial stages of a developmental relationship (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). In response to the interview question, “Is it your perception that minorities have to be more accomplished, more assertive?”, one study participant spoke of her sense of otherness and the feeling that she had to prove herself every day (Burgis, 2009). Where mentors understand and openly acknowledge otherness and racial differences, protégés fare better through more effective psychosocial support and the barriers and boundaries that result from race matters and mentoring may be overcome (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Thomas, 2001).

**Research questions**

Most mentoring research is at the individual level, and calls have been made to expand research to the organizational level (Higgins & Kram, 2001). The goal of this study is to conceptually understand how barriers to the development of mentoring relationships for women of color impact the organization. Conversely, how can organizations benefit from mentoring women of color for leadership?

This qualitative phenomenological study is being conducted to determine how barriers to mentoring relationships experienced by women of color might affect
organizational performance from a human capital perspective. The following research questions evolved from a review and examination of existing literature on mentoring women of color.

Q1. What are the perceptions of women of color regarding the impacts that barriers to mentoring relationships have on the organization?

Q2. What are the perceptions and lived experiences of women of color regarding human capital development practices within the organization?

Q3. What are the implications for organizations regarding barriers to mentoring relationships faced by women of color in corporate leadership?

Summary

Penrose (1959) suggests an approach to internal firm growth that is facilitated by human motivation. A precursor to the resource-based view (RBV) (Barney, 1991; Penrose, 1959; Wernerfelt, 1984), she indicated that firm growth is the result of intentional decision-making, it does not happen accidentally, and it is preceded by the careful planning and direction of its managers. RBV, as one of the most significant theoretical frameworks in business literature, holds that sustainable competitive advantage may be achieved through the utilization of valuable, rare, imperfectly imitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources (Barney, 1991). Firm growth planning, inherent in sustainable competitive advantage, is contingent on the accumulation of firm-specific knowledge deployed through the investment of firm-
specific human capital resources (Wang & Barney, 2006). Human capital resources, based on individual knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs), whether generic or firm-specific, combine to create complex, firm-specific, individual and unit level capabilities making it a VRIN resource and therefore a source of competitive advantage (Becker, 2002; Hitt et al., 2001; Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011; Ployhart et al., 2014; Wright & McMahan, 2011). Also considered a source of competitive advantage is the set of high-performance work practices (HPWPs) and strategic human resource management (SHRM) systems that influence, shape, and combine human capital resources towards executing a firm’s strategic goals (Delery & Roumpi, 2017). While there is no specific definition or component listing of high-performance work practices (HPWPs), the literature agrees that HPWPs involve the creation of human capital, emphasize employee involvement and decision-making attitudes, and include cross-departmental education and training, and teamwork. Mentoring is a human resource practice through which individuals can be developed into better, or more likely, organizational leaders than peers who are not mentored (Scandura, Tejeda, Werther, & Lankau, 1996). In this developmental process, the mentor transfers firm-specific tacit knowledge such that the protégé’s human capital is enhanced and expanded to the benefit of the organization (Scandura et al., 1996). With some employees getting mentored and some not, potential competitive advantage
inherent in firm-specific human capital may go unrealized because their human capital is not recognized, engaged, invested, or developed.

Companies are committing millions to retain and grow their women of color population. For example, Intel committed $300 million to achieve full representation of women and minority populations (McGirt, 2017b). Companies are not only affected by women of color as professionals but also as consumers. The three largest cohort of women of color in America is Black, Asian, and Hispanic women. Neilsen, the company that studies consumers in over 100 countries, reports that Black and Latina women, numbering 52.3 million [over 30% of all women in America], are increasingly becoming aware of their influence and buying power. Including the Asian American female population, the average age is 33, the average annual income is over $70,000, and an average of 29% have at least an undergraduate college education. This population is young, educated, and in the market for quality goods; facts that cannot be ignored by corporations. Being young, they are not only corporate consumers, but they are also their professionals. Further, with women of color increasingly starting and running their own businesses, they will eventually be their competition (The Nielsen Company, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity EEO-1 data which reports workforce demographics, in 2015, thirty-seven percent (37%) of the total workforce was comprised of women of color while only five percent (5%) of senior executives
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and officials were women of color (EEO, 2015). Equal Employment Opportunity EEO-1 data and Census 2015 data depict the lack of equitable representation of women of color at the senior leadership levels (Bauman & Ryan, 2015; EEO, 2015).

The workforce is increasingly becoming more diverse with women of color being a strong cohort ready to be developed, included, and engaged. Organizations that do not give credence to this growing population in their workforce do so at their own peril. Programs touting diversity and inclusion have not been effective. While women of color in the general workforce strongly represent the general US population, this representation dwindles to near zero approaching the upper levels of leadership. Some studies indicate that the business case for diversity and inclusion has not been effective enough. However, corporations continue to pour money into initiatives with the intent of closing this gap. This paper argues that the focus on diversity and inclusion is insufficient. Corporations must also focus on engagement. Mentoring is one scarcely attempted initiative that measurably reaches diversity and inclusion, as well as engagement. Unfortunately, barriers to the development of these mentoring relationships for women of color have been identified in the workplace, and barriers continue to persist. However, they may no longer present in the same way as reflected in previous studies. As the workforce becomes more diverse, these barriers may be obscure and nuanced such that they are not apparent in the macro level view of the organization. By looking at the organization through the eyes of the women of color
whose experiences make these barriers real, organizations can begin to gain some insight into ways of structuring formal mentoring programs and shaping their overall culture to support and elicit the full engagement of the women of color in their workgroups. An ontological approach that recognizes the multiplicity of experiences which make a phenomenon real is the most appropriate means of getting to its roots, impacts, and solutions. The next section will describe this approach and detail the methods and instruments used in this study.
Chapter 3: Research Method

Overview

Women of color are underrepresented in leadership positions in numerous organizations and industries. The 31st US President, Herbert Hoover, is famously quoted as saying “Honest differences of views and honest debate are not disunity.” They are the vital process of policy among free men” … and women. Within an organization, the contribution of different views and honest debates towards policy-making occur among members that are engaged in, valued by, and are often among the ranks of organizational leaders. Any underrepresented demographic among organizational leaders, such as women of color, will likely not have a significant presence for the organization to benefit from their contributions. General accounting practices identify expenditures in human capital as expenses rather than investments driving a minimization mentality when it comes to valuing people (Hubbard, 2004).

This qualitative phenomenological study identifies the impact of barriers to mentoring relationships for women of color in or aspiring to corporate leadership. This chapter provides the reader and future researchers with an overview of the methods used to conduct this research, collect the data, and analyze the results. This work is grounded in a systematic process and strategy to produce accurate data and findings that address the central research question (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010; James, Slater, & Bucknam, 2012). A detailed description of the research process enables
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future researchers to follow the methodology and replicate the findings. The reader will find a clear, accurate, and specific account of the research process. The following paragraphs provide a brief description of each component of the research methodology.

**Worldview**

Human capital analytics is concerned with solving organizational problems by understanding and measuring the critical variables, in terms of cost, time, quantity, quality, and human reaction, that affect human performance (Fitz-enz, 2010). The variables that matter cannot be known or understood without inquiry of the affected individuals. Fitz-enz describes a five-step model of analytics. One of the steps, which he describes as the first level of true analytics, is understanding past behavior and outcomes through an exploratory study of looking for and describing relationships among the data without giving meaning to patterns. This exploration reveals trends that can be studied in a predictive study that gives meanings to these trends in the next level of analytics. This qualitative phenomenological study is an exploratory study into the past behavior and outcomes with regard to barriers to workplace mentoring relationships experienced by women of color. It is rooted in an ontological philosophy commonly associated with qualitative phenomenological research. In conducting this phenomenological study, in-depth interviews to collect data engaged foundational assumptions stemming from this philosophy. Ontological assumptions focus on the
reality of a phenomenon from the perspectives of the participating individuals using their own words, reflecting the possibility for different realities and recognizes that there may be a multiplicity of realities (Creswell & Poth, 2013). Barriers to mentoring relationships are not physical, tangible structures, but rather something perceived. As such, it becomes real at the point of perception which influences individual and organizational behaviors and outcomes, which is what makes the ontological philosophy appropriate for this study.

**Phenomenology**

The study of human consciousness and self-awareness in lived experiences gravitating towards meaning and reflectivity is called phenomenology (Van Manen, 2016). A phenomenological study can involve collecting information via in-depth interviews with as many as ten individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2013). It seeks to study the way in which a person experiences a phenomenon and addresses the meaning the person attaches to that experience. Through this discipline, participants provide a rich and deep account of their experience with mentoring in ways that may not be visible to mentors or organizational leaders because it is not perceived by them as a part of their experiences.

**Organization**

Five main sections comprise this chapter. The first section of this chapter presents the research questions. The second section presents the proposed research
design which includes an overview of qualitative phenomenological research, and the rationale for selecting a qualitative research methodology. The third section provides the rationale for selecting the participants for this study. The fourth section delineates the proposed methods used for data collection, including the interview questions. The fifth section consists of how data was analyzed.

**Research questions**

This qualitative phenomenological study is being conducted to determine how barriers to mentoring relationships experienced by women of color may affect organizational performance via the human capital perspective. The following research questions evolved from a review and examination of existing literature on mentoring women of color.

Q1. What are the perceptions of women of color regarding the impacts that barriers to mentoring relationships have on the organization?

Q2. What are the perceptions and lived experiences of women of color regarding human capital development practices within the organization?

Q3. What are the implications for organizations regarding barriers to mentoring relationships faced by women of color in corporate leadership?

**Research Design**

The research design selected to explore the implications for organizations where barriers to mentoring relationships may exist for women of color aspiring for
leadership employs a qualitative phenomenological methodology. The rationale for using a qualitative phenomenological design is to understand the story behind the data collected that might otherwise be lost or ignored. Since mentoring is a developmental relationship between two or more people, it is important to understand the phenomenological aspects of that relationship. Semi-structured in-depth interviews provided a means of collecting the thick, rich data required for understanding those aspects, and the potential effects to the organization.

**Overview of Research Approach**

Previous research has identified that barriers exist for women in corporate leadership (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1991, 1996). Jeffcoat (2008) suggested a need for a better understanding of how and why these barriers exist. This research seeks to gain such an understanding by asking women of color about their perceptions and experiences concerning how these barriers present themselves as they climb towards corporate leadership. The Ragins and Cotton (1991) and the Jeffcoat (2008) studies were both quantitative, and conducted approximately 26 and 9 years ago, respectively, identifying barriers to mentoring relationships for women and for women of color. Qualitative studies are now needed to continue the exploration of these barriers to mentoring relationships for women of color and potential organizational implication. The exploratory nature of the research problem suggests a qualitative phenomenological approach based on in-depth personal interviews which would allow
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the emergence of themes (Filstad, 2011) that may be important to organizational leaders seeking to engage the benefits of mentoring relationships. This qualitative phenomenological research supports the development of a thick description of the phenomena where the research provides a detailed portrait of events provided by the participants (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2013; King, 1994; Moustakas, 1994).

Population

Creswell and Poth (2013) indicate that qualitative research generally includes a small sample size in order to collect extensive details about each individual under study. Recommendations range from 1 up to 325 with a couple of suggestions for up to 10 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2013). Van Manen (2016) suggests against identifying a specific sample size, instead seeking enough examples to provide a lived experience description of the phenomenon, with a warning that too many transcripts may thwart the creation of a scholarly and reflective phenomenological text. The population of this study appropriately consisted of women of color in the east coast region of the United States employed in for-profit businesses who were in or aspiring to leadership positions. Participants consisted of nine African American women from
five companies across five industries. The companies are not named in this report to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. Figure 14 provides a listing of the industries represented.

Selection of Participants

In choosing the sample, Creswell and Poth (2013) indicates that purposive sampling is used in qualitative research because this sampling method can “purposively inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p.156). Marshall and Rossman (2010) indicate that the sampling plan may change during the study and suggest thinking through some of the complexities. A researcher can employ maximum variation, stratified purposive, snowball, or convenience sampling strategies; or employ one strategy and migrate to another. The convenient purposive sampling and snowballing strategies were the most effective in soliciting personal relationships, new acquaintances, and referrals as participants. Direct and indirect recruiting attempts made through social media to solicit participants were unsuccessful.

- Aerospace and Defense
- Cable, Internet and Telephone Provider
- Enterprise Software & Network Solutions
- Electrical & Electronic Manufacturing
- Investment Banking & Asset Management

Figure 14 Industries represented
Five participants were solicited directly via in-person conversations. Four of the participants were previously known to the researcher, and one participant was an on-chance meeting. At the conclusion of the first interview, each participant was asked to refer any other candidates that might be interested in participating in this study utilizing the snowball or chain strategy. Four additional women were referred and three of them participated in the study. The final sample consisted of nine women. The participants were informed about the study and asked questions about their position and longevity at work. Upon determining that they fit the demographic being studied, were with their company for more than one year, and were in or aspiring to leadership positions, they were invited to participate in the study.

**The Participants**

Participants of this study, listed in Table 4, were selected because they had longevity in their respective field and had been in their positions for at least 2 years with a Fortune 500 company. All participants identified as an African American woman between the ages of 34 and 52, held a Bachelor’s degree or higher, and had demonstrated leadership capabilities. Seven of the nine participants were employed in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) positions, one worked in
the area of Diversity and Inclusion, and one was in the financial industry. Some were in leadership positions or management positions, and others had considered or aspired to management positions at their current company. The participants were all African-American women. They worked for a total of five companies as reflected in the study.

**The Companies**

Four of the five companies in which the participants were employed were current Fortune 500 companies operating in a variety of states across the United States. The fifth company was a foreign direct investor in the United States. This company also appeared on the Fortune 500 listing. These companies each espoused diversity and inclusion values on their websites and in other public information. Yet their C-level populations reflect little, if any, diversity in terms of race and gender. Not one is led by a woman of color.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Type of company</th>
<th>Years in Place</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Team Lead</td>
<td>MIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Senior Manager</td>
<td>MS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>MIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Audit Manager</td>
<td>BBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Financial Services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>BBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Electrical Engineer</td>
<td>BEE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Senior Director</td>
<td>MBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Telecommunications</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>BA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Material Science</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Product Manager</td>
<td>MBA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instrumentation

A three-part interview guide, shown in Appendix C, with a total of 25 open-ended questions was developed by the researcher and used for this study to conduct two semi-structured interviews with each participant. A pilot study, often used in research to test the quality of instrumentation (Chenail, 2011) was conducted with a three-participant sample to test run the interview guide and data analysis. The pilot study resulted in adjustments to the questions to focus responses on perceptions as a woman of color. Individual interviews were used to gather information based on the experiences and perceptions of women of color in the workplace regarding mentoring, human capital development, human capital utilization, and organizational implications. Five of the questions solicited that participants assess their mentoring relationships, human capital development, and human capital utilization on a Likert type scale. Each interview was approximately one hour in length.

The interview format was face-to-face at a mutually agreeable time, format, and location for an initial interview. Interviews were conducted face-to-face via Zoom© video conferencing given geographic and time constraints, or telephonic where the participant did not agree to video conferencing. A second interview was scheduled and conducted. Follow-up interviews were conducted as needed via telephone or Zoom© video conferencing for clarification of data collected. Interviews were conducted using an interview guide. The researcher also reviewed information
on the companies represented by the participants from sources such as the company website, articles, and publicly-recorded financials. Data was also collected from company websites and articles regarding organizational culture, mentoring, human capital development, or human capital utilization. Company financials were researched to find some correlation between profitability and intentional human capital development and utilization.

**Study Procedures**

The qualitative phenomenological research approach calls for systematic procedures that guide the research process. Figure 15 illustrates the procedures that were followed during this study. Invitations were emailed directly to personal contacts, posted publicly on social media, and presented to new acquaintances in
social gatherings. Nine women from five companies were ultimately selected for the study. Once the participants accepted the invitation for an interview and signed an informed consent agreement, the researcher conducted the interviews. To protect anonymity of participants and companies, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant and associated company using online name generators. Participant data
and consent forms were stored electronically under password protection in separate locations to ensure anonymity. This data will be kept for seven years after which they will be deleted.

Data Collection

Initial and follow up interviews were conducted with participants for data collection. Data was collected using a semi-structured interview guide in Appendix C to shape the nature of the questions. The conversations were recorded. Immediately after each interview, the recording was uploaded to the Trint.com transcription service for processing. That text was exported to Microsoft Word® where the researcher manually completed a verbatim transcription and sent to the participant for member-checking. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and given an option to continue or be removed from the study.

Data Analysis

Cohen, Kahn, and Steeves (2000) indicates that the analysis of phenomenological data begins during the interviews as the researcher actively listens to participants to formulate meaning of the accounts of their lived experiences, develops a preliminary coding scheme, and validates the codes through clarifying questions. The Van Kaamen method of analysis modified and proposed by Moustakas (1994) is illustrated by the cycle in Figure 16. The researcher listened to the recordings and reviewed the transcriptions several times for reiterative coding to
determine applicable themes. The analysis process continued during transcription by annotating, categorizing, and developing relationships about what was seen and heard in the data using memos which recursively captured and facilitated analytic thinking (Maxwell, 2013). Following data collection and transcription, the researcher assigned initial codes to excerpts of text using the Microsoft Word® comment feature during multiple reads of the transcripts to identify significant, nonrepetitive and
nonoverlapping statements germane to the participants’ experiences with, and perceptions about, barriers to mentoring relationships reflected in a narrative text in an ongoing process. Moustakas (1994) and Stake (2010) indicate that the act of writing this narrative text is a form of data analysis itself.

The formulated meaning was arranged into clusters of themes in a coding process. These excerpts and resulting codes were entered into a Microsoft Excel® spreadsheet for thematic analysis and correlated with the research questions. After the coding process was complete, the researcher analyzed the results for major themes from the data in a process called thematic analysis (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). Passages from each of the interview transcripts were compared to discover similarities and contrasts in the various accounts. The researcher went back and forth between data collection and data analysis to develop and refine meaning, themes, and insights. For inter-coding reliability, the researcher coding was cross-referenced with automated coding.

**Ethical Considerations**

In all research that involves qualitative methods, care must be taken to ensure the researcher understands potential risks. For the participants, there is the risk that their privacy is being invaded, their confidentiality breached, and also re-traumatization from recalling past events may occur. The researcher assessed the likelihood of these risks occurring to be minimal. The researcher did not solicit any
BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

private information that was not closely related to the research questions to further minimize such impact (Stake, 2010). The participants indicated that the interview process was very cathartic and insightful, and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share their experiences.

For awareness of ethical considerations, the researcher completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program and sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval prior to the collection of any data. In accordance with the Belmont Report, the researcher followed the three ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. The principle of respect for persons involves ensuring the participants have full autonomy, are informed, and have freely consented to engage in this study. This principle was honored using the informed consent form found at Appendix B. The informed consent form was emailed to potential participants expressing an interest in this study for their review and signature. Only after the potential participant returned a signed consent form did the researcher proceed with the initial interview. Participants were reminded that their involvement was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time when the transcripts were sent for their review. The participants had an opportunity to review their audio recorded interviews and check the resultant transcriptions to ensure they were comfortable with the message and information provided, and to provide triangulation (Stake, 2010). No
diminished autonomy or special populations or situations, such as pregnancy, were discovered for any of the participants during the course of this study.

Researchers are required to weigh the risks of a study against its potential benefits in upholding the principle of beneficence. The risks outlined above are minimal in comparison to the potential of providing companies with the insight needed to craft mentoring cultures and formal mentoring programs that are inclusive of all employees, particularly women of color. The study design involved interviews as a means of data collection as the only human interaction point. The researcher ensured that the interview locations and methods were conducive to the participant’s comfort and privacy.

This study relied on the recollection of its participants’ past experiences which may be unfavorable and cause stress, anxiety, or internal pressure. Great care was taken to ensure participant comfort and awareness of voluntary participation. Measures were also taken to ensure confidentiality and privacy, and to protect participant identity as well as their related data.

**Researcher Positionality**

The researcher is a woman of color who has worked 20 years in both military and business entities. She has been a member of a historically black sorority, for over 20 years, starting her journey in New York and eventually migrating to Florida. Inspired by her interest in effective human relations and employee effectiveness in the
workplace, she attended school for, and became an Equal Opportunity Director with a military unit and then a Service Liaison Officer at the Department of Defense schoolhouse where she had previously attended. Diving deeper into this passion, she also became a ‘7 Habits of Highly Effective People’ facilitator and joined the John Maxwell Team to become a certified coach, speaker, and trainer of leadership principles to add value to people using John Maxwell content. The following is a snippet of her story.

I grew up in a lower middle class or upper-lower-class Jamaican household. My parents came to this country to find opportunities for themselves that they did not have back home. They ensured that my siblings and I had a good education so that we could be anything that we wanted to be, hoping it was along the lines of a doctor or lawyer of some sort. My dad joined the military and advised me to do the same when I was in my teens. His military friends further advised me to join as an officer, and I did.

My dad enlisted in the military because it was his pathway to citizenship and because he had been faced with the challenge of getting a job that seemed to make no sense. His aunt told him the challenges he faced was because he is black. Growing up in a predominantly black society, the concept of racism was foreign to my dad and mom. Consequently, my parents did not impose any perceived barriers rooted in racism or any other discrimination to what I could choose to be. However, they could
only expose me to what they themselves knew or to what they had come in contact with in their own experiences. As I passed through school and engaged with other students from different backgrounds, but still mostly Black, my socialization was influenced by what my friends had learned and been exposed to from their parents about being Black and a Woman, and the complexities of being a Black Woman. It is here that the idea of limitations rooted in race and gender were presented. It is in my military experiences that the idea of being different from the mostly Caucasian, mostly male, environment began to take shape. However, I did not know what I did not know, and, in looking back, believe that mentors who would seek to fully understand who I was, who I was becoming, and who I could become were scarce and would have been more helpful. I believe that some of the Caucasian and Black men with whom I had worked tried to be helpful, to the best of their abilities, but also did not know what they did not know. I am fortunate that several continue to be encouragers to this day. There were few women, of any race or ethnicity, available to be mentors. Later in life, in the Air Force I found three significant mentors, none of whom were women, much less women of color. The first is a Black male whom I have known throughout my entire Air Force career. He has provided me with an incredibly challenging and significant developmental opportunity at a pivotal point in my career, and ongoing friendship and counseling – a well-rounded mentoring relationship. The second is my husband, also Black, who continuously, and frustratingly, both challenges and supports
me. He provides some career functions, like coaching, and mostly psychosocial functions like friendship, acceptance, and affirmation. However, he does not have the power or position to serve as a sponsor. Another, a Caucasian male, for whom I worked from 2010 to 2012, provided both career and psychosocial functions as well, and to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for not only providing those critical mentoring functions, but most importantly for being vulnerable and open in allowing me to get to know him, and with that, empowering me to mentor him, to some degree, and others. More recently, as I made myself present and active in the lives of women and women of color to serve as a mentor, I am beginning to develop mutual mentoring relationships.

Through my experiences, I have learned the importance of the exposure that mentoring provides. One of my favorite sayings is “You don’t know what you don’t know, and sometimes you don’t know what you do know until someone shows you.” This is what I envision an effective mentor would do.

Validity and Trustworthiness

As a qualitative phenomenological study, efforts to eliminate bias may not be possible. With interviews as the primary means of data collection, this study used self-reported data and, as such, may be vulnerable to common method bias (Ragins & Kram, 2007a). Since the study relied on the recollections of the participants, there may be consistency issues, inflation, or minimization of barriers perceived by the
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participant. The participants may have also had illusory correlations or implicit theories about perceived negative outcomes being attributed to barriers in mentoring relationships or they may have identified with perceived similarities in researcher demographics. Additionally, due to being familiar with the researcher, respondents may have wanted to aid the researcher to confirm her hypothesis, appear in a favorable light and skew their responses to reflect what they perceived as socially desirable, or other factors having nothing to do with their mentoring experiences may have influenced their responses. Further, personal interviews are generally more vulnerable to socially desirable responses than computer-administered questionnaires. The interview guide was developed to ensure that focus was maintained in the interview process toward collecting data that reflects implications to organizations where women of color may have lived experiences and perspectives regarding the effect of barriers to mentoring relationships in the organization. The use of a semi-structured interview minimized the possibility for researcher bias since questions were thought out in advance to serve as a guide. Conducting two interviews allowed for reflection and more insightful responses toward the implications for organizations. It also mitigated some of the barriers mentioned above. Additionally, it provided a triangulation of data as the same phenomena were reviewed from multiple perspectives and the same participant re-articulate some content from the first
interview in the second interview (Stake, 2010). This was done in addition to member-checking and peer review as described below.

During initial conversations with each participant, the criteria were reviewed to ensure that the inclusion criterion was met for the study, to provide clarity, and answer questions. Then, the informed consent and interview protocol were discussed. Once the informed consent was signed, the interview proceeded and permission to audio-record the interview was explicitly requested and obtained.

The researcher conducted and recorded each interview using Android™ voice recording apps on both cellphone and tablet platforms. Audio files were uploaded to a password protected, cloud-based storage account. Consent forms were uploaded and saved in a different cloud-based storage account to ensure anonymity. Any printed material was for temporary use and shredded thereafter. Microsoft Word® and Microsoft Excel® were used for additional notation, comparison, coding, and thematic analysis of the transcribed data.

Immediately upon completion of an interview, the audio recording was saved under password protection to a cloud-based storage account and uploaded to Trint.com for audio to text conversation. The researcher then exported the Trint.com transcript and manually edited it in Microsoft Word while listening to the original audio file initiating the iterative review process. The text was further refined into a narrative transcript, removing some filler words and adding punctuation as appropriate to
convey meaning. For triangulation, the resultant transcripts were then sent to the participant for member-checking validation, and to two third party individuals to compare the transcripts with the audio files for peer validation further mitigating researcher bias (Stake, 2010). Preliminary analysis began during this iterative process. Transcripts were then imported into an automated coding system and key excerpts were transferred to Microsoft Excel® for manual coding. The two coding schemes were compared and analyzed for inclusion in the dissertation. Key direct quotes from participant responses were included in the findings, analysis, and discussion.

Participants were encouraged to be candid, the importance of their honesty was stressed, and they were reassured that anonymity would be maintained. To maintain confidentiality, the participants were assigned pseudonyms using an online random name generator to select a name to associate with their responses as well as their respective companies. They were also reminded that their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time without penalty. Due to the small number of participants, this study may not be generalizable to other women of color or other women in general. However, experiences, responses and findings may find similarity, correlation, and support in other demographics.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore how barriers to mentoring relationships experienced by women of color might impact the organizations for which they worked and to provide potential opportunities for action and practical recommendations for organizations. Mentoring is widely recognized as a key developmental relationship critical for progression of employees toward the highest levels of corporate responsibility commensurate with their potential and expanding capabilities. Ragins and Cotton (1991) and Jeffcoat (2008) found that women experience barriers to mentoring relationships which may be a factor in the underrepresentation of women of color at the CEO level of Fortune 500 companies. According to Ragins (1989), barriers to mentoring relationships for women might have resulted from a lack of other women to serve as mentors; the decreased likelihood of men to be mentors because they were more comfortable mentoring other men; or a distorted perception of power that decreased access to mentors. These conditions resulted in a diminished likelihood for women, particularly women of color, to develop mentoring relationships that engaged the full potential of their human capital in the organization for mutual pursuit of success, growth, and advancement. Ragins and Cotton (1991) identified five barriers to mentoring relationships for women, and seventeen years later, Jeffcoat (2008) found that women of color continued to experience three of those barriers (Figure 17).
This study explored the lived experiences and perspectives of nine women of color across five organizations and revealed new barriers to mentoring relationships for women of color who aspire to attain leadership roles. An additional purpose of this study was to determine what implications there may be for organizations in identifying and overcoming these barriers. This study provided insight into avenues where mentoring programs and organizational culture could be strengthened to engage the potential of human capital.

**Interview Findings**

The major themes from the research findings were centered on mentoring, human capital, and implications for organizations. Those themes regarding barriers to mentoring are bolded in Figure 18. Lack of awareness, lack of emotional intelligence, limited leadership capability, and a limited understanding of human capital all emerged as new barriers to mentoring relationships. While the participants commonly identified their experience as the value they bring to the organization, they had not
considered the full scope of their human capital as valuable to the organization for mutual advantage. Once their human capital was considered a competitive resource, the participants were spurred to seek mentoring with new insight. Based on the participants’ reflection of mentoring and human capital, implications for organizations were structured in terms of impact and opportunity as seen by the participants.

In Figure 19, the five companies reflected in this report are shown by a pseudonym, indicating the number of women of color (woc) on their board of

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directors or in senior management (Sr. Mgmt) positions according to their respective public facing websites. Based on their individual website data, 60% (3 of 5) of the companies reported revenue of $5 - $10 billion and 40% (2 of 5) reported revenue exceeding $20 billion. Additionally, three of the five companies were founded in the 1800s; one was founded in the latter part of the 1900s; and the other stemmed from a company that was also established in the early 1900s but was recently established in this century through a corporate split-up. Each of these companies currently has an enduring presence, and, as described by Jim Collins (2002, p. 40) in *Built to Last*, have “woven themselves into the very fabric of society” in a myriad of ways. Their slogans, values, and mission statements touted a diverse and talented workforce, being inclusive, and empowering employees to reach their full potential. However, the findings based on the experiences and perspectives described by the participants in their interviews did not reflect this.

The above referenced findings were expanded upon and were organized by research question. The first research question focused on mentoring relationships: What were the perceptions of women of color regarding their mentoring relationships? The second research question focused on human capital and spoke to perceptions of utilization and development. What were the perceptions and lived experiences of women of color regarding human capital development practices? The third research question sought to collect data from the participants related to potential threats to the
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organization and recommendations for action: What were the implications for organizations regarding the barriers to mentoring relationships faced by women of color in corporate leadership? The next section lays out the major themes for the first research question and proceeds accordingly.

Research Question 1: Mentoring

In this research question, what are the perceptions of women of color regarding their mentoring relationships, the participants were asked about their experiences receiving and giving mentoring within their organizations. As organizational culture and structure could impact how mentoring operates within an organization, members were asked about their perceptions of the culture, and the structure as it relates to mentoring and their identity as women of color. Additionally, immediate and senior leaders could have a significant influence as they are often the most effective providers of mentoring or in ensuring that mentoring happens. In addition to their mentoring experiences, the participants offered their insight into barriers to mentoring relationships that they experienced or perceived in their workplaces. In concordance with the literature, the overall perception was that mentoring provided a good and critical relationship for employee development both as a protégé and as a mentor, reflected by their assertiveness and proclivity to participate on both sides.

Forty percent of the companies were found to have formal mentoring programs as reported by their respective employee participants. However, a common theme was
the perspective that these formal mentoring programs were not for them. None of the participants were involved in those programs and commonly indicated that these programs were not “available to everybody” or were for new hires. Where formal mentoring programs were not available, participants relied on informal mentoring relationships through peers, near peers, employee resource groups, industry organizations, or prior work relationships. The five companies represented appeared to have Employee Resource Groups or sponsored chapters in national industry associations that served as potential sources for mentoring relationships as reported by seven of the participants. Every woman valued mentoring and felt it to be of significant importance enough to be a mentor in some way or at some point in their careers to others.

**Participation as a Mentor**

The majority of the participants (56%, n = 5) served as mentors to others. As suggested by Jerome’s (2013) application of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to business, they seemed to see their service as a mentor as fulfilling their self-actualization need, and this fostered increased engagement in their organizations. For example, one participant said, “It’s not even the success or the climbing. It’s the opportunity to be a mentor for somebody.” Another participant stated, “That’s what motivates me more than the titles, the success, and the money.” They viewed mentoring as their effort to address the underrepresentation of women in leadership
positions. All nine participants indicated that they were one of the few women of color in male-dominated environments, highlighting unavailability of experienced women of color to serve as mentors. For example, one participant indicated, “There’s not a lot of people in the IT industry that look like me, period! My mentoring is to give to another little girl, let them see that they too can be this if they want.”

**Assertively Sought Mentoring**

Participants found value not only in being a mentor, but also wanted to be mentored themselves. However, a feeling of not being seen for the capabilities that they brought seemed to be common in the experiences of the participants. Working in such a culture appeared to drive increased assertiveness in being acknowledged and requesting mentorship. Waiting for mentors to find you as suggested by Indra Nooyi and Sheryl Sandberg (2013) seemed not to work for these participants. Similar to the findings of Davis (2012), three participants (33%) described a feeling of “being invisible,” and having to be direct and assertive about being noticed and obtaining mentoring relationships or mentoring functions from their respective supervisors. One participant said, “I pretty much have to stand up and scream, ‘Here I am’, ‘I'm available’, ‘I can do this.’” Another participant, who was not offered mentoring because she came into the organization already experienced, explained how she targeted her supervisor and another individual within her environment whom she admired and professed that both of them would be her mentors. The data revealed that
participants felt that they had to be assertive and outspoken to receive mentoring and a lack of that action would have prevented the initiation of mentoring relationships.

**Known Barriers**

Confirming previous research, this study revealed that women of color continue to experience barriers to mentoring relationships. While, the barriers found in this study were not the same as those described in previous studies, there were allusions to some the previously found barriers. However, these barriers did not present themselves in the same ways as found in previous studies.

**A Lack of Access**

A lack of access was described as being prevented from obtaining mentoring relationships because of a lack of opportunity to meet, develop relationships, or find potential mentors (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1991). With assertive action, seven of nine participants (78%) were able to develop some level of mentoring relationships with their supervisors or second-level manager up-line. Jeffcoat (2008) found that ethnicity was perceived as an added challenge to obtaining mentorship. One participant also perceived her ethnicity as a factor inhibiting mentoring relationships, however, there was a consensus that mentors did not necessarily have to be other women of color to be effective. Participants commonly suggested that cross-ethnic mentoring relationships could work, provided, as one participant indicated, that the mentor was “open to acknowledging and understanding” that ethnicity could be a
factor in disparate treatment. Other participants did not want the differences in ethnicity or gender to be highlighted. For example, one participant articulated, “It's important for me, personally, to be seen as one of the guys,” and another said, “What’s more important is that they respect my experience and why I’m here.” Ely and Thomas (2001) indicated that perspectives bordering on race and gender between both the mentor and protégé should be aligned. The participants did not think there was a lack of access to mentors but did acknowledge that women-of-color mentors were in limited supply as immediate supervisors. They did have access to men and women, to include women of color, outside or in other parts of the organization who could and did mentor them.

**Approval of Others**

This barrier had to do with whether supervisors would authorize time for mentoring or whether supervisors would disapprove of mentoring relationships (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1991). This perception was not found, as indicated by the assertive actions participants took to obtain mentoring from their supervisors that they were concerned about supervisors or co-workers disapproving of their actions. However, the participants from one organization with a culture they described as “siloed” indicated that any talk of mentoring would be “frowned upon” by organizational leaders, indicating that approval of others continued to be a barrier where supervisors were concerned that those above them would not approve.
Nonetheless, once a desire to be mentored was assertively requested by the participant, supervisors were usually found to offer some level of support despite the culture.

*Misinterpretation of Approach*

Ragins and Cotton (1991) found that attempts to initiate a mentoring relationship were misinterpreted as sexual advances. Jeffcoat (2008) added gender and ethnicity as factors in the misinterpretation of approach and found that, due to prior exposure and positive expectations, those with prior protégé experience did not perceive this as a barrier as much as those without protégé experience. All participants in this study had prior experience as protégés, and similarly did not perceive this as a barrier. All nine participants were in male-dominated environments and eight received mentoring or direct leadership from men. None of the participants expressed any concerns with misinterpretation of approach regarding sexual harassment, however the data indicated some concern with appearing aggressive when being assertive and needing to find balance in their approach. This could be considered a new version of a previously identified barrier.

While participants did not perceive a lack of access as a barrier, approval of others and misinterpretation of approach appeared to persist, but in different forms. In addition, participants identified new factors that inhibited the initiation of mentoring relationships. These factors did not appear in extant literature focused on barriers to mentoring relationships and are discussed in the next section.
New Barriers Found

This study began with focus on the individual experiences and perspectives and then shifted focus to the organization. An increasingly diverse workforce is expected to bring higher returns (Hunt et al., 2015), but only if the organization establishes and fosters a culture of supportive inclusion. While the corporations involved in this study touted an environment of inclusion, the perspectives of the participants indicated a culture that is not supportive or inclusive. For example, the participants described their respective organizational cultures as one where everybody’s “dispensable,” and an employee should “be grateful you have a job,” or you should feel “lucky that you got this job”. This type of expression served only to frustrate and further alienate an already underrepresented population, thereby establishing a culture of divisiveness and superficial competition instead of inclusion in the executive pipeline. While mentoring can assist individuals with coping in such environments (Ragins et al., 2017), this kind of climate could pose a barrier to the development of new mentoring relationships.

Jeffcoat (2008) found barriers to mentoring relationships for women of color which delineated into three of the five categories found in previous literature: lack of access, misinterpretation of approach, disapproval of others. These participants did not have experiences that ascribed directly to these barriers as described in previous literature. Two of the barriers persisted, but in an evolved form. Approval of others
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was implied from a culture that was unfriendly toward mentoring based on the tone at the top. This was remapped to a new barrier identified as a lack of awareness. Misinterpretation of approach was also found to persist, but not in reference to sexual advances. Instead, participants expressed concern about being seen as an “angry black woman” when asserting their desire for mentoring relationships. This, however, did not stop them from doing so, and therefore was discarded as a barrier to mentoring relationships.

In discussing what they thought prevented mentoring relationships from being established, participant responses pointed to three factors: awareness, emotional intelligence, and leadership capability. While two participants considered degrees of racism as a factor, the majority (seven of nine participants, 78%) were reluctant to point to disparate treatment based on their ethnicity as a hindrance to the development of mentoring relationships. Rather, the majority considered it a lack of awareness.

*Lack of Awareness*

Participants who engaged with mentors outside or in other parts of the organization realized that these individuals could only provide the psychosocial functions of mentoring which helped them fit into the organization, but not career functions which would help them advance and further engage in their organization. Immediate supervisors, responsible for sponsorship, challenging assignments, protection, and fostering visibility (Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002) are arguably the most
effective resource. While one participant pointed directly to racism as a barrier, and another implied as much, most participants alluded to lack of awareness as the factor. Supervisors were perceived as being unaware of the need to mentor subordinates across the spectrum of their direct reports.

Participants perceived barriers to mentoring relationships with their immediate supervisors that they described as “being unintentional, and as a result of a lack of awareness.” They were not being included in key meetings; they observed others being mentored; and supervisors seemed to be unaware of their existence particularly when geographically separated, which made visibility a challenge. In one case, several unreturned emails and phone calls to her supervisor resulted in contention and a visit to HR to discuss the matter. Only then, was there response and action. The frustration in the voice of this participant was palpable as she relayed her account. She stated, “I was very confused. It's a level of absence of awareness of my existence that perplexed me.” Another participant flatly stated about her managers, “I don’t think that they care.”

Another participant had been passed over for a promotion. Reflecting on this experience, she directly attributed it to decision-maker comfort levels and indicated that comfort plays a bigger role at more senior levels. In preparing her for a promotion to the next level, her supervisory mentors told her that a specific VP needed to become more “comfortable” with her so that her promotion would be approved.
This participant also described a process over time in which an employee is first tasked to provide data, then invited to meetings, then acknowledged at the meeting with questions, and then tasked to present at the meetings thereby building up visibility and credibility with higher officials before being submitted and considered for promotion. Participants agree that these actions did not happen without conscious and strategic action by supervisory mentors at each level of the chain of command to specifically invite, acknowledge, and task protégés to engage in meetings at an increasing scale and scope. Her supervisor had to be mentored by his supervisor to take such actions in preparation for her promotion submission.

This indicates that supervisory mentorship was preemptively important to the awareness of mentoring, human capital development, and the potential capabilities of the human resources for which a supervisor and senior leaders were responsible. Without such mentoring, supervisors were unlikely to task subordinates at higher levels of the organization with increasingly broader responsibility commensurate with their potential talent. In this way, talent gets left on the table instead of being invested by the employee in the organization for mutual benefit and growth.

*Lack of Emotional Intelligence*

Relatedly, another barrier suggested by the participants was a lack of emotional intelligence, which is defined as involving the ability to observe and accurately interpret one’s own emotions and those of others to guide effective action (Salovey &
Mayer, 1990). In mentoring, emotional intelligence is a necessary factor particularly for the provision of psychosocial functions such as role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling, and friendship (Kram, 1983). Participants who served as supervisory mentors in their organization directly saw the effects of mentoring on their respective teams. One such participant, who described her team as high-functioning based on the higher expectations and strategic positioning of the Second VP, explained that her direct reports and subordinates “feel like they are being held to a higher standard” which “sometimes negatively affects morale.” Having a mentorship relationship with direct reports helped her see where and how she needed “to respond to restore balance,” thereby helping “them reengage to get the job done.” This display of emotional intelligence facilitated the psychosocial function of mentoring that kept her team performing successfully. As indicated by Ragins et al. (2017), mentoring has a holding effect on overstressed and frustrated employees through the use of emotional intelligence (Ragins & Kram, 2007a). However, while her subordinates were benefitting from her emotional intelligence and mentoring, she was not getting the same from her bosses, until she assertively requested it.

Recognizing the value of mentoring, participants actively sought supervisory mentoring and advice on obtaining opportunities to grow or to take on more responsibility. They did not expect to be rejected, insulted, ignored, or put off. One participant described how she sought advice from her supervisor who retorted with
“the fact that you’re asking me…that is a problem in itself,” unaware that she had been prevented from opportunities for additional training. She indicated that this exchange left her feeling more frustrated, undervalued, and underutilized. With more exposure, education, and experience, she felt that she could be, and she wanted to be, contributing more to the organization she had been with for 17 years. She too attributed the actions of her supervisor to a lack of awareness, saying, “I don’t even think he realized it, but he does now because I told him. We had to have that conversation.” While also falling in the realm of a lack of awareness, this exchange indicated a lack of managerial emotional intelligence that also hinders the initiation of a mentoring relationship since managers would not be aware of the psychosocial need for mentoring.

**Limited Leadership Capability**

The research is clear that effective mentors are approachable, trustworthy, knowledgeable, and experienced (Batty, Rudduck, & Wilson, 1999). Only one of the participants was in a supervisory mentoring relationship. The mentored participant, describing her boss and her boss’s boss, stated, “I'm on a team that's high functioning, and if the senior leaders want something done, nine times out of ten they come to my boss's boss, and then it goes to my boss, and then it comes to me. I’ve never worked for anybody in my 20 plus year career that is as strategic as they are. And…they give you real time feedback. They’re very supportive and I would go as far as to say that
they’re advocates.” These leaders were found to provide both psychosocial and career functions, and could see more in this protégé than she could see in herself. Because they had created a high-functioning team, they could create opportunities for her to excel and to be seen by the upper echelons of the company. Additionally, she appeared very comfortable, confident, and happy working with them and on a path of growth, largely orchestrated by these leaders in her immediate chain of command.

This is what Ragins (2016) described as high-quality mentoring. In turn, as previously described, this participant provided mentoring to her direct reports and subordinates enabling them to grow and contribute more to the organization for mutual success.

Mentoring begets mentoring, even when it is driven from the middle. This participant explained that she would not have received any supervisory mentoring had she not asserted her position with regard to being passed over for promotion, her capabilities, and her desire for advancement and mentorship. With mentoring infused into the subculture, the entire team was inclined to put forth effort at levels above other teams for the mutual benefit of the individuals on the team and the organization.

However, unmentored participants suggested that there appeared to be little to no “tone at the top” to infuse mentoring into the organizational culture overall. Even in the same company, participants were found to have very opposite experiences depending on their immediate leadership. Echoing others, one participant described her supervisor as doing “the best with what she had. There was no one to develop her
to say, ‘This is what you should do.’” Another participant explained that she first came to the position to work for a different leader, with whom she felt like she “could learn a lot. I felt like that person could help me grow in my career.” That person who she viewed as a mentor left and was replaced by her current boss. Initially, she was excited about working with another woman of color, thinking that she could learn a great deal under this leader as well. “I was just so happy to be working with a Black woman who was just so powerful and had so much influence, and I was so disappointed when I realized that she wasn't what I thought that she was going to be.” She went from seeing her supervisor as a potential role model to disappointingly seeing her as an ineffective leader. “I viewed her as somebody that I wanted to be like, because she’s a high woman in power, there's not many of us, and it’s like she's playing small.” For other participants, leaders were described as lacking people skills, communication skills, or management skills. Another participant described how her boss had capitulated on policy for which the firm had previously been found noncompliant. Participants indicated that their leaders were neither engaged nor personable, and expressed disappointment in their leadership capabilities.

In addition to leadership capability, the initiation of mentoring relationships was also influenced by organizational culture. As stated in Chapter 2, mentors who were empowered by the organizational culture to provide both career and psychosocial functions are more effective than mentors who can only provide one or the other. One
participant was told by her mentor, “you're capable of even more than you know you're capable of. That's why I push you so hard.” This participant received the support and encouragement of the psychosocial functions of mentoring as well as the challenging assignments and visibility of career functions. For most workers, the immediate supervisor who assigned work and evaluated the employee would be the most effective mentor. The quality of mentoring could also be influenced by the nature of the relationship and the barriers that might impede its development. A perceived lack of leadership capability might not only inhibit mentoring relationships, but might also inhibit the enabling of an employee to effectively invest their human capital into an organization, preventing the organization from fully accessing this critical resource.

Research Question 2: Human Capital

As discussed in Chapter 2, mentoring and human capital are closely related, and if properly designed and executed, quality mentoring practices enhance human capital and thus, organizational performance. The second research question asked, what are the perceptions and lived experiences of women of color regarding human capital development practices within the organization? This study, viewing mentoring through the lens of human capital, explored whether the human capital of the participants was being developed through mentoring relationships. Participants were asked to explore what they brought to the tables of their companies that added value
toward the fulfillment of organizational goals, in other words, their human capital.

Human capital is the sum total of a person’s knowledge, habits, social practices, personality attributes, and creativity. They were asked to consider how well their human capital was being leveraged, challenged, and developed by the organization, and how the organizational culture might influence the investment of their human capital. Finally, they were asked how mentoring related to human capital.

Their themed responses were not reflected in literature and therefore represent new findings presenting additional barriers to mentoring relationships. The participants described a strong desire to grow in, and add value to their organizations. One participant summed it up by saying, “I’m not a community service project. I’m here to add value. If I’m not adding value, sever me or give me something to do with clarity.” They expressed a desire for meritocracy where they could do good work, and be recognized and rewarded for that good work. However, their perspective on adding value did not extend into the realm of a critical resource as described by Schultz et al (1961).

**Human Capital Awareness**

*Human capital not fully realized*

This study was designed with a two-part interview process whereby participants were able to reflect on their experiences and responses prior to engaging in the second interview. The time between interviews averaged 1 – 2 weeks. This
separation resulted in a deeper understanding of human capital for both the researcher and the participants. As previously described, human capital is the set of all human abilities either acquired or innate which can be augmented by appropriate investment and serves as a profit lever in business (Fitz-Enz, 2000). As such, ownership of human capital belongs to the individual and it is they that invest it towards that profit or rent which is collected by the firm. In turn, the firm provides incentives in terms of compensation or needs fulfillment (Barney, 1991; Wang & Barney, 2006). However, the individual is a key factor, and their human capital is a critical resource. As a whole, the participants had not considered their experience, efforts, personality, background, etc., i.e., human capital, in terms of creating economic value for the organization. The space between the two interviews allowed them to realize their human capital as a resource that is accessible to and leveraged by the organization for competitive advantage (Becker, 2002; Schultz et al., 1973). Armed with a new awareness that they own and control their human capital, they later described taking assertive actions to establish supervisory mentoring relationships that resulted in growth opportunities. One participant described actions she took between interviews to address the lack of mentoring from her boss, expressing that she “never would have done any of that” had she not realized the scope of her human capital. This lack of human capital awareness thereby presents another barrier to mentoring relationships for women of color.
Empowered to drive action

An awareness of the impact that their human capital had within the organization enabled four participants (44%) to take more empowered action. At the second meeting, participants reported that during the time between interviews they assertively engaged with their supervisors to request counseling and latent feedback about their current performance, and coaching about moving forward and growing. This engagement amounted to mentoring moments between the participant and supervisor which sets the foundation for mentoring relationships. The mentoring led to reassignments or new projects that provided challenging work assignments, as well as exposure and visibility to other parts and leaders of the organization. As the former President of Catalyst said, the path to success is about “who knows what you know” which can only happen with exposure and visibility. As such, the participants’ actions drew in supervisory mentoring that might have been previously blocked by a lack of awareness, emotional intelligence, or leadership capability.

While managerial mentoring can be blocked by limited leadership capability, mentoring episodes can result in empowered action (Fletcher & Ragins, 2007) through increased human capital awareness. One participant reflected on

“At a certain point, the path to success changes from ‘what you know’ to ‘who knows what you know.’ The consistent theme in my own career was people vouching for me and championing me within their networks.”

-Deborah Gillis, Former President & CEO, Catalyst
how she had been handling a disappointing relationship with her boss and explained that she had an epiphany, “I think the major takeaway was that I felt that I've had sufficient experience from past exposure to be more deliberate and aggressive about what happens next in my career. I had fallen into a rut, feeling more like a victim of circumstance, just waiting for someone to fix it for me… I didn't give myself time to see if all of those tactics I learned could actually work for me.” These examples imply that organizations might be affected by factors such as decreased engagement, as well as impaired retention, where barriers to mentoring relationships exist. From the perspectives of the participants, the next section discusses the implications for organization in two parts: potential impacts and suggestions for action.

**Research Question 3: Implications for Organizations**

At the close of the initial interview per study design, participants were asked to reflect on their responses and their work environment with regard to their mentoring experiences, human capital development, and utilization in preparation for the second interview. This research question asked, *what are the implications for organizations regarding mentoring women of color in corporate leadership*. In this interview, participants were asked questions geared towards culminating in their perceptions of the implications that the organization might have with the existence of barriers to mentoring relationships. To that end, participants were queried on their knowledge and understanding of, and direct contribution to achieving their firm’s strategic goals.
They were also asked what impact women of color in leadership might make and how they, as women of color, uniquely contribute to competitive advantage and increased organizational performance. The concept of human capital was also revisited during this interview with questions on how their talents were integrated into the goals of their business unit. The interview culminated with their perspectives on the implications to the organization. Implications fell into two categories: how the organization might be impacted and what can be done with this awareness.

**Impact to organizations**

The catalyst to operational effectiveness is the investment of human capital by individuals, and developing that human capital is the key to maximizing return on investment (Fitz-Enz, 2000). The findings suggest increased turnover, diminished engagement, and reduced job satisfaction as subthemes for organizational impacts proceeding from barriers to mentoring relationships. Participants widely agreed that mentoring develops human capital and felt that it was not as widely incorporated into the organizational culture as it should or could be, particularly from the supervisory level. One participant stated that there is a “tragic loss of talent” when the opportunity to be mentored is absent and diminished engagement or turnover results.

**Reduced Job Satisfaction**

Through either suggestion or experience, job satisfaction was found to be a significant impact of barriers to mentoring relationship stemming from the
underutilized or unrecognized talent. Participants suggested that mentoring helps people feel connected in a community working toward common goals, and barriers could result in separation between people thereby impacting team cohesion. Speaking about community, one participant stated, that in its absence it can be “lonely and daunting,” and involvement in a supportive structure with like-minded people or people with similar experiences was helpful. Although not significant, a lack of recognition was mentioned by one participant as a potential impact of barriers to mentoring relationships. In addition to the diminished engagement that resulted from the factors above, turnover is another impact to the organization.

*Increased turnover*

Participants commonly pointed to the likelihood for turnover, or human capital depletion (Bontis & Fitz-enz, 2002), as one impact for organizations that have unresolved barriers to mentoring relationships. Without the anchoring mechanism of high-quality mentoring (Ragins, 2016; Ragins et al., 2017) or an awareness of the opportunities that mentoring can bring, turnover becomes a threat. During the study, several participants articulated a calculated intent to leave their organization. One participant was already determined to leave, another was considering it, and during the course of this study, one participant did leave the company for another position two levels above where she was previously. Although recently promoted, another participant stated, “I’ll stay in this role for another year to build up my knowledge and
hopefully move on,” because she does not see growth opportunities in the company she worked for.

**Diminished engagement**

Ruderman, Ohlott, and Kram (1996, p. 22) suggest that “without careful examination of the subtle yet potent dynamics that shape assignments and promotion decisions, it is likely that decision-makers will continue to choose candidates with whom they feel most comfortable.” Over 20 years later, little has changed for women of color as indicated by one account of being passed over for promotion. Findings supported the conclusion that the work environment is skewed in favor of men (McKinsey & Company, 2017; Thomas et al., 2017). Every participant identified herself as one of the few African-American women or the only African-American woman in their work environment and anticipated being seen as different from those in power. They also expressed just wanting to be valued for their human capital. This suggested a common concern about being seen as a woman of color, asserting that “what’s more important is that they respect my experience and why I’m here.”

However, if women of color are not being seen for their human capital, then their opportunities to be positively challenged can be limited. Since leaders will tend to select those with whom they can relate for challenging opportunities that lead to promotion, without a conscious effort to notice those outside the scope of relatability, such individuals will continue to be overlooked. Where participants were not being
challenged, motivation waned and engagement diminished. In the second interview, one participant stated that she had realized that she “had fallen into a rut.” As previously reported, she went on to say, “I realized I wasn’t putting forth action. I didn’t give my own effort a chance,” highlighting her decayed engagement. Another participant relayed frustration as she described feeling “stuck” because she was not getting the mentoring she desired to be more impactful in the organization. She expressed that she was staying with the company only because of age, longevity, and for the love of the work. If she felt there were other options, she would leave. Although frustrated, she capitulated and quietly stated, “I love what I do.”

Women of color may also withhold their human capital from the organization and not pursue opportunities for which they may be well suited if a lack of organizational support is perceived, or where there is no mentoring to help them navigate new levels. Some participants expressed a disinterest in upper management positions because of their perceptions of the problems that come with it such as the need for impression management. One participant stated, “I care how I’m perceived,” even though she believed she “would be very beneficial in management.” The participants who had managerial positions pointed to non-supervisory mentors who helped them fit into the organizational culture. The participants also highlighted managers they perceived as ineffective leaders, lacking awareness, or lacking
emotional intelligence whom they would not consider as mentors. These managers can block, stifle, or conceal emerging talent and potential human capital growth.

The participants were found to have a desire to engage in their organizations and grow through increased human capital utilization. Some women were content to steadily invest their human capital with a slower rise, as long as they were growing. Barriers to mentoring relationships could diminish or block this growth and in this way lead to job dissatisfaction, diminished engagement, or turnover. The participants suggested actions the organization could take to mitigate or thwart these impacts allowing these participants to invest their human capital for mutual growth with the organization. As previously stated, one participant declared, “I am not a community service project. I am here to add value.”

**Potential opportunities for action**

Figure 22 summarizes the subthemes of the participant which provided suggestions for organizations to mitigate barriers to mentoring relationships in corporations. Every participant discussed some form of a formal mentoring program bolstered by informal mentoring to create a broader awareness of your human capital and to grow capabilities. As illustrated by one participant, mentoring

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**Figure 20 Actions for organizations to take**

- Establish formal mentoring programs
- Support formal mentoring programs with a mentoring culture that fosters informal mentoring
- Coach and mentor managers
relationships is like “blowing air into a balloon and then the person grows to fill that.” Thinking of a manager who was “mentorship-minded” and who had “put a big gust of air into that balloon” for her, she said, “Wow! I can’t believe it” reflecting on all that she had done with this leader’s mentorship. Another participant stated that, “there’s always growth - human capital growth, when there is a person to open your mind up to the expansion that is possible.” As indicated previously, the supervisory mentor of another participant told her that she is “capable of even more than you know you’re capable of.” Where participants approached their supervisors for mentoring with awareness about their human capital, actions were taken by the supervisors and the participants resulting in new assignments or projects. Following from this, these participants reported increased engagement levels and job satisfaction. Previous research established that mentoring provided by effective managers expanded employee engagement (Madan & Srivastava, 2016).

The participants identified, however, that not all managers were effective. As previously indicated, limited leadership capability was perceived as a barrier to mentoring relationships. To mitigate this factor, participants suggested that managers should receive coaching along with mentoring to ensure their effectiveness because as one participant articulated, “you can’t give what you don’t have.”
Evaluation of Findings

The findings from this research indicate that while mentoring was available from external sources such as Employee Resource Groups, intra-corporate mentoring was found to be lacking. The participants perceived barriers to intra-corporate mentorship relationships related to awareness, emotional intelligence, leadership, and human capital awareness. They suggested that these barriers and the resulting lack of mentoring may result in reduced employee job satisfaction, reduced employee engagement, and increased turnover. To mitigate these effects, the participants suggested that organizations implement formal mentoring programs supported by an informal mentoring culture.

Summary

The data that resulted in these findings were drawn from a convenience sampling of nine women of color each participating in two interviews, and was used to obtain rich information using a semi-structured interview guide. The overall research questions explored perceptions on mentoring and human capital of women of color in the corporate environment through the use of a three-part, two-session, interview guide consisting of 35 questions (see Appendix C). The first set of questions correlated to mentoring relationships and factors that can influence those relationships such as organizational culture and leadership. The second set of questions regarded human capital investment and development. Implications for organizations and
organizational perspectives held by the women comprised the third section. The results of this phenomenological study revealed that women of color in different companies at different stages in their career have expressed similar perspectives on mentoring relationships and human capital. Mentoring continues to be an effective means of developing individuals for leadership positions. However, the findings indicated that what may be more significant is the impact of awareness of one’s own human capital supported by a mentoring culture along with formal mentoring programs.

Principles surrounding the trustworthiness of data and credibility of findings were acknowledged and practiced by the researcher. Trustworthiness and triangulation of data were accomplished through member checking and peer assessments of the transcription accuracy. Additionally, the perspectives of the various participants regarding the same phenomenon provided triangulation. Objective information regarding each company was also collected from company websites. With signed consent provided by each participant, interview sessions were audio recorded and then transcribed for further analysis.

The findings within this phenomenological study offered perspectives that supported the research of mentoring relationships, human capital, and the implications for organizations. The common themes that were prevalent amongst the interviews in the study related to barriers stemming from (1) a lack of awareness, (2) a lack of
emotional intelligence, (3) limited leadership capability, and (4) that mentoring expands human capital awareness for the benefit of the organization. Organizations could be impacted by barriers to mentoring relationships in terms of reduced job satisfaction, increased turnover, and diminished employee engagement. These impacts could be mitigated by implementing formal mentoring programs within a mentoring culture and ensuring that managers received mentoring and coaching to ensure their effectiveness.

The human capital theory of Schultz (1961) was applied to explore the findings and themes of the study. There were several similarities in perspectives regarding the impact to talent management where barriers to mentoring relationships exist, as well as the ability of mentoring to expand human capital. Therefore, the belief that a mentoring culture within an organization drives the development of mentoring relationships which can positively influence productivity may find support in future studies. The following chapter will present a discussion of the overall study, provide additional suggestions for future studies, implications, recommendations, and conclusions related to this qualitative study.
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Barriers to mentoring for women of color continue to persist in the corporate environment and arguably contribute to the underrepresentation seen at the highest levels of leadership. As of 2018, only four women of color have ever served as Fortune 500 CEOs (Carpenter, 2017) and in October 2018, only one remained, signaling a continuing dearth of diversity in corporate leadership mentioned by Elkins (2017). Underrepresentation in the corporate pipeline for CEO begins at the beginning of employment for women as a whole, and women of color in particular (McKinsey & Company, 2017; Thomas et al., 2017). Aware that executive boards from which a CEO would stem are also lacking diversity, companies are taking action toward change (Catalyst, 2014). Mentoring relationships within work environments have been noted as an important factor in providing the skills and exposure needed to progress to these levels (Catalyst, 2017; T. Johnson & Fancher, 2017; Kingsland, 2015; MilestoneVideoNY, 2013; Williams, 2017).

Previous studies into barriers of mentoring relationships (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1991, 1996) did not qualitatively explore the experiences of women of color in corporate environments with a shifting focus toward the firm to gain insight into organizational implications. This study’s purpose was to do just that. The focus of this study was on the barriers to mentoring relationships through the lens of human capital theory and the potential implications for organizations.
This study may have been limited by its small participant size and the nature of it being an exploratory study. Bias could have been introduced due to perceived researcher similarity with participant demographics along with the reliance on participant recollection of past experiences. Nonetheless, a qualitative phenomenological design was determined to be an appropriate approach for this exploratory study (Moustakas, 1994) to obtain the underlying perspectives of those experiences and the implications for organization. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Florida Institute of Technology and its standards and guidelines were followed to ensure an ethical research process.

The prior chapters undergirded the study with a comprehensive literature review and the research plan followed by the findings of the research. This purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of those findings and to provide guidance for future study. This chapter represents the conclusion of the study of barriers to mentoring relationships for women of color in corporate leadership and implications for organizations.

**Contribution of the study**

This study contributes to the research and overall understanding of how intra-corporate mentoring relationships, or the hindrance thereof, impact human capital development and investment in organizations. According to a McKinsey & Company (2018) report, Diversity and Inclusion are important areas of focus for business, and
increasingly being recognized as sources of competitive advantage and growth. However, companies are struggling with the implementation of inclusion to support growth and value-creation goals (McKinsey & Company, 2018). The knowledge gained from this study adds to the literature of mentoring, human capital development, and inclusion for organizations by identifying new barriers and providing insight into the effects barriers to mentoring relationships have on human capital and the organization as a whole. This study has the potential to lay new groundwork for the advancement of human relations initiatives that address diversity and inclusion goals by suggesting actions to mitigate emergent barriers to mentoring relationships.

The research questions were designed to move the participant’s focus from reflecting on their individual experiences to analyzing the resulting implications for organizations. A mentoring organizational culture contributes to meritocratic human capital development to cultivate the necessary skill, and provide effective exposure and advocacy to be qualified, prepared for, and placed in the pipeline for executive responsibility. With changes in and awareness of social dynamics, organizations can enhance mentoring relationships by collecting data about the factors that inhibit them and involve members in a collaborative approach as suggested by Kram (1985). This research provides data about current factors that impede mentoring relationships, limit human capital development and impede organizational diversity goals by giving voice to a significantly underrepresented minority population in the executive arena thereby
adding to the body of literature. The researcher’s view is that the experiences of women of color must be made visible and available so that decision-makers can better understand the barriers to mentoring relationships as those barriers evolve and how those barriers can result in unintended consequences, such as a dearth of board diversity. By increasing this understanding, organizational culture and human capital development practices can be modified to support executive diversity and the fulfillment of organizational diversity goals.

**Discussion and Implications**

Mentoring has been shown and perceived to have long term benefits for the protégé in terms of income, organizational socialization, and career progression (Chao, 1997; Hegstad, 1999; Ragins & Scandura, 1999; Simmons, 2016), as well as for the organization in terms of job satisfaction, retention, organizational commitment and employee engagement (Fagenson-Eland, Marks, & Amendola, 1997; Hegstad, 1999; Hegstad & Wentling, 2004). By extrapolation and as suggested by the findings of this research, barriers to mentoring relationships are contributing factors to decreased job satisfaction, turnover, and ebbing engagement. In this way, organizations are not accessing or losing talent to which they have access.

**Discussion**

Mentoring relationships have also been found helpful in leadership development, on-the-job training, and identification of talent (Hegstad, 1999) and
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research explicitly indicates that the same beneficial impacts apply to women of color (Salisu, 2014). However, their career progression has not influenced their numbers in the upper echelons of corporations. Still, there is a dearth of diversity at the CEO levels of corporations, and not enough in the pipeline to make a difference (Catalyst, 2015; Green & Chasan, 2017). For more women of color to show up in the pipeline to the C-Suite, mentoring relationships are essential (Rosser, 2005) at all levels.

Transmuted barriers, emergent barriers revealed

This study found, however, that barriers to mentoring relationships continue to persist for women of color, though not in the same format as identified in previous research. The findings revealed four emergent barriers to mentoring relationships not noted in previous research. The barriers identified were a lack of awareness, a lack of emotional intelligence, limited leadership capability, and limited scope of human capital.

As an example of the lack of awareness identified by the participants, supervisors and organizational leaders were found to make personnel decisions implicitly based on a subconscious comfort without a full inquisition of the human resources for which they were responsible. Such subconscious actions based on comfort likely stem from implicit bias (Coats, 2017; Ruderman et al., 1996; Smith & Johnson, 2017). In most cases where managers were made aware of a disparity in treatment or the desire to have more impact, they responded by initiating mentoring
relationships. Most participants were adamant about identifying this as a lack of awareness, rather than racism. Unfortunately, this is not the case in every instance, and some women of color continue to be impacted by organizational cultures influenced by racism, sexism, a combination of both, or some other discriminatory or prejudicial perspective. One participant pointed directly to racism as a barrier, and another implied as much. However, a major implication of this study is that these barriers could be overcome not only by assertive behavior by addressing the barriers identified by actively fostering a mentoring culture and implementing formal mentoring programs at all levels as suggested in the study can overcome not only the barriers presented, but also the social ills of prejudice.

*The role of organizational culture*

Organizational culture, driven by top-level support and employee collaboration, and organizational structure are important antecedents to mentoring relationships (Hegstad, 1999; Hegstad & Wentling, 2004). Every participant operated in an environment where they were the only, or one of few women of color on their respective teams. While this was not a concern for some, there were two participants alluding to difficulties resulting from being a woman of color, with one of these attributing barriers to mentoring relationships directly to racism. Nonetheless, the women wanted to operate in a culture where meritocracy works – they do good work and are recognized for that good work with promotion and opportunity to do more.
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good work. One participant felt that she was operating in such a sub-culture with her immediate supervisors at the first and second levels above her, but was clear about her supervisory mentors not wanting to be seen as mentors because mentoring was not “looked on favorably” at the top, and therefore in the overall culture. Although each of the companies touted employee growth publicly, this did not seem to be an obvious part of their operational culture, at least not through mentoring.

**Asserting the need for supervisory mentoring**

All participants involved in this study were in male-dominated industries. Gender role incongruity, identified as a barrier in extant literature did not appear to be a major factor in the experiences of the participants, particularly for those who were assertive and intentional in seeking mentorship and being set up for advancement opportunities. It is important to note though, that several participants felt they would not have received mentoring from their supervisors had they not assertively made them aware of their experiences, intent, and desire to be engaged, grow, and advance. Once aware, supervisors seemed willing to provide some level of mentorship.

Supervisory mentoring facilitated increased engagement and human capital investment in the organizations represented. One participant stated, “if you do good work, and you’re excellent in all things, and you’re clear, and you perform, the opportunities will be there because people want that kind of talent in their organizations.” Another way of saying this is “let the work speak for you.” However,
Carla Harris, Vice Chairwoman of Morgan Stanley, is widely quoted as stating, “The work does not speak…You must put your work in context, and the only way to do that is through the relationships you have in your professional environment.” This plays out in the experiences of these participants but works better when others speak and advocate for you. As an example, one participant identified that her capital exchange budget went from zero to ten million dollars in one year providing her with an opportunity to excel, be clear, perform, and invest her human capital. She directly attributed this to the mentoring she was receiving from her two immediate bosses.

Responses relative to the first research question concerning mentoring relationships showed that mentoring is considered an important factor for progressing in, engaging in, and being committed to the organization, so much so that the participants were willing to assertively seek it. However, the participants expressed a concern that assertiveness can translate into and be perceived as aggressiveness, particularly for women of color. Their experiences indicated that as they progressed, they would have to continue to more actively seek out informal mentoring relationships because formal programs for their level of experience were not available.
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This could result in a continued contentious environment for women of color that might impact their person-to-organization fit in the organization thereby diminishing the opportunity for organizational leaders to recognize, develop, and utilize their human capital. This further implies that barriers to mentoring relationships for women of color will continue to be a factor if companies fail to acknowledge and address barriers.

Participants higher up the ladder in their respective companies tended to have had at least one informal mentoring relationship with a mentor that approached them and helped them grow toward their current position, consistent with research that strongly identifies mentorship with career development and progression for the protégé (Dougherty, Dreher, Arunachalam, & Wilbanks, 2013; Stella S. Salisu, 2014). While progression beyond the current level seemed uncertain, participants expressed a desire to contribute more to their organization and felt underutilized. Those who felt stagnated or hindered from progression attributed this to a lack of supervisory leadership skills and supervisory mentoring. Poor supervisory leadership and absent supervisory mentoring could have ripple effects throughout the organization. If such leaders continue and advance, the entire culture of the organization might be affected. Additionally, supervisory mentors might have the best vantage point from which to see potential and provide challenging assignments to develop untapped talent.
**Formal Mentoring**

The findings suggest that a formal mentoring program would be appreciated and beneficial to ensuring that women of color get the mentoring needed to increase the numbers being added to the pipeline for eventual C-Suite consideration. However, as organizations increase their commitment to formal mentoring programs, the overall effectiveness of formal mentoring could diminish (Holt, Markova, Dhaenens, Marler, & Heilmann, 2016). Mitigating approaches include supervisory mentorship (Fagenson-Eland et al., 1997), and fostering a mentoring culture with high leader-member exchange to improve the quality of formal mentoring programs and encourage supplemental informal mentoring (Holt et al., 2016). An important antecedent to effective formal mentoring programs is organizational culture driven by top-level support.

The implementation of formal mentoring programs may be one approach, but those programs can only be as effective as the organizational culture allows, values, and utilizes them. A mentoring culture would only serve to enhance formal mentoring efforts exponentially. Culture is set, reinforced by, and the responsibility of the top of the organization. While subcultures can and do exist within organizations they do so at the allowance of the organizational leaders. Mentoring throughout the careers of individuals moving toward C-suite status is vital to their progression and human capital development (Rosser, 2004, 2005). Ensuring a mentoring culture exists
enables the benefits of mentoring through formal and informal means to reach every individual within the company, particularly leaders at every level, thereby ensuring that human capital as a strategic resource is fully developed and effectively utilized.

Understanding human capital

The participants in this study did not consider human capital in totality, often limiting their concept to what typically appears on a resume, i.e., quantifiable knowledge, skills, experience, etc. Overall talent, personality, networks, both personal and professional, among other elements are important aspects of human capital that individuals must invest in to realize their full potential. The findings indicate that the concept of human capital is not widely understood and thus underutilized in practice. Not until these topics were discussed did the participants give conscious thought to all they brought to the table enough to fully articulate and determine the next best steps toward human capital development for the mutual benefit of themselves and their organizations. Additionally, human capital development is a partnership between the individual and the company which can be facilitated, enhanced, or executed through good mentoring. Further, there was not much indication that their human capital was consciously being developed by the organization or their immediate leaders. At least two of the participants expressed that involvement in the first interview was like a mentoring session infusing renewed recognition, articulation, and consideration of the investment of their human capital. This brief encounter influenced some of them to
directly approach their immediate leadership with their concerns, intentions, questions, and desires for moving forward in the company. These actions resulted in a reengagement and increased investment of their human capital into the company.

Leadership expert, John Maxwell (2007) says that a leader’s capabilities can limit the organization because “smart, talented, successful people are able to go only so far because of the limitations of their leadership” (p. 8). One participant, frustrated by what she observed as poor leadership, was offered another opportunity and left the company for a position two levels above where she had been. This company lost out on her human capital.

By not developing this resource, companies are already leaving talent on the table and risk losing it to other companies and competitors. This opportunity cost or loss has been described as unrealized human capital, and another new barrier to high quality mentoring. At the writing of this report, one participant had already left her current employer for a higher position with more support and feels like she is being developed for future opportunities. Another participant is taking advantage of the opportunities she has created to develop her talent by “volunteering” with other teams so that she can gain the experience and exposure that her supervisor cannot provide. Yet another has been moved into another area of her company where she is growing, her human capital is being developed, and she is much more engaged than she was at the beginning of this project. Her commitment to the organization has increased.
“If you don’t use it, you will lose it.” Organizations that fail to fully utilize and develop the human capital of their employees as a critical resource will lose that human capital to disengagement or departure. Either the employee will stay and not develop to their fullest potential or they will recognize that they could do better elsewhere and go. Further, in order for women of color to be in the corporate pipeline for higher echelons of leadership, supervisory mentoring is an imperative, not to replace other mentoring relationships, but in addition to other mentoring relationships. Without supervisory mentoring, women of color do not get the developmental projects that will build the skills and the exposure necessary to be included in the CEO pipeline and the dearth of diversity seen will continue.

Organizations should adopt a more complete definition of human capital, one that includes the psychosocial and more tacit talent investments of the individual. There is internal talent that could be used as mentors and teachers to peers and near peers. In this way, talent is developed and utilized. Additionally, those in a supervisory position must understand their own human capital and how their leadership abilities can stunt or grow the talent of their subordinates. Therefore, mentoring coupled with coaching, as recommended in the study by one participant, is critical to ensuring that supervisors can provide effective mentoring to their subordinates, and that they grow as leaders as well.
Implications

*Not necessarily unique to women of color*

The feelings and perceptions these women shared are certainly nothing new and not necessarily unique to their experience as women of color. People from all different walks of life, to include White men and women, have felt like they have had to work for everything they have gotten, they have seen others excel, they have been left behind, and they may have even felt invisible, or isolated in their experiences. The complexity for women of color however, is rooted in the uncertainty of what to do about these feelings, if anything. Is it just a matter of working harder or is it a blind hazy perception that can only be teased out from comparative behavior because the holder of such perceptions may not even be aware of them? In other words, is it unconscious bias? In the absence of information, people will construct meaning from what they already know. Given past experiences in this country, it is not unreasonable to consider the intersectionality of race and gender as a factor. However, because a mentoring culture infuses a mentoring mindset that operates at the individual level with corporate oversight, enforcement, and support, it has the power to create an environment where each person is evaluated for their capabilities and developed towards their potential for the benefit of the organization.
BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

*Mentoring is the key*

Mentoring is key to the development of a critical organizational resource. Where it is lacking, resources are being squandered. All these companies were enduring companies with some longevity; three had been in existence since the 1800s. According to Collins (2009), such enduring companies are able to last because of their vision, flexibility, adherence to principled values, and a full utilization of talents. However, the workforce dynamics have changed. What got the companies to this point will not keep them going. Where the workforce of the past was largely homogeneous, today's workforce is increasingly more diverse in terms of demographics. This diversity must be incorporated into the pipeline for tomorrow’s leaders by today’s leaders. Where today’s leaders are unaware of the talent for which they are responsible because of factors such as their own limited leadership capability or because of bias, the leaders needed to run these corporations for the next 100 years could be hindered in their own capabilities potentially resulting in the demise of the company.

That these women were not fully utilized indicates a shift, or perhaps, a blind spot of which such companies should be made aware. For these companies to continue to last, they must fully utilize their increasingly diverse workforce. This implies that a change needs to come in terms of human capital management and development through all levels of an organization.
Recommendations

Establish formal mentoring programs

Organizations should establish formal mentoring programs, but they should do so within mentoring mindset cultures. Further, they should expect and evaluate for supervisory mentorship to ensure that all members of an organization are getting the mentorship needed to fully develop their human capital. Coaching combined with mentoring, particularly for supervisors, can ensure that organizations have effective leaders at all levels of the organization.

Build a mentoring culture

As globalization increases, so does the complexity of economic environments, workforce dynamics, and customer perceptions, organizations need to have the input of their full workforce to ensure that missteps are mitigated. This is what inclusion is all about. To do otherwise is a waste of time, individual talent, and organizational resources. Mentoring organizational cultures strengthen and enhance formal mentoring programs ensuring success. Further, informal mentoring takes place to provide unforeseen needs overlooked by formal mentoring programs. In turn this provides an environment conducive to the full engagement and investment of human capital.
Explore human capital

Organizational leaders and managers should encourage employees to explore their own human capital for the mutual benefit with the organization. Awareness of the full scope of one’s own human capital enables the individual to take a more self-directed in their approach to career growth, mobility, and further human capital development. Moreover, where individuals are aware and can articulate their own human capital, they can intentionally and intelligently engage and invest that human capital in ways that support company goals. Further, where organizational leaders and managers are aware of the human capital available for investment, more strategic decisions can be made about including the owning individuals as a human capital investors.

Future Research

This study focused on the implications for organizations that could stem from mitigating barriers to mentoring relationships. The study was intended to research women of color. However, the participants were all African-American women. A future study should focus on other women of color, such as Asian, Latina, Native American, etc. to provide a full spectrum perspective of barriers and their implications. Further, given the dynamic histories of minority women from each ethnic group in the US, there may exist intra-corporate power distance differentials as measured by Hofstede which may also impede the development of mentoring
relationships. While Ragins and her colleagues have researched power dynamics in the workplace with respect to gender (Ragins, 1997b; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Ragins & Winkel, 2011), no studies have been found to address the effect multiple power distance orientations in terms of Hofstede’s cultural dimensions may have on mentoring relationships within a single society such as the American workplace. With a diverse workforce, the existence of multiple cultures and subcultures may affect the way in which mentoring relationships develop. As such, a future study that explores power distance in the United States by various factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, or personality type would assist organizational leaders with unconscious bias and employee motivation.

While the literature is saturated with research on mentoring benefits for proteges, mentors, and organizations (Chao, 1997; Hechl, 2018; Kennett, 2012; Kram, 1988; Liu et al., 2009; Ragins, 2016) there is much less literature on barriers to mentoring relationships (Jeffcoat, 2008; Ragins & Cotton, 1991; Randy Emelo, 2013) as a focus. Barriers to mentoring relationships have been noted in other studies regarding the progression of women in the workplace (Hayes, 2016; Womack-Johnson, 2016)

A 2018 study indicates that as women and racial minorities are appointed to CEO positions in environments where they are the demographic minority, White male top managers demonstrate a propensity for withholding work-related help, such as
mentoring, in particular to their female and racial minority colleagues and subordinates (McDonald et al., 2018). This represents another new barrier to mentoring relationships for women of color hindering their human capital development and opportunity to fully engage in the organization. However, if these leaders established a mentoring culture from the top down, perhaps a future study could determine if that would mitigate such a potential barrier.

Five organizations were anonymously represented in this study. A case study with a focus on one organization could provide deeper insight into the findings of this study or serve as a controlled study for determining how organizations can mitigate the barriers that were presented in this study. Focusing only on one organization also allows for comparison of the organizational perception against the perception women of color have as employees. This would be helpful in determining any gaps between what the organization is espousing and what the individual is experiencing. Another avenue of future research is human capital development outcomes as it relates to mentoring.

As an exploratory study, this study did not evaluate the long-term effects of a mentoring culture. Therefore, a future longitudinal, quantitative study of an organization with a mentoring culture as a means of developing corporate leaders and filling the C-Suite pipeline with a diverse pool of potentials should be explored to
BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

provide the impact of such an environment. This would provide more insight into the link between a mentoring culture and firm performance.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of women of color regarding the barriers to mentoring relationships, human capital development, and implications for organizations. Women of color are disproportionately underrepresented in the upper echelons of leadership in Fortune 500 companies. With this awareness, corporations are taking action and setting goals to increase firm diversity to include C-Suite levels. However, women of color may not be getting the mentoring relationships that are critical to grooming for corporate leadership or C-Suite selection, thus frustrating these efforts and negatively affecting the organization as a whole.
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Appendix A: Email/Letter of Invitation

Dear <PotentialParticipant>,

Participants are needed in a research study regarding

Barriers to Mentoring Women of Color for Corporate Leadership: Implications for Organizations

My name is Donna Smith and I am a doctoral candidate at the Florida Institute of Technology pursuing a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree. I am conducting a research study titled “BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP: IMPLICATIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS.” This study seeks to explore the lived experiences and themes of minority women employed in for-profit companies which might help executives understand the organizational implications that barriers to mentoring relationships may have. The findings of this research may help expand the body of research on mentoring. This research may also provide a better understanding of the experiences, issues, complexities, and challenges faced by women of color in the corporate environment as well as provide companies with awareness of and insight into potential implications for the pursuit of diversity and other organizational goals.

To participate in this study you must be a woman of color (eg., Asian, African, Black, Hispanic, etc.,...descent), older than 18 and have aspirations for or be in a leadership role within the company where you are currently employed.

You will engage in two interviews. These interviews should take 60 to 90 minutes each and will be very conversational in nature. While in person interviews at a mutually agreed upon location are ideal and preferable, interviews can be held virtually using video teleconference technology such as Zoom. If you are interested in participating in this study, please email me at donna2015@my.fit.edu with acceptable times and means of getting in touch with you.

Thank you

Donna Smith
Doctoral Candidate
Florida Institute of Technology
## Appendix B: Consent Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Barriers to Mentoring Women of Color for Corporate Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose of the study</strong></td>
<td>This research is being conducted by Donna Smith at the Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Florida, under the direction of Dr. Robert Schaller. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you have indicated that you value mentoring relationships and have some insight into barriers that women of color may face. The purpose of this research project is to investigate the lived experience of such women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedures</strong></td>
<td>The research process will take place over three months, and the procedures involve at least two individual interviews (one-one-one). Donna Smith will conduct face to face interviews at a time and location that is mutually convenient to the participant and to the investigator. Each interview should last about one hour. The interview will be conversational in nature and will explore your specific experiences and perspectives with regards to mentoring relationships. All meetings will be audio taped and transcribed by a third-party service. The interviewer will take handwritten notes. The topic for each of the meetings will be those experiences of mentoring. Sample questions: How much do the leaders in your organization encourage mentoring relationships? What does a good mentoring relationship look like to you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Title</td>
<td>Barriers to Mentoring Women of Color for Corporate Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Risks and Discomforts</td>
<td>There are possible risks in this study. You may disclose personal information (i.e. ‘stories’ or personal anecdotes) related to your experiences in or seeking mentoring relationships during this study. You will be asked to face some sensitive issues of race, gender, age, and ethnicity. You may experience feelings of discomfort as a result of being audio taped. Allowing participants to review their own audio-taped discussions and conversations to make additions, corrections, and/or deletions at any time should do much to reduce the risk of discomfort. Audio-tapings may be reviewed by participants after completion. You are encouraged to ask the researcher questions during the course of this study and may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential Benefits</td>
<td>There are no direct benefits, however, potential benefits to this research include a greater understanding of your own experiences within and/or in seeking mentoring relationships. We hope that in the future, other people might benefit from this study through an improved understanding of what may inhibit the development of mentoring relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Confidentiality  We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, the identities of the participants will be protected through several means. (1) Names of participants will not be included on collected data. You will be asked to offer a single fictional name which will be used in all documents; (2) All collected material and information will be kept in a safe; (3) electronic files will be secured on a private computer and cloud storage using password-protection; (4) consent forms will be separated from material by participants. Aside from a third-party transcription service used to convert audio recordings to text, only the researcher/principal investigator will have access to the material collected.

____ I agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study

____ I do not agree to be audiotaped during my participation in this study.

In addition, collected data such as transcriptions and audiotapes will be kept for ten years then destroyed. Written data will be shredded, computer data will be deleted, and audiotapes will be erased.

If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may only be shared with representatives of the Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, FL, or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.
BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

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<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Barriers to Mentoring Women of Color for Corporate Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical treatment</td>
<td>The Florida Institute of Technology does not provide any medical hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the Florida Institute of Technology provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this study, except as required by law.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to Withdraw and Questions</td>
<td>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:

Donna Smith
917-497-4188
Donna2015@my.fit.edu
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Barriers to Mentoring Women of Color for Corporate Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant Rights</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida Institute of Technology Institutional Review Board Melbourne, Florida, eMail: <a href="mailto:irb@fit.edu">irb@fit.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This research will be reviewed according to the Florida Institute of Technology, Melbourne, Florida, IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Consent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature &amp; date Name of subject:</td>
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<td>Signature of subject:</td>
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<td>Date:</td>
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Appendix C: **Structured Interview Protocol**

This qualitative phenomenological study is being conducted to determine how barriers to mentoring relationships experienced by women of color might affect organizational performance through a human capital perspective. The following research questions evolved from a review and examination of existing literature on mentoring women of color. The questions below represent a question bank. Therefore, there may be some questions that are not asked, and questions may be presented in a different order than they appear. Provide definition sheet (informal mentoring, formal mentoring, human capital).

**Q1. What are the perceptions of women of color regarding their mentoring relationships?**

1. Please tell me a little about your work and workplace?
2. As a woman of color, what do you like most about your organization’s culture? …Least?
3. Does your organization offer any type of mentoring (formal or informal)?
4. What does mentoring involve? (Provide definition from study)
5. How do you personally participate in any mentoring relationships in your organization?

For the next two questions please respond on a scale of 1 to 10 and elaborate as needed
BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

6. How would you rate the amount of mentoring you are receiving in your workplace?

7. How satisfied are you with the mentoring you are receiving in your workplace?

8. What does good mentoring look like to you?

9. How does the organization’s culture impact the development of mentoring relationships within the organization? How is it encouraged or discouraged by the culture?

10. How do your organization’s leaders demonstrate support of mentoring relationships?

11. What would you most want to change about the organizational culture regarding mentoring?

12. What kinds of barriers do you experience regarding the development of mentoring relationships within your company?

13. What best practices can an organization implement to best mentor women of color for leadership?
Q2. What are the perceptions and lived experiences of women of color regarding human capital development practices within the organization?

14. As a woman of color, what do you think you bring to the table that can add value toward the fulfillment of organizational goals? (This is your human capital)

For the next 4 questions, provide your response on a scale of 1 to 10 and elaborate as needed

15. How much do you think the organization values your human capital? How do they show it?

16. How well does the company leverage your human capital (knowledge, skills, abilities, connections)?

17. How much are you being positively challenged in your current role?

18. How much do you feel like you are growing in your current position?

What could foster (more) growth?

19. Tell me about the last time a challenging work, project, or development assignment was suggested to you.

20. How does the organizational culture influence investment/utilization of your human capital?

21. How do you think mentoring relates to your human capital development?

22. Would mentoring help you better add value to the organization?
Follow up interview:

23. How much do you see yourself progressing up to the ladder in your current company? What is the highest level you feel you can attain?

**Q3. What are the implications for organizations regarding mentoring women of color in corporate leadership?**

24. How does your current position contribute to profit and loss responsibilities?

25. What can you tell me about the organization’s business plan and organizational model?

26. What might be some benefits to having more women of color in leadership positions?

27. How could you as a woman of color uniquely contribute to the competitive advantage and increased organizational performance?

28. How much are your talents integrated into the goals of your business unit?

29. If you were the CEO how would you ensure women of color were getting mentored?

30. What could subordinate leaders do to foster more mentoring relationships?

31. In your opinion, what are the implications for the organizations regarding barriers to mentoring relationships faced by women of color in corporate leadership? What can organizational leaders learn from your experience?
32. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to add to this interview?
Appendix D: **Mentoring Definitions**

*Formal mentoring.* A developmental relationship between mentors and protégés that is intentionally structured and managed by the organization for the purpose of protégé development and advancement (Laiho & Brandt, 2012; Ragins et al., 2000; Wanberg et al., 2003).

*Informal mentoring.* An organically evolving developmental relationship between a mentor and protégé initiated for the purpose of protégé development and advancement to the benefit of the organization.

*Mentor.* An individual with advanced experience and knowledge who is committed to providing upward mobility and career support to their protégés (Kram, 1988).

*Organizational Culture.* A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 2010).

*Protégé.* An individual receiving career and psychosocial support via developmental relationship established with a mentor for the purpose of protégé development and career advancement.
Appendix E: Human Capital Definitions

**Human capital.** The collective skills, knowledge, or other intangible assets, such as connections, of individuals that can be used to create economic value for the individuals, their employers, or their community (Becker, 1994; Mincer, 1957; Schultz et al., 1973)

**Human capital resource.** The individual and unit-level capacities based on individuals knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics, such as connections, that are accessible to and may be leveraged for competitive advantage (Becker, 1994, 2002; Ployhart et al., 2014; Wang & Barney, 2006).
Appendix F: Email to Members of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.

Greetings Sorors!

Recently, I announced that I am working on a dissertation project. The title of my study is Mentoring Women of Color for Corporate Leadership: Implications for Organizations.

I am seeking women of color who have been with the company for one or more years, who are in or aspire to leadership positions (may be informal), and have familiarity with mentoring. Ideally, you can articulate how your current and potential engagement in the company impacts its bottom line. The study uses a human capital theory framework and sets the organization as the unit of analysis viewed through your eyes and experiences.

Human capital theory says that you own your knowledge, skills, abilities, talents, and other characteristics (human capital) and you decide how much of that you are willing to invest, in terms of effort, towards the company's success. The company offers benefits and protections, such as compensation and culture, to influence your investment. Your human capital is further developed as you gain skills, knowledge, and experiences specific to the company and industry, thereby becoming more valuable to the company. One effective way to develop firm-specific human capital is through intrafirm mentoring relationships.

Mentoring has been known to help advance people in their careers. Unfortunately, in several studies, women of color report a lack of mentoring relationships as a hindrance to their advancement. This not only hurts the women, but it may also impair the company.

If you are interested in sharing your experience and your insight, or if you know others who would be interested, please share and reply to this email with your contact information. If you don’t think you fit the criteria outlined above, but would like to participate anyway, I would immensely appreciate your participation in a pilot study where you can provide feedback on my interview questions and style.

Thank you for taking the time to read all the way through this email. Please call me if you have any questions (917-497-4188).

Donna Smith
Appendix G: Business Cards
Barriers to Mentoring Women of Color for Corporate Leadership: Implications for Organizations

Donna Smith
Doctoral Student
Florida Institute of Technology

(917) 497-4188 Donna2015@my.fit.edu
BARRIERS TO MENTORING WOMEN OF COLOR FOR CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

Do you …
- Work in a private for-profit company or publicly traded corporation for 1 or more years?
- Have or Aspire to a position of leadership?
- Have an opinion about mentoring in your company?
- Have 2 days and 2 hours each day to spend with me answering more questions?

Do you …
- Work in a private for-profit company or publicly traded corporation for 1 or more years?
- Have or Aspire to a position of leadership?
- Have an opinion about mentoring in your company?
- Have 2 days and 2 hours each day to spend with me answering more questions?

Do you …
- Work in a private for-profit company or publicly traded corporation for 1 or more years?
- Have or Aspire to a position of leadership?
- Have an opinion about mentoring in your company?
- Have 2 days and 2 hours each day to spend with me answering more questions?

Do you …
- Work in a private or publicly traded for-profit company or corporation for 1 or more years?
- Have or Aspire to a position of leadership?
- Have an opinion about mentoring in your company?
- Have 2 days and 2 hours each day to spend with me answering more questions?
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