

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITY WOMEN

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF MINORITY WOMEN IN SENIOR-LEVEL  
POSITIONS EMPLOYED BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

by

Amy Freeman

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Business Administration

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Liberty University, School of Business

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to understand the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government. The study generated from the glass ceiling theory that has been previously studied and explored through different aspects related to barriers associated with discriminatory acts aimed at minorities and women. A thematic approach was utilized to display the data obtained from the participants, illustrating insufficient progress being made over the course of 40-plus years with regards to the advancement of minority women obtaining a senior-level role within the federal government. Participants defined their understanding of the glass ceiling and described how the glass ceiling related to their lived experiences working for the federal government. Although each participant's experience was not exactly the same, the experiences correlated into similar categories. This research could be utilized to develop diversity and inclusion programs for the federal government and ensure equity is imposed at all levels of the workforce, to include senior-level positions. Overall, the study provides an understanding of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government.

*Keywords:* glass ceiling, underrepresentation of minority women, federal government, diversity, inclusion

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**Approvals**



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Date



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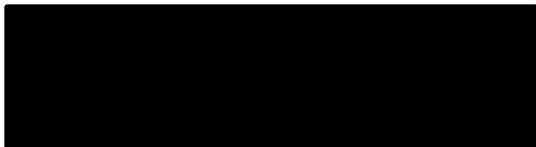
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Date

### **Dedication**

I am dedicating this dissertation to my family and friends. A special dedication to my husband, Howard Leroy Freeman Jr., who encouraged me daily to accomplish this goal through my sweat and tears. Thank you for simply just being there for me over the years and loving me unconditionally. I love you my king. You are my world. To my children, Domonique, A'Mari, Ezra, and Ezekiel, who kept me on my toes and encouraged me to pursue this goal and never give up, I love you all with all my heart. To my parents, Sherman and Janie Hansard, thank you for encouraging me over the years to pursue my goals and never giving up on me. I love you all so much. To my brother, Todd Hansard, thank you for always being the best brother a sister could have and always encouraging me. I love you. To my best friend and sister, Demetria Swindell, you have been there for me through thick and thin, and I appreciate you more than you know. I love you. To my grandparents, Charles and Josephine Walker (rest in power), your granddaughter did it. Thank you for encouraging me to obtain the education and skills I need to be successful. We will meet again. I love you. To my grandparents, Robert (rest in power) and Rosetta Taylor, thank you for encouraging me to pursue my goals and always being happy for me no matter what. I love you. To my grandparents, Shedrick (rest in power) and Cora Burk, thank you for your wisdom over the years and always encouraging me to pursue my goals. I love you. To the rest of my family and friends, I appreciate and love you all for your encouragement.

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Finally, I would like to thank those that participated in my study. Thank you for your time and feedback so that I could complete my research. To every minority woman trying to pursue their dreams of obtaining a senior-level position, may God's will be done and many blessings upon you.

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## **Section 1: Foundation of the Study**

This study examined the current dilemma faced by minority women working for the federal government and minority women who desire to work for the federal government in a senior-level position. Minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions, yet the majority of the federal government workforce is comprised of women and minorities. The lack of diversity and inclusion at the senior-level in the federal government led to this study. The study provides a thorough background of the problem by discussing an in-depth analysis of prior research and emphasizing the importance of understanding the dilemma by adding to the current literature. The first section of the study provides a comprehensive examination of the problem, purpose, nature of the study, conceptual framework, the significance of the study, and literature review. The second section provides an outline of the research and reiterates the purpose of the study while presenting information pertaining to the role of the researcher and participants. The third section provides an overview of the study, presentation of the findings, an application to professional practice, recommendations for further study, and individual and biblical reflections.

### **Background of the Problem**

The underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions in the federal workforce was scrutinized by Congress in the late 1970s when the Civil Service Reform Act was passed, emphasizing the need for the federal workforce to be a mirror image of the nation's diversity (Naff, 2001), yet there has not been much progress. According to Johansen and Zhu (2017), public organizations, such as the federal government and its agencies, have policies promoting diversity programs due to the sector being institutionalized, which leads to diversity and inclusion being a priority for senior leaders. Those views stand true with regards to the entire federal workforce but contradictory regarding diversity at the senior-level, as women and

minorities are less likely to hold a senior-level position in the federal government. Therefore, diversity and inclusion are not priorities amongst senior leaders who do not view the lack of diversity at the senior-level as a problem (Nelson & Piatak, 2019).

Theories contributing to the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions in the federal government revolve around self-identity and social identity. Self-identity and social identity contribute to the behavior of whether a minority woman would choose to or be chosen to represent their organization in a senior-level position, and this often comes with challenges. Minority women may view themselves differently if they are surrounded by an all-male non-minority group, but if minority women were surrounded by a diverse group, they would likely be empowered (Nelson & Piatak, 2019). When there is a continuous cycle of having an all-male non-minority senior leadership group, the lack of minority women representation at the senior-level raises concerns because the needs of the workforce are not being met due to lack of diversity and inclusion (Starks, 2009). Therefore, minority women will continue to be underrepresented at the senior-level in the federal government.

### **Problem Statement**

The general problem addressed was the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government, resulting in a lack of diversity and inclusion. Nelson and Piatak (2019) stated that women and minorities continue to be underrepresented in senior-level federal government positions and minority women experience overlapping injustice because of their gender and race. In a recent study, Grissom (2018) stated that across the United States, women and minorities are underrepresented as top decision-makers within their organization, yet 48.9% of the U.S. workforce consists of women. Still, less than 21% of women are board directors in Fortune 500 companies, and it is worse for minority

women and men because they only represent 14.4% of board directors. Martinez (2018) supported the views stating that only 43.2% of women make up the federal government workforce while the minority groups (men and women) only make up 36.4%. The specific problem to be addressed is the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States, resulting in a lack of diversification and inclusion.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to add to the body of knowledge by developing an understanding of the reasons minority women are underrepresented in the federal government's senior-level positions and the effect it has on diversity and inclusion. This larger problem is explored through an in-depth study of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions and its effect on diversity and inclusion at military installations in the southern United States.

### **Nature of the Study**

The best research method for this study was a qualitative approach. Creswell (2014) defined qualitative research as investigating and comprehending the significance of individuals or groups to a social or human dilemma by collecting information, analyzing the information, and making interpretations. A qualitative research method provides an opportunity to study the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions in the federal government and develop an understanding of why this dilemma is occurring specifically at a military installation in the southern United States. Data was collected and analyzed. Based on the qualitative research, one was able to make an interpretation regarding the phenomenon.

### *Discussion of Method*

For this study, a theoretical lens in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014) was necessary to answer the questions of why minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States and what actions have been taken to hire minority women in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States? One of the main strengths of qualitative research is the focus on context (Sallee & Flood, 2012), which works in favor of this study because of the facts and circumstances that surround it. Being that this study was centered on minority women, the research indicates a problem pertaining to gender and race (which are both marginalized groups) exist. The data collected and analyzed resulted in interpretations for future research and consequently provided an opportunity for a call to action or change.

Quantitative research was not feasible for this study because this study does not need to test objective theories that are analyzed and then measured (Creswell, 2014). The analysis of numerical data has a high probability of being conducted with inferential statistics (McCarthy et al., 2017), and while this study discusses that minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions in the federal government, the research does not need to conclude but provide a better understanding of why this problem is occurring. Since the quantitative research approach was not suitable for this study, it was not resourceful to conduct mixed methods research and integrate qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The mixed methods research approach would allow quantitative and qualitative research to merge during different phases (Clark & Ivankova, 2017), but for this study, data was collected from prior quantitative research to develop a better understanding of the study, which aligns with a qualitative method.

### *Discussion of Design*

The best qualitative research design for this study was a case study. Creswell and Poth (2018) believed a case study would allow one to explore a real-life situation involving data collection from multiple resources. Yin (2018) stated that a good case study provides an opportunity for a researcher to collect, present, and analyze data equitably.

Compared to the other four designs within the scope of qualitative research, the case study allowed the researcher to explore a real-life problem and collect in-depth data detailed from numerous sources. This study scrutinized military installations in the southern U.S., and the case study allowed one to focus intensively on this single case while representing a larger population of cases (i.e., the entire federal government; Elman et al., 2016). Although the military installation in the southern United States only represents a portion of the federal government, the installations had a diverse workforce predominantly made up of women and minorities, yet minority women are underrepresented at the senior-level. This study was an instrumental case because the intent was to understand a specific problem at military installations in the southern United States.

A narrative approach explores the life of an individual and their lived experiences (Carless & Douglas, 2017). Utilizing a narrative approach for this study was not conducive as this study explored multiple cases and was not directed at one individual. The narrative approach is usually directed at one or two individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and for this study, more than two individuals were studied. Therefore, the narrative approach is not practical. A phenomenological approach gives voice to experience (Norlyk et al., 2011) and describes the significance of a lived phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The phenomenological approach includes several individuals that have something in common, and while this approach could have

been used, the study was being conducted to gain an understanding and not to describe the common meaning of what has occurred in several individuals' lives. A ground theory approach allows the research to obtain an abstract theory based on methods, conduct, and synergy within the perspective of the participant (Bakker, 2019). With this study, multiple states of data collected for clarification were not necessary as the data collected are to acquire a comprehension of why this problem is happening and exists. An ethnographic approach searches for patterns in human culture (Sangasubana, 2011) by observing and participating. This approach was relevant to this study as one can relate to the study but chooses not to insert themselves through participation to gain an understanding.

### ***Summary of the Nature of the Study***

A qualitative case study was the best method and design for the research because it allowed one to explore real-life situations and obtain a better understanding of why minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions in the federal government. Utilizing qualitative research provided an understanding of underlying patterns associated with the study. The qualitative case study allowed one to research the problem by collecting and analyzing data to be interpreted. This qualitative case study will provide other researchers an opportunity to study the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions in the federal government. This study can be used for future qualitative or quantitative research. From this study, one hopes a call to action or change will occur.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1. How are minority women underrepresented in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States?



RQ1a. What extent do factors of social identity and self-identity help to understand why minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States?

RQ2. What actions have been taken to hire minority women in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States?

RQ2a. What hiring mechanisms encourage applicants at military installations in the southern United States to apply for senior-level positions?

RQ2b. How do education and training programs, as well as diversity and inclusion programs, encourage applicants to be considered for senior-level positions at a military installation in the southern United States?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theories centered on this qualitative case study scrutinizes the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions in the federal government and the impact it has on diversification and inclusion. Each theory relates to the study and provides an understanding of why the research was needed. The literature addresses each research question and sub-question by providing logic to the study.

#### ***Discussion of Concept 1***

The first theory is the identity theory. The origins of social identity theory derive from two categories of self and identity (Hogg et al., 2017). Self, defined and classified in terms of mutual traits with others of a comprehensive social category (social identity), and self, defined in terms of close connections with certain people (self-identity). At the same time, self-identity is the ability to understand the moral self, which regulates the meaning of one's behavior (Stets & Carter, 2011). Group phenomena are typically associated with social identity and not self-

identity (Hogg et al., 2017). Social identity theory allows one to understand the connections between people's attitudes and behavior (Terry & Hogg, 1996), and self-identity allows one to understand self-definitions related to their own uniqueness and distinctive characteristics (Pierro et al., 2003).

In modern society, people group others or divide others into different categories or social dimensions to include gender, sex, age, religion, race, political ideology, and recreational preference (Brewer et al., 2012). The belief associated with the social identity complexity construct is that individuals identify with multiple social groups, and the different identities are subjectively combined to determine the inclusiveness of the individuals in-group association (Brewer et al., 2012).

Brewer et al. (2012) emphasized the perception of ethnic minorities, stating that ethnic minorities may associate their numerous in-group connections differently than those whose group connections do not include minority identities. A study conducted by Nelson and Piatak (2019) specifically discussed minority women and leadership positions, highlighting social and self-identity issues associated with the underrepresentation of minority women in leadership roles in the federal government. Nelson and Piatak (2019) discussed how minority women feel being compared to their male or non-minority counterparts when put into situations that make them believe they are part of the "out group." The research scrutinizes the need for organizations to promote inclusion for all employees to feel a part of the "in-group" which can be difficult due to social and self-identity complexity.

The identity theory relates to the study because it explains one's behavior and how minority women perceive themselves and others, and how others perceive minority women, based on association of particular social groups and distinctive characteristics. The identity

theory addresses the first research question and sub-question with a notion that social identity and self-identity are two factors why minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions in the federal government. The theory shows that social identity hinders different opportunities for someone because of others' perceptions of that person. The theory also shows that self-identity hinders different opportunities for someone because of an individual's perception of themselves.

### ***Discussion of Concept 2***

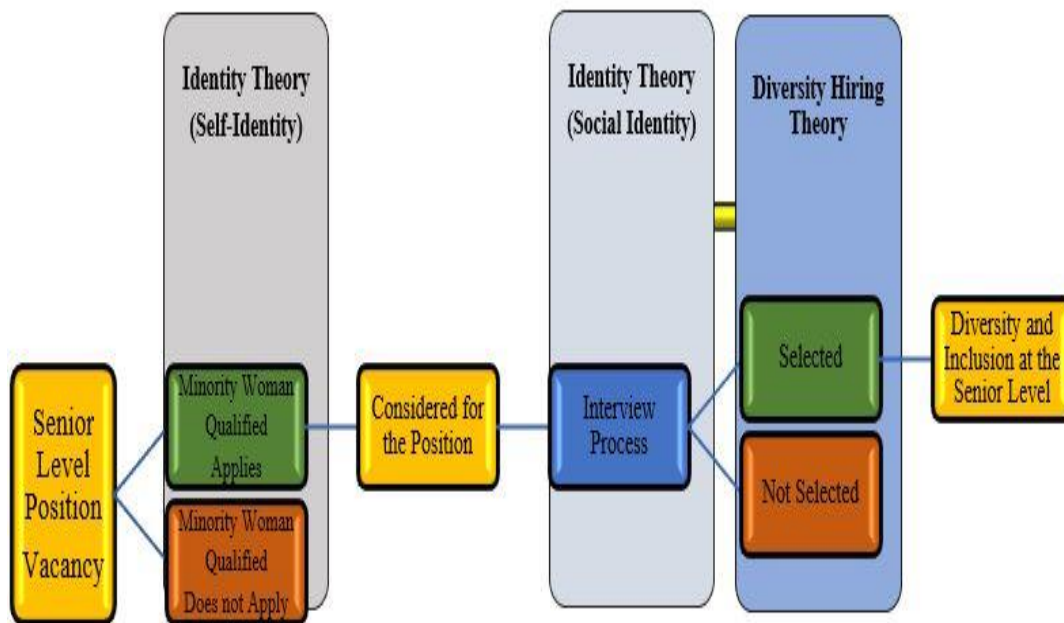
The second theory is the diversity hiring theory. According to Starks (2009), the federal government and its numerous agencies have implemented policies and programs that mandate affirmative action for minority groups to have equal employment opportunities. However, research and analysis indicate that many lower-level government positions consist of minority groups, but there is a decline of minorities in senior-level positions (Stark, 2009). For senior-level positions, an individual must meet the minimum qualifications in order to be considered for the position. Minimum qualifications, which is a screening mechanism during the hiring process, is based on the assumptions of values pertaining to skills, experience, and education the hiring agency has deemed as a critical component of what is needed to perform the job (Dougherty & Van Gelder, 2015). While skills and experience are obtained over time, education is essential for senior-level positions. Education and training are viewed as an investment in human capital, and the number of women obtaining and receiving education continues to increase to obtain senior-level positions and higher pay, yet there is still a decline in women being hired for senior-level positions (Amin & Islam, 2015). Johansen and Zhu (2017) stated that the gender of individuals who hold senior-level positions would determine if diversity and inclusion are a priority for an organization. Women find value in diversity programs in the public sector because women

believe they are more likely to be discriminated against, especially when it comes to being promoted to a senior-level position. Minority women feel discriminated against not only because of their gender but by their race too (Johansen & Zhu, 2017).

The diversity hiring theory relates to the study because it provided an understanding of the behavior of organizations and their hiring practices with regard to minority women and senior-level positions. The diversity hiring theory provided an understanding of mandated policies and programs that should be utilized for equal employment opportunities with regard to the hiring process. The diversity hiring theory provided an understanding of the importance of education and training programs related to promotion and hiring for senior-level positions. This theory addresses the second research question and the sub-question. This theory shows that the best hiring practices are essential within an organization.

**Figure 1**

*Relationships Between Concepts*



### ***Summary of the Conceptual Framework***

During this research, what was expected to be found was there is a lack of knowledge regarding the importance of diversity and inclusion. What was also expected to be found was that without having a minority woman in a senior-level position, there would be a lack of diversity and inclusion because no one was speaking for the federal workforce, who is predominately women and a minority. There is a never-ending cycle of the same people being hired for senior-level positions because mandated policies and programs are not enforced. Therefore, non-minority men are constantly promoted to senior-level positions. The same non-minority men lacking knowledge of diversity and inclusion leads to minority women underrepresented in senior-level positions.

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms are defined to assist the reader in understanding the context of the terms utilized in this study.

*Civilian Personnel Advisory Center (CPAC):* A department within the federal government that represents the Human Resources Office by processing and conducting activities related to human capital (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2020).

*Diversity:* A variety or range of different individuals with different backgrounds.

*General Schedule (GS):* A pay system in the federal government that holds 15 pay grades with 10 steps for each grade (USAJOBS, 2020).

*Glass Ceiling:* A theory used to capture the challenges minorities and women face in climbing the career ladder to senior-level positions in the public sector (Sabharwal, 2013).

*Hiring Managers:* An individual or a group of individuals that determine who is chosen for a vacant position with or without the assistance of the human resources department (Rivera, 2012).

*Inclusion:* Include every individual without prejudice to their background.

*Minority Women:* A group of individuals categorized by their ethnicity and/or race who identify themselves as the female gender but are excluded from an all-Caucasian background and do not identify as the male gender (Murray, 2015).

*Senior Executive Service (SES):* An executive position in the federal government held by an individual whose position is higher than a GS-15 level (Starks, 2009).

*Senior-Level:* A management position in the federal government that is held by an individual with a GS level of 13 or above (Starks, 2009).

*Underrepresented:* minimal representation or a lack of certain groups in the labor market or a particular level in the workforce (Amin & Islam, 2015).

*Workforce:* A group of individuals working for the same federal organization (Valdez, 2018).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, Delimitations**

For this study, there were certain assumptions, limitations, and delimitations that impacted the research. The assumptions were not verified through the study because one relied on the responses of the participants. Since there are risks with each assumption, the risk mitigations were discussed. The limitations of the study identified the potential weaknesses associated with this research and discussed what cannot be controlled. The delimitations can be controlled; therefore, the boundaries of the research were discussed.

### *Assumptions*

Based on the belief system highlighted by Yin (2016), which embraces the worldview, the following assumptions were presumed in regards to the study. An assumption in this study was that minority women are not being promoted or selected for senior-level positions in the federal government because the hiring managers continuously hire individuals they have mentored to follow in their footsteps or hire individuals that have the same background as the current senior-level individuals. According to Naff (2001), minority women have fewer opportunities than non-minority males for temporary promotions and benefits of mentors. The risks associated with this assumption were asking a hiring manager the wrong questions about their decision in the selection process which could have led to the hiring manager not wanting to finish the interview or the hiring manager being uncooperative. To mitigate the potential risks, one asked the right questions without offending the participants in order to get an accurate response. One did not ask leading questions, as leading questions can lead to false data. Researching ways to ask questions to receive truthful responses without offending others assisted in mitigating the potential risks. Another risk mitigation was to reassure the hiring manager that answering the questions is strictly for the study and will not be shared with CPAC.

Another assumption in this study was that minority women are not being promoted or selected for senior-level positions in the federal government because of the way they view themselves. This assumption was associated with the identity theory based on one's own perception of themselves and how other people view them based on their own beliefs. Carter and Bruene (2019) argued that an individual's perception of self represents their own thoughts and feelings as an object which is placed in categories related to individuality, roles, or social status but may or may not be perceived the same way to another individual. The risk associated with

this assumption was that minorities may not want to admit they do not apply for senior-level positions because they do not believe they will fit in, or they would feel uncomfortable in a room with people that do not look like them. To mitigate the risks, participants were volunteers. Therefore, they were able to withdraw from the study at any time. One also reassured the participants that the information obtained was strictly for the study and would not be shared with their organization.

### *Limitations*

One of the limitations associated with this study is time. Senior-level positions are not announced as often as lower-level positions; therefore, it is critical to have participants that are potential candidates for senior-level positions participate in the study during a time a senior-level position is announced. A small number of participants would not capture the data that was needed for this study. Given that one knows when each job announcement was posted, one kept track of each senior-level job announcement to conduct the research accordingly. Since one was familiar with the application statistics associated with certain job vacancy announcements, finding participants was not difficult. To minimize the limitations of not having a job vacancy opened during participant interviews, the researcher tracked the senior-level positions on the southern U.S. military installations to ensure there are specific job announcements referenced during the interview process.

Another limitation was the actual hiring process in the federal government. Since each agency utilizes its own hiring mechanism, one captured the hiring process tools utilized for the job. This was a difficult task because some federal agencies do not like to share their hiring mechanism. Although this is deemed as a limitation, one found prior candidates or current potential candidates of the federal agency's job announcements and asked the candidates about



the overall experience with the hiring process. To minimize the limitations of not capturing hiring process tools associated with the senior-level positions, the researcher documented the information on the job announcements and questionnaires.

### ***Delimitations***

This study was chosen because senior-level individuals and senior-level executives in the federal government emphasized the need for the workforce to mirror the population of the United States at all levels, even though the senior-level positions and above lack minority women. The objective of this study was to understand why minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions in the federal government. The two research questions associated with this study helped provide an understanding and provided an opportunity to add to the literature by evaluating and analyzing the data. The two theoretical objectives were based on the identity theory and the diversity hiring theory, which played a vital role in this study to understand the dilemma. The population chosen as targets for the study were the military installations in the southern United States. Those participating in the study included at least 12 minority women on a voluntary basis. The study will exclude non-minority women, non-minority men, and minority men unless they are hiring managers.

### **Significance of the Study**

The information found in this study concerning the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government provided an understanding of the dilemma and contributed additional information to the phenomenon. The study benefits minority women currently working for the federal government or those who desire to work for the federal government to pursue a senior-level position. Conducting this research provided the federal government's hiring managers and executives an understanding of the importance of

diversity and inclusion at the senior-level. The implementation of numerous diversity and inclusion programs in the federal government continues to fail because the right questions are not asked to the right people. In anticipation to fill the gaps in research, this study evaluated and analyzed the information obtained from the affected minority women and the individuals that are in a position to resolve the problem but allow this dilemma to persist.

### ***Reduction of Gaps***

Prior research is centered on the theory of the glass ceiling, indicating that women and minorities can only reach a certain level within the federal government (Naff, 2001). The percentage of women and minorities in the workforce continues to increase, yet women and minorities are still having difficulty obtaining a senior-level position (Elacqua et al., 2009). Most public and private sector executives believe the glass ceiling to be a myth (Smith, 2012), but the dilemma concerning women and minorities in senior-level positions has not been resolved. This study provided an understanding of why this dilemma continues to occur and added to the current literature to fill the gaps in the study. Based on the identity theory, this study indicates that social identity and self-identity contribute to the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government. Based on the diversity hiring theory, this study understood the impacts the theory has on the federal government's workforce and diversity and inclusion programs.

### ***Implications for Biblical Integration***

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galations 3:28, New International Version). If we could all view one another as Christ views us, this study would not be needed. This study was based on two theories, the identity theory and the diversity hiring theory. The identity theory involves

someone's perspective of either themselves or other individuals. While this theory is centered on how individuals should place themselves or are placed into certain categories because of their background, one should be more concerned with how they are viewed by Christ. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5, New International Version). We were created in God's image and God knows us better than we know ourselves. One should be confident that what God has instilled in them will lead them to opportunities that is in God's will for them, therefore, without denying who God has created them to be, the most important category they should want to be placed in is being a child of God and following God's guidance. The diversity hiring theory involves the behavior of organizations and their hiring practices regarding minority women and senior-level positions. "Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight" (Leviticus 19:13, New International Version). Organizations should promote an employee or hire an employee based on their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and no one should be held back or kept from obtaining a senior-level position. When individuals continuously work hard and obtain the skills and education they need to climb their career ladder, no one should keep them from that opportunity because of their gender or race.

### ***Relationship to Field of Study***

The human resource cognate focuses on various aspects of human resource management as it relates to an organization. The qualitative case study regarding the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government relates to the human resource cognate because the human resource department of an organization or company manages or oversees employment programs and fair hiring practices. Human resource management is defined as having policies and systems in place that influence an organization's

employee behavior, performance, and attitude (Noe et al., 2010). If policies and systems are not in place or are not enforced, the organization can face many problems. The dilemma of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government is a prime example of why policies and systems need to be in place or enforced. The consequences of not implementing best practices in the human resources department will always have a significant impact on the workforce.

### ***Summary of the Significance of the Study***

This study was essential to provide an understanding and add to the literature of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government. The study benefits minority women, hiring managers, executives, and future researchers. The study filled the gaps in research centered on the glass ceiling theory with regards to minority women. The research provided an in-depth evaluation and analysis of the identity theory and diversity hiring theory based on asking the right people the right questions.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

This study examined journals and articles pertaining to the problem statement of the qualitative case study and the two research questions associated with the study. The research questions revolve around the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions and actions taken to hire minority women in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States. Minority women remain underrepresented in senior-level positions in the federal government, and the low representation presents challenges associated with the advancement to Senior Executive Service (SES; Murray, 2015). To understand the dilemma, one examined the different theories and concepts from current research associated with the dilemma through comparison and contrast of the literature.

A critical focus of the literature was self-identity and social identity, which are two factors that are presented in current research that link to the current dilemma and are categorized under the identity theory. The identity theory provides an understanding of the reasons the dilemma is happening from the perspective of minority women and those in place to make hiring decisions for senior-level positions. The examination of the literature provides similar theories and concepts related to the dilemma and provides opposing theories and concepts related to the dilemma.

Controlled variables such as education level, pay grade, and tenure are factors that have an impact on minority women that are currently working for the federal government but the controlled variables for minority women that have a desire to work for the federal government are different and should be based on the minimum qualifications of the senior-level job (Nelson & Piatak, 2019). When hiring an individual for a senior-level position, the hiring manager searches for the best-qualified candidate that will be an asset to the organization; however, in most organizations that is not the case. The examination of past and current research provided an understanding of hiring actions that are associated with the dilemma and the theories and concepts that explain the reasons the dilemma is continuously occurring.

The examination of the literature regarding the diversity hiring theory included theories and concepts associated with hiring mechanisms, education and training programs, and diversity and inclusion programs. The literature linked to the diversity theory highlights practices and programs that can and should be utilized to have a diverse workforce. The examination of hiring mechanisms that are utilized amongst different sectors of the U.S. workforce was scrutinized in order to compare organizations that have a diverse workforce versus those that do not, and focusing on the diversity of senior-level positions within an organization.

The literature pertaining to education and training was scrutinized to reveal what is pertinent to this dilemma by providing different means of education and development that may not be traditional. The different means expanded on the positive and negative associations that provide opportunities for career progression within an organization. The history of education, training, and development were scrutinized in order to provide an understanding of the link between the subject matter and the dilemma.

The diversity and inclusion programs have progressed since the 1960s. However, there is skepticism with current diversity and inclusion programs regarding the value and utility of the programs, which highlights reverse discrimination and resistance of training and education programs that have been deemed ineffective (Valdez, 2018). The examination of literature regarding diversity and inclusion was compared to exhibit the level of importance amongst organizations and the U.S. workforce.

### ***Underrepresentation of Minority Women***

There is a significant demographic shift in leadership positions in the United States (Cook & Glass, 2015). However, women in leadership positions only account for 24% (Haile et al., 2016) and minority women only account for one-third of that representation (Barnes, 2017). Therefore, studies indicate that there is an underrepresentation of minority women in leadership positions. In the United States, the federal government is viewed as the epitome of equal opportunity because of the U.S. workforce policies and programs. While the policies and programs are perceived to eradicate glass ceilings, minority women are still underrepresented at the senior-level in the federal government (Starks, 2009), and as a result, research needs to continue to fully understand the phenomenon.

Before the 1960s, the history of the U.S. workforce barred minorities and women from progressing in the public sector due to discriminatory practices. During the 1960s, the focus of the U.S. workforce was to promote equal employment opportunities (Brown & Kellough, 2020), and instead of progressing throughout the years, the efforts have been stalled, even when public sectors put programs in place to promote diversity and inclusion because the programs eventually fail (Valdez, 2018). Valdez (2018) argued that particularly in the federal government, the broadening participation concept (increasing diversity and inclusion) initiated from efforts to remedy the underrepresentation of women, minorities, and other disadvantaged groups. Anestaki et al. (2019) showed similar evidence of the initiatives. Still, they believed the efforts to promote or hire minority women for senior-level positions were based on the current president of the United States and the political party of the president. Both Valdez's and Anestaki et al.'s theories indicate that the phenomenon continues due to the different barriers associated with the dilemma.

As of March 2018, the federal government's workforce consists of 43.7% of women and 37.2% of minorities, and only 34% of the SES positions were held by women, and 21% were held by minorities (Brown & Kellough, 2020). Based on multiple studies from the past and present research, Brown and Kellough (2020) argued that having minorities and female representation in the policy process for the federal government workforce provides a positive impact to a predominately women and minority-based workforce. Lee et al. (2019) argued that having a diverse representation at the senior-level and decision-making level can provide different perspectives that will help solve the issues or problems at hand that organizations face. However, the researchers also argue that having diversity at the senior-level or decision-making level can cause emotional conflict amongst peers due to different perspectives, which can potentially lead to a decrease in job satisfaction. Cook and Glass (2015) argued that minority

women do not always express comfort within their organization's culture, politics, and norms, but they do bring different perspectives and backgrounds to the table that can enhance the entire organization.

Despite the empowerment for women and minorities to defy the odds against them, there continues to be a lag of women and minorities in leadership and decision-making roles (D'Agostino, 2015). Women and minorities continue to face challenges, and while women and minorities can have similar experiences, minority women face challenges that only other minority women can relate to. Each underrepresented group is familiar with the glass ceiling. However, minority women experience the challenges of overlapping injustice by being a woman and being a minority, which has caused minority women to rename the challenges of reaching a senior-level position from glass ceiling to the concrete ceiling (Barnes, 2017). Although minority women are encouraged to progress and seek leadership roles, the research indicates that overlapping injustices hinders their ability to progress to senior-level positions whether they are empowered to do so or not.

Fritz and van Knippenberg (2018) argued that despite inequality between men and women, in the future, more women will have leadership roles within an organization. Valez (2018) argued that since diversity and inclusion programs have stalled, the progression of minority women advancing to a senior-level position has stalled. Gundemir et al. (2017) argued that minority leadership has many advantages, and two of the advantages being the reduction of prejudice and increasing the performance of minorities, which has led to more firms wanting to increase the presence of minority groups at the senior-level. Siemiatycki (2019) depicted that diversity at the senior-level will help shape the future, but if disadvantaged groups continue to be passed over at the entry and middle level, then there will be a skills deficit in the future for



anyone within the disadvantaged group, and they will never reach the senior-level. Current research signifies that the theories associated with the progression of minority women advancing to senior-level positions differ due to the lack of research that focuses on the same organizations instead of different organizations or sectors and the lack of prioritization regarding the barriers.

If workforce diversity within an organization has been resistant to change, then there are numerous factors associated with the issue. Therefore, it makes it difficult to determine the barriers (O'Brien et al., 2015). Siemiatycki (2019) indicated there is an identifiable hierarchy amongst gender and racial structure within the workforce with the belief that minority women are associated with two subordinate groups and experience greater bias differently than non-minority women, which has led to discrimination and the way they are viewed. Barnes (2017) implied that few researchers consider minority women specifically in their studies and the challenges minority women face. The past and current research regarding the progression to a senior-level role displays a focus on disadvantaged groups with an emphasis on either women or minorities but negates the efforts to research minority women alone who represent both women and minorities.

The perception of minority women based on their cultural identity influences hiring and promotion practices from senior leaders (Barnes, 2017). Thomas (2019) argued that senior leaders only hire or promote women or minorities under risky conditions or when the organization is failing, which is referred to as the glass cliff, meaning if the individual can't turn the organization around within a specific timeframe, the other senior leaders will replace that individual. Whether minority women are judged by their cultural identity or minority women are chosen to save an organization, Bui (2019) theorized that minority women often feel ignored or believe they are being scrutinized while working for their organization. Nelson and Piatak (2019)

argued that all groups from different backgrounds should feel part of the “in group” within their organization, but minority women often feel like an “out group” member due to their association with multiple minority groups if their coworkers do not look like them or have a similar background. Being accepted within an organization as an individual belonging to a minority group allows for personal satisfaction, improving an individual’s well-being, and promoting the notion of being treated fairly (Gundemir et al., 2019). Sabharwal (2013) believed that the factors that hinder women from advancing to senior-level positions are human capital barriers (e.g., experience, resources, education, and finances), stereotypes, communication styles, exclusions within a network, lack of support from management, lack of mentors, sex segregation, and organizational bias. The current research provides an understanding of a few barriers that may be associated with the underrepresentation of minority women advancing to senior-level positions as it relates to the various perspectives of individuals and others. One’s perspective of self and the other’s perspective of an individual leads to recent research regarding the identity theory related to the dilemma of minority women being underrepresented in senior-level positions.

### ***Identity Theory***

Trettevick (2016) stated that one’s identity is significant and linked to roles and groups that contribute to someone’s unique being. According to Stets and Carter (2011), the identity theory provides an understanding of one’s moral self and can provide meaning to that individual and their behavior. Clarke (2015) argued that an individual’s identity depends on their race, sex, family, and background because the information can be verified or confirmed through documentation or observation. However, Kachanoff et al. (2020) argued that one’s identity could be impacted through social identity due to the psychological stance or association linked to one’s perception. Both self-identity and social identity play a role in the identity theory and how it can

contribute to one's perception of themselves and how society views an individual based on their physical characteristics and background. The two factors of self-identity and social identity are categories within the identity theory that relates to the current research and the dilemma associated with the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions.

Brewer et al. (2012) emphasized the perception of ethnic minorities, stating that ethnic minorities may associate their numerous in-group connections differently than those whose group connections do not include minority identities. A study conducted by Nelson and Piatak (2019) specifically discussed minority women and leadership positions, highlighting social and self-identity issues associated with the underrepresentation of minority women in leadership roles in the federal government. Nelson and Piatak (2019) discussed how minority women feel compared to their male or non-minority counterparts when put into situations that make them believe they are part of the "out group." The research scrutinizes the need for organizations to promote inclusion for all employees to feel a part of the "in-group" which can be difficult due to social and self-identity complexity.

Recent research suggests that racial identity within the workplace is linked to self-esteem and cognitive well-being among minorities remains unresolved because of the lack of inconsistencies in theoretical predictions (Hughes et al., 2015). However, Nelson and Piatak (2019) indicated that feelings of inclusion regarding one's perception vary depending on the environment, equity, acceptance, mutual effort, support, and empowerment. Both theories and concepts from the researchers are valid and do not contradict that minority women's behavior or feelings toward being part of the in group should be withdrawn or neglected due to a lack of research within a workplace environment where this dilemma is currently taking place. The research indicates that future research should be conducted regarding the link between minority

women and their behavior and feelings regarding the perception of being part of an in group or their feelings about being a member of the out group.

Trettevik (2016) indicated that the identity theory focuses on a person's expectations regarding their individuality. Social group membership such as race and gender have an influence on perception (Nelson & Piatak, 2019), which can cause individuals or groups to be biased or express their prejudices against people. In the workforce, identity theory is important because of the influences of inclusion or exclusion (Bae et al., 2017). Stets and Carter (2011) argued that when an individual is in a situation that activates their identity, the identity represents the standards for that individual better known as self-identity.

### *Self-identity*

Self-identity is the ability to understand the moral self, which regulates the meaning of one's behavior from the research of Stets and Carter (2011). Self-identity allows one to understand self-definitions related to their own uniqueness and distinctive characteristics, as described in Pierro et al. (2003). Stets and Carter also theorized that one's true identity guides behavior, and therefore, individuals strive to verify one's identity by functioning in a manner that is steady with one's common character. According to Hogg et al. (2017), there are three forms of self-identity one can relate to, which includes individual self, which distinguishes self from others; relational self, which depends on connections and roles one may portray in relationships with others; and collective self, which is based on membership of a particular group the differentiates "us" from "them."

Carter and Bruene (2019) demonstrated that the individual self does not link to other individuals within a social structure and are stable components of one's true identity, and can be referred to as the master identity, which is used throughout one's lifetime. Nehrlich et al. (2019)

argued that individuals should prefer themselves because the individual self takes motivational precedence. Hwang et al. (2015) suggested that the individual self-concept connects interpersonal analogy regarding one's interest for self-worth and uniqueness derived from recognized similarities with and differences from other people. The researchers understand that one's identity, as it relates to individual self, is based on how they perceive themselves as opposed to how others perceive them.

Nehrlich et al. (2019) indicated that the relational self, being the secondary form of self-identity, involves characteristics that are shared amongst an individual and others that are close to that individual. The researchers argue that the relational self is valued less than the individual self. The study by Hwang et al. (2015) is similar, in which the researchers discuss the relational self-concept as being an individual conceptualizing themselves regarding others that are valuable to them. The researchers also imply that relational self-concept focuses on the development and maintenance of the relationship between the individual and those they value. The studies conducted by Nehrlich et al. and Hwang et al. provided a comprehensive analysis of relational self with regards to self-identity. The researchers also provided a clear understanding of the importance of valuable people in an individual's life that helps mold their identity.

The collective self-concept, as described by researchers Hwang et al. (2015), is self-definition with regards to group membership. Hwang et al. (2015) argued that the goal for individuals utilizing the collective self-concept is that they want to fulfill their responsibility as a member of a group and are stimulated by the well-being of the group regardless of their connection with others. Nehrlich et al. (2019) argued that the collective self revolves around the meaningful groups of an individual. The researchers have similar studies regarding the collective

self-concept, and an individual will base their self-identity based on the groups they are associated with.

With the different concepts associated with self-identity, Trettevik (2016) indicated that the identity theory focuses on one's expectations regarding their identity as previously determined by the researchers that identified the three forms of self-identity. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) demonstrated the connection of the identity theory and minority women as it relates to the three forms of self-identity. The article illustrates that non-minority women can self-identify as a woman who happens to be among those in a disadvantaged group classified as minorities but can still relate to a majority-dominated group. However, minority women can self-identify with all areas of minority differences and groups. Therefore, self-identity for a minority woman can result in a struggle when amongst majority-dominated social groups.

### ***Social Identity***

The origins of social identity theory derive from two categories of self and identity, as indicated in the research of Hogg et al. (2017). Self, defined and classified in terms of mutual traits with others of a comprehensive social category (social identity), and self, defined in terms of close connections with certain people (self-identity). Social identity has a lot of influence in organizational and management sciences and an individual's behavior (Hogg et al., 2017). Hamamura (2017) suggested that since cultures are different in many ways, the representation of social identity will differ. Hogg et al. (2017) suggested that group phenomena are typically associated with social identity and not self-identity. Hogg et al. (2017) provided an understanding of social identity and the impact it has on the self-concept in association with society and organizational behavior.

Social identity theory allows one to understand the connections between people's attitudes and behavior as described in Terry and Hogg (1996). Brewer et al. (2012) argued that in modern society, people group others or divide others into different categories or social dimensions to include gender, sex, age, religion, race, political ideology, and recreational preference. The belief associated with social identity complexity construct is that individuals identify with multiple social groups, and the different identities are subjectively combined to determine the inclusiveness of the individual's in-group association (Brewer et al., 2012). The researcher's theories provide an understanding of the behavior of individuals that categorize others into specific categories based on an individual's characteristics and how society may view an individual.

Hughes et al. (2015) argued that social identity reflects how an individual's self-conception as being members of particular social groups, influences behavior and group processes that are associated with motivational, interactional, and cognitive elements. The researchers indicate that social identity involves an individual's awareness of belonging, which is also linked to emotional significance. Hughes et al. (2015) studied the link between social identity and the impact it has on minorities with regards to self-esteem and evaluations of attitudes. The researcher's theories implied that social identity involves individuals being motivated by positive group identity to improve or manage their self-esteem. Hamamura (2016) argued that there are different meanings and representations of social identity depending on the culture. Hamamura (2016) based the study on two theories; different models of social identity involve various importance of intergroup analogy; and with regards to a socially dominant group, multiculturalism implies an adverse intergroup analogy through its support of minorities'

interests and rights. The researchers understand the variations and impact social identity has on individuals and society depending on the group setting or organization.

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) stated that identity is the condition of self that stands in relationship to social groups or classifications of which an individual is a member. The article states that in most cases when research or discussion surrounds gender or race, minority women are often overlooked, although social identity has a major impact on the specific group due to social position and group membership impacting minority women's identity regarding social identity. The article also highlights minority women in leadership regarding the formation of self-identity and social identity in which gender and ethnic differences play a major role. In comparison with the research of Hughes et al. (2015) and Hamamura (2016) regarding social identity, vital features of identity associated with social groups in organizations include race, ethnicity, gender, disability, and religion (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

### ***Hiring Actions***

Anestaki et al. (2019) stated that within the federal government, hiring actions pertaining to diversity and inclusion depends on the president and the president's administration. Research has indicated that based on the president's party, there will either be an increase or decrease in women and minority representation at the senior-level in the federal government (Anestaki et al., 2019). To keep the notion that the federal government's workforce should reflect the U.S. population at each level, it is imperative that the federal government hires and retains minorities and women at the senior-level due to the federal government workforce being predominately women and minorities (Dougherty & Van Gelder, 2015). Dougherty and Van Gelder (2015) also indicated that who is attracted to the job announcement and who is hired for a position is determined by the minimum qualifications that are put in the job announcement. The research



conducted by Anestaki et al. and Dougherty and Van Gelder (2015) expressed the need for future research about hiring actions for the federal government.

Keller (2018) discussed the differences in posting and slotting, referencing that posting is market-based and an organization posts job announcements for candidates to apply for a position, whereas slotting is considered to be a relational process consisting of a hiring manager personally identifying a candidate for a position. Keller (2018) annotated that the process of posting a position would generate a large pool of candidates and would reduce the chances of an organization overlooking a qualified candidate. The researcher indicated that slotting for a position is based on an organization or manager's preference of who they want to hire without regard to the competition of other potential candidates. According to the research, posting a position allows an equal opportunity for anyone to be given a chance for a position. Slotting interferes with fair hiring practices because slotting can be based on discriminatory practices. Discrimination in an organization can be categorized into two categories, taste-based discrimination and statistical discrimination (Zschirnt & Ruedin, 2016). Taste-based discrimination is when an organization or manager prefers someone with a certain racial or ethnic background, and statistical discrimination is when an individual of a certain group is discriminated against because the organization or manager lacks information about the individual regarding the individual's background. The researchers provide an understanding of the importance of posting a position or slotting for a position during the hiring process that concerns fair hiring practices and discriminatory practices.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits employment discrimination against any individual regarding their race, color, religion, sex, and national origin (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2020). Additional policies and programs have been put

into place to protect disadvantaged groups and promote hiring actions for the disadvantaged groups. Kurtulus' (2015) research regarding the role of affirmative action relating to the growth of minority and female employment in the United States indicates there has not been much progress, and there is still a lot of work to be done even after five decades. Rivera (2012) suggested that firms take affirmative action to increase representation amongst minorities and women qualified for positions and put a lot of time, money, and effort into ensuring they are attracting and retaining a diverse group of talent. Rivera (2012) also noted that some organizations have diversity councils and staff that participate in recruiting programs to ensure they are meeting and increasing the demographics within their applicant pools. The research suggests that although Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and affirmative action initiatives are strongly enforced, progression has not been made to ensure diversity at the senior-level by hiring or promoting qualified women or minorities.

According to Muehlemann and Leiser (2018), the success of an organization depends on the employees that are hired. Devaro et al. (2018) emphasized that organizations continuously have job vacancies, and it is at the discretion of the organization to hire an internal or external applicant. Kretschmer (2018) argued that hiring decisions are made based on the needs of the organization and the expectations derive from the previous person that held the position. The article and research conducted imply that employees are essential to an organization, and therefore when jobs become available within the organization, an organization must decide to fill that position with an internal or external candidate. Kretschmer (2018) highlighted that the expectations of the job would be determined by the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the predecessor. Therefore, a job vacancy announcement will reflect the information in the minimum qualifications section.

Janetius et al. (2019) provided an understanding of the hiring and selection process. The researchers specify that employees are essential to an organization, and there are many components put into place during the hiring process to select the right candidate for the position. The researchers state that selection and placement are vital to the productivity of the organization and begins with the announcement of the position to attract the talent and individual they need for the position. Dougherty and Van Gelder (2015) emphasized the importance of announcing and stating accurate minimum qualifications within the job announcements because it will determine the individuals the organization attracts and how the organization decides which candidates to eliminate and which candidates go forward in the hiring process. The researchers understand that employees are important to an organization, and hiring the right person for the job is necessary to help the organization and become an asset. The researchers also indicate that the organization must do its job to ensure the right information is on the job announcement to attract qualified candidates based on the minimum qualifications listed on the organization's job announcement.

### ***Diversity Hiring Theory***

According to Starks (2009), the federal government and its numerous agencies have implemented policies and programs that mandate affirmative action for minority groups to have equal employment opportunities. However, research and analysis indicate many lower level government positions consist of minority groups, but there is a decline of minorities in senior-level positions (Starks, 2009). Starks suggested that a diverse workforce at the senior-level should not be a matter of meeting an organization's quota regarding affirmative action; it should be a matter of survival to reflect the entire workforce so that all individuals are represented at the senior-level. Sabharwal et al. (2018) suggested that diversity has become important in the public

sector over the last two decades. Therefore, given the changing demographics, research regarding diversity has become a vital area of public sector scholarship. Sabharwal et al. (2018) expressed that during the 1970s, diversity was a matter of a black and white dynamic and evolved during the 1980s to include women and other disadvantaged groups due to the lack of representation in leadership positions. The researchers support the concept of the need for future research regarding the lack of minorities, women, and disadvantaged groups at the leadership level. The researchers indicate that diversity in the public sector is becoming critical due to a changing society. The dilemma associated with minorities and women in leadership positions in the public sector has not been resolved, and although Starks (2009) and Sabharwal et al. (2018) provided an understanding of the dilemma, future research is needed to determine why this dilemma has continued for the last six decades.

For senior-level positions, an individual must meet the minimum qualifications to be considered for the position. Minimum qualifications, which is a screening mechanism during the hiring process, are based on the assumptions of values pertaining to skills, experience, and education the hiring agency has deemed as a critical component of what is needed to perform the job (Dougherty & Van Gelder, 2015). While skills and experience are obtained over time, education is essential for senior-level positions. Education and training are viewed as an investment in human capital, and the number of women obtaining and receiving education continues to increase to obtain senior-level positions and higher pay, yet there is still a decline in women being hired for senior-level positions (Amin & Islam, 2015). With regard to minority women, Davis and Maldonado (2015) suggested there are two theories why minority women do not obtain senior-levels. The first is linked to discrimination, which has become less agreeable with regards to theory, and the second is the pipeline problem which refers to minority women

with appropriate minimum qualifications for a job who are simply not available for the job, and therefore, not hired. The research and theories of both sets of researchers indicate that there is a common problem with women who are underrepresented in leadership, but Davis and Maldonado (2015) put an emphasis on minority women, factoring in two theories that relate to discrimination and availability.

Stewart (2016) argued that discrimination could be stopped from the start within the hiring process by conducting blind interviews, and the hiring panel or managers could go through unconscious bias training to put blind interviews in place. Stewart's theory (2016) would allow the organization to remain unbiased and focus on the resume (that contains an individual's education and skills) and interview of the candidate. Once the candidate is on board, the organization would ensure the employee is coached and mentored accordingly to progress within their career through education, training, and development. Haile et al.'s (2016) research indicates that minority women continue to do everything to achieve a senior-level position but cannot due to the pre-conceived notion that a woman has domestic responsibility than a man. Stewart (2016) indicated that women could achieve the goal of becoming senior leaders if an organization would take precautions in the way they are recruiting individuals. Once the candidate has been selected, they will progress through training and development within the organization.

Gender and ethnicity consist of two different status components that may generate different work-related expectations and possibly activate partial decision-making in hiring (Deros & Pepermans, 2019). Deros and Pepermans (2019) argued that minority women tend to have overall hardship than minority men and majority men and women when applying for jobs due to their overlapping injustice. However, Davis and Maldonado (2015) argued that non-minority men are often sponsors and advocates for minority women for them to have access to

hold or obtain a senior-level position. Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) theorized that minority groups, on average, are less educated and lack relevant networks when searching for a job and therefore are not able to obtain a position, especially not one in leadership. The researchers have opposing theories regarding why minority women are not hired for senior-level positions, and a determination cannot be made as to what or who is to blame for this dilemma.

Johansen and Zhu (2017) indicated that the gender of individuals that hold senior-level positions would determine if diversity and inclusion are a priority for an organization. Women find value in diversity programs in the public sector because women believe they are more likely to be discriminated against, especially when it comes to being promoted to a senior-level position. Minority women feel discriminated against not only because of their gender but by their race too (Johansen & Zhu, 2017). Lee et al. (2019) argued that minority women believe diversity management is vital and non-minority men do not believe diversity management is vital because they place workplace participation as a priority while minority women value diversity management over workplace participation. The researchers indicate that women (whether minority or non-minority) value diversity management that is vital in the hiring or promotion process and within an organization.

Kretschmer (2018) indicated that the discrimination regarding the minority labor market continues to intrigue social scientists, yet, few studies have been conducted to research the dilemma. Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) argued that under certain circumstances or unfavorable conditions, one should not be so quick to state that someone from a minority group was discriminated against. Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) indicated that during the hiring process, some organizations do not have the ability to obtain all of the information related to the candidate, or obtaining the information is too costly. Therefore, the organization relies on red flags on the

candidate's application or resume. Kretschmer (2018) argued that when there are low expectations of hiring minorities, organizations opt to hire non-minority workers, and when there are high minority expectations, organizations prefer minority workers. While both researchers have valid theories, due to the lack of research, one cannot determine if the act of discrimination or diversity hiring is present within the hiring process.

### ***Hiring Mechanisms***

Policies and workplace cultures tend to benefit certain individuals while putting others at a disadvantage. Having the right hiring tools to promote and select qualified candidates is essential, according to the research of Bogen and Rieke (2018). Bogen and Rieke (2018) emphasized that technology is a key component in the hiring process. Now, there are predictive hiring tools that allow an organization to inform the job seeker where they are at in the hiring process. While technology is utilized in the hiring process, Scepura (2020) argued that within a job application, some employers utilize pre-employment testing to include instruments that screen personality traits, and those should be avoided at all costs. Scepura (2020) indicated that according to current research, individuals who apply to jobs might be subject to answer questions that make them feel uncomfortable. Therefore, even if they were qualified for the position, the pre-screening assessments stopped them from completing the entire job application. They would not be considered for the position. Hoffman et al. (2017) argued that job assessments enable organizations to rely on technology instead of human judgment. The researchers believe that there is likely less influence of human bias or possible mistakes when technology is utilized through job assessments. Current research implies that technology is a positive hiring mechanism to utilize for the hiring process. However, organizations must be cognizant of how they utilize technology to attract talent and qualified candidates.

Esch et al. (2019) argued that technological advancements in the hiring process are shaping how organizations recruit and hire candidates. Technological advancements such as online applicant tracking systems are benefiting organizations. However, according to Esch et al. (2019), technological advancements may be a disadvantage to some candidates. Current research indicates that while the application tracking systems benefits organizations, some applicants are excluded too early in the hiring process because of the way their application is formatted. The system utilizes artificial intelligence (AI) to capture behavioral and physiological characteristics based on an applicant's resume and application (Esch et al., 2019). The researcher indicates that technology is evolving but comes at a cost to potential candidates for a position at an organization, especially when technology is not appropriately utilized.

Organizations are also known to utilize social media to attract candidates for positions (Alexander et al., 2019). Alexander et al. (2019) implied that organizations could discriminate against an applicant when utilizing social media because the organization can view the applicant's profile which will show an abundance of information about the applicant. Roulin and Levashina (2019) argued that when an organization utilizes social media, little research has been conducted to verify if the process is fair to candidates and if the social media outlet meets established selection criteria (reliability, validity, and legality). Alexander et al. (2019) and Roulin and Levashina (2019) provided negative theories regarding the use of social media regarding an organization and a job seeker.

Sobral et al. (2020) emphasized the increasing trend of temporary agencies and work. While not ideal for some, research highlights that utilizing temporary agencies can be a way to get an individual's foot in the door for other employment opportunities. Organizations establish relationships with temporary agencies to receive potential candidates (Sobral et al., 2020).



Within the federal government, federal agencies utilize contractors, which has always employed minority women and other disadvantaged groups because of Executive Order 10925, signed by John F. Kennedy that mandated government contractors to take affirmative action to ensure individuals were employed and treated fairly (Kurtulus, 2016). The researchers suggest that traditional employment means are not always necessary or ideal to some but could increase an individual's chances of being hired full-time with an organization.

Networking is considered a mechanism that allows individuals to connect and positions them within the social field that can help with career progression (Rho & Lee, 2018). According to Greguletz et al. (2018), studies indicate that networking is vital for career success, and research has shown that networking behavior was beneficial for a man rather than a woman. Rho and Lee (2018) argue that women and men have different networking strategies and behaviors, determining what type of social resources they can obtain. Greguletz et al. (2018) suggested that studies have shown that women's professional networks are not as powerful as men regarding exchanged benefits, and the motivations regarding networking behaviors remain less understood. The researchers indicate that social networking is different based on one's gender and has a possible link to career progression and social relationships. However, Greguletz et al. (2018) suggested there is an existence of structural exclusion due to work-family conflict and homophily.

Hamilton and Davison (2018) argued that the increase of knowledgeable workers in the workforce is not a new phenomenon. Organizations want to recruit and retain knowledgeable workers to have a competitive edge over their competitors. For workers to know a job, they must gain experience and/or obtain the knowledge needed for the position through education and training. Although organizations seek to find knowledgeable workers, Ndobo et al. (2018)

argued that women, minorities, and other disadvantaged groups obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to do a job but are still discriminated against or passed over by a non-minority individual. Merkl and van Rens (2019) suggested that hiring decisions in the workforce are partly selective. Some individuals have a low probability of being selected for a job or even finding a job. The researchers provide relevant theories in the dilemma of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions. While minority women continue to gain experience and education, they are still not selected for senior-level positions.

### ***Education and Training Programs***

According to Torraco (2016), training and development programs initiated in the United States during World War II, and since then, the U.S. workforce has become a strong proponent of training. With new advanced technology, there is a broad range of training methods an employer can incorporate into their organization to help build the knowledge and skills of their employees (Torraco, 2016). Paposa and Kumar (2019) argued that training and development have an impact on job satisfaction. Wynen et al. (2015) argued that organizations create human capital by offering training and development opportunities to their employees. Training and development within an organization have been linked to positive influences on career outcomes (Wynen et al., 2015). Wynen et al. (2015) argued that training and development in an organization provides a positive perception to individuals that work for the organization. Therefore, the employees believe they are part of the organization. The researchers indicate plenty of opportunities to provide employees with training and development due to new technology. The researchers also suggest that training and development lead within an organization leads to positive career outcomes and inclusion within an organization.

Minority women continue to obtain skills through work experience and training while furthering their education through different programs. Still, they continue to be underrepresented in senior-level positions within their career, according to the research of Haile et al. (2016). Haile et al. (2016) also argued that public sectors and organizations need to provide and create training and development programs and policies for women to counter unsuspecting partiality. Nzeru et al. (2015) argued that the training delivery method would determine the effectiveness of the training. However, most effective training programs include cognitive and interpersonal skills. Nzeru et al. (2015) suggested that training programs help relieve anxiety and frustrations that come from the job and build competence within an employee, which leads to efficiency in performance. Haile et al. (2016) argued that investing in training for women will help improve their knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes, which help improve an organization. The training and development programs will also provide an opportunity for women to grow their talents. The researchers suggest that training and development are essential within an organization that wants to help its employees obtain vital knowledge, skills, and abilities and help them grow professionally.

Ezzedeen et al. (2015) argued that different theoretical perspectives are presumed to be the reason why the glass ceiling for minority women exists, stating that the underrepresentation of minority women as it relates to education and training is because women do not ask for advancement. They are not willing to take risks. However, Barnes (2017) implied that women are aware of educational opportunities and are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities provided by their organization as education is viewed as an investment in themselves which would allow them to grow internal to their organization and within their personal life. Ezzedeen et al.'s theory is based on a sample of individuals within a certain organization and does not

indicate the U.S. workforce as a whole or the thoughts or feelings of women working for other organizations. Barnes (2017) provided information from women of different backgrounds and those that want to take advantage of opportunities regarding education and training to better themselves as a person.

Chakravarti (2012) argued that women that receive education should lead them to achieve their goals. Bussemakers et al. (2017) argued that a driving force for female employment and empowerment is education. Maity (2019) suggested that the requirements for training and development have shifted into a mass upskilling to personalize training needs. Organizations now can customize training and development needs based on needs assessments for the programs and follow a structured and scientific approach for the design and scheduling of the training and development programs for their employees. Haile et al. (2016) argued that one of the greatest contributions an organization can make for their women employees is investing and supporting further training and development. The researchers indicate that education through training and development is essential for women within an organization to progress. The researchers also suggest that organizations should invest in customized, effective training and development programs for their employees so that their employees can continue to progress.

Maity (2019) theorized that training and development within an organization could be innovated and effective through artificial intelligence. The research suggests that training and development programs should be designed to promote employee engagement, involvement, and the notion of training transfer. Maity (2019) suggested that training and development can be delivered through non-traditional means such as intuitive e-learning, on-the-go learning, and personalized learning. Training and development management and practices can be conducted through the organization and the organization's human resources department by keeping in mind

that training and development through artificial intelligence would have less human interaction and human bias, which would allow the program to interpret different learning styles for individual employees for a personalized experience. Maity (2019) indicated that organizations should consider training and development through artificial intelligence to create a more personalized experience for employees. Each employee has a different learning style that can be determined through artificial intelligence training and development programs.

Van Vianen et al. (2018) argued that another means for education and development is career mentoring, which studies have indicated that career mentoring contributes to career development and strengthens the need for employees to stay with an organization. Van Vianen et al. (2018) suggested that career mentoring operates at an individual level which develops relationships and supports career progression. However, career progression through career mentoring will depend on the effectiveness of the mentoring program or experience. The goals set in career mentoring should be realistic so that the experience does not suffer at the expense of the mentee. The research indicates that career mentoring can be a means for education, training, and development on an individual level if an effective program is put into place that will allow one to progress within their career.

Dougherty and Van Gelder (2015) argued that education and training alone could not replace experience. Therefore, it is imperative that minority women obtain as much experience as they can while obtaining education and training (Stewart, 2016). Brown and Kellough (2020) argued that within the federal government and to be classified as professional, typically a middle or senior-level position, it requires knowledge in a field of science or learning which is typically obtained or acquired through education or training, and one must be able to exercise the ability of judgment. The researcher's theories provide information that is needed to slightly close the

gap in research and allows for future research regarding education and training as it pertains to the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions.

### ***Diversity and Inclusion Programs***

Studies indicate that organizations that implement diversity and inclusion programs see an increase in minority women at the senior-level (Lyness & Grotto, 2018). Lyness and Grotto (2018) argued that some female leaders perform better than their male counterparts when they are given a senior-level position opportunity, and it closes the gender gap in leadership.

According to Moon (2016), during the past decades, the U.S. federal workforce has diversified its demographic characteristics regarding the legal requirements set by the Civil Rights Act of 1964, equal employment opportunity commission, and affirmative action. Moon (2016) also argued that there is a lack of research regarding diversity management in the public administration sector. Therefore, organizations do not know how diversity influences decision-making outcomes. Lyness and Grotto (2018) provided information regarding diversity and inclusion; however, there is a lack of research to compare the actual benefits of diversity and inclusion programs. Moon's research provides data from past decades that indicates certain patterns regarding diversity and inclusion.

Grissom (2018) argued that organizational diversity and inclusion is a broad topic that covers many categories and groups, and according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there is an estimate of 38 million individuals entering the workforce between 2016 and 2026 and theorizes that the workforce will become older and more racially and ethnically diverse. Bah (2015) believed that the United States is becoming a diverse nation, and diversity adds to an organization's performance and productivity. Bah (2015) also argued that a diverse workforce provides inclusion and has a strong impact on an organization. Grissom (2018) suggested that

diversity and inclusion are critical topics in workplaces around the world. Bah (2015) implied that when diversity is managed correctly, the differences amongst employees are an asset to an organization, and work can be done effectively and efficiently. The researchers suggest that diversity and inclusion are vital in an organization, and they can promote a better work environment for employees with different backgrounds. With the potential of racial and ethnic diversity growing soon, the researchers suggest that diversity and inclusion will have a positive impact on an organization.

Farndale et al. (2015) argued that diversity and inclusion regarding a field of study span through disciplines of psychology, management, and sociology. Farndale et al. (2015) provided an understanding that diversity and inclusion will be different according to the country one resides in due to the different cultures associated with the nation. Farndale et al. (2015) also argued that the scope of diversity and inclusion could relate to different characteristics associated with an individual, such as gender, age, and nationality. The researchers indicate that diversity, as it relates to women, should allow for an enhancement of female employment within a traditional male-dominated field. The researchers also suggest that age impacts a worker's values, abilities, and motivation, and studies show that employees are starting to stay with their organization longer. The impact relating to nationality is that employees can experience different perspectives from a diverse workforce. Gender, age, and nationality provide an opportunity to implement diversity and inclusion into an organization to promote a better workforce and organization.

Sparkman (2019) argued that one must understand the value of differences within the workplace that allow for an exploration of theories to support diversity and inclusion, and by acknowledging such theories, researchers can conduct appropriate research to explore research

gaps. However, Sparkman (2019) implied that thorough research regarding diversity and inclusion regarding human resources development had not been conducted since 2010; therefore, there is a gap in research. Combs et al. (2019) have similar theories and state that challenges remain regarding diversity and inclusion in practical relevance and theoretical progression. Combs et al. (2019) argued that an increase in diverse populations would continue, and organizational leaders want to reap diversity dividends and inflate the positivity of outcomes associated with diversity and inclusion. Sparkman and Combs et al.'s theories acknowledge the lack of research associated with diversity and inclusion. They indicate that additional and future research needs to be conducted to close the gap regarding diversity and inclusion in the workplace, as well as programs that can be implemented to help organizations with diversity and inclusion.

Peretz et al. (2015) argued that there is an increased focus on diversity and inclusion programs in the U.S. workforce to recruit and maintain training and promotion. Peretz et al. (2015) indicated that diversity and inclusion programs had been adopted to maintain workforce diversity due to the expansion of the global economy and the growth of diversity-related characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, and disability. Otaye-Ebede (2018) argued that scholars and practitioners had increased interest in diversity management. However, there is a lack of research related to an employee's perception of diversity management practices. Otaye-Ebede (2018) theorized that the increased interest contributes to the environmental and societal changes associated with corporate ethics and organizational efforts to create and sustain a competitive advantage. The researchers agree that diversity and inclusion programs within an organization are scrutinized because of the evolving society that is becoming more diverse. The



researchers indicate that organizations should be cautious about implementing diversity and inclusion since there are different characteristics associated with diversity.

Black et al. (2018) argued that diversity could include not only race and ethnicity but religion, ideology, physical ability, culture, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. The researchers theorize that individuals want a sense of belonging through inclusion. Black et al. (2018) argued that the environment influences behaviors, and therefore, influences personal characteristics, which then influence a learning environment. The researchers indicate that prior research suggests that diversity and inclusion programs should not just be tolerated but should be embraced and valued. Morley (2018) suggested that organizations should identify the business problem related to diversity and inclusion and then implement an effective diversity and inclusion program. Morley (2018) also indicated that an organization should consider the costs associated with an effective diversity and inclusion program for their employees. The researchers imply that employees want to feel a sense of belonging within an organization, influencing their behavior. The researchers also indicated that to have an effective diversity and inclusion program for their employees, an organization must conduct research and consider the costs of implementing a diversity and inclusion program.

Bah (2015) implied that although it is difficult to quantify one's culture and a sense of belonging, having a diversity and inclusion program and being culturally diverse within an organization increases the cultural variety and brings enhanced benefits to a company. When treated equally, employees feel included, and it benefits the organization and has been linked to performance improvement. Sparkman (2019) argued that diversity would be enhanced with the help and consent of leadership within an organization. The research indicates the need for diversity and inclusion programs with an emphasis on making sure that employees feel included

and the need for leadership to be involved with the implementation of a diversity and inclusion program for their organization.

### *Discovered Themes*

Based on the qualitative case study, there were five themes discovered. The five themes include a crack in the glass ceiling, woman in the mirror, who you know versus what you know, let “us” be great, and time for open dialogue, which coincide with the literature. As discussed above, Starks (2009) argued that policies and programs were perceived to eradicate the glass ceiling. However, minority women are still underrepresented in senior-level positions, which concur with the findings that led to the crack in the glass ceiling theme. While little progress has been made when referencing the glass ceiling, the case study acknowledged that minority women hope to eventually break the glass ceiling, with Vice President Harris as a prime example that it can be done. The woman in the mirror theme developed from the case study corresponds with Trettevick’s (2016) research regarding identity and the significant role social identity plays with the linkage to one’s self-identity. In agreeance with Trettevick’s (2016) argument, Kachanoff et al.’s (2020) argument is that one can be impacted through social identity due to psychological reasoning. Stewart’s (2016) argument emphasized the need to conduct blind interviews and for hiring managers to go through unconscious bias training, to avoid hiring managers selecting people that are within their social capital network coincides with the who you know versus what you know that was discovered during the case study. The let “us” be great theme provided an understanding of why Bogen and Rieke (2018) believed that having the right tools to promote and select qualified candidates is essential. The case study also brought light to Bogen and Rieke’s (2018) argument because having the right tools includes having the right standards in place to promote diversity and inclusion in the hiring process. In order to work towards

rectifying the dilemma, the time for open dialogue theme recognizes Wymen et al.'s (2015) argument that training and development provides a positive understanding within the organization. Having training and development, which includes having diversity and inclusion programs, allows everyone working for an organization to have a better understanding of the importance of equity and why it is important for those in senior-level positions to mirror that of the workforce.

### ***Summary of the Literature Review***

Minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions in the federal government, and there are numerous theories indicating the factors associated with this dilemma. While women and minorities are categorized as part of disadvantaged groups, minority women have overlapping injustices because they are classified as a woman and a minority. The same dilemma has been addressed since the 1960s. However, there has not been much progress in resolving the dilemma due to the lack of research. The research surrounding the dilemma is conducted by studies concentrated on women or minorities and not minority women. Therefore, upon examining the literature, there is a need for future research to provide an understanding and add to the current research and studies.

The two factors scrutinized regarding the underrepresentation of minority women were self-identity and social identity, categorized under the identity theory. The research regarding the identity theory focused on the behavior of different individuals includes minority women and those in leadership positions that make hiring decisions. The research indicated theories of why minority women are underrepresented in senior-levels due to the perspective of themselves or how others perceive them through self-identity and social identity. The literature revealed that while there is a lack of research regarding minority women and the association of self-identity

and social identity, there are studies that indicate that minorities and women want to feel included by being part of the in group as opposed to being a member of the out group. The research also provides an understanding between equality and equity related to disadvantaged groups and the influence it has on an individual's behavior within an organization. The examination of the literature provided an analysis of the links between self-identity and social identity concerning social identity having a major influence on self-identity.

The research pertaining to hiring actions implied that certain laws and programs needed to be followed within the federal government. However, different theories imply that the laws and programs are not followed, which leads to the notion of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions in the government. The literature also scrutinized posting and slotting within an organization related to fair hiring practices and discriminatory hiring practices. Posting, being a fair hiring practice, allows an organization to gather information about potential candidates by posting a job announcement for a current vacancy which provides candidates an opportunity to apply for the position and creates a large pool of candidates for the organization to choose from. Slotting, being a discriminatory practice, allows an organization or manager an opportunity to select a candidate from a personal relationship that would not be in a competitive pool and slotting that individual for a vacant position. The literature also discussed discrimination and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with regards to hiring actions with an organization and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. The research contained in the literature provided an understanding of the selection process as it related to job announcements for an organization.

The research concerning the diversity hiring theory provided an understanding of different programs utilized in an organization. The literature discussed information pertaining to

the diversity hiring theory, such as affirmative action and minimum qualifications related to the dilemma. The literature emphasized that affirmative action is utilized amongst employers that may need to make a quota or believe that a diverse workforce is essential. The literature also indicated that minimum qualifications are provided on a job announcement to get the best-qualified candidate, but theories concerning minimum qualifications on a job announcement have been linked to discrimination amongst the minority labor market but have not been confirmed due to a lack of research.

The literature regarding the hiring mechanisms focused on the tools utilized during the hiring process within an organization. One of the main focuses in the literature was the evolving technology, which benefits organizations because it has been efficient in their hiring practices. The literature discussed the applicant tracking system, and although it is efficient, there are theories that believe the application tracking system discriminates against disadvantaged groups due to certain assessments an organization has deemed as necessary to be included in the application process. Another mechanism discussed was social media being utilized as a hiring tool. While social media has benefited organizations, hiring practices associated with social media are linked to discriminatory practices because an organization can view an individual's profile and base a hiring decision on the profile. The literature also discussed temporary and contracted agencies that provide opportunities for organizations and individuals seeking employment. The research indicates that discrimination and reverse discrimination can be linked to temporary agencies and contractors.

The research and literature pertaining to education and development included many ways an organization can promote education, training, and development internal to the organization. The literature indicated that technology is key to the success of training and development within

an organization. Although minority women receive education internal and external to the organization, the literature suggests they are still not being promoted to senior-level positions. Some researchers believe minority women are unwilling to take risks, but other researchers believe they are encouraged to take risks, especially when it pertains to their education. The literature also suggests that organizational support and investment for their employees is necessary for the employees to progress. Research shows that education, training, and development can be customized to fit the needs of an employee and their learning style. The literature indicated that career mentoring is also beneficial to an employee and organization. Career mentoring would help employees progress and, with that progression, would, in turn, help the organization.

The research regarding diversity and inclusion programs provided an understanding of why diversity and inclusion programs should be implemented in an organization. The research suggests that diversity and inclusion are evolving due to the current workforce made up of a diverse group that will continue to increase in the future. The research also discussed that the diversity and inclusion programs importance depends on leadership and the organization. The literature suggests that diversity and inclusion are only important to the organization that believes diversity is necessary and inclusion is vital. According to research, there is an interest in diversity and inclusion programs research because of the changing society and environment. Research shows that organizations that want to have diversity and inclusion programs will invest in the program so that their employees feel included. The research also indicated value in diversity and inclusion programs, and organizations should embrace the program.

The literature provides an understanding that the dilemma of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions in the federal government lacks research in some areas.

The link between self-identity and social identity regarding the dilemma is a factor that needs to be considered because it can influence an individual's behavior, whether it is a minority woman or someone that participates in the hiring process. An organization needs to be cognizant of their hiring actions and practices regarding the dilemma, as there are many theories as to why the dilemma is still occurring after years of research. Organizations should be aware of the diversity hiring theory as it pertains to discriminatory and reverse discrimination practices that are not suitable for an organization or anyone that seeks employment with the organization. Hiring tools should continuously be monitored as they can benefit the organization but harm potential candidates. Education, training, and development are essential to everyone in the organization because they can help employees and the organization progress. Diversity and inclusion programs are valuable because of the evolving society, and the organization's employees should reflect the diversity of society.

### **Transition and Summary of Section 1**

The foundation of the study provided an in-depth analysis of the problem, purpose, nature of the study, conceptual framework, the significance of the study, and the literature review. This research must be conducted to gain an understanding of the dilemma and add to the current literature. By examining the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed the federal government, the study allowed one to see that diversity and inclusion at the senior-level are essential to a workforce that is predominately comprised of women and minorities. The next section of this study will provide the different elements associated with the research.

## **Section 2: The Project**

This section provides an outline of the research by reiterating the purpose of the study and present the information pertaining to the role of the researcher and the participants. This segment discusses and justifies the reasons the research method and design were selected for this study, based on relevant literature sources relating to the problem of the study. The application describes and defends information regarding the population and sampling method that is vital to this study. A description of the collection technique and processes provides a thorough analysis regarding the collection of data. The reliability and validity of this study were discussed to evaluate the quality of the research.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to add to the body of knowledge by developing an understanding of the reasons minority women are underrepresented in the federal government's senior-level positions and the effect it has on diversity and inclusion. This larger problem was explored through an in-depth study of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions and its effect on diversity and inclusion at military installations in the southern United States.

### **Role of the Researcher**

For this qualitative case study, the researcher was utilized as a human instrument and was an objective viewer. The researcher works for the federal government and is active within the community; therefore, the researcher had access to the participants for this study. The researcher maintained two journals; one journal for data collection and another journal to document any assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. The researcher identified and contacted three different groups for this qualitative case study. The participants included federal government



hiring managers, minority women currently working for the federal government, and minority women that have applied for federal government senior-level positions.

For the researcher to identify the hiring managers, the researcher recruited the hiring managers through a social media outlet. After initial contact and the hiring manager agreed to participate, the researcher emailed the hiring manager the consent form and set up a date and time to conduct the face-to-face interview. For the researcher to identify minority women working for the federal government and minority women that have applied for the federal government's senior-level positions, the researcher recruited the minority women through a social media outlet. After initial contact and the minority women agreed to participate, the researcher emailed the minority women the consent form and set up a date and time to conduct the face-to-face interview. Once each participant had a date and time for their interview, the researcher documented the information and assigned the participants a participant number.

### **Participants**

The sampling method utilized for this study was purposive sampling. According to Yin (2016), purposive sampling is utilized because it allows one to obtain an extensive amount of information and perspectives regarding the study. Yin (2016) discussed that maximum variation should include opposing perspectives to avoid biases within the study. The participants were selected based on their willingness to participate and their availability during the study's timeframe. The researcher established a working relationship with each participant by building a rapport and ensuring a safe environment for communication. The researcher let each participant know why the study was being conducted, the methods utilized, the risks associated with the study, and the benefits of conducting the study. The researcher informed each participant that while their names would not be shared, their background information such as race, color,

national origin, sex, gender, and job information would be shared for this study. The researcher let each participant know that the study was voluntary, and the researcher would protect them from harm and respect their rights as a participant throughout the study.

According to Yin (2016), one should base the appropriate sampling size on the complexity of their study and the depth of the data collection to maximize information for the study. Yin (2016) discussed the number of instances on a broader level and a narrower level. The broader level has only a single instance involving an entity, field setting, or organization. The broader level is rationalized through a limited, extreme, or typical site of the single instance regarding the topic of study. In contrast to the broader level, the narrower level consists of additional instances rather than the single instance of a narrower unit. Yin (2016) advised that a narrower level should consist of 25 to 50 instances depending on the complexity of the study and the depth of data collection. Yin (2016) stated that researcher needs to define the appropriate unit for their study because the purpose of data collection is to maximize information within the study and the research should conclude when new information is not provided and the information collected is redundant.

For this research, a narrower level approach was taken as defined by Yin (2016). Fifteen participants engaged in this study through interviews. There were three hiring managers and 12 minority women interviewed, and the researcher was able to reach saturation with 15 participants. The hiring managers were from different entities within the federal government that fall under the same organization. According to Yin (2014), a researcher performing a case study should not include more than four to five cases within a single study. By selecting the hiring managers from different entities, the researcher captured information from the interview, specifically for that entity, and the data assisted in answering the research questions by showing

patterns and collecting relevant data regarding the dilemma of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government. The data collected from the hiring managers also helped identify the patterns of the diversity hiring theory. The minority women consisted of minority women currently working for the federal government and minority women who have applied for senior-level positions for the federal government. By interviewing the federal government minority women employees, the researcher captured data relevant to the study to answer the research questions pertaining to the dilemma while identifying patterns specifically related to the identity theory (self-identity and social identity).

### **Research Method and Design**

The qualitative research method was chosen for this study because there is a lack of understanding regarding the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government. The reason for choosing qualitative research for this study was that the qualitative research method allows one to understand the problem and explore the problem's theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Minority women being underrepresented in senior-level positions in the federal government is linked to numerous research surrounding the glass-ceiling theory. The glass-ceiling theory has been researched through quantitative and qualitative methods since the 1960s, yet the problem remains unresolved. According to Naff (2001), through research and several signed executive orders emphasizing nondiscriminatory recruitment within the federal government, it was clear by the late 1960s that policies surrounding nondiscrimination would not suffice to ensure women and minorities obtain senior-level positions. This study added to the current literature, and by utilizing qualitative research, one can understand the context of the problem through the participants in the study (Creswell & Poth,

2018). The minority women currently experiencing the problem need their voices heard through qualitative research to gain a detailed understanding of the problem through interviews and the collection of relevant data.

The design chosen from the qualitative research method was a case study. The case study was chosen because the design will provide a comprehensive examination of the phenomenon currently happening at military installations in the southern United States. Yin (2018) discussed that case studies are preferred when behaviors relevant to the study cannot be manipulated, and the researcher desires to study contemporary events. While the study relied on some of the same techniques utilized in historical case studies, it also relied on direct observations of the study and interviews of those impacted by the dilemma or event. Yin (2018) discussed that case studies and history tend to overlap. Still, case studies are unique in nature, particularly in strength, because case studies can handle a wide variety of evidence and participants that in other instances may not be readily available in a conventional historical study. The case study design allowed the researcher to tell a story through the eyes of the participants by utilizing the information that was obtained through interviews and data collection. The case study explored the different aspects of human behavior related to the problem and analyzed the data that can potentially lead to future research.

A qualitative case study was appropriate for the study of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government because the study grants an opportunity to understand the problem that has occurred within the federal government over numerous decades. The study collected information from decision-makers within the federal government and individuals that are impacted by the dilemma being faced by minority women regarding senior-level positions in the federal government. A qualitative case study allowed the

researcher to collect, analyze, and present relevant data about the problem and add to the body of knowledge by developing an understanding of the reasons this dilemma continues to occur.

### **Population and Sampling**

For this qualitative case study, the sample was drawn from southern U.S. military installations and surrounding communities within a 50-mile radius. The sample consisted of civilians employed by the government that work at the military installations and civilians that currently reside within the community. According to the United States Census Bureau (2020), as of July 1, 2019, the population of the southern U.S. military installations and surrounding communities is approximately 195,000 people. The total population consists of 52% identifying as a female and 59% identifying as a minority. There are approximately 4,000 civilian workers that make up the workforce at the military installations, which is approximately 2% of the total population. Based on the Strategic Human Capital Plan for the southern U.S. military installations, in fiscal year 2018, the civilian population consisted of 57% of the workforce identifying as female and 55% identifying as a minority.

The sampling method that was utilized for this qualitative case study is purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows one to select individuals who can shed light on the current phenomenon of study (Creswell, 2016) and obtain significant and ample data pertaining to the essence of the study (Yin, 2016). Purposive sampling will ensure that an unbiased sample is chosen due to having individuals within the study have opposing views of the dilemma (Yin, 2016). Based on the current demographics of the total population of civilian workers, over 50% of individuals at southern U.S. military installations identify as female and minority. The population for this study was based on gender and race to address the current problem of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal

government. Utilizing purposive sampling based on gender and race contributed to the central phenomenon that continues to occur, and it provided the individuals in the case study an opportunity to tell share their experiences.

One should not explore any formulaic guidance for selecting the sample size. Instead, one should think about the complexity of the study and the depth of data collection (Yin, 2016). Yin (2016) stated that within a qualitative study, there is not a formula for determining the desired number of samples for each broader or narrower unit of data collection; however, a researcher performing a case study should not include more than four to five cases within a single study (Yin, 2014) and the recommendation for a qualitative study at a narrower level is between twenty-five to fifty instances. For this study, a single study was conducted with 15 participants, which was conducive for the qualitative case study, and saturation was reached with 15 participants.

To gain access to individuals currently employed by the government, the researcher utilized social media and virtual platforms. The researcher searched the social media platform, LinkedIn, to search for individuals working for military installations in the southern United States. The researcher asked individuals to participate in the case study voluntarily. To gain access to individuals within the community, the researcher also utilized the social media platform, LinkedIn, to search for individuals within the community of a military installation in the southern United States. The researcher recruited individuals that work for the federal government and was in the southern U.S.'s military installation communities.

Three of the participants were hiring managers, and 12 participants were minority women. The three hiring managers were from different entities of the same organization, which provided an understanding of how each entity operates based on the data collection. The

minority women consisted of individuals currently working for the government at the southern U.S. military installations and minority women who have applied for senior-level positions at the southern U.S. military installations. Having minority women that are current government employees and minority women seeking senior-level government positions as participants for this study provided different perspectives and exhibited challenges being faced by minority women.

To be eligible for the study, one must meet a certain criterion relevant to the study.

To meet the criteria of being one of the hiring manager participants, one must:

- be 18 years of age with at least a high school diploma;
- work for the government at the southern U.S. military installations for at least two years;
- have access to job postings for the entity in which they are currently working within the last two years.

To meet the criteria of being one of the participants that currently works for the government at the southern U.S. military installations, one must:

- be 18 years of age with at least a high school diploma;
- work for the government at the southern U.S. military installations for at least two years;
- identify as female;
- identify as a minority

To meet the criteria of being one of the participants that applied for a senior-level position for the government at the southern U.S. military installations, one must:

- be 18 years of age with at least a high school diploma;
- apply for a senior-level position for the government at the southern U.S. military installations;

- identify as female;
- identify as a minority

This criterion was appropriate to this study because the government employs students between the ages of 16 and 18 for summer work. It is relevant to identify that one must be 18 years of age with at least a high school diploma. All new employees are placed on a two-year probationary period, and therefore, it was vital that someone has worked for at least two years at the southern U.S. military installation. Otherwise, it was possible they can be terminated, and that would put this study at a disadvantage if the case study has already commenced. To collect relevant data for the study, it was imperative that the hiring managers have hired candidates within the last two years to obtain information regarding the dilemma. The hiring managers had access to the job postings for the entity within the last two years to collect recent data. Since the study involves the underrepresentation of minority women at the senior-level, it was imperative that participants were minority women. The minority women had access to their application account through the government's hiring website and application tracking system to view relevant data pertaining to the senior-level roles they applied for.

Each component of the qualitative case study was vital to gain an understanding of the current dilemma that is occurring within the government that involves the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level roles. By utilizing a sample of the civilians that currently work for the government at southern U.S. military installations and those within the community, one could collect relevant data pertinent to the study. Although a formula did not determine the sampling size, due to the complexity of the study, based on Yin's (2016) concepts, it was beneficial to utilize a narrower level approach to gain an understanding of the participant's experiences. To participate in the study, the participants met all of the criteria within their



category to ensure that the information aligned with employment qualifications for the government. Ethics were enforced, and it met the standards set forth for this study.

### **Data Collection**

The collection of data for this qualitative case study depicted and utilized certain data collection techniques and data organization techniques. The components that assisted in describing the data collection included instruments, an interview guide, and specific questions (see Appendix A) related to the research questions and problem statement. Each technique and component were vital to the success of this qualitative case study to obtain a better understanding of the current dilemma being faced by minority women as it related to senior-level positions in the government.

### ***Instruments***

In qualitative research, data collection is pertinent to a field-based study. Thus, one must have an effective instrument (Yin, 2016). According to Yin (2016), the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research. The researcher could observe human behavior and discuss a phenomenon amongst the participants while collecting data for the research (Yin, 2016). For this qualitative research, the researcher was the main instrument, and the interview guide served as an instrument utilized by the researcher. The interview guide provided a list of questions asked by the researcher to collect data from the participants. The list of questions coincided with the research questions and prior research that discussed the glass ceiling (about minority women not being able to achieve a senior-level position within the government due to numerous factors). Therefore, the questions allowed the researcher to collect and analyze data for the study and provide an understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher created an informal area to interview each participant in the study and gather information about the phenomenon that

captured the stories and lived experiences of the participants. As the main instrument and as stated before, the researcher maintained two journals, one journal for data collection and another journal to document any assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. With any qualitative research, the researcher's presence had influence over the participants. Therefore, there was influence over the observation, which is unavoidable (Yin, 2016), and it is imperative to document such action. The researcher provided a section on self-reflexivity in the second journal to share the different experiences and ideas the researcher faced while conducting the case study.

### *Interview Guide and Questions*

The interview guide (see Appendix A) describes the components associated with the interview between the researcher and participant(s). It is essential to this study that the questions asked of the participant(s) related to the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government and can assist in providing an understanding of the dilemma. Since there were two different groups of participants (hiring managers and minority women), there were two different sets of specific questions asked of the participants. Each specific question was simple because it was open-ended and easy to understand; however, the questions elicited an extensive response from the participant. The information in the interview guide also describes and addresses clarifying questions and probing questions. The questions were created to allow the participants to talk about their lived experiences while the researcher observed their behavior and collected data for the research. The questions structure was based on the research questions and sub-questions. The questions were arranged in a particular order so the researcher could obtain in-depth information about one topic before proceeding to the next topic.

### ***Data Collection Techniques***

For this qualitative case study, there were two data collection techniques utilized. The techniques were interviews and observations. The interviews with the participants took place virtually due to COVID-19. The researcher asked the participant questions related to the case study. The researcher documented the responses in a journal and by either video-recording or audio recording the interview. Based on the participant's responses, the researcher asked clarifying and probing questions. The researcher observed and documented the participant's behavior when the participant shared their experiences. The documented participant behavior included verbal and nonverbal reactions.

While conducting the interviews and observations of the participants, the researcher asked each participant to sign an agreement stating that they were voluntarily participating in the case study. Upon receiving the agreement, the researcher set a time to meet with the individual participants on a virtual platform. Once the participant entered the virtual platform, the researcher interviewed and observed the participant while documenting the participants' responses and behavior.

### ***Data Organization Techniques***

According to Yin (2018), interviews are the most important sources of evidence in a case study and it provides an opportunity for direct observation in a real-world setting that can be documented by the researcher. For this qualitative case study, journals were utilized to document the interviews between the researcher and participants. The researcher also recorded, by audio and/or video, the information obtained during the interviews and observations. Yin (2018) stated that documentary information (paper or electronic) is relevant to every case study topic and should be the object of accurate data collection. Thus, the researcher documented the interaction

in journals during the interview and kept an electronic file, utilizing Microsoft Office applications, of the journal information on a secured computer. The computer was password-protected, and the electronic files were kept in a secure location on the computer that was password protected. The audio records were kept in the same password-protected electronic files. The participants were labeled by a number that corresponded with a Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet with the list of participants' names that were password protected.

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell and Poth (2018) described the coding process as central to qualitative research and is associated with making sense of the data collected from the research. Coding involves the data collected (text or visual) to be placed into smaller categories and allows one to investigate each category for evidence, and then designates a label to the code (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In qualitative research, inductive and deductive data analysis are processes utilized to build patterns, categories, and themes by organizing data into progressive conceptual units. The inductive process allows the researcher to work back and forth between themes and the data until inclusive themes have been established for the study. The deductive process allows the researcher to review the data from predetermined themes and decide if additional information is needed to support the themes (Creswell, 2014). For this qualitative case study, inductive data analysis was utilized because the codes were created from the qualitative data. Once the themes were determined, deductive data analysis was utilized to determine if more evidence can support each theme or if the researcher needed to gather supplementary information (Creswell, 2014).

### ***Coding Process***

The data collected for this qualitative case study were collected through interviews, documentation (journals and audio recordings), and observations, and the inductive and

deductive data analysis process was utilized. The inductive data analysis process, which coincided with the lean coding process, allowed the researcher to review data and analyze the information to develop an initial code list. In the inductive data analysis process, the researcher reviewed and analyzed the themes and data until there was a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 2014). Then, the deductive data analysis process was utilized, which also coincided with the lean coding process because the steps of the lean coding process were repeated, and the researcher reviewed the data from the themes and determined if additional information was needed. Creswell and Poth (2018) recommended that researchers proceed with lean coding to eliminate having an elaborate list of codes but starting with a shortlist and then broadening the list as needed. To determine what needed to be coded, the researcher based the inductive and deductive data analysis process on the qualitative case study and ensured the themes assisted in answering the research questions while understanding the dilemma.

Gibbs (2007) stated that the list of codes is determined by the relationship and comparison of information found in the data. Several sections or portions of information are identified and then linked into the same category. Thus, all of the information that have similarities or exemplifies the same meaning are labeled or coded with the same name (Gibbs, 2007). Recording and identifying such information is known as thematic analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify and analyze common themes. For this qualitative case study, the researcher utilized thematic analysis to compare and interpret similarities to determine the initial code list; then, the researcher continuously reviewed the data to expand the list of codes to develop the themes. Creswell's (2016) eight-step lean coding process was utilized to code the qualitative case study in conjunction with thematic analysis.

The first step of Creswell's (2016) lean coding process prepared the documents for coding, which included setting up the transcripts from the interview and the field notes for analysis. The second step allowed the researcher to read through all the text. During this step, the researcher made notes about what the participants were saying and doing. The initial coding took place in step three, where the researcher coded for the first time based on large portions (paragraphs) of data. In the fourth step, the researcher listed all the codes, which was determined by the coding in step three. The researcher then grouped the codes in step five to eliminate redundancy and overlap. During this step, the researcher was broadening the themes. During step six, the researcher wrote theme passages and utilized the codes as evidence. In step seven, the researcher developed a story about the phenomenon based on the themes. During the last and final step, step eight, the researcher developed an overall storyline for the qualitative study.

Prior to conducting the lean coding process, the researcher ensured the interviews were transcribed accordingly. The researcher listened to the audio of the recorded interviews and ensured the transcriptions and recordings coincide with one another for accuracy. The researcher made corrections to any documents or notes. The researcher labeled each transcript and any notes pertaining to each participant with a participant number and the date and time the interview took place. The researcher proceeded to upload the information into a secure password-protected file on the researcher's computer. Each participant's file on the researcher's computer was associated with their participant number and the date and time of their interview.

Once the transcripts and notes were uploaded into a secured password-protected file on the researcher's computer, the researcher utilized lean coding according to Creswell's (2016) eight-step lean coding process. During the first step, the researcher set up the transcripts and notes from each interview. Creswell (2016) recommended having 1-inch margins on the left and

right sides of the documents to place the information about the codes and themes. The researcher ensured each document had a 1-inch margin to write down the codes and themes. The participant number, date, and time of their interview were placed at the top of the document as a header. After double spacing under the header, on the upper left side of the document, the researcher placed the title “Codes” as a heading, and on the upper right side of the document, the researcher placed the title “Themes” as a heading. The entire document was double-spaced to allow for easy reading of the questions and responses.

During the second step, the researcher reviewed the transcripts and made thorough notes to document the participants’ behavior, and captured what the participant was saying. The step was repeated numerous times to ensure relevant information was documented. Creswell (2016) provided a short summary for step two of the lean coding process. However, qualitative research is exploratory, and therefore, it is vital that human behavior is documented in this step.

Step three was the initial coding stage of the lean coding process. The researcher identified what to code through recognition of passage in the text and identification of concepts; and finding a relation between them (Gibbs, 2007). Gibbs (2007) emphasized that coding was not just labeling. It was the association of data to the research concept and the link to other data. Therefore, any text that was about the same thing is coded with the same name, which will allow the researcher to index and categorize the text and establish a framework of thematic ideas regarding the codes. During this step, the researcher coded all the text by paragraphs by drawing brackets around the text. Then, the researcher assigned a code to the text segment by utilizing a color code system with colored highlights and wrote a code word on the label. Creswell (2016) indicated that the best way to code labels is to use exact words from the participants or utilize words that were heard during the interview. This method is known as *in vivo* code. For this step,

Creswell (2016) recommended that a researcher use “Quotes” as a code used in the qualitative report. The researcher used quotes as a code and highlighted the actual quotes on the transcript with a highlighter. The step was repeated for each transcript. The researcher coded between twenty-five to thirty codes amongst all the transcripts.

Step four was self-explanatory in the summary provided by Creswell (2016) in the lean coding process. The researcher took all the codes on the left side of each transcript and wrote the codes down on a separate document, and list them accordingly. The list was double-spaced to allow room for step five of the lean coding process.

During step five, the researcher reviewed all the codes (25 to 30) in step four. The researcher ensured there were a variety of codes to capture that were observed. The researcher reduced the codes to broaden the themes. First, the researcher reviewed the 25 to 30 codes. Then, the researcher grouped the codes and information by the color code system and eliminated redundancy and overlapping. The researcher utilized a horizontal hierarchical graph to develop five themes. The researcher reviewed the themes to ensure they made sense for the last three steps in the lean coding process.

During step six, the codes were used as evidence for the theme. The researcher wrote a theme passage during the sixth step of the lean coding process. The researcher used multiple sources and cited different people to provide a realistic description of the phenomenon. The multiple sources were bolded throughout the passage, and the emphasis indicated the numerous individuals being observed and interviewed regarding the discussion of the phenomenon. The multiple sources also indicated the relevance of the dilemma and emphasized a major theme of the qualitative study.



The researcher developed a map of themes during the seventh step of the lean coding process. The researcher began telling the overall story about the phenomenon by considering how the themes were associated with one another. The researcher wrote down each theme on a whiteboard. Then, the researcher ordered the themes accordingly to develop a logical flow regarding the findings section in the qualitative report. By placing the themes into a logical flow, the researcher could complete step eight.

Based on the information from step seven, the researcher developed a narrative story. The narrative story involved all the steps from the lean coding process that developed into the map of themes. The map of themes allowed the researcher to conclude how all the themes were tied together. The researcher drew a summary of the conclusion at the end of the findings section by writing down one to two paragraphs associated with findings.

### **Reliability and Validity**

For this qualitative case study, the researcher's choice of validity strategies determined the reliability of the study. It concluded if there was consistency across various researchers and projects pertaining to this qualitative case study (Gibbs, 2007). There were three validity strategies utilized as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). The three strategies consisted of triangulation of data sources, clarifying personal biases, and seeking participant feedback. Each strategy was utilized to determine the accuracy of the findings while providing quality, trustworthiness, and credibility.

### ***Validity Strategies***

Triangulation utilizes various sources to create themes in the study to build evidence (Creswell, 2016). The establishment of themes, based on assembling numerous sources of data or participant's viewpoints, shed light on the theme (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and added to the

validity of the study (Creswell, 2014). The sources utilized to create themes for this qualitative case study consisted of interview transcripts, journals, and theories. The interview transcripts were vital to this study as it presented the lived experiences of the participants and was the main source for the coding process. The journals were beneficial as the researcher composes information through the observation of what was occurring in the field. Theories were also valuable for the study, as they explained why something might be occurring. Each source assisted in the coding process. Creswell (2016) indicated that triangulation typically occurs during the coding process.

Clarifying personal bias allowed the researcher to disclose their own biases and experiences related to the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By utilizing clarification of bias through the researcher's perspective for a validity strategy, there was an emphasis on reflectivity, which was a core characteristic of qualitative research (Creswell, 2014). Creswell (2014) indicated that good qualitative researcher includes comments from the researcher regarding how their interpretation of the discoveries shapes their background. For this qualitative researcher, the researcher maintained a second journal indicating their own personal thoughts, biases, and experiences, as it related to the study, by documenting information during and after the interviews.

Member checking allowed the participants to judge the accuracy and credibility of the information obtained and interpreted by the researcher. Seeking participant feedback allowed the researcher to involve the participants at another level by providing them a broad summary of the statements regarding the data, which included the themes and discussions of the overall lived experiences (Creswell, 2016). The member checking process does not include the actual transcripts and notes from the interviews. Therefore, the researcher asked the participants for

their feedback based on the researcher's broad summary provided to them, which allowed the researcher to validate the information. During this study, participant feedback took place during a follow-up interview with the participants and after the themes had been established by the researcher. If any information was inaccurate, the researchers modified the themes or information to ensure accuracy (Creswell, 2016).

### ***Reliability***

The interview guide played a major role in the reliability of this study. The interview guide asked specific questions that supported the saturation of this study and answered the research questions. There needed to be consistency during the interview process. Each participant was asked the same questions, depending on their associated group. The main interview questions did not deviate during the interviews, but probing questions were asked during the individual interviews to achieve saturation of the research question.

For this qualitative case study, detailed field notes, video recordings, and transcripts from the participant interviews assisted in the reliability of the study and determined if the validity strategies utilized were consistent across different researchers and projects. Gibbs (2007) suggested several reliability procedures, and those consistent with this study consist of checking transcripts, ensuring consistency of the coding process (to include comparing data and memos of the codes), and cross-checking codes that were previously developed by other researchers. Yin (2009) suggested that researchers document as many steps of the procedures as possible.

During this study, the researcher cross-referenced journals and video recordings of the interviews to ensure that the transcripts were accurate. The researcher conducted follow-up interviews with the participants to ensure all the information referenced in the transcripts was valid. The coding process was also a critical component of this study. The researcher constantly

compares data from the study with the codes to ensure the definition of the codes was consistent (Creswell, 2014). The researcher cross-checked the codes developed by other researchers to ensure the meaning of the codes was similar. Consistency of the codes and comparing the codes to other researchers was vital to ensure reliability.

The researcher anticipated that at least 15 participants would be needed for this case study to reach saturation. The researcher stopped collecting data once the themes were saturated (Creswell, 2014). The research did not find any new information that would add to the understanding of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Transition and Summary of Section 2**

This section of the study provided an in-depth analysis of the qualitative case study to include information regarding the role of the researcher, participants, research method and design, population and sampling, data collection, data analysis, and the reliability and validity of the study. The information discussed in this section allowed the researcher to expound on the qualitative case study and explain how data was collected and analyzed from the participants to reach saturation, which depended on the reliability and validity of the information obtained. Each component contributed to the understanding of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government. The next section of this study provides information about the findings and implications for change.

### **Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change**

This section will provide an overview of the study, presentation of the findings, an application to professional practice, recommendations for further study, and individual and biblical reflections. The overview will discuss a comprehensive analysis of the qualitative case study that was conducted. The presentation of findings will include the themes that were discovered, the interpretation of the themes, representation and visualization of the data, and a detailed discussion of how the findings relate to the essential areas of the research proposal. The application to professional practice will discuss improving general business practices and potential application strategies. The recommendations for further study will discuss specific recommendations based on the findings from this qualitative case study. The reflections segment will discuss how this qualitative case study provided personal and professional growth, as well as a discussion of the business functions explored in this case study as it relates to a Christian worldview.

#### **Overview of the Study**

The study conducted was a qualitative case study. The purpose of the study was to add to the body of knowledge by developing an understanding of the reasons minority women are underrepresented in the federal government's senior-level positions and the effect it has on diversity and inclusion. The research consisted of answering two research questions and three sub-questions. To gain an understanding of the dilemma and answer the research questions, there needed to be a sufficient amount of participants who were interviewed to reach saturation for the study. The qualitative case study consisted of 12 minority women and three hiring manager participants. Each participant was recruited on a social media outlet and signed a consent form to participate in an audio/video recorded interview and a follow-up interview. Depending on the

participants, minority women, or hiring managers, the same interview questions were asked. However, some responses to the questions prompted clarifying or probing questions. During the interviews, the participants were recorded, and their lived experiences and behaviors were documented. Creswell's (2016) eight-step lean coding process was utilized to code and establish themes based on the information obtained from the participants (see Appendix B). To develop the themes, inductive data analysis was utilized because the codes were created from the qualitative data. Once the themes were determined, deductive data analysis was utilized to determine if more evidence could support each theme until saturation was reached.

### **Anticipated Themes/Perceptions**

The underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government case study is a reference to both inequity and inequality. Given the nature of the case study and data being collected from individuals within two different groups (one group was minority women and the other group was hiring managers), one can anticipate the thematic analysis to include valuable information from both perspectives. The minority women will provide information from their lived experiences, and the hiring managers will provide information from their lived experiences from an employer's viewpoint. The anticipated themes associated with this case study include barriers, self-reflection, accountability, planning, and strategies. The anticipated themes are based on the research and literature review of this study.

The theme of "barriers" will provide an understanding of the glass ceiling theory related to minority women trying to achieve a senior-level position. The self-reflection theme will explain how minority women view themselves and the impact or influence society may have on how minority women view themselves. The accountability theme will present information from numerous perspectives about who the subjects hold accountable for the inequity and/or

inequality minority women face at the senior-level in the federal government. The planning theme will provide vital data that could be utilized to move forward with the progression of helping to rectify the dilemma. The strategies theme will be based on the subject's intuitive perception of strategies that have worked or have not worked at their organization that would benefit minority women to advance to senior-level positions.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

The underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government is a qualitative case study centered on the glass ceiling theory. The glass ceiling theory refers to the challenges women and minorities face while climbing the ladder to senior-level positions in the public sector (Sabharwal, 2013). While conducting the case study, the right open-ended interview questions needed to be asked to the participants to answer the research questions and understand why this dilemma continues to occur. The following information discusses the findings and is a representation of the participants' lived experiences.

There were five themes discovered from this qualitative case study. The five themes include the following:

1. A crack in the glass ceiling;
2. WoMan in the mirror;
3. Who you know versus what you know;
4. Let "us" be great; and
5. Time for open dialogue

Each theme will be discussed in further detail and include visualization of the information. After a thorough discussion of the themes, the relationship of themes and summary of findings will be discussed.

### *A Crack in the Glass Ceiling*

The first theme developed from the data collected after interviewing the participants was a crack in the glass ceiling. Forty-plus years ago, Marilyn Loden created the phrase glass ceiling during a panel discussion about women's goals (Faragher, 2018). It was imperative to this case study to ask all of the participants (i.e., hiring managers and minority women) about their knowledge of the glass ceiling since this study revolves around the theory. The participants directly or indirectly referred to the glass ceiling during their interviews. Each participant's response was similar when they defined the glass ceiling. However, some participants went into further detail and even provided examples, and some even referred to Vice President Harris. The similar responses provided by the participants were classified into the same category. Therefore, three different categories were established: the disadvantaged group, minority women, and Vice President Harris. The disadvantaged group category references responses discussing individuals typically labeled by society as being discriminated against based on their mental or physical features. The minority women category discusses answers and examples specifically about minority women and their lived experiences. The Vice President Harris category references different perspectives about whether or not Vice President Harris has broken the glass ceiling.

**Disadvantaged Groups.** The hiring managers discussed their perspectives about the glass ceiling, and each hiring manager, Dave, Karen, and Tyrone, proclaimed the glass ceiling to be about disadvantaged groups. Two (Dave and Karen) of the three hiring managers were hesitant to discuss the glass ceiling theory. However, each of the hiring managers responded. Dave was indecisive regarding the discussion of the glass ceiling, and he was vague with their response: "the glass ceiling is about leadership and disadvantaged groups." Dave did not go into further detail: "I can't really speak much on the glass ceiling theory," as he made the quotes hand



gesture to emphasize that the glass ceiling is merely a theory. Karen was hesitant to answer the question as well and even repeated the question to herself as she made an awkward facial expression:

Discuss my knowledge of the glass ceiling. What I would know of the glass ceiling is that typically men are above the glass ceiling because they are able to make it to the top of leadership or management while women are still experiencing difficulties to make it to management or leadership positions.

Karen seemed annoyed because the glass ceiling is still relevant today and is still being discussed. However, Karen seemed optimistic that the dilemma has slightly improved: “hopefully things are improving in that arena as I’ve seen evidence.” Tyrone loosely heard the glass ceiling term, but he believes the glass ceiling pertains more so to gender and race: “the glass ceiling itself represents a level that is visible but is hard to achieve for women and those of ethnic backgrounds and race.” Tyrone seemed confident in his response but shook his head countless times while discussing the glass ceiling because it is still a modern dilemma.

**Minority Women.** The minority women discussed their knowledge of the glass ceiling. All of the minority women participants believe the glass ceiling pertains to barriers and limitations for disadvantaged groups, particularly women, minorities, and/or minority women. The majority of the minority women believe the glass ceiling is relevant within the federal government. Most of the minority women discussed what they have observed while working for the federal government or provided examples of the negative encounters they have experienced. Mya believes that breaking the glass ceiling is obtainable and reachable within her community, but it is not obtainable within the federal government: “I see it within my community, and it is visible but, within my workplace, not as much.”

Mya provided an example of a minority woman within her community that has broken the glass ceiling stating that the minority woman had “power and confidence” as she climbed the ranks to be a well-known city councilwoman and then becoming the first black female judge in the city she resides in. Raea expressed there are limitations within the federal government for minority women: “the glass ceiling is when minorities and women get to a certain position, and they cannot progress any further no matter how much experience or education they have, there’s always a barrier in front of them,” which aligns with D’Agostino (2015) who believed that despite the empowerment for women and minorities to defy the odds against them, there is a lag of women and minorities in leadership roles. Raea believes non-minority men will advance further than minorities, even though they have less experience or education, and if minorities make it to a senior-level position, it is only because the non-minority male filling that position retired or passed away. Tammy had similar beliefs while discussing the glass ceiling, specifically related to what she has observed in the federal government: “minority women may be in the federal government for a long time, however, they will see people (non-minority) progressing that they feel should not progress because the minority women are working harder, are more knowledgeable and have more experience.” Tammy also believes the glass ceiling is a reference to minority women being able to see everything that is going on within the federal government because the federal government is supposed to be “transparent, with no secrets, no hidden agendas,” but there are barriers that minority women cannot cross or speak of which is similar to Daja’s belief. Daja’s belief agrees with Starks’ (2009) argument, as Daja refers to the glass ceiling as “an unofficial acknowledged barrier” because everybody knows about the theory, but there is nothing in writing that says the theory exists.

**Vice President Harris.** Some of the minority women participants believed it was vital to reference Vice President Harris regarding the glass ceiling. Most of the minority women participants' responses about Vice President Harris were indecisive about whether or not she has broken the glass ceiling because it is all about perception in their eyes. Daja was determined to discuss Vice President Harris and the role Vice President Harris plays when discussing the glass ceiling.

To some extent, I think Vice President Harris has overcome the barrier, but the glass ceiling is not broken. I think it will be broken if she or another female becomes president. Just based on everything that I've seen so far, it was tough, a really tough journey for her, but I think that she's in a place where, I'm just going to say men, where men feel that women ought to be, which is in a supportive position.

Daja seemed hopeful that one day the glass ceiling will be broken, but a woman or minority woman has not yet reached the top role in the federal government, which would be President of the United States. Daja acknowledged that it was a tough road for Vice President Harris to obtain her role, but Vice President Harris still serves in a supportive role to a non-minority male, which is usually the narrative for most minority women working for the federal government. Tia seemed confident that Vice President Harris broke the glass ceiling. Tia believes that in American history, "no woman has ever held that position" and now a minority woman holds that position regardless if it is a term position or permanent position within the federal government:

Vice President Harris, I believe she broke the glass ceiling. That's a position that nobody ever thought or ever dreamed of a woman holding. That glass ceiling is broken and a minority woman at that, reached that level.

Fritz and van Knippenberg (2018) argued that despite inequality between men and women, in the future, more women will have leadership roles within an organization. Tia agrees with Fritz and van Knippenberg's (2018) argument because Tia is optimistic that more minority women will break the glass ceiling eventually, and Tia believes Vice President Harris is a prime example. Tia recalled a time where women would be stuck in positions because they were a woman and Vice President Harris has set the bar high, and anything is achievable with hard work and determination. However, Sheena provided a different perspective on why Vice President Harris has not broken the glass ceiling. Sheena believes to break barriers, you would need to start below Vice President Harris' position because there are minority women in permanent positions within the federal government who are capable of being in senior-level positions, yet they are stuck in their current role due to barriers:

Vice President Harris did not really break the glass ceiling. There are so many other positions in society where we haven't broken that ceiling and to be at the level that she's at, maybe very hard to reach back down to get the people that are below that type of position. I'm sure she's going to do a fine job. I'm sure she's going to set a great example, but it has to start so much further down before we can even say we've broken any ceiling.

Sheena expressed doubt about breaking barriers within the federal government because many underlying circumstances that people outside of the federal government are just not aware of. However, Sheena is optimistic that one day those barriers will be broken to show the younger generation of minority women that they can achieve their goals. Stormy was indecisive about Vice President Harris breaking the glass ceiling because she believes Vice President Harris, being in her role, is still new to everyone. Therefore, Stormy could not make that determination:

With Kamala Harris being Vice President, honestly, it's so new it's only been what two months. I think I won't be able to make a determination of whether or not she's broken the glass ceiling until she's actually out of the position. I think that if you're the first it's hard to know what kind of impact you've had if it can't be repeated.

The glass ceiling pertains to disadvantaged groups, especially minority women, since minority women fall into two disadvantaged groups. To overcome the barriers associated with the glass ceiling, minority women continue to work hard to obtain a senior-level position even if it means they are overlooked or are passed up by non-minority males. Even with Kamala Harris as Vice President, most minority women are indecisive about whether or not the glass ceiling has actually been broken.

### ***WoMan in the Mirror***

The second theme developed from the data collection after interviewing the participants was “woMan in the mirror.” While conducting the interviews for this case study, all of the minority women view themselves differently from a personal perspective and from a professional perspective. When asked specifically about their social identity and self-identity and why it may play a role in their decision to apply for senior-level positions in the federal government, all of the minority women stated that when it comes to physical appearance, they identify as minority women. They believe society (outside of their community or professionally) identifies them the same.

**Confidence.** When discussing the minority women’s confidence, either personally or professionally, some good examples came from the cases of Mya, Shelly, Tia, Lauren, Angela, Wendy, and Stormy. Mya stated that she and her community view her as “strong and direct, honest and loyal,” however, within the workplace. Mya stated

It may come across to them (organization), because of my ethnicity, that I am ruffling people's feathers. That I shouldn't be able to tell a certain group of people what to do.

They don't care that I tell them how to do it, it's what to do.

Nelson and Piatak (2019) believed individuals categorize themselves and others into social classifications that have a great influence on how they interact with others which in turn can cause minorities to face difficulties due to the ability to fit in. In Mya's case, Nelson and Piatak's (2019) argument is true, as Mya self-identifies as being strong and direct, as well as honest and loyal, and her community views her in the same light. However, within the workplace, Mya is viewed in a different light, and she believes the organization she works for sees her as a person that is continuously ruffling people's feathers, and she should not be able to tell a certain group of people what to do. Therefore, Mya does not fit in. Still, how Mya views herself has prompted her to apply for senior-level positions numerous times, although she has never received an invitation to interview for the positions. Mya believes two factors have caused her not to receive an interview, (1) her organization does not want to lose her in the position she currently holds, and (2) her organization already has someone in mind for the position. While the two factors may or may not be the case, Mya continues to apply for senior-level positions based on her confidence and drive to be a senior-level leader one day.

Similar to Mya, Angela is confident in applying for a senior-level as well: "a lot of people see me as knowledgeable, likable, friendly, and trustworthy. I see myself as being a very honest person, eager and willing to learn, motivated, and wants to excel." However, Angela discussed varying factors when it comes to applying for positions stateside versus overseas. Angela believes there is a difference in applying for positions CONUS (contiguous states) versus OCONUS (outside continental United States). She believes she would be further in her career if

she and her family would have stayed overseas. Angela expressed there are two varying factors as to why she believes she would be further in her career overseas; (1) “they have a limited group to choose from” and (2) “the hiring official chose you based on your knowledge” as opposed to applying for senior-level positions stateside where it is (1) “competitive” and your chances of getting hired is (2) “based on who you know.” Angela continues to apply for senior-level positions even if she keeps getting rejected. Tia’s experience was different from Angela’s experience when Tia was met with a dilemma when she retired overseas trying to come back stateside:

I’m very outspoken and that could be a fear for me in high positions, for a woman to be in a category with the men, it’s very intimidating. I am vocal and express how I feel but I also know and learned how to use that. I see myself as somebody who can actually make things happen. When I first applied for jobs, my target was a senior-level because I believe that was my level, where my knowledge was.

Tia expressed that she started applying for senior-level positions when she retired from the military overseas. Based on her education, knowledge, and skills, her target position was that of a senior-level, but it was hard for her to obtain a senior-level position. When she was overseas and trying to apply for positions, she was told to apply for lower levels because it would be her first time working as a civilian. She self-reflects and accepted that is how things were going to be, so she started to apply for lower-level positions. Kachanoff et al. (2020) believed that one’s identity could be impacted through social identity due to a psychological stance affiliated with one’s perception, validated through this study. In Tia’s case, she revealed she is very outspoken, and she sees herself as somebody who can make things happen. Although Tia had the education, knowledge, and skills and believed she should apply for senior-level positions, she was told to

apply for lower-level positions, which caused her to self-reflect based on what society made her believe. Tia's case aligns with Kachanoff et al.'s (2020) research as she allowed her social identity to impact her self-identity. Tia is in a position where her work is that of a supervisor role. She hopes to have a discussion with her supervisor regarding her current role and being promoted, which would place her in a position to potentially become a senior-level leader. Shelly is also vocal-like Tia, and they have similar backgrounds when it comes to their experience in the military and civil service:

I'm somebody that will say what's on my mind, I'm assertive. I don't try to hurt anybody's feelings and I don't try to put anyone down but I'm going to say what's on my mind. Others may perceive that as being a troublemaker or bully, however, if you ask me a question, I will give you an answer.

Shelly admitted that sometimes she would apply for positions to see if they would even acknowledge her. Shelly expressed that when she retired from the military with over 20 years of experience, she applied for senior-level positions because they matched her education, certifications, and skills sets. Shelly declared that for some of the positions she applied for, she never received a response. She and one of her co-workers (who is a non-minority male) applied for a senior-level position for a supervisory role, in which both of them fell under the Priority Placement Program (PPP). Her coworker was chosen for the job even though they had similar backgrounds. Shelly continues to apply for senior-level positions because she is determined that eventually, someone will see her potential and promote her. Shelly expressed that she will continue to apply for positions at the senior-level until she is acknowledged as having the potential to be a senior-level leader. Similar to participants Tia and Shelly, Lauren served in the military for numerous years and has numerous years of experience in the civil service sector:



I'm a go getter. I'm going to get the next position if I meet the qualifications. Other people view me as aggressive, and some would say I'm underqualified but the whole twenty years of being in the military, I've had to fight for my position. It's never been easy. I feel that when I've fought for a position and I've gotten the position, I deserve that position. It's not what everybody else thinks because everybody else has not walked in my shoes.

Lauren stated that her experience applying for senior-level positions was hard, and she had to apply numerous times before she was asked to interview. Lauren believes that the organization chooses someone that fits in that position without disrupting the organization as opposed to someone that knows the job and information. Lauren is one step closer to becoming a senior-level leader and believes she will eventually get there. Stormy also had a hard time breaking into a leadership role. Stormy stated, "I've been told I am a very assertive leader, and I'm passionate." Stormy recalled a situation where another leader in her organization made a comment to her boss stating that she cannot stop speaking, even in meetings where her boss should speak and did not have the words to say anything because he was not prepared, Stormy would speak. That is what some of the leaders told her boss regarding her speaking. Stormy feels she needs to get the job done and figure out a solution sometimes when her boss cannot. Stormy believes she has had some great opportunities, non-supervisory opportunities, and her latest position after serving a short-term assignment in the military. Stormy believed that the military's goal for officers was to create great leaders, which would provide her an opportunity to supervise and gain leadership skills. When Stormy left the military and pursued government positions, specifically supervisory positions, she had many issues breaking into authoritative leadership. Therefore, Stormy had to self-reflect and speak to her mentors to ensure there was not a blind

spot that she was not aware of. Stormy is in a senior-level position but believes it is difficult for minority women to get to that position. Wendy is also seen as a hard worker and tasker:

As a supervisor, I try to train everyone to be self-sufficient. I want to be able to go higher in my career and further my skills, and I know that comes with hard work and dedication. I want to be able to take people with me when I succeed.

Wendy stated that she has applied for numerous senior-level positions, which has been extremely hard for her. Wendy believes she has the education and skills to go further, so she does not know what the issue is, and she believes she is more than qualified. Wendy understands that there are regulations that need to be followed regarding the hiring process. However, if someone does not give you an opportunity, how are you supposed to climb the ladder? Wendy has voiced her concerns to leadership but believes nothing will be done to examine the overall hiring process because leadership does not believe anything is wrong with it. Wendy will continue to voice her opinion regarding the hiring process, and she will continue to apply for senior-level positions.

Although each participant has confidence within themselves that one day they will be in a senior-level position, each participant agrees there have been numerous obstacles in their way and have made assumptions as to why the obstacles occurred. Even after numerous rejections, the minority women feel that it is necessary to keep striving for a senior-level positions. All of the minority women continue to apply for senior-level positions.

**Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities.** When discussing the minority women's knowledge, skills and abilities, there were various responses. Some good examples came from the cases of Tammy, Daja, Raea, Sheena, and Nia. Tammy expressed she is well educated and has good qualities:

I'm a hard worker and I know I don't know everything. I feel like I'm well educated. I'm an outgoing person and I think I have a temperament where I can get along with anyone and I'm a good leader. How others see me, I'm a great leader and I've also been told that I speak well for someone from down south. I've been questioned what makes me qualified for this and that and why do I have so many master's degrees.

Tammy stated that she interviewed for quite a few senior-level positions. However, if when she applied and did not get referred, then it was determined that she was not among the best qualified, and therefore, was not referred to the hiring officials. Tammy declared that at one point she felt stuck at a certain level because she saw people that she trained and were interns, progress quicker than she did. At that point, she did not know who she could complain to. At the time, Tammy wanted leadership to see that she was a hard worker and she had numerous degrees. She did a lot of self-reflecting even if she never understood why she was not in the category of best qualified for the positions she was applying for. Sheena also expressed that people see her as having the ability to lead, which would make her a great leader:

I view myself as a person that has the ability to lead people, the ability to motivate others, the ability to get the job done, but can do that in a way that I'm respecting others. I am an individual that believes in helping others and bringing others up; not forgetting where I come from. I believe that the people that I work around and I socialize with view me in the same light and believe in me. They know that I am fair.

Sheena has applied for numerous senior-level positions, particularly supervisory leadership roles and has been told that it was not her time. Sheena recalled that it took her four years to get promoted when she started in the federal government. Sheena expressed that what she noticed was the people that conducted the interviews and those that were classified as the

hiring officials, none of them looked like her, and the majority were non-minority males. Sheena stated, “when I look around I didn’t even see anybody even in the positions that I was trying to reach that looked like me, so I knew then that it was going to be a hard task to get there.” Daja also believes that it has been tough trying to obtain a senior-level position. Daja expressed numerous perspectives when discussing her character as it relates to social identity and self-identity and what makes her a good candidate to be in a senior-level position:

I think people at work see me as a team player. I’ve been told that I’m drama free and people can always come to me if they want an honest answer about something or someone who is objective, they’ll come to me. I think there’s always room for improvement and I think that based on the person that I am, where I am able to see things objectively and not be judgmental, makes me a good candidate to be in a senior-level position.

Daja stated that in her profession, minority customers and minority employees had voiced their concerns to her, and while she tries to do any and everything she can, she is not in a leadership role. However, if she were in a leadership role, things would change for their organization to be inclusive and considerate of the concerns related to the majority of their customers. Daja said it had been tough applying for senior-level positions, and she lost count of how many times she has applied. She has become frustrated with the system and process due to the lack of information provided to applicants. Like Daja, Raea is viewed as a team player and also applied numerous times for a senior-level position:

Some people view me as a team player, strong leader, and someone who takes initiative.

However, I don’t view myself as highly as others do because I don’t like to put myself on

a pedestal. I guess it is something that I will have to work on and give myself a chance because sometimes I can allow other's view of me to be negative toward myself.

Raea declared that she has applied for senior-level positions. However, at one point in her life, she did not think at any time she would be able to move up because she saw what minorities had to go through to achieve a senior-level position. Raea does believe that she has the skills and knowledge to be in a senior-level position. Nia also shows initiative when it comes to her job:

My coworkers and supervisor think that I get things done. I take care of the job and help out where I can. I get along pretty much with everybody. I'm easygoing. I am knowledgeable but I stay to myself.

Nia expressed that she had been in the federal government for quite some time, and she knew a lot of people that helped her get to her current position.

Although the minority women are seen as dedicated workers, team players, and are well educated, the road to a senior-level position has still been difficult. Each minority woman that discussed their knowledge, skills, and abilities seemed to be an expert within their field and is deemed as a subject matter expert, but has yet to cross that barrier to obtaining a senior-level position.

**Manager's Perspective.** It is conducive for this study to capture the responses from the hiring manager participants. When asked to explain if they believe it is challenging for minority women to obtain a senior-level position; and for them to discuss if society plays a role, from a hiring managers perspective, Dave declared

I haven't seen a lot of women in senior-level positions. The last one I saw was my supervisor before she retired. Since then, I can't think of one minority female or woman of color in a senior-level position.

Dave then expressed that throughout the entire organization, he cannot recall one minority woman in a senior-level position. Dave questioned if something was happening and making it hard for minority women to get promoted and stated they do not have all of the facts, but was adamant that they know minority women are applying for senior-level positions:

I think society does play a role in the challenges minority women face in obtaining a senior-level position in the federal government. Society has harder rules for being hired into a senior-level position than most government positions do. Some minority women may feel that they won't even be considered and some may not try. I know some that won't make an effort because they don't think there's a point. I also know some that have tried, and they're extremely frustrated.

However, Karen believes it is the total opposite in her organization. Karen expressed that challenges are not a factor in her organization when it comes to minority women reaching a senior-level position, but believes challenges can occur if an organization is not doing what is right:

At least in my organization, I don't believe they would have a challenge. Only because if they're qualified they can compete and get the job, however, it may be challenging, may be perceived to be challenging to them if they had challenges along the way, I would think. I'm trying to do my part not to let there be challenges where there should be no challenges. If the qualification is there, then that person is qualified, and you're the best qualified, then they should get it but if they have experienced challenges then they might perceive there are challenges.

Karen expressed she can only control her actions and cannot control other's actions, and there could be challenges if other hiring managers are not fair and doing what is right. Karen

declared “my organization is more inclusive of minority women and minority individuals than some of the other agencies but I’m not sure because I’ve not really been in another hiring process outside of my own.” Karen expressed that it seemed as though there is more inclusivity in leadership within their organization, more minority males than minority females, but that was their observation. Tyrone expressed a different perspective when responding to the question but believes that minority women face challenges when trying to obtain a senior-level position:

There are challenges for minority women trying to obtain a senior-level position. There’s a family dynamic that goes there. Anytime you have a family dynamic there, especially from the minority woman’s side, there’s added responsibility. Not to say the responsibility is not on the father or the male but, there’s just added responsibility there. It just requires additional time that is not required from the male. The male doesn’t have the children, the female has the children, just the birth analogy that’s time away. Then there’s emphasis stages to where of society, the mother is there while the father is paving the way, even with that team dynamic, with a spouse supporting and the other spouse going another direction, it still requires more of that female in the family dynamic than the male. That’s one of the greatest challenges. Then you start talking about opportunities, the need to move the family, it becomes even more challenging. It holds females down, where if you’re going to reach that top plateau, you have to put things off, you have to put that family off until you reach later years. You rarely have that with the male’s side.

Similar to Dave, Tyrone stated his opinion about society playing a role in the challenges minority women face in obtaining a senior-level position:

Society, itself, regardless of region, this world has a factor in it. Females going to a higher position of leadership, and even compounded of being a minority, let alone African American. So, you're talking about a triple whammy. A. being a female. B. being a minority, especially African American, and C. you're talking about a family dynamic. You have three things that's working against them. Society itself feeds that whole paradox, especially within the south. There's just adamant beliefs still today in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that women shouldn't be in the workplace because women pose a threat to power. Just like African Americans, black and brown people pose a threat to power. Couple that with females, you pose a threat to power. What is power? Power is what we constantly see.

According to Barnes (2017), underrepresented groups are familiar with the glass ceiling, but minority women experience the challenges of overlapping injustices regarding achieving a senior-level position because they are women and minority, which is relevant today based on this study. Tyrone's perspective is similar to Barnes' (2017) argument because Tyrone believes there are overlapping injustices for minority women, and minority women are seen as having a "triple whammy" because minority women are "females, a minority, and they have a family dynamic" they have to uphold.

There are three different perspectives of whether or not society plays a role in minority women facing challenges while trying to obtain a senior-level position in the federal government. All three managers believe there are or there can be, depending on the situation. All of the hiring managers' perspectives rested on what they have observed or experienced in the federal government. It seems that society plays a role in minority women facing challenges while trying to obtain a senior-level position if the organization is not doing what is right.



### *Who You Know Versus What You Know*

The third theme that emerged from the data collection after interviewing the participants was who you know versus what you know. Some of the participants, directly and indirectly, described social capital and networking. Social capital comes with building relationships with people that in turn introduce you to other people to build your “network.” In today’s society, most individuals want to have a network of people to help them achieve their career goals. Some of the participants described that the issue with having such a network, is certain people are left out because they were never invited to have a seat at the table. Regardless of how smart or wise the individual may be, they are often overlooked for opportunities because they are not within a certain “network” of people. In general, some of the participants believe rather than providing someone that is outside of the “network” with an opportunity to advance, the individuals within the same “network” are continuously recruited and allowed to advance their careers.

The participant cases that described social capital or networking were Mya, Raea, Shelly, Lauren, Angela, Sheena, Stormy, Dave, and Tyrone’s case. When asked about her experience applying for senior-level positions for the federal government, Mya expressed disappointment: “I’ve seen a lot of nepotism as well as ‘who you know.’ I see a lot of who you know, it’s all about who you know, which is frustrating.” Mya declared she has a Master’s degree and numerous years of military experience and civil service combined. However, she has been in the same position and at the same grade level for years. Mya expressed that leadership is to blame because “they already have in mind who they want. Most of the time it’s who they have an influence on.” Mya articulated that broken leadership draws her to want to become a senior leader. Mya expressed there are not any career progression programs offered, which makes it difficult to say that there are actions or hiring mechanisms in place to help encourage minority

women to apply or get hired for a senior-level position within the federal government. Raea believes that she was promoted into her current position based on what she knew and who she knew, but she believes it was “mostly who I knew. That is something that we do go through, that happens a lot in the federal government.” Raea has a master’s degree with a combination of experience in the military and civil service. Raea stated that pre-COVID, her organization had trained all the time due to the field she is in and as long as you applied to go to the training and it did not interrupt the mission, you were able to go, given there were slots available. However, if it interrupted the mission then you were denied:

I can’t remember what year it was, however, EEO put on a program where it was mentorship for the female population and majority of the females that were in the program were African American because of that glass ceiling. Majority of our mentors were non-minority females who were in the senior-level positions. I would like to see that come back so you know they have the mentorship for the female population.

Raea shared that an African American woman started the program, but once the woman left the organization, the program ended. Raea believes that the program motivated minority women to advance to a senior-level position. Similar to Raea’s belief about being hired or promoted based on who you know in the federal government, Shelly believes the right people need to be in place for her to progress in her career and be promoted. Shelly expressed that she learned every position within her section. However, when she applied for a position that would promote her, someone else was chosen for the position: “the one promoted didn’t know anything. She’s been there the longest but did not feel the need to learn all this stuff.” Zschirnt and Ruedin (2016) discussed taste-based discrimination (e.g., when an organization or manager has a preference in someone with a certain racial or ethnic background) and statistical discrimination

(e.g., when an individual of a certain group is discriminated against because the organization or manager lacks information about the individual with regards to the individual's background), which in Shelly's case, Shelly believes that certain people receive promotions or are hired for senior-level positions in the federal government because of the "network" they are associated with. Shelly believes the reason why the other individual received the promotion was because of the "network" she is in with the supervisor. Shelly did not receive an interview or anything, and nobody in her section (besides the one that got the promotion) was told when the interviews took place because no one else received an interview.

I'm too busy working to have time to be in people's faces. I'm not going to kiss your butt. I'm not going to lower my bar for you; I'm not going to tolerate disrespect; I don't disrespect you, don't disrespect me.

Shelly has numerous years of military and civil service experience and is often awarded for her work. Lauren's perspective also aligns with Zschirnt and Ruedin's (2016) argument, because Lauren believes it is all about who you know versus what you know when referring to a promotion or being hired in the federal government: "Honestly, I think it's not the information you know, it's a game of chess that's being played. People or individuals play this game, a strategic game." Lauren believes that not all organizations follow the same protocol during the hiring process. Lauren expressed that all organizations should abide by regulation, meaning that you have to be in a role for at least 52 weeks before being promoted. Lauren stated, "every post should be on the same level, and they're not." Lauren has a master's degree and numerous years of experience on both the military side and civil service side. Lauren stated the reason why it took her so long to be promoted was due to prior supervisors:

Prior supervisors that wanted to hold you back and didn't want you to progress because they wanted to progress, so by them wanting to progress they wanted to keep you back and do everything they can do to keep you from going to a higher level, but I made a promise when I became a supervisor, at the level I'm at, I will try to help anybody who I supervise to get to wherever level or whatever next job they want to get to, even if it means leaving.

Similar to Lauren's belief, Angela's perspective is relatively the same. Angela also provided an example. Angela stated the factor that played a role in not being selected for a senior-level position was based on who you know: "Basically, when you first come (to her organization), at least when I first came here, it was as if there were a clique, it's a circle that you have to be within." Angela has numerous years of civil service and has been at the same grade level within the same organization for 10-plus years. Sheena believes she was not chosen for a senior-level position when she applied because the playing field was already laid out:

It was just a matter of formality that was going on. The individuals for the two positions that I have applied for that were considered senior-level, believe it or not the person that I felt was going to get the position, actually got the position. So it didn't matter how well I did or how well I didn't do on the interview, it was already set and it played out exactly how I thought it would; and played out exactly how people around me, who know me; who knew my abilities; played out the same way as they thought it would as well.

Anestaki et al. (2019) indicated that hiring actions relevant to diversity and inclusion depend on the president and president's administration at the time, and it will determine if there is an increase or decrease in women and minority representation at the senior-level. In contrast to Anestaki et al. (2019), Sheena believes it depends on the federal government agency, and in her

case of applying for senior-level positions, it is due to social capital networks within the organization. Sheena expressed that any person chosen for a senior-level position is in the same “network” as the hiring officials, and she referred to the network as the “good ole’ boy network.” Sheena has a bachelor’s degree in the field she is in, along with numerous military and civil service experiences. Stormy recalled a time that even when there were not many minorities and females in senior-level positions, they were replaced with non-minority males because all of the non-minority males were in the same “network.” Dave recalls a similar situation and can only remember having two minority women as supervisors in a senior-level position. Dave stated that one retired, and they do not know what happened to the other supervisor. Dave expressed that what they see in their current organization are non-minority males in senior-level positions. Tyrone refers to the “networking” issue and the broken hiring system as the “ducks picking ducks analogy.”

The duck is going to pick the duck that resembles the duck that’s picking. OK, I’ll use a white duck. A white duck is always going to pick a white duck because a white duck knows exactly what the white duck is going to do because the white duck is picking the white duck. The white duck won't pick a black duck because it's hard for the white duck to understand and figure out how the black duck will assimilate to the white duck. OK, that's a color analogy, but you can take that same color analogy and apply it to males and females.

Tyrone believes that when you look across a structure and those in leadership are predominately male, it is challenging for that culture to select someone different other than what they are used to because they do not know what they are going to get and that brings on fear.

Tyrone stated, “We have a tendency and lose sight of what the qualifications are at the table, and the focus is more on, again, how does that duck assimilate to this duck.”

A form of social capital or networking was presented in every case, whether it was referred to directly or indirectly. In some cases, it was even admitted that the individual climbed up the ranks because of who they knew instead of what they knew. It seems that the federal government will suffer in the long haul if they continue to hire based on social capital or networking versus someone’s ability to do the job and do the job right based on their knowledge, skills, and abilities.

### ***Let “us” be Great***

The fourth theme developed from the data collection after interviewing the participants was let “us” be great. “The federal hiring process is set up to be fair and transparent. Please read the following guidance:

The United States Government does not discriminate in employment on the basis of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy and gender identity), national origin, political affiliation, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, genetic information, age, membership in an employee organization, retaliation, parental status, military service, or other non-merit factor. (USAJOBS, 2021)

The Equal Employment Opportunity Policy statement is provided at the bottom of every job announcement listed on the Federal Government’s hiring website. While the words are printed in black and white that the Federal Government is set up to be “fair and transparent,” disadvantaged groups, such as minority women, wonder if the hiring officials working at different federal agencies are also “fair and transparent” when it comes to hiring for senior-level positions.

**The Bare Minimum.** When the hiring managers were asked to discuss how they have encouraged minority women to progress to a senior-level position and discuss the hiring mechanisms that are used to encourage minority women to apply for senior-level positions, Dave stated, “the way I have encouraged them is to do training. I’ve encouraged them to take classes to go to college. I’ve told them to apply for positions and don’t doubt yourself.” Dave expressed that when a minority woman is selected for an interview, the process is fair. Dave revealed that when there is a hiring panel, hiring officials usually select individuals from outside of the specific office to serve on the hiring panel, then all of the interviewees are scored based on how they respond to the question: “The same general questions are asked of everyone, and then in the end, all of those scores are tallied up and then the person is selected based on who has the highest score.” Dave believes another fair practice is that all of the interviews are done by phone, therefore, you cannot see the person you are talking to: “That is a positive thing because you have to judge the person based on their knowledge and skills; and how well they responded to the questions in the interview.” Dave sometimes believes when you can see a person, there are unconscious biases, and people begin to assume things before an individual starts to speak.

Karen also encourages minority women by telling them to “learn as much as they can about the position and about competency that is needed for upward mobility and for those grades that are higher levels.” Karen declared that they also encourage shadowing and applying for internship opportunities with the Federal Government. Karen expressed that all they knew regarding the hiring mechanisms used to encourage minority women to apply for senior-level positions were found on USAJOBS. Tyrone’s perspective was slightly different than Dave and Karen’s:

There are things I can do to prepare you to be successful and things I can set you up to be successful but, you have to take the lead and go with it from there. You have to shape where you're going, and you have to do the other little things there to go up higher. You also have to assess how high you want to go.

Tyrone believes minority women need to be the custodian of their skills and how far those skills will translate to the next higher level. When referring to hiring mechanisms that are used to encourage minority women to apply for senior-level positions, Tyrone made a statement, referencing when a minority woman is selected for an interview:

We have to make sure that our selection panels are reflective of male and female genders. It can't just be all males. It needs to be a diverse mix. It can't just be whites or blacks. It needs to be diverse.

Tyrone believes there are measures in place, however, most agencies will implement the bare minimum to ensure they are covered legally:

You have these measures there, but the measures to me are not always designed to meet that diversity threshold. It's not a maximum measure, it is a minimum measure. You're going to find very few areas where you find some solid succession planning and the succession planning has that diversity in it, where you have organizations that can identify people that are being mentored and groomed for the next higher positions and having that minority women and diversity culture included in it, that's a part of succession planning but, you won't see that because people will revert back to, hey here's the hiring process and the hiring process is fair.

Kurtulus' (2015) research regarding the role of affirmative action relating to the growth of minority and female employment in the United States indicates that there has not been much



progress, and there is still a lot of work to be done even after five decades. Each hiring manager (Dave, Karen, and Tyrone) stated they encourage minority women to apply for senior-level positions or higher positions to eventually get them to a senior-level position. However, Tyrone believes when referring to the overall stance of the federal government's hiring system, the bare minimum is implemented, which aligns with Kurtulus' (2015) research because there has not been much progress to ensure there is a higher standard for diversity and inclusion in the hiring process regarding hiring minority women for senior-level positions. There were varying responses when referring to the hiring mechanisms to encourage minority women to apply for senior-level positions. Dave and Tyrone provided examples of the hiring panels and how they are conducted or needed to be conducted. However, minority women are still not being selected for senior-level positions, and some are not even selected for the interview. The issue at hand is the bare minimum is the standard, and the federal government is okay with settling with the bare minimum. However, progress cannot be made if the standard is the bare minimum.

**Becoming a Senior-level Leader.** It is essential to this study that each participant's response was captured to understand why minority women want to become senior-level leaders. According to the minority women participants, what draws them to become a senior-level leader for the government fell into three categories. Participants Mya, Raea, and Shelly stated broken leadership; participants Tammy, Daja, Sheena, Stormy, and Nia stated representation; and participants Tia, Lauren, Angela, and Wendy stated growth.

Mya sees broken leadership within her organization daily. Mya believes the leaders focus on the mission instead of the employees. While discussing her organization's broken leadership, Mya's facial expression changed in disbelief:

I understand the mission, but they {leadership} have the wrong perspective. The government's mission is mission first, people second and mine is the reverse; people first, then the mission because I believe if you take care of your people, then you accomplish your mission.

Mya expressed that leadership should show compassion and be sympathetic to employees because people have different things outside of work. Mya believes that if she were in a leadership role, she would be a "driving force" and show that it does not matter what seat you hold, from the lowest rank to the highest rank, "no one person can do it by themselves" and "everyone's perspective should be respected." As a leader and interacting with different levels of employees daily, Raea believes that a leader should be fair across the board and not show favoritism:

Being a leader, you want to be fair across the board. You want to be fair no matter who it is. You don't want to show favoritism or anything of that nature and you see some leaders that show favoritism and others see that.

Raea believes that when leaders show favoritism, it causes other employees to become disinterested in interacting with leaders and co-workers. Raea expressed "I just don't want to be a leader that shows favoritism. I want to be a leader that is equal to everyone." Raea understands that not everyone will be the same, but a leader should be able to highlight each individual's strength and use it as an advantage. However, when there is broken leadership and favoritism is shown amongst leaders, the outcome can be seen by employees like Shelly. Shelly believes that within her organization, leaders are not properly trained or managed, which causes the employees of the organization to question the highest level of leadership:

I see a lot of leaders that are not properly trained, they are not managed. They are just left to run ramped, to make chaos and mockers of people's careers and livelihoods and nobody brings them in and it's ridiculous, then when you say something to the highest leadership, they say, well they must have deserved the position.

Kretschmer (2018) argued that hiring decisions are made based on the needs of the organization and the expectations derive from the previous person that held the position. In contrast, Shelly believes that leaders are not properly trained or managed, which causes employees to question leadership. Therefore, if hiring decisions are made based on the needs of the organization and the expectations derive from the previous person that held the position in Kretschmer's (2018) argument, then the organization does not have high expectations for their senior-level roles. Shelly expressed that having broken leadership causes high turnover within an organization. Shelly believes the highest level of leaders continue to question the high turnover rate, however, they should focus on the employees that are staying as opposed to the ones that are leaving. Shelly expressed, "there needs to be some change."

According to the participant's responses regarding broken leadership, the mission comes first in the federal government. However, in order for the mission to be accomplished, the federal government needs people. The federal government proclaims to be fair and transparent, as discussed in the who you know versus what you know section of the findings. The federal government must ensure that once a senior-level leader is hired, the person is also fair and transparent. Senior-level leaders should go above and beyond their duties, especially when it comes to the progression of their employees. Proper training needs to be conducted for senior-level leaders to ensure they are doing their job right. Organizations are a reflection of their senior-level leaders.

Tammy believes representation in a senior-level position within the federal government is essential to show the next generation that it is possible:

Representation. Showing my value, my worth and my skill set. My grandmother, she raised a house full of us. My mother was young when she had me. She {grandmother} told us to never belittle yourself and I can go get whatever the next person has, man or woman, white or black. So it's just a challenge to myself to become the best that I can be so that my daughter can see. I don't want her to feel like there's a limit as to what she can achieve. So, me as her mother or even as a woman or black woman, a single parent (as people label me) but, I have a lot to offer and I don't want anyone to stop me, so I'll go as high as I can, as far as I can.

Janetius et al.'s (2019) research indicated that selection and placement are vital to the productivity of the organization. In Tammy's case, she trained numerous people that progressed further than she has and she believes representation of minority women at the senior-level is essential for the next generation. Based on Janetius et al.'s (2019) research and Tammy's case, Tammy is good enough to train people for them to progress to a senior-level position, which in turn, gives the federal government high productivity. With Tammy having numerous years of experience and many degrees, Tammy should be given an opportunity to hold a senior-level position. Tammy showed confidence in her response, and she believes that becoming a senior-level leader is a challenge, but she refuses to give up because she wants to represent minority women at the highest level possible and be a role model to her daughter. Similar to Tammy, Daja believes representation of minority women at the senior-level is vital. Daja expressed that non-minority people in senior-level positions make decisions off of their experiences, and Daja believes minority women should have that opportunity too:

There's a mass representation of non-minority people in certain positions, in higher positions making decisions that are based off of their experiences, which does not necessarily apply to minority people. I think being in a position that you're able to say hey I understand where you're coming from and being able to see the person, I think that would be helpful.

Daja declared that if she were a senior-level leader within her organization, she would make sure there is a diverse group of people to serve the customers since the majority of her customers are minorities. Daja strongly believes that representation matters. Sheena also believes that representation matters. Sheena wants an opportunity to represent minorities and women at the senior-level within the federal government:

What draws me is just being in the federal government for the time I've been in the federal government and seeing how opportunities are not equally shared. Where I see people that are way capable than individuals that are being selected for these type of positions, never getting an opportunity. What drives me to want to be at that {senior} level is to try to make change and to support minorities; to support females; to support people that are not given a fair opportunity to be a part of the leadership.

Sheena is hopeful that one day she will be a senior-level leader and change the trajectory of how minority women are viewed in the workplace for there to be an abundance of minority women represented at the senior-level. Stormy believes minority women are often used for their skills but are not given the opportunity to progress within their field:

There is no representation. It's great that we can be used for our skillset. I'm sitting here writing emails while other folks sign their names or add develop programs that have been game-changers, multi-million dollar programs, and saved multimillion dollars

development programs, and history writes itself. There needs to be diversity and inclusion, and so it's not enough to say we hire people of color but then we limit where they can sit and what positions they can take.

Stormy seemed frustrated while discussing her lived experience and how hard it has been to climb the ladder to a senior-level role. Stormy believes it is a chosen profession for her to become a senior-level leader within the federal government: "I know that this is a calling for me, I love what I do." Stormy would love to see minority women represented at the highest level of leadership just like Nia. Nia expressed, "it would be nice to see more people of color in leadership roles."

According to the participant's response, it is imperative that there is representation of minority women in senior-level positions. Minority women want change within the federal government so their voices can be heard since they make up a majority of the workforce. Minority women are seen as having an abundance of knowledge, skills, and abilities. Therefore, they need to be brought to the forefront to make the federal government better, as they can relate to almost anyone. Minority women want the next generation of minority women to have an opportunity to achieve a senior-level position that will continue from generation to generation.

Tia's perspective is different, as she believes what draws her to become a senior-level leader is her growth. Tia expressed that she can become a senior-level leader because she knows how to interact with a diverse group of people and she has obtained numerous skills during the duration of career:

I know I have the ability, the skills, the knowledge to deal with people. I've supervised soldiers for such a long time soldiers of all ages; soldiers who are older than me; the soldiers who are the same age as me; younger than me; some almost the same age as my

oldest son; you know when you are put in that position you kind of learn everybody. The backgrounds of people, where they come from; what type of person they are; what do they believe in, it builds you too as a leader and so for that I have the confidence to say you know I've dealt with this all my life.

Tia expressed that she is currently in a supervisory role but would like the opportunity to be a senior-level leader for the federal government because she knows she is capable of handling the job and doing the job right. Lauren is also in a supervisory role and would like the opportunity to be a senior-level leader for the federal government because she likes challenges and with those challenges comes growth. Lauren expressed that she has standards and goals, and she is determined to accomplish them even if she does not receive an opportunity right away:

I like growing; I like challenges; I like to progress and I have a timeline in which I want to progress. I have my entire plan of where I want to be on a timeline. I try to advance according to my timeline and if I don't advance according to my timeline, hey, maybe it wasn't time for me to get there, maybe it's time for me to learn something else before I go to that next level.

Similar to Lauren's beliefs, Angela believes that growth is essential with any job, but when you become a senior-level leader, "you get to have opportunities for training and enhancing your growth, education and all." Angela expressed that once you make it to the top, you can take advantage of any training and educational opportunity within the federal government, which enables continuous growth professionally and personally. Wendy also believes in growth and indicated that her drive to become a senior-level leader is her parents:

Both of my parents retired from the government. They encouraged me to be a go-getter and drove me to be the best and never settle. I strive to do better and take people along with me. My parents instilled a lot of good qualities in me.

Wendy stated that she will continue to “press on” to be a senior-level leader because that is her goal and she plans on accomplishing it. Wendy expressed that she wants to do it for herself, but most importantly for her parents. Wendy believes she is still growing as a leader and she knows the opportunity will eventually come for her to “show off her skills” as a senior-level leader, but for right now, she will continue to supervise her staff and be a mentor to them.

According to the participant’s response, growth is vital to progress as a senior-level leader. Minority women are willing to learn to advance their knowledge, skills, and abilities; they just need to be provided with an opportunity to do so. It seems what their loved ones have instilled in them is that they need to be the best they can be for people to see how great they are.

### ***Time for Open Dialogue***

The fifth theme that emerged from the data collection after interviewing the participants was time for open dialogue. Diversity and inclusion are current “hot topics” discussed in today’s society which goes hand-in-hand with equity and equality. It was important to ask specific questions to both the hiring managers and minority women regarding diversity and inclusion within the federal government. Hiring managers were asked to discuss what diversity and inclusion programs were currently in place and to discuss suggestions they have provided to promote diversity and inclusion programs. The minority women were asked what diversity and inclusion programs they would like to see in the federal government and discuss the importance of diversity and inclusion programs for minority women. Although specific questions were asked, some of the participants referred to diversity and inclusion before the specified questions



were asked. Therefore, it is essential to this study to include all of the information related to diversity and inclusion.

According to Lyness and Grotto (2018), studies show that organizations that implement diversity and inclusion programs see an increase in minority women at the senior-level. Even though all hiring managers (Dave, Karen, and Tyrone) proclaimed that their organizations held inclusion sessions, the hiring managers stated they were mandated by higher headquarters. They stated there was 100% attendance from their employees. However, employees were not obligated to talk during the session, but they did have to listen. The hiring managers stated that due to COVID-19, most of the sessions took place via a virtual platform. The hiring managers stated that the inclusion sessions provided an opportunity for leaders and their employees to discuss race and racism and how racism can be combated and what steps needed to take place. Some of the other programs the hiring managers stated that were in place included sessions with senior leaders that provided employees an opportunity to discuss any matter on their installation, the celebration of heritage, where a different heritage is celebrated on the installation each month, and there are EEO programs. However, Tyrone stated that EEO is an asset of senior leadership, and they do not have a major role in diversity and inclusion other than to administer classes when asked to do so. They do not have the ability to answer questions of why there is no diversity amongst senior leadership. Tyrone also stated,

The sad reality is that we are just getting to a level of inclusion. There's a variety of things when we talk about inclusion from ethnic, to race, to inclusion. It's amazing that we're just getting here, and it just takes so much social unrest to happen for workplaces to evolve to it and that's why we are having the problems we have with upward mobility with women.

Tyrone went on to say,

Inclusion is at an interesting stage. Should be well past that by now, but it's just where we are. It's where we are in the world today, and it's not just where we are in the workforce, society works better being in denial and just standing in the monologue because now we have self-gratification that we can say we're doing something, or we've done something.

Some of the suggestions the hiring managers stated they have provided to promote diversity and inclusion programs included frequent diversity and inclusion sessions, diversity and inclusion training, and participation in cultural events. Karen stated they had not done it yet, but they are implementing monthly diversity and inclusion themes. Karen anticipates that once the diversity and inclusion themes are implemented, the organization will write about the theme to provide information and the history behind the theme. Karen believes that implementing diversity and inclusion themes will provide a lot of the employees' insight into the importance of diversity and inclusion.

Some minority women became emotional when discussing diversity and inclusion programs and the importance of diversity and inclusion programs for minority women. All of the minority women participants believe that diversity and inclusion programs are important for minority women. Mya stated

Education needs to be brought to the attention of being more culturally diverse. That's the glory of working on a military installation because you have diversity, even though you work with a diverse group, you don't always understand their different cultures.

Mya believes that everyone is needed to have a successful diversity and inclusion program. Mya expressed that everyone would need to be on the same page to accomplish the goal of having

diversity and inclusion programs, and that is where the education part would come into play.

Shelly had a different perspective. Shelly believes they should challenge diversity:

They do it with the colleges, they do it with a lot of jobs, do it with the federal government because I know there are minorities that applied for a lot of these jobs and a lot of minority females that applied for these job. So be fair, how did they not make the cut?

While discussing this topic, Shelly's facial expressions kept changing as if she were in disbelief that certain things continue to happen within the federal government, especially for minority women. Sheena declared, "I would like to see more internship programs to help identify up and coming leaders and minority groups from the onset where it could be tracked, and we can see how it's developed." Sheena agrees with Lyness and Grotto's (2018) argument, and she seemed hopeful that diversity and inclusion programs would benefit minority women. She does believe to have success with diversity and inclusion programs, someone would have to plan and implement a program, which she does not feel optimistic about. Wendy expressed, "I would like to see diversity and inclusion training and mentorship programs, which I haven't seen at all." Wendy believes minority women would benefit from diversity and inclusion programs and that is why it is not a priority for leadership within her organization. Stormy stated, "I would like to see more focus groups on developing leaders of color."

Participants Tia and Angela would like to see case studies like this to get minority women's perspectives that translate into diversity and inclusion programs. Tia also provided insight into what a lot of minority women are thinking regarding the importance of diversity and inclusion programs. Tia believes if diversity and inclusion programs are not implemented, there is no way to overcome the barriers:

We're (minority women) very outspoken because when you are a minority you fight for stuff all your life. It doesn't necessarily mean that you were fighting for food or places; it's just the acceptance of hey, this is me. The importance of diversity and inclusion programs will also further our understanding. Minority women at the end of the day, a lot of us, we just want to know the reason why things happen the way they do. Even if it's the hard truth, at least that will be discussed and it can open something like a dialogue for people to understand and even if it's somebody saying no we just don't want to promote you because you're a woman or your minority at least we'd know. We'd know that it came out of somebody's mouth, but that's the reason why.

Lauren's beliefs are similar to Tia's beliefs. Lauren would like open dialogue as well and believes that if everything were brought to the forefront, individuals that are not minority women would develop an understanding of minority women's disposition and what minority women have to go through within the federal government. Lauren believes it would also be a good time to discuss issues that have been going on for years in the federal government as it relates to minority women:

The importance for minority women, if you're discussing diversity and inclusion, and bring it all out in front of everybody, including from the highest position to the lowest position, then you understand, and you know what we as minority women are going through and would be able to address the issues that's there that you weren't aware of or that you turn a blind eye to.

Lauren's understanding of what could occur if diversity and inclusion programs were implemented align with Stormy's knowledge and lived experience. Stormy believes that minority women have a lot of skills that contribute to the overall success of the federal government, but

she questions why diversity and inclusion programs are not implemented to help minority women to become senior-level leaders. To Stormy's understanding, the federal government would rather let a good minority woman employee leave before they would promote or hire a minority woman in a senior-level position or implement a diversity and inclusion program that will benefit minority women:

I think it's important because we have a lot to bring to the table. I do hear from my peers how they leave the workforce and, taking their great ideas and great performance elsewhere, they leave the government. I've been asked to come work for a number of companies. We want the best leading our government programs but yet we're not willing to hold on to that good workforce and so it's important that we push for diversity and inclusion so that we can have a path for people to stay. To say we don't just want folks that end up staying who might just get lucky to get a position along the path. I think it's important that we see each other in those positions.

### ***Relationship of Themes/Patterns to Research Questions***

Each theme was developed after the interviews were conducted and the coding process concluded. The themes relate to the research questions for this study and will be discussed in the order of the research questions.

***Why are minority women underrepresented in senior-level positions at military installations in the Southern United States?*** The first research question asked, why are minority women underrepresented in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States, is addressed in a crack in the glass ceiling theme and woman in the mirror theme. The sub-question for the first research question asked, what extent do factors of social identity and self-identity help to understand why minority women are underrepresented in senior-level

positions at military installations in the southern United States, is addressed in the woman in the mirror theme. The findings address the experience and feelings of the participants as it relates to the research questions regarding the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions and the role self-identity and social identity play being employed by the federal government or while applying for a senior-level position within the federal government.

According to the findings, the reason why minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States is that there are numerous barriers within society that will not allow minority women to progress and prevent minority women from becoming senior-level leaders. When the hiring managers, Dave, Karen, and Tyrone, discussed the glass ceiling, all of the hiring managers believe the glass ceiling pertains to disadvantaged groups. Tyrone stated, “the glass ceiling itself represents a level that is visible but is hard to achieve for women and those of ethnic backgrounds and race.” Minority women fall into two different categories when referring to disadvantaged groups, they are a minority, and they are a woman. While every participant defined the glass ceiling, the glass ceiling is known to be a theory as opposed to a known fact. Daja defined the glass ceiling as being “an unofficial acknowledged barrier” because no one in the federal government or any company functioning within the United States will put it in writing that the glass ceiling is indeed an official barrier known to society that disproportionately targets minority women. While minority women can have an abundance of confidence based on their self-identity, it is difficult to withstand the repercussions society constantly reminds them of, even if minority women continue to be resilient.

Minority women believe they are capable of being senior-level leaders and they want to be acknowledged for their contributions to the federal government by being promoted or selected

for a senior-level position. Sheena stated, “I view myself as a person that has the ability to lead people, motivate others, and get the job done.” Sheena believes that her coworkers view her the same, and they see her as being fair. The problem that continues to resonate amongst the minority women is they are found to be components within their field and are known to be a subject matter expert, but their organization will not promote them or select them to become senior-level leaders. Shelly admitted that sometimes she would apply for positions to see if the organization will acknowledge her. All of the minority women participants continue to apply for senior-level positions, even if they continue to be rejected or are not selected for a senior-level position due to numerous barriers within the federal government.

Being rejected or not selected for a senior-level position has caused some minority women participants to self-reflect. Tammy has numerous years of experience and numerous degrees. However, she found herself self-reflecting because the leaders in her organization would not acknowledge her hard work and educational background. Tammy cannot understand why she was not among the best qualified for senior-level positions she applied for, even after training numerous non-minority individuals that progressed to senior-level positions. Tia also found herself self-reflecting based on how her organization viewed her. Although Tia had 20 plus years in the military, developed leadership skills, and her educational background aligned with a senior-level position within the federal government, Tia was told to apply for lower-level government positions, which caused her to self-reflect because she knew her potential. Tia eventually accepted that she would not get a senior-level role due to the status quo. Therefore, she applied for lower-level positions. Now that Tia is a federal government employee and is in a supervisory role, Tia applies for senior-level positions in hopes that the organization will acknowledge her education, knowledge, and skills.

The glass ceiling is a barrier that targets minority women. Due to such a barrier, many minority women self-reflect because of the stigma society has placed on them. The minority women participants acknowledge that Kamala Harris has been a role model and has overcome barriers. Still, she has yet to officially break the glass ceiling because one person cannot do it alone. To officially break the glass ceiling, minority women, being that they fall into two different categories of the disadvantaged group, must be acknowledged for their hard work and dedication to the federal government. Minority women should not be used for their skill sets, only to see non-minorities they have trained progress quicker than they have to a senior-level position. Minority women should be able to climb the career ladder without unnecessary barriers and break the glass ceiling.

*What actions have been taken to hire minority women in senior-level positions at a military installation in the southern United States?* The second research question asked, what actions have been taken to hire minority women in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States, is addressed in the who you know versus what you know theme and let “us” be great theme. The first sub-question for the second research question asked, what hiring mechanisms encouraged applicants at military installations in the southern United States to apply for senior-level positions, is addressed in the who you know versus what you know themes. The second sub-question for the second research question asked, how does education and training programs as well as diversity and inclusion programs encourage applicants to be considered for senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States, is addressed in the let “us” be great theme and time for open dialogue theme. The findings addressed the experience and feelings of the participants as it relates to actions that have been taken to hire minority women, hiring mechanisms that encourage applicants, education and



training programs, as well as diversity and inclusion programs that encourage applicants to be considered for senior-level positions.

According to the findings, the actions that have been taken to hire minority women in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States are minimal because there is a continuous cycle of social capital networks and the federal government implements the bare minimum hiring processes. Depending on whether or not an individual is a part of the right social capital network may determine the chances of that individual's ability to be promoted or selected for a senior-level position. Over half of the participants described social capital networks as playing a huge role in why there are minimal actions being taken to hire minority women in senior-level positions. Mya stated, "I've seen a lot of nepotism as well as 'who you know.' I see a lot of who you know, it's all about who you know, which is frustrating." Mya as well as other minority women in the federal government have been in the same position and at the same grade level for years even though they continue to apply for senior-level positions and are not selected due to not being in the same social capital network as the hiring officials. Tyrone, a hiring manager, used the ducks picking ducks analogy when referring to social capital networks, "the duck is going to pick the duck that resembles the duck that's picking." More than likely, when it comes to selecting an individual for a senior-level position, most senior-level leaders will choose someone that is like them because if they choose someone different, they do not know how that person will operate and when you are not aware or educated on something, it brings on a sense of fear. Therefore, a non-minority male may not hire a minority woman for a senior-level position out of fear but will hire another non-minority male because he can relate to the other non-minority male. Non-minority males in senior-level positions in the federal

government would rather hire a non-minority male to be comfortable as opposed to educating themselves on diversity and inclusion and hire a minority woman.

The federal government implemented hiring processes to be fair and transparent. However, being fair and transparent only constitutes the bare minimum. All of the hiring manager participants encourage their minority women employees to apply for senior-level positions and provide them with guidance on how to do so. Hiring managers can encourage minority women, however, with the challenges minority women face, the guidance provided to them is insignificant. Without proper education about a diverse culture within an organization and without diversity and inclusion programs, minority women's chances of being hired or promoted for a senior-level position are minimal. As Tyrone expressed, the measures for the hiring process "are not always designed to meet that diversity threshold, it's not a maximum measure, it is a minimum measure." Since the standard for the federal government's hiring processes is the bare minimum to stay out of legal repercussions, progression towards diversity and inclusion at the senior-level is not likely and it will continue to be difficult for minority women to reach that level.

The minority women participants believe that if diversity and inclusion programs were implemented, it would have a significant impact on minority women and help them become senior-level leaders. Stormy stated, "we want the best leading our government programs but yet we're not willing to hold on to that good workforce and so it's important that we push for diversity and inclusion." Since the federal government workforce comprises predominately women and minorities, it is essential that diversity and inclusion programs are implemented. The minority women participants provided great ideas for diversity and inclusion programs such as

educational classes about diversity, diversity and inclusion training and mentorship programs, focus groups on developing leaders of color, and case studies about diversity and inclusion.

Since the actions for hiring minority women in senior-level positions are minimal, it is vital that social capital networks include minority women or hiring officials take a chance and hire someone that does not look like them. To get there, it is beneficial to implement diversity and inclusion programs so the entire federal government workforce can be educated about diversity and inclusion. A lack of education leads to fear, and therefore, progress and change cannot happen or be enforced. Education is key when discussing diversity and inclusion because it is a learning opportunity for everyone. The federal government should have the best employees, and of those employees, minority women should have an opportunity to be in a senior-level position. The amount of skills and education minority women bring to the table should not be disregarded. Minority women should not be kept in the same position and the same grade level for years, because just like a mind is a terrible thing to waste, so are skill sets if not given the opportunity to utilize them.

**Conceptual Framework.** According to the findings, the theme “woMan in the mirror” relates specifically to the conceptual framework concept of the identity theory. The minority women participants identified themselves as minority women, whether they specifically stated they identify as a minority woman or they stated their ethnicity. Based on the identity theory concept, all of the minority women identified their social and self-identity and proceeded to detail how it relates to them obtaining a senior-level position. The findings under the three themes, who you know versus what you know, let “us” be great, and time for open dialogue, relate specifically to the conceptual framework concept of the diversity hiring theory. For each theme, the participants described the federal government hiring practices. The participants

discussed mandated policies that are implemented as well as programs that are implemented. The participants provided an understanding of why education and training programs, as well as diversity and inclusion programs, are important within the federal government to encourage minority women to apply or be selected for senior-level positions.

**Findings and the Anticipated Themes.** The findings discovered in a crack in the glass ceiling theme are associated with the anticipated theme “barriers.” The interviews provided an understanding of what the participants (e.g., hiring managers and minority women) believe the glass ceiling to be and how it relates to minority women trying to achieve a senior-level position, knowing there are acknowledged barriers. The data revealed in the woman in the mirror theme are associated with the anticipated self-reflection theme. The findings provided an understanding of how minority women view themselves, and the impact or influence society has on their self-identity related to whether or not they should apply for senior-level positions for the federal government. The information disclosed in who you know versus what you know theme are associated with the accountability anticipated theme. The discovery of information from the hiring managers and minority women regarding who should be held accountable for the inequity and inequality faced amongst minority women trying to achieve a senior-level position. The findings revealed in the let “us” be great theme is associated with the planning anticipated theme. The information provided vital data that can be utilized for the progression of helping minority women achieve a senior-level position and assist with rectifying the dilemma that has been occurring for numerous decades. The findings identified in the open dialogue theme are associated with the strategies anticipated theme. The discovery is based on the participants’ perception of strategies that have worked or have not worked at their organization that would benefit minority women to advance to senior-level positions.

**The Problem.** One of the common issues the minority women participants face is that they have or are still experiencing difficulties obtaining a senior-level position (whether it be a promotion within their current organization or applying for a senior-level position with another organization within the federal government) due to barriers associated with the glass ceiling theory. The glass ceiling is “an unofficial acknowledged barrier” as Daja stated. The glass ceiling has been discussed since the 1960s, but given a name in the late 1970s. The glass ceiling theory continues to be relevant within the federal government. All participants agree that the glass ceiling is a barrier that mainly pertains to women and minorities. Within the federal government, although Kamala Harris is Vice President of the United States of America, she has only made a crack in the glass ceiling if one narrows the scope. Looking at a broader scope, Vice President Harris has broken the glass ceiling, as holding the position of Vice President has never been achieved by a woman until now. It depends on one’s perspective when discussing Vice President Harris’ position as it relates to the glass ceiling. In general, the participants agree that this particular barrier needs to be broken, as the federal government’s workforce is predominately made up of minorities and women. While the federal government has achieved the goal of ensuring the workforce mirrors that of society, the federal government needs to ensure senior-level positions reflect that of the workforce, otherwise, minority women will continue to be underrepresented in senior-level positions.

One of the factors leading to the cause of minority women not being able to obtain a senior-level position is due to their social identity, which in turn, causes self-doubt impacting their self-identity. Minority women are put into a position where self-reflection is a key component of handling how society views them and why it is imperative for them to embrace self-awareness for both cognitive and emotional purposes. According to one of the hiring

manager's (Tyrone) understanding, minority women are faced with three descriptive factors that are viewed in a negative aspect, especially in the south. Minority women, similar to Tammy, Raea, Tia, Sheena, and Stormy, self-reflect based on how society views and treats them. When minority women have numerous years of experience, skills and are educated or hold more than one degree, it can become frustrating when they cannot achieve their goal of climbing the ladder to a senior-level position within the federal government. When this occurs, minority women question themselves and even doubt themselves, although they are competent and can do their job at a higher level. Minority women similar to participants Daja, Shelly, and Wendy, become frustrated with the hiring system and hiring managers similar to Dave, agree there are challenges minority women face when trying to obtain a senior-level position for the federal government. Some of the challenges indicated by the minority women included lack of information for applicants during the hiring process, the hiring official selecting a peer with a similar background that is a non-minority male, and leadership not finding anything wrong with the hiring process even though concerns have been brought to their attention. Minority women similar to participants Mya, Lauren, Angela, and Nia have also become frustrated with the hiring system, but based on their experiences and observations, they believe applying for a position in the federal government is based on who you know, not what you know.

According to the findings, social capital networks are evident and continue to be an issue within the federal government, especially in the southern United States. When disadvantaged groups such as minority women are not a part of the social capital network, they will never receive a fair opportunity to progress to senior-level positions. When the issue is brought to leadership's attention, and nothing is done about it, then leadership is presumed to be complacent with the issue at hand. Actions to encourage inclusion in senior-level positions cannot be taken

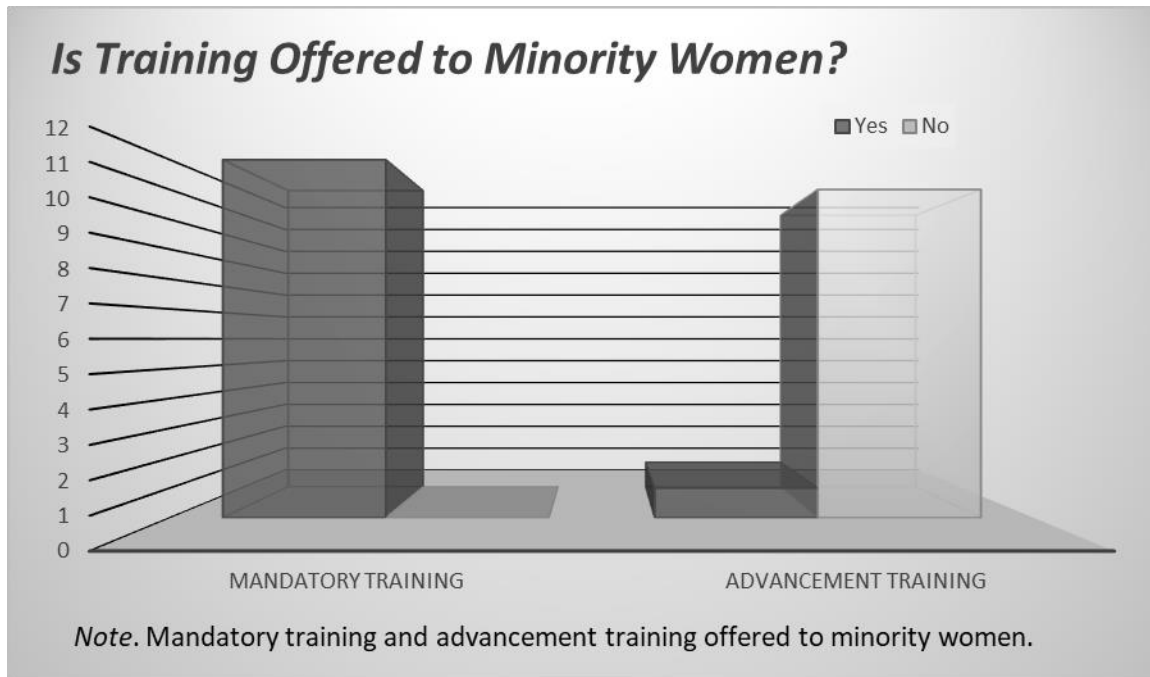
when those in leadership do not see anything wrong with the broken hiring system. Therefore, there are not any actions that have been taken to hire minority women in senior-level positions. Although hiring mechanisms can be put in place to encourage minority women to apply for positions, it is not enough if hiring officials go through the motions but know who they are going to hire before the hiring process begins. The minority women participants for this case study either have the education, numerous years of experience, or both, but yet it has been challenging for them to obtain a senior-level position even with the current hiring mechanisms in place, because within their organization, they are not a part of the social capital network linked to their organization.

Minority women want the opportunity to advance to a senior-level position. However, based on the responses from the hiring managers, the federal government will only do what is “fair,” which does not necessarily encourage minority women to apply for senior-level positions. All of the hiring managers believe that training and development is essential for minority women to advance. However, when the minority women participants were specifically asked about training and development opportunities offered to them that would help them advance to a senior-level position, less than 1% (see Figure 2) stated they are offered training and development opportunities to help them advance to senior-level positions. Most of the minority women participants stated they are told to do the required training that is mandatory of all federal government employees that keeps them employed. However, their supervisors and/or leaders do not suggest and/or offer opportunities that would help them advance to a senior-level position. Therefore, the minority women participants have gone outside of the Federal Government to enhance their knowledge and skills by finding training and development opportunities on their

own and has them wondering why the federal government will not allow them to be “great” by helping them to advance to a senior-level position.

**Figure 2**

*Is Training Offered to Minority Women?*



Hiring managers do believe there is some form of diversity and inclusion programs implemented at their organizations. However, the most recent implementation was diversity and inclusion sessions mandated by higher headquarters, and most sessions only happened once. Employees were told to attend but were only obligated to listen and not obligated to speak and/or participate. Some hiring managers are taking the initiative to suggest or implement certain programs, but it may not be enough according to the minority women. Minority women believe it is time for open dialogue for everyone to be educated about diversity and inclusion. Minority women believe that diversity and inclusion training, focus groups, internships, and case studies would be beneficial to educate people about diversity and inclusion. According to both hiring



managers and minority women participants, the federal government is not doing enough to implement diversity and inclusion programs to overcome barriers within the workplace.

### *Summary of the Findings*

The findings addressed the dilemma of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government by providing data from lived experiences to develop saturation through the themes of this study and corroborate evidence through triangulation of multiple data sources. The findings supported the literature, addressed each research question, and validated numerous reasons why minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions employed by the federal government. The reasons include (a) social identity and how it can have an impact on a minority women's perception of themselves; (b) social capital networks and how it is evident there is a revolving door of non-minority males choosing individuals they have mentored or are within the same network for senior-level positions; (c) hiring actions and mechanisms that are implemented to be fair and only utilize the bare minimum to promote or hire individuals; (d) training and development and how mandatory training is required, but advanced training is not offered to advance minority women to senior-level senior-level positions; and (e) diversity and inclusion programs and how the federal government is not doing enough to implement diversity and inclusion programs to overcome barriers in the workplace with regards to minority women, which all fall under the umbrella of the glass ceiling theory.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to add to the body of knowledge by developing an understanding of the reasons minority women are underrepresented in the federal government's senior-level positions and the effect it has on diversity and inclusion. The larger problem was explored through an in-depth study of the underrepresentation of minority women

in senior-level positions and its effect on diversity and inclusion at military installations in the southern United States. The findings developed an understanding of the reasons minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions within the federal government and the impact it has on diversity and inclusion. The findings and in-depth analysis will add to the body of knowledge revolving around the glass ceiling, particularly in the federal government.

The key conclusions drawn from the findings are the federal government needs to review old hiring practices and implement new hiring practices to break the cycle of having the same individuals with the same background in senior-level positions. The federal government should encourage and implement different diversity and inclusion programs to educate employees within the federal government about diversity and inclusion. The federal government should have a diverse group of individuals in senior-level positions to relate to the workforce to ensure the employee's voices are being heard and solve critical issues related to the workforce.

### **Applications to Professional Practice**

This qualitative case study discussing the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government can improve general business practices within the organization and have a positive impact on the workforce. This segment will discuss, in detail, why and how the findings are relevant to improve general business practices. Also, the segment will discuss the implication of the findings about human resource management and the biblical framework. There are potential application strategies from this qualitative case study that can act or influence people and decisions within the federal government with regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Beneficial information will be provided that can be implemented throughout the federal government and utilized to plan and develop diversity and inclusion

programs. The information will provide overarching data that is pertinent to the federal government workforce and will assist in the progression of breaking the glass ceiling.

### ***Improving General Business Practice***

The findings of this qualitative case study indicate that business practices within the federal government can be improved. Forty-plus years ago, the glass ceiling theory was coined by Marilyn Loden (Faragher, 2018), and unfortunately, the theory disproportionately targets women and minorities today. Based on the findings, there are numerous barriers within the federal government that prevent minority women from progressing to a senior-level position which aligns with Sabharwal's (2013) findings that the factors that hinder women from advancing to a senior-level position are different barriers such as stereotypes, communication styles, exclusions within a network, lack of support from management, lack of mentors, sex segregation, and organizational bias. The federal government continues to utilize old hiring practices that implement the minimum standards, which allows the hiring practices to be fair and transparent concerning diversity and inclusion. However, according to the findings, new hiring process initiatives with higher standards would allow diversity and inclusion at all levels of the workforce, to include the senior-level, and the goal would be to achieve a maximum threshold as opposed to a minimum threshold that is currently in place. The findings are in unison with Sabharwal et al.'s (2018) research which indicates that diversity has become important in the public sector over the last two decades, and therefore, given the changing demographics, research regarding diversity has become a vital area of public sector scholarship. To implement new hiring process initiatives and improve hiring practices, succession planning with key performance indicators (KPI) is vital. KPIs are an indication of how well something is progressing towards an expected result (Key Performance Indicators, 2021). The KPIs would

determine how well human resource management initiatives, budget forecasts, and diversity and inclusion programs are performing based on the measurements. Human resource, finance, and management analyst personnel should work hand-in-hand within the federal government to plan and develop hiring process initiatives and programs; the actions that need to transpire to initiate the programs will be discussed in the next segment.

According to the findings, individuals must be aware of their self-identity (how they view themselves) and social identity (how others view an individual). The findings indicated that in most cases, minority women view themselves as being confident, experts within their career field, and as leaders. However, although minority women and people within their community view themselves in a positive light, some minority women believe society, in and outside of the workplace, view them differently, and they may be seen in a negative light due to stereotypical notions that are often associated with minorities, women, and/or minority women which agrees with Nelson and Piatak's (2019) research which signifies that in certain situations, minority women believe they are part of the "out group." Based on the findings, when minority women are viewed in a negative light, minority women are ruled out or overlooked for senior-level positions even though they are seen as someone who is reliable enough to train others; while individuals that are trained by the minority women are eventually provided an opportunity to advance to a senior-level position and gain access to being in a social capital network with hiring managers or those in a senior-level position. To improve how minority women are viewed in society, and in order for minority women to gain access to social capital networks within the workplace, senior-level leaders need to be educated about diversity and inclusion at the senior-level. A mentorship program with a diverse group of individuals would also aid in ensuring minority women are not excluded from potentially becoming senior-level leaders. Human

resource management encourages mentorship programs as it can be seen as a benefit for an individual to climb their career ladder (Elacqua et al., 2009) and for an organization to have a return on their investment. There are numerous ways the federal government can plan and develop mentorship programs, and the actions that can take place to implement a mentorship program with a diverse group of individuals will be discussed in the next segment.

The findings signify that training and development, as well as diversity and inclusion programs for minority women, would benefit an organization which aligns with Torracco's (2016) research that illustrates there are numerous training methods that can be incorporated into an organization and would allow employees to build their knowledge and skills. All of the minority women participants continue to apply for senior-level positions and believe that training and development within the federal government and diversity and inclusion programs would potentially allow them to become senior-level leaders. The study revealed that minority women and hiring managers believe that without proper training and development, it is hard to progress to the next level. All of the participants agreed that mandatory training and development is offered within the federal government. However, the mandatory training and development is only the foundation of what needs to be learned to advance. The findings also implied that diversity and inclusion programs are only implemented after something occurs. Instead of being proactive, the federal government is seen as being reactive. To improve training and development and implement diversity and inclusion programs within the federal government to educate the workforce, human resource management leaders and senior-level officials must work together to plan and develop an effective program that would benefit the workforce and the organization (Haile et al., 2016). The federal government must be proactive and take heed to understand the workforce that predominately consists of minorities and women. Everyone must

be willing to listen to one another to understand and become educated, whether it is a difficult topic or not within the federal government workplace. The actions to improve training and development and implement diversity and inclusion programs will be discussed in the next segment.

### *Potential Application Strategies*

The potential application strategies are based on the findings of this case study. As discussed in the last segment, general business practices related to this study need to be improved. To improve the general business practices of new hiring process initiatives, mentorship programs, training, and development programs, and diversity and inclusion programs within the federal government, certain actions need to take place. This segment will discuss the researcher's recommendations and provide a detailed discussion of potential application strategies that include steps required for implementation and who will be impacted by the results.

**New Hiring Process Initiatives.** According to the literature discussed in Section 1, Ndobbo et al. (2018) argued that women, minorities, and other disadvantaged groups obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to do a job but are still discriminated against or passed over by a non-minority individual. Stewart (2016) argued that discrimination could be stopped from the start within the hiring process by conducting blind interviews, and the hiring panel or managers could go through unconscious bias training to put blind interviews in place. To develop a successful plan for hiring process initiatives, the federal government should put together a diverse team of management analysts, human resource specialists, and budget analysts. Although management analysts are classified into one category, they can function under numerous roles, advising management on the evaluation of the effectiveness of government operations and programs and/or efficiency and productivity of the management of different federal agencies.

Civilian human resource specialists serve as consultants to federal agencies about human resource management in order to develop and create recruitment and placement initiatives as well as strategic rewards, training and development, and employee relations. Budget analysts advise management on the different phases of budget administration related to knowledge and skills in applying budget-related laws, policies, regulations, and methods. Management analysts, human resource specialists, and budget analysts often work hand-in-hand with one another to accomplish the goal of the federal agencies. After engaging and developing a favorable succession plan (identifying criteria they would like to see in the future senior-level leaders), the team must implement KPIs. All of the analysts and specialists listed above are well aware of KPIs because the federal government constantly utilizes KPIs to measure the performance of its programs. The management analysts would assist the human resource specialists and budget analysts in determining which measurements should be implemented to measure the new hiring process initiatives. To stray away from the old hiring processes that are not viewed as diversity and inclusion friendly according to the findings, the federal government should utilize the following steps for their new hiring process initiatives, which is similar to a civilian organization's hiring process (SHRM, 2021):

- Hiring officials notify human resources (HR) that they have a vacant position
- HR works with the budget team to determine the budget for the vacant position
- Hiring officials work with HR to confirm budget
- All necessary documents are completed by the hiring official and provided to HR
- HR works with the hiring officials to discuss the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are needed to conduct the job (prepare job description)
- Job is posted on the federal government hiring website

- Candidates are sourced by the application tracking system as well as Talent Acquisition Personnel within the HR department (HR confirms all necessary information is completed by the applicants)
- Top candidates are screened by Talent Acquisition Personnel via telephone
- Top candidates receive a phone interview with at least one HR personnel present (hiring officials are not present) and at least one person from the department/section the candidate will be working
- Most qualified candidates are identified and presented to the hiring officials
- A second phone interview is conducted with the hiring official
- Hiring official and HR personnel discuss the job offer (HR ensures the process was conducted fairly)
- Candidate is verbally offered the job
- Candidate is formally offered the job (documents sent to candidate)
- System (application tracking system) generates message to other candidates that they were not selected
- Onboarding is scheduled and conducted
- Candidate attends onboarding and completes documents (candidate is officially an employee)
- Employee must complete diversity and inclusion program within 180 days of employment

The recommended new hiring process initiative incorporates a new section within the HR department and new interview phases, which would align with Stewart's (2016) argument of eliminating discriminatory acts within the hiring process. When an HR department has a talent



acquisition team, talent acquisition personnel are experts within their field. Therefore, they consider strategic planning, workforce plans, skills, competencies, and experience employees need to be successful. Talent acquisition personnel know what is needed to attract and retain employees (decrease turnover), and they also know what is needed for an organization to be successful. When panels are utilized within the federal government, there should at least be one person from the department and at least one HR specialist. The individual from the department will know if the candidate answers scenario-based questions accurately. HR specialists ensure everything is done correctly and fairly. The hiring official should only interview the top candidates to decide on who to hire. By implementing the new hiring process initiatives, it will eliminate some biases and notions that hiring officials are only hiring individuals for senior-level positions that are within their social capital network, according to the findings. Having each employee complete a diversity and inclusion program within their first 180 days of employment will show employees that the federal government wants to make sure they are going above and beyond to hear the voices of their workforce and not just doing the bare minimum. In some instances, veterans can receive priority placement, and that process would be evaluated in its own right.

**Mentorship Program.** Within the federal government, the workforce consists of a diverse group of individuals, and according to the findings, it has been a challenge for minority women to reach a senior-level position. Dougherty and Van Gelder (2015) argued that education and training alone could not replace experience. Therefore, it is imperative that minority women obtain information and experience (Stewart, 2016). Some of the participants in the case study revealed that a mentorship program would give them an advantage if the program was planned and developed accordingly. The findings indicated that quite a few individuals were in a

mentorship program at their installation, but the program failed to deliver, and the program was eventually eliminated. Mentorship programs are a benefit to employees and the organization when implemented properly. According to the literature in Section 1, the effectiveness of mentoring depends on how the employee evaluates the overall experience (Van Vianen et al., 2018). To ensure the federal government's mentorship program is effective and successful, the following should be taken into consideration:

- Outline of the program
  - Reasons for initiating the program
  - The overall objective of the program
  - Determine what the outcome should be
- Recruitment for the program
  - Marketing initiatives
  - Criteria
- Training
  - Educational Material
  - Guidelines
- Algorithm of matching participants
  - Methods of matching employees
- KPIs for program

The outline of the program is crucial because it is the foundation of the program, and it will explain the reasons, overall objective, and outcomes for the mentorship program. The recruitment phase outlines the how mentors and mentees will be recruited for the program and the criteria they have to meet to be part of the program. The training phase will provide

information to the mentors that will help guide them through the process and how they should handle different situations throughout the process. The algorithm of matching participants is also a vital phase as it will determine which mentor and mentee are paired together. Those that manage the program will need to determine if the mentor and/or mentee will be chosen by the program managers or if a computer program will determine the selectees. KPIs will need to be set for this program as it will measure the effectiveness and success of the program.

The federal government's mentorship program should consist of leaders at all levels. By having leaders at all levels, individuals will have an opportunity to be mentored at different levels as they grow or are promoted within the system. With training provided to the mentors, general information should be provided to all the mentees. However, individual information should be given to the mentees based on their needs and career field. The mentors would be evaluated frequently to determine if additional training is needed. The mentors have to be committed to the program and their mentees. The mentorship program will be a proactive program instead of reactive, therefore, the program will be effective and continue to progress.

**Training and Development/Diversity and Inclusion Programs.** Training and development within an organization can determine how well employees function and/or if they receive a promotion (Paposa & Kumar, 2019). Based on the findings, less than 1% of the minority women participants stated they are offered training and development opportunities to help them advance to senior-level positions. Within the federal government, supervisors are to meet with their employees periodically to discuss their individual development plan, which includes training and development opportunities offered within the federal government. According to the findings, although supervisors are meeting with their employees to review their individual development plan, the supervisors fail to budget training and development for their

employees, or they will not let their employees leave their job for numerous days or weeks to participate in training and development opportunities because they do not have anyone to take on the individual's workload. The recommendation is that supervisors need to ensure funds are set aside specifically for training and development for employees within their division or section. It is factual that employees are motivated to receive training and development because it enhances their knowledge and makes them proficient in their field of expertise (Paposa & Kumar, 2019). Each supervisor within the federal government should have at least one person in their division or section that could possibly take their place should they retire or leave the position, and that can only occur if an employee receives training and development to enhance their skills. Another recommendation is that each employee cross-trains within their organization, division, and/or section because the excuse for not sending an employee for training and development should never be that the supervisor does not have anyone that can take on an employee's workload. In the findings, a lot of the minority women admitted that they train a lot of individuals. Still, they should also have an opportunity to receive training and development to enhance their knowledge, skills, and abilities to reach the next level within their career field and eventually become a senior-level leader.

Based on the findings, diversity and inclusion programs are only a reactive measure when something occurs within the federal government or within the United States. All minority women participants believe that diversity and inclusion programs are important and all of the hiring manager participants try to promote diversity and inclusion programs. Diversity and inclusion programs should always be in place within the federal government, regardless if something occurs or not. The federal government should always be proactive instead of reactive, as the federal government should lead this country by example. The following recommendations align

with Sparkman's (2019) researcher about diversity and inclusion as it relates to the method of organizational learning perspective with the triple loop learning concept in mind:

- **Performance:** the federal government must scrutinize their culture and see their senior-level leadership does not mirror their workforce – addressing inequity at each level;
- **Alter:** the federal government must change how diversity and inclusion is viewed and addressed across the board – analyze and understand what diversity and inclusion is;
- **Conform:** the federal government must act in accordance with prevailing standards and practices – adapt to the new culture;
- **Emerge:** the federal government must learn on a continuous basis about diversity and inclusion and incorporate it into their culture to develop programs – develop programs and develop with society (lead).

According to dictionary.com (2021), pace is defined as a rate of activity, progress, and/or growth. Based on the findings and incorporating Sparkman's (2019) research, the P.A.C.E concept was established and should be the first phase of developing effective diversity and inclusion programs for the federal government. The federal government sets laws, rules, and regulations for the U.S. workforce, and if other organizations see that the federal government believes that diversity and inclusion are important, then other organizations would follow suit. However, the federal government must begin within its own organization(s) to create change by learning more about diversity and inclusion. The P.A.C.E. concept allows inequity to be addressed at each level, from entry-level to senior-level. Once inequity is addressed, qualitative data and quantitative data are analyzed for the workforce to comprehend the true meaning of diversity and inclusion. To address inequity, as well as learn and comprehend the true meaning

of diversity and inclusion, training or classes can take place. The federal government would then set new standards and practices to adapt to the new culture. When the new standards and practices are in place, diversity and inclusion programs addressing different topics can be incorporated. The diversity and inclusion programs will continue to evolve, and learning should be continuous.

### ***Application to Professional Practice Summary***

The application to professional practice discussed improving general business practices, which consisted of hiring process initiatives, mentorship programs, training, and development as well as diversity and inclusion programs. The general business practices discussed were based on the findings in the case study and incorporated information related to biblical framework and human resource management. The general business practices also discussed who would be involved in improving the practices and what roles they would have. All of the general business practices would need to incorporate KPIs to measure the effectiveness of the initiative or program. The potential application strategies were discussed in detail as they related to the general business practices. Recommendations were provided and steps to take for the initiatives or programs to be successful and effective. Concepts were developed based on previous research related to the topic. It would be beneficial to the federal government to review the recommendations and concepts to consider them for review and implementation.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

The glass ceiling theory and studies related to the theory have been researched for decades. This particular qualitative case study focused on the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government. According to the findings, further research can be conducted. The areas that should be studied include Vice President Harris

and the glass ceiling, the emotional impact of social identity in the workplace, social capital networks and the influences it has on career progression, and the importance of diversity and inclusion programs in the workplace. The specified areas should have research conducted because the topics were discussed by the majority of the participants when they were asked specific questions during their interviews, which indicated there was a concern or a need to discuss in further detail. The lived experiences or topics discussed would add value to numerous topics in general business practices, particularly in human resource management.

There were numerous comments made about Vice President Harris since this study revolved around the glass ceiling theory. Some participants believe she broke the glass ceiling, while others believe she did not break the glass ceiling or only made a crack in the glass ceiling. Being that Vice President Harris is new in her role, further and future studies can be conducted to determine if there were an impact on minority women and/or women, in general, being selected for senior-level roles in the federal government because of Vice President Harris holding the second-highest rank in the federal government. Different studies can branch from this case study to include qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method research.

According to the findings, social identity can determine whether you progress in the federal government or stay at the same level in the federal government in terms of career progression. As discussed by some of the participants, social identity can take a toll on self-identity, which can have an emotional impact on an individual. In most minority women's cases, their self-identity aligned with how people within their community viewed them. However, they were seen in a different light in the workplace or outside of their community. Further research can aid in determining if social identity truly impacts someone's self-identity, especially in the workplace.

Social capital networks were discussed amongst the majority of the participants. Based on the findings, federal government employees believe that being in social capital networks allows you to progress in your career. If you are not in a social capital network, then your chances of being promoted or selected for a higher-ranking position are slim to none. Further and future studies can be conducted on this topic as it is currently a theory that the majority of the federal government workforce seems to know about it or believe it to be true.

All of the minority women participants expressed that diversity and inclusion programs are important in the workplace. Some participants discussed that diversity and inclusion programs or lack thereof could determine if minorities, women, or minority women can progress in their careers within the federal government. Further research can be conducted to see how many diversity and inclusion programs are amongst the federal government agencies and if within those agencies, minorities, women, or minority women have progressed further in their careers. Another suggestion would be to research what diversity and inclusion programs are offered and if they are effective within their federal government agency. There are numerous research topics that can be conducted about diversity and inclusion programs within the federal government. However, there needs to be a targeted group of individuals discussed to determine the effectiveness.

### **Reflections**

The research for the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government has provided me with personal and professional growth. This study has provided me an opportunity to learn and understand other minority women's perspectives while working for the federal government. Being able to relate to the minority women participants as they discussed their challenges working for the federal government



provided me with confirmation that most minority women feel the same way. We want our voices to be heard and to be treated fairly. Hearing that some of the hiring managers agree that minority women face challenges while trying to obtain a senior-level position was also confirmation that others are seeing the problems and issues we face. While some hiring managers will never know what it feels like to be a minority woman, they can sympathize with what we go through.

### ***Personal and Professional Growth***

This journey allowed me to learn an abundance of information by researching numerous topics related to my topic of choice. This study allowed me to grow personally and professionally, as it provided me an opportunity to connect with other individuals with different perspectives and gain insight into how others view life. Life is what we make of it, but for me, it is about the individuals I connect with that make life worth living. While listening to the participants' lived experiences, from my perspective, I believe this topic should be researched until there is change within the federal government because diversity and inclusion are essential. Personally, I enjoy working in the HR field, but I feel that the HR field does not do enough to ensure real-life matters are incorporated into the workplace. Employees should be able to discuss diversity and inclusion within the workplace to cope with everyday life. They should not feel as though they are limited in what they can speak about when discussing diversity and inclusion. This topic will continue to gain exposure, as diversity and inclusion are hot topics within society, which will eventually be a main topic discussed amongst individuals in the workplace.

I saw myself in every single minority woman that participated in this study. There are challenges they have to go through to obtain a senior-level position. The numerous instances where they have trained others only for the individuals they have trained to be promoted before

they are. The times they have voiced their opinion or concern, but it is as though no one heard them. The times they have remained silent, so they are not perceived a certain way. The way they continue to push ahead even if the outcome is not favorable to them. This experience showed me how much strength minority women have in and outside of the workplace, even when they continue to be mistreated or overlooked for opportunities.

### ***Biblical Perspective***

The information from the findings determined the general business practices. The general business practices (e.g., new hiring process initiatives, mentorship programs, training and development programs, and diversity and inclusion programs) discussed earlier fall into the HR business function. HR consists of several core functions that include recruitment and selection, performance management, learning and development, succession planning, compensation and benefits, HR information systems, and HR data and analytics (SHRM, 2021). The HR business function explored in this study relates to and integrates with a Christian worldview.

The qualitative case study of the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government is about diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace. Based on the study, some initiatives and programs related to diversity, equity, and inclusion were implemented in the federal government. However, not enough effort was put forth to continue the programs, therefore, the programs failed. “What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?” (James 2:14, New International Version)? As most Christians today would summarize James 2:14, faith without works is dead. To improve such initiatives or programs, having faith but not putting in the effort is ineffective. The HR business function has to ensure that everything is aligned before implementing an initiative or program.

Although the HR business functions were explored through this study, individuals working under the HR function within the federal government must work with every business function to have a progressive and functional workforce. The Bible teaches us that “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, New International Version). When one aspect of the business fails, the entire organization fails. In this study, the federal government continues to fail minority women, a major part of their workforce, because the HR business functions continue to fail due to a lack of initiative and programs geared towards diversity, equity, and inclusion.

While the HR business functions are guided by higher echelons within the federal government, senior-level leaders in the HR business function must speak up and educate the other senior leaders about what is best for the workforce. “Turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, indeed, if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:2-5, New International Version). Minority women’s voices should be heard with a listening ear to understand and not just a listening ear to just reply. Actions need to be taken within the federal government to incorporate different diversity and inclusion programs that minority women can benefit from to progress to senior-level positions.

### ***Summary***

This qualitative case study has provided me with an opportunity to grow personally and professionally while staying true to my Christian beliefs. I believe in an individual’s personal and professional life. They should be treated fair. To be treated fairly within society, we must

address the inequities that are constantly posing problems. Personal and professional reflections were discussed throughout this section and scrutinized the issues that are currently being faced within the federal government as it relates to diversity, equity, and inclusion. A biblical perspective was also incorporated into this section related to the HR business functions explored in the study.

### **Summary and Study Conclusions**

This section provided an in-depth analysis of the case study findings, applications to professional practice, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, and reflections. The information explained in this section allowed the researcher to illustrate the qualitative case study through the participants' eyes as the data obtained were analyzed and placed into themes for the purposes of this study. The information was examined and discussed through a business perspective lens which determined what actions and further study needed to be conducted. The researcher provided a personal and professional perspective about the study to demonstrate how the researcher grew throughout the journey of the study. The Christian worldview was also discussed as it relates to HR business functions.

The comprehensive study about the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government added to the body of knowledge of this particular topic by developing an understanding of the reasons minority women are underrepresented in the federal government's senior-level positions and the effect it has on diversity and inclusion. The findings provided insight that the federal government workforce has a long way to go before society can say the glass ceiling has been broken because not enough minorities, women, and minority women have achieved the goal of obtaining a senior-level position. They are still struggling to break barriers. Stereotypes and lack of knowledge have

caused society to look at minority women differently. Although a lot of minority women self-identify as being confident, their social identity within the workplace continues to be diminished because those in senior-level roles, which consist of mostly non-minority males, do not know how to relate to minority women because they will not take the time to get to know them to see a different perspective. With that being the case, minority women are not given a seat at the table to be in a senior-level position because they are not in the same social capital network as most non-minority males, which creates challenges for minority women to progress. Minority women continue to obtain knowledge, skills, and abilities hoping that one day they will have an opportunity to be in a senior-level role. Still, until there are changes within the workforce, minority women have a slim chance of holding a senior-level position. Therefore, diversity and inclusion programs can help the workforce become a better diverse workforce. Educating the entire workforce about diversity and inclusion is beneficial to have an understanding of the federal government workforce which predominately consists of minorities and women.

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### **Appendix A: Interview Guide**

The Interview Guide for this qualitative case study will address the underrepresentation of minority women in senior-level positions employed by the federal government, resulting in a lack of diversity and inclusion. The two main questions and sub-questions are the following:

1. Why are minority women underrepresented in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States?
  - 1a. What extent do factors of social identity and self-identity help to understand why minority women are underrepresented in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States?
2. What actions have been taken to hire minority women in senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States?
  - 2a. What hiring mechanisms encourage applicants at military installations in the southern United States to apply for senior-level positions?
  - 2b. How does education and training programs as well as diversity and inclusion programs encourage applicants to be considered for senior-level positions at military installation in the southern United States?

To answer the research questions, the research must ask the participants specific questions to gain an understanding of the dilemma. There are two sets of participants (hiring managers and minority women) for this qualitative case study. Each set of participants will be asked a set of questions, individually, that will be documented and observed by the researcher. It is imperative that the questions are simple but provide an opportunity for the participant to answer an extensive response based on their life experiences.

#### **Main Interview Questions – Hiring Managers**

- Tell me about how you have encouraged minority women to progress to a senior-level position.
  - Discuss your knowledge about the glass ceiling.
- Do you believe minority women face challenges in the promotion process? If so, what are those challenges?
  - Discuss the guidance you provide to minority women that want to be promoted.
- Do you believe minority women face challenges in the hiring process? If so, what are those challenges?
- Tell me about the hiring mechanisms that are used to encourage minority women to apply for senior-level positions.
- What education and training opportunities are provided to minority women that will help them achieve a senior-level position?
- What diversity and inclusion programs are in place at your organization?
  - Discuss suggestions you provided to promote diversity and inclusion programs.
- Do you believe it is challenging for minority women to obtain a senior-level position? Why or why not?
  - Discuss if this society (military installation in the southern United States) may play a role.

### **Main Interview Questions – Minority Women**

- Tell me about your knowledge of the glass ceiling.
- Tell me about your experiences applying for senior-level positions at military installations in the southern United States,

- If you have interviewed for a senior-level government position, please tell me about your experience? If not, why do you believe you were not chosen to interview?
- Discuss your social identity and self-identity and why it may play a role in your decision to apply for senior-level positions for the federal government.
- Discuss what draws you to become a senior-level leader for the federal government.
- Tell me about the training and development opportunities that have been offered to you that would help you advance to a senior-level position.
- Discuss training and development programs you have completed outside of the federal government to help you advance to a senior-level position.
- What diversity and inclusion programs would you like to see in the federal government?
  - Discuss the importance of diversity and inclusion programs for minority women.

The specific questions for both groups will provide information that will answer the research questions. Although there is not an order in the specific questions, the researcher will ask the questions based on how the prior question is answered or ask a specific question after a clarifying or probing question. Each question will allow the participant to elaborate on their life experiences or allow an opportunity for the researcher to continue asking questions to obtain more information that will help answer the research questions and provide a better understanding of the dilemma. The researcher will document all the responses from the interview and observation by maintaining a journal.

### **Appendix B: Lean Coding Process**

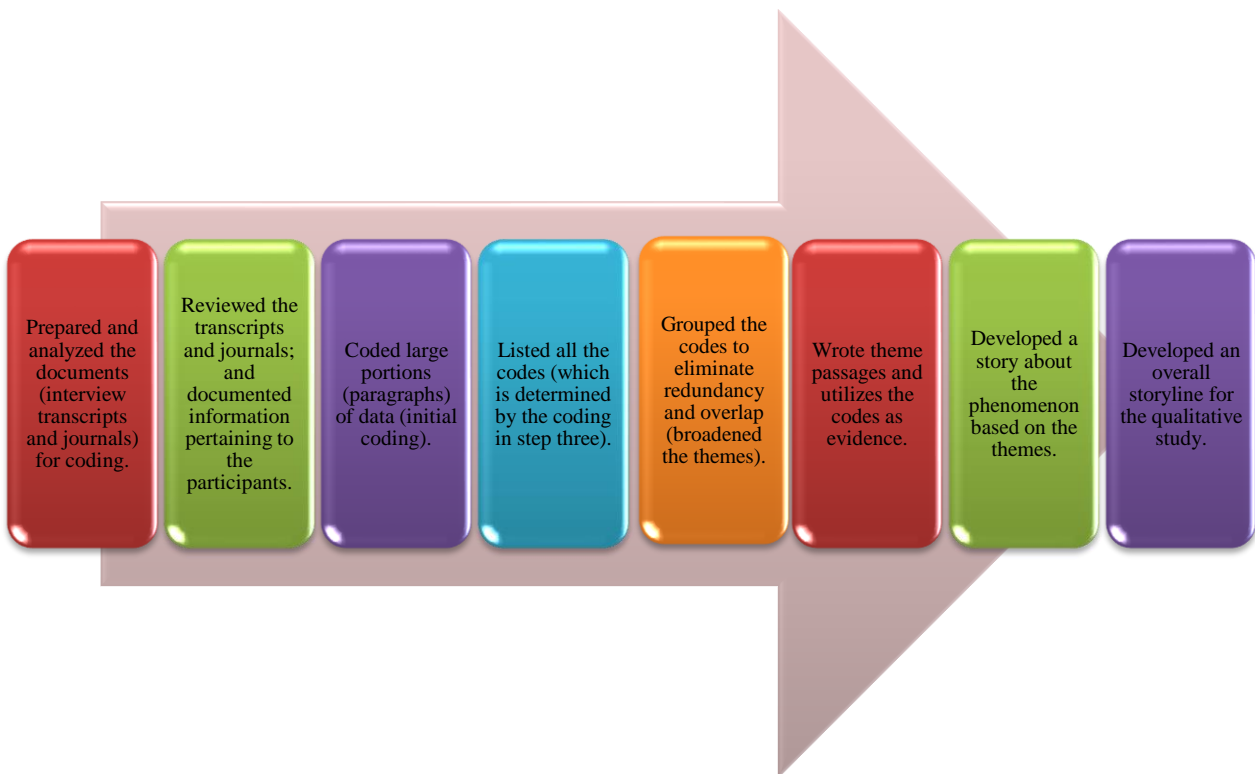
Creswell's (2016) lean coding process was utilized to make sense of the data collection for this qualitative case study. Both, inductive and deductive data analysis was used during different stages of this process. The lean coding process for this study consisted of the following eight steps:

- 1) Prepared and analyzed the documents (interview transcripts and journals) for coding.
  - Transcript heading included participant number, date and time of the interview – centered on the transcript;
  - Double spaced and left 1 inch margin on the top, bottom, left, and right side of document;
  - Placed the word “Codes” under the heading on the left side of the transcript – centered within the 1 inch margin; and
  - Placed the word “Themes” under the heading on the right side of the transcript – centered within the 1 inch margin.
- 2) Reviewed the transcripts and journals; and documented information pertaining to the participants.
  - Documented notes about the participant (behavior and gestures)
- 3) Coded large portions (paragraphs) of data (initial coding).
  - Highlighted transcript information (used different colors for each code) and documented codes (with same highlight color as transcript information) on left side of the document.
- 4) Listed all the codes (which is determined by the coding in step three).
  - Placed codes in the code book (code book on a separate document and in a separate folder)
- 5) Grouped the codes to eliminate redundancy and overlap (broadened the themes).

- Filed codes with the same meaning or characteristics under a general code
- 6) Wrote theme passages and utilized the codes as evidence.
- Documented themes on the right side of the document
- 7) Developed a story about the phenomenon based on the themes.
- Wrote down each theme on a whiteboard
  - Re-ordered the themes accordingly to develop a logical flow
- 8) Developed an overall storyline for the qualitative study.
- Concluded how all the themes tied together
  - Drew a summary of conclusion at the end of the findings section (wrote down one to two paragraphs associated with the findings).

### Figure 3

#### *Lean Coding Process*





**Appendix C: IRB Approval****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 12, 2021

Amy Freeman

Ryan Ladner

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY20-21-332 The Underrepresentation of Minority Women in Senior-Level Positions Employed by the Federal Government

Dear Amy Freeman, Ryan Ladner:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: January 12, 2021. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB.

These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural

beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**Research Ethics Office**