ABSTRACT

SHAW, SONYA REDDICK. The Career Experiences of African American Women Leaders in Parks and Recreation Organizations (Under the direction of Dr. Myron F. Floyd).

African American women are underrepresented in executive level positions in parks and recreation. This study used a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Twelve African American women leaders in parks and recreation participated in this study and shared their experiences en route to leadership positions. Women leaders shared characteristics of their career pathway to leadership, including descriptors for resiliency, barriers faced en route to leadership and how they overcame barriers. Themes that emerged to describe career pathways were be resilient and bounce back, it’s a faith walk, a positive attitude is everything, positive relationships matter, and it’s all about community. Themes used to describe barriers faced in the workplace were race and gender still a problem, negative perceptions of African American women, workplace needs a facelift, and intense hiring practices. Emergent themes that described negotiation strategies were early introduction to the profession is key, prepare, prepare, prepare, strategic thinking required, and patience is key. Key findings of this study indicated that African American women leaders are resilient. Other findings indicated that this study provided a foundational basis for future research on African American women leaders in parks and recreation, provided descriptive data on the formative years of experience that shaped their careers, and extended research on the career development of African American women. Findings from this study provide empirical insights into the experiences of African American women leaders and contribute to theory, practice, and literature regarding the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation.
The Career Experiences of African American Women Leaders in Parks and Recreation Organizations

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DEDICATION

To my heavenly Father- none of this would have been possible without you. To my parents, husband, son, siblings, family and friends- thank you so much for your support, encouragement and guidance during this journey. They will always be remembered. I dedicate this research to the future of underrepresented populations working in the parks and recreation profession. May the findings be used to motivate and direct your pathway to leadership. May this work teach my son, nieces and future family generations the value of perseverance, commitment, and prayer, required to obtain any of your goals.

~Selah
BIOGRAPHY

Sonya Shaw is a native of Washington, North Carolina, where she participated in sports programs throughout her childhood such as basketball and softball. Her pursuit of parks and recreation as a career began when she started coaching girls’ basketball at the local parks department in college. From coaching, she transitioned to working part-time with the athletic staff to later changing her college major to recreation administration. She has been in the parks and recreation profession for over 25 years. She received her B.A. degree in Leisure Studies and Recreation Administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She also received both of her Master Degrees from North Carolina Central University – one in Public Administration and one in Counseling (summa cum laude). She currently serves as the Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Resources Director for the Town of Garner, North Carolina. Ms. Shaw’s interests include mentoring young women and future professionals. She has coached women’s basketball at the high school and collegiate levels for nearly 10 years; served as State director and Undergraduate Chapter advisor to members of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc., attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina Central University and Duke University. She also serves as co-founder and organizer of the North Carolina Friends of HBCU Colleges and Universities with Parks and Recreation Majors. Ms. Shaw is an avid believer in the economic benefits parks and recreation departments provide to local economies through special event programming and performing arts. One of her fondest professional memories is leading her organization to achieve national accreditation and leading a hometown tour for an American Idol Winner. She holds a certified parks and recreation professional credential.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Dating back to the late 1800s, women such as Jane Addams initiated the beginnings of a long lineage of strong women leaders who were committed to providing parks and recreation services to communities in need (Hartsoe, Sanders & Bridgers, 2009). In 1889, Addams started a settlement house in Chicago, known as the Hull House, which offered a range of social services to assist the urban poor. The Hull House provided families in need with medical treatment, childcare, temporary shelter, legal aid, and classes in English, music, art, and dance. In 1893, Addams acquired buildings near the Hull House and converted them into a coffee house, gymnasium, and playground. Addams believed that recreation provided citizens with not only opportunities for play and recreation, but also for creativity and an ideal training ground for democratic citizenship. Addams was a huge proponent of organized play in urban environments during the playground movement, serving as one of the founding members of the Playground Association of America in 1906. Through her writings, she expressed the belief that recreation and social work were closely related, and that recreation was a human basic need. Addams (1909) stated that, “the undoubted powers of public recreation bring together the classes of a community in the modern city unhappily so full of devices for keeping them apart” (p.96). Addams recognized that play and recreation were a means to promote the mental and social well-being of youth.

Addams’ leadership did not end with the playground movement. She continued working for women in the peace movement holding leadership positions in the Women’s Peace Party, International Congress of Women, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom and American Civil Liberties Union, and the National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In 1939, she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in world peace, becoming the first American woman to receive this prestigious recognition (Hartsoe, Sanders & Bridgers, 2009).

Joining Addams during the playground movement was Dorothy Enderis. An educator turned practitioner, Enderis was responsible for bringing recreation programs to Milwaukee, Wisconsin’s “Fifth Ward,” an inner-city section of Milwaukee described as “The Bloody Fifth” (Hartsoe, Sanders & Bridgers, 2009). She served as director of the Milwaukee Recreation and Adult Education Department and brought opportunities for citizens to participate in children’s play, music lessons, and specialty clubs such as photography or dance during evening hours. Referred to as lighted schoolhouse programs, Enderis’ programs could be considered pioneer models for today’s afterschool programs. The lighted schoolhouse programs catered to community youth and provided supervised activities during afterschool and evening hours. Enderis expanded programs from six social centers and fourteen playgrounds to thirty-two indoor centers and sixty-two playgrounds. The stories of women leaders such as Addams and Enderis provoke questions about their pathway to success. What barriers or challenges did women pioneers in parks and recreation face along their career pathway? How were women pioneers able to navigate through barriers or challenges? What contributed to their resilience and their ability to negotiate through challenges faced in the workplace? A number of questions arise considering the early achievements of women pioneers in parks and recreation.

Through no fault of their own, African American women pioneers in the parks and recreation profession did not fare much better regarding their career experiences being
explored or captured in literature. Pearl H. Vaughn, educator and community recreation professional, was a trailblazer and innovator during a time when Jim Crow laws were being enforced across the land (Hartsoe, Sanders & Bridgers, 2009). Vaughn’s career began as an entry-level recreation leader, yet she rose through the ranks to become a recreation supervisor and later faculty member at Grambling State University. Known as “Mother Pearl” to many, Vaughn was responsible for building a reputable parks and recreation academic program at Grambling State University and was an active member of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), particularly serving with the Society of Park and Recreation Educators and the Ethnic Minorities Society. Vaughn’s efforts and leadership would lead to Grambling State University hosting the first NRPA National Workshop on a historically black campus in 1970. The workshop focused on the role of black colleges and universities in preparing black professionals and students for problems they would face in the profession. During this time, NRPA president, Sal Prezioso, attended the workshop and recommended that the NRPA Board establish a national task force to develop and implement programs to educate and train minority professionals. He further recommended teams visit black colleges and universities and junior colleges to assist with development of parks and recreation curricula. Given Vaughn’s ethnic background and the time frame of Vaughn’s contributions to the parks and recreation profession, it’s likely she encountered numerous obstacles and barriers during her career, yet Vaughn demonstrated resiliency and used negotiation strategies of some sort, to navigate through challenges she encountered.

Virginia Munger, is also among a long list of African American women pioneers in parks and recreation during the 1940s. Munger’s career experiences spanned over a 40-year
period. She was known for providing leadership to professional staff members, and was an active member in NRPA and founding member of the Ethnic Minorities Society. Helen K. Mason was the first African-American district supervisor with Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department and arts advocate who established the Black Theater Troupe, a center for performing arts in Phoenix (NRPAEMS, 1996). Denise Scott-Johnson, the first African American women president of the North Carolina Recreation and Park Association, was also a pioneer in the profession. Scott-Johnson rose through the ranks of the Winston-Salem Parks and Recreation Department (North Carolina) to become Assistant Director, serving the profession for over 30 years.

Past studies on women in parks and recreation management and supervisory positions (e.g., Henderson, 1992; Henderson & Baaske, 1985; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1990, 1995; Henderson, Grappendorf, Bruton, & Tomas, 2013; Shinew, Anderson & Arnold, 2000; Smith, Santucci, Xu, Cox, & Henderson, 2012) have addressed issues of inequality and discrimination against women leaders in the parks and recreation profession. Findings from these studies consistently echoed the experiences of white women, yet did not share the stories about the career pathways to leadership for African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations.

NRPA, a professional organization comprised of over 50,000 leisure service practitioners and educators, provides members with professional development, educational training, resources and networking opportunities. According to registration data from the 2015 NRPA membership database, only 17,722 of the 50,000 members reported demographic information such as race, gender, or ethnicity. Of those 17,722 members, only
7,435 reported being female and 8,691 members responded to questions related to race or ethnicity. Of the 8,691 members responding to race and ethnicity questions, only 283 identified themselves as African American women. Of 283 African American women, only 16.5% or 47 women reported being in leadership positions such as Director, Assistant/Deputy/Division Director, or Superintendent. Considering that several thousand members did not self-report gender, race or ethnicity, these numbers alone represent the miniscule number of African American women in leadership positions in parks and recreation organizations. In addition, most parks and recreation agencies only provide financial support for upper management staff to attend national conferences such as NRPA.

In addition to the lack of literature examining the career experiences of African American women, minimal research addresses specific barriers affecting the progression to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations. Of the limited research on race and progression to leadership, one study focused on African Americans identified perceived issues of discrimination and inequity in their workplace and perceived underrepresentation in the field, particularly in upper management levels, as barriers (Shinew & Hibbler, 2002). The study also found that African Americans faced a range of barriers including marginalization in salary raises and promotions, limited social capital (Allison & Schneider, 2008), workplaces strained by homosocial reproduction, lack of mentorships, and institutional barriers such as discrimination and unfair hiring practices (Shinew & Hibbler, 2002). These studies represent only a few studies exploring the career experiences of women in parks and recreation organizations. Such barriers warrant further research. Understanding the career experiences and challenges African Americans face is
important as we look for ways to develop strategies that facilitate progression to leadership positions. This study specifically focused on the experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations.

**Statement of the Problem**

While African Americans hold positions in parks and recreation organizations, there is a disproportionate number occupying leadership positions at the executive level (Allison, 1999; Godbey & Henkel, 1976; McDonald, 1981; Outley & Dean, 2007; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Tapia & Kvansny, 2004; Waller, 1989). Moreover, studies examining the lived experiences of African American women in parks and recreation organizations, who have successfully obtained leadership positions, are lacking in the literature. Examining the experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations could help prepare the next generation of leaders who are seeking advancement opportunities in the profession. Research of this kind can also contribute new theoretical perspectives related to women’s progression to leadership.

The literature on women in parks and recreation organizations sought to identify the positions women held in these organizations, yet mostly focused on the experiences of white women. Other literature centered discussions on challenges women faced in parks and recreation organizations such as discrimination, inequity, and barriers to upward mobility. However, limited qualitative research exists to uncover and share the lived experiences of African American women in parks and recreation organizations.

Further study of these experiences provided insight into the barriers and challenges that impacted their pathway to leadership. Exploration of the negotiation strategies or
mechanisms affecting their progression to leadership contributed to the body of knowledge surrounding African American women leaders and provided a voice for a group almost non-existent in the literature.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the pathway to leadership for African American women in parks and recreation organizations. To achieve this purpose, I used qualitative methods to examine the pathways to leadership, barriers affecting their progression to leadership, and negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitated African American women’s progression to leadership positions. The following research questions guided my study:

1. What characterizes the pathway to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?
2. What are the barriers that affect progression to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?
3. What are the negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitate progression to leadership positions among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

I conducted this qualitative study from a post-positivist stance, in that researchers seek to discover and explain realities through an inductive process (Ryan, 2006). Utilizing a phenomenological approach, I collected data using semi-structured interviews with African American women. Through the phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews revealed stories of the participants’ lived experiences (Creswell, 2014). Even though the
career experiences of some women in parks and recreation showed slight gains in achieving upper management positions, African Americans still lagged behind in obtaining executive-level positions (McDonald, 1981; Outley & Dean, 2007; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Waller 1989). It was important to explore these experiences and the low number of African American women holding executive-level positions in parks and recreation.

**Conceptual Framework**

I approached this phenomenological study of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations using two theoretical perspectives: Resiliency theory (Polidore, Edmonson & Slate, 2010) and structuration theory (Gidden, 1984). These theories guided the research design, methodology, and data analysis. Resiliency theory provided insight into the individual skills related to a person’s ability to cope with difficult situations. Structuration theory provided insight into barriers, such as informal systems, or social structures within organizations, that hindered the upward mobility members of ethnic and minority groups faced along their career pathways.

**Resiliency theory.**

An ecological and developmental model of human development was an appropriate conceptual framework for this study because it provided a systematic look at the personal, social and environmental factors that influence an individual’s ability to adapt to difficult situations. Luthar, Cicchetti, and Becker (2000) referred to the construct of resilience as “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaption within the context of significant adversity” (p. 543) or a person’s ability to bounce back from difficult challenges. Resiliency is also
defined as the ability to develop coping strategies and positive responses despite adverse conditions or circumstances (Brodkin & Coleman, 1996).

Resiliency is viewed through the developmental lens when examining the growth and development that occurs over the lifetime of the individual, while an ecological perspective provides an exploration of how people adapt to external processes such as their environment, social customs, values, or behaviors. If African American women leaders are able to obtain executive-level positions, understanding factors that influenced their developmental processes might help increase our knowledge of experiences of African American women holding leadership positions in parks and recreation organizations.

Polidore, Edmonson, and Slate (2010) examined the philosophical views and life experiences of African American women leaders in education to understand the role of resiliency during their careers. Eight themes emerged through the research that provided a template to model adult resiliency in education. The eight themes were:

- Importance of religion: strong spiritual beliefs serving as sources of encouragement.
- Beliefs about controlling events: an individual’s belief about controlling events affecting them.
- Outlook on life: ability to see adverse situations in a positive manner.
- Autonomy: an individual’s ability to believe they can self-govern, control or influence events in spite of hardships.
- Commitments: strong involvement or commitment to personal activities and relationships.
- View on change: ability to view change as something positive and exciting.
• Positive relationships: ability to seek out positive role models and mentors.

• Importance of education: education viewed as important.

Polidore et al.’s (2010) conceptual framework of resilience provided a lens through which to explore the backgrounds and career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. Each theme in the conceptual framework model was used to examine the processes by which these leaders described resiliency, personal development, and adaptation, during their progression to leadership positions. Examining these processes provided a better understanding of the individual skills and personal development necessary for adaptation to challenges faced along their pathway to leadership. If resiliency factors can be identified, recreation research will be enhanced, along with the literature on leadership. In addition to examining the individual skills and personal development related to African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations, the social structures in these organizations were also examined.

**Gidden’s structuration theory.**

A model examining the social structures in organizations was an appropriate conceptual framework for this study. Gidden’s (1984) structuration theory focused on human activity and social systems for conducting research on individuals in organizations. The theory describes those social rules and practices that are properties of social systems created and recreated by members within the social systems. These systems are described as repressive structures and facilitative structures.

Applied to the workplace, repressive structures in the workplace are those repeated social rules and practices which constrain the career development of ethnic and minority
groups, such as being overlooked for leadership opportunities or promotions. Facilitative structures are the rules and practices that enable ethnic and minority groups to circumvent the oppressive forces of racism to advance their careers. Gidden’s framework provided a lens to view the social rules and practices that influence the career experiences of African Americans. The careers of African American women in leadership positions are developed within an organization’s repressive structure of social rules and practices. Exploring and identifying repressive and facilitative structures, which contribute to both the challenges and successes of African American women leaders, was crucial for understanding the nature of barriers to leadership positions.

**Definition of Key Terms**

*Ethnic Group*: A microcultural group that shares common history, culture, behaviors, or values along with other characteristics that cause members of the group to have a shared identity (Banks, 2001).

*African American*: United States citizens who identify as Black; and are non-Hispanic (US Bureau of Census, 2015)

*Leisure Service Agencies or Organizations*: Agencies or organizations that provide leisure time activities and recreation experiences, identified in the professional areas of hospitality (hotels, restaurants), recreational leisure (entertainment, sports), and tourism (travel, attractions), to its customers (Lashley & Lee-Ross, 2003).

**Significance of the Study**

My study contributed to the leisure literature as it addressed aspects of race, gender, inequities, barriers, and upward mobility of African American women leaders in the leisure
field. Though no research exists on the career experiences of these women, this study was built on minimal research addressing such issues faced by women in parks and recreation. In leisure research, several researchers have studied race (e.g., Floyd, 1998; Floyd, 2007; Floyd & Mowatt, 2014; Murphy, 1972); gender through the role of women in parks and recreation management and supervisory positions (Henderson, 1992; Henderson & Baaske, 1985; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1990, 1995; Shinew, Anderson & Arnold, 2000); inequities and barriers (Anderson & Shinew, 2001; Henderson, et al., 2013; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Smith, et al., 2012); and the upward mobility of African Americans (Godbey & Hinkel, 1976; McDonald, 1981; Outley & Dean, 2007; Waller, 1989; Worsley & Stone, 2011). However, little research has been conducted on the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations.

My study was the first to be conducted on African American women leaders in parks and recreation and sought to not only increase knowledge about the underrepresentation of African American women leaders in the profession, but to create new knowledge how these women managed to overcome barriers to reach and maintain leadership positions. This study examined the individual characteristics, such as resiliency, that help African American women continue their pursuit of leadership positions. The study also examined the informal systems and social structures embedded in organizations that created barriers for African American women along their journey.

As baby boomers exit the workforce over the coming years, opportunities will exist for African American women to pursue leadership positions in parks and recreation organizations. Such career opportunities should be explored more closely to identify factors
that influence or thwart African American women from pursuing careers in parks and recreation agencies. By sharing life and career experiences, participants in this study contributed to the general body of knowledge on women, particularly the unheard voice of African American women leaders in the profession and provided access to research that may encourage more women to seek leadership positions in the profession. Also, the field of leisure has called for more research related to the underrepresentation of African Americans and African American women in leadership positions (McDonald, 1981; Outley & Dean, 2007; Waller, 1989; Worsley & Stone, 2011).

As an African American woman leader in the profession, it is important for me to share knowledge about the challenges and barriers African American women face during their progression to leadership. It is equally important to share the strategies African American women used to successfully obtain and maintain leadership positions. Knowledge gained from this study may encourage more women to not only seek positions of leadership, but also be more prepared and armed with strategies to be highly effective and successful in their efforts.

**Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. To achieve this purpose, I examined career pathways, barriers faced along their pathway to leadership, and negotiation strategies used to help them overcome. Historically, women have exhibited a strong commitment to providing parks and recreation services to communities dating back to the 1800s. During this time, women led coordination efforts of playground and after-school programs. However, past studies on
women in parks and recreation management and supervisory positions did not begin capturing their unique experiences as women leaders until the late 1900s. Yet, the voice of African Americans remained nearly silent, as literature on the experiences of African American leaders did not emerge until years later to begin addressing the challenges and barriers African Americans faced during their career progression.

My research provided data and analysis that explored how they navigated through their barriers and used negotiation strategies to overcome difficulties in the workplace. Though limited research exists from the perspective of African American women, exploration and understanding of these career experiences contributed to scholarship by extending the existing body of knowledge on the leadership experiences of African Americans in parks and recreation. This study created new knowledge specifically about the career experiences of African American women leaders of parks and recreation agencies.

Polidore et al.’s (2010) conceptual framework of resilience provided a perspective to examine the processes by which these leaders described resiliency, personal development and adaptation during their progression to leadership positions. Using these frameworks, my analysis of the career experiences allowed for a better understanding of the role of race, gender, and barriers to their upward mobility. Findings and discussions of this study led to the development of common themes shared among African American women leaders that can inform practice and future research.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized as follows: Chapter 1 provided an overview and introduction of the study, problem statement, conceptual framework, purpose, research
questions, significance of the study and researcher stance. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on women in recreation and collegiate sports organizations, race and ethnicity in leisure, upward mobility of African Americans in parks and recreation organizations and intersectionality of race and gender. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and data analysis of the study. Chapter 4 provides a synopsis of the career experiences of African American women leaders in the parks and recreation profession through a demographic and biographical summary of participants and narrative descriptions of the participants. Key themes and sub-themes are discussed along with their relation to existing research. An analysis of the methodology, limitations of the study, contributions of the study. Chapter 5 provides a summary and interpretation of findings, contributions of the study, researcher reflections, and conclusions and implications for policy, practice and research.
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the literature related to pathways to leadership for African American women in parks and recreation organizations using a historical perspective. According to Patton (2002), historical literature reviews examine research throughout a period of time in order to understand what research precedes this study and to build upon the existing literature. This historical literature review focused attention on the early evidence of structural barriers for women. Similar to Gidden’s structuration theory focused on informal and formal practices embedded in organizations, Feagin (2014) discussed racial discrimination by describing “past-in-present” discrimination whereby historical discrimination is embedded in current practices (formal and informal). These informal and residual effects still exist and have consequences for African American women. As Feagin (2014) stated,

The social norms guiding racial discrimination can be formal or legal, but most norms today are unwritten and informal. Moreover, much anti-black action is not sporadic but is carried out repeatedly and routinely by numerous dominant-group members influenced by the important norms of their social networks. Whites have the power to discriminate as individuals, but much of their power to harm comes from their positions in traditionally white networks and white-controlled organizations. (p.145)

Thus, this literature review described social practices such as discrimination that are historically embedded in organizations and shape current outcomes even when sanctioned or legal forms of discrimination no longer exist. Reviewing the history surrounding women and African Americans in leisure service organizations not only raised the awareness of what
leisure work was like for women and African Americans, but also provided the literature with examples for why this historical review was critical to this study.

**Historical Perspective of Women in Recreation and Collegiate Sports Organizations**

This historical review of women in recreation and collegiate sports organizations focused attention on early evidence of structural barriers for women. The feminization, or the predominance of women employed in the recreation profession, dates back to the early 1900s. During this time, women dominated as the largest number of employees in the leisure service field, particularly during the playground and recreation movement between 1906 and 1930 (*Playground and Recreation*, 1929). According to Henderson, Bialeschki and Sessoms (1990), males did not dominate the profession until the 1940s. During this historical period in the early 1900s, women were fighting for voting and civil rights. The Women’s Movement pushed for women’s voting rights laws. The 19th Amendment to the Constitution granted women the right to vote in 1920 (Imbornoni, 2006). Women of color also demanded equal and fair practices in hiring, with the founding of the National Council of Women in 1935 by Mary McLeod Bethune. Even during the mid-1960s women continued to demand equitable and fair hiring practices. Former President John Kennedy appointed Eleanor Roosevelt to lead the Committee on the Status of Women. The committee would be the first to formally document discriminatory practices for women in the workplace. Later in 1964, the Civil Rights Act passed in response to unfair hiring and employment practices running rampant throughout the United States (Imbornoni, 2006).

Even with the major accomplishments of gaining greater civil rights and access to the workplace from the 1930s through the 1960s, Henderson et al. (1990) argued that during the
early 1900s women faced numerous challenges and obstacles pursuing leadership positions in the leisure service profession. Women traditionally worked in direct caregiving roles, leaving positions of management mostly to men resulting in occupational segregation. Henderson et al. (1990) questioned whether this segregation was due to employee choice or employer discrimination. For women, employee choice could mean,

Women make career decisions generally based on having to fulfill several social roles such as employee, spouse, and parents which at times may conflict. Therefore, women tend to choose careers that allow them to leave their jobs or reduce professional responsibilities when other roles require maximum attention. (Henderson et al., 1990, p. 1)

As women held the traditional roles of caregiver, men were given more opportunities to pursue management and even considered more fit for management roles than women, reflecting prevailing workplace stereotypes (Henderson, 1990). These stereotypes and social practices, intentional or not, appeared consistent with the plight of women pursuing employment in the parks and recreation profession, still unable to obtain leadership positions over a number of years. Negative social practices contribute to a continuous cycle or reproduction of social structures in the workplace resulting in women pursing the traditional roles related to caregiving instead of pursuing positions in management.

As a result, Henderson (1990) stated that women may have chosen employment options such as recreation programming, which allowed for more flexibility, versus management roles which require “uninterrupted experience and organizational relationships” (p.1). Women may have felt they possessed more skills in caregiving than in management, resulting in career segregation created by personal choices of women. Similarly, career
segregation meant that employers may have chosen men for management positions due to men’s preferences for more physically-based tasks.

Career segregation also implied that negative stereotypes of women, and their roles in organizations, were embedded in the social structure of organizations and formed repressive structures that kept women from moving into management roles. In addition, assumptions women held about obtaining uninterrupted experience and having organizational relationships as a requirement to move into management positions may have been embedded in social structures and reproduced as women continued to face workplace barriers resulting from stereotypes, traditions and social practices.

Job segregation between men and women became more evident from 1940 to 1980 as men comprised most of the field during this time period. In a 1980 U.S. Bureau of Census report, the percentage of women classified in the “recreation worker” occupation was 45 percent in 1970 and 68 percent in 1980, demonstrating a dramatic increase in the number of women employed in the field. Recreation worker positions were mostly part-time or supplemental positions. Research conducted in Wisconsin on women in recreation revealed that women were concentrated in specialty areas such as therapeutic recreation and recreation for older populations, while men were predominately represented in parks, community recreation and outdoor education specialty areas (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1980; Henderson & Baaske, 1985). Job segregation may have forced women to consider alternative positions as recreation workers, senior workers, and therapeutic recreation workers, deemed more appropriate for women. Choosing such positions may have been the pathway women negotiated to maintain their positions in the profession.
Despite the large percentage of women holding part-time positions, more women began majoring in recreation than men in subsequent years (Bialeschki & McAllister, 1989). Johnson (1987) suggested that reports from the Hudson Institute indicated that the workforce would likely be comprised of more women in the future. As the number of women in the recreation profession continued to grow, based on the rising number of female students majoring in parks and recreation (Bialeschki, 1992; Henderson, 1992), interest in conducting more research aimed at examining the career experiences of women slowly emerged.

Henderson and Bialeschki (1995) conducted a quantitative study of 300 female practitioners who were members of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), as well as, women employed in Canadian leisure service organizations. Female respondents were randomly selected from various branches of NRPA, such as the American Park and Recreation Society (APRS), National Therapeutic Recreation Society (NTRS), and National Society for Park Resources (NSPR). Female respondents consisted of various entry- and management-level positions: 25% front line staff, 43% supervisory or mid-management, and 28% senior management. The majority of respondents were white (94%), with only 6% (n=18) being women of color. Henderson and Bialeschki (1995) stated that, “although demographic comparison across racial groups would be of interest, the number of women of color responding was so low that these comparisons could not be made” (p. 31).

In a U.S. survey of professional women in parks and recreation, 1,146 female members responded about their professional positions in parks and recreation organizations: 51% were senior managers, 41% were supervisors and 8% were entry-level employees. Ninety-two percent were white, while 8% were women of color, representing an increase in
the number of women of color responding (Henderson, et al., 2013). These results demonstrate a significant increase in the number of females holding senior management and supervisory positions, with fewer holding entry-level positions, compared to Henderson and Bialeschki’s findings (1995). Given the limited number of respondents who were women of color, minimal opportunity existed for comparison or discussion of executive positions held by women of color. Currently, few studies exist to examine the career experiences of African American women, much less studies that examine any significant increases in the number of African American women holding senior- or executive-level positions in parks and recreation agencies. Further, both aforementioned studies were quantitative and provided a broad perspective of barriers faced by almost 1,200 women, but do not capture the individual stories of career development among participants. Such stories could allow one to examine barriers women faced in seeking executive-level positions. Thus, more qualitative studies are needed to capture the career experiences of women in leadership positions.

Nonetheless, studies revealed discriminatory practices against women in parks and recreation (Henderson & Baaske, 1985; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1980, 1995; Henderson, et al.,2013). If women were not able to obtain positions as managers or leaders, did forms of discrimination exist as barriers to their progression? Were women subjected to social practices existing from earlier hiring practices in the parks and recreation profession? Given the dominance of men in the profession of parks and recreation, women likely faced social practices rooted in the profession from years past when white men dominated positions of leadership in the workplace and in professional organizations. Supporting this belief, Henderson and Bialeschki (1995) stated that the career development of women differed from
men due to cultural and organizational barriers and the traditional roles of women that may affect career advancement. In addition, Frisby’s Model of Women’s Career Development was utilized to further examine personal and family issues, inequity, and discrimination women faced in organizations (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995). Even though cultural and organizational barriers affected the career development of women, these barriers reflected repressive, social structures embedded in organizations that negatively affect the career development of ethnic and minority groups (Gidden, 1984). More studies are needed to further examine the negative impact of repressive structures on ethnic and minority groups’ career development.

Did women respond by using negotiation strategies to overcome barriers faced in the workplace or did women exhibit particular forms of resiliency that allowed them to bounce back and continue working despite hardships faced? Choosing to work in areas of programming versus executive-level management seemed to allow women flexibility needed to better balance work and personal life (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995). This choice lends itself to be considered a negotiation strategy women used to navigate through challenges faced in the workplace. In addition, these women demonstrated resiliency factors such as commitment, optimistic bias, and positive relationships when faced with inequities and discrimination (Polidore et al., 2010). Women reported a high degree of job satisfaction despite having to deal with low salaries, age discrimination, gender discrimination, lack of female mentors, and limited opportunities for upward mobility (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995). Even when facing difficult work situations, women exhibited resiliency by staying committed and remaining positive while facing adverse work environments and valuing the
importance of support from family members, colleagues, and friends. Examining resiliency allows scholars to gain a better understanding of the characteristics women used along their pathway to leadership to navigate through difficult social structures embedded in recreation and sports organizations.

Women in collegiate sports organizations faced similar challenges as women in parks and recreation organizations. In particular, women are severely underrepresented in executive-level administration and coaching positions. In collegiate sports alone, women have been consistently underrepresented in leadership positions as athletic directors at Division I schools (Lapchick, 2014). During the years 2005 and 2006, only 43.4% of women held head coaching positions compared to 90% of women’s sports coaches holding head coaching positions in the 1970s, prior to the enactment of Title IX in 1972 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012). In 2016, the NCAA reported that only 40%, of all women’s collegiate teams were coached by women, and only 20% of women held athletic director positions, representing no increase in the number of women athletic directors since 2005.

Lapchick (2016) stated that when considering the 128 institutions in Division I Football Bowl Subdivisions (FBS), which does not include Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), women of color had not held an athletic director position. It was reported that only seven white females held the position of athletic director at FBS schools, compared to 102 white male athletic directors. With the exception of one white female (Judy MacLeod, Old Dominion University), white men held all FBS commissioner positions. A person of color has never held an FBS commissioner position. However, recent reports indicated that more women were being hired as athletic directors at FBS schools
(Lapchick, 2017). In 2017, women held 8.3% of athletic director positions, with the first African American female (Carla Williams- University of Virginia) and Latina (Desiree Reed-Francois-University of Nevada-Las Vegas) athletic director being hired at FBS schools. In addition, African American women held a small number of positions as Division I basketball coaches, despite the large number of African American women playing college basketball. African American women held 11 percent of Division I women’s basketball coaching positions, while 47 percent of Division I women’s basketball student athletes were African American (Lapchick, 2016). This statistic demonstrates a striking contrast when comparing the number of African American women coaches and players.

The history of this significant disparity dates back to years of discrimination in sport, hiring practices, and the coaching profession in general (Kamphoff, Armentrout, & Driska, 2010). The deficit of women in sport professions could explain gender-related issues for women in sports organizations. First, the dominance of men in leadership positions, especially positions of hiring authority, could contribute to the disparity of women leaders in collegiate sports programs (Lowry & Lovett, 1997; Lyle, 2002). Some men were more comfortable appointing other men like themselves, leading to a culture of homogenous-based hiring practices (Lowry & Lovett, 1997). Second, one study found that women left coaching positions because they lacked control of their careers (Knoppers, 1994). The uncertainty and unpredictability of college athletics, based on winning, recruitment, tournament eligibility, and fundraising, leaves most coaches wondering from year to year how long they will remain in their positions before being forced to resign or face termination.
Balancing the multi-faceted challenges that accompany collegiate coaching reinforced the notion of uncertainty and lack of control in coaching careers.

Other studies pointed to lack of opportunities in coaching, structural barriers, and the perception that men coaches are better than women coaches (Knoppers, 1994). Last, the gender of athletic directors at intercollegiate sports programs also impacted women coaches. The percentage of women head coaches decreased when the gender of the athletic director was male (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Men tended to hire more male than female coaches and women were left on the sidelines, removed from positions previously occupied by a majority of women prior to the enactment of Title IX (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012).

In general, women in both recreation and college athletics faced similar barriers in hiring practices and employment opportunities when seeking to obtain executive- or management-level positions in parks and recreation and college athletics. White women leaders in parks and recreation showed some gains in obtaining executive- or management-level positions, while white women in college athletics showed no increases in obtaining athletic-director positions. A small percentage of white women were able to obtain Division I coaching positions, while African American women represented an even smaller percentage of Division I coaches. The small percentage of African American women leaders in recreation and college athletics raises questions about the role race or gender plays in employment opportunities, specifically related to the challenges African American women face when attempting to obtain executive- and management-level positions.

In the aforementioned studies involving women in collegiate athletics, most were quantitative and only captured statistical demographic data on the race and gender of athletic
directors and coaches and did not capture the individual career pathway to coaching nor identify barriers to progression. Qualitative data could help reveal discriminatory practices faced by leaders and reveal the resiliency of women leaders in the profession. In past studies, the lack of responses from African American women limits the ability of researchers to compare different career experiences of White and African American women in the profession. Such data could further describe discriminatory and negative social practices faced by women and minorities.

**Race and Ethnicity**

Research exploring the role of race and ethnicity in leisure provided perspective related to the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. During the late 1800s when women leaders such as Addams were establishing recreational opportunities for white and immigrant children, black Americans were forced to deal with the aftermath of slavery. During the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), the Freedman’s Bureau was established to help integrate a population of freed slaves into American society (Murphy, 1972). Program priorities of the bureau focused on integrating blacks into politics, education, employment, and leisure. Nevertheless, these intentions were never fulfilled due to the assassination of President Lincoln and no one being appointed as head of the bureau (Colby, 1985). Despite the bureau’s efforts to integrate black Americans into leisure activities, early pioneers in the playground movement conceived that recreation was a means of counteracting the negative implications of poverty, bad housing, and juvenile delinquency for underprivileged white youth, giving little attention to the recreational needs of black youth (Murphy, 1972). Floyd and Mowatt (2014) stated that, “as the field of leisure research was
developing, it failed to take slavery and its consequences into account, and it has also neglected to ponder the quality of life of an enslaved population” (p.55). Following slavery, individual black Americans and black communities were subject to increased lynchings by the Ku Klux Klan (Mowatt, 2012) and unprecedented Jim Crow laws (Woodward, 1974). Also, black Americans faced de facto racial segregation laws following the U.S. Supreme Court decision Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), later overturned by Brown v. Board of Education (Murphy, 1972). During the Jim Crow era black Americans faced entrenched racism and discrimination and were denied access to various recreational facilities and parks such as beaches, swimming pools, amusement parks and centers, baseball stadiums, and public parks and facilities (Murphy, 1972). If African Americans faced racist and discriminatory practices in accessing recreational facilities in the Jim Crow era, one is left to question the extent the underlying value system and social structures that allowed for the harsh treatment of African Americans and minority groups endure to the present. Such value systems were likely embedded into the social structures of leisure service organizations and passed on to generations in the workforce, creating informal systems and social practices that result as barriers and constraints in work environments.

Racist and discriminatory practices were oftentimes manifested through local community leaders such as Robert Moses, a well-known, yet controversial urban planner (Caro, 1974). In the mid-twentieth century, Moses was largely responsible for the development of New York City’s infrastructure, including playgrounds and parks. Although credited with leading ambitious development projects that benefitted New York City, Moses restricted recreational opportunities and access for African Americans and Puerto Ricans. He
allowed racist practices that limited funding for parks in African American communities such as Harlem. Moses used a variety of tactics to restrict minority access to city and regional parks such as keeping the water temperature extremely cool in pools to deter African Americans and Puerto Ricans from intermingling with Whites in public swimming pools (Caro, 1974). Moses served in key roles such as New York City Parks Commissioner, Head of the State Parks Council, and Chairman of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority – all major positions of power with the ability and authority to negatively impact park and playground development and transportation for minority populations in the city. Not only did agency leaders such as Moses seemingly translate these beliefs into the structure and culture of organizations designed to provide recreational opportunities for all people, but also the attitudes and actions of white parents were reflected in deeply embedded social structures of park and recreation agencies. White parents expressed concerns about their children swimming in the same pools as Blacks (Murphy, 1972). Middle-class Whites abandoned public pools and began attending private clubs or pools (Wiltse, 2007). Parks and recreation directors’ views on the issue did not assist with changing this mindset as some directors supported separate use of facilities based on race (Murphy, 1972).

Past attitudes and behaviors of recreation directors determined the organizational culture of public recreation facilities and oftentimes dictated the experiences of black users. In Chicago, in the 1940’s and 1950’s, because Blacks tended to swim together at public schools they were stereotyped. Some white recreation directors felt Blacks congregated together in swimming pools because they were afraid of the water, instead of understanding that some Blacks congregated away from Whites in pools for fear of their own safety.
In addition, Blacks were directed to public beach areas in Chicago that did not offer amenities similar to the areas Whites used. Blacks were welcomed to attend dances held in certain pier areas, but were not welcomed in some dance halls as they were told the bands performing preferred not to see them in the venue (Murphy, 1972). These are just a few examples of embedded social structures within organizations that created challenges for Blacks and remained in organizations over the years.

Further, separate-but-equal laws resulting from Plessy vs. Ferguson (1896) created negative implications for public parks and recreation agencies and black Americans (Murphy, 1972). One of the first attempts at meeting the needs of black people did not occur until World War I and the development of War Camp Community Service Programs, established to provide recreation for black soldiers during wartimes. In 1917, the War department established the War Camp Community Service Program to organize the social and recreational resources of communities and provide recreation services for soldiers residing near northern and southern war camps. Clubhouses, dormitories, canteens, and community centers were established for black soldiers. The War Camp Community Service program marked the first program of the Playground Movement to meet the recreation needs of Blacks. Murphy (1972) stated that,

> It was the first expression of the recreation movement to formally undertake a position as a human service agency, advocating the development and promotion of leisure activities and facilities for the benefit of all the people – black and white Americans. (p. 39)
As the focus of recreation slowly shifted to being necessary for all individuals, instead of just underprivileged youth, local communities began advocating for more recreational programming and leadership (Murphy, 1972). Recognizing that the recreational needs for Blacks were unmet, the Playground and Recreation Association of America hired Ernest T. Atwell, an African American, to direct its field service program aimed at providing recreation opportunities and leadership training for Blacks. Atwell came by way of Tuskegee Institute, having been closely associated with Booker T. Washington. Atwell was able to build and leverage his relationship with Washington to navigate through challenges both men faced and strategically placed himself in a position for hire by the Playground and Recreation Association of America. Atwell was likely altruistically motivated to serve in this role given its significance in providing recreation for black communities across the United States.

Atwell’s first task was to transition the War Camp Community Services programs and activities for black soldiers, referred to as Red Circle Clubs, into more permanent recreation centers (Murphy, 1972). The success of the program increased the need and desire for proper recreation within black communities. The War Community Service and the Bureau of Colored Work joined together to create training programs for Blacks, with Atwell serving as Director of the Bureau of Colored Work from 1920-1945, representing some of the earliest career training programs for Blacks. At the close of World War II several black leaders were trained by the War Community Service program to organize drama and music classes, supervise playgrounds and increase programming for blacks in the community (Murphy, 1972).
The Bureau of Colored Work (1920-1942) was a major contributor to the training of black recreation leaders in cities requesting such services. The Bureau initiated its own training schools since other recreation schools, including those sponsored by Playground and Recreation Association, denied educational opportunities for blacks (Murphy, 1972). Blacks faced barriers in upward mobility if they did not qualify to attend training institutes at local, state or national. The same standard held true for blacks wanting to serve on local boards and commissions that were responsible for establishing policies for recreational programs (Murphy, 1972).

Given these circumstances, early career advancement efforts for African Americans appeared hopeless at best. If African Americans had few chances to obtain basic training and educational opportunities for entry-level positions, it was highly unlikely that they would obtain leadership positions. The lack of employment opportunities, coupled with the lack of training, left African Americans with minimal chances to prepare for any type of career advancement in parks and recreation organizations. Past practices such as these reflected the repressive structures African Americans faced in their attempt to obtain basic training opportunities required for career advancement. African Americans were denied educational and training opportunities due to past practices of professional organizations such as the Playground and Recreation Association, despite the Association’s attempt to make amends for negative practices of years past. The Bureau of Colored Work attempted to provide training for Blacks, but lacked support and funding to sustain its training program (Murphy, 1972). However, local communities were required to obtain financial support that would sustain the Bureau’s training efforts and help defer costs associated with operating
recreational programs. When funding and community support for programming reached insufficient levels, programs established by the Bureau ceased to exist, leaving Blacks with even fewer opportunities to maintain their positions, and fewer advancement opportunities.

The lack of training and educational opportunities represented years of negative practices that resulted in barriers to success for not only black workers, but also black communities that benefitted from skilled and trained workers provided through the Bureau of Colored Work to coordinate recreational activities. The shortfall of trained workers created a systemic problem for black communities. Commenting on the Bureau’s impact on black communities, Murphy (1972) observed that,

Much of the attention of the Bureau was not only directed to white civic leaders but to blacks themselves who had to develop the necessary leadership to stimulate a general social program for their own people. The inferior status stamped on blacks had a marked influence on their behavior in community life. The staff of the Bureau of Colored Work had the responsibility of arousing general public sentiment not only about the lack of facilities necessary to meet the general needs of black people, but what had to be done to meet the needs of a wholesome recreation program. (p. 64)

Even after Atwell’s dedicated and worthwhile efforts with the Bureau, discriminatory practices remained that kept African Americans from advancing in the profession. It would be nearly thirty years later before an official report was published that provided statistics on representation of blacks in parks and recreation jobs. This report and other studies are discussed in the next section.
Upward Mobility of African Americans in Parks and Recreation Organizations

Hawkins and Berhoven (1974) published a report on black workers in public parks and recreation agencies in the U.S. The report included responses from 599 parks and recreation agencies. The report focused on determining the number of full-time and part-time, entry-level and paraprofessional positions held by blacks in the profession. Results of the study revealed that black workers held 13% of full-time positions while 25% of Blacks held part-time positions. Most part-time positions were concentrated in community centers with working titles such as attendants, aides, activity specialists, program leaders, and recreation facility supervisors (Hawkins & Berhoven, 1974). The report was limited in scope as it only provided descriptive information about the positions blacks held in recreation. In addition, the report did not detail the educational backgrounds of Blacks, nor did it reveal educational or training opportunities offered to black workers necessary for career advancement.

Godbey and Henkel (1976) conducted a study on employment trends in public recreation and parks in Michigan. The sample included 3,624 recreation and parks agencies from across the United States, with 1,858 agencies responding. Data were collected to describe the characteristics of full-time employees in the profession (e.g., gender, race, region, occupational title, education, and type agency). The study found that minority groups were well represented in lower-level, supervisory positions and noticeably absent from leadership positions in upper administration. African Americans represented 39% of community center directors, 31% of recreation program leaders and 28% of recreation aide/attendants. However, African Americans were only 1.5% of chief executives and 2% of
recreation superintendents (Godbey & Henkel, 1976). Findings resembled earlier patterns of African American representation in part- and full-time positions (Hawkins & Berhoven, 1974), mainly concentrated at the recreation centers, with numbers still lagging behind in African American representation at executive-level positions.

Godbey and Henkel (1976) also found that African American males outnumbered African American females in the parks and recreation profession at the time and held a larger number of administrative positions. Salary disparities were found between African American men and women, as men were paid more than women. These findings shed light on early disparities in pay for African American women.

McDonald (1981) conducted a similar study and identified factors that may have influenced the occupational mobility (ability to switch positions to find gainful employment) of African Americans in the recreation and parks profession. Study participants (N=39) were recruited from the Ethnic Minority Society of the National Recreation and Park Association. Data were collected on occupational factors and demographic characteristics such as gender, education, and geographic mobility. Her findings revealed a noteworthy relationship between gender and occupational mobility as males outnumbered females by a ratio of two to one, with males holding 67% of administrative positions and females holding 33% of administrative positions. As for education, the majority of respondents held graduate degrees, suggesting a significant relationship between education and occupational mobility. Whereas geographic mobility and occupational mobility appeared to be related, some participants reported downward mobility when they relocated to another state. Explanations of this downward mobility were not discussed in this study, but could have resulted from
participants relocating to lower paying positions in other states, in order to get their “foot in the door” of a more progressive organization. McDonald’s study gathered descriptive data on participants, but did not include measures on barriers or challenges faced by participants. Further details would be needed to describe distinct reasons participants reported downward mobility. Additional detail could provide insight into discriminatory practices related to career advancement.

Waller (1989) examined race and gender in relation to upward mobility of African Americans within parks and recreation in Michigan. Upward mobility describes the ability to rise from a lower to higher occupational position or status within the profession. The study examined gender, number of years of related work experience, level of education, presence of an affirmative action plan, race of the appointing authority, and job satisfaction. No differences were found between occupational mobility and gender, years of related work experience, or levels of education. Because more women were entering the profession, and possibly achieved training and educational levels comparable to men, this may have allowed women to compete with men for available positions (Waller, 1989). Women in this study were well represented in administrative and supervisory positions. It was assumed that years of work experience prepared employees for higher-level positions, but the study found no difference in mobility based on years of work experience. The type of experience, not the years of experience, may determine opportunities for occupational mobility.

Though education was not found to be a contributor to occupational mobility, study participants were well educated with approximately 80% of the sample having completed an undergraduate degree or higher (Waller, 1989). There were no differences found between the
presence of an affirmative action plan, race of the appointing authority, and job satisfaction. Affirmative action programs were most effective for Blacks and other minorities entering organizations, but did not necessarily promote upward mobility once individuals were employed in organizations (Waller, 1989). Although Whites hired 64.5% of respondents, 57.8% of respondents indicated that their race, gender, or both may have contributed to them not obtaining promotions. Despite challenges faced in the workplace, 54.1% of respondents reported that they were satisfied with their jobs (Waller, 1989).

Although Waller’s study reported data on variables that could help explain occupational mobility, it was limited to African American parks and recreation professionals in Michigan, not across the United States. Even though no significant differences were identified between the variables examined in the study and occupational mobility, the study pointed to several variables related to occupational mobility of African Americans occurring outside of the workplace such as economic outlook, community ties, and family support (Waller, 1989).

Based on these studies, African Americans faced a number of challenges obtaining proper training and education dating back to World War I. During this time, discriminatory practices constrained African Americans’ educational and training opportunities necessary for career advancement in parks and recreation. Discrimination seemed to remain in organizations over the years resulting in social practices that negatively impacted the upward mobility of African Americans, resulting in their underrepresentation in upper-level administrative positions (Godbey & Henkel, 1976; Hawkins & Berhoven, 1974). Past studies that examined social and demographic factors such as race, gender, years of experience,
education, and race of appointing authority did not reveal significant findings related to occupational mobility. However, they contributed to the development of this study on the plight of African American women leaders in the profession (Godbey & Henkel, 1976; McDonald 1981; Waller 1989).

To further examine factors that may have an impact on the upward mobility of African Americans, it is necessary to examine more recent studies. Over the last two decades, only three studies have been conducted on the upward mobility experiences of African Americans in the profession. These studies indicate that discrimination and inequity continue to be salient in parks and recreation organizations.

Shinew and Hibbler (2002) conducted a multiphase study that examined perceptions of discrimination and inequity among African Americans in the parks and recreation profession. The first phase of the study included telephone interviews with 11 African American municipal parks and recreation mid-level managers from a mid-western state, of which four were women. The second phase was a focus group held at the state conference, which included African Americans employed in various parks and recreation positions. Questionnaires were later mailed to African Americans working full-time in the field. Results indicated that African Americans perceived discrimination and inequity in their workplaces and underrepresentation in the field, particularly in upper-management levels. African Americans reported they had personally experienced or witnessed discrimination and inequitable treatment in the workplace. Respondents also reported fewer promotional opportunities, that they felt unprepared for upper management positions, and lack of mentors. African Americans in the study felt that the lack of mentor support in their
organizations limited opportunities for personal and professional development, while Whites benefited from having powerful mentors who provided them with such opportunities (Shinew & Hibbler, 2002). Though the study’s sample size was small, findings provided insight into the issues facing African Americans employed in the parks and recreation profession.

Outley and Dean (2007) interviewed 11 African Americans and 26 Whites in upper management of Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in the United States. Their interviews suggested that homosocial reproduction, or the process by which members of the dominant group seek homogeneity in those with whom they surround themselves, created barriers to upward mobility for African Americans. Five themes were identified which represented the sample’s experiences and perceptions about the barriers African Americans face seeking upward mobility. These themes represented examples of barriers African American women likely faced seeking upward mobility. The Ole-Boy Network theme described the association that occurred when key positions were given to individuals who resembled those in power, typically white males. Byrd and Scott (2014) stated that an organization’s social culture is represented through its good ole’ boy network which is a social system within workplaces that allows biases to linger and determines who is accepted or remains an outsider.

The Need to Assimilate theme suggested that everyone should assimilate to the dominant group in order to obtain upward mobility. Kanter’s (1977) homosocial reproduction theory described the barriers African Americans faced when members of the dominant group only seek homogeneity with those whom they associate.
The next two themes of Outley and Dean’s (2007) study reflected discriminatory practices embedded in the social structure of organizations. The Candidate Screening and Profiling for Upper Management Positions theme suggested that decision makers had preconceived ideas about the demographic characteristics candidates should have in order to be successful in certain communities. The Being Pigeonholed theme described how numerous African Americans were placed in positions and expected to serve in certain location, such as the inner city. If African Americans made it beyond the stereotypes and prejudices keeping them from obtaining positions, they were only allowed to serve in inner-city communities, likely at the programmer or community center manager level. Being profiled and placed in inner city communities at lower-level positions, limited the opportunities for African Americans to be exposed to management-level training and experience. Hence, they would never receive the experience or training required to move into upper-management positions. And, if by happenstance an African American gained the necessary training and experience for upper-management positions, but was screened out of the selection process based on demographic characteristics, the likelihood of them ever obtaining executive-level positions was little to none. This cycle of discriminatory practices left African Americans facing an even larger systemic problem deeply rooted in the social structures of organizations from years past.

Outley and Dean’s (2007) study showed that not only did African Americans face barriers working within minority-dominated inner-city communities, but they also faced barriers working in communities that were not comprised of minority populations. The theme of Community Perceptions, described the fear of placing minority workers in majority White
Employers felt that placing minority workers in majority White communities would somehow decrease program participation numbers and memberships.

Worsley and Stone (2011) conducted a qualitative study involving 10 African American practitioners in parks and recreation and discovered six major themes. Study participants held positions as entry- to mid-level managers, not executive-level managers. Some themes described in their study represented social structures, rules, and practices Gidden (1984) believed negatively influenced minority groups. Worsley and Stone (2011) identified themes such as It’s Not Who You Know, but What You Know, Work Environment Needs Overhaul, and Mentors Matter, to show the impact of negative social practices had on the career experiences of study participants. The themes reflected barriers and challenges African Americans in leisure service organizations faced while attempting to progress to upper-management positions. The theme, It’s Not What You Know, but Who You Know, also known as cronyism, occurred when favoritism was shown by superiors to subordinates based on relationships instead of qualifications. This theme reflected a social system similar to the good ole’ boy network shown to constrain the upward mobility of African Americans (Outley & Dean, 2007).

Another theme reported by Worsley and Stone (2011), Work Environment Needs Overhaul, described hostile, negative, and chaotic work environments in which staff displayed negative attitudes and inflated egos. Little communication occurred between African Americans and managers, along with little opportunities for training (Worsley & Stone, 2011). This theme also reflected the social rules and practices found in organizations that constrain the career development of African Americans. If African Americans received
little to no information regarding training or employment opportunities, chances of upward mobility are slim to none (Worsley & Stone, 2011).

Two other themes shared by Worsley and Stone (2011) reflected the resiliency of study participants who despite their challenges, found opportunities to obtain additional education, training, and mentors to assist with career advancement none. The theme, Go Getters, described ambitious individuals who pushed forward to accomplish their goals and sought additional training and educational opportunities, since these qualities were thought to attribute to rapidly progressing careers. Another theme, Mentors Matter, suggested that mentoring was a developmental partnership in which knowledge, skills, information, and perspectives on personal and professional growth were shared. Sosik and Godshalk (2000) reported that the benefits of mentorship include increased self-esteem, job satisfaction, and compensation, along with increased promotions and career commitment. Polidore et al. (2010) supported this belief as the ability to seek out positive role models or mentors was attributed to resilient behavior, which assisted African Americans with career progression.

These studies represented the most recent parks and recreation studies focusing specifically on barriers to upward mobility African Americans face in the parks and recreation profession (Outley & Dean 2007; Worsley & Stone, 2011). Barriers identified were social capital and homosocial reproduction, which created psychosocial barriers such as the lack of mentorships and social networks for African Americans. Other factors identified included institutional barriers such as discrimination and unfair hiring practices (Shinew & Hibbler, 2002).
This study conducted on the career experience of African American women leaders in the parks and recreation profession extended this body of knowledge by providing research on the educational and professional backgrounds of women leaders and factors associated with their progression to leadership. The study also examined the barriers women faced along their pathways and discussed the impact of negative social systems and practices designed to constrain the advancement of African American women in the profession. This study extended the research of former scholars focusing specifically on the upward mobility of African Americans in the parks and recreation profession (McDonald, 1981; Waller, 1989) and perceived barriers to success for African Americans (Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Outley & Dean 2007).

**Intersectionality**

Research focused on the intersectionality of race and gender for African American women and offered perspective on understanding how their experiences were influenced by multiple forms of oppression. The challenges African Americans face obtaining employment in the parks and recreation profession dates back to the early 1900s. The existence of organizational barriers and social practices limited opportunities for African Americans to receive education and training necessary for career advancement. African American women were not exempt from the negative experiences resulting from such discriminatory practices.

The term intersectionality was coined by feminist scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) and describes multiple social identities of minorities, particularly those of African American women, related to systems and structures of oppression or discrimination. These social categories include race, gender, age, class, ability, and sexuality. Each category emphasizes
that forms of oppression such as sexism, racism and classism do not act independently, but
join together to contribute to inequality in society (Collins, 1990; Knudsen, 2006).

In a *Washington Post* article, Crenshaw (2015) stated, that

…racial and gender discrimination overlapped not only in the workplace but in other
arenas of life.... Intersectionality, then, was my attempt to make feminism, anti-racist
activism, and anti-discrimination law do what I thought they should — highlight the
multiple avenues through which racial and gender oppression were experienced so
that the problems would be easier to discuss and understand.

For African American women, intersectionality provided a means of examining the
relationship between social categories of race and gender in the workplace and in society.
Lanehart (2009) shared three ways of conceptualizing intersectionality: structural, political,
and representational. Each area details the social rules and practices that created challenges
for women in the workplace and society.

Structural intersectionality described the intersection of experiences women of color
have with political or social systems. Women of color and white women may experience
similar struggles, yet the struggles appeared different when identity characteristics such as
race, class, immigration, or English-speaking statuses were considered. When these factors
were considered, structural intersectionality occurred as the political and social systems
intended to help women ended up failing them. For example, if a Latina dealing with
domestic violence contacted the police, the system designed to protect her from domestic
violence created more problems for her if she was undocumented. Thus, a social system
designed to assist with domestic abuse, ended up failing her when race, class, immigration, or English-speaking statuses were all considered simultaneously.

Political intersectionality described the two-dimensional struggle women of color faced due to the conflicting political agendas of race and gender. Women of color experienced racism and sexism in ways that differed from the experiences of black men and white women. When political movements worked together towards justice for different groups, such as feminism and antiracism, the interests of racial and ethnic groups may have been overlooked. Political intersectionality was a problem for minority women because the politics of race and gender were usually inadequate in serving their needs.

Representational intersectionality proposed that issues of race and gender were so closely linked for minority women that the two issues sometimes fell somewhere between concerns of race and gender, which resulted in the omission or suppression of these issues for minority women. Representational intersectionality focused on ways in which the representation of race and gender served to devalue women of color in popular culture. This occurred when images of women were taken to be representative of the entire group, distorting the complexity of the group, similar to the negative images of minority women portrayed in movies or rap videos. Even though the images only represent a few women of color, the entire complexity of the group is distorted due to such strong negative imagery.

In general, sociology and the social sciences literature on intersectionality shed light on its role in creating barriers for minority women. Yet, the literature only shared descriptive data about the social categories of intersectionality (e.g., Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Knudsen, 2006). In addition, social categories of race, gender, and class, are studied by
multiple disciplines and are complex in nature, thus making the methodological study of intersectionality more difficult. However, it is important to examine and be aware of the oppressive forces of racism or sexism remaining in organizations and society as a result of these social categories. Such negative forces created barriers for African American women in the parks and recreation profession and constrained career advancement.

**Barriers Women and Ethnic Minority Groups Face in Leisure Service Organizations**

Allison and Schneider (2008) stated that ethnic minorities face a range of barriers when attempting to move upward into management positions. In one study that examined retention strategies for minorities and women, both groups were marginalized in salary raises, promotions, terminations, and layoffs and usually had limited social capital (Tapia & Kvasny, 2004). Regarding social capital, both groups lacked mentors or role models who could provide leadership, guidance, and social connections necessary for upward mobility. In general, the literature suggests that employees with more social capital or networks tended to benefit from more frequent promotions, pay increases, and desired assignments (Coleman, 1986). Limited access to key networks has the potential to leave African Americans unequally represented in senior management positions in parks and recreation organizations. Other researchers have argued that variables such as gender and race of the appointing authority (i.e., homosocial reproduction), relevant work experience, and educational level affect the upward mobility of African American parks and recreation employees (Anderson & Shinew, 2001; Outley & Dean, 2007; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002).

The limited amount of research available in this area of scholarship represents a gap in the literature that can be addressed by giving research attention to the career pathway of
African Americans in parks and recreation organizations. Further research is needed to identify and more fully describe the barriers African Americans face in the parks and recreation profession that ultimately influences career progression. This study can provide data to inform development of strategies to help African American women achieve success in parks and recreation organizations, based on the lived experiences of African Americans women currently serving in leadership positions.

Summary

In summation, the review of literature clearly demonstrates the need for more research in the area of the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. Across all four threads, (a) historical perspective on women in recreation and collegiate sports organizations, (b) race and ethnicity, (c) upward mobility of African Americans in parks and recreation organizations, and (d) intersectionality, there is substantial evidence that African Americans are underrepresented in executive-level positions in parks and recreation organizations. This experience was evident during the late 1800s and continues into the current century. African Americans still face barriers to upward mobility toward executive level positions, even though the literature identified key barriers and strategies that affect career advancement. This study sought to provide a closer examination of the careers of successful African American women leaders in parks and recreation to understand these barriers. Specifically, the study examined the pathway to leadership for African American women in parks and recreation organizations. Three research questions guided my study:
1. What characterizes the pathway to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

2. What are the barriers that affect progression to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

3. What are the negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitate progression to leadership positions among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the pathway to leadership for African American women in parks and recreation organizations. To achieve this purpose, I used qualitative methods to examine the pathways to leadership, barriers affecting their progression to leadership, and negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitated African American women’s progression to leadership positions. This chapter describes the methods used to explore research questions and is organized using the following sections: study rationale, phenomenological inquiry, role of the researcher, sample selection, study recruitment, data collection, interview protocol, data analysis, and trustworthiness and credibility.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Because we need a deeper understanding of the experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation, a qualitative phenomenological approach was most fitting for this study. According to Creswell (2013), there is value in hearing the direct perspective of participants who are actively engaged in the area under study, as the intent of qualitative research is to make sense of the meanings others have about the world. This understanding oftentimes reflects the “interpretive” nature of qualitative research. Hence, this research followed an interpretive/constructivist perspective because the purpose of the research was to understand and describe the experiences of participants (Merriam, 2009).

Qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions and uses varied strategies of inquiry, data collection methods, data analysis, and interpretation in order to study research questions inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or
human problem (Creswell, 2013). During data collection, qualitative researchers use
interviews to gather personal stories and information about the participant’s experience.
Collection of data through interviews allows researchers to understand how people make
sense of their experiences and the world (Hatch, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In
qualitative research, multiple sources of data collection such as observations and artifacts are
preferred over a single source so that researchers can review all data, make sense of it, and
organize it into categories or themes (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002).

For this study, I conducted interviews with 12 African American women leaders in
the parks and recreation profession. Other data collected during this study included field
notes from interviews and resumes of each participant, along with professional and
demographic information forms. I conducted the analysis of multiple data forms to identify
and categorize major themes or categories.

Holloway (1997) identified four characteristics common to all forms of qualitative
research:

• The researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis;
• The focus is on process, interpretation, and meaning;
• The researcher uses thick-description to describe, analyze and interpret; and
• The process is inductive and generates new ideas or concepts, or modifies existing
  ones.

By using qualitative approaches, this study provided a deeper understanding of the career
experiences of African American leaders in parks and recreation. Their experiences should
be heard due to the underrepresentation of African American women leaders in the profession and the unique experiences of these women.

**Phenomenological Inquiry**

The research methodology chosen for this study was phenomenological inquiry. The focus of phenomenological inquiry is what people experience in relation to some phenomenon and how they interpret those experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). A phenomenological study describes the meaning several individuals give to a concept or phenomenon (Patton, 2002). The goal of phenomenological research is to explore the conceptual world of participants and gain an understanding of how they construct meaning in relation to a specific event (Bogdan & Bilken, 1992).

Phenomenology focuses on “exploring the ways human beings make sense of experiences and transform experiences into consciousness-how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, and make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 104). Using this approach, I interviewed 12 African American women leaders in parks and recreation about their lived career experiences. I was able to gain a deeper understanding of their pathways to leadership and the barriers they faced by utilizing phenomenological inquiry.

**Role of the Researcher**

Creswell (2013) discussed the importance of researchers being aware of biases they possess towards research areas, typically because qualitative researchers oftentimes have a deep-rooted interest in their area of study. As I served as the primary research instrument, I brought my personal and professional interests and biases to this study on the career
experiences of African American women in parks and recreation agencies. I am an African American woman leader in a parks and recreation organization, with over 25 years of professional experience. I have worked with many students and served as a mentor to students interested in advancing their careers in the parks and recreation profession. I personally experienced racism, ageism, and sexism. I personally experienced and continuously hear other African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations share stories about their daily struggles of watching inequities and discriminatory practices in the workplace. Nonetheless, I maintained a clear focus and unscripted memory and was able to put aside my personal experiences to remain unbiased, while conducting this study.

Creswell (2014) stated that in the qualitative research process researchers should focus on the meaning participants share about a problem, not the meaning researchers bring the research. Consequently, I am aware of how biases, given my extensive background and working knowledge of the challenges women face along their career pathways, could have influenced my interpretation of the stories shared by study participants. I have controlled these biases by follow-up phone calls to verify accuracy of written responses on data collection forms and verbal responses given during the actual interview. In addition, study participants were sent their transcribed interviews to review for accuracy and thoroughness. Throughout the interview process, there were times I felt myself assuming the meaning of what participants did not communicate, as I am walking this same journey in my career. I had to remain mindful of this and intentional about asking follow-up questions to participants. This process allowed me to obtain and share the meaning participants gave to their
experiences based on their responses and not my assumptions, thus decreasing my personal biases in this study.

As the researcher, I served as the point of contact with participants and the collector of data. All interviews were conducted via telephone since participants were located throughout the United States. My methods were reviewed and approved by my dissertation committee members and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at North Carolina State University. Participants in this study were adults employed in parks and recreation agencies. (See Appendix for IRB application and Appendix F for IRB approval letter). To ensure adherence to the strictest ethical standards, I maintained full compliance with IRB standards.

In my IRB proposal, I emphasized the importance of name anonymity and the benefits of conducting interviews with participants from across the United States to help minimize identifiable information. I maintained anonymity of all participants by using pseudonyms for each participant throughout the study. Once participants expressed their intent to join the study, they received an email (see Appendix C) or phone call explaining the study. The email or phone call contained the following information for each participant: an introduction, purpose of study, study procedures, and forms for signature and completion such as the consent form (Appendix D) and demographic information form (Appendix E). The consent form included details about the data collection process (semi-structured interview process, interview length, method of recording interview, transcription of interview, and review of transcript by participant). Participants also received information about anonymity and confidentiality of the study, and secure storage of study data and documents. I informed participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time. All
participants were required to sign and return the mandatory consent form before the interview took place. I followed all protocols and procedures as instructed in order to minimize potential harm to participants.

**Sample Selection**

Purposeful sampling was used in this study to identify potential study participants. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative researchers use purposeful sampling to select individuals who can purposefully inform and assist with understanding the phenomenon being studied. According to Patton (2002) “the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 169)

The sample size in most qualitative research, is typically small in nature and likely includes few participants, yet extensive detail can be derived for each participant studied (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling also lends itself to making changes amidst the data collection process, adding flexibility such as deciding who or what should be sampled during the study. In addition, the validity, meaningfulness, and insights gathered from qualitative research are focused more so on the rich details and vivid descriptions of the study’s participants (Creswell, 2013). I used purposeful sampling for these reasons.

Specifically, I chose three criteria to establish the first phase of purposeful sampling for study participants. Twelve African American women leaders were selected for interviews in this study based on the following criteria: (a) being African American, (b) Female, (c) having a minimum of five years of work experience in parks and recreation agencies and (d)
currently working in a parks and recreation agency. The second phase of sampling used in this study included the selection of African American women leaders serving as parks and recreation directors, parks and recreation assistant directors, parks and recreation bureau managers, parks and recreation deputy managers, and parks and recreation division managers. Each woman chosen for an interview held executive-level, policy-making positions. Directors serve in executive-level positions of leadership, have oversight management of parks and recreation agencies and lead policy-making. Assistant directors, managers, and deputy managers serve in upper-management positions, normally working alongside directors, oftentimes completing special projects, and managing day-to-day operations and staff. The duties and roles of each position varies depending upon the size of the agency, yet still reflects executive-level decision- and policy-making responsibilities. For example, a deputy manager in an agency serving over 200,000 people may have similar leadership responsibilities (oversight management and policy-making decisions) as a director of an agency serving a population of 50,000 people. Using that same line of thought, directors serving populations under 25,000 may serve in leadership positions and lead policy-making, but may also manage programs, facilities, and day-to-day operations.

As previously mentioned, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality upon completion of the consent form. Participants were located throughout the United States and represented the West, Midwest, South, and Northeast regions. More specific regions were not used to add an additional level of anonymity to this small group of women.
Study Participant Recruitment

Participants currently employed in the field provided the most current account of lived experiences, versus the lived experiences of retirees. African American women with a minimum of five years of experience in the field, serving in leadership or policy-making roles, provided a comprehensive account of their past career experiences. African American women leaders in parks and recreation agencies were chosen as they represented individuals who successfully advanced in parks and recreation organizations.

Creswell (2014) discussed the importance of gaining access to participants in qualitative research. As the researcher, I gained access to study participants through membership and acquaintances in the National Recreation and Park Ethnic Minorities Society (NRPEMS), an organization comprised of minority members of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). The NRPEMS aims to provide a voice through which minority members can address issues or concerns, and provides a network through which members can discuss career goals and aspirations. NRPEMS meets regularly at annual NRPA conferences with some states having local Ethnic Minorities Society chapters.

Study participants were identified from three sources. Membership listings from NRPA and NRPEMS were used as a reference to obtain an initial roster of study participants. In addition, a listing of African American women leaders was generated from various state parks and recreation associations across the country and the National Recreation and Park Association research team. Most importantly, acquaintances with colleagues across the country provided additional contacts for potential study participants. Consequently, I used snowball sampling as a secondary technique in recruiting study participants. Creswell (2013)
stated that after a qualitative study begins, researchers may ask participants to recommend other participants who may have experienced the same phenomenon being studied. This method helped create a listing of more participants to recruit from and allowed study participants to serve as the “gatekeeper” to potential study participants.

My initial intent was to gain access to additional study participants by conducting an educational session at the 2016 National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) Congress, entitled “Our story, our voices: a journey from the workplace to the literature.” The session focused on increasing the awareness of the underrepresentation of African American women leaders in parks and recreation agencies. The session discussed the lack of literature on African American women leaders in the profession, explored barriers to upward mobility African American women have experienced, and discussed strategies to overcome those barriers through presentations on current-day literature and small, interactive group discussions. The session consisted mostly of parks and recreation practitioners in mid-level management positions and students in parks and recreation graduate programs. However, the session did not yield any additional study participants.

Data Collection Procedures

A purposeful sample of 12 African American female leaders in parks and recreation were recruited for this study. First, I sent an email to participants requesting their participation in the study. The email included the purpose of the study and the criteria for participating in the study. If participants agreed to take part in the study, they responded via email or phone message, confirming their intent to participate in the study.
Upon initial contact with the participants, I provided further details to clarify any outstanding questions regarding the interview or research process. Next, participants received the following information via email: Interview Consent Form, Professional and Demographic Information Form and Interview Guide. Participants completed and returned all forms, including their resumes. Upon receipt of these forms, I assigned a code name or pseudonym to each participant to protect their identity and provide confidentiality. Participants were allowed to keep interview guides for reference during the actual interviews.

To encourage participation in this study, I offered a $25 restaurant gift card for each participant completing the study. Once the Interview Consent Form and Professional and Demographic Information Form were returned, interviews were coordinated with study participants. Participants were emailed copies of the interview consent form for their record and contact information for further questions or concerns.

**Document analysis.**

Document analysis was conducted in this study. According to Merriam (1998), “Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (p. 118). I reviewed the professional and demographic information forms of each participant to gain a deeper understanding of their personal life (marital status, number of children), educational background, salary and professional and social organization memberships. The form also requested information on each participant’s agency (budget, number of employees, population). Creswell (2014) stated that document analysis allows researchers to collect and review information related to study participants. Such information helps to triangulate, or examine multiple data sources
simultaneously, to better understand and make connections across the stories participants shared about their pathway to leadership.

Field notes.

Field notes were used to aid researchers in collecting and retaining information from observation sessions (Patton, 2002). I used field notes to reflect on my thoughts during and after interviews. Field notes were very helpful to reflect upon the emotions of participants during the interview. For example, several participants became very emotional when asked an interview question related to what made them successful when others didn’t reach their success level. My notes reflected phrases like “paused about 10 seconds before answering” or “cried and had to gather self before continuing response.” I was able to accurately report these emotions when reviewing field notes.

Interview Process and Protocol.

Semi-structured interviews provided primary insight into the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2013). Semi-structured interviews were most fitting for the study as this type of interview provided opportunities to gather and record the rich and descriptive experiences of participants. Semi-structured interviews allowed the interview to include more probing questions and explore emerging topics or themes. I asked participants questions listed in the interview guide along with any follow-up questions to clarify points and encourage participants to share their stories.

Open-ended questions enable researchers to study complex experiences of this nature. The advantages for respondents were (a) the ability to qualify or explain answers, (b) the
opportunity to express ambivalent or contradictory feelings, and (c) the freedom to answer as they wish, using their own spontaneous language (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Questions were pilot tested with a small group of African American parks and recreation professionals. This process assured that interview questions were aligned with the intended purpose of the study. The interview guide was organized according to five categories related to aspects of Polidore et al.’s (2010) Resiliency Theory themes and Gidden’s (1984) Structuration Theory. The first category of questions focused on general background information and aimed to establish a rapport with participants. According to Lester (1999), establishing a good level of rapport and empathy is critical to gaining an appropriate depth of information. The first category of questions also asked participants to describe resiliency, leadership experiences, and their involvement in parks and recreation growing up (e.g., childhood experiences). The second category of questions focused on participant descriptions of their pathway to leadership and factors that shaped their career experiences. In the third category, participants were asked to share their experiences facing workplace barriers and social practices that created challenges for them. Next, participants were asked to share any negotiation strategies or mechanisms that facilitated their pathway to leadership. Lastly, during closing questions, participants were asked to share their thoughts about the challenges future generations may face and to share the names of other colleagues who may be good candidates for the study.

At the beginning of each interview, I explained the goals of the study. Since the study included participants from across the United States, I used telephone interviews to collect study data. Interviews lasted 60-120 minutes. With the permission of each participant,
interviews were recorded using one mini-digital recorder and one microcassette recorder. Two audio recorders were used to be certain that the data were captured on multiple sources in the event one device did not properly work during data collection. Field notes were taken throughout each interview to capture the dialogue of participants, since interviews were conducted over the telephone.

There are advantages and disadvantages to conducting phone interviews in qualitative research. Telephone interviews require less space, reduce time and cost to conduct data, and allow a larger geographic region to be covered (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Disadvantages of phone interviews include the inability to read facial expressions and body language for confirming clarification or understanding of participant responses. Instead, researchers must listen carefully and pick up on verbal cues such as pauses or hesitation (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). Skype and other video-internet methods allow researchers to see or use visuals and read non-verbal cues. However, these technologies can also present barriers with populations who may feel less comfortable with technology or who do not have access to the technology (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). Thus, phone interviews were judged as the most consistent and accessible mode of data collection with the women in this study.

At the conclusion of each interview, I stopped both audio recorders and used snowball-sampling methods to recruit more study participants. I asked each participant if they knew any other African American women leaders in parks and recreation who should be considered. After the fifth interview, participants began duplicating names that were previously shared with me, confirming the notion that very few African American women hold leadership positions in the parks and recreation profession. At the end of audio
recording, some interview participants shared additional information about the profession and positive affirmation about the need for this type study. This information was recorded in my field notes. After interviews were transcribed, each participant was emailed her interview transcript for review. Follow-up phone calls were made to provide clarity and accuracy of interview responses. Once data had been transcribed and coded, all audio recordings were destroyed.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

As described earlier, I used a phenomenological approach to data analysis. This involved coding and categorizing data to make sense of the essential meanings of the phenomenon under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I read and reviewed each transcript to identify themes that emerged from the stories shared by study participants. I transcribed interviews, reviewed detailed field notes taken throughout each interview, and reviewed information from each resume and professional and demographic information form completed by participants.

A major consideration in using this approach is the large amount of data produced from the interviews and review of documents (Patton, 2002). A common solution to this issue is to ‘code’ or ‘tag’ the transcribed interview data using words or phrases applied to a section(s) of the interview data. For this study, I derived codes from my interview guide and research questions.

To begin the coding process, I developed a codebook to identify categories that were used during the data analysis process. A codebook is a set of codes, definitions and examples that acts as a guide to help analyze interview data (MacQueen, McLellan, Kay, & Milstein,
1998). The codebook helps researchers think about codes or information that you expect to see, such as those developed from the study’s interview guide (deductive coding) and those themes and codes that emerge from a closer reading of the data (inductive coding). For example, I used the phrase “definition of resilience” to tag or code the section of the data where a participant discussed what resiliency meant to them, a topic in the interview guide. I used an open coding process to identify themes that emerged from the raw data or experiences shared by participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

According to Creswell (2014), “sophisticated qualitative studies go beyond description and theme identification, and form complex theme connections” (p. 200). To identify connections across each storyline, I analyzed themes and patterns by reviewing transcribed interviews, field notes, professional and demographic information forms, resumes, and any other information shared by participants. Short paragraphs were written to summarize findings to denote similarities and differences across themes.

I used constant comparative methods throughout data analysis to compare and connect experiences seen throughout the data analysis process. In addition, narrative passages, or shared stories from study participants, were used to share thick, rich details of this research to convey the findings of this analysis. I drew on my personal experiences as an African American woman parks and recreation director to provide understanding of their experiences. As participants shared about their career pathways and challenges or barriers faced along their journey, I reflected upon their experiences and saw how the themes connected because of my research and my professional experiences. Consequently, interpretation and analysis of this qualitative study encompassed multiple forms and included
analysis of transcribed interviews, document analysis, coding, and thematic identification to associate connections across themes, theories, and existing research. Continuing the constant comparison of my data throughout the process enabled me to synthesize the data around the main concepts related to the career pathway of African American women leaders in parks and recreation.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Establishing trustworthiness in any study is an important step for researchers. According to Creswell (2014), trustworthiness and credibility are both used to describe evaluation strategies in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that ensuring credibility is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. The aim of trustworthiness is to support the argument that the study’s findings are worthwhile or “worth paying attention to,” while credibility evaluates whether or not the interpretation of the data is believable or credible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used the following strategies to address trustworthiness and credibility:

- Participant recruitment and selection process;
- Triangulation of the data;
- Member checks;
- Thick and vivid descriptions of the data;
- Background and experience of the investigator; and,
- Auditing Process.

Conducting this study required that I select participants and establish criteria to recruit study participants who could speak to the phenomenon under investigation. This
process allowed for the recruitment of participants who fit the criteria and decreased the possibility of selecting participants that were friends or colleagues. After reaching out to colleagues who were familiar with this population, in addition to pulling potential participants from national state and local parks and recreation association directory listings, 12 participants were initially identified as potential participants for this study. One potential participant was grieving the recent death of family members and unable to participate in the study. Two participants did not meet the criteria and one participant was unable to participate for personal reasons. Thus, eight participants met the criteria and were able to participate in this study.

Snowball sampling produced six more potential participants. However, two participants were retirees and did not meet the sample criteria, leaving 12 potential participants for the study. Of the 12 participants, I had previous knowledge of three. Nonetheless, these participants were asked the same questions as other participants to maintain a consistent interviewing protocol and data collection procedures to minimize researcher bias.

Triangulation of the data, or collecting and reviewing multiple data sources, occurred after conducting individual interviews and analyzing the remaining sources of data (i.e., resumes and professional and demographic information forms). This approach provided a richer, more detailed and credible data set (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I used informants to further analyze the ideas and experiences of study participants. Use of informants proved to be a valuable resource when reviewing the context of data collected during the study.
Once interviews were transcribed, I continuously reviewed each transcript along with field notes. To help make sure I was not transferring my experiences as an African American women leader in the profession, I constantly asked follow-up questions to minimize opportunities to make assumptions about participant responses or thoughts during the interview process. I approached the data with an open mind, knowing that each experience shared would be different than my own.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is one of the most important steps that can be taken to increase the credibility of a study. I conducted member checks by providing a transcript copy of the interview for study participants to review and acknowledge agreement on the accuracy of written transcripts.

I conducted document analysis to gather additional data about demographics, professional, educational, and community-service experiences of each participant. In addition, field notes and self-reflection journal notes were consistently reviewed and used throughout data analysis to capture thoughts, feelings, and revelations. Upon reviewing this data, I was able to draw conclusions and connections about participants.

Detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being studied promoted credibility of the study by conveying the information shared by participants and the context that surrounds them. The thick and vivid descriptions of the career experiences of African American women in this study were examined by identifying themes and patterns that emerged throughout the study. This information provided readers with insight needed to determine if the data appear true and real.
According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the auditing process is one of several verification strategies used to assess the trustworthiness of qualitative studies. The process challenges researchers to document the research process and provides support and validation of steps used to conduct research. To establish trustworthiness of this study, I used an auditing process. A colleague with expertise and credibility reviewed the original research proposal, research questions, methodology, findings and discussion sections of this study. Feedback was provided on significance of the study, research design, theme development, connecting themes with current literature and solidifying recommendations for practice and research.

The colleague serving as auditor viewed the significance of this study as an extension of the limited past research conducted on African Americans and women leaders in parks and recreation. The colleague confirmed that the research design was as a methodical and well thought out process for conducting qualitative research on the career experiences of African American women leaders, adding another level of trustworthiness and credibility.

From the review of stories and quotes shared by women, resiliency was confirmed as the major theme of participants’ career pathway experiences. Other themes reflecting the career pathway experiences, barriers faced, and negotiation strategies to success were also reviewed and deemed accurate and confirmation of the shared experiences of women leaders. A colleague provided feedback on connecting themes with current literature. Because women in this study described spirituality and religion to be an important part of their career pathway, it was suggested that I connect this data with current literature on the role of
spirituality in the workplace and public service as a calling. I have done so by adding literature on these topics.

The credibility of the researcher is especially important in qualitative research, as the researcher is the major instrument of data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). My background and experience as an African American woman leader in the parks and recreation profession deepened my understanding of the experiences shared by participants. Having been in the field for over 25 years and experienced some of the barriers and challenges of study participants allowed me to have a sharper lens through which to view and understand the data.

Summary

This chapter provided the rationale for the study design and described methodologies used in this study. A phenomenological approach was used to further detail the shared experiences of study participants. Purposeful sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit and select study participants. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and demographic and professional information forms. Triangulation, coding, and thematic development were used for data analysis. The next section will review study findings.
CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. Polidore et al.’s (2010) resiliency theory and Gidden’s (1984) structuration theory have been used as a framework to analyze ways in which African American women leaders in parks and recreation have dealt with barriers in their positions and overcome them. Research questions guiding this study were:

1. What characterizes the pathway to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

2. What are the barriers that affect progression to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

3. What are the negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitate progression to leadership positions among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

Study findings were obtained through telephone interviews with 12 African American women leaders in parks and recreation. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were designed to understand the lived experiences of women leaders with the goal of participants elaborating on their pathway to success. This chapter covers the following sections: (a) participant professional and demographic profiles, (b) participant comparative data, (c) participant profiles, (d) resiliency, and (e) emergent themes from findings.

The findings of this study represent a sample of the small number of African American women leaders in parks and recreation currently holding executive-level positions. I have made every effort to keep the identity of each participant anonymous. Thus, each
participant has been given a pseudonym. Identifying information such as agency names, states, cities, and other individuals mentioned during the interviews was not included in this study. The pseudonyms of participants are: Adrina, Angela, Beverly, Clarice, Danielle, Gwen, Miriam, Pamela, Robin, Sharon, Teresa and Zaneta.

As suggested by the literature review, African Americans hold a majority of part- and full-time positions at the community center level. All study participants previously held positions at community centers or managed community centers. Six of twelve participants or 50% started in the parks and recreation profession in a part-time, community center position.

Table 4.1 presents demographic information of participants in this study. Participants completed professional and demographic information forms about themselves and their agency. Data from Tables 4.1-4.4 represent information shared by participants. Of the 12 study participants, three are in the 40-44 age range, one is in the 45-49 age range, three are in the 50-54 age range, three are in the 55-59 age range and two are over the age of 60. On marital status, one-half (6) of participants are married, while three are single and three are divorced. Seven of the twelve participants (58%) have children. Two participants have 4-5 children, six participants have 1-2 children and five participants have no children. Three of the participants without children are single.
Table 4.1 Demographic Profiles of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrina</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarice</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaneta</td>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These African American women leaders represent diverse backgrounds, experiences and degrees. College degrees and academic disciplines vary from recreation to education. Three participants (25%) hold undergraduate degrees in recreation, while the others hold degrees in psychology, social work, urban studies, human growth and development, political science, education, business marketing, communications and education (Table 4.2).
Table 4.2 Educational Profiles of Study Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Undergraduate Degree</th>
<th>Graduate Degree Earned</th>
<th>HBCU or PWI (Undergraduate Years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrina</td>
<td>B.S. Human Growth and Development</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>B.S. Psychology</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>B.S. Business Marketing</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarice</td>
<td>B.S. Communications</td>
<td>Master Business Admin.</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>Some college- 2.5 years</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>B.A. Urban Studies</td>
<td>M.S. Urban Planning</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>B.S. Education</td>
<td>M.S. Parks and Recreation Management</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>B.A. Political Science</td>
<td>Pursuing Master of Public Admin.</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>B.S Recreation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>PWI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>B.A. Social Work</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>B.S. Recreation</td>
<td>M.S. Rec. Administration and Supervision</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaneta</td>
<td>B.S. Education</td>
<td>M.S. Education Administration</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was an even divide among colleges attended by participants. One-half of participants attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and one-half attended Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). Half of the participants hold, or are pursuing, graduate degrees concentrated in parks and recreation management. The women obtained graduate degrees while holding full-time positions.
The African American women in the study led departments in cities ranging in size from 20,337 people to 1.5 million people with budgets over $300 million. The number of employees in each participant’s agency ranged from 13 to 1,300 employees. Information gathered from census data provided additional community demographics of each city. The majority of women, 7 out of 12 participants (58%) served in communities with predominately African American populations. As for the type of community worked, one woman worked in an urban community (8%), two women worked in metro-area communities (17%) and the remaining nine women all worked in suburban communities (75%). Women worked in three regions of the US: 10 women in the South, 1 woman in the West and 1 in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Parks and Recreation Agency Budget</th>
<th>Population of City</th>
<th>Number of Full-time Employees in Agency</th>
<th>Region of U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adrina</td>
<td>$213,000,000</td>
<td>909,535</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>$94,000,000</td>
<td>1,300,000</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly</td>
<td>$4,100,000</td>
<td>51,483</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarice</td>
<td>$161,971,455</td>
<td>608,660</td>
<td>947</td>
<td>West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>$50,255,499</td>
<td>681,170</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwen</td>
<td>$17,500,000</td>
<td>223,170</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miriam</td>
<td>$14,806,701</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela</td>
<td>$10,800,000</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>$300,000,000</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>$6,000,000</td>
<td>87,000</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>$1,667,581</td>
<td>20,337</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zaneta</td>
<td>$94,000,000</td>
<td>446,753</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Midwest. Educational level in communities was an even divide with half serving in communities where more than 50% of the population held bachelor degrees or higher and the other 50% serving in communities where less than 50% of the population hold bachelor degrees. Median income for half of the communities represented by participants ranged from $40,000-$55,000, while half ranged from $56,000-$70,000. The range of median age was 31-37 years old for these communities.

**Comparative Data on Participants**

Table 4.4 reveals the following information regarding the career progression and upward mobility of African American women leaders in this study:

1. Years of professional experience ranged from 20 to 40 years.
2. The number of years worked in the parks and recreation profession ranged from 7 to 35 years. The mean number of years worked in parks and recreation was 22.92 years.
3. The number of positions held by women leaders prior to obtaining an executive level position ranged from 2-8 positions. The mean number of positions held by women leaders prior to obtaining an executive level position was 4.
4. Women leaders who obtained executive level positions after holding only 2 positions in the parks and recreation profession had 12-28 years of prior work experience in other professions (education, military).
5. Half of the women were in their first executive level position. Half were in their second or third executive-level position.
6. Five women (42%) experienced upward mobility, working their way up the career ladder in one agency. Four of these five women worked in a southern US agency.
After moving to another agency, five women (42%) experienced upward mobility after working 8-26 years in the second agency. Two women (17%) experienced upward mobility after working in more than two agencies.

7. Of the top 10 salary rankings, 80% worked in the U.S. south.

8. Four of the women (33%) are members of historically African American sororities comprising the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC). All women hold memberships in state and national recreation and parks professional associations.

9. Over half of the women (58%) working in southern states earned $115,000-$165,000 annually. Two women (16%) working in the West and Midwest earned $95,000-$114,000 annually.
In addition to providing professional and demographic data, women were asked in initial background questions to describe their career pathways to leadership. Participants discussed their background, upward mobility, duties and responsibilities, best experiences, important relationships and their involvement in parks and recreation growing up. These stories are highlighted in the next section.

**Participant Profiles:**

*Participant 1: Adrina.* Adrina grew up playing sports in community centers she currently manages. As a school-aged child through her teen years, Adrina always had a love of sports such as basketball, track and field, and volleyball. Community centers proved to be
safe havens for young people in her community. Today, she continues advocating for the
growth and development of youth through her position in the parks and recreation profession.

Adrina’s love of and dedication to sports afforded her the opportunity to attend
college on a basketball scholarship. During her college years, Adrina continued developing
her love of working with young people and sports activities. She completed an internship in
teaching, but decided that it was not the classroom setting where she wanted to work with
young people – it was recreation. Shortly after completing an internship in parks and
recreation, Adrina began working in recreation as a part-time seasonal employee, until being
hired full-time at a community center. She experienced upward mobility working her way
through the ranks, initially moving from being center director to managing clusters of
community centers. For the last seven years, she has served in a deputy director position
managing a $55 million operating budget for four programming divisions, comprised of over
400 employees in the southern region of the United States. Adrina’s community is
predominately African American with a population estimate of over 900,000 people. She has
worked in the same agency for the past 30 years.

Adrina’s age range is 55-59. She is the mother of an adult child, yet continues her
love of young people because of her passion for youth development and seeks to provide
positive learning experiences and skill-building experiences for them. One of her best
experiences has been working with and developing leadership programs for young people.
She believes that, “young people don’t need as much as we think they do…just give them a
safe space, with minimal structure and they will do the rest.”
Participant 2: Angela. From an early age, Angela felt she was destined to be in parks and recreation and is ever so grateful for the opportunities she has received that have allowed her to grow and succeed in her position. At the early age of 15 years old, Angela’s first interview for a part-time recreation leader position involved a three-part interview session. The first part involved a five-member panel of professionals who asked her a series of questions about working with youth. During the second part of the interview, she received a box of crafts and supplies and had to develop a project demonstrating her creativity. In the final part of the interview, she was placed in a room with children acting unruly and was challenged to figure out ways to entertain and calm them down. She was offered her first part-time position programming for youth and teens in a recreation center.

Although Angela had a background working in parks and recreation as a teenager, she pursued a degree in social work in college and began work as an intervention counselor only to find that she would return to working in parks and recreation years later. After packing up her Durango and her apartment, she moved from the western part of the U.S. to the south. When Angela arrived in the new city, she went directly to the local parks and recreation department to inquire about vacant positions and was later hired. It would be in this agency that she experienced upward mobility moving through the ranks of program coordinator and facility manager to district manager and eventually assistant director. In the assistant director role, she provides executive level management over 40 recreation centers, specialty facilities, and 19 afterschool and summer programs. Angela manages over 400 employees and is responsible for a $19 million operating budget.
Angela’s community is predominately white with a population of approximately 1.3 million people. She has worked in her current agency for the past 20 years and has been in the assistant director role for almost two years. Angela’s age range is 40-44. She is a wife and mother of one teenage son who is also growing up to be a “parks and recreation kid” as he attends programs and events alongside Angela.

Angela recalled that her best experience was when she became an assistant director and realized she could implement positive change in the organization. Angela saw her promotion as an opportunity to fix what she had complained about and worked with staff to develop procedures to improve operations.

*Participant 3: Beverly.* By the age of 25, Beverly became the first part-time director of a parks and recreation agency in her mid-western hometown of about 10,000 people. During summer breaks during her college years, Beverly worked in the agency as a basketball official and as a part of the parks organization team. When she returned from college, the agency was seeking their first director position and hired Beverly to serve in that role. Beverly was able to build the department’s programming with only a part-time coordinator to assist. This experience served as her gateway into the profession.

After serving in this role for about six years and developing professional relationships statewide, she received an opportunity to serve as a parks and forestry superintendent. Understanding that this position was a non-traditional one for women, Beverly recognized this unique opportunity and set out to increase her knowledge of park maintenance and urban forestry for the next five years. This experience leveraged Beverly into a similar position in a larger southern agency where she experienced upward mobility. In this agency, Beverly
experienced upward mobility and moved from park maintenance management to district manager of an area covering over 225,000 people, with a predominantly white population. She later relocated to another southern community to become parks and recreation director in a predominantly African American population of nearly 50,000 people. Beverly currently manages a staff of over 80 full- and part-time positions with a budget of $4.1 million. She is responsible for managing the recreation, athletics, aquatics, park maintenance, senior services, arts program, and special events divisions. In the age range of 50-54, Beverly is the mother of an adult child. Her most memorable experience is being part of a local movement to build a new recreation center in her community amidst controversy. The city had to use school facilities, which presented scheduling issues for the parks and recreation department. Beverly and the city manager were considered the “young and new city leaders,” as both were 25- and 36-years-old (respectively) at the time and in their positions for only a few years. The two began considering the need for a recreation center. Older adults in the city were against the idea of building a new recreation center due to potential tax increases. Beverly and the city manager, along with multiple community youth and family members continued advocating for the new facility. Ultimately, after many long public discussions and debates, community leaders decided to build the new facility. Being a part of that experience was “just like watching a dream from childhood to now, come to fruition…it was like the best world.”

Participant 4: Clarice. Clarice grew up one block away from the local community center where she held her first job as a teenager. She spent numerous hours at the center, which served as a safe haven for community youth, since she was 10 years old. Clarice
worked with summer camp and late-night programming throughout college in this southern community.

After college, she graduated and was hired as an assistant recreation center coordinator. She was the youngest African American woman in the agency to be hired in that position. After five years of working in that role she returned to college and received her master’s degree. She was later promoted to recreation center coordinator, being one of the youngest African American women promoted to that position. After four years of working in that position, she hit a glass ceiling due to unfair hiring practices and transitioned out of the profession. Over the course of the next 13 years in human services, she advanced to an executive-level, division director position, but decided it was not the best fit. One year later, the former parks and recreation agency where Clarice had previously worked recruited her. She accepted a recreation director position and has been in this role for three years. Clarice is responsible for directing the overall planning, program development, operations, and services for the division of over 200 employees. After hitting the glass ceiling with this agency during previous employment, prior to returning she had to make sure “the agency was back to supporting women of color in leadership,” as they had done years prior to her departure. Her community is predominately white with a population of 608,660 people.

Clarice recalled that her best experience occurred when she received the recreation director position and had the support of the majority of staff behind her. Knowing that they “valued my opinion and being at the table was one of the best experiences ever.” Clarice is in the 50-54-year age range and is single with no children. Nonetheless, family is very important to her and she puts them first. “My mom and I spend lots of time together, as my
dad passed last year…those relationships are pretty important to me.” She spends lots of time with her sister and other family members, particularly one nephew. He reminds her that he loves their time together and shared “Auntie, I’m so glad you don’t have any other kids because you can spend all your money and time on us.”

Participant 5: Danielle. Danielle gained first-hand knowledge of the parks and recreation profession through her mother who worked in the profession. When she returned home from Europe after serving in the military, she was looking for employment and recreation sounded like something she could be good at doing. She entered the profession as a recreation specialist and worked through the ranks to achieve an executive level position in the same agency over a 27-year period.

Danielle remembers being young and energetic and wanting to increase programming opportunities for youth and seniors in her community. However, when Danielle did not receive support or appreciation for her efforts, she left the agency. After about six months, she received a phone call from another manager in the agency about a higher-level position available, and she applied. Danielle received the position and experienced upward mobility over the next twenty-plus years moving from recreation specialist to managing clusters of recreation centers to regions of the city as a site manager. She was then promoted to recreation division chief managing 10 regional managers and 280-plus staff, 72 recreation centers, and 340 fields and courts. Danielle has been in this role for six years. Her division is responsible for program implementation, facility management and maintenance, community engagement, human capital planning, fiscal planning, and performance measurements. The city’s population is 681,170 and is predominantly African American.
In addition, Danielle served as a staff sergeant for 27 years in the military reserve, including a nearly one-year active duty assignment in the Iraqi Freedom campaign. She is single, has no children and is in the 55-59-year age range. She considers herself a human growth thinker and spends lots of time thinking and reflecting.

Participant 6: Gwen. Gwen worked in a southern city’s planning department prior to transitioning into parks and recreation. While looking for more exciting adventures, Gwen volunteered to work on a local task force designed to deal with local crime and gang issues, and access to city services. She worked with the city to build a service center in a low-income area that would provide residents with access to health services, social service and bill pay. Gwen really enjoyed working with this community project, local partners and training staff to operate the facility. Shortly thereafter, a recreation program coordinator position became available in parks and recreation and her colleague encouraged her to apply. She was offered the position and worked in the role four years overseeing programming and services for a city region.

Next, Gwen relocated to accept an executive-level position as assistant director in the same state with a similar population, responsible for providing leadership and direction to a management team of planning, park maintenance, urban forestry, administrative services, cemetery management, recreation programs, and special initiatives. She managed nearly 240 staff and $16.6 million operating budget and $5.5 million capital improvement budget. After 10 years in the assistant director position, Gwen later returned to her previous city of employment as a deputy director responsible for providing leadership and direction to a recreation division comprised of recreation centers, athletics, senior programs, cultural arts,
aquatics, and out-of-school time activities. She has been in this role for five years and manages a budget of $6.6 million and staff of nearly 100 people. She is currently serving as assistant director with oversight management of 208 employees. The city’s population is 223,170 and is predominantly African American. Gwen is in the 60-year-plus age range.

Even though Gwen transitioned into parks and recreation, she was no stranger to the profession or play. As a teenager, Gwen remembered wanting a summer job and shared “my first job was working in a community center…. and that work turned out to be fun.” When she was younger and lived in the northeast, the streets and alleys served as places of play for her. She and her friends spent lots of time riding bicycles and running through streets and alleys, while the neighborhood boys played stickball. Streets and alleys were the only available spaces for play in her neighborhood during the time. Later, Gwen recalled going to the community park that was six blocks away from their home and playing on the playground with friends.

Participant 7: Miriam. Miriam, a wife and mother during her undergraduate years of college, has experienced leadership at its best and most challenging periods. She is no stranger to adversity. Miriam started working in parks and recreation when she was 15 years old in youth, senior, and therapeutic summer camp programs. By age 18, she had transitioned to aquatics and was an assistant waterfront director, after having worked a few summers as a lifeguard. Miriam continued working part-time in the profession until a year after graduating from college. Because she had a scholarship and was paying her own way through college, she had to pursue a different degree program since a degree in parks and recreation was not offered at the university she was attending. Miriam had her first son and was married by her
senior year of college. She pursued a social work degree and upon completion, found out that she was pregnant with her second son and actually delivered him on her graduation date.

After graduation, Miriam began working as a school psychologist only to find that she was really bored with the position. She sought another social work position that ended after she went on a drug raid with her agency. Miriam had to go back into the home to identify the children left after the drug raid was over. To her surprise, someone jumped out of the closet after the police inspected and cleared the home. Miriam and the children made it out safely, but she knew that would be her last day in social work.

Miriam sought out other employment and was hired as a community services coordinator for youth programs, building on her high school and college years of experience previously spent in an African American southern community within a large city (over 800,000 people). After working as a community services coordinator and center coordinator, she returned to city parks and recreation as a community center supervisor and experienced upward mobility to become a division leader of recreation services over the next eight years. Miriam is the first African American female appointed to this position in her agency. She currently manages over 200 recreation and school sites, 50 full-time and 600-800 part-time employees, and a budget of $6,779,213. Miriam is also an adjunct instructor for a university located in the southern US. She has taught sports and government, urban recreation and facility and event management. She is in the 50-54-year age range, mother of four children who has been married for 27 years.

Miriam’s best experience was being assigned a completely new programming area in which she was unfamiliar. She was able to work with staff and learn this new programming
area from them. This was her first time entering a leadership position in which she knew nothing about. “I really had to garner support, and convince them that I was a good person to lead and then develop a team out of that.”

Participant 8: Pamela. Pamela grew up playing in parks that she was responsible for managing. Pamela’s father introduced her to recreation. He regularly took Pamela and her friends to the local park. She learned to ice skate in the park, and play softball and basketball. She had early exposure to getting out to play and going to parks. She always enjoyed parks from childhood through adulthood.

Pamela has been a public servant for 28 years. Her work in local government began in the clerk’s office. She then moved to the role of human resources manager where she provided human resources or personnel assistance to the parks and recreation department. She worked with department directors and managers on parks and recreation related personnel issues and began learning more about parks and recreation. From her role in human resources, she was able to learn about staffing and management from a parks and recreation perspective. Department managers embraced her and once a position became available she applied. Pamela was the only female of nine candidates to apply, and was selected to operate one of the largest urban parks in the U.S. She was also the youngest person on staff supervising a number of veteran employees. With the support of a manager who wanted to promote and support more women in management, she accepted the opportunity and began her transition to the profession of parks and recreation. Pamela worked in the park manager role for six years before being promoted to recreation manager and later parks and recreation director. She managed a staff with over 200 full- and part-time
people and a $17 million budget. Pamela worked for this mid-western community for over 16 years in parks and recreation, serving as director for eight years.

Now in her second directorship, Pamela manages over 5,000 acres of parkland. She is responsible for maintenance, capital improvement, strategic plan development, environmental education, programming, and special events. Pamela is in the 45-49-year age range, married, and does not have children.

Pamela’s best memory of working in the profession is surviving four different administrations during her time of public service. Pamela points to mentoring as the reason she was able to get through some difficult times as “people continued pouring into me and growing that affinity and love for the field.” Pamela’s first directorship occurred in a mid-western, predominately African American community with a population of 670,000. Her second directorship was in the same state, but in a county of over 1.5 million people, predominantly African American.

*Participant 9: Robin.* Robin believes she didn’t choose recreation, “it chose me.” While in college, Robin realized that engineering was not the profession for her, so she changed her major to elementary education. She taught for four years and left to become a regional director of a private company providing educational resources to high school students.

Years later, Robin had a friend, appointed to a leadership position in recreation, who asked if she was interested in being an associate director of parks and recreation. Robin previously worked as a women’s program coordinator and felt this would be a good transition into the profession. She became one of the youngest to hold the associate director
position. She recalled facing many challenges in this position and not wanting to hear people say, “I told you she didn’t know anything…she’s a young whippersnapper,” so Robin threw herself into parks and recreation. Fifteen years later, she has successfully progressed to her fourth executive-level position as deputy director of her agency. Robin previously worked in southern cities as deputy director (three times) and division chief. Three of the four communities were predominantly African American. Robin currently serves in a predominantly African American community of 900,000 people. She is responsible for five divisions ranging from public affairs and marketing to health and wellness made up of over 500 employees. Robin manages a budget of about $150 million. She is in the 40-44-year age range, single, and has no children.

Robin grew up participating in parks and recreation basketball leagues and taking classes at recreation centers to explore her interests. Her best experience in parks and recreation has been advocating for the resources necessary to provide youth with opportunities to explore their interests through parks and recreation activities and programs.

*Participant 10: Sharon.* Sharon has been fortunate enough to work in the southern community she grew up in which has a population of 87,000 people and is predominantly white. Sharon sees the playground she spent countless hours in from her mother’s yard. “Being the director and now taking care of that same playground really has a special meaning for me.” Sharon also played basketball in one of the recreation centers and community parks she manages now. These experiences played an integral role in her growth and development.

Sharon began working in parks and recreation as a part-time recreation leader during college. She attended college nearby, majoring in social work. During her junior year in
college, Sharon was hired as a seasonal part-timer and spent the next few years learning the business of parks and recreation from a great group of professionals, so she decided to make parks and recreation a career.

Sharon experienced upward mobility as she remained in this agency for 20-plus years. She received promotions as recreation supervisor, recreation superintendent, assistant director, and director. As Director, Sharon is responsible for overseeing more than 40 parks and recreation facilities that include recreation centers, playgrounds, and athletic fields. She also oversees cemeteries. Sharon manages an operating budget of over $6 million and a capital improvement budget of $12 million.

Sharon describes her best experience as “being able to accomplish goals of the capital improvement budget, despite the nay-sayers.” When faced with funding challenges, she was able to reallocate budget items to open the city’s first stand-alone recreation facility in an African American community. Once that occurred, Sharon felt that she could do anything. This was a proud and historic moment for Sharon and her community. Sharon is in the 40-44-year age range, wife, and mother of three children.

Participant 11: Teresa. Teresa grew up as an Air Force brat traveling the world when she was younger, until her father retired. She participated in afterschool programs and sports such as track and field, cheerleading, and gymnastics. Upon graduating early from high school, she was unsure of her next steps, initially thinking she would be an attorney and work in corporate America. After realizing that she did not want to be in a professional environment that was “stuffy and in suits every day,” Teresa began considering other professions. About that time, she recognized that the parks and recreation industry was
starting to blossom, and she wanted to work in a profession where she could “just get out and enjoy participating with seniors and children, but yet, work in an administrative capacity also.” Teresa set out to follow this dream and enrolled in college to major in recreation administration. After completing her Bachelor of Science degree in recreation, she decided to continue her education and pursued a Master of Science in Recreation Administration and Supervision. When Teresa graduated, she began teaching recreation, leisure studies, and physical education courses at a southern university. She also coached the cheerleading squad and dance group with band. Teresa found that she really enjoyed teaching and coaching. She also enjoyed research and published articles on recreation and physical activity. After five years of teaching, she began noticing that several universities were merging parks and recreation programs with other academic departments or eliminating them altogether. Teresa began looking for available positions at the local parks and recreation department and was hired as a program manager responsible for managing park districts with over 150 employees and 60 recreational centers and parks.

After working as program manager, she accepted a recreation superintendent position in the same state and relocated to continue her professional development and upward mobility. Once Teresa had her son, she accepted a director position that placed Teresa and her husband closer to family. She has been in this position for 14 years. The southern community population Teresa currently works in is predominantly white with a population of 20,337 people. She manages about 100 full- and part-time staff, 11 recreation facilities and a nearly $2 million budget. Teresa is in the 55-59-year age range.
Her best experience was working in a hostile work environment that would eventually turn out to be one where she felt most respected. When she was in the program manager role, she managed all men who were not accustomed to working with a woman leader. She was young and did not have as many years of experience as these men. “Being a 32-year-old black woman, responsible for managing over 20-plus black men who were in their 40s and 50s was difficult. Learning ways to get things done and commanding respect, while still giving respect was challenging.” In addition, the facility she worked in had gang activity and youth carrying guns such that staff had to wear panic buttons on their belt buckles because they may not have been able to get to a phone to call the police. Teresa learned quickly to be flexible and respectful, while the staff found a new level of respect for her work ethic, ability to complete tasks, and maintain high levels of respect from all levels.

**Participant 12: Zaneta.** Zaneta has been in the parks and recreation profession for nearly 30 years. After spending about eight years of active duty in the military, she joined a parks and recreation department located in the southern part of the US as an assistant director of administration and finance. She was responsible for managing many of the administrative functions such as finance, personnel, payroll, privatized golf and tennis, and beverage concessions operations. While Zaneta worked in this position, she was also a part-time weekend warrior, serving as a military reservist. Zaneta received a promotion to assistant director of regional operations in the same agency and was responsible for swimming pools, park maintenance, recreation center operations, and afterschool programming, along with other programs and activities. Currently, Zaneta works in a park district managing 180-plus parks, zoo, fitness centers, 230 athletic fields, three skating parks, five tennis centers, and six
golf courses amongst other facilities servicing 470-plus square miles. She reports to a nine-member board of commissioners of a predominantly African American community of over 446,000 people.

Zaneta experienced upward mobility in both the military and parks and recreation. She remained as a military reservist for 19 years until she retired. During her time as a reservist, she recalled her best experience was being promoted to a high-ranking military position, making Zaneta the only African American woman to hold this position in her state. This promotion “was the most validating experience” for her. “It really propelled me in a way that I don’t think anything else could have. It was the reaction of the other people that made it really significant.” Her promotion came in September 2011, around the time September 11th terror attacks happened. As a result, she had to run deployments around the US and in other countries and was the leader over command post operations during the response. After this experience, she felt she could achieve anything. Zaneta is in the 60-64-year age range and has two adult sons.

**Emergent Themes**

This section provides descriptions of themes that emerged from participant narratives. These stories describe several themes that emerged and are related to each research question for this study. The following section presents themes that emerged about the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation.

Table 4.5 is a summary of themes that emerged from semi-structured interviews and professional and demographic forms of participants.
**Table 4.5 Research Questions and Emergent Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What characterizes the pathway to leadership among African American women in</td>
<td>• Be Resilient and Bounce Back</td>
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<tr>
<td>park and recreation organizations?</td>
<td>• It’s a Faith Walk</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• A Positive Attitude is Everything</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Positive Relationships Matter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• It’s About the Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What are the barriers that affect progression to leadership among African</td>
<td>• Race and Gender Still a Problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>American women in parks and recreation organizations?</td>
<td>• Negative Perceptions of AA Women</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Workplace Needs a Facelift</td>
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<td>• Intense Hiring Processes</td>
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<td>3. What are the negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitate progression</td>
<td>• Early Introduction to the Profession</td>
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<td>to leadership positions among African American women in parks and recreation</td>
<td>• Prepare, Prepare, Prepare</td>
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<tr>
<td>organizations?</td>
<td>• Strategic Thinking Required</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Patience is Key</td>
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**Research Question 1: What characterizes the pathway to leadership among**

**African American women in park and recreation organizations?**

To address this question, several themes emerged from participants’ stories related to their pathway to leadership. Several participants discussed the role of resiliency throughout their careers, along with the importance of religion and spirituality. Participants also felt that positive attitudes, outlooks and relationships helped them along their career pathways.

The following themes emerged from participants’ narratives to describe their pathway to leadership: (a) Be resilient and bounce back, (b) It’s a faith walk, (c) A positive attitude is
everything, (d) Positive relationships matter, and (e) It’s about the community. Table 4.6 shows how African American women leaders described resilience.

Table 4.6 African American Women Leaders Resilience Descriptors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Be Resilient and Bounce Back</th>
<th>It’s a Faith Walk</th>
<th>A Positive Attitude is Everything</th>
<th>Positive Relationships Matter</th>
<th>It’s All About the Community</th>
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</table>

**Be Resilient and Bounce Back.**

The majority of participants defined resiliency as the ability to bounce back from adversity or difficult situations. Others defined resiliency as dealing with whatever comes your way, tackling obstacles, coping with issues or troubles and staying the course. Some of the characteristics participants used to describe resilient leaders were being thick-skinned, tenacious, ability to collaborate, true to one’s self, and having a strong character.
For some women, building resiliency required one to be strategic, flexible, and build strong character. More specifically, participants shared how they demonstrated resiliency along their journey to leadership positions.

Danielle approached resiliency through a strategic lens. She stated:

Being resilient over the years has meant taking a look at whatever the concerns are, or whatever is being presented, and having the wherewithal to strategically take a look at it piece by piece to determine what it actually is, and then make adjustments.

Teresa addressed resiliency from a continuously changing environment in which she had to exercise flexibility. She shared:

Resiliency means that when things change, one has to be flexible and able to weather the storm. One has to figure things out while trying to get ahead of it…and being proactive and not reactive and getting a clear sense of judgment. Also, knowing when to stay still, knowing when to move…just trying to kind of get a sense of knowing what's most appropriate when faced with challenging circumstances.

Zaneta focused on character building that occurred when reflecting on the role resiliency played in her career. She stated:

When I was thinking about resiliency, I remembered something I heard one time. It was referred to as organized suffering. Organized suffering because, when you think about it, when we tackle obstacles and we find the hidden reserves we have down inside of us, you don't even think you have. You find things out about yourself, that you are able to handle all kinds of stress and pressure and bounce back. It is really about being an overcomer in the face of all odds and opposition and rising to new
heights… At the end of the day, it moves you higher. It makes you stronger. It helps you to face greater challenges. Because I really do believe that as you hit one situation head on, if you get through it without getting killed in the process, it strengthens you, gives you muscles to move to the next level.

Pamela described resiliency strategies and decision-making skills used throughout her career. She shared:

I think that it’s about being able to roll with the punches. Picking your battles.

Knowing, do you want to win the battle or the war? Which one is better for you? You have to make those key decisions. Also, retooling yourself and trying to get the lesson out of whatever difficult or uncomfortable situation that you may have experienced to see how you can become better personally and professionally.

*It’s a Faith Walk.*

All of the women described the importance of religion or spirituality in their personal and professional lives. Women used religion and spirituality as the foundation and guiding source of getting through difficult times, both personally and professionally. Prayer was used most often to get through difficult situations. Some used it as a source of energy or renewal sharing that pushed them through difficult times. Below are some of the quotes women shared about the significance of religion and spirituality in their lives:

- It’s not just for work…That's every day. I don't know if I can survive without that.
- My hope is in how I treat people, how the decisions are made really shows people that I'm a child of God.
- I think it's the foundation of everything that I do.
• Yeah, my faith is what sustains me.

• Oh, my goodness. Let me tell you something, it is my guiding force. I look forward to going to church to replenish, to rejuvenate for the next week… If it were not for the Lord, I don't know where I would be…

• Spirituality and religion and things of that nature are very important to me because I always say, "It's not my way. It's God's way. It's not my will. It's God's will."

• I really do believe this is my ministry. This is not just my job, this is my ministry, what I do.

• Oh, my goodness… It plays a big role.

• I pray every day, every step. I think it's extremely important for me because it's what keeps me balanced.

Women shared their beliefs about controlling events and autonomy. Participants held a strong sense of independent decision-making, self-awareness and self-accountability throughout their careers. Women demonstrated self-accountability and the ability to function independently by their choices and decisions. Participants understood that ultimately, they did not control anything in the larger universe, but their response and reaction to different situations faced along their career pathways. Women believed in a power higher than themselves. They believed that everything happened for a reason and ultimately all things worked together in the end. Sharon summed up her thoughts on control and autonomy, similar to those of most women leaders:
I believe that God gives us free will, so we do have decisions that he allows us to make... I don’t believe that things just happen. I believe you can make them happen. I believe that we have the ability to do whatever we put our minds to... what’s meant for me is going to be for me. Along this journey, there were times that I did not get the promotion. There were times that I did not get recognized for the work that I did, but I always believed that if I continued to just push forward, that it will all work out.

Women reported being able to demonstrate self-control by checking their emotions and finding alternative solutions. Women worked hard not to be labeled as “too emotional” by taking the emotions out of conversations and decision-making. Facial expressions seemed to be a challenge for some if they were naturally animated and had no “poker face.” When faced with challenges, most women did not give up. They became creative and found alternative solutions to problems by being strategic, collaborative, weighing the options of their decisions, and understanding the politics of their communities. Women used positive self-talk and relied on their religion or spirituality to get through personal and professional challenges.

*A Positive Attitude is Everything.*

All of the women were optimistic and shared their positive outlook on life. Most women recognized that change was inevitable and were open to it. Some were nervous about change but recognized that it had to occur. Others were thankful to be in their current situations. More specifically, participants stated the following:
Sharon.
It’s inevitable. Get over it. It’s an ever-changing field, it’s an ever-changing world.
Life is ever-changing. Things happen.

Miriam.
If we're going to continue to provide leader services and recreation activities, we have to pay attention to how the people that we're serving have changed and their needs have changed. It's necessary, and we have to learn how to adapt to it and recognize it.

All participants had a positive outlook on life and were optimistic about their future. Danielle shared: My outlook on life is, you're only going to get out of it what you put into it… I think life is amazing. It's amazing, it's interesting, it's complex, it's a whole lot, but if you walk through it with your eyes wide open, and your heart open, the benefits are so endless, they really are.

Gwen.
I really have a positive outlook on life. I'm really blessed. I'm a cancer survivor…Because of that, I have to have a positive outlook on life…He [God] brought me this far. He brought me through it. I'm cancer free, so I'm blessed. I'm telling you, I don't have anything to be sad about. If I do, I check myself and say, “Oh, wait a minute. There are people out there doing worse than you.”
Robin.

I love life. I love the things that we do, I love the opportunities that I've been afforded. Parks and recreation is a wonderful profession and occupation to go into because it means so much. I mean what other occupation could you have where you are tired of being in the office and you can go out and kayak on the river…You could go into a parks and rec building and see little kids playing basketball, watch them paint or see them in a cooking class or see them asking questions or take them on a hike or experiencing plants and wildlife or go to a senior class…There's so many things that you can do in parks and recreation that it's amazing, so I think parks and recreation has taken over my life but it's a welcome takeover.

*Positive Relationships Matter.*

Role models played an important part in the lives of these women. Each woman had a family member, friend, or colleague serving as a role model. Role models were women and men of different races; thus, gender and race did not create a hardship in this instance. The contributions of role models in the lives of women leaders were priceless to these women. Role models provided women leaders with encouragement, someone to talk to and vent about problems, and an example to follow. Other women leaders felt their role models gave them great advice, helped mold their character, helped shape their careers, set high standards for them, coached them through the politics of the job and provided a global perspective on parks and recreation. Over half of the women shared stories of family members, friends and mentors who encouraged them to consider working in parks and recreation and pursue executive-level positions.
Both Gwen and Danielle shared that their best experiences grew out of relationships with positive leaders in their agency. For Gwen, one of the things she really enjoyed was working with a particular city manager she felt was a hard worker. “I think she was tough on women. Everybody managing was male [except for her]. When we worked with her, we worked hard. We worked late and weekends and things of that nature, but that was one of my best experiences.”

Danielle had a similar experience with a former supervisor who provided a great example of leadership and encouraged her to pursue more opportunities that would prepare her for upward mobility.

I would say, working with the prior leadership [in my agency] was an opportunity. We had a new director that came in. He walked in the door and did an assessment. He was such a strategic thinker. He chose his leadership team and I happened to be one of those chosen. To learn from him was…it was amazing to watch him…it was as if he was playing a chess game. When I say that, he was managing and massaging the complexity of the agency, while doing the same with the politics, but also moving through NRPA to get us to accreditation, and that's a heck of a task…to have the ability and authority to make decisions without being second-guessed was because he felt that I was going to do what's best for the agency and for the profession. For him to walk in and learn the profession…was even more important, and [when he said] you need to jump on this boat, as well…and you need to learn...because my learned experiences were from the industry…it was just learned, just on the cuff. He made me realize that you need to do more than that. You need to read the research. You need to
understand what it is. You really need to know those things, which I eventually began to do. I think that's the best part, for me. That's the best.

In addition to leading busy professional lives, participants also lived very full personal lives. The majority were involved with their church. All women participated in activities with family, close friends, and spouses. The majority of participants had hobbies or personal activities they committed to regularly including fitness groups, travel, and golf. Five participants were members of predominantly African American sororities and participated in local chapter activities. Such wealth of activities provided women leaders with outlets to help balance their lives and rid themselves of stress associated with their positions.

**It's all About Community.**

Participants recalled memories of their best experiences during their career progression. Half of the participants reflected on their ability to change and improve their communities through local projects and advocating for youth development and programs.

Sharon is currently the parks and recreation director of the city in which she grew up and shared her best experience that involved a project no one thought she would be able to complete.

“The best experience would be, being able to accomplish the capital improvements that we’ve done in our department despite the budget, despite the naysayers. I’ll give you an example. We have a recreation center here, and it was my first capital project. It was an empty, old African-American high school. It was part of the Rosenwald schools that had been closed for 40 years, boarded up, nothing happening to it.
I remember finally working with the Boys and Girls Club, and they said they were
going to come in and give us a million dollars. It didn’t happen. [The funding] fell through…” I was then told, we don’t need to move forward with the project…and being able to go through my entire capital budget, cut some things, moved some things…and opened the city’s first stand-alone recreation facility in an African-American community, and the only one that we had, was definitely one of my biggest accomplishments. I felt, when that occurred, I could do anything.”

Beverly had a similar experience working on a project in the community in which she grew up. Against the odds of building a much-needed facility for her community, she was able to work with city leaders to successfully build the facility. She stated,

Being a part of something that was just like a dream from childhood to like now come to fruition was like the best world. I would have worked there the rest of my days, that's all I wanted. I couldn't even see any further than me having a Recreation Center, us having a Recreation Center in our community. I was going to live there for 30 years and just retire. That was the goal.

Two participants, Adrina and Robin, felt that advocating for youth development programs was their best experience contributing to improving communities. Adrina shared,

Youth development has been one of my passions ... [youth development] is my passion in working with parks and recreation. Back in 2008, we created this program for youth… It's a late night supervised program for teens 12 to 19 years of age that's offered during the time that school is out for the summer. So, we've partnered with the local municipalities and the police department to actually get them on board to be
a part of [the program] … I was working with one of our councilmen sharing info about the crime rate, these young people don't have anything to do during the summer months and he was right, and I said, you know what, we could probably do something, and we could just try this late night. At the time, we were met with some resistance because there was a curfew in place, 10:00 p.m., and we wanted this program to go to … they actually wanted it to go to 1:00 a.m. but were successful to getting it to occur as late as midnight… So, this has been a very popular program that has reached national recognition.

Another influential factor that shaped the career pathway of women leaders was the profession of parks and recreation itself. Four participants were attracted to the profession based on what it offered them- family-like work experiences, personal health and wellness opportunities, and a range of programs and activities to enjoy coordinating and attending in their communities.

**Research Question 2: What are the barriers that affect progression to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?**

**Barriers Women Faced Along Their Pathway to Leadership.**

The following themes emerged around barriers women faced along their pathway to leadership: (a) Race and gender still a problem, (b) Negative perceptions of African American women, (c) Workplace needs a facelift and (d) Hiring processes are intense. Table 4.7 presents barriers women faced along their pathway to leadership. Women faced racial, gender and work environment barriers on their pathway to success and some continue to deal with these barriers in their current positions. Eight of twelve women spoke about challenges
with race. Nine of twelve women felt that negative perceptions of African American women presented barriers for them. All of the women faced negative experiences in the workplace related to race, gender or the negative perceptions of African American women.
Table 4.7 Barriers African American Women Leaders Faced Along Their Pathway to Leadership Positions in Parks and Recreation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Negative Perceptions of African American Women</th>
<th>Workplace Needs a Facelift</th>
<th>Intense Hiring Process</th>
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**Race and Gender Still a Problem.**

Though race and gender were described as problems in the workplace for women, they are displayed as separate categories in Table 4.7 to represent the experiences shared by study participants. Robin, Teresa, and Zaneta experienced situations in which race and gender created barriers for them in the workplace.

Robin shared her thoughts on race and gender when she reflected on the role it plays in normal meetings and her experiences across the profession:

Being an African American expert is a barrier and/or being a spokesperson for all African American people is a barrier...so a lot of times when I'm the only African
American female or the only African American at the table I share another viewpoint…that can sometimes be a barrier because then people look at you as an expert on all things black and don't look at you as a parks and recreation expert.

Sharon agreed and stated:

I feel like sometimes I’m speaking for all black women, when I’m constantly in these meetings and I’m the only one.

In her assessment of the role of race across the profession, Robin stated:

I think race is more of a barrier than age, because when I'm looking around the country I would see directors who are well 25, 30, 33 [years old] but they're not African American or they're not Latino. They're typically Caucasian men or women, so I think that race is more of a barrier than age. Very rarely will you see someone who is African American and young being a director, very rarely, and if they are nine times out of ten their boss is an African American.

Zaneta has worked in different locations across the US south and shared her view on the role of race and gender over the course of her career including her current position:

It's really interesting to see how men operate with women in the south… I don't know how it happens [where you work], but over here they don't take too kindly to women telling them what to do… As a woman in the military, I had to learn how to lead a whole lot of men. One thing I learned about men … working with my sons is that they need respect as much as the air they breathe.

Teresa described barriers she faced working in a male-dominant group she previously supervised:
The fact that we're black, the fact that we're female, the fact that I'm a short black female and back in the day, a petite black female, those stereotypes that come along with that, “She can't do that job…she was only given that job because she was cute,” … they've been challenging.

Miriam described a stereotype she regularly encounters when attending meetings with male colleagues that create barriers for her:

I think the biggest barrier I have is that I'm one of the only ones [African American women leader] so when I walk into a room, if I walk in with one of my [white male] employees, sometimes people initially turn to that male employee that I walk in with [and they think he’s the director]…the fact that we are African-American and we're women, it is a disservice to us all the time because most of the people I'm meeting with are white males. That's who they want to deal with. It has gotten better over the years, but I think that's the biggest challenge…just who we are. It's not necessarily our education level or anything like that.

**Negative Perceptions of African American Women.**

Women shared that negative perceptions of African American women posed barriers for them. Women described negative perceptions of the angry black woman, communication styles, natural hair and work attire.

*Angry black woman.*

Sharon described her concern over the negative perception women leaders dealt with attempting to dismantle beliefs about the angry black women. She stated:
I try not to be the angry black woman. I’m always nervous about, if I say it this way, how will they look at it? … I hate when a man says it, I hate it, especially when a white man says it, “Calm down, it’s okay.” … I talk with my hands. I’m excited about what I’m doing, … I’m not angry … I don’t need you to tell me to calm down.

Clarice shared that during meetings she has to be conscious of her communication style: “When you are very straight-forward and direct and use neutral language, folks still think you're an aggressive, angry black woman.”

*Natural Hair and Work Attire.*

Sharon and Clarice both felt that their natural hair and style of dress created barriers for them. Clarice shared:

> It's how you look and how you dress and how you show up. My hair is natural ... if I decide to wear corn rolls, there's going to be a different thought about who I am. ... I'm really intentional if I'm going down to city council, I will still wear my hair in an afro. But I may not have khakis on and high healed tennis shoes that day. You know there's another look that I wear there…

Sharon agreed and shared:

> Another barrier that I face is that I have [natural hair] locks so I am unapologetically black. I do not sugar-coat it in any way, shape or form ... It’s always the stereotype of … if you don’t dress this way, if you don’t speak this way, if you don’t wear your hair this way, you can’t be a professional.
Workplace Needs a Facelift.

All of the women identify some type of workplace experience that presented barriers for them based on race or gender. Women shared their dissatisfaction with always having to prove oneself, frequently being questioned about their qualifications and dealing with upper-level administration.

Three participants shared their frustrations with always having to prove their knowledge and skill levels to other colleagues: Pamela stated: “Understanding the level of expertise and the experience, it’s always a challenge. I think that's probably stereotypical that you probably don’t know as much… because you're African American. Just the bias.” Gwen shared:

I think some of the barriers have been that people make up their minds, when they need to, whether you know something, or you don't know something. Specifically, those departments or areas where it's predominantly white males, like utilities…public works…like planning. I think people in those areas don't think you know a lot.

Executive-level management also presented barriers for women. Some women shared frustrations with having to work with administration who sometimes appeared to lack the history and knowledge about their agency’s purpose and needs. Some women shared their frustrations with upper administrators who were seemingly disconnected from their agency and did not understand the economic benefit of having viable parks, recreation, and open space in their communities.
Intense Hiring Processes.

Women leaders shared about intense hiring processes faced along their career pathway. The hiring process for these women to obtain executive-level positions involved a series of interview panels with various committees or boards, interview panels, assessment centers, or direct appointments. Panels consisted of a diverse mix of people. Seven participants went through a series of interview panels with different committees or boards. One participant was hired through an assessment center. Four participants were appointed by hiring managers or boards. Some participants endured strenuous and lengthy hiring processes.

Beverly described her daylong hiring process:

You know what? It was a unique experience. I never had an experience like this. I made it to be one of the two finalists. The other finalist was an internal individual. So, for the two finalists, they gave us a whole day of events that began with an interview and a Meet-and-Greet with the Council and the advising board members, so they were able to speak with you. I had lunch with the entire Parks and Recreation Department. They were able to ask me questions during their lunch. And so, I got a chance to kind of know who the staff was, what they were looking for, what were their priorities, what they thought about, and what they wanted to see. And then after, having time with staff, I think we did the tour in the afternoon. They told me more about the agency and then later, we ended up going to dinner with the City Manager at his house! Not only was it the City Manager’s house, his wife cooked, and it was just so homegrown. Someone from the Board was there as a face from the City Council and I
had dinner with them. I started at 8 o'clock that morning. I didn't stop until 9:00 that night!

Beverly had never been through a full-day interview process, but saw this as a positive experience and opportunity for her to interview the city while they were interviewing her.

Teresa’s hiring process involved an assessment center, which is a process in which participants go through a series of activities to measure one’s skills and ability to perform a certain job. She stated:

I applied for the position and was selected to participate in an assessment center type interview. Somehow, they did some kind of matrix system and five to seven of us were selected and we came down for a two-day process… There were three to four tiers of the interview process… We had lunch with the other executive part of the team and we also met with the department staff. I was able to go by and meet the department staff… We also interviewed with the chairpersons of about five volunteer groups. So, I probably had four to five interviews during that two-day process…

Then, we had that final interview…and the [final] decision was made.

Zaneta described a very political and intense hiring process. She shared:

It was very intense. It involved a great deal of scrutiny and vetting. I’m not sure why it was so extreme. I didn’t know if that’s the way they select senior executives to that position or if they did it because of me. They hired a consulting firm to perform the search… A gentleman that I met in a class told me, “You know what? You should apply for that job.” He said, “You would be an awesome director…” I said, “I never thought about leaving where I worked for many years to do anything.” … I thought,
“Well, I’ll go ahead and check this out.” I threw my name in the hat. They flew me in for two different interviews. There were about 40 people in the room for both interviews. They had the media, the board of commissioners, key, and top staff members. My predecessor was also in the room. They did a private interview with me later. It was with three committee members… That would have been the third interview. It was a very intensive process… Several members of the local media were also in the room. They interviewed me as well… To be able to compete, I had to have every square filled in order to get to the table… They went into a four-hour deliberations process… They wanted to make sure they had a unanimous decision when they walked out, and they did.

Clarice faced challenges in her recruitment and selection process. She stated her frustrations with the early part of her hiring process:

I had worked there [in the parks and recreation department] previously nine years and applied for the job. Two people recommended by the hiring manager were people of color… we didn't even get screened in through the city’s hiring process. He had to contact them up and say, “Okay city personnel. I know one person definitely qualified because she came from the department. How did she not get screened in?” I don't know what he did on his end but then I got an interview. The interview was with the hiring manager, a strategic staff member and a city council person. The first panel was made of eight people. It was a two-hour interview. The second interview was with select people from the mayor's office, city council and some park staff. It came
down to me and another candidate. We made verbal presentations, then I was selected.

Despite this setback, Clarice had an African American hiring manager work through obstacles associated with her hiring process. In most instances, African American leaders are not able to work through such obstacles due to low representation in executive-level positions. The absence of African Americans in leadership position possibly limits opportunities to address inequities faced by women leaders such as Clarice.

Women discussed the importance of gathering background information on potential topics that may come up for discussion in meetings, anticipating questions that may be asked during meetings, and being prepared and armed with information to respond. Some shared that understanding community needs and the political environment helped them better manage this barrier.

**Research Question 3: What are the negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitate progression to leadership positions among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?**

**Strategies to Overcome Barriers.**

The third research question sought to identify the negotiation strategies or mechanisms African American women leaders used to overcome barriers. The following themes emerged from participant narratives to describe strategies and mechanisms that facilitated their progression to leadership: (a) Early introduction to the profession, (b) Prepare, prepare, prepare, (c) Strategic thinking required, and (d) Patience is key. Table 4.8
displays themes and sub-themes that emerged from the shared stories of women leaders and extend the themes were common across all the women.

Table 4.8 Negotiation Strategies and Mechanisms Facilitating Progression to Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Early Introduction to the Profession</th>
<th>Prepare, prepare, prepare</th>
<th>Strategic Thinking Required</th>
<th>Patience is Key</th>
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<td>Zaneta</td>
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*Early Introduction to the Profession.*

As mentioned earlier, the women in the study were introduced to the profession at early ages. Most either worked part-time in parks and recreation as a teenager, serving as camp counselors, lifeguards, or recreation leaders. These positions were entry-level, part-time positions participants held in high school or college. In addition, most participants were introduced to the profession through local facilities hosting sports and recreational activities, or just the simple neighborhood park or playground. These experiences provided women
with an early introduction to the profession, leaving lasting memories and positive experiences for most.

*Prepare, prepare, prepare.*

Education was important to all women as nearly half held graduate degrees. Two subthemes were evident related to education and growth through the fire. Women felt that formal educational training, along with professional certifications and trainings helped them along their career pathways. Women felt that education was necessary for advancement and that it helped them understand the profession of parks and recreation in general. Education provided exposure to new ideas and moved them out of their comfort zones. Women also shared that learning was a lifetime commitment.

*Growth Through the Fire.*

Six participants shared stories about the outcomes of very challenging circumstances, being some of their best experiences. Going through these situations was very difficult for women, yet they came “out of the fire” with more expertise, confidence and respect from their colleagues. Clarice and Teresa shared stories about receiving the support and respect of staff while working through very difficult challenges in the workplace. Clarice stated:

The best experience that I've had was getting this job and then having the support of the majority of staff behind me. It has been a great experience. Being able to be present in the lives of staff both professionally and personally and knowing that they value my opinion and being at the table is one of the best experiences ever.
Teresa shared a similar experience managing a team of men, with more years of experience and knowledge than she had, and later gaining their respect. Teresa was driven to grow quickly in her career progression. She stated:

I learned early on and quickly how to be flexible, how to be respectful, how to be sensitive and definitely how to be flexible in terms of what may work today may not work tomorrow. But I learned that I was able to do all of those things and it was a good feeling… There was a little sabotaging going on, trying to cause havoc, but after that year and a half of going into a very hostile environment, and then coming out of it with the respect of these men meant a lot to me. That was probably in my mind, one of my greatest achievements.

Miriam also reflected on her best experience gaining the support of staff during a transition period in her career progression. She was given a program area to manage that she knew little about, yet still managed to work with staff and be successful. She shared:

I think the best experience I've had in my career as a leader, has been when I received the nature centers. I have a group of professionals who were really good, and I have to say that I think my naturalist and park rangers are the best. But supervising someone who you have little to no experience in what they're doing is humbling, so it was my best experience because I learned the most from it and I was able to develop relationships. I remember my first meeting with them, and we were like halfway through the staff meeting and then one of them finally said, do you have any experience in nature? And they knew the answer. So that was the best experience for me, because it was the first time that I was entering into a leadership position which I
didn't know anything about the people I was leading. So, I had to really garner support, and convince them that I was a good person to lead them and then develop a team out of that. So, we were able to successfully do that.

This experience stretched Miriam and forced her to learn new areas outside of her comfort zone of learning.

Zaneta gathered the support of her military peers over a 27-year period to become the first African American female promoted to the rank of colonel in a branch of the US military. She stated:

It was probably the most validating experience I have ever had. It really propelled me in a way that I don't think anything else could have. When I walk into a store or at the mall people look at me and say... a colonel?... It was the reaction of the other people that made it real significant. I mean, when I would walk into a room, if I had my military uniform on, people would stop talking and look at me.

This promotion was a historical and proud moment for Zaneta.

**Strategic Thinking Required.**

Women shared that strategic thinking was required for them to be successful in their positions. Women felt that understanding the importance of communication and community dynamics was critical. They also felt that making fair and equitable decisions was the right thing to do, given some of the inequities faced along their career pathway. When faced with barriers, women used communication to identify problems or concerns, discuss alternatives and develop solutions. Women also understood the importance of choosing their battles, but most importantly referenced understanding that “losing a battle” does not mean that they
“lost the war.” Women recognized there would be small defeats along the way, but as long as they won the more important ones, they were able to deal with the small losses along the way.

Five women discussed the importance of communication by talking through issues or concerns and listening to others. Women stated the following about the important role open communication played in their ability to move beyond barriers. Gwen stated: “One of the skills that I've really learned, and it took a while, is listening when people talk to you.”

Miriam added:

So, I have learned to actually let the people tell me what they want…then listen to everyone that they have to say and then figure out if what they're looking for will fit into what I'm looking for, and how I can make it sound like it's a partnership.

Pamela shared:

I think that's how I've kind of put some strategies in place to either remedy some barriers and see what the impact of having that barrier does... If we are able to remove the barrier or reduce the size of the barrier…I think that just takes information, open communication, and strategically looking at things to make sure…that the overall strategic goals are the same as what you're trying to meet for them.

Zaneta believed:

My mom would always say, “There's always 101 ways of doing everything…Your way is not always the right way or the best way, so you need to use the resources around you to help you get the mission done.” That's been sort of a strategy that I use,
to try to be quiet. Silence, many times I tell people, is golden. Sometimes if you just hush, you'll see a positive outcome.

Some women noted that understanding community dynamics helped develop their strategic thinking skills. Developing skills such as identifying community stakeholders and their interest and understanding community politics helped move them past barriers. Some women felt that being fair and equitable in decision-making was a huge success factor throughout their career pathway.

*Patience is Key.*

Based on the number of years women worked in the parks and recreation profession, patience is key in working through barriers faced along their career pathways. Data from demographic forms revealed that on average, women leaders in this study worked in the profession for 23 years. Women had 20 to 40 years of professional experience in professions outside of parks and recreation. As for upward mobility of African American women leaders in parks and recreation, most held two to eight positions prior to obtaining an executive-level position. Three women reported working in the same organization over 20 years before obtaining an executive-level position. The remaining nine women relocated to increase opportunities for upward mobility, which normally occurred in their second or third agency of professional employment in parks and recreation.

**Chapter Summary**

As passages from participants’ narratives indicate, the career pathway of African American women leaders in parks and recreation has been both challenging and rewarding. Despite facing barriers, women leaders were able to move beyond them and achieve
executive-level positions. The lives and experiences of these women have been described according to emergent themes that evolved during semi-structured interviews. The chapter began with results from the participants’ professional and demographic information forms and individual profiles of each woman leader. Next, the second phase of the chapter provided thick rich details of emergent themes that developed through interviews.

Various themes described the career pathway to leadership for African American women parks and recreation leaders, such as be resilient and bounce back, it's a faith walk, a positive attitude is everything, positive relationships matter, and it’s about the community. Emergent themes used to describe the barriers women faced along their career pathway were race and gender still a problem, negative perceptions of African American women, workplace needs a facelift, and hiring practices are intense. Themes around negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitated women’s progression to leadership were an early introduction to the profession, prepare, prepare, prepare, strategic thinking is required, and patience is key.

The next chapter will address the following: summary of findings, discussion and further interpretation of findings, conceptual framework discussion, contributions of this study, researcher reflections and conclusions, study limitations, and implications of the research.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the pathway to leadership for African American women in parks and recreation organizations. To achieve this purpose, I used a phenomenological approach to examine the pathways to leadership, barriers affecting their progression to leadership, and negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitated African American women’s progression to leadership positions.

Polidore et al.’s (2010) conceptual framework of resilience was used to describe and understand ways African American women have been able to obtain and maintain executive-level leadership positions despite facing hardships. Eight themes of resiliency used were the importance of religion, beliefs about controlling events, outlook on life, autonomy, commitments, positive relationships, view on change, and the importance of education. Each theme was used to examine the processes by which these leaders described resiliency, personal development, and adaptation, during their progression to leadership positions.

Gidden’s structuration theory was also used to understand the informal systems that create barriers for women and strategies women used to overcome them. Examining these processes provided a better understanding of the individual skills and personal development necessary for adaptation when faced with challenges along career pathways.

The following research questions guided my study:

1. What characterizes the pathway to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

2. What are the barriers that affect progression to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?
3. What are the negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitate progression to leadership positions among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

This chapter begins with a summary of my findings from Chapter 4 based on each of the research questions. Second, the chapter provides a discussion of the results related to the conceptual framework that guided this study. I highlight the key themes and sub-themes and discuss how they relate to existing research. Finally, the chapter concludes with discussion of the methodology, limitations of the study, contributions of the study, implications for practice and educators, and recommendations for future research.

**Summary of Findings**

Twelve African American women leaders in parks and recreation from across the US participated in this study. Three participants were under the age of 50, four participants between 50-54 years old, and five were between the ages of 55-60-plus. Half of the participants were married and over half had children. Others were single or divorced. Findings about marriage and children demonstrated a shift in the research about social roles creating barriers for some women leaders. Henderson et al. (1990) argued that some women may have self-segregated by having to choose between careers and the social roles women played at home, such as spouse and parent. Women leaders in this study were able to maintain marriages and families while holding executive-level positions.

Eleven women held undergraduate degrees and half of the women earned or were working towards graduate degrees while working full-time positions. In addition, all were members of state and national professional associations stressing the importance of
continuous education for women leaders. Previous research stressed the lack of educational and training opportunities as barriers for women in parks and recreation (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995; Henderson et al., 2013; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Worsley & Stone, 2011). Women leaders expressed the importance of continuous education and training as factors that helped them along their pathway.

As for years of professional experience, participants worked in the parks and recreation profession an average of 22.92 years. Women held an average of four positions prior to obtaining an executive-level position. These African American women led cities ranging in population from 20,337 to 1.5 million. The majority worked in suburban or metro areas, which were predominately African American communities in the southern US. Others worked in predominantly white communities and urban communities in the South, Midwest, and West. Half of the women were in their first executive-level leadership position, while the other half were in their second or third executive-level leadership position. Of the highest paid women in this study, 80% worked in the U.S. south.

Given the history of racism and discrimination in the U.S., barriers still existed for these women. Yet, they were able to work through barriers and obtain leadership positions. Dating back to the late 1880s following slavery, when the field of leisure was developing, African Americans living in the south faced racism and discrimination resulting from Jim Crow laws (Mowatt, 2012; Woodard, 1974). The lack of training and educational opportunities reflects years of racist or discriminatory practices that limited the number of employment opportunities available to African Americans in parks and recreation during the early- to mid-1900s (Murphy, 1972).
According to Hawkins and Berhoven (1914), in 1974, 25% of African Americans working in the field held part-time positions in community centers with 13% holding full-time positions. Most of the women in this study were introduced to parks and recreation working part-time in high school or college, yet were able to rise to executive-level positions in various communities, particularly predominately African American communities located in the U.S. south. This finding is consistent with Gramman and Allison’s (1999) observation that women and minorities tend to be more represented in labor markets with high numbers of minority populations. Moreover, in large cities and urban centers with more diverse populations, the public tends to be more accepting of diversity in the workforce.

During semi-structured interviews participants described their career pathway experiences, barriers faced, negotiation strategies, and mechanisms used for leadership progression. Polidore et al.’s (2010) conceptual framework on resiliency and Gidden’s (1984) structuration theory on social structures were used to explore the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. An analysis of data revealed several emergent themes for each research question as shown in Table 5.1.
Table 5.1 Research Questions, Themes and Conceptual Framework Factors

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<th>Conceptual Framework Factors</th>
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<td>• Resiliency and it's 8 Sub-themes</td>
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<td>park and recreation organizations?</td>
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<td>• Religion &amp; Spirituality</td>
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<td>• A Positive Attitude is Everything</td>
<td>• Outlook on Life, Autonomy, View on Change</td>
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<td>• It's About the Community</td>
<td>• Influential factors, View of Change</td>
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Research Question 1: What characterizes the pathway to leadership among African American women in park and recreation organizations?

Within the existing literature, the career experiences of African Americans in parks and recreation have received little attention (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1990, 1995; Outley & Dean, 2007; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Waller, 1989; Worsley & Stone, 2011). This is the first study conducted on the career experiences of African American women leaders in the profession. The study sought to understand the career pathway of women leaders and initiated a new body of research that explores pathways to leadership for African American women.

Polidore’s et al. (2010) eight sub-themes of resiliency used to explore the pathway to leadership for African American women in parks and recreation were importance of religion, beliefs about controlling events, outlook on life, autonomy, commitment, view on change, positive relationships, and importance of education.
Based on the findings from this study, five themes emerged from participants’ narratives to describe their pathway to leadership: (a) Be resilient and bounce back, (b) It’s a faith walk, (c) A positive attitude is everything, (d) Positive relationships matter, and (e) It’s about the community. Each of the five emergent themes will highlight some of Polidore et al.’s (2010) resiliency sub-themes to understand the role resiliency played throughout the careers of women leaders.

**Be resilient and bounce back.**

Women leaders approached resiliency through different lenses, yet were able to develop useful strategies and skills to build resiliency as they moved up in parks and recreation organizations. Resiliency allowed participants to bounce back despite the challenges faced. As women leaders reflected on their pathway to leadership, they shared the meaning of resiliency for them. The majority of women defined resiliency as the ability to bounce back from adverse situations, tackling obstacles and being able to handle whatever comes your way. Existing literature defined resiliency as the ability to bounce back from difficult challenges and the ability to develop coping strategies and positive responses despite adverse situations (Luthar et al., 2000; Brodkin & Coleman, 1996). Women indicated that resiliency was used as a strategic lens through which to approach and view problems. Resiliency was also seen as character-building skills that helped them withstand difficult situations and demonstrated the significance of being strategic and flexible. The literature supported claims that resiliency provides an explanation of how people adapt to external processes such as their environment, social customs, or behaviors (Brodkin & Coleman, 1996). Resiliency was viewed as a development process occurring over time. Women
discussed difference in their responses to challenges over the years. In their earlier years, women felt they responded quickly and sometimes with emotions. Over the years, women learned to respond to challenges with facts and data to support their stance. Thought processes utilized by women leaders were also more methodical and strategically aligned with their goals, as they developed personally and professionally over time.

**It’s a Faith Walk.**

Women believed religion and spirituality were important factors that helped them be resilient. Spirituality relates to religious and nonreligious activities, which involves believing in a power higher than oneself and having a faith that positively affirms one’s life (Musgrave, Allen & Allen, 2002). Religion and spirituality were used as guiding forces to help deal with challenges. Women leaders held positive attitudes and outlooks on life due to their solid foundation based in religion. Women leaders also shared that their jobs were personally seen as a calling to serve the larger community, some specifically sharing about the need to advocate for the less fortunate be it youth or older adult populations.

According to Giger, Appel, Davidhizar, and Davis (2008), the Black church plays an important role in the lives of African Americans dating back to slavery, and continues to be a pillar representing the strength of African American communities. The church provides spiritual renewal and empowerment which provides women healing and meaning when going through difficult tests and trials (Musgrave et al., 2002). Most women grew up attending and participating in church regularly and continue this tradition today.

Though religion and spirituality played a significant role in the lives of all women leaders, the literature on the role of spirituality in public service is minimal. According to
Houston and Cartwright (2007), the fields of business management, social work, and health care have demonstrated the relevance of spirituality in the workplace. Nonetheless, the field of public administration and leisure studies has not yet conducted substantial amounts of research in this area. Houston and Cartwright (2007) suggest the concept of public service as a calling to describe the beliefs and views public service employees have concerning their positions and view on spirituality. Their work is based on the importance of “the common good, service to others and social equity” (p.90). They serve to contribute to the betterment of society instead of serving for personal self-gain. Women leaders echoed the “call to public service” and recognized their purpose was to advocate for the betterment of communities through their roles. The notion of being called to public service revealed characteristics women held in this study such as humbleness, empathy, patience, and giving. Women felt that these characteristics, which were rooted in religion and spirituality, assisted with their career progression.

**A Positive Attitude is Everything.**

All of the women expressed the importance of having a positive view on life and the provision of parks and recreation services. Along their career pathway, they realized that they could not control different situations in the work place, but that they could find something positive to learn from each experience. When dealing with challenging situations, most women relied on their faith or religion to stay positive. The ability to do this evolved over the course of their career progression.

During periods of transitions or change, women still maintained a positive outlook. Women realized that change was inevitable and their response to the change was much more
important than the change itself. Women leaders felt that change was a part of life, growth, and development. They understood that developing a way to positively receive the change helped progress their career development. Sharing that oftentimes they were the only African American woman among others during meetings forced them to be aware of their responses as some felt they were seen as representative of all African American women. Thus, taking the high road or pushing back from the table when they became irritated or disagreed with a decision became skills women used to continue staying positive. Women also recognized the mentality of “losing battles, but winning the war” as a means of maintaining a positive outlook despite facing hardships.

**Positive Relationships Matter.**

Women maintained positive outlooks through meaningful relationships with family, friends, and mentors. The support from these relationships provided an outlet for women to have someone to discuss challenges with and bounce ideas off or just enjoy being themselves, outside of their leadership roles. Previous leisure research supported the notion that mentoring relationships and support matter for African Americans in the parks and recreation profession (Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Worsley & Stone, 2011). Shinew and Hibbler (2002) found that African Americans felt mentoring was needed to better prepare them for upper management positions. In their study, almost 60% reported they did not have mentors. Of those that had mentors, most were older African American men. Worsley and Stone (2011) found that African Americans in parks and recreation believed that mentoring relationships were very important for enhancing personal skills, professional development, and providing positive role models.
For these women, the ability to build and leverage key relationships with mentors and role models was instrumental in navigating around the impact of discrimination and racism during their career progression. Relationships represented social capital resources which enabled women to navigate through personal and professional challenges. Due to key relationships, women were able to establish their identities, learn about workplace culture and politics, obtain personal and professional advice and garner support to help navigate their career progression.

Social capital theory is described as a framework for understanding social structures and networks and the process by which these structures facilitate social change (Glover, 2007; Putman, 1993; 2000). Over the past few years, social capital has become a term used to describe those personal networks or associations individuals possess that can be used to leverage relationships for personal and professional gain (Parks-Yancy, 2006). Given its focus on social structures, networks, and the process by which these structures facilitate change, social capital can help explain the career development of African Americans (Glover, 2004). Since Whites tend to have larger networks, women leaders recognized this value and had a mixture of mentors, both black and white, male and female colleagues and friends. Women noted the challenge with finding other African American women mentors in executive-level parks and recreation positions, but noted that the advantages of having a good mentor and network of professionals outweighed whether mentors were African American or White.

As for the value of personal relationships to women leaders, social capital provided the opportunity for them to have time away from work as women reflected upon their time
spent with families and friends. Women discussed the importance of time with family and friends as a time to relax and rejuvenate from the rigors of their work. This was an important example of the importance of social capital for job satisfaction. As noted by Sosik and Godshalk (2000), the benefit of social groups for these women included increased self-esteem, job satisfaction, promotions, and career commitment.

**It’s all About Community.**

Women leaders expressed the importance of improving their communities through service. Half of the women shared proud feelings of being able to positively change a community through their leadership position. They saw work as more than a job, but more so a calling. Women shared that these experiences increased their confidence levels, allowed them to advocate for youth and other minority groups, and dedicated themselves to the greater good of the community.

The four themes of “Be resilient and bounce back”, “It’s a faith walk”, “A positive attitude is everything” and “It’s all about community,” reveal the importance of religion, spirituality, positive attitudes, family, friends, support, and community to African American women leaders during their careers. There is a dearth of research on the role these factors play in the career development of parks and recreation professionals. Nevertheless, the fields of psychology and counseling provided some insight on the experiences African American women faced throughout their career journey. African American women leaders in parks and recreation saw religion, spirituality, and social support as means of coping with challenges faced during their careers. Findings on the importance of spirituality, religion, and positive relationships matter reflect literature describing the significance of spirituality religion as
coping mechanisms for African American women (Broman, 1996; Christian, Al-Mateern, Webb, & Donatelli, 2000). Social support described the importance of personal and professional relationships, or mentoring as a means of helping African American women cope with difficulties in the workplace (Neighbors, 1997; Taylor, Hardison, & Chatters, 1996). According to Plummer and Slane (1996) African Americans were found to seek sources of strength and support from family and friends more so than Whites. African Americans in the U.S. tend to be more involved with religious activities than their White counterparts (Taylor et al., 2003).

The idea of community has been found to impact career development of African Americans in parks and recreation. According to Cheatham (1990), the cultural traditions shaped by slavery such as maintaining harmony, cooperation versus competition and community versus individual survival, impact the career development of African Americans. Survival of the community was viewed as more important than individual survival or success. The value of community in the lives of women in this study brings to mind the theory of collectivist orientation in which the betterment or good of society is placed over the individual (Hofstede, 1980). These ideals are similar to the expressions of African American women leaders who felt the job as their calling and need to be an advocate and voice for African Americans in their communities were more important roles than personal or professional gains.

A Gallop poll (2012) of American religiosity showed evidence of the role of the black church in the lives of African Americans. The poll found that African Americans recognized and shared their beliefs about religion more than any other racial or ethnic group. African
American women were found to be more religious than men. A longitudinal study by Flannelly, Galek, Kytle, and Silton (2010) investigated religious affiliation and strength of faith for Americans and found that older black women, living in the southern US identified as having a strong faith walk and regularly attending church. Houston and Cartwright (2007) argued that spirituality was a characteristic of public service employees that “entices people who are inclined to address a need to fulfill a higher purpose, to meet their own needs through service to others, and to grow as individuals through the process” (p.99). Such studies and consistent with themes reflecting the lived experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation who shared that religion, spirituality, and social support sustained them through difficult situations given the themes of “It’s a faith walk” and “Positive relationships matter.” The black church has served as a positive source of strength and foundation for women, thus supporting the theme of “A positive attitude is everything.” The black church has also served as the source of community for African Americans over the years. It has an extensive history of furthering community involvement of educational, social, career and health initiatives (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). For some, growing up in a black church naturally provided a sense of giving and serving communities for the greater good, by the basic philosophical foundations and principles of most black churches. Acts of service may have influenced many women leaders to pursue parks and recreation beyond just a career and considered their role as a calling to help improve conditions in their communities. Though an old cliché, faith, family, and friends, all played a role in sustaining this group of African American women leaders.
Research Question 2: What are the barriers that affect profession to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

Some leisure research has been conducted on workplace barriers African Americans face in parks and recreation (Godbey & Henkel, 1976; Henkel & Verhoven, 1974; McDonald, 1981; Murphy, 1972; Outley & Dean, 2007; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Waller, 1989; Worsley & Stone, 2011). However, barriers specific to African American women’s experiences in the profession were not captured in the literature.

It is noteworthy that this study used the term barrier rather than constraints. The term constraint is used in parks, recreation and leisure literature to describe attributes that inhibit the formation of leisure preferences and participation (e.g., Casper, Bocarro, Kanters, & Floyd, 2011; Godbey, Crawford, & Shen, 2010). Prior to the 1980s, barriers was a commonly used term to describe factors that prevent participation in leisure activities (Schneider, 2016). Because the study focused on upward mobility in organizations, rather than individual behavior, the term barrier was used in the study to describe practices or structures that prevent or inhibit the upward mobility of African Americans in parks and recreation. Since this study focused on the personal experiences of career professionals, I felt the term barrier was the most appropriate to present to study participants to get them to describe such experiences from their points of view. It is highly likely that the participants understood barriers as obstacles (which can or cannot be circumvented) rather than constraints, a conceptual term used by researchers.

The use of barriers also fits with previous studies. In leisure research related to organizational practices, the term barrier described structures that prevent or inhibit the
upward mobility of African Americans in parks and recreation (Henkel & Verhoven, 1974; McDonald, 1981; Outley & Dean, 2007; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Waller, 1989; Worsley & Stone, 2011). In studies on the upward mobility of African Americans and women, workplace barriers have been defined and treated as systems and structures that condition their career experiences. However, in this study, participants were left to define and interpret barriers for themselves, as the interviewer did not define the term. Thus, although the participants were free to describe barriers from their own experiences, I coded and interpreted the study data using theory, concepts, and methods from the literature.

In this study, Gidden’s (1984) structuration theory was used to examine barriers faced by women leaders. Structuration theory provided a framework to view the social structures embedded in organizations that create challenges for minorities, also known as repressive structures. Based on findings in this study, themes that emerged around repressive structures or barriers women faced along their pathway to leadership included the following: (a) Race and gender still a problem, (b) Negative perceptions of African American women, (c) Workplace needs a facelift, and (d) Intense hiring practices.

**Race and Gender Still a Problem.**

Based on study data, regardless of geographic locations African American women leaders faced racial and gender discrimination during their career pathway. These women leaders shared stories about their experiences with racial and gender discrimination. However, throughout the course of their lives gender posed more of a problem for all women, while race posed problems for over half of them. Women spoke about their frustration with being seen but not heard during meetings and discussions with white
colleagues. They discussed the lack of respect they had been given over the years and always having to prove themselves more knowledgeable than others. Some felt they were denied some promotions along their journey due to their race and gender. Males, both black and white, challenged most women. Some women shared frustrations about others assuming that their opinions and thoughts were representative of all African American people, particularly when they were the only minority represented in meetings and discussions. African American women shared their frustrations about other African American women being jealous of their promotions, work relationships, and dress attire.

Existing literature found that African American women faced challenges during their upward progression due to systems that supported men in executive-level positions, as more men held executive-level positions than women (Godbey & Henkel, 1976; Henderson, 1995; McDonald, 1981). However, other studies found no significance between gender and upward mobility of African Americans in parks and recreation, but found common factors that contributed to barriers African Americans faced seeking upper-management positions such as economic outlook, community ties, and family support (Waller, 1989). Nonetheless, this research reveals some data about why only a small number of African American women currently serve in parks and recreation leadership positions.

The barriers of race and gender are not new phenomena for these women leaders, but a continuation of previous barriers that created constraints for African Americans in parks and recreation such as access to facilities, discriminatory practices, negative attitudes, and stereotypes of African Americans, particularly in the U.S. South (Murphy, 1972). In addition, literature on the intersectionality of race and gender provided insight on organizational

In general, the concept of intersectionality describes multiple social identities of minorities related to systems of oppression and discrimination which join together to contribute to inequality in society. In this study, women experienced sexism more so than race discrimination. Two examples of the role intersectionality negatively played in the work lives of these women include African American women leaders walking into meetings with white male colleagues as others assumed the white colleague was the director and women leaders having to stroke the egos of white males more than other women or ethnic groups. The literature on workplace discrimination is consistent with the race and gender challenges faced by African American women leaders in this study (Feagin, 2014; Kaufman, 2002; Roscigno, Garcia, Mong, & Byron, 2006; Vallas, 2003). Despite significant gains of African Americans in education 50-plus years after the Civil Rights, the brunt of workplace discrimination is still felt by ethnic and minority groups. Inequalities in salary, promotion, and employment disparities still impact the career progression of African American women leaders. Though the intersectionality of race and gender and workplace discrimination negatively impacted the career experiences of African American women leaders, they remained resilient as these experiences did not keep them from moving up the career ladder.

**Negative Perceptions of African American Women.**

A second theme that developed from the analysis of barriers women leaders faced in the profession evolved around negative stereotypes. African American women leaders shared their concerns about negative stereotypes they have faced over the years. Women leaders
discussed perceptions of the angry black woman and their efforts to negate this perception. Women had to be cautious of their verbal and non-verbal actions being perceived as being mad or upset. Women had to be mindful of the “direct nature” of their communication styles as colleagues oftentimes complained about them being direct and to the point. Some women leaders had to be mindful of their natural hair and work attire sometimes being perceived as a negative or being unprofessional.

The concepts of impression management and white normativity relate to this study given that women had to be conscious of negative stereotypes and perceptions from mainly white colleagues. Impression management describes the process one uses to control how one is perceived by other people (Leary, Landel & Patton, 1996), while white normativity defines an accepted standard of behavior or actions determined by Whites (Roberts, 2009). In this study, some African American women leaders found themselves changing their physical appearance to fit in with the organizational culture and to put others at ease in their attempts to fit into the norms of their workplaces. The idea of white normativity created conflict for women leaders as they found their authentic identities in conflict with workplace norms. Women leaders also found a way to check themselves, let issues go, and monitor facial expressions to manage the impressions others had of them. Women had to be flexible and rely on monitoring and checking themselves in order to navigate through barriers or challenges in the workplace.

**Workplace Needs a Facelift.**

Women leaders felt the dynamics of the workplace itself presented barriers for them. Women shared stories about always having to prove themselves among male colleagues and
the continuous frustration with going through the motions of this all too often. Most women discussed the level of disrespect received from male colleagues, both black and white. Women felt they always had to be better than the next person to maintain their positions and gain the respect of others. Ten of twelve women agreed that their worst experiences stemmed from personnel-related issues. In most instances, women leaders were the supervisor looking to help another employee move their career forward. Most personnel issues involved relationships with mentees or employees they supervised, while other issues involved upper management. Two other women shared that the lack of respect from colleagues and navigating workplace politics as some of their worst experiences. Some expressed challenges with upper administration who seemed disconnected or unaware of agency needs. Some women shared about being overlooked for positions other managers recommended they apply.

Some research exists on negative work environments in leisure settings. This type of work environment creates barriers for minorities and constrains career development (Worsley & Stone, 2011). These include institutional barriers of racism and unfair hiring practices (Shinew & Hibbler, 2002) negative impacts of the ole boy system and unfair candidate screening and profiling (Outley & Dean, 2007). Obviously, such work environments were seen as hostile, negative and chaotic, and need to be alleviated to provide fair and equitable work experiences for African Americans.

**Intense Hiring Processes.**

A part of the journey to obtaining leadership positions required women to endure very difficult hiring processes. Some of the women encountered hiring processes equivalent to
city managers and high-ranking government officials and CEOs. Gone are the days of interviewing with just one person for positions that require a range of skills, abilities, and maturity to handle challenging work environments. Most women interviewed with diverse panels of people from various ethnic and racial backgrounds. One was hired through an assessment center and others were appointed. Some women leaders had multi-day interviews. The most extreme interview involved numerous boards, the general public, and the media. Women had to pull from their experiences to successfully move through these types of processes, as there is no formal training to get through these types of interviews, besides the sole experience of interviewing. Women had to be prepared because they did not receive breaks like others who may just chat and have dinner with some group or individual before getting hired. Even though hiring processes were very intense, this is not unique to African Americans, but for most interviewees in progressive, forward-thinking cities with laws guiding hiring processes. Nonetheless, the hiring processes were difficult, but women found the resiliency to maneuver through difficult hiring processes to obtain leadership positions.

Some women faced barriers in their selection and screening process, even after being recruited for jobs or asked to apply for certain positions. Outley and Dean (2007) discussed the impact screening processes had on African Americans being selected for upper-level management positions. They suggested that decision makers had preconceived ideas about the demographic characteristics candidates needed to be successful. This process represented embedded negative practices in organizations African Americans faced pursuing upward mobility. Had it not been for some of these women leaders knowing people in executive-
level positions who could prevent unfair screening processes from occurring, some of these women leaders would not hold their current position in the profession.

Beyond the literature on intersectionality and African American women, Essed (1991) coined the term “gendered racism” to describe the complexity of oppression experienced by African women based on racist perceptions of gender roles. Similar to intersectionality, gendered racism reflects the racism and sexism African American women experience simultaneously that creates oppressive experiences for these women. Similar to participants in Essed’s study, women leaders felt they lacked respect, were seen as invisible, and oftentimes had to prove themselves because of race and gender. When confronting racist forms of workplace behavior of others, women were stereotyped as the “angry black woman” when taking a stance to confront subtle and blatant forms of racist practices in the workplace. African American women leaders in parks and recreation described these patterns as a barrier to career progression.

Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, and Huntt (2013) conducted a study on African American women’s experiences using concepts from Essed’s (2013) gendered racism and Sue’s (2010) theory on racial aggression to identify themes that reflect racial and gendered microaggressions. Sue’s (2010) research revealed three themes that demonstrated gendered racial microagressions, similar to the experiences of African American women leaders in this study. The themes were centered around stereotypes of the “Angry Black Woman,” “Silenced and Marginalized,” which included feeling silenced, invisible, and disrespected, and “Assumptions about Style and Beauty,” which described the assumptions made about African American women’s communication style and physical appearance, all of which
created stressors for African American women. These themes mirror some of the same concerns African American women leaders in parks and recreation shared: race and gender are still problems, negative perceptions of African American women still exist, and workplaces need a facelift. These findings present new insights for leisure research that describes the barriers African American women leaders face along their career pathway. Past leisure research captured some of the barriers African Americans in general faced, but the concepts of gendered racism and racial aggressions offer new evidence on factors that create barriers for African American women leaders in parks and recreation.

**Research Question 3:** What are the negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitate progression to leadership positions among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

The literature on negotiation strategies African Americans in parks and recreation used to circumvent negative work environments is minimal as most past studies focused on identifying and describing barriers ethnic and minority groups face seeking promotion and upward mobility (Outley & Dean, 2007; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002; Waller, 1989; Worsley & Stone, 2011). Nevertheless, Gidden’s (1984) structuration theory framework provided a lens to view the facilitative structures or strategies that contribute to the success of African American women leaders. Facilitative structures are practices and supports that enable a person to circumvent the oppressive forces of workplaces to advance their careers.

Based on findings from this study, the following themes emerged from participant stories to describe strategies and mechanisms that facilitated African American women
leaders’ progression to leadership: (a) Early introduction to the profession, (b) Prepare, prepare, prepare, (c) Strategic thinking required, and (d) Patience is key.

**Early Introduction to the Profession.**

All of the women leaders reported being introduced to the profession of parks and recreation through sports or working part-time in high school or college. These opportunities were seen as facilitative structures. Some women knew that once they started working in the profession, parks and recreation was the type of work they wanted to pursue for a professional career. Most of these women who started working in the profession during high school or college began their careers working in community centers. Others worked in outdoor programming, therapeutic recreation, and aquatics. For minorities, early exposure to professions has been shown to propel their interests in certain professions. For example, STEM programs that introduce students of color to experiences and professions in science, technology, engineering, and math may increase opportunities for them to pursue college degrees and later professional careers in the sciences (Johnson, 2016).

Ultimately, if parks and recreation were to follow this same logic, introducing students of color to the profession during their school-aged years could promote interest in the field and encourage them to consider parks and recreation as a college major and profession. In their study, Shinew & Hibbler (2002) found that African American practitioners recommended early recruitment efforts of minority students during their high school years as a means of increasing the number of minority professionals in the profession.
**Prepare, prepare, prepare.**

The importance of education was mentioned as a key strategy to overcoming barriers in the workplace. With such an accomplished group of women, lifetime learning was of great significance. Women discussed always having to know more and be more prepared than others at meetings and discussions. Women leaders held bachelor and master degrees, yet still stressed the importance of continuous learning. Because the nature of their positions ranged from leading teams to managing construction projects, this group of women relied on multiple forms of continuous education (i.e., graduate degrees, professional training, personal development) as a means of overcoming barriers.

Earlier studies found that the lack of education and training was a barrier to upward mobility for African Americans in parks and recreation dating back to World War I (Murphy, 1972; Godbey & Henkel, 1976; Henkel & Verhoven, 1974). The lack of training opportunities led to African Americans being deprived of skills necessary for upward mobility. Later studies noted fewer promotional opportunities and feelings of unpreparedness for executive level management positions that created barriers for minorities in parks and recreation professions (Shinew & Hibbler, 2002).

Even though women leaders experienced barriers, they were able to turn hardships into learning opportunities. Women buckled their bootstraps and went to work learning the finer details of their positions. Some of the most difficult work situations allowed them to see their inner strength and continuous personal and professional development.
Strategic Thinking Required.

Women learned early in their journey to leadership that strategic thinking was key to survival. Women learned to communicate thoughts and ideas in ways that did not always offend colleagues or reflect negatively on other African American women, yet still reflected their position and stance on certain issues or concerns. Women leaders matured across their journey to understand that most problems were resolved through open communication. By listening to others and identifying the underlying concerns, women were able to address most concerns through active listening and equitable decision-making. This allowed women to stay away from being involved in the “special favors” game, in order to make decisions that were best for their communities. In order to do so, women had to understand the dynamics of community relations, identify and build relationships with key community stakeholders, while simultaneously matching the interests of stakeholders, upper administration and the general public to meet agency needs. This juggling act required that women be involved with community agencies as some served on local boards. It required women be present at community meetings and events to gain firsthand knowledge of community issues. Women were also required to be intentional about staying in front of public issues or concerns before they snowballed into major problems.

Patience is Key.

Given the number of years women worked in the profession prior to obtaining their leadership positions, patience was a key skill learned along their journey. Women worked an average of 23 years in the profession and held an average of four positions prior to obtaining an executive-level position. Some worked in the same agency for over 20 years while others
moved to other agencies and still worked a significant number of years prior to obtaining their leadership position. From the data shared by women leaders, five women experienced upward mobility, working their way up the career ladder in one agency. After moving to another agency, five women experienced upward mobility after working 8-26 years in the second agency. Most women leaders demonstrated upward mobility with each move, obtaining higher positions with more duties and responsibilities that ultimately prepared them for leadership roles. Intuitively, the extensive number of years women spent working their way up the career ladder demonstrated the important role of demonstrating patience throughout their careers.

The themes of “early introduction to the profession,” “prepare, prepare, prepare,” “strategic thinking required,” and “patience is key” proved vital for the success of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. These findings provide new information on how African American women navigated their rise to leadership. Further study of the characteristics, leadership styles and support mechanisms could prove useful in identifying skills and abilities African American women leaders will need to pursue and maintain leadership positions in the profession of parks and recreation.

**Researcher’s Reflections and Conclusions**

As an African American woman leader in the parks and recreation profession, most of the stories and experiences shared by these women rang true and caused me to reflect on my journey to leadership. It did not take long for the face of gendered racism to rear its ugly head en route to my first full-time position in the profession. I was always a fan of sports and played them throughout high school. During my freshman year of college, I was introduced
to the profession of parks and recreation through volunteer coaching at a local parks and recreation agency. I would later network with the recreation superintendent and began working in athletics on a part-time basis. This experience lasted from my sophomore to senior year. Upon graduating with a degree in leisure studies and recreation and having three years of programming experience under my belt including an internship with this agency, a full-time position became available. I was currently working in the same position on a part-time basis for the past three years. Knowing there would be a competitive process, I put my best effort forward in completing the application, only to find that the human resources staff member did not think I qualified for the position. My superintendent, who was an African American male, had to request my application be sent for consideration. Once completing a panel interview and being selected as a finalist for the position, the same human resource staff member attempted to reprimand the superintendent for allowing me to gain that much experience as a part-time employee. It was in this moment that I recognized that I would also have to be better than the next person to be considered for higher positions. I also recognized that race and gender played a role in the hiring process of my first position in the profession. Over the years, I have experienced people’s misconceptions about me as an African American woman in parks and recreation – from the way I spoke and used hand gestures, to my tone being too aggressive, to my choice of words being too direct...the list goes on.

After spending 15 years with this agency working my way up the career ladder to mid-management level after three promotions, I was poised to move into a director role. I had gained so much knowledge and experience over the years, worked in numerous programming areas, completed two graduate degrees and felt the timing was perfect. Once
the director position became available, I applied and was eliminated from the process after the first round of interviews. At this point, I recognized that my upward mobility would not take place in this agency, so I began applying for positions outside of the agency. My second application was to a municipality that one of my former co-workers transitioned to in order to obtain upward mobility in his professional field. I met with him to discuss the agency and decided I would interview and landed my first executive level position as a parks and recreation director, a few months after my agency of the past 15 years hired a white male.

Vindicated I was! At that moment, I recognized the power I held to make decisions about my career upward mobility that would never again be left up to anyone else to decide by denying opportunities I was more than qualified to obtain. There are so many stories such as these that I, too, encountered over the years, but these experiences motivated me to do and be more. These actions resemble the resiliency of other African American women parks and recreation leaders.

In all the stories shared by women in this study and findings from this research, my experiences over the past 25 years mirror those shared by this group of women. Religion and spirituality have always been important to me and have sustained me over the years, having been raised in a black church and currently serving in one today. I try to find the silver lining in most situations. And in those difficult moments that I can’t see the positive, I have family members, friends, sorority sisters, and mentors to call on. I am humbled to be positioned to serve my community, however race, gender, and negative stereotypes still pose problems for me. Until the workplace dynamics change for myself and other women in leadership by becoming more accepting of different ideas, views, and people, we will continue strategizing
and negotiating our way through workplace challenges. This will require African American women leaders to always be prepared, strategic in thinking, and patient in decisions and actions. This is our story, and these are the themes that paint a picture of a walk in our shoes as African American women leaders in parks and recreation.

Based on participants in this study, I conclude the following about African American women leaders in the parks and recreation profession.

1. African American women are resilient. These women used facilitative structures or success strategies to overcome numerous barriers faced along their career pathway to help them build their resiliency.

2. This group of African American women leaders resembles none of the negative stereotypes associated with African American women. These women are phenomenal, dynamic, intelligent, well-grounded, and giving women, who are truly inspiring. More studies should be conducted to capture these stories for the next generation of leaders.

3. African American women leaders in this study are capable of leading any parks and recreation agency regardless of the community’s size, location, or demographics. Their educational and professional backgrounds, leading small to large agencies throughout the US demonstrates their leadership abilities.

4. Despite the underrepresentation of African American women leaders in parks and recreation, the legacy of this group of women is remarkable. These women pioneers have managed to work past numerous obstacles such as race, gender,
negative stereotypes, and work environments. More studies are needed to capture
their unique stories and experiences.

5. It is important for African American women aspiring to obtain leadership
positions to begin developing personal characteristics such as having a positive
outlook on life, maintaining positive relationships with family, friends and
mentors, be religious or spiritual, lifetime learners, strategic thinkers, patient,
community minded, and always prepared for the unexpected.

Unanticipated Findings

An unanticipated finding in this study involved workplace challenges. Despite the
progressive nature of some cities women worked, women still reported facing challenges in
the workplace over the course of their careers. Unfortunately, these challenges still exist in
workplaces, despite the women having reached their level of success. I would have expected
fewer workplace challenges given that over half of the women worked in young communities
with the median age between 31 and 37 years of age and over half of the communities having
more than 50% of the population holding bachelor degrees or higher and median incomes of
$56,000-$70,000. More educated and wealthier communities would appear to present fewer
challenges for women leaders, however if the hiring structure has not changed and
homogenous populations still remain in the workplace, women leaders will continue facing
barriers in the workplace despite community demographics. Future studies should include
demographics when examining career pathways for women and ethnic groups.

Because this study served as the foundation for future research, I was left with a few
questions after thinking through the findings: How does the career pathway of African
American men compare to African American women in this study? How does this study compare to the results of the previous studies on white women? If white males had the education and years of experience identical to these women, would it have taken them as long to obtain leadership positions in parks and recreation? How would study findings differ if this study was conducted with white women? Findings from this study contribute to new knowledge and new perspectives to consider when comparing the career experiences of various racial, ethnic, and gendered groups.

In reviewing my theoretical framework, there were data that did not fit within the themes. Though I collected data on race of hiring authority and hiring processes, the data did not directly apply to the theoretical themes. However, the data reinforced the notion that few African American women held positions of leadership in parks and recreation agencies and upper levels of city management. Women shared that the race of the hiring authority for their positions included multiple ethnic backgrounds. African American males hired four participants. A White female hired one participant. White males hired four participants, while panels consisting of a mix of African Americans, Asians, and Whites hired three participants. There were no participants hired by African American women. This finding supports the literature citing the underrepresentation of African Americans in executive-level parks and recreation positions and city management. Of the few African Americans represented, consistent with the literature most were males. This information is useful in examining barriers women faced seeking upward mobility, but did not really fit into one of the existing themes.
Methodological Reflections

If I had to conduct this study again, I would do three things differently: (a) conduct a separate study for each research question, (b) decrease the number of sub-questions, and (c) collect all professional and demographic information forms prior to the interview session. If I had to conduct this study again, I would likely conduct a separate study for each of the research questions. Lasting over two hours, interviews revealed a wealth of data. However, due to the busy schedules of these women and limited time to participate in the study, I did not want to extend their time past the typical one to two hours allotted. Had this happened, some women may not have participated in the interview altogether and some initially looked at the number of questions and considered not participating. Once I realized this for some participants, I was very respectful and cautious of the time commitment required for them to participate in the interviewing process. The only other option would be to eliminate some of the questions if I replicated this study in the future. This would allow for more in-depth questioning but not necessarily capture the essence of their experiences. Also, while conducting data analysis, I realized that I was able to ask more in-depth follow-up questions to those participants who had completed the forms prior to the interview. The data forms allowed me to anticipate follow-up questions prior to the interview and provided me with a better sense of the participants’ professional and personal lives. For future studies, I would collect all of these forms a few days prior to the interviews to allow more time for review and question formulation.

There is difficulty in sharing and interpreting study findings when one lives the research they are conducting. This process required a lot of triangulation of data to be sure
participants’ words and thoughts were shared to echo their thoughts and expressions. Because women likely shared more with me as a researcher and colleague, I felt it was necessary to take more steps to increase their anonymity and share only the data necessary and most representative of their career pathway. This included reviewing transcripts and taking out even more identifying information that could be associated with each participant. I also felt that not conducting interviews with the few remaining African American women leaders actually increased anonymity. Interviewing all women could decrease anonymity, particularly if professionals familiar with this small population began playing the matching game in an attempt to identify study participants. Thus, not conducting interviews with all participants left some possibility for increasing anonymity among this small population of women leaders.

**Limitations of the Study**

Although this research adds to the existing literature, limitations exist for this study. First, the sample size is small. However, a small sample size of twelve has proven to be adequate in using phenomenological approaches focused on thematic development (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006), but still not generalizable to larger populations. Morse, Lowery, and Steury (2014) made the point that the concept of data saturation has many meaning to many researchers, yet it is inconsistently assessed and reported. Data saturation is not about the numbers per se, but about the depth of the data (Burmeister & Aitken, 2012). A large sample size does not guarantee that data saturation will be reached, so one should choose the sample size that will provide the researcher with the best opportunities to reach data saturation.
Second, time was a limitation. Interviews lasted over two hours for some participants. This limited the depth of questioning for interviewees. Third, researcher as the primary instrument could be perceived as a limitation. This researcher serves as an African American woman leader in parks and recreation. The researcher is familiar with the scenarios described by participants, but relied on member checking to maintain an unbiased approach to this research. I have controlled for these biases by follow-up phone calls to verify accuracy of data, sending transcribed interviews to participants for review and approval and conducting an auditing process. I carefully analyzed the data using only information shared during the interviews and not including my personal assumptions or thoughts on participant responses. Following these processes allowed me to obtain and share the meaning participants gave to their experiences directly from the data responses, thus decreasing my personal biases in this study.

**Implications for Research**

Study findings support and contribute to the small body of leisure research on African Americans in parks and recreation organizations. Findings from this study extend the leisure research on African Americans in parks and recreation, particularly the experiences of African American women leaders in their pursuit of upward mobility. Findings also break new ground by examining the career pathways of African American women leaders in parks and recreation, identifying strategies and skills African American women leaders will need to prepare for and maintain executive level positions. Based on study findings, three implications emerged for research and future studies, gathered from the wealth of knowledge and experiences of study participants:
1. Upward mobility and career achievement are facilitated by resiliency.

2. Repressive structures condition the career experiences of African American women.

3. Formative years of experience and human capital facilitate success and achievement of African American women leaders in parks and recreation.

In reviewing past literature on African Americans in parks and recreation, the literature examined the leisure experiences of African Americans by examining constraints, preferences, and behaviors. The past 20 years of leisure research captured the experiences of ethnic and minority groups as participants or consumers of leisure and recreational services. According to Floyd (2007), the past 20 years of leisure research on race and ethnicity has gone through three major shifts: disparities in access (barriers and constraints) to recreational opportunities between African Americans and Whites (since the 1970s), understanding leisure preferences and behaviors (1980s to 1990s), and inclusion of more ethnic groups as it relates to the intersection of race and ethnicity research related to social and cultural experiences (late 1990s to early 2000s). Though this literature examined the experiences of African Americans as participants in recreation and leisure services, little research has captured the experiences of African Americans as providers of recreational services. If leisure considers research on the participatory experiences of African Americans and other ethnic groups, the career advancement of these populations should also be considered. Past research found that African Americans faced challenges accessing recreational services. Consequently, it should be of no surprise that African Americans face similar challenges as employees in the profession. The systems of racism and oppression likely remained through homogenous hiring practices, creating a new set of barriers for African Americans,
particularly for African American women in the workplace. The history of African
Americans in leisure research, findings, and the primacy of this study led to the discussion of
three implications for this study: Upward mobility and career achievement are facilitated by
resiliency, repressive structures condition the career experiences of African American
women and formative years of experience, investments in educational, and professional
development and human capital facilitates success and achievement of African American
women leaders in parks and recreation.

*Upward mobility and career achievement are facilitated by resiliency.*

The first implication of this study is that upward mobility and career achievement are
facilitated by resiliency. Concepts and ideas that contribute to resiliency such as an
individual’s ability to bounce back or develop coping strategies in difficult work
environments are important processes to examine when seeking to understand the
experiences of African American women and other marginalized groups. In reviewing
findings from this study, one question that emerged was related to resiliency. Are there
different types and levels of resiliency for African American women? If so, what are the
sources of resiliency? Past studies described the challenges African Americans faced seeking
upward mobility (Allison & Schneider, 2008; Shinew & Hibbler, 2002), yet these African
American women were able to be resilient and obtain leadership positions. Given the
challenges African Americans faced seeking upward mobility, some level of resiliency likely
existed for those who advanced from entry- to mid- level management. However, seemingly
higher levels of resiliency may have existed for women leaders to obtain executive-level
positions.
Additionally, this study provided a retrospective lens through which to view the role of resiliency during the careers of African American women leaders. The role of resiliency provided a perspective that could be seen over the course of 20 to 30 years for some women, not just a small segment of their career. By capturing the importance of resiliency using a retrospective approach, this study identified characteristics associated with negotiation strategies women used to achieve and maintain executive level positions. Thus, resiliency can provide future research with characteristics and skills women leaders identified as necessary to move past barriers faced in the workplace.

Past literature addressed the inequities and discrimination African Americans faced in the profession. Findings from this study indicate that barriers of race, gender, negative perceptions of African American women, and intense hiring processes still present problems for women leaders during their career pathway. Yet, these women continued their pathway to success while others did not. Did these women leaders have a different level of resiliency that may not have existed for those who did not achieve this level of success? What were the sources of resiliency used by women who were able to obtain leadership positions? Findings from the study indicate that spirituality, personal beliefs about control, positive outlook on life, ability to self-govern, view of change, personal relationships and commitments, and advanced education are sources of resiliency that positively impacted the career development of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. Based on the literature and study data, one implication is that resiliency explains and characterizes this pathway and these sources of resiliency contribute to it. The findings provide insight into the study of
workplace equity for women and ethnic groups and guides us into ways to study their career experiences in future research.

*Repressive structures condition the career experiences of African American women.*

The second implication of this study is that repressive structures condition the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. Though women leaders faced repressive structures that existed in organizations, they were still able to work through them to obtain leadership positions. This study showed evidence of two factors in play regarding repressive structures in the workplace: normative behaviors and impression management. Roberts (2009) raised the question of white normativity and how white people construct and define whiteness. More specifically Roberts asks, “How do White people construct and redefine whiteness in their own terms and as a means of preserving their social privilege, their place in the hierarchy of power, and their dominance in leisure entitlements?” Though Roberts references whiteness in wilderness settings, this question is applicable to workplace settings in which recreation professionals have a great deal of influence on how and what services are provided and on workplace culture. In this sense, the concept of white normativity can create workplace barriers and discrimination in the career progression for African American women leaders in parks and recreation when minority culture clashes with dominant organizational norms.

Similar to coping strategies, impression management also serves as an outcome to working in repressive structures or normative environments (Leary, Landel, & Patton, 1996). Why do women have to alter their style of dress, tone of speaking and hair styles to be
accepted by larger society? One outcome of working in repressive structures in which women have to move away from being themselves creates conflict in the workplace for women leaders who are not able to be their authentic selves, but alter themselves to fit within the boundaries of what is acceptable in white normative environments.

Repressive structures such as workplace discrimination cause stress for African Americans. Research has shown that the stress of discrimination from workplaces creates health risks such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, increased smoking and alcohol consumption among African Americans (Chavez, Ornelas, Lyles, & Williams, 2015; Gilbert & Zemore, 2015; Krieger & Sidney, 1996). Repressive structures exist for women and the concepts of white normative behavior and impression management offer future researchers additional perspectives for how African American women leaders navigate careers to achieve upward mobility.

An additional insight from these data indicated that race was not as salient as expected. Discrimination and racism have a long history in parks and recreation. Murphy (1972) and Scott (2014) provided a comprehensive history on the existence of “separate-but-equal” policies (formal and informal) in parks and recreation services. The women in this study have first-hand experience with or were one generation removed from a period when African Americans were denied access to most public parks, recreation centers, beaches, swimming pools, and other facilities because of skin color. In addition, at this time educational and professional opportunities within parks and recreation were restricted and positions were also segregated by race. Unfortunately, racial discrimination continues to play a role in our society. A 2017 NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan
School of Public Health survey found that 56% of African American adults reported discrimination when applying for a job, 57% reported discrimination related to pay or promotion, and 60% reported they or a family member experienced being unfairly stopped or mistreated by police. In addition, 51% of African American adults reported being the target of racial slurs. In view of discrimination and its continuing significance, it would seem surprising that a singular race theme was not as prominent as the gender discrimination theme.

Clearly, with race being a less dominant theme that gender, one should not assume women did not experience racial discrimination during their careers or were not conscious of racist practices in everyday lives. Race as a less prominent theme over gender reminds us of the importance of intersectionality as a concept in research on African American women career experiences. Though gender seemed to play a larger role in the challenges African American women faced in the workplace, the intersectionality of both race and gender negatively impacted their career experiences. The study findings indicated that both race and gender created barriers for women leader, though gender seemed to present more challenges. One may think that these women should have reported racial and discriminatory practices more often, but doing so could have created more barriers for their future career opportunities or categorized them as “problem employees” who would eventually be labeled as problem employees, ostracized or denied future employment opportunities. Another viewpoint on the race and gender theme, where gender was more prominent, lies in the possible taken for granted nature of discrimination among African American women leaders. As mentioned, in view of the history of discrimination in society, in the profession, and in
daily life, institutional and personal racism become part of the everyday experience. As the 2017 NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health survey results on discrimination and studies on microaggressions (Sue, 2010; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008) suggest, for African Americans discrimination is so routine. The findings of the study showed that the women were able to draw upon their personal resilience and community relationships to cope and overcome negative experiences to progress in their careers. Despite challenges related to race and gender as reflected in the findings, African American women leaders remained resilient as they continued their movement up the career ladder.

**Formative years of experience and human capital facilitate the success and achievement of African American women leaders in parks and recreation.**

The third implication of this study is that findings indicate the experiences of African American women in parks and recreation were characterized by a unique set of formative experiences. These formative experiences influenced or facilitated the career achievement of these women such as their early introduction to the field, continued investments in education, and professional development and human capital. Women were introduced to parks and recreation through sports and part-time positions as camp counselors, lifeguards, or recreation attendants. These experiences provided women with early exposure to the profession. Though all of the women were introduced to parks and recreation during school-aged years, some still did not major in parks and recreation during college. Nevertheless, they continued working in the profession or temporarily transitioned to other professions only to later return to parks and recreation to build their careers. Somehow, their earlier
experiences in the profession were rewarding enough for them to return, even after working in other professional areas. In addition, the formative experiences of women in this study also contributed to their ability to achieve leadership positions evident through their pursuit of advanced degrees and professional development. The concept of human capital and the stock of knowledge and skills one possesses is thought to contribute to achievement and success. During their formative years, women leaders in this study recognized the value of human capital and worked to obtain education, skills, and professional development to help prepare them for leadership positions. Based on literature and data, obtaining additional education, training and skills characterized the pathway to leadership for women and these resources contributed to their success.

One of the most significant findings in this study is the negotiation strategies women used to facilitate their pathway to success. Though women experienced barriers, they were still able to move forward and be successful throughout their careers suggesting the importance of agency as a concept to describe the persistent nature of these women leaders’ efforts to pursue, despite challenges they faced (Parry & Fullagar, 2013). Earlier research identified the barriers women faced having to choose between career upward mobility and the loss of family and spouses (Henderson, 1990). In general, African Americans did not have the option to choose the outcomes of their upward mobility as discrimination, inequity (Shinew & Hibbler), homosocial reproduction (Outley & Dean, 2007) social capital and human capital (Worsley & Stone, 2011) robbed them of the opportunity to choose their career progression. However, this study provided evidence that women were able to negotiate through negative structures to have career success, families, and children. This study
provided future studies with a framework to examine this phenomenon while extending the research on barriers women face in the workplace.

In summary, this study contributed to theoretical perspectives in three key ways. First, the career achievements of African American women leaders were facilitated by resiliency. Women leaders were able to bounce back and develop coping strategies while working in normative environments. Resiliency was viewed over the course of 20 to 30 years that provided a retrospective lens to allow examination of not only the role of resiliency in the lives of women leaders, but the characteristics they associated with resiliency. Utilizing the role of resilience and its characteristics permit greater insight into how women leaders moved past barriers faced along their career pathway. This offers a potential framework for understanding negotiation strategies of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations.

Next, repressive structures condition the career experiences of African American women. Even though women leaders faced repressive structures in the workplace, they were able to obtain leadership positions. This study extended the literature on repressive structures by highlighting the concepts of normative behaviors and impression management. In addition, the study brings to the forefront the question on how women process racism or cope with it in their workplace. On the surface, some readers might expect a different theme would have emerged related to ways women leaders could have described their daily interactions with racist or discriminatory practices. However, the taken for granted notion that women leaders understood they would likely encounter racist or discriminatory practices along their career pathway provided another way of thinking about negotiation strategies used by women
leaders. The absence of a prominent race or racial discrimination theme and the emergence of a race-gender theme illustrates how intersectionality provides important perspective on African American women’s climb to leadership.

Last, formative years of experience and human capital facilitate the career experiences of African American women leaders. This study extended the research on barriers women face in parks and recreation organizations and skills necessary to navigate around them. Despite facing barriers, women leaders still obtained executive level positions. Women were able to navigate through difficult work environments by recognizing the value of making investments in their educational preparation and professional development. In essence, the women’s experiences indicate that human capital is important to career progression. Human capital theory offers an additional framework for understanding career success and upward mobility among women in parks and recreation organizations (e.g., Worsley & Stone, 2011).

The next sections offer recommendations for increasing the success of African American women pursuing leadership positions. The summary highlights implications for policy, practice and programs.

**Implications for Policy**

The policies and practices of human resources departments must be reviewed to promote the hiring of underrepresented ethnic and racial groups. This recommendation follows from study results describing the intense nature of hiring practices. Due to the changing demographics of communities with increasingly diverse populations, policies and practices should recognize and promote the importance of diversity. Having a diverse
workforce starts with a commitment from the top. Given the intense hiring practices
experienced by women leaders, interviews must be well-structured and consist of diverse
panel members. Human resources departments must seek to create hiring policies that recruit
and hire staff that reflect the demographic makeup of communities to increase the number of
underrepresented ethnic and racial groups in the workplace. Recruitment material should
contain photos, events and activities that reflect the diversity of communities. Diversity
training must be provided to all staff to increase the awareness of social practices and
systems that discriminate against women and underrepresented populations in the workplace.

Human resources department must exercise flexibility in the hiring ages of part-time
parks and recreation staff members. An early introduction to the parks and recreation
profession during high school years provides additional opportunities for high schoolers to
learn about the profession prior to attending college. Early exposure to the field could yield
more students majoring in parks and recreation during college to become the next generation
of parks and recreation leaders.

**Implications for Practice**

The results of this study showed that social and human capital enable women to move up the career ladder in park and recreation organizations. Agencies should invest resources to
grow current and future leaders. Conferences and workshops at regional and national
meetings provide opportunities for racial and ethnic groups generally, and women
specifically, to increase human and social capital through networking opportunities,
mentoring and sponsorship (e.g., scholarships for travel). It is extremely important for city
and county leaders to diversify efforts to recruit and retain African American women leaders.
Leaders should identify funding for leadership training of up-and-coming professionals in their organizations.

The challenges women described related to the workplace (it needs a “facelift”) provide direction to city and county leaders and leadership staff within recreation and park organizations of the need to increase the awareness of microaggressions in the workplace that negatively affect women and minorities. Actions to address workplace issues should be intentional with a goal of eliminating microaggressions from work environments.

The findings also provide directions for leadership and professional development workshops for women. The women in this study display a great deal of resilience to get to the top of their professions. Much of their success springs from their internal strength and the strength of their communities. Leadership workshops can be tailored to help women leaders develop their inner strengths and find mentors and networks to discuss workplace challenges, success strategies, and professional opportunities. Women who aspire to become leaders must draw on the characteristics of resiliency women leaders spoke about in this study to assist them with upward mobility, such as having a positive outlook on life, connecting with religious or spiritual spaces, and understanding the importance of community, family and friends. Additionally, they should be open to new responsibilities and duties on the job to increase their human capital opportunities to help prepare themselves for upper management positions.

**Implications for Programs**

National and statewide associations can play a role in reducing the implicit bias and institutional discrimination that exist in organizations. The associations can highlight the
achievements of African Americans and African American women and their success in overcoming barriers faced in the profession. In this study, all of the women were successful leaders. There are other stories of other successful individuals from racial and ethnic minority groups. Associations can feature more prominently in conferences and they can be resources to design programs and leadership workshops to grow future leaders. In addition, associations must create ways to make boards and advisory groups more inclusive and eliminate the structures and good ole’ boy networks that create barriers to engagement.

Parks and recreation academic programs must look for opportunities to recruit and retain ethnic and racial groups in academic programs. The road to increasing the number of African Americans conducting leisure research begins with student retention. If students of color can be recruited, retained and encouraged to pursue masters and PhD degrees, there is a chance that the research on underrepresented populations may increase. Educators should establish programs with local high schools to introduce students to parks and recreation as a college major prior to students attending college. Programs should include culturally relevant literature in course readings that focus on leadership skill development to help prepare women leaders of color for professional experiences. Efforts to recruit and retain a diverse faculty are necessary in parks and recreation academic programs to create role models who provide academic, personal, and professional support for students of color. Inviting diverse panels of ethnic and minority leaders in the profession to talk with students about professional opportunities and challenges can help all students better understand diversity and equity issues in parks and recreation.
Chapter Summary

Overall, the career experiences of African American women leaders represent a wide range of diverse experiences. While each story was different, each one revealed the unique pathway to leadership for each African American woman leader in parks and recreation. Beginning with the first interview, it was apparent that this group of resilient women articulated a strong sense of self-awareness and self-accountability amidst challenges faced throughout their careers. They acknowledged that leadership required a deeper understanding, analysis and reflection to move beyond barriers and glean lessons that were learned along their journeys. As participants described their experiences as African American women leaders, they readily shared the source of their strength and ability to navigate through challenges and recognized them as learning opportunities to improve their knowledge, abilities, or skills in the profession. Most participants described adverse situations centered around personnel-related issues, which included employees, upper management and policy-making boards.

For these women, working in the profession of parks and recreation was more than a job. It was a calling and demonstration of their commitment to enriching the lives of people in their communities. Despite facing hardships, these women found the wherewithal to be creative and determined to find a way to gain necessary support to successfully complete projects. They exhibited a passion for working with and developing youth in the community. These African American women leaders were lifelong learners committed to seeing hardships as opportunities for personal and professional growth. Most importantly, they were strategic thinkers and excellent managers of limited resources. These women understood the
impact of leadership in organizations. Through their career experiences, women leaders
demonstrated leadership styles that reflected fairness, equity, respect, honesty, and openness.
These skills allowed most women to gain the necessary support and respect to continue along
their pathway to leadership, despite facing challenges.

In examining the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation, several theories and concepts such as social capital, public service as a calling, workplace discrimination, impression management, white normativity, gendered racism, and microaggressions emerged to support findings from this study. These concepts and theories further describe the career progression experiences of women, on both professional and personal levels, and provide leisure researchers with new strategies for examining the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation professions. In addition, the study findings provide direction for changing policies related to recruitment, hiring, and workplace practices in parks and recreation agencies. The study also suggests ways agencies can develop women leaders and executive level administrators from racial and ethnic minority groups. Findings from this study provide a voice for African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations and help increase our knowledge of the experiences of African American women in leadership positions in parks and recreation.
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Influence the Occupational Mobility of Black Personnel Within Recreation, Parks and Leisure Services (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Maryland).


Appendix A – IRB Application

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH
SUBMISSION FOR NEW STUDIES

Protocol Number 9268

Project Title
An Exploration of the Career Experiences of African American Women Leaders in Parks and Recreation Organizations

IRB File Number:

Original Approval Date:
11/21/2016

Approval Period:
11/21/2016 - 11/21/2017

Source of funding (if externally funded, enter PINS or RADAR number of funding proposal via ‘Add New Sponsored Project Record’ button below):

NCSU Faculty point of contact for this protocol/NB: only this person has authority to submit the protocol

Floyd, Myron F: Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management

Does any investigator associated with this project have a significant financial interest in, or other conflict of interest involving, the sponsor of this project? (Answer No if this project is not sponsored)

No

Is this conflict managed with a written management plan, and is the management plan being properly followed?

No

Preliminary Review Determination

Category:
Expedited 7

In lay language, provide a brief synopsis of the study (limit text to 1500 characters)

The predominance of women in the parks and recreation profession dates back to the early 1900s. During this time, women dominated as the largest number of employees in the field. The influence of extraordinary women leaders in public leisure service organizations laid the groundwork for the strides women continue to make in the profession. When examining literature on women in management and supervisory positions in parks and recreation, past studies have addressed issues of inequality and discrimination against White women in the profession, yet fail to share the detailed rich stories of the career pathway experiences of African American women leaders in the profession.

Thus, this study will use resiliency theory and complex structuration theory to provide perspective on the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation. This study will employ a qualitative, phenomenological approach to provide descriptive data on these experiences as twenty semi-structured phone interviews will be conducted with African American women across the United States for this study. Findings will be used to increase the awareness of experiences, barriers and negotiation strategies of African American women leaders in the profession, help prepare the next generation of leaders and contribute to the existing literature gap by providing a voice for African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations.

Briefly describe in lay language the purpose of the proposed research and why it is important.

The purpose of this study is to examine the shared experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations; moreover, factors influencing the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations. To achieve this purpose, this researcher will examine the pathways to leadership, barriers affecting their progression to leadership and negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitate African American women’s progression to leadership positions in parks and recreation organizations. This research is important because there is a disproportionate number of African American women represented in leadership positions at the executive level of parks and recreation organizations. In addition, a gap exists in the literature examining these experiences. Examining the shared experiences of these women will provide a voice in the literature for this population of women and help prepare the next generation of leaders who are seeking advancement to positions of leadership in parks and recreation organizations.
My research qualifies for Exemption. Exempt research is minimal risk and must fit into the categories b.1 - b.6 found here: http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/45cfr46.html

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Is this research being conducted by a student?
Yes

Is this research for a thesis?
No

Is this research for a dissertation?
Yes

Is this independent research?
Yes

Is this research for a course?
No

Do you currently intend to use the data for any purpose beyond the fulfillment of the class assignment?
Yes

Please explain

If so, please explain

If you anticipate additional NCSU-affiliated investigators (other than those listed on the Title tab) may be involved in this research, list them here indicating their name and department.

Will the investigators be collaborating with researchers at any institutions or organizations outside of NC State?
No

List collaborating institutions and describe the nature of the collaboration

What is NCSU's role in this research?

Describe funding flow, if any (e.g. subcontractors)

Is this international research?
No

Identify the countries involved in this research

An IRB equivalent review for local and cultural context may be necessary for this study. Can you recommend consultants with cultural expertise who may be willing to provide this review?

Adults 18 - 64 in the general population?
Yes

NCSU students, faculty or staff?
No

Adults age 65 and older?
No

Minors (under age 18--be sure to include provision for parental consent and/or child assent)?
No

List ages or age range:

Could any of the children be “Wards of the State” (a child whose welfare is the responsibility of the state or other agency, institution, or entity)?
No

Please explain:

Prisoners (any individual involuntarily confined or detained in a penal institution -- can be detained pending arraignment, trial or sentencing)?
No
Pregnant women?
No
Are pregnant women the primary population or focus for this research?
No
Provide rationale for why they are the focus population and describe the risks associated with their involvement as participants

Fetuses?
No

Students?
No

Does the research involve normal educational practices?
No
Is the research being conducted in an accepted educational setting?
No
Are participants in a class taught by the principal investigator?
No
Are the research activities part of the required course requirements?
No
Will course credit be offered to participants?
No
Amount of credit?
No
If course credit will be given, list the amount and alternative ways to earn the same amount of credit. Note: the time it takes to gain the same amount of credit by the alternate means should be commensurate with the study task(s)

How will permission to conduct research be obtained from the school or district?

Will you utilize private academic records?
No
Explain the procedures and document permission for accessing these records.

Employees?
No
Describe where (in the workplace, out of the workplace) activities will be conducted.

From whom and how will permission to conduct research on the employees be obtained?

How will potential participants be approached and informed about the research so as to reduce any perceived coercion to participate?

Is the employer involved in the research activities in any way?
No
Please explain:

Will the employer receive any results from the research activities (i.e. reports, recommendations, etc.)?
No
Please explain. How will employee identities be protected in reports provided to employers?

Impaired decision making capacity/Legally incompetent?
No
How will competency be assessed and from whom will you obtain consent?

Mental/emotional/developmental/psychiatric challenges?
No
Identify the challenge and explain the unique risks for this population.

Describe any special provisions necessary for consent and other study activities (e.g., legal guardian for those unable to consent).

People with physical challenges?
No

Identify the challenge and explain the unique risks for this population.

Describe any special provisions necessary for working with this population (e.g., witnesses for the visually impaired).

Economically or educationally disadvantaged?
No

Racial, ethnic, religious and/or other minorities?
Yes

Non-English speakers?
No

Describe the procedures used to overcome any language barrier.

Will a translator be used?
No

Provide information about the translator (who they are, relation to the community, why you have selected them for use, confidentiality measures being utilized).

Explain the necessity for the use of the vulnerable populations listed.

The study is based on the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation profession across the United States. This is the target group for my study.

State how, where, when, and by whom consent will be obtained from each participant group. Identify the type of consent (e.g., written, verbal, electronic, etc.). Label and submit all consent forms.

After approval has been granted to conduct this study, participants will be emailed/called to participate in the study. This email will include the purpose of the study and the criteria of research participants. If participants agree to become a part of the study, they can respond via email, phone message or text message, confirming their intent to participate in the study.

Once participants have expressed their intent to participate in the study, they will receive an electronic email/phone call explaining the study- self-introduction, purpose of study, information about forms they will need to complete (consent form, demographic information form), data collection process (semi-structured interview process, interview length, method of recording interview, transcription of interview, review of transcript by participant), confidentiality of the study, and documents that will be requested from each participant (resume, press materials, articles, websites of announcements. Once the study consent form has been received from participants, an interview will be scheduled for each participant.

If any participants are minors, describe the process for obtaining parental consent and minor’s assent (minor’s agreement to participate).

Are you applying for a waiver of the requirement for consent (no consent information of any kind provided to participants) for any participant group(s) in your study?
No

Describe the procedures and/or participant group for which you are applying for a waiver, and justify why this waiver is needed and consent is not feasible.

Are you applying for an alteration (exclusion of one or more of the specific required elements) of consent for any participant group(s) in your study?
No

Identify which required elements of consent you are altering, describe the participant group(s) for which this waiver will apply, and justify why this waiver is needed.
Are you applying for a waiver of signed consent (consent information is provided, but participant signatures are not collected)?  
A waiver of signed consent may be granted only if: The research involves no more than minimal risk; The research involves no procedures for which consent is normally required outside of the research context.

No

Would a signed consent document be the only document or record linking the participant to the research?

Yes

Is there any deception of the human subjects involved in this study?

No

Describe why deception is necessary and describe the debriefing procedures. Does the deception require a waiver or alteration of informed consent information? Describe debriefing and/or disclosure procedures and submit materials for review. Are participants given the option to destroy their data if they do not want to be a part of the study after disclosure?

For each participant group please indicate how many individuals from that group will be involved in the research. Estimates or ranges of the numbers of participants are acceptable. Please be aware that participant numbers may affect study risk. If your participation totals differ by 10% from what was originally approved, notify the IRB.

It is estimated that at least twenty (20) African American women leaders in parks and recreation will be involved in this study. This number is based on the estimated time for study data to become saturated.

The researcher will also conduct an educational session at the 2016 National Recreation and Park Association Congress that will focus on increasing the awareness of the underrepresentation of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations. The session will discuss the gap in the literature on African American women leaders in the profession and explore barriers to upward mobility African American women have experienced in the profession. Through small group discussions, session participants will share strategies used to overcome those barriers.

At the end of the session presentation, this researcher will announce general information about this study. Participants will be asked to leave contact information if they are interested in participating in this study. Also, at the end of each interview conducted for the study, participants will be asked if they can recommend any potential candidates for this study.

For each participant group, how will potential participants be approached about the research and invited to participate? Please upload necessary scripts, templates, talking points, flyers, blurbs, and announcements.

Once participants have expressed their intent to participate in the study, they will receive an electronic email/phone call explaining the study- self-introduction, purpose of study, information about forms they will need to complete (consent form, demographic information form), data collection process (semi-structured interview process, interview length, method of recording interview, transcription of interview, review of transcript by participant), anonymity and confidentiality of the study, secure storage of study data and documents that will be requested from each participant (resume, press materials, articles, websites of announcements).

Describe any inclusion and exclusion criteria for your participants and describe why those criteria are necessary (If your study concentrates on a particular population, you do not need to repeat your description of that population here.)

In order to participate in this study, participants must be 1) African American, 2) female, 3) have a minimum of 5 years work experience, and 4) hold an executive level position in a parks and recreation organization with job titles such as Parks and Recreation Director, Parks and Recreation Assistant Director, Parks and Recreation Bureau Managers, Parks and Recreation Deputy Managers, Parks and Recreation Superintendents, Recreation Superintendents, Area Managers, Region(al) Managers, Division Managers, Division Chief or District Manager.

Is there any relationship between researcher and participants - such as teacher/student; employer/employee?

No
Describe any risks associated with conducting your research with a related participant group.

Describe how this relationship will be managed to reduce risk during the research.

How will risks to confidentiality be managed?

Address any concerns regarding data quality (e.g. non-candid responses) that could result from this relationship.

In the following questions describe in lay terms all study procedures that will be experienced by each group of participants in this study. For each group of participants in your study, provide a step-by-step description of what they will experience from beginning to end of the study activities.

1) Participants will be emailed a request to participate in the study.
2) Participants will receive an interview consent form, professional and demographic information form and interview guide.
3) Participants will complete and return all forms to researcher the interview consent form.
4) Researcher will contact participant to schedule and conduct interview.
5) Researcher will conduct interview via telephone and record using two mini-recorders.
6) Researcher will transcribe each interview.
7) Researcher will contact participant with any follow-up questions from the interview, professional and demographic form, or any other documents submitted by participant.
8) Researcher will send transcript of interview to participant for review and approval. If necessary, researcher will ask any final follow-up questions to participant and finalize interview transcript once all changes have been made by researcher and approved by study participant.
9) Researcher will mail $25 gift card to each participant and their participation in the study will end.

Describe how, where, when, and by whom data will be collected.

All study data will be collected solely by this researcher. Once IRB approval has been received, it is estimated that semi-structured interviews will be scheduled and conducted within a 2-week to 10-week window. Interviews will be conducted via telephone and recorded using two mini-recorders to be certain data is captured on multiple sources. Field notes will be taken throughout each interview to capture the dialogue of participants. The researcher will collect these documents from participants for review and analysis-consent form, professional and demographic information form.

Social?
No
Psychological?
No
Financial/Employability?
No
Legal?
No
Physical?
No
Academic?
No
Employment?
No
Financial?
No
Medical?
No
Private Behavior?
No
Economic Status?
No
Sexual Issues?
No

Religious Issues/Beliefs?
No

Describe the nature and degree of risk that this study poses. Describe the steps taken to minimize these risks. You CANNOT leave this blank, say 'N/A', none' or 'no risks'. You can say “There is minimal risk associated with this research.”

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. Participants are free to not answer any question that makes them uncomfortable, and participants may withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. If participants become uncomfortable with the interview topic, questions or process, participants will be permitted to end the interview. If participants are unable to continue, any information that has been collected from them will be destroyed.

If you are accessing private records, describe how you are gaining access to these records, what information you need from the records, and how you will receive/record data.

The study does not require a need to access private records and this researcher does not seek to gain access to any private records of study participants.

Are you asking participants to disclose information about other individuals (e.g., friends, family, co-workers, etc.)?
Yes

You have indicated that you will ask participants to disclose information about other individuals (see Populations tab). Describe the data you will collect and discuss how you will protect confidentiality and the privacy of these third-party individuals.

In an effort to recruit study participants, snowballing techniques will be used to gain access to other potential study participants. The researcher will ask candidates if they know of any colleagues who maybe good candidates for the study. If participants share the names of other colleagues, the researcher will not communicate whether or not the recommended colleagues decided to participate in the study.

If you are collecting information that participants might consider personal or sensitive or that if revealed might cause embarrassment, harm to reputation or could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, what measures will you take to protect participants from those risks?

I will not collect personal or sensitive information that might cause embarrassment, harm to participants' reputations or place participants at risk of criminal or civil liability as participant names will remain anonymous, pseudonyms will be used so their names remain anonymous.

If any of the study procedures could be considered risky in and of themselves (e.g. study procedures involving upsetting questions, stressful situations, physical risks, etc.) what measures will you take to protect participants from those risks?

Participants are free to not answer any question that makes them uncomfortable, and you can withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. If participants become uncomfortable with the interview topic or process, the interview will end.

Describe the anticipated direct benefits to be gained by each group of participants in this study (compensation is not a direct benefit).

There are no direct benefits to participation in this research study.

If no direct benefit is expected for participants describe any indirect benefits that may be expected, such as to the scientific community or to society.

The indirect benefits are that findings from this study can be used to increase the awareness of experiences, barriers and negotiation strategies of African American women leaders in the profession and help prepare the next generation of African American women leaders for the workforce. Findings will also contribute to the existing literature gap by providing a voice and dialogue to portray the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations.

Will you be receiving already existing data without identifiers for this study?
No

Will you be receiving already existing data which includes identifiers for this study?
No

Describe how the benefits balance out the risks of this study.

Will data be collected anonymously (meaning that you do not ever collect data in a way that would allow you to link any identifying information to a participant)?
No

Will any identifying information be recorded with the data (ex: name, phone number, IDs, e-mails, etc.)?
Yes

Will you use a master list, crosswalk, or other means of linking a participant’s identity to the data?
Will it be possible to identify a participant indirectly from the data collected (i.e. indirect identification from demographic information)?

No

Audio recordings?
Yes

Video recordings?
No

Images?
No

Digital/electronic files?
Yes

Paper documents (including notes and journals)?
Yes

Physiological Responses?
No

Online survey?
No

Restricted Computer?
Yes

Password Protected files?
No

Firewall System?
Yes

Locked Private Office?
Yes

Locked Filing Cabinets?
Yes

Encrypted Files?
No

Describe all participant identifiers that will be collected (whether they will be retained or not) and explain why they are necessary.

Emails containing identifier information will be collected when communicating with potential candidates for this study. Emails are necessary because they will contain study information for potential candidates, resumes, press materials, consent form and professional and demographic form. These forms will be completed by the participant and contain information that is relevant and necessary for the study. All forms will be returned to the researcher via email, and some may be returned via US mail. Upon return of these forms and when conducting interviews, the researcher will assign a pseudonym (nickname) to each participant to maintain anonymity of participants and confidentiality of the study.

If any links between data and participants are to be retained, how will you protect the confidentiality of the data?

The information collected in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. The recorded interview will be transcribed, but no reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link the participant to the study, as a pseudonym (nickname) will be used for each participant so that their identity remains confidential. In addition, when returning transcript to participant for review, all identifiers (i.e.- names, locations of organizations) will be removed from the transcript to maintain anonymity. The consent forms, professional and demographic information forms, resumes and press materials, will be stored securely in a locked file within the researcher’s home office. At the end of the study, the recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

If you are collecting data electronically, what (if any) identifiable information will be collected by the host site (such as email and/or IP address) and will this information be reported to you?

No identifiable information such as IP addresses will be reported to me. I will use email addresses to contact participants for scheduling interviews, sending consent forms, professional and demographic information forms, and copies of transcribed interviews. Email addresses may also be used to communicate any follow up interview questions.

Describe any ways that participants themselves or third parties discussed by participants could be identified indirectly from the data collected, and describe measures taken to protect identities.

The information collected in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. The recorded interview will be transcribed, but no reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link the participant to the study, as
a pseudonym (nickname) will be used for each participant so that their identity remains confidential. The consent forms, professional and demographic information forms, resumes and press materials, will be stored securely in a locked file within the researcher’s home office. At the end of the study, the recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

Each participant will take part in a semi-structured interview, which will last approximately 1-2 hours. The interview will be audio-recorded on two digital recorders, used for data analysis. The researcher will be the only person with access to the recordings. Recordings will not be used in publications or data reporting to protect the identity of the participants. No images of participants will be used in this study. Recordings will be transcribed by this researcher. At the end of the study the recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

Describe how data will be reported (aggregate, individual responses, use of direct quotes) and describe how identities will be protected in study reports.

The recorded interview will be transcribed, but no reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link the participant to the study, as a pseudonym (nickname) will be used for each participant so that their identity remains confidential. All participant information will remain confidential, but anonymous direct quotes (with no link to participants’ identity) will be used in the dissertation summary.

Will anyone besides the PI or the research team have access to the data (including completed surveys) from the moment they are collected until they are destroyed?

No one outside of the PI will have access to any of the data collected by the researcher, from the moment collected to the moment all data is destroyed.

Describe any compensation that participants will be eligible to receive, including what the compensation is, any eligibility requirements, and how it will be delivered.

Participants will receive a $25 dining gift card for completing this study. The requirements are that participants complete consent form, professional and demographic information form, submit resume, press material, complete the interview, review and return interview transcription and answer any follow-up questions.

Explain compensation provisions if the participant withdraws prior to completion of the study.

If participants withdraw from the study prior to its completion, participants will not receive any compensation or $25 dining gift card.
Appendix B – IRB Interview Guide

Interview Protocol Guide by Research Question

Pseudonym of Participant: ____________________________________________________________

Date of Interview: ___________________________________________________________________

Time of Interview: ___________________________________________________________________

**Research Title:** An Exploration of the Career Experiences of African American Women Leaders in Parks and Recreation Organizations

**Background Questions**

A. Tell me about yourself.

B. Describe your career pathway to becoming a (job title of participant- i.e. director, assistant director).

C. Describe your current position duties and responsibilities as a (job title of participant- i.e. director, assistant director).

D. What was the selection and hiring process utilized by the hiring agency for your current position?

   a. What was the race of the person that hired you?

E. How would you define resiliency?

F. What meaning does being a resilient leader have in your career?

G. What has been the best and worst experience you’ve had in your career as a leader? What did you learn about yourself from these experiences??

H. Describe your involvement in parks and recreation growing up.

**Research Question 1:** What characterizes the pathway to leadership among African
American women in parks and recreation organizations?

1.1 Describe any influential factors that shaped your career pathway.

1.1.1 What role, if any, does religion or spirituality play in your life? If so, how did your religious or spiritual beliefs help you navigate difficulties during your career?

1.1.2 What, if any, beliefs do you hold about controlling events occurring in your life?

1.1.3 What is your overall outlook on life?

1.1.4 How do you self-govern, control or influence events in spite of hardships?

1.1.5 Describe your involvement or commitment to personal activities and relationships.

1.1.6 How do you view change? Please explain.

1.1.7 Do you have role models or mentors? Describe those relationships. How did the role models or mentors contribute to your success?

**Research Question 2:** What are the barriers that affect progression to leadership among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

2.1 Describe the greatest barriers or challenges you face as an African American woman in your position? Do you feel these barriers or challenges are common to other African American women in your position? Please explain.

2.2 Describe any stereotypes you face in the workplace that create barriers for you.

2.3 Describe any workplace traditions you feel create barriers for you.

2.4 Are there social practices that create barriers for you? One example could be not getting invited to weekend trips or gatherings with your coworkers. Please explain.

**Research Question 3:** What are the negotiation strategies and mechanisms that facilitate progression to leadership positions among African American women in parks and recreation organizations?

3.1 Share with me any strategies or skills you have used to deal with barriers faced in your
position. Are those the same now, as they were earlier in your career?

3.2 What type of support system or relationships, if any, do you have in place to help you overcome barriers?

3.3 In what ways has your education helped you overcome some of those barriers?

3.4 What motivates you to overcome barriers you face in the workplace?

3.5 Have you noticed a change in how you deal with barriers now versus when you were new to your position? If yes, please share how. What about now and earlier in your career?

3.6 What do you think makes you successful when others may not reach your level of success?

**Closing questions**

A. What advice would you give to African American Women aspiring to become leaders in the parks and recreation profession?

B. What do you think the biggest barriers or challenges will be for the next generation?

C. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

D. Can you share with me the name and contact information of colleague(s) you feel would be good candidate(s) for this study?
Shaw Recruitment Phone/Email Script for Study Participants

First Email to Participants

Hello (Name of African American Woman Parks and Recreation Leader). My name is Sonya Shaw and I am a doctoral candidate in the Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management program at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC. Under the guidance of Dr. Myron Floyd, my dissertation chairperson and faculty advisor, I am conducting a study on the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation agencies. The purpose of this study is to examine the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations by examining factors influencing their pathways to leadership, barriers affecting their progression to leadership, along with negotiation strategies and mechanisms used to overcome barriers during their careers. As you may be aware, there is both an underrepresentation of African American women leaders in parks and recreation and in academic literature. Prior research has been conducted on women leaders in parks and recreation, but not focused on women from underrepresented populations. The purpose of this call is to invite you to participate in this study because I believe that your unique perspective as an African American woman will greatly enhance this research area. Your participation is completely voluntary.

Is this study something that you would be interested in participating in? (If she responds no, I will thank her for her time.)

If she responds yes: In order to fully prepare you to consider participating in this study, I would like to provide you with some important information. (By the way, you will receive the information that I have shared with you on this phone call in an email.)

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form and complete a brief professional and demographic information form prior to the interview. This will be sent via email to you. Each participant will take part in a semi-structured interview, which will last approximately 1-2 hours. The interview will be audio-recorded on two digital recorders. During this interview, you will be asked questions about your past experiences as a woman leader in parks and recreation, barriers and challenges you faced on your pathway to becoming a leader, as well as the ways you have overcome them. I would like to reserve the
right for a follow-up interview, if necessary. The recording will be transcribed by me and sent to you via email for your approval and/or any revisions you would like to make. All participant information will remain confidential, but anonymous direct quotes (with no link to your identity) will be used in the dissertation summary.

In addition, you will be asked to provide a current resume and any press material (news articles, websites, or announcements) highlighting your experience/achievements as an African American woman leader in parks and recreation. You may provide paper copies or email these documents. You can also share links to such information.

The information collected in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study, as a pseudonym (nickname) will be used for each participant so that your identity remains confidential. Your recorded interview will be transcribed, and along with your consent form, professional and demographic information form, resume and press material, will be stored securely in a locked file within this researcher’s home office. At the end of the study, the recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

**Second email to Participants:**

Attached, you will the following three documents: *Consent Form* *Professional and Demographic Information Form* *Interview Guide*

Please compete the consent form and professional demographic information form, which contains information about your educational and professional background. Upon returning these two forms via email or in the self-addressed, stamped envelope that I will send to you by (insert date), please email or include your resume with this information. If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact me via phone at (919) 225-5597 or by email at (srshaw@ncsu.edu) or my dissertation chair, Dr. Myron Floyd at (919) 515-3675 or at mffloyd@ncsu.edu.

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I look forward to your voice contributing to the literature in the field of parks and recreation.

Sonya Shaw, PhD Candidate  Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management Program North Carolina State University
Appendix D – Informed Consent Form

North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: An Exploration of the Career Experiences of African American Women Leaders in Parks and Recreation Organizations

Principal Investigator: Sonya Reddick Shaw  
Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Myron F. Floyd

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of research studies is to gain a better understanding of a certain topic or issue.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in a study. Research studies also may pose risks to those that participate. In this consent form you will find specific details about the research in which you are being asked to participate. If you do not understand something in this form it is your right to ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If at any time you have questions about your participation, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of this study is to examine the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations by examining factors influencing the pathways to leadership, barriers affecting their progression to leadership, along with negotiation strategies and mechanisms used during their careers.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form and complete a brief professional and demographic information form prior to the interview. This will be sent via email to you. Each participant will take part in a semi-structured interview, which will last approximately 1-2 hours. The interview will be audio-recorded on two digital recorders. During this interview, you will be asked questions about your past experiences as a woman parks and recreation leader, barriers and challenges you have faced on your pathway to becoming a leader, as well as the ways you have overcome them. The researcher may ask you for a follow-up interview, if necessary. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher and sent to you via email for your approval and/or any revisions you would like to make. All participant information will remain confidential, but anonymous direct quotes (with no link to your identity) will be used in the dissertation summary.
In addition, you will be asked to provide a current resume and any press material (news articles, websites, or announcements) highlighting your experience/achievements as an African American woman leader in parks and recreation. You may provide paper copies or email these documents; links may also be shared with the researcher.

**Risks and Benefits**

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. You are free to not answer any question that makes you uncomfortable, and you may withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. If you become uncomfortable with the interview topic or process, you will be permitted to end the interview. If you are unable to continue, any information that has been collected from you will be destroyed.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits are that findings from this study can be used to increase the awareness of experiences, barriers and negotiation strategies of African American women leaders in the profession and help prepare the next generation of African American women leaders for the workforce. Findings will also contribute to the existing literature gap by providing a voice and dialogue to portray the career experiences of African American women leaders in parks and recreation organizations.

**Confidentiality**

The information collected in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study, as a pseudonym (nickname) will be used for each participant so that your identity remains confidential. All notes, transcripts of interviews, and the research product will contain the assigned name rather than your real name. Your recorded interview will be transcribed and, along with your consent form, professional and demographic information form, resume and press materials, will be stored securely in a locked file within this researcher’s home office. At the end of the study, the recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

**Compensation**

For participating in this study you will receive a $25 dining gift card. If you withdraw from the study prior to its completion, you will not receive any compensation.

**What if you have questions about this study?**

If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact Sonya Shaw at 919-225-5597 or srshaw@ncsu.edu, or the Faculty Sponsor, Dr. Myron F. Floyd at 919-515-3675 or mffloyd@ncsu.edu.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Deb Paxton, Regulatory Compliance Administrator at dapaxton@ncsu.edu or by phone at 1-919-515-4514.
Consent To Participate

“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may choose not to participate or to stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled.”

Subject's signature_______________________________ Date _________________

Investigator's signature___________________________ Date _________________
Appendix E – Professional and Demographic Information Form

**Please return this form no later than (INSERT DATE) along with your resume via email: srshaw@ncsu.edu or mail to 209 E. Garner Road, Garner, NC, 27529. **

**Study Title: An Exploration of the Career Experiences of African American Women Leaders in Parks and Recreation Organizations**

Please provide the following information:

I. Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Degree(s) Earned</th>
<th>Salary Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ Single</td>
<td>☐ Under 35</td>
<td>☐ B.A</td>
<td>☐ $65,000-$74,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Married</td>
<td>☐ 35-39</td>
<td>☐ B.S</td>
<td>☐ $75,000-$84,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Divorced</td>
<td>☐ 40-44</td>
<td>☐ M.R.A.</td>
<td>☐ $85,000-$94,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Widowed</td>
<td>☐ 45-49</td>
<td>☐ M.P.A.</td>
<td>☐ $95,000-$104,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of children</td>
<td>☐ 50-54</td>
<td>☐ M.B.A.</td>
<td>☐ $105,000-$114,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 55-59</td>
<td>☐ Over 60</td>
<td>☐ Other</td>
<td>☐ $115,000-$124,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Over 60</td>
<td></td>
<td>☐ Other</td>
<td>☐ $125,000-$134,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Municipal Government Information

Town/City Population Estimate: ________________________

2016-2017 Department Budget Total: ________________________

Number of Department Employees: ________________________

III. Employment Information- Positions Held

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Title</th>
<th>Agency/City- State</th>
<th>Years of Employment (YYYY-YYYY)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

IV. Professional and Educational Background (educational, community and civic associations/affiliations, if not listed in resume)

_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

Professional and Demographic Information
Principal Investigator: Sonya Reddick Shaw
Email: srshaw@ncsu.edu
Phone: 919-225-5597
Floyd - 9268 - IRB Protocol approved

1 message

Mon, Nov 21, 2016 at 1:03 PM

Sonya Shaw <sshaw@ncsu.edu>

Dear Sonya Shaw,

IRB Protocol 9268 has been approved

Title: An Exploration of the Career Experiences of African-American Women Leaders in Parks and Recreation Organizations

Pr: Floyd, Myron F

The project listed above has been reviewed by the NC State Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research, and is approved for one year. This protocol will expire on 11/21/2017 and will need continuing review before that date.

NOTE:

1. You must use the approved consent forms (available in the IRB system with the documents for your protocol) which have the approval and expiration dates of your study.
2. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: FWA00033429.
3. Any changes to the protocol and supporting documents must be submitted and approved by the IRB prior to implementation.
4. If any unanticipated problems occur, they must be reported to the IRB office within 5 business days by completing and submitting the unanticipated problem form on the IRB website.
5. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to call us.

Sincerely,

Deb Paxton
919.515.4514

IRB Administrator
deperson@ncsu.edu
NC State IRB Office