COURAGE UNDER FIRE:  HOW BLACK WOMEN HAVE LEARNED TO SURVIVE IN

CORPORATE AMERICA

by

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(Under the Direction of Juanita Johnson-Bailey)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how racism and sexism impacted the career

progression of executive Black women in Corporate America.  The research questions that

guided the study were:

 (1) What are the significant learning experiences that supported Black women's career

progression in Corporate America?

(2) What strategies have Black women used to support their career progression in

Corporate America?

This qualitative study was conducted with eleven Black women who work for Fortune 500

organizations who were Directors or Vice-Presidents.

The data was collected included semi-structured interviews, field notes, and documents.

The data revealed four themes: 1) Negotiating an Unwelcomed Existence; 2) Battling Ethgender

Isolation in Corporate America; 3) Serving as the Domestic in the Corporate Boardroom; and 4)

Creating Strategies From Lessons Learned.  The first two themes were in response to the first

research question that asked what the women had learned to bolster their careers. The data

revealed that executive Black women found a way to survive in Corporate America despite the

fact that they never felt that they were a part of the environment and had to battle racism and

sexism. The third and fourth themes were in response to the second question that asked about strategies that strengthened career advancement of executive Black women. The data showed that although the women felt very uncomfortable in their corporate existence which relegated them to servitude, the women found a ways discover lessons that would help them with their career growth. The two major conclusions that resulted from this study were: 1) Successful career progression forced the executive Black women in this study to learn to negotiate their tension filled lives while constantly weighing their cultural alliances against their corporate acceptance; and 2) The women in this study used their negative racial and gendered experiences to find ways to inform and manage their careers.

INDEX WORDS:    Adult Education, Black Feminism, Black women, Career Development,
                Corporate America, Critical Race Feminism, Corporate Culture,
                Qualitative Research

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Cole and Austin, my sons.  You always make me want to be better.  I love you both. And to Grandmother, Luella G. Kelly, who left us in 2004 while I was in the process of completing my dissertation.  Your love, guidance, support and grace will always be a light in my life.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a Black woman with a career in Corporate America, I have often wondered if others have felt the isolation that I feel.  What success have women had and why?  There are several realizations that came to me.  The one that is the most frustrating is that I feel terribly isolated in Corporate America.  In most cases, I have been the only Black woman in a room of all White men and often felt like I was a token.  At the same time, I recognized the duality of the roles that I play in my own life.  The twin roles in my life are that of being a Black woman and a corporate professional.  This study sets out to examine the lives of executive Black women in Corporate America.

The journey of a Black woman in Corporate America is complicated and full of twists, turns and detours.  It requires that Black women have a true understanding of themselves and their identity while on this journey. Cole (2006) explains that so often in corporate settings, Black women are told that they are very articulate and present very well. This comment means that the Black women, who are told that they are articulate and present well are being judged against the stereotype of the deficient Black woman, and are constantly battling this phenomenon, which impedes their ability to learn, adapt and progress through organizations. The perspective from Black women is that they have to out-learn, outpace and outdo all of their contemporary counterparts (p. 54, 2006).  "Stereotypes are powerful impediments to the upward mobility of members of minority groups in organizations," (Thomas, 2005, p. 78).  The journeys hat these women encounter need to be recorded and discussed in an effort to bring about change.

Black women make up 6% of the corporate labor force (Catalyst, 2004). Of that percentage, only 5.1% of those women are employed in leadership positions, which mean that 94.9% of the labor force of Black women do not have leadership positions. The projected increase of Black women in the work force from 1992 to 2012 is estimated to be 45.8% (Catalyst Report, 2004). Based on the United States Census Bureau's current population reports, 18% of Black women compared to 16% of Black men age 25 and over have earned at least a bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2002). These numbers indicate that Black women are investing in themselves and trying to place themselves in a marketable position. With the projected number of Black women in the workforce and the investment that Black women are making in themselves, this population arguably should be embraced as a considerable segment of the future leaders of Corporate America.

The large percentage of Black women entering into the corporate workforce, 45.7% (Catalyst Report, 2004), is an amount too large to be ignored. If these women are overlooked, there would be a severe loss of talent in organizations. Corporate America needs to begin to proactively include these women as resources and insure that their talents are represented in leadership and on corporate board rooms. These women as part of the corporate workforce will have to deal with racial and sexist issues in order to survive in their professional journeys. These women have to recognize the obstacles ahead of them. Their lives are shaped by their relationships, both past and present, with Corporate America. The definition of who they are is linked to their corporate and familial roles. And this very definition resonates with a career for many Black women. Individuals create their careers within organizations. Organizations are made up of people of very different cultures, styles and ethnic backgrounds. The diversity within these backgrounds includes race and gender. As the demographics of the workforce

changes, so should the leadership and the board rooms of Corporate America. Black women are

becoming a part of this group. Understanding how advancement should occur for Black women

is important, but it should include not only advancement but survival, as well. There are several

components that contribute to this advancement. Those components consist of the Black women

themselves, the organizations that they work in, and the relationships that are part of their career

path.

Giscombe and Mathis (2002) conducted a multi-phased research study and discussed the

retention of women of color (which included Black, Asian, Island Pacifica and Native America

women) in professional and managerial positions:

> With women and people of color gaining entry to occupations and industries from
> which they have been excluded, the major barriers to upward mobility are no
> longer at the recruitment and job entry stages of employment process, but at the
> advancement stages. (p. 115).

Of more concern are the issues that these women face as they are trying to succeed in the

corporate workplace, including the stereotypes they must face: "Women mangers seeking

further development have to push hard for such development, given that their mostly

male bosses often take a stereotyped view of women's careers ambition and commitment

to leadership" (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003, p. 297).

*Race in White Organizations*

Race matters in organizations and this concept has often been ignored by those

individuals (primarily White) who exist within organizations. Wooten (2006) writes, "race not

only represents an individual-level characteristic that has implications for an employee's success,

but it also has implications for the success of the firm" (p. 192). The importance of being White

in an organization and its accompanying benefits is often overlooked. When diversity training is

deployed in organizations, it is usually only the race of minorities that is considered. Rarely does

an organization report on the demographics of White people. Being White is not talked about because one of the privileges associated with being White in our society is its invisibility and its acceptance as the norm. According to Thomas (2005, p.121), "Often we can tell who is privileged and who is not by asking about the extent to which certain groups must think about or negotiate their identity at work. Macalpine and Marsh (2005) examined how race is constructed for those in the organization and also examine the impact of being White. They asked the very important question, "What it is like being White in an organization?" The overwhelming response from those that were White was: they took it for granted; they don't think about it; and it is not an issue. In contrast to those statements, Black women specifically indicated that they were very aware of being Black. A most compelling comment from a participant was that she could not leave her Blackness at home; therefore she was always reminded of being Black (Macalpine & Marsh, 2005).

The understanding of what it means to be White in an organization and its omission from the discussion is critical in recognizing what is occurring in Corporate America. While race is the most obvious feature when a Black woman walks in the room, these women must also identify with those who don't look like them. The discussion on race must be expanded to include this perspective.

Critical Race Feminism provides a useful perspective for understanding these different experiences of race and gender for Black women. This theory posits that race and gender is embedded in all that is experienced for Black women. Wing (2003) discusses Critical Race Theory as an emergence out of legal academics at the end of the twentieth century to emphasis the legal and social concerns of both women, minorities and disproportionately poor. Critical Race Feminism coupled with the use of narrative analysis provides voice for Black women that

empower them to speak their experience. "Stories by people of color can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism," (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 7).  Critical Race Feminism is based on a legal academic discourse but also intersects with Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism.  It allows an analytic framework for addressing issues as they relate to race and it situates that racism and gender is endemic to the American culture and our society.  "The 'legal storytelling' movement urges Black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess laws' master narratives," (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001, p. 9).  Because of the power that this theory allows for these Black women, they will be more willing to describe the racism and sexism they have faced. "Powerfully written stories and narratives may begin a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our human community" (Deglado & Stefanic, 2001 p. 43).

The reality of being the only one and being isolated from your peers or staff is a reality that every Black woman faces because of both her race and gender.  Thomas (2005) discusses that minorities often are not provided opportunities because they lack the chance to form relationships with co-workers and leadership across demographics differences.   It is something of which the organization and the individual must be painfully aware.  Cobbs and Turnock (2003) argue that:

> In every relationship throughout the organization, being a Black American is a salient feature.  There are times you feel uncomfortably visible, as if in a fishbowl.  At other times you feel you are not seen at all.  Not very long ago -- not even two generations -- each Black in Corporate American was in fact isolated as 'the first' and 'the only'.  (p. 26)

The fact is that it has to be a component that organizations are willing to face through cultural indoctrination. Bell and Nkomo (1994) discuss the fact that "social" isolation

will be a part of what Black women will deal with in the organization that they choose. Black women in organizations are faced with dealing with their identity and the various roles that they have in organizations, home and community. This identity is also determined by race and gender and how that impacts how they show up to the organization every day. Black women must determine that before they walk in the door every day. "Their unique challenge is developing a healthy and positive identity within an environment that often portrays their racial groups quite negatively and uniformly," (Thomas, 2005, p. 182). Identity becomes something with which Black women are constantly faced with as they interact within the organizations that they work in and the people that they work for.

Black women face learning how to exist in White organizations through formal and informal mechanisms that they have innately or that they have to learn. They are dealing not only with the aspect of individuals within the organization but the organization system as well. Chrobot-Mason and Thomas (2002) discuss both the individual and the workplace that these women must identify with:

> We propose that in order to understand the conditions that affect an organizations' ability to attract, retain and make the most of its cultural diversity as well as minority employees' experiences in the workplace, one must consider racial identity at both the organizational and individual level of analysis. (p. 324)

The identity that these women take is often more than their own. They are dealing with the many identities that they must have so that others feel comfortable with them in the organization. These women are faced with learning how to adapt and relate and be successful in the organizations in which they work. Learning becomes a critical factor for these women to negotiate if they hope to become successful.

*Career Development and Learning*

In a Corporate America environment you are identified by your knowledge, skills and achievements. Knowledge in a corporate setting is how people create who they are and how they position to advance. Learning not only consists of formal education, but oftentimes, it is incidental or accidental. The ability to overcome the environment that you must learn can create fear and that perspective of fear within a corporate setting is the something that women have to possibly endure. When you overlay gender with race, it becomes equally challenging. Women have success in learning despite the lack of support. Women learn, regardless of the multiple roles that they have to assume and despite societal norms. As Hayes (2001) explains, "While at one time women were excluded from higher educations, they now constitute more than half of all bachelor's degree recipients" (p. 35). Women evoke emotions, intuition, relationships and subjectivity in the way they learn. The importance of relationships is found in the literature as it relates to the way women learn (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997). Connected knowing allows the relational aspect of learning for women to become realized (Hayes, 2001). "Connected knowers realize that they can only approximate other people's experiences and so can gain only limited access to their knowledge" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 113). Within this connected knowing, relationships are the crux to that knowing. "Relationships are inseparable from identity and help women gain a sense of self" (Bierema, 2001, p. 58). This understanding of relationship allows the conceptualization of feminist pedagogy and how Black women can situate themselves in the way of learning and knowing.

Black women have to create their identity and it is shown in the Black feminist movement. Their identity has been so mired in what was defined for Whites that they were not allowed their voice. "White feminists assumed that their experiences constituted *the* [italics

added] epistemological and ontological grounds of gynocentric knowledge production: they assumed that they had sole power to name reality" (Yancy, 2000, p. 158). This is the reason why voice has to be constantly defined for Black women.  As we look at the statement from Yancy (2000) we learn that Black women's experiences are a site of identity formation and contestation of Whiteness ontology.  Critical Race Feminism provides the very framework within which these women know their world. The inter-sectionalism of both Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism provides the understanding because it identifies both race and gender as a way in which these women can make sense of the world in which they work.  This understanding is best articulated through Critical Race Feminism.

In every aspect of learning, race and culture identity plays a role. Because the ways in which individuals learn resides within their culture and race, how we learn resides in who we are. One's being is intertwined into everything that they do, even the way they learn:  "One's lived experiences are grounded in race, class, gender and other factors that contribute to their understanding of the process for producing knowledge" (Sheared, 1996).  Being who you are is something that you cannot deny or ignore and most Black women are sure about who they are and where they come from.  In most cases, Black women do not deny who they are. Instead they have to identify with many roles and then determine what they need to be, and for whom. Often time, Black women suppress who they are to make others feel comfortable with them. Individuals' context of who they are shapes how they take in information. Relationships are crucial in the way in which women learn.  The formal process of education may be devoid for Black women because they are often isolated and alienated in the learning process. This would be specifically true in a corporate setting where they were not provided the tools or channels (exposure) to learn the landscape.

During the process of learning, the challenges that are faced consist of creating a learning situation that should apply to everyone, specifically as it relates to a corporate organization. The social context is needed in any rich learning process. However, acknowledging the social context makes visible the constraints of racial and gender lines for Black women. These lines and the inherent power structure continue to restrict the learning process for Black women. In order to ensure that both gender and race are recognized in the learning process, organizations have to focus on a model that considers the aspect of gender and race in the learning process. "There are two ways in which we might give more attention to diversity in future research on women's learning: by overcoming White, middle-class biases while being more inclusive of currently under-represented groups of women" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 228). This concept will allow the understanding of learning through the lens of others and theories that will be applicable for those groups who are not typically considered. This will be especially important for Black women as the research will create theories that will apply. "Our knowledge can be considerably enhanced by the work and perspective of women scholars from more diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. The work of feminists of Color in other disciplines has yielded significant new insights into women's diversity" (Hayes & Flannery 2000, p. 231). Black women have to move beyond concerns of silence and authority to ensure that their voices are heard. They must break the perpetual cycle and recognize that transformation begins with the one who should be transformed -- the Black women in Corporate America. The importance of learning, formal or informal, transformational or incidental, must be done and should also include the social context.

Statement of Problem

There is some research about the challenges that Black women face in predominately White settings and how they can work and succeed within that environment.  For instance, in the study completed by Alvetta Thomas (2004), where she discusses career succession for Black women leaders in two-year colleges.  In addition, a similar study was completed by Patricia Wilson (2004), which examines the career development of senior-level African American women working in community and technical colleges in the United States.  The goal for this research study was focus specifically on how Black women survive in Corporate America.  This research dealt with the intersection of gender and race in organizational settings.  According to Macalpine & March, "Most of the literature on gender did not refer to ethnicity, and that in the organizational literature there was an absence of similarly complex and intense debate on ethnicity as there is on gender" (Macalpine & Marsh, 2005, p. 430).  It is further outlined by Macalpine and Marsh (2005) that although there is literature that identifies power and speaks specifically to gender and sexuality, it does not speak to both gender and race.  This very omission excludes Black women in research.  Their voices are not there even with the changing face of the workforce.

Organizations should be aligned with the changing workforce and the impact of globalization.  Livers and Carver (2003) discuss that organizations need to relate to all racial and ethnic constituencies because it has not been done very well and organizations are missing the benefits that can be gained by having diversity as a key value in their business.  There are other studies that involve Black women but none that speak specifically to how they learn and progress up the corporate ladder. "Women mangers seeking further development have to go push hard for

such development, given that their mostly male bosses often take a stereotypical view of women's careers ambition and commitment to leadership" (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003, p. 297).

The purpose of this study was to examine how racism and sexism impacted the career progression of executive Black women in Corporate America. The research questions that guide the study were:

(1) What are the significant learning experiences that supported Black women's career progression in Corporate America?

(2) What strategies have Black women used to support their career progression in Corporate America?

<center>Significance of Study</center>

This research examined how Black women see their situation and the obstacles that they face as they navigate through Corporate America. Additionally, the research identified how Black women learn and adapt to the work environment in Corporate America. The study is significant because it focuses on Black women in executive or high ranking positions in Corporate America. This study is specific to Black women because when they talk about minority women as a total group, it includes Asian and Latino women. There are 3.7 million women of color in the United States workforce. Women of color represent 15% of America's private-sector workforce; Black women account for 8% and 1.1% of corporate officers in Fortune 500 companies (The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2002; Women in Cable & Telecommunications, 2004). This study will look at what makes those 2.2% different from those who started in developmental positions that should have led them into the boardroom. "Women of color have a long history of labor-force participation, yet they still hold fewer managerial jobs than their presence in the labor force would indicate," (Catalyst, p. 3, 1998).

The most compelling reason that this research is significant is that the demographics of

Corporate America are changing and with these shifts, organizations are going to have to be

prepared to find successors for key roles.

Many corporate organizations are not going to survive if they do not start embracing

Black women and looking beyond the White males who are currently in leadership positions, a

dwindling population. Some organizations understand that in order to be successful they are

going to have to rely on people of different backgrounds. Black women, who have contributed

successfully to the organizations of which they already plan an integral part, have much to say

regarding how they can contribute to the future life of their corporations.  In this study the voices

of the future leaders in Corporate America, Black women, are heard.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine how racism and sexism impact the career progression of Executive Black women in Corporate America. The research questions that guided the study were:

(1) What are the significant learning experiences that supported Black women's career progression in Corporate America?

(2) What strategies have Black women used to support their career progression in Corporate America?

This chapter examined the following literature for this study: 1) Racism and Sexism in Corporate America, 2) Black women in Corporate America, 3) Critical Race Feminism, 4) Black Women's Strategies in Negotiating Corporate Culture, and 5) Career Development. Each of these critical factors intersect and create the thread of why this study is important for leaders in corporations and those individuals (Black or White) that reside within them.

Racism and Sexism in Corporate America

The overall understanding of racism and sexism in Corporate America is critical to understand how Black women are positioned in corporate. This historical account is important because it identifies the challenges that Black women face today. "Understanding why the experience of Black women are different from those of other women and those of Black men is steeped in the historical progression and ideology of Black people in the United States," (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 19). According to Cleaver (2003, p. 48), "If it weren't for Black

women, there would have been no Montgomery Bus Boycott, few voting rights campaigns, far less marvelous educational impact – in short, the civil rights movement as we know it could not have occurred." Black women are situated in the history of America but their voices continue to be unheard. "Black women are mired at the bottom of American society according to every social indicator," (Wing, 2003, p. 1). This historical account helps us to understand the position of Black women in Corporate America today.

<div align="center">Black women in Corporate America</div>

Black women are faced with how to relate in a leadership role being both Black and female. The challenges that surface for Black women are trying to maintain their identity and be successful. Rigg and Trehan's (1999) case study of Black women's experience in a critical management learning process shows how their experience are painful and disempowering: "Black women's presence within management learning, their experiences, their diversity and commonality are invisible within the critical management academe" (p. 266). The understanding that Black women experience something very different as it relates to learning in a critical management incident allows us to view those events. Those very experiences that the women encounter shape the way in which they seek strategies to cope and succeed in a corporate environment. The negotiation strategies these women must put in place to manage stresses and challenges are different from their White counterparts: male or female. As Black women face leadership systems, they are faced with tokenism, dualism and assimilation. This requires that Black women work through the issues that they face while working up through corporate.

Tokenism refers to the way in which a minority person is being labeled as the only one in a group. It allows organizations to say that they value diversity because they have one or two minorities. "The dynamics of tokenism engender perceptual tendencies such as increased

visibility, assimilation and polarization (Craig, O'Neal, et al. 1992).  For Black women tokenism takes on a set of stresses that are not easy to work through, "the contrast of the two groups fosters uncertainties among dominants about how to treat tokens, resulting in the isolation of tokens from formal and informal communication networks" (Yoder & Sinnett, 1985).  Johnson (2004) adds:

> What Whites often don't realize is that hearing demeaning dismissive comments over the years, about 'tokens' and 'affirmative action' can take its toll.  Some people have those wonderful personalities that can deflect that kind of negativity. Most of us have to build defenses to deal with it. (p. 126)

These very defenses are what many Black women use as coping mechanisms.

Dualism occurs when Black women find that they have to be part of different cultures which forces them to live two different lives.  They have to work, live, worship and socialize in different spaces and typically all of them require them to show different parts of their selves. This type of schism creates both challenges and stress for Black women as they have to straddle each of the culture lines, the one in which they live and the one in which they work.  The fact that Black women have to fit into two different dichotomies is a form of dualism.  Dualism requires that the individual understands their own culture and the culture they have to assimilate to, which is this study in Corporate America.  Bell and Nkomo (1994) discuss the fact that Black women have to live in two different cultures and while working through their own identity to fit in one and continue to remind themselves of the other.  "Structuring one's life bi-culturally is often a conscious choice, permitting a woman to hold on to her African-American rootedness [sic] without being totally assimilated into the dominant culture" (Bell & Nkomo, 1998, p. 213). To ensure that they hold on to their cultural roots, Black women make the decision to participate in each culture. There is very little integration but yet a sense of cultural pluralism that often requires them to live separate lives.

Assimilation is losing oneself in the environment that you are a part.  It can be argued that assimilating into an organization is the best way to rise to an executive level.    Assimilation is where an individual immerses themselves in a culture by in part leaving their own culture behind.  This allows a Black individual to be integrated into a White organization. The identity of both gender and ethnicity is irrelevant and you are just part of the culture.  The challenge is that Black women may find that they may lose who they are if they do not identify with the culture that is part of their environment. This approach also allows the majority members of the organization to feel safe and not have to be challenged with differences. A Black woman in this model loses a part of herself and the ability to relate to the difference that she brings to the organization. The goal of the assimilation model is to make the racial difference irrelevant.  The fact remains that there is a difference that needs to be both recognized and celebrated and completely assimilating does not allow the appreciation for diversity or gender.

*Importance of Black women in Corporate America*

Within the complexity of the organization, the importance of the culture of the organization impacts those that reside within. "For those who grow up with the uncertainty and doubt that accompanies being Black in America, the corporations presents layers to penetrate" (Cobbs & Turnock, 2003, p. 2).  A Black woman has to always carry the awareness of both her race and gender.  In an organization, the realization that there is a glass ceiling is always there. She is reminded by how few Black women are in executive positions or in positions of power. She is reminded by how few are in the board room making critical decisions. Organizations play a role in career development because they have to create environments that are conducive for women to have development and growth.  There will be obstacles but there has to be a way in which Black women can be successful within an organizational culture and structure.  It is

important to be reminded that most organizations were founded by White mainstream males who in turn created the culture and structure. "The organizational culture/structure is where the policies, procedures and rules (formal or informal) reside" (Pierre, 1998, p. 42). It is critical that self-assessment is done in making decisions about career advancement: Black women will have to make a personal decision about the organizations to which they would like to belong. In addition to knowing what type of organization they are a part of, they must remember that gender and race matter. "Race prevents minority women from fully participating in organizational life, with minority women managers reporting greater scrutiny and extra challenges because of their race" (Bell & Nkomo, 2001, p. 17). This is something that appears in most research as it relates to gender and race in the work force.

*Racism and Sexism of Black women in Corporate America*

Race and gender are phenomena that organizations are going to have to contend with as long as they do business and hire employees. As the demographics of the world continue to change the importance of having diversity in the workplace is increasing. A major study (Catalyst Report, 1998) discusses how organizations have a responsibility to diversity and it must go beyond just the diversity training that they require employees to take. As is indicated by the information in the growing literature on Black women in Corporate America, it is apparent that the divide is becoming a larger canyon that Black women have to bridge. Every individual in the organization must deal with race and gender: either personally or as a manager. Diversity management is becoming the new affirmative action as organizations are creating diversity positions and departments to position them as a place of employment for Black women. "Organizations are also introducing diversity management programmes that go beyond equal opportunity legislation and affirmative action" (Wirth & International Labour Office, 2001, p.

18). But there should be a way to close the divide of gender and race in organizations beyond affirmative action and diversity programs.

Livers and Caver (2003) discuss the effect of miasma, which states that individuals who work with those who are different are on a continuum. The continuum is "embracing difference" and it ranges from low to high. Within in the continuum, you go from miasma (low) to acceptance (high). Miasma is defined as the cloud of uncertainty that Black managers must work in. It is an environment that consists of uncertainty, misperception, and distortion. "Whereas on the inverse side, acceptance is understanding and valuing differences" (Livers & Caver, 2003, p. 17). Miasma is considered a treacherous or threatening environment that has been created and is difficult to maneuver in and around. Consequently, it is important for Black women to know how to work in this environment and possibly enlighten others to get to the acceptance environment. In an accepting environment, you feel as if there is an understanding of what you are and you are recognized for your differences. When Black women have to live in an environment of miasma, there is very little trust and the perception is that you can never let your guard down or make a mistake. In this type of setting, Black women come off as aloof and unapproachable, which does not create an environment in which they can experience career advancement.

Race and gender make up an individual's identity which impacts their social context. This context is what comprises Black women. "Even though it is not central in every situation, your race is part of who you are, part of how others see you, and a key part of how you see yourself" (Cobbs & Turnock, 2003, p. 8). This is also true with individuals that reside within an organization. People make up an organization with what they bring along with them, as well. Livers & Caver (2003) discuss the identity and the intersection of race and gender:

> Because race and gender are unchangeable aspects of one's identity, their impact
> on work experiences depend to a great degree on the perceptions and reactions of

others. Race and gender -- individually and combined -- are laden with preconceptions. They affect Black opportunities to develop strong corporate relationships and to receive equity in the workplace, (p. 81).

These perceptions and reactions that individuals have of Black women in the workforce impact their ability to succeed in that organizational structure.

Organizations must move beyond just the affirmative action programs and create an environment that is conducive for the growth of Black women. It is not just an individual issue, but an organizational issue. Fitzgerald and Shullman (1984) discuss the impact of affirmative action in career opportunities for women.

While the affirmative action issues surrounding the expansion of career opportunities for women have been publicized by both corporate public relations departments and feminist groups, recent statistics do not show that women have been able to develop managerial careers in most organizations. (p. 65)

The corporate organization has to understand their role and responsibility in the advancement for Black women and all it entails. There are issues of isolation, alienation, political landmines and glass ceilings that I will further detail as opportunities for organizations to assist Black women to navigate within their culture. The work of diversity is something that organizations are starting to embrace because it impacts the bottom line. "Workplace diversity is driving change. Both customers and workers are increasingly diverse, and some companies are finding it advantageous to encourage diversity" (Bierema, 1998, p. 95). Not only are organizations finding it advantageous but they are realizing that if they do not change the complexion of their organization, they will find themselves in lawsuits that will not only cut into their profits but may make them non-existent. For those lawsuits that we hear about in the media, there are that many more settlements that occur that we do not hear about. But it also makes good sense for

both the business and the community in which the organization resides to be good

corporate citizens and embrace what diversity really is. This positive approach to

embracing diversity can be defined as pluralism.

Pluralism is the approach in which differences are celebrated and valued.  The

organization creates a culture in which those who do not value the appreciation are questioned

and ridiculed. The ability to stereotype is not allowed in this model; instead an individual (or

group) will reframe their thinking to create a culture of inclusion.  The challenge with this model

is that it is not comfortable for most that are in the majority because it requires them to self-

examine and structure thoughts and actions toward appreciation of differences.

*Other Barriers for Black women in Corporate America*

The reality of being the only one and being isolated from your peers or staff is a reality

that every Black woman must face. It is something both the organization and the individual must

be painfully aware of.  Cobbs and Turnock (2003) introduces being Black in Corporate America:

> In every relationship throughout the organization, being a Black American is a
> salient feature.  There are times you feel uncomfortably visible, as if in a
> fishbowl.  At other times you feel you are not seen at all.  Not very long ago-not
> even two generations-each Black in Corporate American was in fact isolated as
> 'the first' and 'the only'. (p.38)

In a study conducted by Bell and Nkomo (1994), they discuss the fact that isolation will

be a part of what you will deal with in the organization that you choose.

Leaders need to be aware of the isolation that Black women face within their

organizations. With the exclusion and isolation that Black women experience, the ability to learn

and seek coping skills is very different for them than their White women counterparts. Hughes

(1996) discusses isolation:

> Isolation is a result of feeling as if one is the only person experiencing a given phenomenon. Feeling isolated increases the odds that one can objectify a mainstream reality, but the possibility remains that one may internalize the negative experience. Both gender and ethnicity isolate minority women. (p. 480)

The fact that Black women must deal with being a part of organizations in which they are faced with both their race and gender everyday compounds the complexities they face.

## Critical Race Feminism

Power refers to those that have the ability to make decisions about others. In organizations, power plays a critical role in the decisions of how advancement occurs. To understand the power players and where the power is aligned it is important to know how advancement occurs. Power also speaks to privilege that one has. "Privilege is often a trigger of diversity conflict, especially when majority groups and minority groups just can't seem to see things for the same perspective" (Thomas, 2005, p. 123). This would speak to career development and advancement. Advancement occurs through the power that the majority holds. With the power that they have they can give the illusion of advancement. That illusion is the glass ceiling with which many Black women are faced.

The glass ceiling concept has been utilized for the definition as to why women and people of color have not been able to ascend into certain positions within Corporate America. The glass ceiling is considered an invisible barrier, perception and attitude that Black women to advance beyond a certain level within an organization (Inman, 1998; Wirth & International Labour Office, 2001). In spite of efforts that have been made in organizations to embrace diversity, the number of Black women in executive positions as compared to the population is disproportionate and therefore organizations are still missing the mark. "Despite the progress made in the workplace by women and minorities in recent years, it is quite apparent that there remains a great disparity in the executive suite of Corporate America: women and minorities are

greatly under-represented in executive roles at major American companies" (Inman, 1998, p. 2).

The reality is that the glass ceiling for Black women should be called the concrete ceiling

because the chance of penetrating into to executive ranks is very difficult. Bell and Nkomo

(2001) indicate that the concrete ceiling manifests itself in the following ways: racism, higher

expectations, exclusion and isolation, and lack of company commitment of advancement for

Black women. There comes a comfort level with placing the minority group into positions that

are both non-threatening and will not impact the bottom line. These positions are considered

racialized positions that carry some value and are needed in the organizations but are safe

because of both the role of the job and the comfort by which minorities can fill them.

Racialized positions are those positions that have been created for people like Black

women and show a perceived commitment to diversity. The only problem with this is that these

positions are not mainstream roles that allow Black women to have viable career advancement

opportunities.  According to Powell, 1994, p. 241), "Characteristics of organizations other than

their commitment to EEO, AA programmes and HRM practices affect the proportion of

management positions."  These positions are safe from being part of the mainstream and they are

considered non threatening positions of which White men would not want.  They would be

positions like EEO Manager, Affirmative Action Manager, and Diversity Manager. These

positions are staff positions that would not be considered as revenue generating positions.  They

are also positions that are not in the mainstream of the organization and can become a dead end.

These positions are not developmental roles that could lead to executive level positions.  In other

words, these positions do not have any power associated with them. Organizations found a way

to incorporate diversity by hiring Blacks into these racialized positions. By having Black women

in these positions, it embeds the glass ceiling theory to solidify lack of advancement throughout

organizations. Black women are so often faced with the stereotypes that attempt to explain who they are.  These stereotypes are women faced on a daily basis.

The browning of America has been a popular comment that has been used in describing the changing demographics of America. This description of how America is becoming more multi-cultural is also true of what Corporate America has to watch. With the browning of America, it is evident that race is a part of what identifies individuals. There will not be equality for Black women because race and gender will stand in the face of all that is equal.  It is important for us to understand the story that each of these women tell through a critical race lens because their view is one that fuses race and gender.  As critical race is identified, it purports that race is a part of everything that exist for someone of color. But the goal is to also to empower those who are powerless and do not have a voice to address the injustices that have occurred. There is a cross section for these women that provide them the challenge of both race and gender. By looking at race as the first lens, it provides the foundation of how these women determine the strategies for succession in Corporate America. The next lens has a feminist view. Race and gender becomes an interpretation within the research and defines the epistemological view that is provided. When you intersect Critical Race and Black Feminism, you have Critical Race Feminism. Critical Race Feminism aligns with the story being told by each participant.

To just look at Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism is not enough to capture the true understanding of the story of Black women in Corporate America. It is important to view these women through a lens of both race and gender, which adds to the complexity for Black women.  Critical Race Feminism provides the view of both race and gender and it situates itself in the theoretical framework of this study.

Critical Race Feminism emerged in the twentieth century (Wing, 2003) to examine those in our society who are women of an ethnic background. For this study, Critical Race Feminism allows the intersection of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminism. "Critical Race Feminism constitutes a race intervention in feminist discourse, in it necessarily embraces feminism emphasis on gender oppression within a system of patriarchy," (Wing, 2003, p. 7). Wing (2003) indicates to truly understand what Black women are faced with you must view both their race and gender. You cannot separate the two and Critical Race Theory only provides the lens of race and while Black Feminism provides the lens of being a Black women, which focuses both on race and gender, is usually misinterpreted as being more about feminism than about race. According to Wing (2003, p.7), it is believed that "Their identities must be multiplied together to create a holistic one when analyzing the nature of the discrimination against them" (Wing, 2003, p. 7).

In a study that was completed by Few (2007), she discusses the importance of how Critical Race Feminism identifies the intersectionality and the "politics of location." Few states that, "I give to Black women an authoritative voice about their experiences rather than impose a normative gaze," (2007, p. 453). For this study, it is important that voice is provided and that we examine concepts of race and gender. "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (Crenshaw, 2003, p. 24). The duality that Black women face in the many different roles that they play speaks to the complexity of these women. The complexities of the roles these women play exist in their homes, communities and organizations. "Black women's experiences are much broader than the general categories that discrimination discourse provides," (Crenshaw, 2003, p. 28). If

we take the view of just one identity of these women, we deny the true issues of these Black women. "Thus, in an essentialist world, Black women's experience will always be forcibly fragmented before being subjected to analysis, as those who are 'only interested in race' and those who are 'only intersected in gender' take their separate slices of our lives," (Crenshaw, 2003, p. 34).  Race and gender shape the experiences that Black women face because it is a permanence of who they are.

<div align="center">Black women's Strategies in Negotiating Corporate Cultures</div>

As Black women negotiate through different corporate cultures, there is a perspective that learning should be a component of that negotiation: that learning could provide the ability to advance their careers and assist with career development.  Learning for these women helps provide the foundation to put together the road map of both survival and career progression.

*Career Development*

To better understand the importance of the relationships that impact Black women, I will outline the critical career development theories that can parallel the strategies that Black woman must face in achieving.  It is important to understand career development theories before discussing how it will impact Black women in making decisions about their career.  Donald Super's developmental self-concept theory of vocational behavior draws from two themes of the self-concept theory based on reading from Carl Rogers and writings on developmental psychology from Charlotte Buehler (Osipow, 1973).  Over the span of his lifetime, Super developed his theory into fourteen components.  The fundamental components that are the most basic consist of: self-concept, life space, life span and role changes in life (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Super's theory is very thorough in its scope and provides and outlines items that can be

used for organizations.  Super has outlined the fact that, in dealing with career development, you are dealing with humans who have cycles in their careers (Straby, 2001, p. 8).

Krumboltz's emphasis is his social learning theory that career development for individuals are impacted by genetic endowments, environment events, learning experiences and a task approach skill.  This learning theory utilizes components of Krumboltz's theory. "Learning experiences are the primary focus of Holland's theory. Learning experiences are involved in creating self-observation generalization (e.g., interests), the primary focus of Holland's theory" (Straby, 2001, pg. 9).  This theory outlines the following trends that must occur: individuals must expand interest and capabilities; individuals must prepare for changing work; individuals must become empowered; and individuals must inventory personal and professional challenges.

The challenges of each of the theories discussed are based on White educated males of European descent as the way of knowing and doing.  In most instances, these theories allow no room for race or gender.  The most obvious of race and gender that is not evident is the Ginzberg theory which indicated that women are not "career-minded."  The reality is that Black women have to find their way to a job and then pursue a career.  Based on the Catalyst study (1998) there is a need to have a systematic approach to understand the careers of women of color in business. The fact is that women are important to corporations because of the consumer aspect, or better said, the buying power of this group.  It is critical that businesses tap into women of color because they are a growing buying power that should be not be ignored (Catalyst, 1998).

Career development must be defined for Black women before we can discuss the relationships, meaning what it looks like for Black women to have careers in organizations. Based on the article written by Hackett and Byers (1996), the best model that has emerged for

career development to include ethnicity would be from Bandura's social cognitive theory

(Hackett & Byars, 1996). Bandura (1977) indicates that there are four sources of information:

performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, physiological and affective states, and verbal

persuasion. Bandura stresses the importance of personal performance -- phrasing it as self-

efficacy. He outlines the fact that individual have to have faith and confidence in their own

ability along with all the other components that create career success. "An efficacy expectation

is the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the

outcomes" (Bandura, 1977, p. 79). This understanding of self-efficacy can draw parallels to self-

confidence. Self-confidence provides you the ability to be successful and determine success by

personal standards.

The reality is career development for many Black women is often over-shadowed by the

fact that they are the major breadwinners and their primary goal is to pay the bills (Cohn, 1997,

p. 168). Often, the realization of just living comes into play before the unlikely goal of having a

career. And the realization that discrimination occurs has to be addressed as well. Discrimination

occurs both outside and inside the Black race. These are the things that most Black women must

face as they are making decisions about where to gain career advancement. While having those

in mind, the impact of the relationships that these women have are paramount to both their

advancement and success. The concept of perseverance and making a way out of no way has

been a mantra for many women of color and the fruits of those labors come to fruition very

slowly. In a project in which Peterson interviewed former students of two urban high schools on

their advancement and self-enhancement, the emerging theme was that these individuals "had

well-thought-out personal philosophies and self-concepts" (Peterson, 1997, p. 172). Specific

research has indicated that the ability to persevere without those mechanisms of information and

support is vital for those who are part of ethnic groups, (Peterson, 1997; Johnson-Bailey &

Tisdell, 1998).

After Bandura, Linda Gottfredson began to critique the career development theories and

felt that the theories lacked the individual's freedom in career development and pursuit of their

career satisfaction. "Gottfreson theory has four stages that consist of: orientation to size and

power, orientation to sex roles, orientation to social valuation, orientation to internal unique self.

Her theory is a hybrid of Holland and Super's theory as they relate to self concept and job

realization," (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997, pp. 13-14). This theory takes into account the stages that

individuals must go through and although Gottafredson does not explicitly indicate that it is more

gender friendly, she does highlight the fact that it allows life's changes to occur and is not as

linear as previous theories. In understanding career development models, it gives a backdrop to

the type of relationships that Black women must have to assist in enhancing their careers and

career stages but the relationships in which they must be involved for advancement.

With the understanding of all the career development theories that are mentioned, it is

vital to I tie them together for the understanding of the type of relationships that Black women

will find critical in advancement. These relationships are outlined as organizations, managers,

mentors, role models and themselves. The relationships discussed are those that impact the way

in which Black women advance and how they feel about themselves during this journey. What is

discussed resonates throughout the literature provided on career development theories. To

understand the theories provides insight into how they correspond with the relationships that are

important for Black women to form and cultivate. In addition, within each of these relationships

resides a developmental or non-developmental component. The corporate environment has to be

developed for Black women to advance. Based on the Catalyst study (2003), organizations that

have an environment that is conducive for both the growth and advancement of Black women

will find that they will recruit and retain this group.  Organizations have to place a lot of effort

into creating environments to retain Black women because well-trained Black women are highly

marketable.. In other words, their closet competitors will take advantage of the talent that they

have trained and developed. There are several barriers stated by Catalyst (1998) that

organizations have to remove: providing access to executives providing mentoring, providing

high visible assignments and having role models who look like the group.

Succession planning is way in which organizations can monitor whether retention and

advancement is occurring with Black women.  Catalyst (1998) stated:

> Companies that have been successful at retaining and advancing women of color
> generally have recognized and addressed the need to integrate diversity and
> succession planning into a systematic and seamless process in which corporate
> executives and directors partner with HR and diversity professionals to plan and
> monitor the career progress of valued women of color. (p. 33)

This understanding of the importance of the integration of diversity for organizations has been a

buzz word for the last 20 years.  Black women make up a large portion of consumers and as

consumers: they are part of organizations. Organizations realize that they have to disintegrate the

barriers that exist and people of color also realize that this is an opportunity to advance.  There

are several components that have to occur to make that happen. The approaches that have been

outlined by Thomas and John (1999) are between assimilation and pluralism or a combination of

both.

In order for inclusion of Black women into an organization to occur, there has to be

sponsors that are embracing and leading it.  Diversity initiative can only be successful if

corporate leaders are promoting the change.  It must be considered a priority by the leaders in the

organization, otherwise it will fail.  Regarding sponsors, there must be organizational sponsors

and individual sponsors for Black women which will create an environment that will be favorable for advancement.  Access to informal networks allows accessibility to knowledge and information to help be placed on projects or into positions that are highly visible. In addition, informal networks provide not only access for the Black women but it also allows the mentor or role models who are part of this matrix to give data back to the organization and to those in charge.

In creating informal networks, individuals tend to gravitate to individuals that are much like themselves. This alone is challenging for Black women because there are very few individuals like themselves in executive ranks. With that visibility being so few and far between, accessibility is near to impossible. But the reality is that these informal networks provide a safe environment to be yourself and let your guard down. The ability to break into mainstream networks may be difficult but having access to some informal network will create comfort in the organization.  "Although Blacks may have difficulty in braking into some White networks, they generally have an easier time breaking into organization's Black networks" (Livers & Caver, 2003, p. 100). Access to at least an informal network provides you some balance while working within the organization. What is becoming more accessible is the fact that a few Black leaders are scattered throughout the organization that can provide an outlet and an opportunity to understand the organizations dynamics through their counsel.  "Although these might not have the organizational power of some of the other mainstream groups, they can still greatly assist Blacks in their careers" (Livers & Caver, 2003, p. 100). These informal networks can lead to other opportunities and access.

The access to leaders throughout the organization is critical to gain experience and exposure to those that make decisions. This is where having both an organizational and

individual sponsor assists in this process. It has always been an unwritten rule in Corporate America that actual decisions are made prior to meetings but yet on golf courses, at happy hour and in other social settings. Because of the multiple roles that Black women play in the home community and work, the accesses to these soirées are not open. The key to having access is positive visibility. The opportunity to meet and speak with someone in a social setting allows for the guards to be taken down and you truly get to know someone. The ability to play golf, talk about sporting events and hang out is something that men have the corner on. Executive leaders in organizations have to open the doors for this access for Black women.

Admission to the high visible projects is a way to allow the organization to know your skills and see your capabilities. As a result of the informal networks, it allows access to know the high visible positions. This access allows individuals to see your performance and hopefully allows them to look beyond race and gender. The challenge with highly visible assignments and roles is that you have to ask or be asked for them to occur and if Black women are not part of that circle, it is very difficult to access those opportunities. The understanding of this plays very heavily in cultivating those relationships that provide you the access to know what is going on and to be asked to be present. "Because of their lack of contact with other departments or key organization executives, they (women) may be overlooked for promotion" (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1984, p. 67). This requires that women and their networks provide them exposure to those that can see and assist in advancement to the next level.

The biggest challenge for Black women to advance is to create relationships of trust and know that they can trust those that will be of value to them in their career. The ability to cultivate trust will be crucial for further advancement in any organization. The importance of relationships, as before mentioned, in sponsors, mentors and the like are the linkage for

advancement and in order to have those relationships, you must be able to trust individuals and in turn, be trustworthy. The ability to build trustworthy relationships will establish Black women in the organizations that are seeking advancement. In doing so, you have to be open. "Fear, or the lack of being in a safe haven, has been one of the reasons Blacks are reticent to share their private world" (Livers & Caver, 2003, p. 87). This inability to trust will not open opportunities for advancement and growth. The bottom line is that Black women have an opportunity to trust, especially as it pertains to relationship regarding personal information. The challenge is opening up to people and historically this has not been a positive experience for Blacks. "Blacks often perceive that Whites not only share too much of their own personal information but expect Black to share their own personal lives as well -- and this is a source of discomfort and awkwardness for Blacks" (Livers & Caver, 2003, p. 97). This goes back to creating those alliances that will help you to build that trust in both the organizations and individuals. You need to build what Livers and Caver (2003) call trust agents. "These trust agents need to cross race and gender lines. In these trust agents you learn and be coached about your behaviors, issues and perceptions and they in turn provide a different lens in which Black women will be able to see themselves clearly within the organization" (Livers & Caver, 2003, p. 89).

Knowing who you are and what you are willing to deal with is critical for Black women to make a decision about their career advancement. This allows Black women to make decisions about positions that they are willing to take and organizations that they are willing to be a part of. In knowing who you are, you are aware of your leadership style. Leadership style allows alignment within the organization that you are trying advance. "As organizational structures are flattening and requiring more participative management, some suggest that many women have a natural style that will enable them to more successfully lead and manage within these new

corporate environments compared to the more male dominated pyramid-shaped hierarchy" (Crampton & Mishra, 1999, p. 94). To understand your own personal style is critical in the way in which you manage and you lead in the organization. Being a good leader is critical to being able to rise into executive positions. The advantage in knowing yourself allows you to understand your development opportunities and to seek a mentor, role model or training to enhance or strengthen that area. This self awareness allows you to seek opportunities in the organization you are in or other organization. "Career strategies are much more entrepreneurial as individuals realize the importance of developing and marketing themselves rather than their positions" (Inman, 1998, p. 37).

Being equipped when you are called to the table through succession planning is fundamental. In other words, you need to make sure that you have all the qualifications that are required. Formal education and required certifications or formal knowledge are important to ensure that is happens. Credibility goes along with knowledge. In ensuring that Black women are bringing what it takes to the table, they must have both experience and knowledge to do the job that they have been expected to do. Because Black women are faced with breaking the stereotype of incompetence and lack of qualifications, they are constantly faced with always being better than their White counterparts with more education and experience. The fact is that Black women are going to be judged by a very different standard because of the stereotypes that exist. Nkomo and Bell (2001), explain what Black women were faced with as it relates to competency, "The Black women felt that they were held to a higher standard because they were always fighting the stereotype of being incompetent, despite having the right educational and experience credentials" (Bell & Nkomo, 2001, p. 145). Both competence and credibility are considered psychological characteristics. "The more positive the regard in which one is held, the

more likely the person is to have credibility with others" (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999, p. 115).

The combination of competence and credibility allows the grounding of intuitive sense and

allows interconnectivity within the organizations (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999) for a Black woman

to reach the executive ranks. The opportunity for visibility that leads to creditability has been

outlined by Livers and Caver (2003):

> Gaining large-scale visibility, or at least visibility in the eyes of those more
> influential than them, can help Blacks promote and retain their creditability by
> placing their actions in a public forum, and thereby making those actions a part of
> the institutions history. As an executive, it is imperative that you have both
> competence and creditability which in turn will provide you with influence within
> the organization. Influence is the ability to become a change agent and valued in
> the organization. (p. 103)

The ability to demonstrate credibility and confidence will allow Black women to be viewed as

capable and with that recognized capability confidence in a corporate environment will be

apparent.

Black women are becoming a part of this monolithic group that consists of White people

in corporations. Understanding how advancement should occur for Black women is important so

it can occur. There are several components that lend itself to this advancement. Those

components consist of the Black women (of course), the organizations that she will be a part of

and those relationships that is part of her career path. These relationships consist of mentors

(formal or informal), role models, managers, and self. Organizations and Black women must

play a part in this career development path. This path is one of winding and treacherous roads

(Bell & Nkomo 2001, p. 99). But it is a path nonetheless that many Black women have made the

decision to take. Or better yet, did not have a choice but to go down that path. Due to family

commitments, obligations and making a living, having a career is critical to both survival and

satisfaction. With that being said, it is important to outline how that road should be traveled void

of u-turns. The importance of relationships of career planning should be viewed in light of how theories that may lend themselves to career development for Black women.

*Feminist Pedagogy*

Feminist pedagogy is important as it relates to how women learn. Women were consistently told that they would not be successful in the hard sciences such as math, chemistry, biology and were encouraged to go into areas such as home economics, literature, teaching and nursing. "Feminist epistemology and philosophy of science studies the ways in which gender does and ought to influence our perceptions of knowledge, the knowing subject and practices inquiry and justification," (Anderson, 2004, p. 1). The concept of how gender "situates" a topic provides you with how to determine your methods of research. Feminist pedagogy is the strategy to teach women so that they are empowered to impact their own lives. It acknowledges the importance of relationships for women in learning, and self confidence (Tisdell, 1993, p. 93). The concept of being liberated through learning should be considered the foundation of how women learn. Feminist pedagogy gives you both the structure and the strategy for women to learn. Within in this construct, the acknowledgment that women learn through relationships is explicit and respected. The fact that women have also taken on the caretaker role is realized in feminist pedagogy. Understanding the construct of power within feminist pedagogy is important because the concept of having knowledge as a form of emancipation is critical. This facet requires that feminist understand that learning incidentally is a way of learning for women. A women's position in society and gaining equal rights and opportunities for women resides within the power relation between women and men. Gender equality resonates in the understanding of how women learn and the power struggle that exists with that ability to have access to learning.

As Crotty (1998) explains feminine epistemology he states that women "theorize the act of knowing in a way different from that of men" (p. 174) and because of that, the way of knowing will be different, as men and women have to work together in a corporate culture but will inevitably interpret situations very differently. There are many different classifications that provide definition of where individuals may reside within feminism. Crotty (1998) defines that feminism is outlined as liberal feminism, Marxism feminism, radical feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, existentialist feminism, and postmodern feminism. Liberal feminism is considered a "means to an end" (Crotty, 1998, p. 164) as it out lines what a liberalist is in political standings. Marxism feminism defines itself as equality for women in relation to men. It looks at all equality of women and correlates a cost to that equality whether you work in the home our outside of the home. Radical feminism is out of the liberation of women and speaks to the oppression that women have faced. The suffrage movement stands on the concept of radical feminism. Interestingly, radical feminism is stated to deal with sexuality and this is where the rise of lesbianism comes out. This form of feminism speaks to women's rights, as it relates to women's bodies and having the rights of control of that. When women were dealing with Roe vs. Wade and having the right to make decisions about the body would be considered radical feminist. Psychoanalytic feminism grounds itself within the Freudian framework (Crotty, 1998, p. 166) in which it is outlined. Existentialist feminism is stated that men had to continue to make women subordinate as a form of control. This form of control exists in myths that are stated about women (Crotty, 1998, p. 167). The criticism in feminism that rises out of who is actually speaking for whom in the discourse of feminism. Haynes and Flannery (2000) offer a framework to understand the critical dialogue about how and why women learn. The structure of the book provides you the following framework: voice, identity and self-esteem and ways of

knowing. The literature from this book was pulled from several pieces that recognize the understanding of women's knowledge. There is an expansive growth in the way in which women are gaining knowledge. It is from formal to informal, incidental to transformational but the fact is that they are receiving knowledge and there is a different way in which scholars realize that women learn. It is very unlike how women were told that they learn, only through emotions and with very little substance. Women have become empowered and powerful in their quest for knowledge. Haynes and Flannery (2000) states:

> As gendered persons, we learn who we are as girls and women; we learn how to act, how to interact with others, how we are valued because of our gender, and what place and power we have as women in various groups and societies. (p. 4)

This synthesis of Haynes and Flannery (2000) takes you through that maze of how women learn and what hurdles women have jumped and the challenges women continue to overcome.

Identity and self esteem are wrapped in the roles that women must occupy. Roles establish our activities and establish who we are. With identity there is the difference between the mental (psychological) and the physical (physiological). The gender part of learning deals with both the mental and physical aspect of individuals. Because of this distinction, the roles that women have played have come largely because of how they were socialized within their families and the fact that society solidified those roles through school, community and environment. The roles of women have taken on more than just the task assigned, it provides the context in which women learn and it affects the way someone will react and the outcomes of a situation (Hayes, 2001, p. 39). The origin of identity began at home. The understanding of self-doubt became present in the women as children. The experiences at home outlined the understanding of knowing and then perpetuated through to adulthood. "Experiences in the home are another source of self-doubt for women that can influence their learning. These experiences

include women's childhood homes or families of origin and their adult household"(Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 74). The experiences from home cultivated into what one would become in womanhood. But from the cultivation comes the issue of authority, specifically for Black women. The concern with authority has been a distress for Black women. When identity and self-esteem is measured based on environment and the way of knowing, the concept of authority plays a role.

During the process of learning, it is important that the pitfalls to women's learning do not occur in the educational process. The challenges that are faced consist of creating a learning situation that could apply to everyone but to do that you have to take out the social context. This is not realistic. In addition, creating a situation where it is men versus women in the learning process creates the lines that women cannot cross and continues to build that power structure that is prevalent in the learning process. But in the same respect, there can not be overgeneralizations that are made about men and women because it trivializes the learning process for each. With the concept of overgeneralization during the learning process, you want to make sure that a generic category for women is created that the importance of diversity is not lost. In each of the pitfalls that are mentioned, making one concept apply to all will hurt the importance of women as learners and the importance for the learning for women to be women centered (focused on their learning). In order to ensure that both gender and race are recognized in the learning process, the focus on one model has to become the model that focuses on the aspect of gender and race in the learning process. "There are two ways in which we might give more attention to diversity in future research on women's learning: by overcoming White, middle-class biases while being more inclusive of currently under-represented groups of women..." (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 228). This concept will allow the understanding of learning through the lens of others and

theories that will be applicable for those groups.  This will be especially important for Black women as the research will create theories that will apply. "Our knowledge can be considerably enhanced by the work and perspective of women scholars from more diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. "The work of feminist of Color in other disciplines has yielded significant new insights into women's diversity" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 231). Women of color have to ensure that their voice is heard. They must go beyond the concerns with silence and authority and make those voices heard.  They must break the cycle that has been perpetuated and recognize that transformation begins with the one who should transform, not necessarily those that need transformation.  The importance of learning, formal or informal, transformational or incidental must be done and it has to include the social context because no one should be denied a say-so.

Voice, as discussed by Haynes and Flannery (2000) represents them through giving voice, developing voice, reclaiming voice and no voice (which is silence).  Voice is considered a source of power so when you create a situation in which a person is not willing to use their voice, you have then taken their power.  For women, voice can be used as a narrative that they can tell their story due to the powerful and colorful images that women have.

Silence has been used in many different ways for women during the learning process. When women do not allow their voice, they allow space for others which quickly diminish the voice and place her in silence.  For some, the idea of silence is a form of protection. For those who could respond and do not because they live in fear does not allow the true story to be heard or told.  However, by the learner looking at the understanding of learning, silence should only be used if that is what the women learner wants to do. "The extreme sex-role stereotypes that the silent women accept reflect the powerlessness they have experienced.  Men are active and get

things done, while women are passive and incompetent" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 29). Due to the continued stereotype that women have as it relates to silence is the very reason that they must use and cultivate the voice that they have.  Silence is a detriment to the learning process for women and the use of voice allows them to be heard and emancipated. Women's impression of voice is that it is mired with conflict and confusion and silence will lessen that. "Words were used to separate and diminish people, not to connect and empower them. The silent women worried that they would be punished just for using words-any words" (Belenky et al., 1997, p. 24). Because of this theory women learned to deny their voice and not to be heard. The absence of voice for women is critical to understand the other points of voice that women can use. Based on the type of silence (if any) in which women have participated will indicate if they need to develop their voice, have voice given to them or re-define their voice.  Moving from silence into the development of voice provides a since of liberation that is both exhilarating but with a price to be paid.  The research that was completed in *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al.,1997) sets forth that when women become more aware of their inner understanding for knowledge and value then a 'small voice' awakens inside of them and they begin to have an inner strength that allows development of voice.

The development of voice indicates that a voice is there but needs more expansion and possibly experiences to assist in the development. The opportunity for illumination allows the voice to come into its own and provide knowledge.  During this time of development is also a time of discovery.  A chance to critically reflect and then to provide power behind the voice to give knowledge, allows the voice to increase. "We are constantly creating and recreating through voice; giving voice to ourselves is a process of identity development itself, not simply a

reflection of what already exist" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 99).  This opportunity is the beginning for the women as a learner.

Giving voice provides a right to be heard to someone who never had one.  The thought of voice is liberating and gives a women power. It can also be constraining just as it can be liberating.  Hayes and Flannery (2000) use the example of Women of Color (as identified as not only Black women but Asian, Island Pacifica, Native American women) being constrained due to the numerous labels that they will have to claim as a result of having voice.  "When voice is given it requires individuals to have to question the status quo and place them in a situation that is new but frightening," (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 93).  It is a form of freedom.

Having the opportunity to reclaim voice is indicating that a voice was there and taken away and now the voice is regained.  The interpretation of voice is that something was taken and the individual had to recover what was once was theirs.  This concept of voice gives the women learner power through her voice. "For Women of Color, a central issue in reclaiming a voice my be regaining the ability to articulate identities that have been repressed because of experience in racism and sexism" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 98).  Black women have been challenged with not having voice and being silenced and using the silence as a weapon to hide the fear of calling attention. Due to the multiple identities that women must participate in they must understand the voice they should use. As women are identifying and re-identifying themselves, their voices are part of this identification and re-identification. "We are constantly creating and recreating ourselves through voice; giving voice to ourselves is a process of identity development itself, not simply a reflection of what already exists" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 99).

According to O'Donnell (1999), Habermas introduces us to the importance of communicative action and that action is a part of social enlightenment and the opportunity to use

communication as a form of sense of self through language. Critical theory and self-directed learning, discusses the stance that Habermas felt as it related to communicative action and that communication was used to just be in the circumstance. "Habermas does not conceive his analysis of the general structure of action oriented to reaching understanding or agreement as a continuation of critical race is identified, it purports that race is a part of everything that exist for someone of color. But the goal is to also empower those that are powerless and does not have a voice for the injustices that have occurred. Theory of knowledge by other means" (O'Donnell, 1999, p. 252). Habermas provides the ideology that communication is the form of the narrative and that, as oppose to agreeing to what is being said, we should just try to understand what is being said. Scott Stroud completed an analysis of the critical theory around how Habermas discusses text as it relates to narrative language in a paper that was presented at the Annual meeting of the critical theory roundtable and discusses the understanding of the reader. For the purpose of understanding, the researcher is related as the reader. "The projected world of text relates to a possible states of being, and the reader partaking in the text can see this world as it relating to them in three ways-as being projected world appropriated to relate to their past, to their present situation, and to the their future projects and goals," (Stroud, 2001, p. 6). It is important as a researcher that we understand the text and remind ourselves that it is being related to us and how it fits into the subjectivity of our understanding in relation to what is being said. Stroud uses this as an example as he discusses narrative as it relates to fictional narrative but I feel that the parallels are there as we discuss what is being said and how it relates to those that are providing the information (the participant) and those that are analyzing the information (the researcher). "Included in much hermeneutic theory is the prospect of gaining an understanding of the text that is deeper or goes further than the author's own understanding," (Crotty, 1998).

Delving deeper into the understanding of qualitative research and how to go about researching the topic, narrative analysis is the method that could be used. Again, my goal is to allow my research participants to tell their story with the truth that they know as it relates to them.  It gives these Women of Color the opportunity to have voice and use it to inform others so that it may help others.

The way an individual knows is involved with how they take in information. Hayes and Flannery (2000) discuss the way of knowing by subjective knowing and connected knowing, as it pertains to women.  Understanding is not just a physical term that is used but it involves intimacy and an equal portion of self and the information (Belenky et al., 1997).  There is a difference between knowledge and understanding.  Knowledge is just the information that is given but understanding is the personal interpretation that involved personal context along with the information that is given.  Subjective knowing is the knowing within that involves self-intuition and global processing.  Separate knowing is individualistic knowing. This type of knowing involves impersonal reasoning. It is void of emotions and uses the concept of knowledge with nothing else involved with it.  Connected knowing involves the importance of relationships.

Subjective knowing is connecting inward. The learners look inward to draw the understanding of knowledge and how it should be applied. The understanding of truth is connected to the personal understanding of subjective knowing. With this learning, you do not seek others to provide you interpretation of the knowledge. You draw from your own personal experiences and draw both the conclusion and interpretation that you must have about the knowledge that you have been given.  Within subjective knowing, intuition is the crux to the feeling that the learner has and the ability to tie that to an experience to gain knowledge.

Subjective knowledge ties the connection of the learning to the experience that is gained.  This is

considered an effective way in which women learn.  The critique to this way of knowing is that it

is perceived that women do not have the capability to have rational thought processing because

they only are equipped with subjective knowing, which is embedded in emotions and intuition.

The idea of intuition involved in knowing has been both ridiculed and not accepted as a form of

learning.  It is much like the sixth sense that is discussed that women have.  It may not involve

any concrete knowledge of the subject but just a 'hunch' or 'feeling' that the learner may be

having. The advantage in subjective knowing for women is that it ties the relationships that are

valued in the understanding of knowledge.  "Establishing rapport with others, nurturing them,

and responding to their needs depends on appreciation for the subjective, sensitivity to affect as

well as intellect, and understanding that goes beyond the purely rational" (Hayes, 2001, p. 38).

Connected knowing involves the importance of relationships and having a connection

with someone else as you encounter the learning process.  In this connectedness the importance

of relationship and having the opportunity to provide and receive support during the learning

process is important.  Because of this connectedness, women are able to cultivate and build

relationships with those with whom they have personal experiences.  "Through this type of

learning, the learner is very willing to believe and trust as oppose to judge and put labels on the

learning" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 125).  This way of knowing provides the

interconnectedness and the relationship that women seek in their learning process.

Transformational learning is a concept that needs to be understood as it relates women's

way of knowing. Most of the teaching on transformational theory has been in learning and is tied

to Jack Meizrow in Adult education. Transformation learning takes a learner through the journey

of self-awareness and critical reflection. The ability of critical reflection can then be related to

actions that would require emancipation or conscious awareness by the newly informed learner. The learner has the opportunity to take this knowledge and apply it to the current environment that they are in or take this acquired knowledge to another environment to provide enlightenment. As Black women become a force that must be recognized in academia, the opportunity to enlighten becomes more frequent and those that have the ability to transform must take their place at the proverbial table that is required to make a change. Meizrow (1996) says it best when he describes the fact that new learners must use their new knowledge to spread the news. "Transformative learning includes learners making informed decisions of how and when to act upon their new perspectives" (Meizrow, 1995, p. 124). There is a great opportunity to open the discussion about learning but also to make the transition to the fact that culture and race impact the way in which people learn and Black women have the greatest opportunity to do so. They are both equipped and knowledgeable about learning for women and how it impacts them in any setting.

Women's learning has not been on the forefront of the agendas of universities or colleges, historically or presently. "Women's learning is shaped in part by their access to formal education" (Hayes & Flannery, 2000, p. 270). The consideration of curriculum and student development for women is not as advanced for women as it is for men. Women have now made strides and the consideration that women know how to learn has not been the issue. What now is something that is in consideration is that you have as many women as men in higher education and receiving formal education but in comparison the numbers are not parallel with positions in corporate or academia (Hayes & Flannery, 2000). Even though women continue to dominant institutions there is no correlation of women's learning and job attainment and advancement to the numbers in the schools obtaining bachelor's, master's and professional degrees. As this

divide is recognized, there are constructs that must be understood to show how women learn. This very learning transcends into how learning and development occurs for Black women.

The ability to overcome the fear of learning of any subject is the first hurdle that women must overcome. When you overlay gender with race, it become equally challenging.  Women have success in learning despite the lack of support.  Because of the success that women have, regardless of the multiple roles that they have to assume, they learn, in spite of societal norms. "While at one time women were excluded from higher education, they now constitute more than half of all bachelor's degree recipients," (Hayes, 2001, p. 35).  Women evoke emotions, intuition, relationships and subjectivity in the way they learn. The importance of relationships is found in most of the literature as it relates to the way women learn.  Connected knowing allows the relational aspect of learning for women to become realized (Hayes, 2001).  "Connected knowers realize that they can only approximate other people's experiences and so can gain only limited access to their knowledge" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1997, p. 113). Within this connected knowing relationships are the crux to that knowing. "Relationships are inseparable from identity and help women gain a sense of self" (Bierema, 2001, p. 58).  This understanding of relationship allows the conceptualization of feminist pedagogy and how Black women can situate themselves in the way of learning and knowing.

<div align="center">Chapter Summary</div>

The gaps in the literature provide an opportunity for this study to provide an explanation and an understanding of Black women in Corporate America and how they learn and adapt in that hostile environment. There are particularly challenged in this corporate setting since Black women only recently moved into positions of leadership and power in corporate. While there are works that offer parallels of what White and Black women deal with, and suggest how Black

People (emphasis on Black Men) deal in corporate, there is nothing that explicitly outlines how Black women learn and adapt to Corporate America. The hope is that this research continues the dialogue for Black women.

Racism and sexism is something that Black Women face as they go through their experiences and roles in Corporate America. The literature in this chapter explored tokenism, dualism and assimilation.  The literature indicated that Black Women, because of their rate of entering into the workforce with higher education are a population that Corporate America will need to utilize as talent in their organizations.  Furthermore, the chapter also presented the career development literature, highlighting the gap in the existing literature regarding this group

This chapter also presented the study's theoretical frame, .Critical Race Feminism, which explores the duality of those race and feminism.  This framework also provided assistance in discussing how the literature relates to Black Women who were negotiating the Corporate culture

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine how racism and sexism impacted the career progression of executive Black women in Corporate America. The research questions that guide the study were: (1) What are the significant learning experiences that supported Black women's career progression in Corporate America? (2) What strategies have Black women used to support their career progression in Corporate America?

Qualitative research is the method that was used for the study. "Often qualitative researchers undertake a qualitative study because there is lack of theory or an existing theory fails to adequately explain a phenomenon," (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 5). Qualitative research has traditionally being used in social sciences to help those in that profession." Drawing from a long tradition in anthropology, sociology, and clinical psychology, qualitative research has, in the last twenty years, achieved status and visibility in the social sciences and helping professions," (Merriam & Associates, p. 3, 2002). Qualitative research outlines strategies that allow the researcher to involve and communicate with the participants of the study. Furthermore, data collected have termed soft, that is, rich in description of people, places and conversations that are not easily handled by statistical procedures," (Bogdan & Bilkin, 2003, p. 2). Qualitative research allows the opportunity for the participants to be heard and have their story told. Due to the fact that human interaction is unpredictable and very complex, qualitative research provides an avenue to get to the meaning of each experience that the participants encounter. "The qualitative researchers' goal is to better understand human behavior and experience. They seek to

grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe those meanings,"

(Bogdan & Bilkin, 2003, p. 38).

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

This study was informed by narrative analysis because the researcher focused on collecting the stories of the participants. Their narratives outline their work lives and how it has shaped them. This method of inquiry allowed the Black women in this study to use their voice to relate their experiences. The participant told their story in their own style; through their narratives and descriptions. Narrative style allows the participant the space to provide details as they remember. The voices of these women are paramount to the research. "As a qualitative research method, narrative inquiry serves the researcher who wishes to understand a phenomenon or an experience rather than to formulate a logical or scientific explanation. The object of narrative inquiry is understanding-the outcome of interpretation-rather than explanation" (Kramp, 2004, p. 104). Narrative inquiry is a form of cultural expression. "Narrative analysis is not in itself a culture of inquiry but rather a range of techniques for interpreting the meaning of texts with the structure of stories. Narrative form implies that something happened to particular subjects in a given lifeworld" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 115). Narrative allows you to take the understanding of language as it sits in the culture of the participant and provide the meaning to the text. "Ensuring to utilizing narrative inquiry as a method of research is the understanding that narrative is a way of knowing"(Kramp, 2004, p. 106).

The literature provides different accounts of narrative inquiry and the interchanges between narrative inquiries with narrative analysis. It is important to define the two and any differences that should be accounted for. Interestingly enough, the words have been used

interchangeably.  For the sake of understanding, narrative inquiry is the method that is used to acquire knowledge from a subject based on the research topic.  Narrative analysis is taking the narrative that has been provided and adding themes to come up with a conclusion inferred by the participant. Both narrative inquiry and narrative analysis are bonded by the broad definition of narrative and trying to pursue the truth through the means of narration (Verhesschen, 1999).

The ability to tell a story for a person is a sense of power.  In several cultures, the ability to have a story told over and over again was the preservation of the history of the culture.  Many cultures had a historian and that story would be told to the next historian.  So the importance of telling a story has being evident, even as we look at the interpretation of the bible.  "Narrative knowing is expressed in a narrative form we call stories" (Kramp, 2004, p. 106).  This story gives you the account of what your participant has gone through in their eyes.  The form of narrative inquiry provides voice which in turn provides them the participant power to tell their story.  "As a way of knowing, narrative enables the storyteller to organize the story told by link events, perceptions and experiences," (Kramp, 2004, p. 107). This linkage allows for flow of the narrative and provides a connectivity that is essential as the story is being told.  In the form of a narrative the actual event is what makes it the phenomena for the participant.  It places the understanding of knowing through their eyes.  "A narrative connects events, actions, and experiences and moves them through time," (Kramp, 2004, p. 110).

As the researcher, we have the opportunity to take the narrative and determine the themes that the participants have communicated. But the power is held with the participant.  "Narrative privileges the storyteller. It is through the personal narrative, a life, as told rather than through the observations as researchers, that we come to know life experienced," (Kramp, 2004, p. 111).  This form of communication gives you a view into the inquirer that would otherwise not be

heard. This form of analysis gives so much more voice to the participant and allows the understanding of their message from their context. Even though this information could be considered subjective to the subject it holds an amount of validation through the eyes of the participant. It gives you more than you would have if, you as the researcher, were merely doing observations and gathering themes from that method. "In addition to truth claims and appropriateness claims, I see narrative, more than other types of communicative action, as highlighting and inner world of the participant o which the inquirer has privileged access," (Conle, 2001, p. 28). Conle (2001) states it best when she outlined the fact that we would not have access to this form of communication if we do allow the participant to have voice and tell the story. The story is drawn from the participant data. But nonetheless it is their recount of what happened and how it impacted them. As a researcher, this is an enormous opportunity to just let the story be told through the eyes of the participant.

It has been mentioned that the participant provides us their account of things that have happened with their truth attached to it. The biggest opportunity for narrative analysis is that we are only aware of one truth, that of the participant. That truth is on the interpretation of that participant. But with the story being told, there could be many variations of the truth, of which, we only get the one account of the truth, that of the participant. Collins (1985) discusses truth and how it is viewed in narrative research:

> One recurrent finding of much comparative research on narrative form is that, while narrative proceeds to be playing on thematic oppositions and is somehow perceived as having a larger significance; both the thematic oppositions and the larger significance are rarely explicitly stated. Rather, they are left for the audience to infer. (p. 58)

Once the story has reached the researcher, it could be in a third or fourth iteration of the story. Now, we cannot discount what the participant feels the truth is but the question remans, do we

have the absolute truth and is there anything like the absolute truth? As the researcher, you can only know the truth through the participant. "You as the researcher give authority to the storyteller, whom you acknowledge as the one who knows and tells,"(Kramp, 2004, p. 111).

Truth is a matter that continues to come up when you speak about the challenges of narrative inquiry. The critique is that the truth that is it coming from the participant is their interpretation of the truth. You have a challenge that truth is not absolute in narrative analysis nor is truth absolute in any form or method of qualitative or quantitative research. But I would argue that regardless of what is defined as truth, it will be the participant's truth. "In order to be able to make the right choice, the researcher first has to give a perspicuous representation of the present situation. The narrative researcher has the task to tell the truth" (Verhesschen, 1999, p. 50).

*Black women and Narrative Analysis*

In making the decision to study Black women, it is important to use the most effective method to get the stories from the women that would help to shape the analysis of the research. In addition, it is important due to the culture inferences that occur when interviewing Black women (Johnson-Bailey, 2004). "Studies of American Indian, Afro-American, Hawaiian-American, and working-class British narrative events have shown the importance of continuous audience validation, intonational cues, and implicit conventions for cyclic repetition in determining the form of narratives as performed," (Collins, 1985, p. 59). As a researcher, we must remind ourselves that this form of method provides voice and allows Black women to have power that they may not have. "The format has been relied on heavily by this group of researchers, especially those doing work on women of color, because the implicit collaborative and interactive nature of the designs is recognized for attending the power disparities involved in

research" (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 124). What is important about the narrative process is that it is a format that provide less interference from the researcher's voice or perspective. The cultural cues that Black women use in their language and the stories that they told were important. I felt that narratives were important in order to keep the truth and the voice in the narrative for these women. "In addition, this format gives preeminence to displaying data in its original state which is acknowledged as a trustworthy way of giving 'voice' to the participants," (Johnson-Bailey, 2004, p. 124). "In addition to truth claims and appropriateness claims, I see narrative, more than other types of communicative action, as highlighting an inner world of subjectivity to which the inquirer has privileged access" (Conle, 2001, p. 28).

Language is important to the telling a story. The way that a story is being told is based on the conversation that the researcher is having with the participant, the participant is speaking in their language with all the slang and iterations that go along with the story. In a study that was completed by Collins he discussed the way that the story is being told through the eyes of Black Students, "In particular, we found that the Black students used syntactic and intonational cues differently than their White counterparts" (Collins, 1985, p. 63). Those components of the story contributed to the authenticity that the participant is providing. This not only speaks to the story but the impact that the storyteller has on the information that is being provided.

The importance of impact of narrative analysis is the fact that there are very few studies about Black women in the corporate setting/environment. Given the increase of Black women executives in corporate, having research that discusses their truths, how they have gotten there and the stories that they have to tell will impact practice. As opposed to using quantitative measures to research, it would be appropriate to use the method of qualitative research that identifies the narrative that lies within the participant.

The most desired result of this research is "To encourage those we study to attend to and tell about important moments in their lives, it is necessary to provide a facilitating context in the research interview, which implicates the interview schedules we develop," (Riessman, 1993, p. 54). One expectation is that the story of the participants will emerge. The other expectation is that it will help provide researchers with a place to begin a dialogue about the structures that should be in place for Black women to be successful in corporate.

For so long, Black women have been discounted in their accomplishments and their abilities. Robust and rich research will allow these women to have their story told. It could be that the Black woman story is not different from the story of the Asian, the Native American, or the Latino woman, but it is her story nevertheless and the opportunity to have words, language and information that is provided by her will make the difference

<div align="center">Study Criteria</div>

The participants in this study must identify themselves both as Black and a woman. The entire study is to look at the experiences that Black women have in a corporate structure. Each woman must currently or have been in a *Fortune 500* organization, hold a Bachelor's Degree or higher. In addition, they must have held a leadership position for over five years and have led a team. For this study, being in a *Fortune 500* organization will speak to the organizational structure that each of the participants had to negotiate to reach the level of Director. The sample selection of the participants was critical to the validity of the study because of the experiences they have gained through years in a corporate organization. This criterion identifies the experience that each of these women has had and will directly correlate to the age of each woman which should be over thirty years old. Both age and experience will speak to the different roles that each of the women encountered in their career.

Data Collection

As participants were identified to become a part of the study, they were contacted by phone to discuss their interest in taking part in the study. As each participant indicated the interest to be a part of the study by phone, they were sent a packet that included the participant letter (Appendix A), consent form (Appendix B), and the demographic questionnaire (Appendix C). Each form was requested upon the date of the interview. A code was provided on the demographic questionnaire. This code corresponded with each participant transcriptions.

*Interviews*

I used semi-structured interviews. See the interview guide in Appendix D. I took notes with each participant. The purpose of the interview was to gather and analyze a story from each of the participants. The semi-structured interview allowed the participant to tell their story at their own pace. "Even when an interview guide is employed, qualitative interviews offer the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the participant a chance to shape the content of the interview," (Bogden & Bilkin, 2003, p. 95). The semi-structured interview, in this study, was the stepping stone into the story. The goal of the researcher was to the let the participant guide the interview, and the semi-structured interview process ensured this process. For example, how did their career begin, who was critical in their career, and what were their successes? Bogdan and Bilkin (2003) described how being the researcher is like being a detective trying to piece everything together to gain the research and understand the participants point of view.

The story of each participant was recorded and then transcribed. During the interview, notes were taken describing the participant's gestures, physical description and the observer's behavior as she told the story. The transcriptions were verbatim to the story that was told by each

participant. Upon the completion the transcriptions, they were be analyzed and compared to the other participants in the study to understand common themes that were threaded throughout the study.

*Field Notes*

During and after the interview, field notes were be taken. These notes were put in a file folder for each participant included all information pertaining to their interview and documents provided. These notes were the researcher's attempt to capture information that would later inform the transcriptions and the data analysis. The goal is to make sure that the researcher was able to capture any comments, gestures, reflections that were observed during the interview (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). Field notes are a descriptive view of what the researcher observed. "The qualitative researcher's field notes contain what has been seen and heard by the researcher, without interpretation," (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 73).

During the interview process, observations were documented to provide further data points of the participants. Observing provided a detailed account of how the participant reacts during the interview process. "Observational data is directly related to typical behavioral situations; that is people are seen in action" (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 154). An observation provided the opportunity to put a picture with the words that the participant provided during the interview. Since qualitative data is the detailed description of each of the participants in the study, observation provides the measurement of behavior to augment the interview data. This was critical for the process to observe how each participant reacts in their environment or the environment that they chose to have the interview conducted.

Each of the participants was required to provide a resume and asked to submit them before the actual interview. This document collection further validated the selection of the

participant in the study to ensure that they had both the experience and education that was required as the study criteria.  In addition, the participants provided additional information as it related to their career progression or development. This information was placed in each of their files.  Document analysis consisted of collecting their consent, reviewing their resume and demographic questionnaire, and the letters the participants were asked to write to young Black women entering Corporate America. The data management of the documents ensured that there was a process in place to keep the documents that were collected and organized in preparation for analyzing the data.

The instruments that were used during this study were both a digital recorder, Wave software, and a transcription machine. These devices are used to capture accurate information and to help take that information and translate it into notes that were used in the coding process. Transcriptions were completed after each interview.

*Documents – A Letter to a Young Black woman*

Each participant, during the face to face interview was asked to provide a mock up of a letter (Appendix E) that they would provide to a young Black woman who was beginning her career. I wanted the participant to tell their story during the face to face recorded interview but felt that the letter would provide them with an opportunity to critically reflect on their survival strategies. As stated by Bogden and Biklen, "Personal documents that the subjects write themselves are usually discovered rather than solicited by the researcher.  On occasion, researchers do ask people to write for them or get others to help them produce such materials, (p. 125)."  This helped to provide more clarity from the participant to understand what they would have described as survival methods for someone and possibly what they have used during their career in Corporate America.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the approach to review the data that you have collected from field notes, interviews and observations and begin to draw conclusions as it relates the to the problem statement of the study. Data analysis is inductive in that data received from each participant is compared to information received. "One begins with a unit of data (any meaningful word, phrase, narrative, etc.) and compares it to another unit of data, and so on, all the while looking for common patterns across the data," (Merriam & Associates, 2000, p. 14). Data analysis is where you begin to understand the themes that emerge for the study.

In completing the data analysis, it is important to review the transcripts and field notes to ascertain common words, themes and strands of sentences and compare these items with each participant's response. "You search through for regularities and patterns as well as topics your data covers and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns," (Bogdan & Bilkin, 2003, p. 161). When a pattern has been determined, it allows you to group the patterns and place codes with them.

During the analysis, the transcripts were studied for themes, constantly comparing the interviews collectively and in segments, searching for themes that were common across the data. The preliminary themes were coded from each individual transcript and organized to compare the themes across the participants in an effort to find the common threads. While continuing through the analysis process recurring themes emerged, as categories were collapsed and refined.

In this research codes consisted of formal training, incidental experience, mentoring and/or isolation. This approach allowed me to create a list of categories to help the researcher organize the data. Once a list of categories was created, Bogdan and Bilkin (2003) recommends

placing your categories, which could be sentences and paragraphs into a category family. This approach provided the opportunity to compare the themes.

Constant comparative is an inductive category coding system that is used to identify themes in the data. This method allowed the understanding of how the data will be sorted and analyzed. Special focus was made to maintain the participants' narratives and to create narrative codes. Bogden and Biklen (2003) indicate that maintaining narrative codes allow you to keep the structure the participants' wording, preserving meaning. As each narrative is told by the participant, you recognize structures in how your participant organized their story when telling it. When using the narrative code it provides the opportunity to look at each participant as multi-data sources to compare and contrast each experience that the participants had relative to their experiences. After coding is completed, the research is compared against each participant in the study. "As each new unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorized and coded) with similar unites of meaning," (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 134). Code words were selected that aligned with the themes that emerged in the data. I used index cards, sheets of paper, markers and tape for placing coding into categories from each participant, Maykut and Morehouse (1994). Themes were placed onto notes cards and comparison of participants. "Grouping the code words around a particular concept in the data, called categorizing, reduced the number of code words with you which to work," (Brott & Myers, 2002, p. 149). This allowed me to streamline the data to capture the main themes.

<div align="center">Validity and Reliability</div>

Validity and reliability are important in qualitative research because it provides credibility and credence to the study. Qualitative research has specific standards to ensure

validity and reliability in the study. The words that are interchangeable with validity and

reliability are trustworthiness, dependability and credibility. This standard in qualitative research

speaks to the how the researcher ensures that the research is conducted in a credible way that

made it both valid and reliable. For this research, validity and reliability will be defined

*Validity*

Validity is important because it provides credence to the qualitative research that is being

conducted. Validity gives you the creditability of the study and the authenticity of the study.

"Validity cannot be dismissed simply because it points to a questions (or questions) that have to

be answered" (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 205). Validity allowed the researcher to look at truth

and what truth looks like through the lens of the participant. What is important is the authenticity

that these women show through their narratives. Authenticity can be viewed as the validness of

voice. Validity is further viewed as the degree in which we ensure that the participant has said

through voice is correct or true. It is critical to understand the participant and their viewpoint to

uncover the complexity of the situation that the participant is experiencing and present that in a

'holistic interpretation' of what has occurred (Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

The following strategies ensured validity in this study; triangulation, member checks, and

peer/colleague examination (Merriam, 2002 ). Each of these strategies provided the opportunity

to ensure that the data was trustworthy. Worthen (2000) discusses the components of validity:

> You demonstrate validity by showing that you collected your data in a thorough
> and authentic manner, were rigorous in your analysis, can explain alternative
> competing meaning, and can show through your steps of data transformation the
> path you to develop your knowledge statement or findings. (p. 141)

*Reliability*

Reliability provided that the data was consistently and systemically collected. It is critical that the researcher observes carefully and takes thorough field notes that correspond that attend to the established protocol "Reliability depends on essentially on explicitly described observational procedures," (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 41). The documents collected during the study, strengthens the reliability of the study. The researcher is the instrument of the study and as the primary instrument become the data collector and the organizer. As we look at this study during data collection and analysis, the reliability is when the researcher uses the same process with each participant. In this study each participant interview was recorded, using the same interview guide. Each participant was required to provide their resume and complete a demographic questionnaire prior to meeting. The consistency of the process for each participant provided the reliability, showing the study to be dependable and credible.

## Subjectivity – Insider/Outsider View

I am not an outsider in this research. I am actually an active participant with a story to tell. In addition I had the opportunity to hear other stories and develop a better understanding how to analyze the study data. Subjectivity lends to the richness of the study. A moment of cognitive dissonance occurred for me when I realized that I would never become a Vice President at the organization I had been a part of for over five years -- not because of lack of skills or education but I feel because I was Black and a Woman. At that point of my discovery, I made the decision to resign. During my epiphany, I found out about a woman I had worked with in a previous company who was the highest ranking Human Resources (HR) Vice President at this *Fortune 100* organization resigned to pursue other opportunities. She was a Black woman,

as well.  But what I heard from another colleague who knew her well was that she was pushed out by "the powers" within the organization.

Power can be described as the hierarchical position that one may hold in an organization. For instance a Professor in describing her experience of power in an academic setting said that she resides, "within the hierarchy of power in our organization, a White male holds the highest position", (Katira, 2006, p.81). This incident made me reflect on my experiences throughout my career and I wanted to understand "the powers" within those organizations and how access and power plays as it relates to Black women success and survival. But this story of the Black woman executive who was pushed out is not uncommon.  As I hear these types of stories, my question is, "How did she make it this far?"  What were the de-railers in her career at that organization? How can other Black women learn from them?  How can organizations learn from Black women? Her story is just one of many that I have heard, but there are so many others that need to be told.  These stories need to be told in order to teach, reflect and learn so organizations can understand and take action.  During my career, I have admired many women like her that look like me and have persevered against the "powers." I think excitedly that there is a rich landscape about Black women executives that has not been discovered and cultivated.  These Black women in corporate can provide hope, enthusiasm and knowledge for Corporate America, the academy and other Black women.

I have been in the human resource (HR) profession for over fifteen years and have had several learning moments throughout my career. I was introduced into the field of HR during my career at a *Fortune 30*0 organization at the age of 21.  I had the opportunity to go into a developmental assignment as a Regional Recruiter.  I felt I had found my niche.  I absolutely loved being in the Human Resource Department and knew that I wanted to move forward in my

career as an HR professional. To that end, I decided to go back to school to earn my MBA because I felt I needed more education to compete. I attended a historically Black college and university (HBCU) in the South. That experience led me to understand that race and gender struggles exist. Early in my career, I did not understand that. Even later in my career, I struggled to understand until the last five years. When I graduated from my master's program, I went back to work at the *Fortune 300* organization and continued my career as an HR professional. I became a Regional HR Manager in the South. That job was grueling but exciting. Due to situations and exposure, I can truly say I gained my best learning experiences during that time. I look back and think how grateful I am for the mentoring and support that I received in that experience. But on further reflection, it was a Black man who was my mentor and boss who helped guide me in the right direction and provide me with access to networks from which I would otherwise been closed.

I moved to another *Fortune 500* organization and was promoted very early in my tenure with the organization. Because of the quick promotions, it led me to believe that I was considered a high potential and I would move throughout the organization very quickly. At this juncture in my career, I felt that I was a fast tracker with high potential and knew that I could gain an executive position quickly in this organization with hard work. I had gained technical experience but lacked the political knowledge and savvy that I needed to navigate through the organization. I still did not understand the access I did not have because I was a Black woman in a White organization. There are things that I encountered through this experience that both surprised and impacted me, such as discrimination, isolation, tokenism and dualism. As a result, I moved on to another organization for growth because I knew I was not receiving support for advancement. As I think about my subjectivity in this research it all revolves around the fact that

I do not feel that Black women are allowed the opportunity to learn the corporate culture and ascend through the journey the same as their White counterparts. Black women are not given the same opportunity to power, access and exposure as their White counterparts. As both a practitioner and a scholar, I have witnessed specific things in my past that has led me to believe that organizations are not set up to truly support and mentor Black women. As Black women continue to emerge into corporate, I feel that organizations must have them at the table. This needs to begin with hearing the story of Black women and their experiences.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this study, it was important for me to ascertain if other Black women were experiencing and feeling the same I was as it related to isolation and loneliness. These other ten women were interviewed in an attempt to understand that what I was going through was real. As I made the decision to research this topic, it was important that I could view the story that I could tell, as well. My experiences were told in this research as a participant. I completed my interview with my methodologist and completed a letter to a young Black woman (Appendix E) just as I had requested of each of them. As I completed the study I realized that I was both an insider and an outsider.

<p align="center">Chapter Summary</p>

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology of this study and the approach that was used in determining the type of study, the approach, and the validity and reliability. During the chapter I explained the appropriateness of using a qualitative design for this research. In addition, the sample criteria, data collection, and data analysis that provided the structure for the study were presented. Finally, the chapter concluded with a brief subjectivity statement where I, as the researcher, explained why this study was important to me as both an outsider and insider of the

research.  In deciding to do this research, it was important that I conveyed my perspective and told my story.

CHAPTER 4

THE EXPERIENCES OF CORPORATE BLACK WOMEN

The purpose of this study was to examine how racism and sexism impacted the career

progression of Executive Black women in Corporate America.  The research questions that guide

the study are:

 (1) What are the significant learning experiences that supported Black women's career

progression in Corporate America?

(2) What strategies have Black women used to support their career progression in

Corporate America?

In the first part of this, I profiled each of the women, offering a demographic profile. In

the second part of the chapter, I presented the common themes that emerged from and across the

data.

<center>Demographic Profiles</center>

I conducted interviews with twelve Black women ranging in age from thirty-six to sixty-

two. All the women in the study had a title of Director or above and managed a team in various

multi-site Fortune 500 organizations.  However, one of the women refused to disclose or to

speak candidly about her experiences. Her duplicity was revealed while triangulated the data

collected with other participants. In addition, I also had personal knowledge of her corporate

experiences. After consulting with my methodologist, it was determined that her interview was

not credible or useful and it was therefore eliminated from the data pool.  All of the women that

participated in this study (with the exception of the researcher) were assigned pseudonyms to

protect each of their identity in the study.  The following pages provide details and insight into each of these women; their backgrounds and experiences. The demographic profiles are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

*Participant Demographic Profiles*

| Participant NAME | AGE | TITLE | Years of EXPERIENCE | Highest Degree ATTAIN ED |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DeRetta | 40 | Director | 17 | MBA |
| Grace | 61 | Vice-President | 38 | Bachelors |
| Jane | 36 | Director | 13 | Bachelors |
| Rose | 60 | Director | 35 | Bachelors |
| Barbara | 62 | Senior Vice President | 39 | Juris Doctor |
| Dawn | 44 | Director | 21 | Bachelors |
| Mary | 38 | Director | 14 | MBA |
| Janet | 40 | Senior Vice President | 16 | Bachelors |
| Valerie | 46 | Senior Vice President | 23 | Bachelors |
| Angie | 36 | Vice President | 13 | MBA |
| Leslie | 48 | Vice President | 22 | Bachelors |

*Note: This table summarizes the demographic profile of each of the participant in the study.*

*Grace Hollyvale*

Grace is a fair skin sixty-one year old Black woman who is medium built in stature whose coloring is coloring similar to Halle Berry. Grace has long hair that was swept up into an up do. She was dressed in a very classic manner with a back sheath dress and a tailored jacket and seemed very comfortable in her surroundings. We began her meeting in her office which was designed with African art and very tasteful pieces of wooden statues. Grace is beginning her third career.  She had a very calm demeanor and was at ease during the interview.  She had a grace and calmness that made the interview conversational in nature. Grace holds a bachelor degree in technology.  She has held several key positions in two major Fortune 500 organizations.  Grace is divorced with a daughter.

*Jane Watson*

Jane is a thirty-six year old woman who has been with her organization for over six years. She has a medium build with a short bob as her hairstyle. She has a medium coco brown complexion and smiles often despite her braces. When we met, she was wearing a dark blue suit with a White Brooks Brothers French cuff shirt. The reason that I was aware of where she purchased her shirt is because we discussed how important it was to ensure that you dressed the part and that people viewed you in positions that were higher than you role indicated. She began as a recruiter, moved into a leadership role as a manager and is currently a Director with four direct reports. During our interview, she was very self-conscious about her braces and mentioned them often. She has a bachelor's degree in business administration and is considering to go back to gain her MBA. She often seemed uneasy while we talked as if she was uncomfortable discussing her leadership, her experiences and her successes. Jane is divorced with no kids.

*Rose Button*

Rose is a sixty year old woman. In talking with her you are immediately aware of her wisdom. She had been with her organization for twenty years and is full of exuberance and energy, even after all this time with her company. She is married to a minister and has two daughters; one of her daughters was in the midst of getting married when we conducted her interview. She talked a lot about balance and the importance of remaining true to who you are as a Black woman. Rose appeared to be grounded in both her personal and professional life. She was very eager to tell her story because she wanted to make sure that someone could learn from it.

*Barbara Jennings*

Barbra has a Juris Doctorate and is an attorney by profession, but had worked in this Fortune 500 organization in a non-legal capacity for several years when we completed her interview. Prior to joining the company, she worked in a law firm on Wall Street. Barbara has a very stern demeanor and strong opinions about how Black women should carry themselves in all settings. Barbara is a very statuesque woman who is about six feet two, medium toned skin with a very short pixie hairstyle. When we met, she was wearing a St. John's blue knit suit with pumps, which made her taller and possibly intimidating to encounter. She discussed the importance of being self-aware and knowing your surroundings and how you are perceived. She has two master's degrees, one of which is in Public Administration. Barbra has never been married and has no kids.

*Dawn Smith*

Dawn is forty-three year old woman who has been married for twenty years. She is small framed but tall build. She is a fair skinned Black woman with a short hair cut. When we conducted her interview, we were at her home office on a Sunday. She was very relaxed in a tee shirt and jeans. For the first thirty minutes, we talked about how she and her husband meet and the fact that they were high school sweet hearts but had no kids. After we talked and laughed about that she begins to talk about how her career began and how she attributes her success from the things that her Mother instilled in her as it relates to work ethics and how you just had to make things happen. She also talks about how she recognized her that she often lacked self-confidence until she leaned on what her Mother taught her and the different role models that she had throughout her career. Even though she described her role models, she also discussed her frustration experienced throughout her career with having to be the one that was smarter and one

or two steps ahead in your job or your peers. I viewed her as self-confident and possibly intimidating. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in business and several certifications and accommodations in her profession. When we began the interview, it seemed very formal but as we progressed she began to be very comfortable in our discussion and it began to flow as if we had been old friends for a long time. Toward the end, she made me feel comfortable by having a lot of discussion about her family. She is the youngest of eight brothers and sisters.

*Mary William*

Mary is a thirty-eight dark complexion Black woman from New York. The interview took place in her office which overlooks a major interstate. She was very formal and took notes as I was taking notes. She seemed very guarded about her experiences and was very methodical in her responses. It was as if she had concerns that our conversation would be discussed amongst those within in her organization. Her parents were from Panama and she talked a lot about her upbringing and how that impacted career decisions. She discussed a lot about the importance of being promoted to a Vice-President and seemed much consumed with the prospect of her next promotion. She is currently a Director within her and was promoted within the last two years. She is married with a two year old daughter.

*Janet Borden*

Janet is a very statuesque and attractive medium complexion thirty-nine year old Black woman. We met at a restaurant of her choice where we had a two hour conversation over a fancy breakfast. Janet was very relaxed and poised. She was dressed in a bohemian manner and wore her hair in an upsweep of beautiful braids, belying her upper middle class upbringing. She has a unique background of boarding school education in upstate New York. She had access to privilege of which most of my participants could only dream. She was very comfortable with

herself and who she was as a Black woman. She is active in community organizations, and holds a leadership position in one. She is also a board member of several non-profit boards. There was a comfort and ease that she had about her that made you feels just as comfortable. She eased into the conversation and almost immediately began to discuss her experience of growing up in New York with immigrant parents from Panama. She felt that it was important to discuss her upbringing because she often reflects on and discussions her early life of growing up in extreme poverty and progressing to extreme privilege. She felt that her family and home life was very safe and secure and supported with an understanding of faith and spirituality. She described her experience in corporate as it "is what it is" and you "must make the most of each experience; regardless of what it is." She had a quiet confidence that made it very easy to have a discussion and her describe her story. She is married with one son.

*Valerie Jensen*

Valerie met me in her office for our interview and the environment was very warm and homey feel. Valerie is a forty-six year old Black woman, medium built, fair skinned with a pixie hair cut. She was dressed in a very vibrant print dress and as she discusses her experiences, is very expressive as she uses her hands for expression. She had a very folksy feel to her conversation that it made it very easy to get off topic. We were about thirty minutes into our discussion before I realized that I had not yet turned on the recording. We met in her office that overlooked the atrium of the building and had pictures of her family. Her office was decorated in a very warm and inviting manner. Valarie was very open and spoke of her family and settled easily into a discussion of her experience. Within the first few minutes we were laughing which created a very easy rapport that furthers the discussion. It was clear that Valerie was an executive with an intensity and drive that was evident as she talked about her progression in her

career.  My interview with her lasted the longest because we seemed to get off track several times.  She was very expressive in telling her story by using her arms and infliction in her voice. She had been divorced and re-married, and has two teenage sons.

*Angie Peterson*

Angie, a vice president, was the youngest of the participants. She is thirty-six years old. She had a very different demeanor than the other women. She is a small framed dark skinned Black woman with long Black hair and dressed in a grey suit with Chanel glasses. When we conducted her interview, we were sitting in her office that was three sided windows.  As I would ask her question, she would often pause and look out the window that she was facing before she answered.  I got the feeling as we would sit in a pregnant pause before she answered that she needed to be very cautious on her answers as if her boss was hearing her response.  She was very formal throughout our meeting and at times seemed to be defensive in her responses. We conducted the interview in her office and she seemed uncomfortable to openly discuss racism and sexism as part of the topic.  She is married with no kids.

*Leslie Dobbs*

Leslie and I meet at a Barnes and Noble Bookstore and we sat on the floor in the history section of books.  She was very casual, wearing jeans and a tee shirt. She is forty-seven with a nineteen year old daughter in college and a four year old daughter in Pre-K. She talked about the fact that she had been focused on getting her MBA and that her organization was paying for it. But she had to stop because of family priorities.  She had been in her profession for well over twenty years but in our conversation, seemed to long for the recognition of becoming an Executive Vice President. She had a confidence but also a seemed unsettled regarding her career.

She has been married for over twenty years but talked more about her daughters than her husband.

Although the participants in this study were very diverse group of Black women, their experiences were parallel in many ways. They had very difference career trajectories and career paths but each felt the same as they climbed the corporate ladder. Often when they told their stories, I felt that I was talking to the same one. Each of these women had the opportunity to tell about their experiences and they each were dying to have that conversation.  In some instances, I would have completed the questions and turned the tape recording but women were still talking..

<div align="center">Themes from the Study</div>

The data revealed four themes: 1) Negotiating an Unwelcomed Existence; 2) Battling Ethgender Isolation in Corporate America; 3) Serving as the Domestic in the Corporate Boardroom; and 4) Creating Strategies From Lessons Learned. This chapter introduces each theme with the representative data to support the theme.

*Negotiating an Unwelcomed Existence*

*Negotiating an Unwelcomed Existence*, the first theme speaks to the first research question: What are the significant learning experiences that supported Black women's career progression in Corporate America? It was noted that the women in this study were able to carve out an existence in Corporate America, albeit a second class status, because they carried a racial consciousness that made them aware they were unwelcomed. And it was knowledge of this standing that freed them to in turn navigate this space – a no woman's land of middle ground. Each woman in this study spoke readily to the dilemma of racism and sexism. This theme was prevailing in all of the conversations of my eleven participants as they described their experiences in Corporate America. In *Negotiating an Unwelcomed Existence*, the women

expressed feelings of having to always out perform their White female counterparts and a constant feeling that their work was either not recognized or perceived as deficient.

As I spoke to each of my participant, there was a willingness to openly discuss the consistent feeling of being under appreciated and feeling unwelcomed. All eleven women in this study spoke of feeling uncomfortable in their jobs, relating to their reception. Each expressed in different ways the knowledge that they were not immediately received with open arms in their environments. Perhaps Valerie, the Senior Vice President of Technology for a large national media organization had the most representative experience. What she described as being unwelcomed to her was the fact even in 2010 there is a 'good ole boy' network that exists. Valarie explained that she knows that she is not part of the inner circle because every time she walks in the room things become hushed, giving the very impression that they do not want you there. She explained knowing that her presence was not welcomed in her first few positions. In these positions, she consistently encountered White females who marginalized her. She recalled an incident involving a White female manager who she described as a control freak:

> She (the manager) could not believe that this young Black woman, who had been in the workforce for two years at this point, could actually run an entire department. But I got a chance to do so and started from scratch. So I created this department…She would make comments like, 'I'm the captain of this ship and you are just a passenger on it. And you do what I tell you to do.' She would snap her fingers at me and tell me to come here. And so one day I had had enough of this and I said, 'Ain't no dogs up in here. And if you need to snap at somebody you go find you a dog cause you are not going to disrespect me and talk to me that way.'

A similar situation also occurred at Valerie's second position. She stated, "And then I relocated to Memphis, TN and worked for another White lady who had lots of control issues and I faced nothing but racism through that entire experience." Valerie continued and gave a more succinct description of why she felt unwelcomed.

As the researcher (DeRetta) and a member of this study, I felt a special connection to what

Valerie says about her situation. As a forty year old Black woman in my second job as a human

resource director for a profession services organization, not only was I experiencing an

unwelcoming existence but it was very humbling, as well. I recall that:

> "…the factors that impeded me was that I have been too safe or too polite.  Where
> I can see my White counterparts ask the question to get what they wanted I never
> felt that comfortable in any of the environments that I experienced that I could
> ever ask.  I always felt like I was an invited guest and I could be asked to leave at
> any time.  I also saw that way to well being a part of several Human Resource
> organizations.  My biggest recollection of that is when I was placed in a Diversity
> Director position reporting to White female who was also a Director.  In all of my
> career I was always in an office and I was placed in a cubicle and told that I did
> not have the leadership capabilities to project manage Diversity."

Jennifer described always feeling very over worked and unappreciated. She recalled an

incident where she felt unwanted and alone saying:

> "I had a certain colleague that I teamed with on projects and he was a White male.
> It was fascinating to watch how the team would react to him and meetings and felt
> that he was the leader of the team even though we were co-leading the project.
> There were many times on this project when he would leave early and leave me
> behind to finish what was started or to deal with issues that were hard.  What I
> would do is keep my head down and focus on getting the work done because I had
> no other options as far as I was concerned. Well, when the project was finished, I
> clearly remembering when the VP was giving recognition in all staff meeting, he
> recognized this gentleman as doing a great job and helping getting the project
> across the finish line.  I remember leaving the office at that night a crying all the
> way home."

Janet described her unwelcomed position as one of loneliness, especially when it came to

negotiating your way in corporate:

> "I always try to make good decisions in light of whatever the situation may be
> that I am facing with my White counterparts.  Making good decisions and owning
> them no matter the consequence has served me personally.  Suppose your
> employer asks you to move.  Pro and con the opportunity both in the short and
> long term as well as the potential impact to you personally and professionally.
> Ask as many clarifying questions as comes to mind.  If it works in your favor,

> great. You own it. If it does not pan out, too bad. You still own it. I call making
> and living with your decision being a grown up. Being an adult is a very
> important perspective to me."

In our discussion she also described that when she went to work in many cases were described as

the following:

> Oftentimes I felt like I may be in warfare. And with that warfare came day to day
> combat that could be both rewarding but exhausting. I say rewarding because
> often times, I was the only Black female in many of the meetings that I
> participated in and I felt like it was an obligation that I must fulfill to be a voice in
> the room. But in the same instance, it often felt like battle fatigue because there is
> always a fight and there is always a scrimmage that I had to fight and that could
> become very tiring. But the reality is that you have to always be battle ready.

As most of the participants talked about their feelings, I could look at them and see the

discomfort that they felt as they were re-counting experiences that they faced.

In summarizing the first theme, *Negotiating an Unwelcomed Existence*, it is evident that

the Black women in this study felt a tenuous in their executive positions Corporate America.

While each of the women told stories that range from the subtle to the dramatic, the collective

stories are connected by the commonality of their co-workers being uncomfortable and distant.

*Battling Ethgender Isolation in Corporate America*

The second theme to emerge from the data is *Battling Ethgender Isolation in Corporate*

*America* also directly relates to the first second research question: what are Black women's

significant learning experiences on career progression in Corporate America? The women in this

study are not proclaimed feminists, but rather are firm believers in fairness and equal access.

This is one of the reasons that attracted them to Corporate America: a belief that the American

dream awaited them. However, a salient learning experience for the women in this study has

been that they are forever viewed differently from men and differently from Whites and that it is

their lack of race and gender privilege that defines their lives in Corporate America. The

inevitable affect of this effect is isolated. And isolation had two definitions for these women: 1)

being the only Black female in the room with their colleagues and 2) being subjected to different

scrutiny than their White female counterparts did not experience. Rose is representative of the

majority of the women in the study when she described how isolation made her reflective:

> Believe or not, a corporate career, like any profession, invites you to learn about
> YOU: what motivates you, what scares you, how you relate to others, live your
> values and manage your ego.  So pay attention, every situation will surface
> something instructive or revealing about how you are.  Reflect to see if the who
> you are at any given time matches who you want to be.  Sometimes you will be,
> sometimes you won't.  When there is a disconnect work to close the gap.

Another participant, Barbara, talked about having to examine yourself and who you are in

the process of your career development. Barbara reminds us that it very difficult to create

relationships in such environments but the reality is that we have no choice and we have to make

the situation work.  More importantly, the concept that we as Black women must know and

understand ourselves as we sit in these very complex organizations so that we have self

awareness is a key to success.  Barbara could readily relate the lessons she had learned by relying

on her woman's intuition. She discusses this by saying:

> "Remember, if you are employed at will without an employment contract, no
> matter what they tell you, it's your employer's party and you are merely an
> invited guest.  Absent extenuating circumstances (often legal), you can be asked
> to leave…when a person shows you who they are, believe them.  Loyalty and
> trust are important, but not always reciprocated.  Companies are not loyal, but
> individuals should be.  Don't "throw anyone under the bus" unless there are legal
> implications you are asked a direct question that requires a direct honest answer.
> Be loyal to individuals who deserve it and who are loyal to you.  It helps to have a
> friend at work, preferably in another department.  Establish relationships outside
> your department and function and at various levels.  It's amazing how much you
> can learn about the "big picture" when you talk to people who have functional
> responsibilities that are different from yours."

Jane, one of the youngest participants at thirty-six, works as a director. She carried an awareness of her ever present race and gender, which always forced her to take extra care in her appearance. She explained this point by saying:

> I remember when my very first manager, who was a huge mentor for me in my career, discussed the importance of how I always had to look the part. He use to tell me that as a woman in Corporate America, when you walked in the room you must show a particular presence and part of the presence had to do with how you showed up and how people would view you. I remember the first time that he and I talked about the important of presence and how he would always speak to me about it. What I found interesting is he always discussed the difference between men and women but never discussed race. I guess it was much safer for him to have the discussion about gender as opposed to my race and the actual racial tension that I felt when I walked in room, regardless of what I was wearing…

Jane was very conservative in dress but had a very confident stance. She also discussed the importance of strength in the corporate setting where you are always alone and must live on the force of your convictions. However, she had also learned that her race set her apart:

> Your confidence might be construed as arrogance, your strength might be construed as overbearing, but never back down on your thoughts, beliefs, and opinions because you will regret them later. People will test you in a variety of ways simply because you don't look or act like them, or even because you have a different perspective.

All of the participants were able to communicate their isolation, and feelings of vulnerability, Yet they had also learned that their uniqueness necessitated a game plan to always be more prepared than their White counterparts. Mary William, a small framed Black women with long Black hair who is an Executive with a entertainment company, addressed the fact that she felt that you must always accept the environment that you were a apart of and how you made that work. She explained how the process isolates you and encourages you to account for your every move:

> "Beginning a career in Corporate America can be a very exciting and rewarding. As you embark on your first professional role here are a few nugget's to consider;

focus on execution in order for you to be considered for the next role, you need to deliver results at the current level, keep a record of all of your success/accomplishments…"

Angie Peterson, a Black Vice President who worked for a large insurance company discusses the concept of making it happen. She related how being the only Black person in her environment simultaneously challenged but also isolated her:

> "In the current role, I am on the only women in it (she did not mention if there were other Black people in the role) and I realized that they gave this opportunity to me as a stretch opportunity because I am the youngest but I feel that I have to do just do it. The reality is that I never had the desire not to be in Corporate America. I have always liked the stability."

What was interesting with Angie was that she was visibly uncomfortable during this part of the conversation, wringing her hands and looking out the window as we talked. She said:

> "I feel that I have had to break down barriers and being the only one has been very difficult because they view me different when I walk in the room and I have to ensure that I have more education, more licensing; just more than my counter parts. I had to make sure that I was very polite and got along with people because I did not want to be viewed as the angry Black woman. I constantly feel like I have to fight that perception and I am always proving myself."

It took me almost sixty minutes into the conversation that I got her to open up about what she is really experiencing. Her hesitancy reminded me of the same type of experiences that I have personally faced in Corporate America:

> When I went to a majority college, I learned and experienced how racist and elitist White people could be…one of the lessons that I learned is that I have to get angry and do something about my anger. So as opposed to being polite and waiting (pause in the conversation) and the other lesson is that I do have something to offer. I have done a lot of self-deprecating and blaming myself saying that I was not at the right place at the right time, I didn't say the right things. I always feel like I'm part of the problem and I spend time saying, "What is it about me?" I have had several White people say to me that I had a great pedigree but yet I was not at the same level, title, salary. I had pedigreed, what did that mean. I am still angry but I try to channel it. The reason that I went back

to get my doctorate was to help me channel my anger.  I have also learned to the lesson to leave as opposed to being loyal.

A lot of the women in the study articulated that same notion in some sort of fashion and it was noted that the participants placed a lot of onus on themselves as opposed to looking at the environment that they were a part of.  This continued sub-theme of under recognized but just having to make it happen is something that each one described in their own story.  It was amazing to me how much I felt that I could often relate to each of these women in some sort of way in incidences that I had throughout my career.  I can recall being in a meeting being the only Black women and one of my colleagues stating that we needed to "ethnic cleansing" as he was describing how we needed to manage the professionals in the organization.  There have been so many instances where I have heard those types of comments and in some instances did not what my retort would be.  It lends itself to the continued feeling of isolation in not only meetings but throughout your entire career.

In summary, in *Battling Ethgender Isolation in Corporate America*, each of the participants in the study could readily recollected being isolated because of their race and gender. In many of the conversations, I could hear in my participants' voices the pain and suffering that accompanied the feeling of isolation.

*Serving as the Domestic in the Corporate Boardroom*

The women in this study were faced with being the first generation of Black women in Corporate America with no role models or roadmap to help them find their way. They were faced with the issue posed in the second research question: what strategies have Black women used to advance their careers in organizational systems. Their answer is that the women in this study, for better or for worse, have duplicated adapting methods that have worked for their disenfranchised group in other settings. Most of the women in this study discussed that they felt

that many of the projects, positions and assignments were those that no one else wanted and that

you had to constantly prove yourself before the notion of another opportunity would avail itself

or a deserved promotion would be placed on hold. So this third theme, *Serving as the Domestic

in the Corporate Boardroom*, reveals the combined effect of being a woman who is affected by

the second class status of gender, and a Black person, a member of a racially disenfranchised

group. Their strategy is to do the grunt work, take on the big projects, and succeed by embracing

the words of twentieth century feminist, Charlotte Whitton, "Whatever women must do they

must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good. Luckily, this is not difficult." For

example, Valerie described this experience for her as the following:

> "It's interesting that I am always asked to come in and do the most undesirable
> projects or jobs that my White female counterparts have not interest in doing and
> don't have to do to prove their value in the organization. In my current job, I
> have been asked to come and re-structure the department so that it could be a
> profit center but before I can do that, they requested that I get rid of
> underperformers on the team. What was difficult for me to swallow is that these
> individuals had been in the organization and that department for five years and I
> have only been her for two years but that was the expectation. In order for me to
> become a Senior Vice-President, that is what I had to do. Don't get me wrong,
> this is not the first time that this has happened but I get tired of being the maid
> that does the clean-up work but am not recognized to what I bring to the table."

This sentiment was expressed by most of the women in the study. They carried the

overwhelming cognizance that not only were they not really members but they were the

domestics that were constantly asked to prove themselves. Although most of the women either

had their advanced degree or had credits toward an advanced degree with career progression to a

Vice-President or Senior Vice-President taking twelve to fifteen years, they were overly

concerned with proving themselves. Leslie Dobbs, forty seven years old female who had a

medium to large build and her hair was pulled back into a pony tail. Leslie, who is a Vice

President in the insurance industry, discussed how functioned as the cleanup person for her

organization:

> I was always up for a challenge but what became the most frustrating for me is
> that I kept being thrown into impossible situations that my peers never had to face
> and I always felt as if they were expecting me to fail…almost hoping that I would
> fail so that they could fire me or move to do a job that was less important.  It was
> if I was going to boot camp with every new assignment and role that they threw at
> me with no recognition of what I had done previously. In my mind, as a Black
> female, your leadership is more of being a servant to the company that you serve.

What Leslie describes further illustrates feelings that these women had about what they had to do

to manage. Their experiences were counter to the experiences of their White female counterparts.

They felt that they always had to go above and beyond and still did not get the recognition that

they felt they should have gotten. There was a level of hardiness that each of these women

described that they had and this assisted in their continued success in Corporate America.

Leslie's encounter is no different than Dawn's, a forty-four year old Black woman from

Louisiana. Dawn believed that she was consistently asked to take the position of servant to the

company and to co-workers. She says:

> It would be amazing to me when I would work side by with people and how they
> could get away with leaving work undone or the comfort level of having someone
> else do it for you.  I realized that I often had to not think of myself and I had to
> become selfless and work through what ever my issues were about the White
> people that I worked with…it could not be all about me but I knew that I had to be
> smart, confident and a leader amongst those that I worked with .  I can tell you
> that it was always a balancing act that I was doing and yes, I exhausted and pissed
> and frustrated but I had to do things quicker, faster and smarter. My mother
> always was said 'girl you don't have the same luxuries as those White people so
> you got make it work and you can not make the same mistakes, if any…you have
> to be damn good Dawn!' So what do you do with that, you make the shit work
> and that is what I have been trying to do for the last ten years of my
> career…trying to make it work.

The overwhelming perspective in this theme is that most of the women described that they provided the hard labor. Even though they had higher education than their White female counterparts, they were consistently running behind them in advancement and taking on more difficult and less desirable assignments. Again, as a participant in the study, I can provide an illustration of the experience that I had vividly by the following:

> "…the hardest thing for me to swallow was when I was put up against a White female who I hired and worked for me and she only had a bachelor's degree and less experience.  She was promoted to my peer after working for me for four years. Then we were both asked to post for a Senior Director position and she ultimately was given the position.  I say that was hard to swallow because the made the decision to pass me up for the role.  Not to mention that over and over I was placed in very difficult positions and business predicament.  In my mind, it was if they were hoping that I failed.  But this is something that I continue to face because it has happened to me as recent as six months ago.  This phenomenon becomes disheartening and frustrating to the point that you want to completely disengage.  You go into to clean up matters and situations but you are not recognized for your experience, education or anything else that you bring to the table."

Valerie also talked about this notion of cleaning up things and making things better for your colleagues to benefit.  She states:

> I always felt like I was the little Black girl that was in their having to clean up.  It was about having to prove myself over and over again.  It comes down to who you are having to take care of and why.  I already have those at in my family that depend on me when does the madness end.  I kept telling myself that my job was not to take care of them but I find that truly is my job."

Black women felt that they were considered a domestic as opposed to being a credible professional with the credential that is equivalent or higher to your White female peers. In summary, *Serving as the Domestic in the Corporate Boardroom* was evident in most of the depictions that the participants described.  The feeling of being a domestic and having clean up positions was something that most of the participants talked about.  While each description was different in their own voice they each felt as if they had to prove themselves over and over again

so that they could be recognized for both their abilities and skills.  This notion of being a domesticated corporate citizen is something that each Black female recognized as their station in their corporate role.

*Creating Strategies from Lessons Learned*

The fourth and final theme is in response to the second research question: what strategies have Black women used to advance their careers in organizational systems. The specific strategies that the women discussed were found in their letters that they wrote in response to my request. Only seven of the eleven women wrote the letters. Overall their letters detailed the strategies that they had developed from their difficulties on Corporate America. These tactics had helped them to survive. By *Creating Strategies from Lessons Learned* the executive Black women in this study were able to survive against the odds and to successfully reach the higher echelons of corporate. The women looked around at their lives in Corporate America and found meaning and lessons in their experiences: (1) Self-awareness, (2) Mentoring, (3) Networking and (4) Performance.  In each specific strategy, I provided the quotes from the letters that each participant provided.

Self-awareness was specific to knowing yourself and ensuring that you were grounded as you sit in Corporate America. Jane expressed it best,

> "Often times you may be the only female in the room, and certainly the only
>
> Black Female. And you may feel compelled to just "fit in."  Your confidence may
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> be construes as arrogance; your strength might be construed as overbearing, but
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> never back to down to your thoughts, beliefs, and opinions because you will
>
> regret it later."

Rose also talked about self awareness when she advised in her letter to be mindful: "So pay attention, every situation will surface something instructive or revealing about who you are. Reflect to see if the who you are at any given time matches who you want to be."

Mentoring was used by the women as a strategy to ensure that they had someone both in and outside of your organization that you could speak to and provide you guidance in your career. Each of the women spoke of individuals that were mentors to them and more specifically highlighted using it as a strategy in their letters by stating the following: Barbara said in her letter, "Find a knowledgeable mentor and/or hire an executive coach. You'll need experience and objectivity to help you navigate corporate cultures and to deal with personalities." Janet expanded on this same fact by explaining that mentoring is a two-way street. She elaborated, "Mentor and be mentored. And you HAVE to mentor. It's one of the ways to answer the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s question: 'Life's most persistent and urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?" Although she expressed it a little differently, Valerie said, "As you begin your career, you find mentors and champions. EVERYONE needs a champion to help them maneuver and work through their career."

Networking, the third strategy, was outlined as a tactic that the participants discussed more in letters that were obtained. Networking could be described as creating those relationships outside and inside the organization in which they reside. The comments that they wrote were as follows: "Over the next several years, you meet a variety of people, work with a variety of people, and share a variety of experiences. As you have interactions, keep in mind that each person possesses something unique and brings something different to the table. You will not like everyone that you work with and vice versa, but as hard as it is; always maintain professionalism," (Jane). "Get to know your immediate team. Establishing strong relationships

will allow you to be more productive," (Mary). "Establish relationships outside the department and function and at various levels. It's amazing how much you can learn about the 'big picture' when you talk to people who have functional responsibilities that are different from yours," (Barbara). "You should also develop relationships with colleagues/industry associates/membership associations. This will develop your network and self valuation. Your 'valuation' to your discipline and area will come from your knowledge and the respect others have for you. This is built from the network, which you have established," (Valerie).

The last strategy that the participants shared was the concept of making sure that you performed and executed in the role that you had. This strategy was described in their stories, as well, when they discussed that you had to always be the best in what you do. The written comments from the letters were as follows: "Focus on execution in order for you to be considered for the next role, you need to deliver results at your current level," (Mary). "You will need to be so much better than others that you work with…you may resent it but accept it. If it becomes unbearable, look for employment elsewhere. Be prepared to accept any promotion offered because you may not be offered another promotional opportunity. Employers don't like rejection any more than individuals do," (Barbara). "You must ALWAYS do your best work and try to resolve any issue presented to you. However, the hard work is just beginning. It is what is expected, but more is required. You are required to do more and to be more…than your counterparts," (Valerie).

Each of these strategies that the participant discussed assisted in what the literature states about the importance of each of those strategies that are required for success. What was more interesting is that the strategies that these women discussed were more in relation to survival in Corporate America than success.

Chapter Summary

In summary, I presented the themes that emerged from the data collected from the eleven participants, who have been identified as successful in Corporate America. The first theme focuses on the women negotiating their existence in an environment in which they are not welcomed because of both their race and their gender: neither of which they could change. This unwelcomed way of life manifested itself in their daily work lives. They were overworked, un-recognized and under-credited.

The next theme was the continued realization that there was always a feeling of isolation and of constantly feeling like you are the only one. The isolation always reminded them maybe they should not be that there. The women said that they felt they were guest at a dinner party and at any given time they could be asked to vacate the premise. Again, in this theme of isolation, there was always a feeling of having to do more than their White counterparts. But not only having to do more but also having to do it better than anyone else. It did not negate the fact that you would still feel as if you were the only one but it further the degradation that these women described that they had. So in conjunction with feeling like they were the only one, they did not feel as if they got the recognition that they felt that they deserved. They always felt as if they were the "one" that the organization could always say that they had a Black female on the team. They felt as if they were the one gesture that the organization could speak to for the fact that they were truly enlightened and a diverse organization. The only challenge that these women described with that is that the behavior in kind did not always reflect that feeling of being special and recognized for that feeling. They always felt like they were on stage and had to be "on" in order to be invited back to the dinner table again.

The third theme that emerged was the feeling that you were always serving as the clean-up person. In most instances, these women described that they were chosen for clean-up projects. It was either a project that no one wanted or that was not a high profile project that we garner the recognition that their White counterparts would want. They always found themselves in a situation where they had to work through bad circumstances and experiences every time in order for them to be recognized for their actual skills. And often, their White counterparts had the opportunity to get the recognition and even the promotion without having to do the act of proving themselves in circumstances over and over again. These women described it as a repetitive act that had to continue to do over and over again, in which the sub-theme arises of being over-worked and under-credited. These women described their experiences as one of exhaustion and self-doubt of their own experiences. There was a constant negotiating that they had to of themselves and the role that they played in Corporate America. For some, they felt that the cost was very high but tried to always understand the reward that could possible follow them. Outside of the themes that emerged, these women showed a level of resilience and confidence that cannot be captured in this study. The sheer toughness that each of these women showed is a testament to the Black women in Corporate America and the fabric that they are weaving in the story of Corporate America. It further demonstrates their ability to be successful regardless of the continued obstacles that they face. Their stories deserve to be told.

The fourth theme, *Creating Strategies from Lessons Learned,* was evident in the letters that seven of the women wrote in response to my request to advise a young Black women entering Corporate America. It revealed that the women were able to use their negative experiences to extract meaning and methods to help them survive.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine how racism and sexism impacted the career progression of Executive Black women in Corporate America. The research questions that guided the study were:

(1) What are the significant learning experiences that supported Black women's career progression in Corporate America?

(2) What strategies have Black women used to support their career progression in Corporate America?

There were two conclusions that were drawn from this study: 1) Successful career progression forced the executive Black women in this study to learn to negotiate their tension filled lives while constantly weighing their cultural alliances against their corporate acceptance; and 2) The women in this study used their negative racial and gendered experiences to find ways to inform and manage their careers.

In this final chapter presents the conclusions that were drawn from the study of executive Black women's corporate lives. It also addressed how the relevant literature intersects and speaks to the study's findings. The chapter concludes with recommendations for Corporate America and research implications.

Black women Surviving in Corporate America

This study recognizes the achievement and success that the Black women in this study gained in Corporate America. But further addresses the cost these women paid for their

advancement. The first conclusion: Successful career progression forced the executive Black women in this study to learn to negotiate their tension filled lives while constantly weighing their cultural alliances against their corporate acceptance. It was noted in this study that the participants lead lives of quiet desperation in Corporate America. They did not have the support systems that the White counterparts had. In addition, they also lived with an awareness that as part of the leadership they were often called upon to act is ways that were counter to the racial group affiliations and allegiances.

The second conclusion: The women in this study used their negative racial and gendered experiences to find ways to inform and manage their careers. The women in the study discuss the challenge that each of them had as it related to making sure that you outperformed your White counterparts.  The fact that they constantly dealt with both their race and gender required them to always perform; regardless of the circumstances. One of the participants discussed this as she writes a letter to Black women professional by stating this, "There were many times when the choices that I made were not in keeping with who I wanted to be. Too many were the times that I spent responding to emails instead of being fully present with family.  I let work encroach on life with family, friends or leisure pursuits.  I blame no one but myself, but in retrospect, I would have more closely guarded time with loved ones.  No salary, level or sphere of influence is more important than those closest to you."  These women understood the sacrifices but often felt as if they did not have any other choice.  The women in the study knew that they were dealing with trying to break through the glass ceiling and going through the pains that required you to hit up against that ceiling and watching those ascend on an escalator; which speaks to ease and comfort of their White counterparts career.  Now the concept of the concrete ceiling should be considered for these women because the ability to break through concrete requires more effort and

perseverance. The concrete ceiling is considered to be more dense and with no ability to penetrate. In a study conducted by Marjorie Moore (2000), she purports that Black women face obstacles that their White counterparts did not face but they persevered regardless and should be considered pioneers in the respective fields. "African American women say that the ceiling barring them for advancing is not glass but 'concrete'. The concrete ceiling is more difficult to penetrate and doesn't give one the ability to see through it," (Moore, 2000, p 25). The third and final conclusion: women in this study, who described themselves as accidental administrators believed that they succeeded because they obeyed culturally grounded rules that mandated perseverance rather than submit to hostile norms of Corporate American: racially driven isolation, hostility and non-acceptance.

In this study four of the eleven women had advanced degrees and credentials that allowed these women to advance in the roles that they occupied but each of the participants readily discussed the fact that they were always there to clean up issues and be a glorified administrative assistant even though they had titles of Directors, Vice-Presidents or Senior Vice President. In addition two of the women were in the process of pursing advanced digress.

<div align="center">Situating the Study in the Literature</div>

I have discussed and talked about the importance of the study that would either substantiate or refute the existing literature. Black women make up a considerable portion of the work force in Corporate America. These women hold different roles throughout corporate organizations. The research completed in this study adds another dimension of the importance of Black women in Corporate America. A study conducted by Microquest Corporation in 1996 states, "Despite the progress made in the workplace by women in minorities in recent years, it is quite apparent that there remains a great disparity in the executive suite of Corporate America:

women and minorities are greatly under-represented in executive roles at major America companies." This study further stated that this perspective will only create a liability for individual companies due to the evolving workforce. Corporate organizations are going to find themselves in a deficit of talent if Black women are not only embraced but advance into key leadership roles. This study helps to expand the perspective that Black women should have a significant role in the leadership make-up of organizations. As indicated by the participants, they discuss the type of work that they found themselves doing.  Many of the women considered themselves as "cleaning up" behind their counterparts. These women were doing the type of work that many of their counterparts felt that it was beneath them. This study further expands on the fact that Black women hold a very important role as role-models, not only to younger Black women professionals but to their families and the communities that they reside.

Further, the study also helps to support the fact that these women faced racism and sexism but in different ways. Each one of the participants insisted that they knew that they were treated differently because they were Black and female. This only made it more difficult to not be "on" all the time. While the Black executive women in this study were at work they had to display the façade required to be successful in their corporate settings.  Black women have had to create the situation of both identity and voice that had to be discovered and learned along the way. The reality is that Black women have always had to create their identity based on the setting.  Their identity has been so mired in what it is defined for Whites that they were not allowed the voice to articulate how they viewed themselves.

During this study, most of these women discussed their personal strategies for persevering, being successful and sitting in the corporate culture. As I spoke to each of my participants, I asked each of them to provide a letter to younger Black women professional.

Many of the letters talked about they wished they had done or what they would implore these women to do. This study supported the concept of both mentoring and each of the women talked about the importance of mentoring and career development; formal or informal. This study discusses the importance of career development and the research further expands on the importance of career development and how each of these women talked about it being a specific strategy that they used to further their career and the consul that they would give a young Black women professional. The women in the study made specific references to taking those positions that were lateral to gain more skills and expanding your networks to gain knowledge that may not be formal, supporting the fact that the Black executive women must work at a higher level in order to succeed within corporate.

<div align="center">Implications and Recommendations for Future Research</div>

The implications in this study go beyond the eleven women that participated. As Black women continue survive in Corporate America, the system will have to find a way to tap into this large resource pool for their talent and for the future of corporate. This is indicated by the statistics that Black women were awarded 90,312 bachelors, 38,749 masters and 2,007 doctorates (National Center for Education for Statistics, 2006), which show Black women to be a vast and growing educational reserve. These numbers alone indicate that the educated populations of Black women have wonderful potential for Corporate America.

It is important to understand that implications are a direct correlation to how Black women have been situated throughout the United States as it relates to their status. As indicated by this study, there has always been a dichotomy between Black women and White women and how there seems to be standards that are the same foe each but equally different for each, as well. "In other words, White and Black women did share problems common to gender; however,

Black women's problems were often exacerbated by racism" (Smith, 1998, p. 10). The race issue was a huge obstacle for Black women and they had a very different fight at hand. In this study, it allowed each of the women to have a voice about their experiences as it relates to Corporate America, their challenges and their identity as it related to being Black and female. Yancy (2000) identifies the site of identity formation and contestation of Whiteness ontology. But as we view it further it is important to have the "fundamental consumptions or assumptions about reality and about how it is structured" (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 171). In this study, the women talked about how they had to relate and make sacrifices that they sometimes looked back and wished they had made other choices. In their comments, many of the participants spoke to recommendations that they had for both Corporate America and younger professional Black women.

Perseverance for these women often looked like forced mentoring and requisite relationships that were necessary for success. That alone is an opportunity for further research in this area. This research adds another dimension in the area of Black women in Corporate America and it can be expanded further in research as it relates to the informal mentoring that is often necessary in Corporate America and how Black women can gain access to those particular networks. There is also a huge opportunity for Corporate America to review not only their draconian policies but for individual leaders to take an interest in the fact of Black women, asking of this population more than just the 'clean-up' described by many of the participants. This study implicates that Corporate America has responsibility to provide sincere support to these women that reside within their organizations. As opposed to construing artificial ways to support their diverse populations, there needs to be a concerted and sincere effort to create an environment that both supports and promotes these women.

Recommendations for Corporate America

As this study has mentioned and as the participants have indicated, there is a power structure within Corporate America in which Black women are marginalized. That is evident with the lack of Black women in executive and board room positions.  Based on continued research from this study, the participants outlined that as opposed to feeling like you are succeeding in this environment, it is more survival.  These women stated that they felt isolated and they continuously focused on having to be the best and brightest while still not being recognized like their White counterparts with like positions, opportunities or rewards.  Based on that summation, the following recommendations should be considered by American Corporations:  (1) Build the promotion of minorities (specifically Black women) into the reward system for top Executives in the organization, (2) Redistribute the power structure and setup prescribed career strategies and ladders.

The reality for any organization is being profitable.  That also translates into how the compensation program is set up.  The reality is that progress will not be made unless there is accountability for those that are the 'power' in the power structures.  Once the concept that an executive may lose their bonus because they have no successfully supported a Black woman, who has been identified as having executive potential, there may be a change across American Corporations.  There has to be a concerted effort on the parts of these organizations to create a culture that is not so difficult and ominous for Black women to navigate.  These women did not readily discuss the challenges of success: they discussed the tactics of trying to survive in Corporate America. That ownership of creating an environment that is more attractive and easier to navigate is placed on Corporate America.

In addition, the distribution of the power needs to change in Corporate America to allow Black women the equal access to navigating and climbing the corporate ladder. The power structure is what the women in the study discussed as a major obstacle. The feeling of always having to be the best and brightest and bring more to the table than your White counterparts was a part of their stress that they experienced in their positions in striving toward Executive level positions.  The concept of shifting the power structure is something that individual leaders will have to become both accountable and comfortable with doing.  The reality is that most individuals do not want to shift the power structure if they are the ones in power.

Closing Remarks

As I sit in many corporate meetings, n this particular day, in this particular meeting I was thinking about the phrase that I had heard about the browning of America and how that is not occurring at executive levels in Corporate America.  I recently had a young Black woman professional come to me almost in tears describing to me an incident that had just occurred.  She has been identified by her manager as a high performer and she has done well with her performance. But what she was beginning to experience was the weight and impenetrability of the corporate culture and the politics that she would have to navigate in order to continue to be successful.  As I listened to hear story, it reminded me of my journey and my similar experiences.  It also made me reflect on the women that I have encountered in both my career and my personal life that have contributed to my success and I realized that this topic will never get old.  There is so much more that needs to be discovered and revealed.  Each of the women in my study touched me in a very poignant way. I have tried to ensure that voices are heard.

The women in the study were courageous, brave and vulnerable as they discussed their experiences and how they would like to see younger Black professional women have better

experiences than they did.  These women have inspired me to continue to tell the story as often

as I can.  And their encouragement, stamina and strength tell a story of women who were

courageous under fire.

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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT LETTER

Date


740 Links View Drive
Sugar Hill, GA  30518


Participant Name
Address
City, State  Zip Code

Dear Participant:

You have been selected to participate in a research study on how Black women learn to succeed in Corporate America. You have been selected because of your success in your career and, as the researcher, I would like for you to tell your experiences.  The research will consist of having a one on one, face to face, interview that will take one to one in half hours, at a location that is convenient to you.

If you are interested in being part of this study, please contact me via email at deretta@bellsouth.net . Upon receiving your acceptance to be a part of this research, I will contact you via phone to set up our appointment send you a packet that includes the consent form and demographic questionnaire.   When you receive the packet and you have any questions, please contact me at 404-432-3978.

I look forward to having you as a participant in this research study. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



DeRetta Paschall, Doctoral Student
University of Georgia
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration and Policy

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "Black women and their Navigation through Corporate America" conducted by DeRetta Paschall from the Department of Adult Education at the University of Georgia (404-432-3978) under the direction of Dr. Ronald Cervero, Department of Adult Education, University of Georgia (706-542-6600). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate and stop taking part without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I understand that the purpose of this study is for the researcher, DeRetta Paschall, to examine Black women's success in Corporate America to include career development and ascension in corporate settings.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I understand that
- I will complete a demographic survey instrument that will be used to obtain maximum variation in the selection of participants.
- I will participate in a 1 to 11/2 hour long interview session.
- The researcher will ask me open-ended questions about my experiences related to my career development in Corporate America.
- The researcher will audio tape my responses.
- I may be asked to participate in follow-up sessions to capture the experiences that I have had in my career.

I understand that the contents of my interview will be held confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent or unless required by law. It is my understanding that the researcher will create transcripts from my audio tapes. As a participant, I will be allowed to review the transcribed interview for accuracy. The researcher will send a copy of the transcription to me upon completion of the interview. I understand that pseudonyms will be used instead of my real name in all written notes, transcripts and audio tapes. The audio tapes will be kept in a secure place at the home of the researcher and will be destroyed one year after the completion of the project.

I understand that there are no foreseeable risks associated with my participation in this study. I also understand that I will not directly benefit from this study, but my participation may lead to information that will improve understanding of Black women's experience in their career in Corporate America.

I understand that DeRetta Paschall will answer any questions about the research, now or during the course of the project. The researcher can be reached by phone (404-432-3978) or by email deretta@bellsouth.net.

I give my written permission for the researchers to use my audio taped interview and interview transcripts.
Circle one:    YES / NO    Initial _____

I give my written permission for the researchers to copy and use an analysis of written documents provided by me.
Circle one:    YES / NO    Initial _____

*I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.*

_____

| DeRetta Paschall | Signature of Researcher | Date |

Telephone: (404) 432-3978
Email: deretta@bellsouth.net

_____

| Name of Participant | Signature of Participant | Date |

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONAIRE

This questionnaire asks specific questions about your background relative to your gender, race and professional accomplishments. Note that the information shared in this questionnaire will be held in confidentiality.  If selected to participate in the study, this information may be revisited by the participant and the researcher to provide the opportunity for further discussion and elaboration.

Please…
❖ Use blue or Black ink to complete the questionnaire (DO NOT USE A PENCIL).
❖ Place an (X) in the box next to the correct answer.
❖ If you make a mistake, completely color in the incorrect box then mark the correct box.
❖ Write legibly when required to do so.

Participant Identification Code:
(Completed by the researcher)

1. **Race:**
□ Black/Black □ Native American □ Hispanic
□ Caucasian/White □ Multi-racial (Specify) _____
□ Asian/Pacific Islander □ Other (Specify) _____

2. **Highest Educational Level Obtained:**
□ Associate Degree in Business
□ Baccalaureate Degree in: □ Business □ Other (Specify) _____
□ Master's Degree in: □ Business □ Other (Specify) _____
□ Doctorate Degree in □ Business □ Other (Specify) _____

3. **Have you acquired certifications related to business?** □ Yes □ No
_____

4. **Do you have additional credentials outside of business?** □ Yes □ No
_____

5. **Are you currently in pursuit of additional degrees or certifications?**
□ Yes □ No Specify Type _____

6. **How long have you been in business or Corporate America?**
□ 1 – 2 years □ 10 – 14 years □ 25 – 29 years
□ 3 – 4 years □ 15 – 19 years □ 30 – 34 years
□ 5 – 9 years □ 20 – 24 years □ Over 35 years

7. **Do you work in a Fortune 500 organization?** □ Yes □ No

8. **What is your current position?** _____

9. **How long have you held this position?**
□ 1 – 2 years □ 10 – 14 years □ 25 – 29 years
□ 3 – 4 years □ 15 – 19 years □ 30 – 34 years

☐  5 – 9 years                    ☐  20 – 24 years        ☐  Over 35 years

**10. What other areas in business have you worked?**  (Please attach resume)

_____

_____

**11. Are you willing to participate in interviews as necessary to obtain adequate data for this research project?**☐  Yes ☐  No

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. How did you start your career?

2. Describe the different positions that you have held.

3. What factors have helped you in your career?

4. What factors have impeded you in your career?

5. What important lessons did you learn on your way to your current position?

6. Of all your learning experiences identify the most important one or two.
   a.    Why do you consider these the most important?
   b.    At what stages of your career did you learn those lessons
   c.    How would it have impacted your career had you learned them earlier?

7. What have been your most memorable career experiences?

8. Who has been instrumental in your career and why?

9. Please connect these lessons, if you can, to the various stages of your career?

10. How have you changed over the years in relation to how you think about your

    job/career/yourself?

11. If you could write a letter to a young Black women just starting out who wanted a career in

    Corporate America what would you tell her?

APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT LETTERS TO A YOUNG BLACK WOMAN PROFESSIONAL

My Dear Mentee:

As I have had many experiences, the one thing that I have found important is that you need to know what you want and your boundaries of what you will take.  I have often found myself in situations where I was not willing to work 'outside of my anatomy'.  In other words, I was not willing to compromise my perspectives, values and beliefs for the sake of climbing the corporate ladder.  I will admit to you that in some cases, that may have hurt my advancement but I was also assured that I could look at myself in the mirror and be OK.  The one motivation that has kept me in "the corporate game" is the concept that I am at the table and can provide a point of view as a Black women that is not always there.  It is also important to me that I can pull up.  I have had individuals in my career that have been instrumental to my survival and success and who has helped me.  My goal will always be to give back whenever I can!  The other thing that I will say is that no one can ever take away your experience or your education.  When you think about your career and your desires; always ***be true to yourself***.

So, be you, give of yourself and appreciate all experience; good and bad!  I wish you the best in all that you do.


Sincere regards,

DeRetta

Dear Tiarra:

As you start your journey in Corporate America, I am writing to you to share my perspective on establishing a career in Corporate America. Specifically, there are three items I want to highlight. They are the importance of relationships, continuous learning, and finally being your authentic self.

The corporate work environment is a combination of relationships. It is essentially many relationships rolled up into one, the organization itself. And generally speaking, most individuals in an organization share the same ideals, values, and principals. These ideals translate into it's "corporate culture". With that said, learning to navigate through takes time. Over the next several years, you will meet a variety of people, work with a variety of people, and share a variety of experiences. As you have interactions, keep in mind that each person possesses something unique and brings something different to the table. With that said, do not judge a book by it's cover. One could have so much more to offer than what you initially think. Also, don't burn bridges. You will not like everyone you work with and vice versa, but as hard as it is, always maintain professionalism. You never know whose path you will cross 10 years down the road. The world is a funny place and you often re-connect with people from prior times/experiences, especially in the workforce. Finally, it is just as important to connect with your peers, as it is to connect with executives. We all like to befriend executives, but your peers will end up in places you would never imagine.

From a personal standpoint, you should continue learning and gaining knowledge. Just because you finished college does not mean there is nothing else out there to gain. Always be in a learning mode. The day you stop learning, or lack the desire to increase yourself within your work environment, is the day you should walk out the door and pursue something else. You

continue to learn by technical updates related to your work, joining professional associations and networking, and by building relationships with others who have expertise in areas you may not be as familiar with.

Finally, always be your authentic self. Often times you may be the only female in the room, and certainly the only black female. And you may feel compelled to just "fit in". Your confidence might be construed as arrogance, your strength might be construed as overbearing, but never back down on your thoughts, beliefs, and opinions because you will regret it later. People will test you in a variety of ways simply because you don't look or act like them, or even just because you have a different perspective. What you have understand is that the world is big enough for everyone. And although what you bring to the table may be different, it is just as valuable as what the next person brings.

I hope this helps as you begin your journey. It will get rough and there could be days you will want to walk out and quit, but resist the urge if it is your passion.

Always,

Jane Watson

Dear XXX,

Beginning a career in Corporate America can be very exciting and rewarding. As you embark on your first professional role here are a few "nuggets" to consider.

* Focus on execution in order for you to be considered for the next role, you need to deliver results at your current level.

* Keep a record of all of your successes/accomplishments. You can refer to this document during your performance review or if there is an opportunity for a promotion.

* Get to know your immediate team. Establishing strong relationships will allow you to be more productive.

* Arrive on time to work and all meetings.

*Dress appropriately

*Be passionate about your work , but keep your emotions in tact when you are trying to make a point.

I hope these "nuggets" will help set a solid foundation for a successful career.

Sincerely,

Mary Williams

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Sent from my BlackBerry Wireless Handheld

Dear Young African-American Professional:

My advice to you is set forth below.

1. First and foremost: Don't engage in conduct you would not want your loved ones to learn about or see in any form of media including but not limited to the news or the front page of the Wall Street Journal, NY Times or their local newspaper. Social networks are included. Think of the possible long-term consequences before you post material on social network sites. Forgo immediate gratification and the "knee-jerk" temptation to communicate the first thought that comes to mind. Imagine that when you're 45 you're asked to be the CEO of a Fortune 500 Company or offered a cabinet post and your loved ones, including your children are watching the evening news when the forgotten films of your younger years are shown nationally. Ask yourself…is it worth it? Let me answer for you…No! If you don't follow the advice, you will not be heard to complain later.

2. You will need to be so much better than others you work with…you may resent it, but accept it. If it becomes unbearable, look for employment elsewhere.

3. Respect yourself…if you don't, don't expect respect from others.

4. Do not crap where you eat. Engaging in romantic/sexual relationships at work is very risky because consensual relationships have been known to "go south." Find love/lust elsewhere, unless you are willing to risk losing your good name, reputation, and possibly your job. Having said that, if you assume the

risk and find true love, one of you should leave the company to avoid possible conflicts of interest.

5.  Before you leave for work, look in the mirror and ask yourself…Is this the statement I want to make? Personal appearance is critical. Dress for success and walk tall.  You don't know who you'll meet on any given day. Remember, you only have one chance to make a first impression.

6.  Seek employment with employers that encourage and value ethics and integrity and embrace those values.  If after you're hired you don't believe your employer operates in accordance with those values, seek employment elsewhere. Your professional and personal reputations are your stock and trade.

7.  Remember, if you are employed at will without an employment contract, no matter what they tell you, it's your employer's party and you are merely an invited guest. Absent extenuating circumstances (often legal), you can be asked to leave, but you can choose to leave at any time.

8.  When a person shows you who they are, believe them.

9.  Loyalty and trust are important, but not always reciprocated.  Companies are not loyal, but individuals should be. Don't "throw anyone under the bus" unless there are legal implications or you are asked a direct question that requires a direct, honest answer. Be loyal to individuals who deserve it and who are loyal to you. It helps to have a friend at work preferably in another department.

10. Find a knowledgeable mentor and/or hire an executive coach. You'll need experience and objectivity to help you navigate corporate cultures and to deal with personalities.

11. Decide whether you want to be a leader or an individual contributor.

12. Establish attainable career goals, develop a plan to achieve your goals and execute against your plan. A written plan will help keep you focused and let you know if you're off track. You may decide later to revise your goals and plan. As you progress professionally, your goals may change.

13. Avoid workplace disputes. If there is a dispute, "don't have a nickel in that dime" unless you feel strongly to suffer the consequences. It may cost you the promotion you were expecting or a presentation you expected to make that would have increased your visibility to executives.

14. Even if your company does a good job of career pathing and developing its employees, take responsibility for your own career. Obtaining certifications in specialized areas is good, but degrees are better. Take advantage of tuition assistance benefits, if available. Education and training will make you more marketable and they are portable if you decide to change jobs.

15. Avoid conspicuous consumption. Managers can be petty. If you have the money to take trips and make expensive purchases, your manager may feel that you're being paid too much and give you a lower merit increase or bonus or fail to promote you.

16. Be the best employee you can be. Establish a reputation for being a reliable, punctual, flexible, detail oriented, well-prepared, pleasant team player who can "think outside the box". Don't be a clock watcher.

17. Don't be a "schemer and a scammer", but learn to recognize those who are and try to avoid them.

18. Be prepared to accept any promotion offered because you may not be offered another promotional opportunity. Employers don't like rejection any more than individuals do.

19. If your employer has a 401(k) plan enroll in it. You will be glad you did and not just for retirement.

20. Keep your loved ones out of the workplace. Well-meaning significant others and parents should never call your employer on your behalf. The only exception I can think of is if you are too sick to call in to inform your supervisor that you will be absent.

21. Establish relationships outside your department and function and at various levels. It's amazing how much you can learn about the "big picture" when you talk to people who have functional responsibilities that are different from yours.

22. Be discrete and maintain confidences.

23. Never lie…no good will come of it.

24. Maintain personal financial integrity. You don't want a garnishment against your paycheck. Imagine the message that would send to your employer.

25. Give back by making charitable donations and/or donating your time. Not only is this a way to help others, it may create new contacts that will benefit you going forward.

I salute you and wish you well!


Regards,

Barbara Jennings

November 4, 2009

Dear Sister,

So you are embarking on a corporate career. That's great! If your experience is anything like mine then you're in for the ride of your life. I am not talking about meeting incredible people, tackling challenging projects or engaging the world through multi-cultures. Though I hope you are blessed to do all those things, I'm referring to a much more personal journey.

Believe it or not, a corporate career, like any chosen profession, invites you to learn more about YOU; what motivates you, what scares you, how you relate to others, live your values and manage your ego. So pay attention, every situation will surface something instructive or revealing about who you are. Reflect to see if the who you are at any given time matches who you want to be. Sometimes you will be, sometimes you won't. When there is a disconnect work to close the gap.

There were times when the choices I made were not in keeping with who I wanted to be. Too many were the times I spent responding to emails instead of being fully present with family. I let work encroach on life with family, friends or leisure pursuits. I blame no one but myself, but in retrospect, I would have more closely guarded time with loved ones. No salary, level or sphere of influence is more important than those closest to you.

As a woman of faith, I thank God, for the gifts that enabled my corporate success. I also thank Him for opportunities He gives to minister and be ministered to. Many days I was encouraged by colleagues and co-workers who live their faith; sometimes overtly and others simply letting their light shine. *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof.* Praise God, this applies to corporations as well. Don't hide your faith, share it!

My sister, many blessings on your career!  May you experience the full breadth, depth and scope of life in the corporate world.

Take care,

Rose Button

Dear Beloved,

I've been asked to "write a letter to a young Black woman who has made the decision to join

Corporate America."

Herein, then, what you have is some of my most urgent thoughts as it related to succeeding both

personally and professionally. In many instances, I've given you personal examples of what I

mean not for you to follow but to model what I mean.

First things first, start with who you are on the inside.

1.      You have to have and own your own definition of success. – For me, success means:

•       Growing in my walk with Christ.

•       Having a healthy, thriving marriage. To that end, my husband Tarik and I will

celebrate 12 years of marriage on September 27, 2009.

•       Being an active, involved, hands on Mom to our son, James. James will be three in

June 2009. Say that o say, I have no choice in the "active" part ☺

•       Nurturing healthy relationships with my extended family and friends.

•       Doing paid and unpaid work that allows me to make meaningful contributions while

simultaneously providing me with opportunities to grow my technical and functional skills.

Those are my five hallmarks of success and in that order.


2.      Once I got my heart and mind around what I wanted in terms of success, I then had to and

continue to define and live in a way that is consistent with how I define success:

•       Church and Sunday School on Sunday. Bible Study on Wednesday. Daily devotional and

prayer time.

- Date Night with my husband every Saturday night. Home made dinner more time than not each week. Vacation with and without our son. Scheduled sex if it comes to that.

- James and I have a standing date three Saturdays of each month to the Zoo. If I don't make it home in time for dinner. I will make it home to bathe James or at least to put him to bed. Our bedtime ritual does include me reading to him.

- The one Saturday I don't take James to the Zoo is when I take my Mom to the spa for our monthly Spa Date. My parents and my mother-in-law all live in the metro area. Friday night is Family Night. We eat dinner as a family. It rotates from house-to-house. I see my parents every day. My Mom still works and my Dad is retired and takes care of James during the days he's not at pre-school.

- I serve on a number of nonprofit boards. My passion is the preservation of the family with a particular emphasis on the stewardship of children. That's the first filter for my involvement. My second filter is the time requirement. If the math as it relates to time doesn't work, then I can't commit to it. I have learned to say no gracefully and to offer up viable alternatives.

Paid work. I am nine months into a new job. Turner did a fantastic job courting me and so far has lived up to every promise. In considering the opportunity, the primary questions were: what do I have to offer? What do I stand to gain?

I *generally* work from 9 (I take James to school, my husband picks him up) to 6. I have a 45-mintue commute each way. I don't talk on the telephone during my morning commute as that is time set aside for James. On my evening commute, I use the time to return telephone calls etc. I have a Blackberry; however, it rarely makes it into the house. I check it in the morning before I start my commute and one last time before I enter my home. I have all kinds of rules with respect

to how many breakfast and lunch appointments during the week, both internal and external. My goal is no more than two evening functions per week. I don't (as opposed to won't) work on weekends. I take all my vacation.

I give you all that context because I genuinely believe if you don't have a general, holistic view of your entire life, you can't be successful in a sustainable way by anyone else's measure at work. A friend of mine, Yvonne Bryant Johnson teaches a terrific time management class in which she has participants literally map out a 24-hour period. The "aha" is the question: is how you are spending your time reflective of what you say is important to you. For me, if I am not spending sufficient time in my five areas of "success," I know I have to recalibrate.

As it relates to specific workplace tools and tips, consider the following:

1.      Have at least one skill that hands down you are the best at – demonstrated, documented competence is a must. Enthusiasm is necessary and insufficient.

Complete the following sentence: "Hands down, I am the best at _____."
Whatever you answered with, that is where you need to spend your energy. Hone that skill. Promote that skill. Look for opportunities to use that skill. Know the value of that skill. Know your number two and three skills as well; however, focus on your primary skill.

2.      Know how you will contribute to an organization – what is your value proposition? Complete another sentence for me: "I will contribute to my employer's vision/mission by _____."

We, women, tend to focus on what we do. That should only be half of our focus. Our full focus should be HOW what we do contributes to the success of the organizations we work for.

3.      Understand your employer's economic model for making money – what does the company you plan to work for do and how will your wok support the company's marketplace objectives. This is particularly true for individuals in staff positions.

You don't need to become an imitation CFO. You DO have to understand the basics of money in and money out. Sit down with someone in the organization's finance department and have that individual walk you through the balance sheet. If you work for a publicly traded company, listen to the quarterly earnings calls.

4.      Always know what you want and how to ask for it, e.g., raise, promotion, new or different assignments.

At the end of any interview never forget to say, "I want this job." Be prepared to answer why.

5.      Know the value of your skills on the open market – research online tools, share information with similarly situated friends.

Get comfortable asking similarly situated people how much they make and be willing to share how much you make. If solid numbers are just too much for you to ask for, try ranges. The point is get reliable data. Share information. Rid yourself of the notion that how much you earn is not a statement of you the person. If you are underpaid or under employed, that is only a statement of your need to hone your negotiation skills or a signal for you to upgrade your skills.

6.      Negotiate everything – I just read the following on yesterday: "The failure to negotiate for an additional $5,000 at age 22 will cost a woman $500,000 in total lost wages by age 62." As Clark Howard would say – THAT'S A LOT OF MONEY! Never leave any money on the table. And when I say everything, I mean everything – start times, deadlines, performance goals, severance packages, etc.

One additional note here: When asking for a raise, your rising cost of living should be of no consequence to your employer. The focus point has to be is your employer appropriate valuing what you bring to the table?

Same is true when you are looking for a job. If you can't put it on a resume, don't say it out loud. For example, "I'm a single Mom" is no reason for a potential employer to pay you more than what the job you are applying for is worth.

7.     Ask for and respond to feedback. Related to that, never ask a question to which there is only one right answer. It's a set-up for the other person and it's bad for you in that your behavior will make it difficult for other people to be transparent with you.

Take a second to answer this question: when was the last time you asked someone for feedback? In my experience, people who ask for feedback *on a monthly basis* are the first considered for promotion opportunities and career enhancing opportunities.  People who ask for feedback on a monthly basis *and act on it* are most likely to succeed when they receive the promotion or the career enhancing opportunity.

8.     Mentor and be mentored.

And I don't mean find a buddy with whom you commiserate on regular basis. Here is a short list of what a mentor or mentors can do for you:

a.           Communicator – they can promote your skills and abilities

b.           Long Term Career Adviser – they can provide input when you are planning for the long term

c.           Short Term Career Adviser – they can help you evaluate an offer

d.           Role Model (symbolic, e.g., Ursula M. Burns @ Xerox; or actual e.g., a friend or relative)

e.	Sounding Board (e.g., role playing upcoming events like a presentations or a speech)

f.	Interpreter (e.g., performance feedback you may r receive and its implications)

g.	Network (e.g., extending their own network to you or  helping you to develop your own network)

And you HAVE to mentor. It's one of the ways to answer The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s question: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is, 'what are you doing for others?'"

9.	Make good decisions and own them no matter the consequence. Sounds simple enough, however it is difficult to do. Suppose your employer asks you to move. Pro and con the opportunity both in the short and long term as well as the potential impact to you personally and professionally. Ask as many clarifying questions as comes to mind. If it works in your favor, great. You own it. If it doesn't pan out, too bad. You still own it. I call making and living with your decisions being a grown up.

BOTTOM LINE: put your big girl panties on ☺

10.	You can leave when things are good.

You don't have to wait for things at work to go horribly wrong. Leaving for a new experience or a better opportunity is perfectly okay.

Well, that's it. Those are the big ones. One last thing I'd like to share … and old Irish Blessing a mentor once shared with me:

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind always be at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face, and rains fall soft upon your fields.

And until we meet again, May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

All the best to you!

Warmly,

Janet Borden

Dear Mentee,

As you begin the next chapter of your life, I would suggest that you keep in mind the following guiding principles.

1. **Faith** – Your foundation for the future will require you to keep your faith. You will have many test along the way. This is so you can give a 'testimony'. Therefore, you must know that through every challenge, set back, and obstacle; you have not lost or failed. You have gained another opportunity to make a negative a positive. You should look to grow from every door that closes or is broken along the way. You can and will over come knowing your priorities…faith is your fundamental basic to success.

2. **Do what you are passionate about!** Your job should NOT be work, but instead a way to get paid for what you love. Therefore, it is not an issue to get up and go to work. Although, no one loves 100% of what they have to do on any job; you should love at least 80%, so your strengths are being utilized. You should not be in an environment where you feel that you need to be "fixed" or changed to be successful. If that is the case, then you probably are not in the best position for you. Not to mention that you are not utilizing your strengths, but constantly focusing on "perceived opportunities".

3. **Hard work is only a piece of the pie.** You must ALWAYS do your best work and try to resolve any issue presented to you. However, the hard work is just the beginning. It is what is expected, but more is required. You are required to do more and to be more…then your counterparts. The world is not 'fair' and balanced, so you must remove all excuses. Make sure that you continue to invest in yourself through gaining knowledge, i.e. training, workshops, mentoring, special projects, etc. If you don't invest in your future and yourself, how can you ask anyone else to do so? Even though you

know this is the case, DO NOT USE IT AS AN EXCUSE!!!!  Instead, take those excuses

and fuel it into "positive energy of success"!  You CAN'T change the world by yourself!

4. **Mentors –** As you begin your career, you should find mentors and champions.

   EVERYONE needs a champion to help them maneuver and work through their career.  A

   champion can come through mentoring and/or a working relationship.  You should find

   mentors of different races and genders.  Know the strengths and positive characteristics

   that you want help with from your mentors.  You should also develop relationships with

   colleagues/industry associates/membership associations.  This will develop your network

   and "self valuation".  Your "valuation" to your discipline and area will come from your

   knowledge and the respect others have for you.  This is built from the network, which

   you have established.

5. **Balance –** It is extremely important that you define balance for yourself.  What is

   important to others, may not be the same priority for you in your life.  Know that if you

   get married or have children, your values and requirements will change.  As they need

   you differently at different points of their development, you will change what is

   important to you along the way.  In addition, balance can be achieved by quality and not

   quantity.  The type of relationship that you have with who is important to you….ONLY

   YOU CAN DEFINE!!!!  Each person's sacrifices MUST be decided by each individual.

   NO ONE can tell you what is RIGHT for you, they can only give you advice and

   guidance.

I hope that the above 5 guidelines will help you as you hit the world of ADULTHOOD and

WORKING.

Valerie Jensen