

The Historical Perspective of Black Women in Leadership and the Complexity of Work/Life Balance Industry

Arifah Goodwin, Virginia State University

Chevelle Hall, Virginia State University

Kristal Moore Clemons, Virginia State University

Abstract: This study explores the historical and contemporary complexities of work-life balance for Black women in leadership roles through a lens informed by race, gender, and systemic inequality. Tracing its roots to the era of American slavery, the notion of balance for Black women has historically been shaped by forced labor, caregiving under duress, and the erasure of personal autonomy. For enslaved women, the intersection of work and life was not a balance but a singular, survival-driven existence. These historical realities provide critical context for understanding the contemporary experiences of Black women leaders who continue to navigate structural and cultural expectations in both professional and domestic spheres.

As Black women have advanced into leadership roles, they have done so while carrying the residual weight of historical oppression and the modern-day burden of intersectionality. This research investigates the lived experiences of full-time, professional Black women who face dual obligations—leading in the workplace while managing significant familial responsibilities. Utilizing a qualitative approach, the study examines how these women define, negotiate, and attempt to sustain work-life balance amidst heightened performance expectations, racialized workplace dynamics, and underrecognized emotional labor.

The findings reveal that while Black women leaders display remarkable resilience and strategic adaptability, they often do so within environments that undervalue their contributions and overburden their roles. The research underscores the importance of acknowledging how race and gender compound work-life challenges, and it calls for more equitable organizational practices that recognize and support the unique needs of Black women in leadership. This work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that advocates for culturally competent frameworks in leadership studies and workplace policy design.

Keywords:
Black women leaders; work-life balance; intersectionality; leadership and gender; racial inequality; historical oppression; Black feminist thought; professional Black women; dual roles; systemic barriers; caregiving and leadership; workplace equity; resilience; emotional labor; race and gender discrimination.

Historically, the concept of work-life balance for Black women began during the era of slavery in the United States. Still, it took a drastically different form compared to the modern understanding of the term. During slavery, Black women faced inhumane and intense labor and harsh living conditions, leaving little room for any semblance of balance between work and personal life (Berry, 1982). For these women, work was life. The experiences were marked by race and gender while often navigating dual roles as laborers and caregivers for their families (Higginbotham, 1992). These historical accounts shed light on the complexities of work and life for Black women, underscoring the importance of addressing issues related to race, gender, and work-life balance.

The advancement of Black women in leadership positions within an organization is a testament to their resilience, determination, and competence. Overcoming historical prejudices and systemic barriers, they have proven their abilities to lead and inspire others, fostering diversity and inclusion in the workplace. However, beneath their achievements lies a complex interplay of demands, expectations, and personal sacrifices required to achieve a semblance of work-life balance.

The concept of work-life balance has become increasingly crucial in contemporary society. As employees seek to achieve equilibrium between their professional responsibilities and personal lives, the discourse surrounding work-life balance has gained momentum across various industries and communities (Clark, 2000). For Black women in leadership positions, the challenge is further compounded by intersecting identities, including race and gender, which can give rise to unique obstacles and opportunities (Crenshaw, 1991).

This research examined the work-life balance of Black women who work full time outside of the home and have challenges meeting the demands of work obligations while taking care of nonstop household responsibilities. The purpose of this study was to better understand the full scope of Black women and how they manage the demands of work and family.

Statement of Problem

Many Black women living in the United States have felt the weight of having to choose between their work responsibilities and their families. However, the choice becomes more challenging for Black women in leadership roles (Lewis, 2001; Collins, 2000). It is almost impossible to consider the subject of Black women in leadership roles without observing the role race, gender, and high personal expectations play in the experience of Black women leaders (Bell, 1987; Thomas, 2004). The responsibilities associated with Black women leadership positions are often extensive, high-performance driven, with often less pay than their female white counterparts, and with the expectation to perform more.

Work-life balance is important to understand for specifically Black women since these individuals are faced with the same challenges of balancing work and home as their non-minority counterparts; however, they also must navigate through affected racial and gender discrimination (Hamm, 2014).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the work-life balance experiences of Black women in leadership roles. This research aimed to comprehensively understand their experiences, challenges, and strategies as they navigate the complexities of professional leadership and personal responsibilities.

The research aimed to illuminate Black women's unique barriers and opportunities in leadership positions, considering the intersectionality of race and gender in shaping their career trajectories.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do Black Women perceive their role while balancing work and home responsibilities?

RQ2: What are the unique experiences and challenges faced by Black Women in achieving work-life balance, considering the intersectionality of race, gender, and cultural factors?

Literature of Review

The literature on Black women in slavery was a rich and evolving field that continued to uncover the resilience, strength, and contributions of Black women in the face of systemic oppression. Examining the work-life balance of enslaved women in historical contexts provided crucial insights into the complex and often brutal experiences they endured. It highlighted the intersection of race, gender, and labor in the lives of enslaved individuals.

"Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" by Harriet Jacobs (1861): Harriet Jacobs, writing under the pseudonym Linda Brent, shared her experiences as an enslaved woman and her unique challenges. She discussed the sexual exploitation and abuse she endured, her efforts to protect her family, and her eventual escape to freedom. "Narrative of Sojourner Truth" (1850): Sojourner Truth, born into slavery as Isabella Baumfree, became an influential abolitionist and women's rights activist. Her narrative discussed her life in slavery, escape, and advocacy for freedom and equality. Many Black Women today still embody the fighting spirit of their ancestors, like Sojourner Truth, who fought for women's fairness during the most significant level of bondage in this country.

"Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery" by Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer (2013): This book features photographs and narratives of formerly enslaved individuals during the Civil War era. It provided visual and written insights into the challenges of achieving work-life balance during a transition period. This source offered a greater understanding of the experiences of enslaved and post-slavery African American women as they navigated the demands of work, family, and societal structures. It highlighted the resilience and agency of these women in the face of immense adversity and oppression.

Stevenson (2000) examined the lives of enslaved women during the era of American slavery. Her work delved into the strenuous work routines, the complex challenges they faced, and the profound absence of any semblance of a work-life balance in the lives of enslaved women. A running theme in this study was how slavery systematically denied enslaved women any thought of a work-life balance. It highlighted the deliberate dehumanization and exploitation of enslaved women's labor by enslavers.

While discussing the harsh realities of enslaved women's lives, Stevenson's study also recognized their resilience and resistance to the system designed to keep them enslaved. It acknowledged their efforts to maintain family bonds, support one another, and find moments of autonomy and self-care within the confines of slavery. The study emphasized that despite the overwhelming challenges, enslaved women displayed strength while navigating their circumstances.

Race and Gender

In navigating the intersection of race and gender in leadership, the research led to a journey that uncovered the narratives of Black women who, against incredible odds, rose to leadership positions in various fields. Their experiences often came at the expense of racism and sexism; the following literature offered insights into the complexities of leadership. (Crenshaw,1989). Black women often navigate a complex terrain where societal norms dictate their roles as caregivers and breadwinners (Collins, 2000). These traditional expectations could create a dual burden, as Black women were expected to excel both in their careers and in fulfilling familial responsibilities, including childcare and household management.

According to Crenshaw (1989), the intersectionality of race and gender for Black women in leadership was not just a concept but a lived reality. In this dynamic intersection, Black women leaders navigated a path where they challenged stereotypes, broke barriers, and inspired change. Their triumphs and achievements were more remarkable when viewed through the overlapping of race and gender, as they confronted multiple layers of bias and discrimination.

Recognizing this cross guard was not just information to be more aware of, but a call to action. It commanded the need for inclusive leadership strategies, equitable workplace policies, and a societal commitment to dismantling systemic inequalities to ensure that Black women's voices were heard and fully recognized. Giving deeper meaning to the lived experience through the lenses of race, Black women often faced a triple burden related to race, gender, and work-life balance.

The ongoing effects of systemic racism contributed to disparities in economic opportunities and access to workplace support (Collins, 2000). This could result in greater pressure on Black women to excel in their careers while simultaneously addressing the unique challenges associated with being Black in White work environments. The intersection of these identities influenced their work-life balance experiences, as they strived to balance professional demands with the need for self-care and family responsibilities (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2009).

Workplace Stressor

Black women might have felt the need to constantly prove themselves, leading to longer working hours and less time for personal and family life (Nadal et al., 2016). Microaggressions could also have affected relationships and family life. Black women who experienced microaggressions at work might have brought the emotional toll of these experiences home, impacting their interactions with family members and their overall well-being (Nadal et al., 2016). Black women might have avoided reporting these low-key and often undetected aggressions for fear of losing their positions of leadership or being falsely labeled.

Microaggressions in the workplace could have created a hostile or unwelcoming environment for Black women, leading to increased stress and anxiety. This chronic stress could have spilled over into their personal lives, affecting their ability to achieve work-life balance (Sue et al., 2007). Black women might have had high rates of depression and anxiety due to work stressors. They might have been more likely to experience marital instability and guilt from prioritizing their careers over their families (Walden, 2018).

As the number of women in the workplace increased, there was a parallel increase in stressors related to conflicts between family and work life. Often, when Black women chose to take time off from their careers to care for their children or needed personal time, they faced criticism from their coworkers, employers, or families (Tajili, 2014).

Balancing Home

Higher education did not necessarily result in a successful and stable marital relationship (Kim, 2012). Black women faced lower rates of marriage, higher rates of divorce, and an increased likelihood of experiencing marital instability (Barr & Simons, 2012). These trends persisted regardless of their level of educational attainment (Kim, 2012). Even when married, Black women with children who were employed full-time outside the home still had to take on more household responsibilities (Matheson & Rosen, 2012). Childcare obligations were among the factors cited by Black women as contributing to feelings of imbalance and having an impact on their emotional welfare (Matheson & Rosen, 2012). Many felt they were abandoning their children or could not keep up with the demands of both places, leaving them guilty and ashamed.

Methods

The methodology in this research was a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach to understanding the human experience of Black women in Leadership and the complex nature of work-life balance. The main objective of phenomenological research, as articulated by Cadwell (2018), was to gain a deeper insight into how individuals perceived and interacted with the world around them, based on their unique life experiences, in this research as it related to the workplace environment while being a Black woman leading.

Utilizing this approach allowed the researchers to investigate the meaning of these experiences, making it highly suitable for investigating the experiences of Black women in leadership and their pursuit of work-life balance. By employing the phenomenological approach, the researchers sought to uncover the participants' perspectives while shedding light on the type of challenges they encountered in the workplace, the effects of their leadership roles, the coping strategies they employed, and the impact on their personal lives.

Target Population and Sample

The target population was Black women in leadership roles within various sectors, including corporations, academia, government, arts and entertainment, media, entrepreneurship, sports, faith-based organizations, technology, human services, the medical field, and the military. Additionally, participants needed to fit into one or more subsequent categories: married with children, single with children, or divorced or widowed with children. Lastly, eligibility criteria included participants having encountered workplace discrimination related to race or gender.

In this study, participants were selected through purposeful and Snowball sampling methods. Purposive sampling was a non-random sampling method in which researchers intentionally selected individuals or elements based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. This method was beneficial when researchers sought to gather in-depth insights from individuals who possessed expert knowledge or had unique characteristics related to the study.

These two sampling methods offered researchers flexibility when dealing with this population as they aimed to gather information from individuals with expertise or hard-to-reach backgrounds. While the typical participant counts usually fell within the range of five to 25 individuals, researchers possessed the flexibility to exercise sound judgment in determining the optimal number of participants (Mason, 2010). For this study, a deliberate choice was made to include eight participants, effectively representing the target population. This number was selected to achieve data saturation and, potentially, generalizability of the findings and results.

Protection of Participants

The researchers adhered to privacy measures of subject coding. The research activities were carried out in a private office, and various tools were used to ensure participant data confidentiality, including using a personal laptop, audio recordings, transcribed data, and a securely locked file cabinet. To enhance security, data on the laptop was encoded without any participant identifying information and protected by a password. Access was maintained by the office and the locked file cabinet, which housed the laptop, audio recordings, and transcribed data throughout the study. All research-related information remained in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's private office and was kept according to the Library of Congress's recommendations for one year.

Positionality

Positionality has its roots in feminist literature and allows researchers to clearly identify the lens through which they interpret the social world. How one conducts fieldwork, how one codes the data, and one's rapport with participants are extremely important. When utilizing Black feminist thought as a methodological technique, researchers recognize this as a political stance (Clemons 2019, p. 5) As Black women faculty members and researchers, we situate our work within Black Feminist Thought, recognizing that our identities, lived experiences, and cultural histories shape the knowledge we produce.

Clemons (2019) emphasizes that Black feminist qualitative research centers Black women's voices, challenges hegemonic epistemologies, and acknowledges that knowledge is not neutral but deeply situated. To avoid researcher bias, we engage in ongoing reflexivity, interrogating our assumptions and social positions while remaining accountable to the communities we study. Rather than striving for objectivity detached from our realities, we embrace an ethic of care, reciprocity, and justice in our research practices. This commitment ensures that our scholarship is rigorous and ethical, resisting dominant deficit narratives and instead illuminating the complexity, agency, and brilliance within Black communities.

·Data Collection

The researchers recruited influential Black women through email correspondence, social media platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn, and second-party connections. The researchers initiated direct communication with each person who responded to the email or phone call. These interactions aimed to motivate their participation or encourage them to recommend suitable participants in alignment with the study's criteria. The researchers verified the demographic details with all those interested in participating in the study. Upon confirming that these participants met the study's requirements, the researchers proceeded to provide a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, participant expectations, and the anticipated timeline. The researchers forwarded an informed consent form to potential participants, indicating the submission procedure and deadlines for returning the document. The informed consent form was emailed to applicants upon their expression of interest.

The participants were asked to review the form and ask additional questions before signing. Once they stated they were comfortable with the process and had no further questions, they were asked to sign and return the consent form electronically (via email) before the interview and data collection. Only candidates who submitted completed informed consent forms to the researcher could participate in the study. Each participant was notified in the initial conversation that no direct benefits existed for those who participated in this study.

The data collection was a crucial step in the research and information-gathering process. It involves various methods such as surveys, interviews, observations, and retrieving existing data sources. Data collection ensured that accurate, reliable, and relevant information was obtained to answer research questions or make informed decisions. This study used a combination of personal journaling, a focus group, and interviews.

- Each participant was requested to engage in a five-day reflective documentation process, capturing their daily experiences in work and home life.
- Each participant had the audio option or provided written journal entries. They were tasked with recording or writing about various aspects of their day, focusing on how they navigated the intricate intersections of work-life balance. Specific themes to be explored in these journal entries included addressing issues related to race, confronting gender biases in the workplace, managing the responsibilities of parenting and marital status, coping with stress, and exploring personal identity.
- The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants who met the defined criteria of holding leadership roles and possessing pertinent demographic characteristics such as age and parental status. These interviews were conducted through Zoom videoconferencing, ensuring accessibility for participants regardless of their geographical location.
- The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed, serving as the primary qualitative data analysis source. This combined approach of journaling, focused group, and semi-structured interviews facilitated a holistic exploration of the dynamics of work-life balance for Black Women in leadership positions in their settings while giving them reflective time and space.

The target audience is Black Women who will meet the following criteria.

- 21 through 75 years of age
- Black women who currently hold leadership positions across various industries.

Personal status must include:

- Single or single with child/children
- Married or married with children.
- Divorced
- Widowed

The researcher observed the relationship between race and sex, family/work, and internal conflicts such as Black women and stress, race, gender as they related to education, antiquated policies and practices in the workplace, Black women achievements and strives that had been made through Black women's empowerment, and the need for self-advocacy.

Researchers analyzed the data collected from interviews and journal entries using thematic analysis through Qualtrics. Qualtrics allowed for efficient data organization, making storing and managing data securely possible. The analysis was conducted iteratively, ensuring data saturation and no new themes emerged. Additionally, the researchers engaged in reflexive practices to acknowledge their potential biases and ensure impartiality in the analysis.

Data Analysis

In this study, triangulation was applied as a methodological approach to build more credibility for the research findings. The researchers collected all data from journal entries, focus groups, individual interview transcripts, and notes to identify themes and categories about the original two research questions. Instead of opting for manual data coding, the researcher chose to use Qualtrics, an electronic software program, for data analysis. In the initial stages of the coding process, the researchers used field notes to generate a list of potential themes and categories.

These field notes served as a reference point for cross-referencing any defining quotes or “aha moments” within the transcripts, assisting in evaluating individual and collective themes and categories. The researchers provided eleven guided research questions during the interview to help create dialogue for each participant.

Findings

Demographics

To humanize the participants in this study while protecting their confidentiality, historical names of prominent Black Women leaders have been used as symbolic identifiers. These names reflect the spirit, resilience, and leadership qualities found in each participant’s story. For the sake of this research, the eight Black Women—who held leadership roles across fields such as corporate business, education, government, entrepreneurship, sports, faith-based organizations, technology, human services, medicine, and the military—will be represented by the following names: Harriet (Tubman), Sojourner (Truth), Ida (B. Wells), Fannie (Lou Hamer), Shirley (Chisholm), Rosa (Parks), Maya (Angelou), and Bessie (Coleman). Harriet, Sojourner, Ida, Fannie, Shirley, Rosa, Maya, and Bessie were the eight Black women in various leadership roles; these roles were in the field of corporations, education, government, entrepreneurship, sports, faith-based, technology, human service work, the medical field, and the military, who completed the journaling and interview process. Harriet, Sojourner, Ida, Fannie, Shirley, Rosa, Maya, and Bessie were married, single, and divorced Black women aged 21 to 75. These interviews were done over the phone for this study, and the group discussion was via Zoom.

The women’s identities were kept confidential, and they did not have to provide their full names or any other identifying information. To ensure we had a diverse group, they were only asked to share their age, marital status, and family dynamics, outside of asking about their type of profession if they were comfortable doing so. The only requirement for participation was that they identified as female, Black, and willing to take part in the study. Each woman was originally identified by number for this study.

Harriet, Sojourner, Ida, Fannie, Shirley, Rosa, Maya, and Bessie ranged in age from 21 to 75 and identified as married, single, or divorced. They took part in the research through phone interviews and a virtual group discussion via Zoom. All were asked to share only minimal personal details—such as age, marital status, family dynamic, and professional field if comfortable. The use of these historical names is intended to honor the legacy of Black women trailblazers while maintaining the anonymity and dignity of each contributor in this study.

Table 1

Population Demographics

Age		Marital Status	Dependents
21-30	1	Preferred Not Say 1	Children 5
31-40	2	Married 2	No Children 2
41-50	2	Single 1	Grandchildren 1
51-60	1	Divorced 2	
61-75	2	Widowed 1	

Gender and Race Biases

The responses from Maya, Rosa, Shirley, and Ida when asked, how do they navigate the intersection of gender, race, age, marital status, and parenthood in leadership positions, and how does it impact their work-life balance? The question revealed a nuanced perspective on workplace discrimination, particularly concerning Black Women in leadership roles from Maya, Rosa, and Shirley (45 and older). A recurrent theme was the assertion that this demographic faced more pronounced racial and gender biases compared to millennials, who, due to the nature of remote work, did not encounter the same level of interaction with upper management as those working in office environments.

During the discussion, Harriet, Sojourner, Ida, Fannie, Shirley, Rosa, Maya, and Bessie shared varied experiences with discrimination on their jobs. Some highlighted subtle instances of racism in their interactions with colleagues or clients.

For instance, Fannie recounted a situation where she was the first Black Woman to own and operate an alternative day school, but was told by placing authorities that it was because her natural hair was affecting her student enrollment into her school. She encouraged her to change her hair to be more “presentable” as a Black Woman if she wanted her business to grow.

Table 2

Description from Data

Theme	Summary from participants' responses
Gender & Race Biases	Being clear on what is acceptable at work.
Managing Stress	Learning when to pull away from work, set deadlines.
Stereotypes	More open and honest dialogue showcasing positive images in media.
Balancing Home	Time management / the emotions when I can't make everyone happy.
Flexibility	Remote work as an option to balancing work and life.
Unity	Advocate for policies and practices to be reviewed.
	Affordable insurance that included mental health supports.

Harriet, Sojourner, Ida, Fannie, Shirley, Rosa, Maya, and Bessie, who were 45 years and older, who worked in both sports and entertainment, acknowledged their encounters with racism and suggested the existence of sexism. "I have definitely experienced some racism. And without a doubt experienced sexism," but it's not the blatant things that are the highest extreme, so it's not really recognized."

Ida disclosed incidents of sexism in her current position, emphasizing instances where her ideas were allegedly stolen or presented as someone else's by a male colleague, and other incidents where it was implied to compromise herself sexually for promotions. In a more severe case, Maya indicated that her experience with racism had reached a point where legal counsel was being sought.

Conversely, Harriet, Sojourner, Rosa, and Bessie asserted that they are aware of these challenges but had not experienced any form of racism, sexism, or discrimination in their professional roles. This diversity of perspectives highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of workplace experiences for Black Women in leadership roles, particularly those in the 45-and-older demographic, compared to their millennial counterparts. The remote work context also emerged as a significant factor influencing the nature and perception of workplace biases.

Stress and Black Women in Leadership

Discussing stress and work-life balance, Harriet, Sojourner, Ida, Fannie, and Shirley shared various experiences and perspectives. When asked about factors that cause challenges in the workplace, Harriet, Ida, Fannie, and Shirley stated that they often find themselves dealing with micro-aggressions at work or the constant battle of having to prove themselves, which adds an extra layer of stress.

Other Black Women added that the discussion about being a mother, a wife, and a professional can be overwhelming and the pressure to excel in every role takes a toll on my work-life balance. All Black Women shared that as Black Women, they feel that they must sometimes have to work twice as hard to get recognized. The stress of breaking through those glass ceilings is real and affects our work-life equilibrium.

All Black Women noted that while they were stressed regularly from trying to find balance, the married Black Women stated that their spouse was supportive in managing the household. They stated that there was both a spoken and unspoken expectation that they would still be overall responsible for managing both the children and household responsibilities. Although all agreed that this was unfair and a major contributor to stress and a need for rest, "getting it done correctly" was still the end goal for everyone.

"Strong Black Woman Stereotype"

Several Black Women addressed the pervasive "Strong Black Woman Stereotype" in distinct ways. Harriet, Sojourner, Rosa, Ida, Fannie, Shirley, Maya, and Bessie addressed the notion that this stereotype traces its roots to the historical experiences of Black Women during slavery, specifically those of Black Slave Women. We were often forced to endure hardship and display resilience. They were all deeply passionate about their delivery on this topic. Shirley, an educator, stated that society has historically perpetuated stereotypes in the media that position Black Women as strong, resilient, and able to withstand adversity without showing vulnerability. Maya and Bessie, who refer to themselves as "seasoned" executives in corporate America, expressed their internal conflict in adhering to the "Strong Black Woman Stereotype." While she embraces her resilience and determination, she acknowledged feeling pressured to suppress vulnerability and prioritize their career over personal well-being.

The other Black Women argued that Black Women must emphasize the need to redefine strength beyond societal norms and embrace a more holistic and authentic approach to leadership. This sentiment resonated with all Black Women, illustrating their struggles between self-perception and external expectations.

All Black Women agreed that embracing a holistic and real approach to leadership was important as Black Women evolved. Harriet, Sojourner, Rosa, and Maya stated that regularly reflecting on personal values and priorities, setting clear boundaries for oneself while understanding what work-life balance means to oneself, and aligning one's leadership approach with those values are important.

Education

Harriet, Sojourner, Rosa, Ida, Fannie, Shirley, Maya, and Bessie discussed their academic achievements and leadership positions, providing valuable insights into the multifaceted challenges and successes they encountered. The Black Women highlighted how their higher education, including advanced degrees and professional certifications, empowered them. Education was seen as a tool for breaking through barriers and gaining credibility in leadership roles. Maya stated, “I always felt some kind of way because many don’t know that I didn’t get my degree, but yet I have this executive role in sports entertainment.” She stated, “even though I worked hard for 25 years, I don’t get paid what the college execs get, it’s always two strikes against me without the degree.” The Black Women articulated the unique challenges arising from the intersectionality of being Black and female in leadership.

Despite their educational accomplishments, several women discussed the persistent stereotypes and biases they faced as Black Women in leadership. The study revealed the need to challenge preconceptions and prove competence beyond academic qualifications. These challenges encompassed subtle biases, microaggressions, and the need to navigate workplace dynamics influenced by race and gender. Most of the conversation revolved around balancing professional commitments and personal life. Managing leadership responsibilities while addressing familial and personal needs presented a constant challenge.

The Black Women shared their strategic approaches to career advancement, emphasizing the importance of continuous learning, mentorship, and networking. Their journeys reflected a commitment to professional development beyond formal education. Work-life integration emerged as a challenge. The women shared experiences of blending their professional and personal lives, addressing the complexities of achieving balance while excelling in their sometimes-demanding roles.

Balancing Home

Considering Harriet, Sojourner, Rosa, Ida, Fannie, Shirley, Maya, and Bessie’s diverse family structures, the discussion delved deeper than a one-size-fits-all perspective. This inclusive approach considers individuals with spouses and children, single mothers, divorced individuals, and elderly women. The thorough exploration provides valuable insights into the dynamics influencing the work-life balance of Black Women in leadership. It offers an understanding of the challenges and successes they experience within various family structures.

Harriet, Sojourner, and Rosa discussed juggling their leadership responsibilities alongside the demands of raising children and maintaining a healthy relationship with their spouse. They shared insights into how family support is crucial in her work-life balance and how often it can be challenging to make everyone happy and fulfilled. Sojourner and Rosa emphasized the importance of effective time management and clear communication with their spouses. Weekly family meetings synchronized schedules and shared responsibilities, ensuring a supportive home environment.

Fannie’s story about balancing work and life was not about juggling her career and kids but also factored in her grandson. This happened when Rosa’s youngest child had a child unexpectedly, and she felt that the child was not mature enough to be a parent and provide for the child; she said, “Even though I wasn’t trying to re-raise anybody, I had to do what I had to do for my family.” I didn’t have time to worry about anything after that but tried to get another promotion to help support him. This meant I was gonna have to work more than what I was already doing”. She recounts that “I was never home to really spend time with him when he was first born because I had to provide.” Ida decided to build a team that could handle things without her. The alternative is having her family at work with her, and her desire to work remotely.

Ida, a single mother in a leadership position in the medical field, emphasized the unique challenges she faces as the sole provider for her family. She described how navigating professional responsibilities while attending to her children's needs requires strategic planning and resilience. She stated, “As single mother, “I really depend on my support network, including friends, family, and community resources to help me”. She discussed using flexible work hours and remote work options, allowing her to fulfill professional and parenting duties.

Fannie and Shirley, who both went through a divorce while in a leadership role, highlighted the impact of such life changes on their work-life equilibrium. One participant shared that her leadership role compromised her marriage.” It was hard to turn that off at home,” she said,” and I often felt guilty when I could not, please everyone.” The Black Women appeared to be able to relate to her statement by nodding their heads.

Flexibility

They spoke about the need for flexibility in the workplace during transitional periods. Fannie shared the significance of open communication with her employer during this transition as difficult as it was because “I was “afraid” to seem vulnerable or “weak” to the white men or women and little do they know outside of work; my whole life is falling apart and then I have to process through those raw emotions daily and still meet a deadline.” Rosa stated “I wish I would have the options of working from home when I was going through my divorce, at least I could be comfortable in my own setting without having to pretend to be ok in front of people I couldn’t really tell anything to because they barely wanted to speak let alone, care about my marriage falling apart.” They both expressed that it was important to negotiate flexible work arrangements and access counseling services, which were strategies they found instrumental in maintaining their work-life balance during such a difficult period in their lives.

Maya and Bessie, women over 60, shared their experiences of balancing a long-standing career with significant health challenges, financial and family dynamics shifts. Maya stated, “I would go to work with tears in my eyes from pain in my body, and no one would ask what was wrong with me, or if they did. They would say,” You’ll be alright,” as if I were not even human! But if my co-worker cried over something small like losing a file on her computer, the whole team would rally around her to make sure she was ok, she was even allowed to leave work for the day, and here I am sitting in pain.” This insight sheds light on the complexities elder Black Women faces in leadership roles. Harriet and Rosa shared their strategy of delegating specific responsibilities at work and optimizing their leave time for appointments. Harriet said “I thrive on organization and structure, relying heavily on lists and schedules.

At the start of each week, I formulate my top three priorities. Every day, I narrow it down to a smaller list of three crucial tasks and just readjusting here and there to stay on track and accomplish everything on time.” Sojourner shared “my thing is, I just tell everyone what it is that I’m going through and delegate responsibilities, I pretty much treat home like work sometimes and then I just go back and check to see if it’s done the way I like it.”

Unity & Empowerment

When asked, "What types of support systems, both within and outside of the workplace, have been most valuable in your quest for work-life balance, particularly as a Black woman in leadership?" there was a common theme of faith, family, and the comradery of other Black Women. Collectively they shared that by relying on each other in this way, Sojourner Truth said, “Black women bosses really just stick together because there aren’t a lot of us.”

Harriet Tubman said, “We are more likely to create a community with each other so we can have a place addresses challenges only we understand, it really empowering in the workspace, but I think too many of us (strong Black Women) in a group makes other groups uncomfortable.” Ida B. Wells and Harriet Tubman shared that they have not had a positive experience working with other Black Women in Leadership. Ida B. Wells stated, “Her ego was bigger than a man and did not ‘look out’ for other Black Women when it came to advancements.” Harriet Tubman stated, “Black Women supervisors can be difficult to work for sometimes to be honest. They are often under a lot of stress and tend to take that out on everybody around them.” In Harriet Tubman’s perspective, they do not form supportive community well because of their strong personalities.”

All the women stated that having a support network is empowering when everyone works together. They also stated that they rely on their faith and place of worship, sororities, travel, and business friends in their professional and personal lives. They shared peer mentorship network groups whose aim was to provide support and empowerment. The women stated that these kinds of networks recognize the unique challenges that only Black Women face.

Interpretation of the Findings

The study's findings confirm those in the existing body of scholarly literature that support the challenges Black women in leadership positions face with work-life balance and racial and gender equality. Black women continue to face significant disparities in wages, unequal treatment, and systemic oppression, as evidenced by ongoing research (Redden & Kasperkevic, 2016).

The discussion on stress and the symptoms they experienced because of the work-life imbalance highlighted the additional pressures faced by Black women. Black women frequently face elevated levels of depression and anxiety and are often hesitant to seek help (Cole & Secret, 2010). In this study, many of the Black Women participants mentioned experiencing moderate to elevated levels of stress regularly, such as a lack of sleep or rest, headaches, poor eating habits, anxiety, and depression.

Addressing the stereotypes that plague Black women's existence, all the Women expressed that they have often felt the need to work twice as hard for recognition. The "Strong Black Woman Stereotype" emerged as a pervasive theme, influencing self-perception and external expectations. When discussing the influence of stereotypes, the "Strong Black Woman Stereotype" emerged as a pervasive theme, influencing self-perception and external expectations, increasingly adding complexity to their experiences. According to Tillman-Meakins (2017) a strong Black Woman is "an ever-self-sacrificing woman who is emotionally unaffected, self-sufficient, and responsible for meeting the needs of others in her family and the community before herself" (pg. 4). The study reveals that these Black Women were tired of receiving prestigious titles for exchange for low wages and an increase in work and home responsibilities.

When discussing educational achievements, they were seen as empowering tools. However, it was discussed that there is a continuous need to challenge racial and gender biases and prove one's competence beyond academic qualifications. According to Bernstein (2015), "Black females are more likely than other females to report having to prove themselves over and over again" (pg. 1). The study revealed the ongoing need to challenge biases and prove competence beyond academic qualifications. Sharing their frustration of constantly "getting cut into a million pieces in the effort of breaking glass ceilings in the workplace". They expressed that workplace micro-aggression was a breeding ground to make highly educated and qualified Black women feel inferior and insignificant while using work performance evaluations as a tool to hold Black Women back from equitable pay and promotion opportunities. These Women shared strategies for career advancement, emphasizing continuous learning, mentorship, and networking. The discussion also delved into the challenges of balancing home life, considering diverse family structures.

Insights from single mothers, divorced individuals, and elder women in leadership roles provided a comprehensive understanding of the complexities faced by Black Women. Flexibility, open communication, and support networks, both within and outside the workplace, emerged as crucial factors in achieving work-life balance.

The discussion concluded with reflections on the significance of faith, family, and the camaraderie of Black Women in leadership roles. Despite varied experiences, all eight Women emphasized the empowering effects of support networks and the need to address challenges unique to Black Women collectively. Many agreed that they felt there was power in numbers and had a responsibility to other Black Women to champion equality in every way. Hearing the women's lives, this study contributes valuable insights for organizations, policymakers, and individuals striving to create inclusive and supportive environments for Black Women in leadership.

Sharing their experience about what they felt needed to be done to achieve a better outcome, all eight Women engaged in discussion about strategies for career advancement, emphasizing the need for continuous learning, mentorship, and networking. The challenges of balancing marriages, children, or quality time with friends and family stress the importance of workplace flexibility through remote work options (Harris, 2020). The ladies talked about their workplace experience before they had a remote position. They had to bring work home or schedule most of their important appointments after work, sometimes missing those appointments for their children or themselves, because they sometimes had to work late. This helped them to be there emotionally and physically for their husbands and children, which improved their relationships and made their work-life balance healthier. Ida stated that “remote work saved my marriage”. Remote work gives flexibility to be in a work meeting while doing household tasks during the workday helped to manage their time better and cut down on evening task like preparing meals for the family, while Harriet stated it reduced stress from competing with heavy traffic to and from work and to be a familiar setting that they have personalized made them feel eager to work on new projects.

When addressing setting healthy boundaries over time. All the women shared that having an accountability partner was one of the strategies used, whether that was a reminder on their phone or a person to remind them of those set times to stop working for the day. They agreed in the group discussion that by setting boundaries and leaving work at a specific time, they managed to separate work from their personal life, whether in the office or from home. The need for mental and emotional rest, outside supportive networks like church, sororities, and support groups that specifically speak to the needs of Black Women, and where support is encouraged, expected, and celebrated.

Recommendations

After collecting the data on Black Women in leadership and work-life balance, several implications were discovered. First, organizations must recognize and address Black Women's unique challenges in leadership roles. This includes implementing policies and practices that support work-life balance, such as flexible scheduling, remote work options, and family-friendly benefits. Additionally, there is a need for more diversity and inclusion initiatives that promote equal opportunities for career advancement and support Black women to thrive in leadership positions. Organizations can improve retention rates and foster a more diverse and equitable workforce by creating inclusive environments that value diversity and support work-life balance.

In addition to the qualitative methods used in this research, future researchers should consider conducting a quantitative survey to gather broader insights and statistical data on work-life balance among Black Women Leaders. Quantitative research is a systematic empirical investigation that uses statistical, mathematical, or computational techniques to collect, analyze, and interpret numerical data. It aims to quantify relationships, patterns, and phenomena to generalize findings to a larger population or draw statistical inferences.

The survey could include standardized scales or questionnaires to assess different aspects of work-life balance, such as workload, family responsibilities, support systems, and overall satisfaction. By collecting quantitative data, researchers can analyze trends, correlations, and associations that provide statistical evidence to complement qualitative findings.

Integrating qualitative and quantitative methods will offer a more profound understanding while combining narratives with empirical data. Triangulating findings from both methods can enhance the validity and reliability of the research.

Conclusion

This research proved why work-life balance is vital to a Black Woman's existence. Attaining a balance between work and personal life poses a considerable challenge for many Black women who lead others and who frequently confront the demands of both domains. Juggling professional responsibilities alongside households often results in elevated stress levels, heightened anxiety, and, in some cases, depression. Nevertheless, cultivating supportive family dynamics, tapping into available outreach programs and resources, and embracing flexible work arrangements can significantly enhance autonomy and well-being across various aspects of Black women's lives.

By prioritizing self-care and establishing clear boundaries, Black women can effectively navigate their professional and personal obligations while fostering a more harmonious coexistence between their work and home lives and enhancing their overall quality of life. In conclusion, the journey toward achieving work-life balance is essential for the holistic well-being of Black women in leadership positions. By leveraging supportive networks, accessing resources, and advocating for workplace flexibility, Black women can create environments that allow them to professionally and personally thrive. Prioritizing self-care and setting boundaries are critical steps in achieving this balance, leading to greater satisfaction, fulfillment, and challenging systematic oppression in the workplace for the next generation of Black women who will lead.

As a Black Woman researcher, Dr. Goodwin's positionality is deeply rooted in lived experience, cultural identity, and a commitment to amplifying the voices of marginalized women in leadership. Her perspective brings authenticity and insight to the exploration of the historical framework of Black women leaders and the complexities of work-life balance. To avoid researcher bias, Dr. Goodwin employs reflexivity, consistently acknowledging her own perspectives while centering participants' narratives through ethical, culturally responsive methodologies. She embraces a critical, intersectional lens to ensure that power dynamics and systemic barriers are thoughtfully examined. This approach allows her research to be both personally informed and academically rigorous.

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