RISING TO THE TOP: A NATIONAL STUDY OF BLACK WOMEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTS

by

ROBBIE SMITH LATIMORE

(Under the Direction of JUANITA JOHNSON-BAILEY)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand how African American women community college presidents in the USA ascend to the presidency. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What is the typical career preparation of African American women presidents of community colleges? (2) What are the common strategies that African American women presidents of community colleges use to negotiate their careers? (3) What were the salient factors that affected or shaped their career paths?

Eight African American women presidents of two-year colleges in the six accreditation regions that are recognized by the United States Department of Education were interviewed in this basic qualitative study. The constant comparative method of data analysis was employed to uncover emerging themes from the transcripts.

The first finding of the study was that typical career preparation of African American women presidents of community colleges consisted of extensive preparation, which included holding several jobs throughout the college, frequently volunteering for special projects, acquiring and cooperating with a mentor, earning advanced terminal

degrees (despite the career norms of White males and White females who held the jobs), and participation in leadership training. The second finding was that the Black women community college presidents negotiated their careers by: constructing a well-developed professional image that exuded confidence and by taking calculated risks that better positioned them for advancement. The third finding was the Black women community college presidents' careers were shaped by their understanding of and management of the racism and sexism that they encountered and by strong reciprocal community and family relationships.

Three major conclusions were indicated from the findings. First, the career preparation of African American women community college presidents is different because the women were held to higher standards than their counterparts because of racism and sexism and therefore the women "over achieved" and "over prepared" and "over credentialed" in an effort to counteract these implicit societal forces. Second, African American women community college presidents developed a deliberate yet flexible approach to their careers that was consistently cognizant of managing their images and that was informed by a mentoring collective. Third, African American women presidents were engaged servant leaders who constructed and nurtured a politically savvy persona that they used to engage the community as a base and support system.

INDEX WORDS: Adult Education, African American Women Presidents, Career Development, Community Colleges, Higher Education, Mentoring, Positionality, Racism, Sexism, Women's Career Development

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DEDICATION

The journey to earning my doctorate degree has been challenging and rewarding. But I have been sustained by the unwavering support that I have received from my huge and remarkable family and faithful friends. Most of all, God has been my constant guide and through him, once again, it has been demonstrated that all things are possible.

My husband of 33 years, Frank A. Latimore, has been my biggest supporter, my rock, and my encourager during my "UGA voyage." Thank you, Frank, for continually encouraging me to "sit at the table and get busy" during the times that I did not want to read another article or another book. I will always cherish your love and support.

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Finally, this study would not have been possible without the eight outstanding women presidents who so willingly shared their life experiences. It is my prayers that the

information that has been captured in this dissertation will be a catalyst in the careers of other African American women who aspire to become college presidents.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Women make up 51 percent of the United States population and 46 percent of the workforce; further 60 percent of women are now in the labor force compared to 74 percent for men (United States Census Bureau, 2007); yet women are noticeably underrepresented in senior level administrative positions such as presidents and vice presidents in the workforce. This underrepresentation of women is particularly apparent in higher education administration, regardless of the classification of the institution, whether two-year college or research university (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Though women as a population still lag behind in upper level positions, reports (Catalyst, 2004; Jackson & Phelps, 2004; King & Gomez, 2007) reveal that White women are outpacing women of color in acquiring positions and pay that have been traditionally reserved for the dominant White male leadership.

According to King and Gomez (2007), the percentage of women presidents more than tripled from 1986 to 2006 from 8 percent to 29 percent, while the percentage of presidents who were members of minority groups rose from 8.1 percent to 13.6 percent during the same period. That growth, however, has slowed in recent years showing only a two percent growth in the last ten years for women and minorities. From all indications, community colleges still may represent fertile ground for African American women, in particular those with aspirations for presidencies since community colleges led all other institutions in hiring women presidents (King and Gomez, 2007). Between 1996 and

2006, more than one-third of the new presidents were women. Additionally, King and Gomez point out that community colleges also led the way in hiring minority presidents with 15 percent minority appointments compared to 13 percent for other institution types.

The impending retirement of scores of community college presidents further represents opportunities for African American women. Boggs (2003) contends that community colleges are nearing a considerable transition in leadership because a significant number of administrators who came in during the fast-paced growth period of the 1960s are quickly approaching retirement. The American Association of Community Colleges conducted a survey that indicated 45 percent of the 249 presidents surveyed planned to retire by 2007 (Shults, 2001). The study further reported that a high percentage of chief academic officers and chief student service officers are also nearing retirement. It is important to note that the chief academic officers are the administrators who most often advance to presidential appointments. It is apparent, then, that extraordinary opportunities will exist for individuals seeking advancement to senior level administrative positions in higher education.

In 1996, Foote and Holub (1996) observed that community colleges are enrolling significant numbers of students from the African American, Latino, and Asian American backgrounds, yet the community colleges have not achieved the same measure of diversity among the administrative leaders. In 2007, over ten years after Foote's observation, community colleges were showing immense promise towards balancing the scales in women executive leadership positions in proportion to the women student population (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008); still, the gap is far from being closed. Opp and Gosetti (2002) point out that during the past ten years, two-year

colleges have outpaced four-year colleges in the hiring of women administrators and full-time women faculty. Though community colleges are exceeding four year colleges, they still fall short when the percentage of women faculty and administrators is compared to the percentage of women students, particularly women of color. Alarmingly, the growth in African American women administrators has remained virtually unchanged over the past decade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

Two-year technical colleges in Georgia have shown substantial gain in White women executive leadership, but just as statistics reveal in other arenas of higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008), senior level African American women administrators in higher education are still severely lacking. For the past ten years, White women vice presidential and presidential leadership has increased exponentially in Georgia's technical college system (Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, 1998-2008), from five percent to thirty percent. Conversely, Thomas (2004) revealed that of the technical college presidents in Georgia, only one of 34 was African American female and of the 132 vice presidents only eight were African American female; still in 2009, these statistics for vice presidents remain virtually unchanged and there is still only one Black woman president (Technical College System of GA, 2009). Of the sixteen public and private community colleges in Georgia, there are no African-American female presidents (*U. S. Community Colleges by state*, 2008).

Research via phone contact with the American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC) national office in March 2009 and a review of the AACC Membership Directory 2005 reveal similar under representation of African American female presidents in the community and two-year colleges across the United States. Of the 1,195

college presidents, only 34 are African American female. Given these unbalanced statistical representations, it is pertinent that special attention is given to the career development of African American women.

According to Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998), there is a paucity of literature specifically related to diversity in career development of women; moreover, the preponderance of research in this area has been inferred from studies directed at the White male. Thus, the experiences of women have not been copiously researched or documented. To a greater extreme, women of color have been all but excluded from the career development literature. Though there continues to be a deficit in the literature on African American women's career development, research is slowly increasing that specifically focuses on this population. Recent studies such as *Career Development Factors of Black Women Who Work in the Professions (Beach-Duncan, 2004), Factors Contributing to the Career Succession of African American Women Executive Leaders in Community and Technical Colleges (Thomas, 2004), and The Career Development of Senior-Level African American Women Working in Community and Technical Colleges in the United States (Wilson, 2004)* are gradually closing the gap on the under representation of Black women in career development research. However, these academic studies are not in the popular domain.

Career development can include themes such as mentoring and positionality. The concept of cross-culture or cross-race mentoring is on the rise and particularly important since the greatest percentage of senior level positions are held by White males. Thus, it would be expedient to the career development of African American women and all marginalized races if the dominant White male leadership recognized the benefit of cross-

culture mentoring. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) concede that struggles, contradictions, and opportunities do arise because of the differences in race, gender, and culture, but they state that these issues can be resolved. Furthermore, they set forth that both mentor and protégé benefit from the relationship.

Leadership development of African American women as a component of career development deserves specific attention. How does the African American woman gain leadership skills? Various means exist for career development for the general population, but how specifically should leadership development be addressed for African American women? According to Watts and Hammons (2002), graduate preparation programs, in-house programs, and institutes and workshops are options for leadership development. Historically, African American women have participated in these activities, but still are lagging behind in senior leadership positions. What other strategies or negotiating skills, then, do African American women need to acquire to be chosen for higher level leadership positions? How can these women compensate for the double jeopardy status of race and gender? These are examples of questions that will need to be answered in order to address the paucity of Black women administrators in higher education.

Historically, the expectation has been that women will acclimate and acculturate to the dominant White male leadership. Ultimately, the differences in the ways that men and women are expected to act, to behave, to be treated and to be valued, according to Northouse (2004), have much more to do with gender or the learned beliefs than to do with the person's race. The problem with this type of reasoning, Northouse continues, is that numerous studies have revealed that *male and masculine* have been valued as superior to *female* and *feminine*. This attitude carries over to the workplace and limits

contributions that individuals make based on the concept of gender. How then can the African American woman compensate for being not only disenfranchised because of the marginality of her race, but also because of her gender?

Statement of the Problem

African American women have early history experiences different from those of other women as well as different from the experiences of African American men. Historically, Black women's major roles were housekeepers, cooks, and nannies for the White race and caretakers for their own husbands. Thus, the double oppression of racism and sexism was born for African American women, according to Howard-Hamilton (2003), when their "subordinate status was assumed and enforced by White and Black men as well as White women" (p. 19). Education was deemed not needed by or intended for African Americans, especially women, who were considered less than human. Howard-Hamilton contends that these stereotypes and inequities continue to exist and create barriers as Black women work towards gaining educational and economic parity.

Over the years, African American women have cast off the shackles of being shut out of "formal academic learning" and have acquired not only K-12 education, but are one of the fastest growing populations of students in higher education. According to the Digest of Education Statistics (2008), Black student enrollment in higher education increased from 9 percent to 13 percent from 1976-2007. Likewise, Black women student enrollment in higher education increased approximately 12 percent from 1989 and 2002. This increase of Black women in higher education extends to faculty and administrators, but the gain is not as impressive as that of African American women students. Jackson (2004) points out that the senior level administrative appointments have gone primarily to

White women; thus Black women continue to lag significantly behind White women in holding senior level administrative positions.

Rosser (2001) contends that between men and women leaders, there is an increasing body of literature that points to important differences in leadership styles, qualities, and priorities. The literature, however, does not distinguish between Black and White women in these leadership styles, qualities, and factors. Research readily reveals, however, that Black women often have the same education and credentials as White women but fail to be promoted at the same rate. The literature is not clear, however, on factors other than education and training that might influence the ability for Black women to be promoted or appointed to senior level higher education administrative positions. This research will seek to understand what factors in addition to educational credentials contribute to the upward mobility of African American women who aspire to the presidency in community colleges.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to understand how African American community college presidents ascend to the presidency. The research questions that guided this study were:

(1) What is the typical career preparation of African American women presidents of community colleges?

(2) What are the common strategies that African American women presidents of community colleges use to negotiate their careers?

(3) What were the salient factors that affected or shaped their career paths?

Significance of the Study

African American representation of women students in two-year colleges has increased significantly during the last few decades. In contrast, African American women remain disproportionately underrepresented not only in leadership but also in all professional positions in the two-year colleges. Many African American women have prepared themselves for leadership by obtaining the minimum educational requirement for entry into leadership positions. Once the degree credential and associated requisite training and qualifications are achieved, what else can the African American woman do to position herself for higher education leadership advancement? Why aren't these women being selected for leadership positions at the level more aligned with the African American women student representation? Since many Black women possess the minimum qualifications for leadership in two-year colleges, but are not being promoted comparable to White women and men, this study will seek to identify strategies that this target group of women can employ to contribute to their upward mobility.

This study was significant because the existing literature does not reveal characteristics or strategies beyond educational credentials and training that will benefit African American women in leadership development or in navigation or negotiation skills. The goal of this study, then, was to begin to fill the knowledge gap both conceptually and practically on strategies that African American women can use to negotiate in the dominant leadership culture. As previously stated, the student body is becoming more diverse in two-year colleges, thus it would be expedient for these learners to be able to communicate with instructors and administrators who can more closely identify with their backgrounds and cultures.

Adult educators can utilize the results of this study to develop curricula for leadership development training that target African American women; employers can utilize the results of the study for staff development and continuing education opportunities for existing employees; and finally, African American women can utilize the results of the study for personal and professional development. This study is especially significant for Black women because it is a study of Black women who have successfully negotiated the dominant leadership structure.

Since this is a national study, Black women from across the United States of America will be able to apply the findings and conclusions of this study to their individual situations to facilitate their ascension to the community college presidency.

Explanation of Terms

African American and *Black* will be used as synonymous terms throughout this document. The participants and the literature used them interchangeably. Therefore, this researcher used the same standard of applicability.

Senior-level position will be used synonymously with *president or vice president;* however, when it is necessary to make a distinction, it will be noted.

Community college, two-year college, and technical college will be used interchangeably throughout this document. However, when a definite distinction is required, it will be noted. In the literature review, community colleges were often referred to as two-year colleges; they are primarily designed to provide transferability of courses to four year institutions. The primary focus of technical colleges, however, is not transferability of courses, but direct entry into the workforce; thus, transferability of courses is not a major focus for technical colleges.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand how African American women of community colleges ascended to the presidency. The research questions that guided this study were:

(1) What is the typical career preparation of African American women presidents? of community colleges?

(2) What are the common strategies that African American women presidents of community colleges use to negotiate their careers?

(3) What were the salient factors that affected or shaped their career paths?

The literature review focuses on the topics of women in college leadership, career development, racism and sexism, positionality, White privilege, power, and mentoring.

Black Women and Leadership: A Historical Perspective

Bass (1997) tells us that many people believe that the effects of leadership are in the eyes of their beholders; correspondingly, Peters, Kinsey, and Malloy (2004) stipulate that leadership requires that others perceive one as a leader. With the insinuation from these authors that leadership is a perception, it is easy to understand why Burns (1978) advises that "Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (p. 2). Bass (1981) commented that there are likely as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have endeavored to define the concept. Consequently, much of the literature reviewed discussing leadership did not offer a concrete definition

but more often than not described leadership as a process. Northouse (2004) describes leadership as a process where an individual influences others to achieve a common goal. He further postulates that leadership involves influence, occurs in groups, and pays attention to goals.

Dating back to slavery, many African American women have been perceived as leaders. Although representative leadership roles within mainstream America have been elusive to African American women, the Black female has been leading for decades. Women such as Harriet Tubman took up the leadership mantle long before women were permitted to lead in official capacities. Tubman was born a slave in 1820 and in 1849 escaped to the free state of Pennsylvania. After the Fugitive Slave Act was passed making it illegal to assist in the escape of slaves, Tubman joined the Underground Railroad (Gikow & McGowan, 2002; Smith, 2003). During 20 trips from the South to the North, Tubman helped to free an estimated 300 slaves. Later, in 1908 she founded the Harriett Tubman House, a home for elderly Blacks. Tubman was considered an exemplary leader, both in the Underground Railroad and in advancing the pursuit of freedom for Black Americans. Additionally, Collins (2000) provides a reminder of the contributions of two Black women civil rights activists, Septima Clark and Ella Baker.

Fernandez (1999) posits that in order for Black women to be elevated to leadership positions, they must combat stereotypes about their capabilities and must outperform White males. Furthermore, Black women must fight this battle while they lack sufficient power and authority and while they are additionally isolated from the power centers of informal work groups. Black women have had to be overqualified in order to obtain their opportunities, informs Fernandez. Opportunely, the leadership

opportunities for Black women seem to hold some promise. Indvik (2004) proffers that African American women currently represent the largest group of women of color in management and are surpassing African American men in executive and managerial positions. Although women's inclusion in leadership roles has increased, Indvik indicates that this increase does not reflect their overall proportion of the workforce or population. Perhaps there is a logical explanation as to the reason women in general are not represented proportionately to their workforce involvement. Heilman (2001) argues that competence does not ensure that a woman will ascend to the same organizational level as an equivalently performing man because gender bias penalizes women in work settings. She also posits that female gender stereotypes impede women from advancing the organizational hierarchy because executive level positions are almost always defined as male in sex-type. Thinking such as this precludes the recognition of women's competence.

In addition to facing leadership challenges brought on as a consequence of race and gender, Black women have to contend with what DuBois (1990) called double consciousness. Dubois, in his infinite wisdom, recognized in his 1953 writing that Black people, especially in the professional world, functioned between two socio-cultural environments, Black and White. Johnson-Bailey and Alfred (2006) describe this cultural balancing act as living in opposition of the norm culture while inevitably negotiating between cultures. With this double consciousness that DuBois wrote about, Black people saw the world from the Black and White perspective and assimilated accordingly. What Dubois termed double consciousness over 50 years ago today is expressed as biculturalism (Blake, 1999).

Women in College Leadership

Women in senior level leadership positions have increased significantly during the last several decades, according to Indvik (2004); still, the increase is not reflective of women's statistics in the workforce or population. Indvik further asserts that recent demographic data on female and male leaders are indicative of salient progress for women, yet a continued imbalance exists in the proportion of women in leadership roles. It is significant to note that the majority of the leadership positions have been awarded to White women (Opp & Gosetti, 2002); African American women continue to lag glaringly behind White men and women, and Black men in the acquisition of the coveted leadership positions in academia and in the corporate world (King & Gomez, 2007).

Hamilton (2004) reports that women and minorities hold a greater share of faculty and senior-level administrative positions than ever before in history; nevertheless, both groups remain underrepresented. As evidence of the disproportionate representation of women and minorities, *The American College President: 2002 Edition* (Corrigan, 2002) reported that in 2001 women represented only 21 percent of presidents and minorities represented only 13 percent. A later report by *The American College President: 2007 Edition* (King & Gomez), reveals a slight increase in women and minority representation of 23 percent and 13.6 percent respectively. Not only are women and minorities still underrepresented, but also according to *The American College President: 2007 Edition*, the rate at which these two groups are rising to the presidency is beginning to slow.

Catalyst (2004) reports that African American women face barriers that likely hinder their advancement to upper level administration. Utilizing a quantitative and

qualitative research design, Catalyst conducted a study of African American women to determine opportunities and barriers to leadership advancement in corporate management; 963 women in Fortune 1000 companies responded to a survey and 23 focus groups participated in interviews. The findings revealed that African American women believe their advancement was hindered by the "concrete ceiling" commonly referred to by White women as the "glass ceiling." Unlike the glass ceiling which can be seen through, Catalyst stresses that the concrete ceiling is considered more difficult to penetrate or shatter and cannot be seen through or around and no view of the top is available. Other barriers cited include negative, race-based stereotyping; a lack of visibility; more frequent questioning of authority and credibility; being a "double-outsider," (not sharing the same race or gender with the dominant culture); and a lack of institutional support. The women also contended that they were excluded from informal and formal networks; that the historical legacy of slavery that included discrimination based on skin color still affected their relationships; and that their diversity programs were ineffective. Unfortunately, over one-third of the women believed that their opportunities to rise to senior level positions in their companies were declining over time. The study participants asserted that strategies Black women used for upward mobility were exceeding expectations, communicating effectively, connecting with mentors, building positive relations with managers and colleagues, and using their cultural backgrounds to enhance job performance.

Contrary to Catalyst's (2004) findings that Black women believed their opportunities for advancement were decreasing, Yolanda Moses expressed divergent views. In a discussion on leadership in four-year colleges, Stewart (2002) quoted Yolanda

Moses, a former four year college president and editor of *Black Women in the Academe* as saying, “I am very hopeful because so many Black women are in the pipeline and in leadership positions now.” Though Moses did not give evidence for her statement regarding more Black women in the pipeline and holding leadership positions, she argued that there are more avenues to the top such as development, fundraising and student services. Unfortunately, Moses statement does not hold true for the technical college system in Georgia; Black women in the pipeline for leadership positions are dismally low. Presently, only nine Black women hold the title of vice president from a total of 136 positions, and only three of these are vice presidents for instructional services or academic affairs from a total of 34 positions; furthermore only nine Black women hold the title of Director of Instruction from a total of approximately 135 positions. The Director or Dean of Instruction position traditionally leads to Vice President for Academic Affairs, the position which in turn most often leads to President. Thus, opportunities in the technical college system in Georgia for Black women appear to be stagnant or declining because these statistics have been virtually unchanged during the past five years. The literature review indicates that the pipeline for African American women leadership is bleak not only in technical colleges but in community colleges as well.

The Status of Women Presidents in Community Colleges

The time is nearing when community colleges will have a significant transition in leadership at the presidents’ level, according to a recent report. Ashburn (2006) conveys that based on a survey from the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 56 percent of community college presidents will be retiring by 2012 and 84 percent of

presidents will be retiring in the next 10 years. In 2002, Weisman and Vaughan (2002) related that community colleges were reporting significant increases in the number of women acquiring the position of presidents of community colleges; to be specific, women presidents increased from 11 percent to 28 percent in the ten year period from 1991 to 2001.

From 2001 to 2005 the increase in the percentage of women presidents was virtually stagnant, rising by only one percent. Ashburn (2006) reports shocking statistics from a summary of survey findings from the *2006 Community College President: Career and Lifestyle Survey* released by the AACC in April 2006. Ashburn observes that the survey reveals minority groups have made no gains in the last five years and women have made only slight gains. In fact, the percent of community college presidents for minorities has dropped from 14 percent to 13 percent since 2001; further the rapid rise of women presidents that took place from 1991 to 2001 has stalled given that only 29 percent of community college presidents today are women compared to 28 percent in 2001. The impending mass exit of mostly male community college presidents should provide increased opportunities for the previously fast growing population of women receiving upper level administrative appointments, but the recent statistics indicate that women appointments seem to be at a standstill. This reality becomes especially problematic for Black women since the presidential appointments have gone primarily to White women (Jackson & Phelps, 2004).

Research readily indicates that appointments of Black women presidents have remained virtually unchanged over the last decade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). What can Black women do, then, to increase the probability of

becoming community college presidents? The next section will delineate a few studies discussing strategies that Black women can use to increase the probability for career advancement. Topics include leadership strategies, career paths, and career advancement of women administrators in community colleges.

Women Administrators in Community Colleges

In a qualitative study of women administrators in community colleges, Tedrow and Rhoads (1998) explored patterns of women's leadership. The participants included a purposeful sample of 30 women—24 White and 6 African Americans—holding senior-level leadership positions and also members of the senior executive staff at their community colleges in the Midwest. The interviews, conducted independently with each participant, focused on how the women viewed their leadership roles, the challenges they faced as women administrators, their perceptions of gender issues within their organizations, how they negotiated the organizational context, and how they managed the intersection between personal and professional lives.

Tedrow and Rhoads (1998) identified three general strategies that the women employed in their leadership: adaptation, reconciliation, and resistance. They maintained that each study participant displayed a preference for one of the three categories; however, all the women tended to use all of the strategies to some degree. The authors further used the three strategies, adaptation, reconciliation, and resistance, to explore leadership identity, communication style, and gender issues. Tedrow and Rhoads found that the women primarily constructed their leadership identify as a response to organizational expectations and norms grounded in the experiences of the men.

The adaptation strategy replicated the instrumental and detached behaviors exemplified by male leaders. The leadership identity was reflective of a strong authority figure; the communication style was depersonalized to the extent of placing emphasis on one's organizational position, and keeping one's distance from subordinates. Finally, the adapters denied or minimized gender issues. Tedrow and Rhoads (1998) posit that with the reconciliation strategy, the women conformed to expectations of both women and men depending on the organizational context and situation. Their leadership identity reflected the duality of instrumental and relational behavior. The women's communication style was that of constantly taking initiatives to achieve group harmony which entailed considering their own agendas as well as the agenda of others. The study participants were aware of the gender issues and their effects on their leadership. Reconciliators saw their response as necessary to survive. In the third category, resistance, Tedrow and Rhoads (1998) emphasize that the women wanted to create a work context where relational leadership styles had equal status with the traditional instrumental behavior. The leadership identity seeks to develop the whole person through on-going education and discourse. The communication style integrated the nature of leadership by interlocking formal and informal communication, excluding overly authoritative conduct, and creating an affirming environment. Gender issues were openly addressed.

In summary, the data analysis revealed several findings: 1) Each woman tended to display a preference for one of the three strategies of adaptation, reconciliation, and resistance and found ways within the traditional work context to develop their own leadership identity and communication style; 2) A few of the women denied gender as an

issue in their leadership, but found the gender differences challenging; and 3) If the women followed male leadership styles, they were usually rejected by the women colleagues and if they were successful with the male leadership style, they were often unaccepted by the men because they were women. Tedrow and Rhoads (1998) surmised that community colleges will have to take a critical look at their organizational cultures in order to develop women's leadership to include critical reflection about issues of inclusion and expanded opportunities for women at all levels. It could be concluded from the study findings that whether conscious or unconscious, women typically employ a leadership style that is more relational than men's leadership styles, and when women do exhibit the instrumental and distant style of leading, they are often merely imitating the dominant male culture leadership style.

In another study on women in community colleges, McKenney (2000) conducted a study to investigate the career paths and mobility factors of female chief academic officers in public community colleges. McKenney sent surveys to the entirety of the 628 male and female chief academic officers (CAOs) at the 1487 public community colleges holding membership in the American Association of Community Colleges. The survey yielded 369 study participants which was a response rate of approximately 59 percent. To identify the factors affecting the career paths and mobility of the study participants, McKenney profiled the demographic characteristics of the women CAOs, compared the career paths of men and women CAOs in community colleges, and sought to identify potential internal and external barriers to mobility for women aspiring to advance to the position of CAOs in community colleges. McKenney's (2000) analysis of the data revealed that the following factors were significant in obtaining a CAO position: (1)

previous positions held by the participants, (2) the career entry port of participants—most common for both sexes was a faculty position, and (3) the number of higher education positions held by the participants. There was no evidence that pointed to the impact of gender in the career path to CAO; yet, men CAOs were significantly older than the women, and women chief academic officers were younger and moving faster through their career paths than their male peers.

Continuing with the focus on women in senior-level leadership in community colleges, Lesslie (1998) interviewed 15 women from various regions of the North Carolina Community College System to examine factors affecting their advancement and to identify salary discrepancies between women and men in similar positions. Lesslie conducted a quantitative study 15 years earlier on the same topic and sought to determine if women had made progress in attaining senior-level positions and salary parity since that study. The findings revealed that more women are obtaining senior level administrative positions, but most of the gains continue to be concentrated in lower level positions such as student service directors, personnel supervisors, and business office managers. The study also found that the positions of president and vice president were least likely to be occupied by women. Further, the data indicated that women have not achieved salary parity with men in similar positions that are occupied by the women. Other issues referenced were the lack of proper mentoring and networking opportunities, and gender discrimination. Lesslie concluded that women continue to experience inequality in promotional opportunities at senior level administrative positions and continue to be discriminated against in salaries.

The findings of the three aforementioned studies on women in community colleges by Tedrow and Rhoads (2000), McKenney (2000), and Lesslie (1998) cannot be generalized to African American women or any other women of color. A rich description of the women and their characteristics was absent from all the studies; therefore, any generalization to women of other races would hold only peripheral significance. Tedrow and Rhoads' (1998) study was the only one of the three studies that distinguished the women by race with a sample of 80 percent White women and 20 percent Black women. It would be necessary for studies to specifically reference African American women and delineate the findings by race to gain useful information for Black women's career advancement.

After delineating a few studies on Black women in higher education, attention will now be directed to recent studies that specifically address career development and career advancement strategies and issues for Black women in two-year colleges.

Black Women in Two-Year Colleges

The increase in women being appointed to presidential positions in two-year colleges has grown significantly; Boggs (2003) reminds us, however, that the significant growth in women presidents has been ineffective in diversifying the leadership by ethnicity. A survey by Weisman and Vaughan (2002) showed only a three percent increase in minority presidents between 1991 and 1996 and the percentage showed virtually no increase from 1996 to 2001. Consequently, though White women have made notable gains, African American women's voices are still primarily silent in community college senior leadership.

In 2004, Thomas provided a broad look at Black female directors of instruction in a two-year college system in the southeastern United States. The purpose of the study was to examine factors that contributed to the succession of African American women to executive leadership positions in two-year colleges. Specifically, the research endeavored to unveil structural, institutional and professional factors that impacted or shaped the women's leadership succession experiences and to uncover personal factors common to the research participants. A director of instruction (DOI) is an academic administrative position which falls directly beneath the vice president for instructional services (a.k.a., vice president for academic affairs) in professional ranking. All six Directors of Instruction, the entirety of Black women DOIs in the two-year college system under review, were requested to participate in the qualitative case study; however, one declined.

Thomas (2004) delineated her findings as structural factors, institutional and professional factors, and personal factors. The structural factors that affected the DOIs career succession experiences were racism and sexism. Thomas purports that in the two-year college system referenced in the research study, Black females DOIs are under represented considering the 63 percent female and 42 percent African American student population as compared to the sex and race of the Directors of Instruction: 51% White male, 34 % White female, 9.8 % Black females, 3.3% Black male, and 1.6% multi-racial male. Thomas posited that although racism and sexism were revealed through the data, the women were virtually silent on how it impacted their career succession. The institutional and professional factors that figured in the participants' career succession were supervisory and institutional support, mentoring, and restricted networking opportunities. Finally, personal factors that were considered important in the participants'

career growth were family motivation and role models, drive and determination, and desire to make a difference.

In summary, Thomas revealed that four of the five Directors of Instruction interviewed are employed at colleges headed by Black presidents; moreover, the student populations at these colleges are predominately African American. A major finding, according to Thomas, is that African American women have been unsuccessful in breaking through the ranks of Director of Instruction in colleges that are not majority African American.

In another study on Black women in higher education, Wilson (2004) examined the career development of senior-level African American women in a technical college system in the United States. The study sought to identify factors significant in the career advancement of the women, common mentoring experiences of the women, and common strategies the women used to advance their careers. Nine women, representing the totality of senior-level African American women in the technical college system, were participants for the qualitative study. The purposeful sample included eight vice presidents and one president. Wilson presented the findings in three segments: (1) factors that played a significant role in African American women's career development, (2) common mentoring experiences of the study participants, and (3) strategies that the women utilized to advance their careers.

In the first segment of findings, factors that figured prominently in the women's career development, Wilson (2004) identified professional development which encompassed working in a positive organizational context, formal peer groups and individual self-development. Support systems, internal and external to the organization,

surfaced as the second salient factor for the women's career development. The last factor considered highly important was double jeopardy experiences, the dual discrimination of being Black and female. In the second segment of findings, common mentoring experiences, two categories were identified—foundational and career related. Foundational mentoring experiences occurred from childhood to pre-career; career-related mentoring experiences were provided by co-workers, peers, and supervisors.

Wilson (2004) described the concluding finding as strategies utilized by the women to advance their careers. The four salient themes that emerged were acceptance of ownership of their careers by utilizing goal setting and career planning processes, recognition of the value to continually invest in self-development through lifelong learning and educational pursuits, staying grounded from a spiritual perspective and honing and developing interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills would conceivably increase effective communications and positive interactions with a diverse population. Wilson (2004) postulates four conclusions from her study that she speculates would be valuable to the career development and advancement of African American women: formal professional development opportunities; pro-active self-management and career management; support networks; and management of diversity issues.

The next section will synthesize studies of Black women in higher education that specifically address racism, sexism, and other factors of oppressionism and socialization.

Black Women in Higher Education

Yolanda Moses (1989) posits Black women are members of two groups—women and African Americans—that have been treated in a tangential manner by higher education. Approximately 15 years later, Hughes and Hamilton (2003) expressed similar

sentiments, “African American women enter institutions of higher education that are characterized by barriers constructed according to race, sex, …” (p. 95). Their sentiments echoed the same marginalization theme proffered by Moses. Consequently, whether a member of the student body, staff, faculty or administration, African American women are forced to contend with the supplementary challenges caused by the intersection of race and gender.

Zamani (2003) argues that although gender is significant in communicating the experiences of African American women in higher education, the influence of race often is more salient in differentiating their experiences and opportunities. African American women are subjected not only to those restrictions that handicap women, but also to restrictions that target Blacks. Clearly, African American women stand at the rear of the line behind White men and women and Black men largely due to the double oppressionism of being Black and female. And what do the women who bring up the rear receive?—the picked over, the leftover, and the less desirable.

Consistent with Zamani (2003), Patitu and Hinton (2003) found that African American women administrators considered race to be more oppressive than gender. Patitu and Hinton conducted a study to explore factors of concern and overall experiences of African American female faculty and administrators in the academy. The women were questioned regarding aspects such as salary issues, affirmative action, racism, sexism, campus climate, tenure and promotion processes. Several of the women in their study cited race as being salient in retaining their positions and in seeking promotions. The findings for Patitu and Hinton’s study based on the responses from their study

participants included marginalization, lack of support, the pertinence of survival and coping skills, and transition and growth.

Graham (1974) asserted, “The most important single observation about women in the academic world is that their numbers decrease dramatically as the importance of the post increases (p. 238). Opportunely, Graham’s 1974 statement is slowly losing its legitimacy given that women as a whole have made significant strides in the classroom and in administrative positions in higher education during the last several decades. Although women in senior level administrative positions in higher education have made notable gains, the current status of Black women is dismal. In fact African American women purport that their opportunities for advancement are at a standstill or declining (Catalyst, 2004).

In 1989, Yolanda Moses conducted a study to explore the climate for Black women students, faculty members, and administrators in predominantly White colleges and universities and in historically Black colleges and universities. The study pays particular attention to the subtle and not so subtle ways that race and gender can intersect to create double obstacles for Black women. Moses’ study utilized data from existing files and reports from the Program on the Status and Education of Women. In addition, she conducted informal interviews with Black women and made use of anecdotal material collected through an informal questionnaire of Black women students, faculty, and administrators around the country. No indication is given in Moses’ study of the number of women involved in the interviews or the number of informal questionnaires. The following summary will consider primarily the results of the survey relative to Black women faculty and administrators.

Moses' (1989) study revealed that Black women faculty and administrators face myriad barriers to their advancement and success. The leadership, advocacy, and career satisfaction that African American women administrators pursue were affected in subtle ways by an unwelcoming environment. The data further uncovered the slow pace that African American women were advancing in career positions as compared to White women. In 1985, only 3.4 percent of administrators in higher education were Black women and they were concentrated primarily in predominately Black institutions in lower-level administrative positions, usually less than a dean. During the same period, White women held 30 percent of the administrative positions.

Racism and sexism, according to Moses' (1989) study, are still alive on the college campuses and represent double oppressive obstacles for Black women. Moses' study revealed that Black women may be ignored, isolated and passed over for promotions in favor of individuals who are less qualified. Participants also reported attempts by subordinates to go over their heads or around them in order to subvert the women's authority. Moses' study further disclosed that some Black women leaders indicated that they were considered "tokens," and were therefore treated as representatives of their group rather than as individuals. Black women were also expected to represent Blacks as experts on committees and serve as role models for students. Corresponding to Moses' comments, Brayboy (2003) asserts that Black faculty purports being considered as "token voices of color" whenever the issues of diversity arise. The tokens also "become problem fixers in their departments regarding issues of race and diversity" (p. 81). Because of the paucity of Black professionals, African Americans

believed they were sometimes overworked as a result of having to be diversity representatives and role models for student of color.

From her data analysis, Moses (1989) observes that Black women in higher education are often viewed as "other" or "outsiders" and as a result are excluded from networks. Moses' study further determined that Black women also face gender inequities in predominately Black institutions and that there are fewer women in top administrative positions in these institutions. Moses advises that more research needs to be done on the quality of the campus environment and career satisfaction for both Black women faculty and staff.

Continuing with the focus on Black women in higher education, Bowles (1999) conducted a study to identify common socialization factors in the early social development of African American females who became presidents. The study further explored three broad areas—family, community, and education—to determine how they affected the development of decisions with regards to professional goals. Bowles sent a researcher-designed questionnaire to 42 Black women presidents at institutions in the United States ranging from two-year colleges to universities; 26 presidents completed and returned the questionnaire. After analyzing the questionnaires, Bowles formulated interview questions and selected five presidents to participate in qualitative case study interviews in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the influences of socialization factors and to learn the presidents' motivations for seeking and accepting their positions.

Bowles (1999) found that the women's decisions to become college presidents were a conscious combination of decision making and accepting the opportunities. The study further revealed that mentors and positive role models appeared to be the foremost

type of interpersonal involvement that influenced the career decisions of the African American women presidents. In the three areas of family, community and education, Bowles disclosed several research determinations. First, in the area of family, Bowles found that aspects such as birth order, socioeconomic status, and marital status had no direct impact on the participants' career decision making. Secondly, the neighborhood as community, though fondly recalled in most cases, did not have a strong impact on the goal development of the presidents. In contrast, church as community had an immense positive impact for most of the presidents interviewed. Lastly, early education did not provide a positive stimulation for goal determination nor did the collegiate educational experience, except in cases where a mentor was present. Mentors were deemed central to professional career growth.

The following section will discuss the status of Black women presidents at four-year colleges and universities.

Black Women Presidents

According to *The New Crisis* (2001), 27 of the nation's 2,320 four-year institutions of higher education were reported to be led by Black women, thus, "African American women presidents are not the rarity they once were in the professional groves of academe" (p. 26). Black women have made small strides in securing college presidential positions which have been traditionally monopolized by older White males. The New Crisis asserts that in the last third of the twentieth century, facilitated by affirmative access, Black women administrators have stayed the course of preparation, performance, and perseverance which have created a pool of qualified contenders for the presidency.

The representation of Black women presidents are primarily at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) with African Americans representing 95.7 percent of presidents while Whites held 4.3 percent of these presidencies. At all institutions as a whole, African Americans did not fare as well, King & Gomez (2007*)* continued, because Whites held 87.2 percent of the college presidents positions, while African Americans represented 6.3 percent including presidencies at HBCUs.

According to Bates (2007), racial and gender diversity at the presidential level in four-year institutions appear to be changing rapidly. In a 2006 study from the American Council on Education, Hassen (2007) reported that six percent of all presidents were African Americans and minority presidents were more likely than White presidents to be women. He further reported that nearly one-third of African American presidents were women, compared with only 22 percent for White women. African American women appointed as presidents at the community college level show a number slightly higher than appointments at four-year institutions.

Thirty-two African American women have the distinction of being the "first" college and university president at their respective institutions (*The Crisis*, 2001). The prestige of "first" college and university president is afforded to individuals such as Mary McLeod Bethune, who founded Bethune-Cookman College; Johnnetta B. Cole, who served as the first female president of Spelman College and as president of Bennett College, two historically Black colleges for women; and Ruth J. Simmons, who served as president of Smith College and currently serves as president of Brown University, the first African American with this appointment. Other notable Black women college presidents are Charlene Drew Jarvis, president of Southeastern University; Julianne

Malveaux, president of Bennett college, and Thelma Thompson, president of the University of Maryland Eastern Shores.

One Black female college president, Dr. Ruth Simmons, has certainly shattered the glass ceiling. She has traversed the terrain and secured the presidency at one of the nation's most prestigious Ivy League schools. In July 2001, Dr. Simmons was sworn in as the 18th president of Brown University. This Black woman has a number of "firsts" to her credit; she is not only the first women and the first African American to sit at the helm of Brown University (Crayton, 2001), but also prior to being appointed president at Brown University in 1995, Simmons became the first African American woman to head one of the "Seven Sister colleges" when she was selected as the president of Smith College. Dr. Simmons was no stranger in the halls of "Seven Sister colleges" since she was a student at Wellesley College, one of the colleges in the "Seven Sister" group, during her junior year (Kingsbury, 2007*).*

Black women have made gains in presidential positions in community colleges and baccalaureate degree granting institutions; however, they still lag behind White men and other women as previously indicated. Yet, they are continually climbing.

Challenges of Black Women in Academe

The preceding research studies focused primarily on African American women in higher education. Whether the African American women were employed at a community college or a university, researchers investigating their experiences drew similar conclusions regarding barriers, benefits, and career development needs of the women. The barriers that were identified by the literature to the advancement of Black women in senior level positions in higher education were racism, sexism, double-outsider status,

exclusion from formal and informal networks, ineffective diversity programs, and unwelcoming institutional environments or climates. The bias of racism was considered to be systemic, permeating all aspects of the institution. Racial biases, viewed to be operating on conscious and subconscious levels, disadvantaged African American women while favoring White Americans. Finally, the more recent studies reviewed indicate that gender and race discrimination, the two major positionalities identified as obstacles to Black women's career progression, show no sign of rectification in the foreseeable future.

Career Development

Any effort to address and understand the issue of why so few Black women leaders rise to the top ranks of higher education administration would be enhanced with an examination of the literature on career development. Career development for Black women cannot be limited to education and traditional professional development but encompasses a wide array of issues inclusive of mentoring, race, gender, positionality, White privilege, insider/outsider status, and power. These issues can have immense impact on the career development and advancement of African American women; accordingly, separate major sections are being devoted later in the literature review to investigate these topics.

Pietrofesa and Splete (1975) assert that "Career development is an ongoing process that occurs over the life span and includes home, school and community experiences related to an individual's self-concept and its implementation in life style as one lives life and makes a living" (p. 4). They further proffer that self-awareness, career awareness, career exploration, educational preparation and work experience are all

components of career development. Career development theories were envisaged to give general explanations on why and how individuals make career plans and chose their careers. This researcher contends that career development for Black women must extend far beyond Pietrofesa and Splete's explanation given that the literature has revealed that this group of women has been systematically passed over for positions for which they were similarly qualified as were men and White women.

Career Development Theories

Over the years, many theories have been offered regarding career development. Donald Super (1957), one of the early career development theorists, developed one of the more popular theories, the "life span, life space" approach to career development. In the life span approach theory, Super contends that individuals move through five stages of career development: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline. Distinct progressions occur during each stage. During the growth stage, ages 4 to 14, individuals are curious and become aware of their interests and begin to develop their abilities. During the exploration stage, ages 14 to 25, tentative choices are made which subsequently evolve in a career choice. Progressing to the establishment stage, ages 25 to 45, the individual develops within the career through comfort, advancement or frustration. The maintenance stage, ages 45 to 65, is typified by stagnation or updating and innovation. The final stage, decline, age 65 and older, involves retirement and possibly transitioning into a new career or hobby. A drawback of Donald Super's life span theory is that it focuses on males and discounts how socialization factors, gender issues, limited role models and structural inequalities affect the career development of women (Bierema, 1998; Cohn, 1997; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998).

John Holland, another classical career development theorist (Holland, 1973, 1997), formulated the “trait-factor” career choice theory which purports that individuals make career choices based on their personal interests. The main purpose of Holland’s (1973) trait-factor theory is to offer an explanation of vocational behavior and practical assistance to individuals who are selecting jobs, changing jobs, and seeking to attain career satisfaction. The trait-factor theory, according to Holland, does not focus on personal competence, educational behavior and social behavior, instead the centrality is on the person’s interests. The trait-factor theory can be summed up as the concordance of a person with his or her environment. Holland emphasized that people are typically more comfortable among friends whose taste, talents, and values are similar to their own, likewise are individuals more apt to perform well at a vocation in which there is a psychological fit. Like Super’s theory, Holland’s theory focuses on males and has been criticized for lack of inclusiveness. Bierema (1998), Johnson-Bailey (1998) and Schreiber (1998) are among the researchers who noted the limitations of Holland’s theory.

In harmony with Holland’s (1973, 1997) observations, Betz, Fitzgerald, and Hill (1989) assert that “The trait-factor theory has as its basis the characteristics of the individual, those of the work environment, and the match or fit between the two sets of characteristics, often called the degree of congruence or correspondence” (p. 28). To assess an individual’s potential suitability for the job, standardized measurement instruments are often utilized by career development practitioners who apply trait-factor theory intervention. Betz et al. (1989) maintain that these types of measurement instruments to assess the ability of individuals disproportionately and adversely affect disadvantaged groups, particularly Blacks. They concluded, “The fact of lower

performance has an adverse impact even in the absence of discriminatory intent as long as the same selection criteria are used for majority and minority groups" (p. 29). Brown (1995) cautions that it is difficult to speculate on the applicability of the trait-factor career theory with African American women given the dearth of well-controlled and well-designed research that tests the career behavior of Black women.

Others theorists share similar perceptions on the patterns of behavior related to career development. Kroll, Dinklage, Lee, Morley, and Wilson (1970) stipulate career decision-making involves two primary sets of data, the self and the world of work. Additionally, Kroll et al. emphasize that acquiring, retaining, and utilizing information pertaining to the world is the focal point of a great deal of the informal and formal education provided through society.

Ginzberg, Ginzburg, Axelrad, and Herma (1951) developed a career development theory that purported career choices were influenced by educational achievements, emotional factors and individual values. They contend that the developmental process occurs between teen years and young adulthood. Similar to Super's theory, Ginzberg et al. suggest that individuals progress through stages of development, which include becoming aware of one's values, interests and abilities within the framework of the work environment.

Women's Career Development

Bierema (1998) argues that major career development theories such as those of Super (1957) and Holland (1973, 1997) were developed for men and have limited usefulness for women's applicability because they do not consider the complexity and diversity of women's issues. According to Bierema, "Women's career development

cannot be approached with a 'one-size fits all' mentality" (p. 97). She goes on to say that women's career development is complex and diverse. Bierema cites primary obstacles to women's career development as positionality, career interruption, and alternative arrangements.

Social career expectations for women, notes Healy (1982), are different from those of men. "Society expects a woman to subordinate her career to her husband and family and allots status to a woman based on her husband's achievement" (p.101). The preceding statement has an air of prejudice since it implies that all women are married and that they are all heterosexual. This flawed rationale regarding career sex stereotyping is taught to females early in their development through sources such as the home, school, church and society. The career development process that Blacks and most other minorities encounter is reported by Healy to be less effective in meeting their needs than those of mainstream White Americans. The instruments and informational material are biased in favor of Whites, thus possibly impeding the careers of African Americans.

In Bierema's (1998) book, *Women's Career Development Across the Lifespan: Insights and Strategies for Women, Organizations and Adult Educators*, several writers add to the commentary and research on women's career development. Schreiber (1998) one of the contributors to Bierema's book, posits that women's career development is more complex than that of men because women must deal with a combination of attitudes, role expectations, behaviors and the socialization process. Schreiber (1998) further suggests that women's career choices are made in a context characterized by sex role stereotyping that views women's primary role as homemakers separate and somewhat

incompatible with career involvement. Women are not encouraged to develop career interests that diverge from the sex role stereotyping socialization.

Schreiber asserted that "a useful theory of women's career development must place women's career choices in the context of current social norms and beliefs about women's capabilities and acceptable roles and must recognize the over and covert mechanisms that contribute to maintaining these beliefs" (p. 6). Women's careers are distinct, says Schreiber, because it is quite common for women to juggle work and family since women bear children and are usually the primary caregivers; thus women sometimes face a home versus career dilemma. The workforce has been slow to accommodate the combination of work and family; consequently, the major impact falls on the woman. Schreiber concludes by asserting that the world of work is changing and the traditional linear career is becoming less typical not only for women but for all workers, thus flexibility must be characterized in this new world.

Black Women's Career Development

There have been a host of career development theories; however, the major focus has been on White males; thus the applicability of these studies to minorities is very limited. Osipow (1966) stressed that classical career development theories are more aligned with the experiences of middle class White boys or men, but are less suited to the experiences of persons from poor families, persons of color, and women. Consistent with Osipow, Brown (1995) observes that many of the current theories of career development have not been empirically tested using African Americans. Current career development practices do not encompass the needs and concerns of ethnic minority persons because they are based on the values and psychological orientations of the majority society who

were the studies' participants and researchers (Kimbrough & Salomone, 1993). Through the years, gender disparity has been a significant social factor which has disproportionately disadvantaged women and Black women in particular.

Hackett and Byars (1996) contend that because of family makeup and economics, African American women often experience more crossovers between traditionally male and female roles and duties in the household because every member of the family has to do whatever it takes to survive. Modeling is significant to the career development of some African American females. Consequently, Hackett and Byars stipulate that African American girls' persistence in pursuing academic and career goals is facilitated by their parents' aspirations.

In a career development study, Alfred (2001) interviewed five Black female faculty at a majority White university. She found that race and culture influenced the learning experiences of individuals. Her study further revealed that the women maximized their biculturality to develop strategies for navigating the academic culture. The women took charge of creating their own self images by ignoring the assignment of cultural stereotypes that were often associated with African Americans. Thus, the study participants guided their own positive career development.

Correspondingly, Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998) described similar barriers to women's career development. In their article, *Diversity Issues in Women's Career Development (1998),* Johnson-Bailey, a Black woman, and Tisdell, a White woman, found similarities and differences in their career development. The positionality of the women, especially race for the Black woman, was integrally woven into their career experiences. Women are more likely than men to have divergent focuses that may impede

their career development and these divergencies are often related to the home and include career interruptions for familial reasons such as child birth and child rearing.

Trapped Under a Glass Ceiling or Riding a Glass Escalator?

According to several authors, the professional achievements of Black women and women in general have been obstructed by a glass ceiling (Catalyst, 2004; Inman, 1998; Nicholson, 1996). This glass ceiling phenomenon is an organizational practice which subordinates women's professional lives. A glass ceiling allows women to see the potential of their aspirations but stops them from getting there. In contrast, the glass escalator gives an advantageous to men in female-dominated professions in hiring and promotion and men are "elevated" by their minority status (Budig, 2002; Hultin, 2003; Maume, 1999; Williams, 1992). Simply stated, women are discriminated against by the glass ceiling, and men are advantaged by the glass escalator.

More detrimental than the glass ceiling, Black women argue that a "concrete ceiling" obstructs their paths and serves as a barricade to their career advancement. The glass ceiling can be seen through and can eventually be shattered, but Catalyst (2004) stresses that the concrete ceiling is considered more difficult to penetrate or shatter and cannot be seen through or around and no view of the top is available.

Bell and Nkomo (2001) tells us that even before Black women can attempt to shatter the glass ceiling or the concrete ceiling, they must tackle the concrete wall. The theory behind the concrete wall is that it prevents Black women from participating in activities that could enhance their careers. Black women are excluded from informal and formal networking where learning takes place. Further, the women's accomplishment are not acknowledged and sometimes even concealed in an attempt to avoid putting a

positive spotlight on the women, thus before these women can undertake address the glass ceiling they must knock down or scale the concrete wall.

Affirmative Action was mandated as an attempt towards achieving parity for women as well as minorities in the workforce. However, Turner and Myers (2005) posit that through Affirmative Action, White women have made considerable gains in academe but the glass ceiling still serves as a blockade for Black women. They contend White women have been the primary benefactors of workforce equal opportunity legislation.

While the Black women are struggling with the concrete wall, the glass ceiling and the concrete ceiling, White men pass them by riding on the glass escalator. These White men are considered tokens in predominately female-oriented professions. Although women often contend with discrimination in male-oriented professions, Williams (1992, 1995) concluded through research that underrepresented men not only tend to escape negative consequences of tokenism, they are also generally treated advantageously by supervisors, coworkers, and clients or customers. As a result of this preferential treatment, the internal career development opportunities of these men in female-dominated professions tend to exceed those of their female coworkers. Thus, men appear to possibly have an advantage in male-dominated as well as in female dominated professions.

Formal and Informal Networks/Personal Support Systems

Networking and support systems are crucial to career development. Community involvement and family and colleague support can provide the non-academic and emotional support that are important to career growth.

The literature revealed that formal and informal networks are at play in the workplace; unfortunately, African American women are usually excluded from these networks which can be invaluable to women's socialization and to discovering the norms within the organizational culture (Catalyst, 2004; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Hunsaker & Hunsaker, 1986; Lesslie, 1998; Moses, 1989). Emphasizing the importance of networking, Miller and Vaughan (1997) argue:

> Informal and formal professional support networks of African American female executives in higher education are critical to them in making both personal and professional decisions as they move through the workplace culture. Such networks are vital to African American women's survival and success because these women tend not to be in the mainstream of the university milieu. (p. 182)

Catalyst (2006) purports that a lack of access to networks of influential colleagues is a barrier to women of color. Influential colleagues are considered those who have position and power, connect women with information, resources or other contacts that can promote women of color in their career advancement. Catalyst contends that women of color face "double exclusion" in the workplace because of their gender and race. These women often do not have mentors or sponsors, lack company role models of the same racial or ethnic group, and lack high visibility assignments.

Catalyst (2006) conducted a study to examine the characteristics of informal networks of women of color and how different networking strategies linked to the women's promotion rates and organizational commitment. The study included more than 50 focus groups and interviews and collected survey data from 1735 African-American, Asian and Latina professional women in thirty Fortune 1000 companies. Supplementary

qualitative information on networking was also collected from a small sample of women of color.

The study resulted in the following findings: (1) The context for navigating the corporate environment differs across women of color groups. (2) Women of color are faced with different strategies to networking. Two strategies that women of color use are "blending in" and/or "sticking together." Blending in refers to having a high network of Whites, men or colleagues from the same company, whereas sticking together entails having a network high in those of the same/ethnicity or gender, and low in company colleagues. African-American women had the highest number of other African-Americans in their networks as well as the highest number of women of their race, which represented a "sticking together." (3) Among Latinas and African-American women, those with more colleagues in their networks were more likely to feel committed to their organizations. (4) Asian women appear to be relatively successful at leveraging relationships with Whites, men, and colleagues. (5) When African-American women succeed in the workplace, they may do so without being accepted as insiders. Catalyst contends that this particular finding indicates the successful usage of the "sticking together" strategy that African Americans use, partly because of the higher levels of exclusion that they perceive. Catalyst (2006) concludes by delivering a message of inclusiveness:

> It is especially important that business leaders and managers work to create more inclusive cultures that facilitate interactions among the diversity of talent in organizations…The benefits of creating more inclusive work environments should reach all women of color. While we recommend that individual women of color

> optimize their networks to the extent possible, it is impractical to assume that individuals can single-handedly transform an organization's culture. However, CEO's and managers can implement programs that will have wide-ranging effects on workplace culture. (p. 6)

Support systems external to the workplace were also considered central to the career advancement of African American women; these systems consist primarily of family, friends, and community. In a mixed methods study to understand the path of Black women to leadership positions, Banner (2003) surveyed 88 Black women administrators in two-year colleges in South Carolina with a 51 percent return rate and also conducted in-depth interviews with a purposeful sample of five Black women administrators. Banner found that among the career facilitators for the women were networking opportunities and personal support systems which included family, friends, church, and religious beliefs.

Several authors in the literature review spoke to the centrality of personal support systems to the career advancement of African-American women (Green, 1997; Thomas, 2004; Wilson, 2004). Crawford and Smith (2005) reported in a study primarily investigating mentoring in African American women that the majority of Black female administrators purported that their families provided the only support in helping them strive to attain educational and professional goals. Similarly, in a qualitative study of factors contributing to the career succession experiences of African American women, Thomas (2004) noted that family support was beneficial to the participants' career success. Likewise, Wilson (2004) researching the career development of African American women found that support systems external to the organizations were salient

for Black women. Thus, Black women need to be cognizant of the vital role that support systems external to the workplace can play in the upward mobility of their careers.

Career Development Summary

The literature that was reviewed on career development demonstrates an absence of African Americans in the research of classical theories. The theoretical framework for career development centered primarily on middle class White males and boys and negated the values and characteristics relevant to women and ethnic minorities. Therefore, classical theories on career development by White male researchers such as Ginzberg, Ginzburg, Axelrad, and Herma (1951), Super (1957), Super, Starishevsky, Matlin and Jordan (1963), and Kroll et al. (1970) are not applicable to Black women with professional aspirations in the academy. Historically, the career development of Black professional women has been saturated with obstacles; namely, the interlocking systems of race, gender, and class permeating from the White dominant culture. Additionally, Black women struggle with the glass ceiling and society's socio-political systems as they endeavor to heighten their social and economic status in American society.

Power Issues Affecting Career Development

To understand how Black women ascend to the presidency in community colleges in America, it is imperative to consider how racism and sexism, positionality, White privilege, and power affect their career development. Following is a discussion on these themes which impede the careers of Black women.

Racism and Sexism

Racism can be compared to an open wound that has been covered by a bandage; no real attempt is made to facilitate healing, rather the purpose is to mask the condition. A

reflection of the progress made by African Americans since the enactment of Affirmative Action laws until the present time helps to affirm the slow advancement of African American women in many arenas. Racism remains a paralyzing phenomenon still almost 17 years after Bell (1992) questioned the effect of the Affirmative Action laws in the advancement of African Americans by making the following statement:

> The goal of racial equality is, while comforting to many Whites, more illusory than real for Blacks. For too long, we have worked for substantive reform, then settled for weakly worded and poorly enforced legislation, indeterminate judicial decisions, token government positions, even holidays. I repeat. If we are to seek new goals for our struggles, we must first reassess the worth of the racial assumptions on which, without careful thought, we have presumed too much and relied on too long. (p. 14)

Race and gender are inextricably woven into the lives and careers of African American women, thus the previous and subsequent literature review in this research paper is sprinkled throughout with references to the double oppressionism of race and gender in the lives and careers of Black women. These two positionalities are practically impossible to bracket when discussing African American women, thus the topics are entangled throughout this document and therefore does not require extensive discourse in this section on racism and sexism.

The career aspirations and advancement of Black women have been thwarted by the interlocking systems of racism and sexism, as noted by Evans & Herr (1991). Likewise, Johnson-Bailey (2001) suggests that the lives of Black women have been negatively impacted by racism and sexism and have relegated many women to the

working class and the poor. Cohn (1997) reminds us of the significant role of racism during the exploration stage of career development for Blacks and other minorities; she further asserts that racism and ethnicity has had an adverse affect on the career development of Blacks. The exploration stage of career development spans the ages of 15 to 25, the critical years within the career development process of an individual. Research conducted by Kerka (1998) also reveals that race, gender, and social class impact career development. Furthermore, the affect of positionality on the career development and advancement of Black women is found in research conducted by Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998) which stipulates that the interlocking issue of race and gender influenced career aspirations among Black women.

Black women also have to contend with the "insider/outsider" phenomenon. In addition to race and gender, the power disparity between the dominant culture and subordinate culture positions the Black woman in an "outsider" status. Omolade (1994) posits that race is the primary factor explaining stratification, domination, and inequality in American culture and society. Three characterizations of the insider/outsider status—the other, the outsider within, and the double-outsider—continually recurred in the literature review. Johnson-Bailey (2004) proffers that the term, other, "has come to mean the 'different' when compared to the 'norm'" (p. 5). She conveys that in feminist research, the "other" is usually classified as women of color. Collins (2000) points out that the "outsider within" can be connected to slavery days when Black women were domestic workers in the homes of Whites. Collins purports that, in present day, the outsider within has been extended to include the triple oppression of race, gender, and class for African American women. Finally, the "double outsider" status refers to the

intersection of race and gender that serve as obstacles to the advancement of African American women.

Clearly, the Black woman's positionality within the intersecting social systems of race, gender, and class adversely disadvantages her and can indisputably obstruct her career advancement. In addition to racism and sexism, positionality, White privilege, and power can all intersect to hinder the career development of African American women.

Positionality

Lee and Johnson-Bailey (2004) stipulate that positionality "refers to the place one assigns to a person based on his or her membership in a group, with the major categories being gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and age" (p. 59). Given Lee and Johnson-Bailey's description of positionality, one can readily perceive why in the American society, the White heterosexual male is positioned at the top of the hierarchy. Positionality is often an elusive phenomenon to members of the dominant society, however, because of their White privilege status.

The legacy and history of Black women's contributions in the labor market are directly related to the economics of slavery and the associated restrictions on this population. Members of the dominant society may question the relevance of mentioning the slave history of Blacks, yet it is this very paradigm that establishes the positionality of Black women. Being considered as second class citizens ranking below White men and women and Black men has continued to plague the careers of African American women. Yes, positionality has indeed played a major role in the career advancement of African American women. Racism and sexism intermingled with numerous other positionalities such as the insider/outsider phenomena and power have all intersected to render Black

women virtually immobilized in many aspects of their career advancement. This disenfranchisement of Black women so early in their career development can be a hindrance to their career growth.

In the hierarchy of positions that exist within our social structures, Alfred (2001) points out that White males have historically positioned themselves at the top of the hierarchy and Black women have been positioned at the bottom. Moreover, Alfred contends the differences in how Blacks and Whites experience themselves create problems for Black women in the White male-dominated academy. Johnson-Bailey (1999) asserts that racism is active in every day lives of Black women; thus, Black women are forced to struggle with their position within the dominant society.

A review of the related literature reveals that most writers, including African Americans, have failed to investigate or omitted from the literature the aspect of skin color of African Americans as a positionality. Johnson-Bailey's (1999) study revealed that the degree of "lightness" or "darkness" of an African-American's skin can venture into the insider/outsider phenomenon. Johnson-Bailey related in her study that the darker skinned women believed the lighter skinned women received more privileges and advantages. Yet, the lighter-skinned women seemed to be unaware of the privileged positions bestowed on them because of skin color. It is interesting to note that, just as the White male may be oblivious of his privileged position due to race and gender, the light skinned African-American woman may also be unaware of the advantages that she might have received because of her skin color. It appears, then, that individuals who hold particular positionalities may be unaware of their privileged positions and the subsequent benefits that they may have received or be receiving.

The positionality of Black women continues to be disempowering because the privilege that our dominant White society benefits from escapes the Black female. Black women have been seen as caregivers throughout the years dating back to slavery and still today, nurturing continues to be expected of African American women. Lee and Johnson-Bailey (2004) support the contention that the privileged are the primary beneficiaries of caring and the less privileged are the care providers. The positionality of Black women in the American culture power structure evidences this precept.

White Privilege

White privilege denotes superiority in the systems of race and gender. McIntosh (1995) argues that race and racism are the underpinnings of the White privilege phenomenon. She further posits that males are not taught to recognize their male privilege just as members of our White society are not taught to recognize their White privilege. White privilege, McIntosh claims, is invisible since the White dominant society has determined that this is the way things should be and it is also oppressive because it prevents the disenfranchised from enjoying similar privileges. Schlumpf (2006) asserts that the benefits of White privilege are "the unearned, unjustified advantages not automatically afforded to people of color in this country and generally taken for granted by those of us who are classified as White" (p. 12). Schlumpf goes on to say that the myth of American meritocracy, which declares that everything must be earned, is in direct conflict to White privilege. Brody, Fuller, Gosetti, Moscato, Nagel and Pace, and others (2000) argue that individuals who enjoy the privileges of a system that perpetuates their privileged status are often oblivious that the systems exist. Simply stated, members of the White race are often unaware that they receive special privileges because they are

members of the majority race. We can understand, then, why McIntosh and Schlumpf assert that White privilege is an unearned entitlement that confers dominance because of one's race or gender. For White women, privilege is most often a gender issue; however, with Black women it is foremost a race issue, followed by the gender issue.

Hart (2001), who is White, stated that African Americans have been "othered" by her own dominant culture and she is trying to get a handle on her whiteness and the privileges it accords in a racist culture. "I am also learning to see my privileges as sources of deficit, of blindness and ignorance with respect to the knowledge created and preserved by those the White culture has "othered" and whom it continues to violate and destroy" (p. 171). Hart's statement indicates that an awareness of one's privileged position is a first step toward understanding what obstacles the unprivileged might be confronting.

Over the years, the White privilege phenomenon has been investigated by various researchers. In a recent study, Logan (2002) conducted a qualitative case inquiry to understand how adult learners experience White privilege in higher education classrooms. Her participants consisted of twelve racially diverse adult learners and two instructors in two higher education classrooms. The research study resulted in the following findings: 1) White racialness privileged the White adult learners while non-White racialness burdened the learners of color, 2) Class was found to be empowering to the White adult learners who could claim higher social locations, 3) When class intersected with race, White learners at the lower end of class claimed power from whiteness, 4) Adult learners from higher and lower social class locations drew on their class backgrounds to negotiate issues of race that operated in the classroom, 5) A higher social class location was of no benefit in the classroom for non-White adult learners who

could claim that status, and 6) Male gender and African American racialness of one of the instructors was intimidating only among the White students. From her findings, Logan concluded that White privilege is a major factor in the dynamics of a higher education classroom, that the historically White college and university acts to enable the operation of White privilege in its classroom, and adult learners of color are complicit with White adult learners in perpetuating White privilege in the classroom.

In another qualitative study that addresses White privilege, Manglitz (2002) sought to understand how White antiracist adult educators challenge racism. Her study included twelve participants who belonged to one of five different antiracist educational organizations. She interviewed two participants, a White and a Person of Color from each organization. Manglitz analyzed her data separately from the perspectives of her White study participants and the People of Color study participants. The study yielded the following findings from the White participants: (1) racism as institutional and systemic, (2) the importance of historical perspective, (3) color-blindness as a rhetoric of denial, and (4) an analysis of White privilege that included whiteness revealed first through difference, development of antiracist identify over time, and awareness of the contradictions related to being White and working to challenge racism. An analysis of the data of the People of Color revealed the following: (1) racism as institutional and systemic, (2) recognition of the power embodied in the system of racism, (3) importance of historical perspective, and (4) analysis of White privilege that included an understanding of the attributes of whiteness, the ability to interpret the impact of White privilege, and an understanding of the significance of emotions and pain for Whites who are challenging their own racism. Manglitz drew four major conclusions from her study.

First, the system of racism continues to impact our society, albeit in different ways and with different ramifications. Second, White adult educators are struggling with their own White privilege and racism in their efforts to challenge racism. Third, the positionality of White adult educators enables as well as constrains their ability to challenge racism. Lastly, commitment, hope, and the educational process are significant in challenging the system of racism which still impacts everyone.

Manglitz, Johnson-Bailey, and Cervero (2005) comment that "far too often educators elect to exist in the comfort of their ivory towers, never moving their ideas of democracy and equality past their writings or classroom lectures" (p. 1266). It is clear, however, that challenging racism and White privilege must occur across the races to facilitate a more equitable society for all. As a Black woman senior-level administrator in higher education, this topic of White privilege reveals the underpinning of some of my personal experiences as the only Black senior staff member. I am expected to over explain and to basically prove any comments or actions or ideas that I bring forth whereas my White counterparts' comments or usually accepted at face value. It is no wonder, then, Brookfield (2003) states that "non-White perspectives are represented as the exotic Other, the alien tradition of different racial experience that is added on to the White center" (p. 155). Hopefully, the increasing discourse on racism and White privilege will move the world in the direction of a color-blind society.

Power

Women fought for equal rights, representation, and a voice in their political future during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and struggled through various movements to gain social reforms to improve their status. Gilligan (1993) submits that

women sought through the vote to have their voices heard in the shaping of history and to change widespread practices that were damaging to present as well as future generations. The rights that the White women struggled for included the right to be educated; however, this right to be educated continued to elude Black women. According to Amott and Matthaei (1996), the pursuit of an education among Blacks during the post-slavery era was relentless because an education was central to their empowerment. Aside from domestic work, teaching was the most common occupation for Black women during the post-slavery era. Teaching was a form of social activism for Black women, proffered Amott and Matthaei, and many of the nineteenth century national Black women leaders began their careers as southern elementary school teachers.

Affirmative Action was intended to level the playing field for minorities, the disabled, and women in employment, thus providing access to education and the pursuit of business endeavors. Conspicuous gains in housing, education, and accommodations can readily be observed for the disabled, and statistics (Catalyst, 2004) verify the growth of White women and Black men in the workforce. Yet Black women still struggle for equal opportunity. Farmer and Associates (1997) contend that the persistence and lingering affects of racial discrimination in this country today diminishes the intent of Affirmative Action in the first place. Farmer and Associates document the extensive benefits of Affirmative Action to White women, followed distantly by Asians and Black males with Black females in a distant fourth position. Jackson-Leslie (2001) stipulates that Affirmative Action opponents promote merit and qualifications, yet they insist that Blacks are incapable of doing anything as well as White people.

Jackson-Leslie (2001) asserts that the playing field is still not level and access to career aspirations continues to be elusive to Black women. Moreover, it is important to note that power is a social construct. Consequently, we must bear in mind that power and power relationships are based on social structures in American society. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1997) appropriately remind us that in the real world, power relationships infuse our social structures such that we are unable to put them on and take them off at whim. Cervero and Wilson (2001) also advise us that people plan and work in complex organizations and these organizations have set traditions in which power relationships exist. Moreover, they indicate that one should not lose sight of the power relationships that exist within the organizational structure because it is central to promoting and constructing programs within the organization.

Power relationships and struggles exist within the boundaries of the Black community itself. In her article discussing gender, power, and knowledge, Luttrell (1993) exposes power relationships that are based solely on skin color. Unfortunately, within the Black community power and privilege are still sometimes situated in skin color; Luttrell emphasizes that light skinned women are afforded more opportunities than dark-skinned women. Luttrell contends that her study participants themselves enumerated the advantages they were afforded by Black teachers because of skin color. Behavior such as within-race discrimination based on physical features reinforces the message of dominant White society. Although Luttrell's article depicts the school setting in the south, this type of mind-set spreads across social venues.

Historically, Blacks have at times received privileges based on their light skin color, not only from Black teachers as noted by Luttrell (1993), but also from other

segments of society. During slavery days and in early history, the light-skinned Black women were usually chosen to be the housekeepers and nannies; in other words, they were the Black women who were privileged to work indoors instead of in the fields. Likewise, African-Americans with skin color more closely resembling that of the White race such as Lena Horne, Duke Ellington, Harry Belafonte, Dorothy Dandridge, and Thurgood Marshall were more accepted in their various professions by the White race. Finally, Burke, Cropper and Harrison (2000) remind us that power is a contested term and can be sensitive and controversial and is often associated with other terms such as oppression, inequality, powerlessness and discrimination. Ironically, all of these terms have been linked with the Black woman.

Nicolson (1996) posits that power is by nature a rare commodity and beyond the grasp of most women and men, but still it is almost exclusively in the hands of men. Nicolson indicates that the glass ceiling phenomenon takes place in a patriarchal context, which depicts male success and female failure. According to Rodriguez and Villaverde (2000), the theory of patriarchy focuses on the privilege men derive from their male power in addition to the oppression women experience in relation to it. Women's lack of power in male-dominated organizational structures is a result of their inability to access patriarchal knowledge. Nicolson purports that powerlessness can be reduced when one understands organizational life to the same degree that human interactions are understood.

Bierema (2003) reminds us that although some women have broken through the glass ceiling, they emulate men and foster patriarchal systems that discriminate against

women. Moreover Bierema states, “Women’s glacially slow movement into positions of power in corporate America is mysterious given their sheer numbers in the workforce” (p. 3). Hayes and Flannery (2000) contend that the workplace has hidden agendas that reproduce power structures similar to education. Black women are forced to navigate both racial and gendered power relations to succeed in the workplace. Women’s access to power in the workplace will likely continue to elude them given that the power structures continue to be primarily male dominated.

The research has overwhelmingly confirmed that Black women are at a clear disadvantage based on their positionality as Black females (Alfred, 2001; Cohn, 1997; Evans & Herr, 1991; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Kerka, 1998). These authors addressed such issues as race and gender discrimination, insider/outsider status and biculturalism. In addition, the literature affirms the impediment of racism overshadowing the other interlocking systems of gender and class in the discussions of positionality, power and leadership. What's more, because of the marginal position of Black women, power issues arise in the workplace. Several authors include a discussion of the effects of power or the lack thereof in their writings (Bierema, 2003; Cervero, Wilson, & Associates, 2001; Gilligan, 1993; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1997; Nicolson, 1996).

Historically, the American culture hierarchy and the invisible system of White privilege are the primary impediments to Black women leaders rising to the top ranks in educational administration. The affirmation of this proposition is found in the writings of Johnson-Bailey (1999), Alfred (2001) and Lee & Johnson-Bailey (2004), among others. Positionality is a significant obstacle to Black women rising to senior leadership positions within the academy; these women are doubly positioned outside the power structure and

have been excluded from formal and informal networks as well. Thus, the opportunities for ascending the leadership ladder have been greatly diminished for the Black women—the women who are typically positioned outside the leadership pipeline. Power and power relationships are fundamental to individuals seeking advancement to senior leadership positions; however, power is an aspect that typically eludes Black women. Black women have a long standing history in leadership roles; one need only view the legacy of role models akin to Harriet Tubman, Septima Clark and Ella Baker to realize African American women's capacity to assume top ranking leadership positions.

Why do so few Black women rise to the top in higher education administration? The literature is clear in demonstrating that the negative effects or race, gender, positionality, White privilege, and power all intersect to serve as impediments to Black women realizing their career goals. Overwhelmingly, the literature supports the contention that the primary obstacles of Black women's career development today continues to be two-fold, that of double jeopardy—Black and female. Still, in the twenty-first century, DuBois' (1990) words resonate, "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (p. 16).

Mentoring and Black Women

Mentoring requires special attention for the career development of Black women. Numerous articles and studies chronicle the need for but lack of sufficient role models for African American women (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Hansman, 2003; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005; Wilson, 2004). Cross-cultural mentoring was recommended as an option for the mentor shortage (Bova, 2000; Gardiner & Tiggermann, 1999; Jenkins, 2005; Johnson-

Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005). This discussion on mentoring will include a detailed discussion delineating the role of a mentor, the mentoring process, cross-cultural mentoring, and mentoring challenges.

Mentoring Defined

Mentoring is currently the vanguard for strategies used to advance in workplace learning and career advancement. Indvik (2004) points out that one of the most critical types of relationships for career advancement is a mentor relationship in which a senior individual provides task coaching and emotional encouragement and sponsors the protégé within the organization. Caffarella (1992) characterizes mentoring as "an intense caring relationship in which persons with more experience work with less experienced persons to promote both professional and personal development" (p. 38). It is interesting to note that Caffarella emphasized that the mentoring relationship should be a "caring" one. Although more individuals can be involved, a mentoring relationship requires at least two participants, a mentor and a protégé. Hunsaker and Hunsaker (1986) inform that a commonly accepted definition for a mentor is "a senior person who undertakes to guide a younger person's career development" (p. 67). A plethora of synonyms have been used to describe mentoring—teaching, coaching, advising, training, directing, protecting, sponsoring, guiding and learning (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000). Similarly, a long list of terms exists to describe a mentor—coach, guide, role model, peer advisor, and sponsor. Also, various terms such as protégé, mentee, apprentice, and learner have been used to describe the person being mentored (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005).

Stalker (1994) suggests two basic functions of mentoring: relationships and outcomes. Relationships include structural relationships such as hierarchal or lateral

connections with people and personal relationships which consider how people relate on a more personal level such as friendships. Outcomes refer to the benefits that may ensue from the mentoring relationship such as career advancement and increased skills. Gardiner et al. (2000) refer to relationships as psychosocial and outcomes as career advancement.

Mentoring, though informal in early history, has been utilized for decades to promote career development. Jenkins (2005) writes that, historically, mentoring was an informal process where top executives identified future leaders and groomed them in social settings such as on the golf course. Gardiner et al. (2000) refer to the golf course mentoring as the “good ole boy” network. Jenkins posits that Black professionals were not in the circle of these “outside of the office” relationships and were therefore excluded from these mentoring opportunities. Mentoring has been identified as a vital component in the career development of African Americans, especially African American women. Organizations today, Jenkins claims, acknowledge the benefit of developing young talent and are establishing mentor programs to support the career advancement of minorities. Crawford and Smith (2005) emphasize that in order for mentoring to be beneficial to the mentor and the protégé, "it must be personally valued and personally espoused; it cannot be dictated or prescribed” (p. 53).

The Mentor

Mentors serve a vital role in the career and leadership development of new employees and to individuals who desire to advance their careers. The principal role of mentors in education, according to Bowman, Kite, Branscombe and Williams (1999), is to model how to succeed in academic settings and to provide emotional support,

encouragement, and a trusting environment during the career development of the protégé. Crawford and Smith (2005) add that mentors share values, career counseling, information, and advice, and socialize the protégé to the rules and culture of the organization.

Where formal mentoring programs do not exist, Black women must be assertive and seek out their own mentors. To that end, Bell (2003) offers some special advice to Black women on finding a mentor. She advises Black women aspiring to move up the leadership ladder to do the following: (1) Get noticed by talking to people; find out who in the organization is known for developing talent and get to know them, (2) Reach out by approaching senior level people that you admire without regard to race or gender and let them know what you have learned about their leadership abilities, (3) Invite your prospect to lunch; let the person know that you would like to learn from his or her experience and in addition, get insight about your own career, (4) Build amiable relationships with support staff because these individuals often can offer information and special favors if they trust you, and (5) Observe the style of dress of higher-ranking women in your company and follow their lead. Hunsaker and Hunsaker (1986) advise that women cannot afford to wait to be chosen to be mentored. They advocate actively seeking out people who are in positions to help accomplish goals and to help navigate the internal political system. They further suggest that women should make their goals known, seek high visibility assignments and document accomplishments, use the networking system and remain professional at all times. The literature revealed that some organizations have formal mentoring programs where protégés are assigned to mentors.

In the article, *Cross-Race Faculty Mentoring*, Christine Stanley (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005) recounted how she, a new faculty member at Texas A & M University, sought out Yvonna Lincoln, a highly-respected senior faculty member, when she had questions related to the university and her department. These contacts resulted in a mentoring relationship. Stanley does not recall how the mentoring relationship began, but it is interesting to note that she described some of the strategies that Bell (2003) delineated to find a mentor. Stanley discussed reaching out to Lincoln on issues such as department culture, unwritten rules and diversity issues.

Mentoring Process/Relationships

Many mentoring relationships are initiated by the two people directly involved, the mentor and the protégé, and are not guided by a formal process designed by their employers. However, organizations that sponsor a mentoring program typically have a structured program that delineates the mentoring process. Whether in an aircraft company (Kajs, 2002) or a classroom (Kram, 1985), mentoring processes comprise similar components that are designed to develop the individual, yet still have variations unique to the organization. The primary components of many mentoring processes are mentor selection, mentor and protégé training, and the subsequent relationship of providing mentoring through constant interaction and feedback between mentor and protégé (Kajs, 2002). Bova (2000) purports that other factors to be considered in ensuring the success of a mentoring program are proper selection and assigning of a program coordinator, mentor training, and program evaluation. A true mentoring process, stipulates Boswell (2004), is a continuous, long-term relationship of professional growth and development resulting in benefits for the mentor and the protégé.

Crawford and Smith (2005) advise protégés to seek out several mentors because individuals customarily have strengths in different areas, thus protégés will have the benefits of tapping into the strengths and reaping the benefits of various leadership personalities. Agreeing with Crawford and Smith on the benefit of multiple mentors, Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998) stipulate that multiple mentors are recommended for African American women because of the diversity of issues in their career development. Moreover, Catalyst (2004) found that the more mentors a woman has, the faster she moves up the corporate ladder.

Several writers advocate training for mentors suggesting that workshops/training be provided for mentors in order that potential mentors might understand the role of mentoring. Hansman (2003) advises that specific training sessions be designed for cross-race/cross-gender mentoring that address issues such as power, race, class, gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Education about mentoring can ultimately dispel and reduce fears of those who may be resistant to mentoring; it can also provide a forum to openly discuss mentoring concerns and the role of mentoring. Possibly if more individuals who have navigated the leadership hierarchy felt comfortable with the prospect of mentoring and additionally considered it an obligation to help others achieve, the doors would likely open for more African American women. Regarding the responsibility to mentor, Lincoln (Stanley & Lincoln, 2005) stated:

> Mentoring, whether cross-race, cross-gender, or same race/gender has always seemed to me to be an integral part of what senior scholars owe across the generations to junior colleagues. I have personally heard senior scholars request "release" time for mentoring, as though it were a course from which one might be

excused. My own belief is that it is a part of the institutional citizenship responsibilities of every senior faculty member, not a form of "overload." (p. 48)

Mentoring Experiences

Positive mentoring experiences can advance the careers of African American women. In a qualitative study examining the career developmental experiences of nine senior-level African-American women working in community and technical colleges in the United states, Wilson (2004) found that the majority of the women acknowledged mentoring experiences that contributed to their career advancement. She categorized the mentoring experiences of the study participants as foundational and career-related. The foundational experiences encompassed the pre-career mentoring experiences provided by parents, high school teachers and counselors, and spouse. The career related mentoring experiences were the experiences that occurred from college through employment from mentors such as college personnel, co-workers, and previous employers. Wilson observes that the foundational mentoring experiences reportedly enhanced the participants' identities and self worth, provided positive role models, and planted the seeds of "you can be whatever you choose to be" (p. 138). The career-related mentoring experiences consisted of sponsorship, coaching, and provided visibility and professional development opportunities. Wilson concluded that the foundational and especially the career-related mentoring experiences significantly impacted the upward mobility of the careers of the participants.

In another qualitative study, Thomas (2004) examined factors that contributed to the career succession of African American women to executive leadership positions in two-year colleges. Mentoring was identified by four of the five study participants as

significantly contributing to their career development. Even the fifth participant acknowledged that she believed mentoring would have enhanced her career. According to Thomas, the women emphasized that mentoring develops management and supervisory skills, builds confidence, motivates towards excellence and aids in identifying career opportunities.

Crawford and Smith (2005) conducted a study to investigate the importance of mentoring for seven African American women who chose a career in higher education. The study also sought to explain how sociocultural and gender experiences influenced their career choices and development. The study found that mentoring in the traditional definition had no impact on the women's career choices and development because none had informal or formal mentoring experiences; further, none were socialized by a senior member as to the rules and culture of the academy. Crawford and Smith contend that because the women did not have mentors, the academic institutions have not capitalized on their talents, nor did the women receive the benefit of participating in situations where their leadership ability could be developed. Consequently, the women were trained, but not nurtured. The women reported feeling isolated and frustrated and shut out of the inner circle and overwhelmingly expressed dissatisfaction in their careers. Finally, Crawford and Smith related that the women believed that mentoring would have resulted in greater job satisfaction because mentors could have made recommendations concerning their career advancement, publicly praised their accomplishments and abilities, served as a confidant, and very possibly could have facilitated their career progression.

Cross-Culture/Cross-Race Mentoring

Bowman, Kite, Branscombe, and Williams (2003) proffer that African American women are likely the population most in need of mentoring given that they are members of a group—Black and female—that has been doubly oppressed. However, mentors have been lacking for African American women because mentors were primarily White males and outside race and gender mentoring was practically an anomaly. Thus, Black women faced a monumental challenge trying to find a mentor. Further, many Black women are "firsts" or among the "few" in dominant culture organizations; consequently, there are often no same race and gender mentors available. Cross culture mentoring, then, becomes highly significant for Black women.

Johnson-Bailey, a Black female, and Cervero, a White male, began their cross-cultural mentoring relationship when Johnson-Bailey was a student and Cervero was a professor at the same research university (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). Johnson-Bailey later became a faculty member at the same university and in the same department as Cervero. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero describe a highly successful mentoring experience where Cervero guided Johnson-Bailey as she navigated and negotiated the power structure and rose through the ranks to become an associate professor. (Johnson-Bailey has since been promoted to full professor.)

Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) stress that trust is the foundation of a successful mentoring relationship; however, because of such issues as historical legacies and societal impacts, trust may not be so easily achieved. They further advise that cross-cultural relationships have to overcome the cultural burden of mistrust as well as the power dynamics and the race issue that are innate in Black/White relations. Their

mentoring relationship was sprinkled with the most problematic mentoring challenges of diversity in sex and race. Accordingly, several writers warn that cross-culture mentoring relationships can entail struggles when race, class and gender are interjected (Hansman, 2003; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004; Thomas, 2001).

Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (2004) conclude their article by delineating the impact and significance of mentoring at both the organizational and personal level. They argue that both parties benefit from the mentoring experience. The protégé gains access to an experienced guide, greater job success, higher salary, and greater career mobility; on the other hand, the mentor receives career enhancement, recognition and personal satisfaction. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero were both enriched from their cross-race mentoring experience because they were "exposed to another culture and the challenge of stepping outside of their comfort zone" (p. 19). As can be surmised from Johnson-Bailey and Cervero's mentoring experience, ultimately, the mentoring experience can result in greater job success and satisfaction for both parties.

Mentoring Challenges

As can be determined from the preceding discussions, mentoring can endow Black women with vital support. However, with a situation where there are advantages, there are sometimes disadvantages as well; the same holds true for mentoring. Kram (1985) asserts that in formal mentoring programs, the risks can outweigh the benefits of mentoring if the program is not properly and inclusively developed. Consistent with Kram's contention, a study conducted by Ragins, Cotton and Miller (2000) made parallel conclusions. They found that bad mentoring may be worse than no mentoring at all and

that formal mentoring programs may be less effective for women than for men. Kram makes the following statement concerning the potential perils of mentoring:

> Those who are not matched become increasingly pessimistic about their career prospects; those who are matched can feel burdened by the new responsibility; and immediate supervisors may be threatened by a program that appears to undermine their authority. While some relationships become helpful and enduring, more often than not, the matched pairs remain superficial alliances at best. (p. 40)

Kram further asserts that potential mentors may not support the mentoring concept because they were not mentored or may possibly be experiencing career blocks or issues that cause them to be disinterested in the careers of newcomers. Protégés, on the other hand, may not trust senior managers' motives or their competence and may not have the interpersonal skills to interrelate with senior management. It is important to note that in many mentoring programs, including the type that Kram speaks about, management is heavily involved in the pairing of the mentor and protégé.

Like formal mentoring programs, informal mentoring programs also have potential drawbacks for Black women; a probable drawback is the paucity of mentors (Hansman, 1998). Since the majority of mentors, have been White males, informal mentoring relationships have typically excluded Black women. The intersection of race, class, gender, and ethnicity become problematic for White men and Black women who may be uncomfortable with the various implications of the cross-race and cross-gender mentoring experience.

Mentoring Summary

Black women customarily have the appropriate education and the credentials to achieve their career aspirations, but they have traditionally lacked the nurturing and support in the workplace to aid them in moving up the career ladder at a faster pace. Isolation and alienation from informal and formal networks have been the norm for Black women in dominant culture institutions. These networks provide access to essential information that may not otherwise be available (Jenkins, 2005; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005). Mentors often provide support and serve as the connection between Black women and the internal networks. Crawford & Smith (2005) purport that individuals have succeeded in the past without the assistance of mentors and will continue to do so, still mentors are invaluable in ensuring that protégés are socialized within the organizational culture. Black women's career advancement would likely be fortified by caring mentoring relationships.

If more senior faculty and administrators considered it a responsibility to mentor, without regard to the race or gender of the individual being mentored, African American women would likely be the primary beneficiaries of the increased mentoring opportunities. Positive mentoring relationships coupled with highly credentialed Black women would, in all probability, open doors that have long been closed to Black women. Finally, the literature revealed that in successful mentoring relationships, the mentor and the protégé both reap rewards. Hansman (2003) summarized mentoring this way, "Supportive mentoring relationships can contribute to the psychosocial development of individuals, and helpful mentors can greatly enhance a person's career development" (p. 16).

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a review of the literature on African American women in higher education, career development, power issues affecting career development, and mentoring. The focus of the topics were to investigate the current status of Black women in higher education administration and to understand what the literature says about the influence of career development and mentoring on the upward mobility of Black women's careers in senior-level higher education administration. A thorough examination of the literature reveals that Black women have made some advances in gaining senior-level leadership positions but still distantly trail White men, White women, and Black men. Even more alarming, Black women have made no notable gains in the past five years in acquiring presidential positions in community colleges.

The career development literature was absent of theories as well as recommendations that spoke to the career advancement of Black women. It is clear that Black women are not a monolithic group; accordingly, a formula does not exist that would speak to the career development of all Black women. The mentoring literature revealed that mentoring is highly critical to the careers of Black women; fortunately, cross-cultural mentoring is on the rise. This is significant because of the dearth of same race and same sex mentors for African American women. Positionality, inclusive of race, gender, and maybe even skin color, continue to impede the career mobility of Black women. Without a doubt, the literature revealed that special attention needs to be given to the leadership and career development of Black women. Yes, progress has been made over the years, but Black women still remain significantly under represented in senior-level administrative positions in higher education.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to understand how African American women community college presidents ascend to the presidency. The research questions that guided this study were:

(1) What is the typical career preparation of African American women presidents of community colleges?

(2) What are the common strategies that African American women presidents of community colleges use to negotiate their careers?

(3) What were the salient factors that affected or shaped their career paths?

This chapter presents a discussion on the qualitative research design, delineates its characteristics, and explains why this approach was the most appropriate for my study. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion on sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and researcher's statement.

Research Design

Qualitative research, which was utilized in this study, is designed to allow the researcher to explore in depth the experiences of the participants through various means such as interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In my study, interviews were conducted, documents received directly from the participants were reviewed and analyzed, websites of the participants' colleges were examined, and each participant's name was "googled" uncovering voluminous documents—often with accompanying photos of the participants in various settings and activities. The content

from the phone interviews, inferences from the women's speech and voice tones, and the many documents all combined to offer rich information for the study. Patton (2002) contends that qualitative methods "facilitate study of issues in depth and detail" (p.14). Since qualitative research is conducted without being constrained by previously determined categories of analysis, the researcher has the latitude to probe for depth and detail and to allow openness in participants' responses to prevail. Clearly, then, as Bogdan and Taylor (1975) purport, qualitative research allows the researcher "to explore concepts whose essence is lost in other research approaches" (p. 5). Thus, through effective and efficient investigation utilizing qualitative methods, I was able to gain in-depth and rich information for my research topic.

Merriam (2002) writes that qualitative research is an umbrella term that encompasses several philosophical or theoretical orientations and includes several types and designs of qualitative research. Merriam further observes four major characteristics of qualitative research: (1) the researcher seeks to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants, (2) the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, (3) the strategy builds toward theory, and (4) the result of the inquiry is richly descriptive. Following is a more-detailed discussion of these four characteristics.

The first characteristic of qualitative research is that researchers endeavor to understand the meaning people have constructed about their experiences. Consequently, the researcher is interested in the participant's perspective of the phenomenon, and the focus is on what it means from the participants' perspectives to operate from their worlds and their settings. To be a part of the setting of the study participants, according to Merriam and Simpson (2000), the researcher must conduct fieldwork which entails going

to the people, site, institution, or whatever comprises “the field” to collect data. Similarly, Patton (2002) suggests that researchers should observe as intimately as possible the lives and activities of the setting under study to develop an insider’s view or emic perspective of the phenomenon. Through the emic perspective, the researcher sees as well as feels what it’s like to be part of the setting. Finally, Bogdan and Taylor (1975) emphasize that through the qualitative approach, myriad concepts can be studied from the standpoint as they are viewed and experienced by people in their everyday lives.

The second characteristic of qualitative research discussed by Merriam (2002) is that the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Miller and Crabtree (1999) observe that the researcher is engaged in the field in some active manner, primarily through participant observation and interviews. Because the researcher is a human instrument, the research can be enhanced through communication and immediate response on the part of the researcher. Conversely, the researcher has to be careful of personal biases that might threaten the credibility of the research; thus it is vital that researcher’s biases, prejudices, and assumptions be revealed. Peshkin (1988) cautions the researchers to be meaningfully attentive to their own subjectivities throughout the entire research process. As an African American female administrator in higher education researching other African American women in the same profession, it was imperative that I delineate my subjectivities.

The third characteristic of qualitative research is that the process is inductive because it builds toward theory. As the researcher gathers the data, themes, and categories, theories emerge from the patterns found in the cases under study (Merriam, 2002). Likewise, Patton (2002) describes inductive analysis as immersion in the details

of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelations. Patton contends that inductive analysis begins by exploring, then confirming, and is guided by analytical principles rather than rules, and ultimately ends with a creative synthesis. My research on understanding how African American women presidents of two-year colleges ascend to the presidency was definitely inductive because I did not undertake to build a theory, but investigated a phenomenon in its setting and context.

The fourth and final characteristic of qualitative research, stated Merriam (2002), is that the data results in a rich description of the phenomenon. Akin to Merriam's position, Bogdan and Taylor (1975) inform that qualitative research produces descriptive data consisting of people's own spoken or written words or observable behavior. This descriptive data which includes interviews, documents, and/or observations are analyzed and described in detail.

Direct quotes, capturing the exact words of the participants, are also paramount to research. Patton (2002) observes that direct quotes are used in qualitative research because "they reveal respondents' depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their worlds, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences and their basic perspectives" (p. 21). During my research, I was careful to record the interviews and mindful of taking copious and detailed notes, eliminating the need to place any reliance on memory.

The preceding discussion of qualitative research illustrates that the major focus of the qualitative researcher is not primarily the end result, but rather investigation of the lived experiences of the participants to uncover prolific data that will detail the path to the end result. Since I was interested in understanding how the African American women

who participated in my study perceived how they ascended to the presidency, the qualitative method of inquiry was surely the appropriate design. Utilizing the characteristics of qualitative research resulted in a roadmap toward developing theory.

Sample Selection

For this study, purposeful sampling was used. Qualitative sampling and quantitative sampling are two methods of sampling but have vastly different strategies, logic, and purposes. Whereas qualitative inquiry usually focuses on relatively small samples that are selected purposely to permit in-depth inquiry and understanding into a phenomenon, Patton (2002) points out that quantitative methods primarily depend on larger samples selected randomly to allow the findings to be confidently generalized from the sample to the population that it represents. Unlike quantitative research which is characterized by statistical probability sampling, Patton stipulates that "qualitative inquiry is distinguished by purposeful sampling which focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (p. 230). Since my purpose was to understand how African American women presidents of two-year community colleges ascend to the presidency, it was most beneficial to talk with women who have ascended to the position of president. Thus, purposefully choosing my sample was the appropriate method for sample selection.

Sample Selection and Criteria

Kuzel (1999) purports that in qualitative research, sampling is not driven by the need to generalize to a larger population, but rather to increase the scope of data to uncover deeper understandings and multiple realities. Merriam (2002) asserts that because researchers seek to understand the meaning of a phenomenon, they should

choose samples from which the most can be learned. Purposeful samples, Patton (2002) observes, produces a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. Consequently, the depth and understanding of the cases and situations of inquiry are amplified. Since my research aimed to understand how African American women presidents of two-year colleges ascend to the presidency, it was imperative to identify participants with experiences relative to my study.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) advise that the research design should delineate the rationale for the selection of the setting, the people, or whoever or whatever is chosen as "the sample" for the research. Similarly, Merriam (2002) emphasizes that one must determine essential criteria for selecting the study participants. Consequently, I selected participants for this study who met the following criteria: (1) an African American female president currently employed at a community college in the United States or retired for less than two years—retirees of less than two years will normally still have vivid memories of their tenure, 2) hold a minimum of a master's degree which is usually the minimum requirement of a two-year college president, and 3) the college must be accredited by one of the regional accrediting agencies recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Sampling Procedure

To facilitate selection of study participants, I was assisted by one of my dissertation committee members who is also a former community college president and an associate member of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC). She gave me an AACC Membership Directory containing information on over 1,000 colleges and also assisted me in obtaining from the AACC office a list of the 34 African American

women presidents whose colleges are members of the AACC. The list, in addition to the names of the presidents, contained the names of the women's colleges, college addresses, and phone and fax numbers. A cross-reference of the AACC directory and the list of presidents netted further information including e-mail addresses, credit enrollment, and the type of institution control—public, private, independent, or tribal.

My next step was to separate the list of 34 presidents into the six accreditation regions. The results yielded the following number of presidents in each region: Middle States – 4; North Central – 7; New England – 4; Northwest – 1; Southern – 11; and Western – 6. My hope was to gain the participation of the one president from the Northwest region and at least two each from the other regions (one from a small school and one from a large school), for a total of 11 study participants. As a precursor to my request for participation, my AACC committee member sent an email to the five women with whom she was acquainted, introducing my study, informing them that I would be contacting them, and requesting their participation. I then made contact through email and U.S. mail with the five women plus 10 other potential participants. After two weeks, I received affirmative replies from four women; I made contact by phone to set the interview dates and times and followed up with confirmation emails. For those who had not responded after three weeks, I sent a second email requesting their decisions. After receiving no additional participants from the first round of requests, I sent correspondence to the remainder of the presidents, receiving four additional "yes" responses for a total of eight participants. I was able to gain participation from at least one woman in each accreditation region. I believe the eight women is a solid

representation because I began to see a pattern in responses approximately midway through the interviews.

Data Collection

Merriam (2002) purports the data collection method should be determined by the purpose of the study and the sources of data that will result in the most significant information with regards to answering the research question. Fieldwork, the primary method of data collection for qualitative research, according to Patton (2002), requires having direct and personal contact with participants under study in their own environments. The researcher, through fieldwork and close proximity, can see more into the world of the participants by experiencing for a short period of time their environments and daily life circumstances.

Through field work, data for qualitative research is derived from three major sources: interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002). Since specific information is desired from participants, the researcher usually has predetermined questions to ask during the interviews; however, the questions are often open ended to allow the participants greater flexibility with responses. Patton asserts, "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe" (p. 340). From interviews, the researcher obtains direct quotations from participants about their feelings, opinions, experiences and knowledge. In essence, researchers are looking through the lens of the respondents, seeing the world from their perspectives. Patton stipulates that direct quotations are essential in qualitative inquiry because they reveal respondents' depths of emotion, the ways they have organized their worlds, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions.

Adhering to the advice of various authors (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002) regarding data collection, I used three sources of data collection—interviews, documents and field notes or researcher notes.

Interviews

The major source of data collection that my study utilized is semi-structured interviews. The interview guide is attached in the appendix. Merriam (2002) informs that the semi-structured interview falls somewhere between the highly-structured interview which is characterized by an adherence to predetermined questions and their order and the unstructured interview where neither the questions nor the order is determined. Although the interview questions were predetermined, the order was flexible and the participants were given the latitude in these open-ended interview questions to allow their perspectives to be heard. Edgerton and Langness (1974) write that with open-ended interviews, the researcher asks very general questions and then permits the participant "to talk at length, elaborating, volunteering, and pursuing whatever is of interest to him" (p. 44). During the interview, it was beneficial to obtain copious information rather than to have limited responses to questions and possibly have foregone rich detail; follow-up questions were also asked to participants' responses. The interviews, which lasted approximately one hour each, were conducted by phone in the participants' home or office over a six-month period. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

Documents

My second source of data collection was documents. Merriam (2002) contends that the researcher collects documents that can be analyzed and utilized in the research

study. Documents can be particularly enlightening. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) point out that in personal documents, "people reveal in their own words their views of their entire lives, or parts of it, or some other aspects about themselves" (p. 6). Thus, documents revealed aspects of the participants which could not have been learned through the interviews. Consequently, as a component of my data collection process, I requested documents such as vitas, biographies, and profiles in order to gain supplementary knowledge of their backgrounds and skills.

To complement the above mentioned documents, I collected supplementary documents from the internet. I reviewed the websites of the participants' colleges and printed out useable information, printed copies of the participants' profiles and photographs from the directory of the Presidents' Roundtable of African American CEOs, and obtained and examined voluminous articles and documents from the internet by "googling" the participants' names. Since I did not meet seven of the women face-to-face, these documents were invaluable as I looked into the lives of these outstanding women.

Field Notes

My final method of data collection was field notes or researcher notes. I maintained a written record of my experiences and interactions with each participant. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) posit that field notes are a written account of all that the researcher hears, sees, and experiences during the collection of data for qualitative research. Field notes or researcher notes, according to Glesne (1999), further enables the researcher to recall elements of the interview that cannot be elicited from the taped recorded interview. Bogdewic (1999) stipulates that it is sometimes difficult, especially

for novice researchers, to decide what to include in field notes because we cannot be certain what might eventually contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon.

Before, during, and after the interviews, I followed the advice of Bogdan and Taylor (1975) who cautioned researchers to make an attempt to record everything remembered about the session because field notes cannot be trusted to memory. Therefore, as soon as possible after each contact, I recorded field notes. The field notes consisted of observations during the interviews and my thoughts and actions before and after the contacts.

Data Analysis

Whereas data collection consists of collecting information through various methods, data analysis moves to the process of organizing, synthesizing, and interpreting the collected data to allow for the presentation of findings. Marshall and Rossman (1989) describe data analysis simply as “bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data” (p. 112). During data analysis, I looked for statements that showed relationships among the categories of the collected data.

Patton (2002) purports that a great challenge of qualitative analysis is making sense of the large amount of data. My task was to reduce the volume of data collected into a framework for communicating the essence of what the data revealed. Patton contends that analysis should begin with specific observations and build toward general patterns. Consistent with Patton, Merriam (2002) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) assert that categories emerge as the researcher comes to understand patterns that exist in the phenomenon of interest. Patton cautions the researcher to allow the findings to emerge without presupposing in advance or making assumptions regarding what the findings will

be. To analyze my data, I utilized two methods common in qualitative research: the constant comparative method and coding. I was mindful to avoid injecting my opinions into the findings.

Constant Comparative Method

Merriam (2002) observes that with the massive amount of data generated through qualitative research, the researcher should begin analyzing the data with the first interview, observation, and document. Merriam further asserts that "data analysis is simultaneous with data collection" (p. 14); this simultaneous data collection and analysis method is commonly known as the constant comparative method (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2001). This method for analyzing qualitative data was devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for a qualitative methodology called "grounded theory." The constant comparative method, however, has been decoupled from grounded theory and stands on its own as a theory for data analysis. Utilizing the constant comparative method, I continually compared one unit of data to another to allow for the emergence of themes that would respond to the research questions.

Coding

Coding is my second and final process of data analysis. According to Schwandt (2001), coding is a process of analyzing the large volume of data generated in the form of transcripts, field notes, photographs, and other documents. Data is broken down into small or manageable pieces and given a name or code representing the concept. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe the progression of data analysis through three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The researcher begins with open coding, scrutinizing the data by line, sentence and paragraph; the researcher then proceeds to

axial coding, putting the data back together by themes and categories; and finally, through selective coding, the researcher integrates the categories to form a substantive theory. Merriam (2002) similarly describes the coding of data for qualitative research as beginning with a particular incident from data collection and comparing it to another incident in the same set, looking for common patterns.

To analyze my data, I compared data in the same interview then progressed to comparing that data to information from a different interview. These comparisons resulted in categories or themes which began to show similar meanings or essences from the data. These combined themes resulted in the building of findings which represented the preponderance of the data.

Validity and Reliability

Validity in qualitative research refers to the accuracy and truthfulness of the findings. According to Merriam (2002), "All researchers aspire to produce valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner" (p. 22). Moustakas (1990) writes that the question of validity is one of meaning; in other words, the results of the research should be presented comprehensively, vividly, and accurately so that the meanings and essences of the experiences are properly conveyed. It is imperative that the stakeholders can trust that the data has been presented in an accurate manner and that the findings can be confidently applied for their own purposes. In qualitative research, there are several strategies for addressing the trustworthiness of a study. Qualitative researchers, Merriam cautions, should pay close attention to internal validity, reliability and external validity.

Internal Validity

Internal validity seeks to insure that the researcher's reality and interpretation accurately represents the interpretations of the participants (Merriam 2002). According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), internal validity asks the question, "How congruent are one's findings with reality?" (p. 101). Simply stated, the purpose of internal validity is to assure that we are measuring and observing what we think we are measuring or observing. There are numerous strategies for ensuring internal validity in qualitative research. To accomplish internal validity, I utilized triangulation, peer review, and reflexivity or researcher's position.

Merriam (2002) discussed four types of triangulation: multiple investigators, multiple theories, multiple sources of data, and multiple methods to confirm emerging findings. Of these four types of triangulation, my study utilized the multiple sources of data. Merriam (2002) and Patton (2002) suggest using more than one source of data collection because multiple sources enhance the validity of the findings. I collected data through interviews and documents. Patton posits that different kinds of data can be brought together to illuminate various aspects of a phenomenon.

My second strategy for ensuring internal validity was the peer review (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Through the peer review, a recent doctoral graduate with whom I regularly communicate reviewed my documents and offered helpful comments and suggestions. Most importantly, my major professor provided feedback as to whether my findings seemed plausible.

My third and final strategy for internal validity was reflexivity or researcher's position. Merriam (2002) describes reflexivity as the researcher explaining his or her

position regarding the topic under study. Similarly, Borkan (1999) refers to reflexivity as "the technique by which researchers turn the focus back on themselves to evaluate their influence on the findings and interpretations" (p. 194). Consequently, it was necessary for me to delineate any experiences, assumptions, or biases that might have unconsciously impacted the research findings. In the last section of this chapter, I have given a detailed account of my biases, assumptions, and prejudices so that the readers will understand my positionality and interpretations.

External Validity

External validity or generalizability, another form of validity in qualitative research, refers to the extent to which results or findings of one study can be transferred to a similar situation (Merriam, 2002). Since qualitative research often involves a small purposeful sample, it is not usually undertaken for the purpose of generalization. In fact, Patton (2002) observes that qualitative methods usually have reduced generalizability because of the small sample, but these cases typically provide rich descriptions.

Merriam (2002) suggests two strategies for ensuring external validity: 1) rich, thick description, and 2) multi-site designs or maximizing variations. During the research study process, I kept extensive records that included descriptions of participants, their colleges, in-depth interviews, and other observations. The rich cases and descriptions will allow the reader to determine whether the study matches his or her own situation and the extent that the findings can be transferred.

I also employed the multi-site design and maximizing variations strategy; consequently, my study encompassed participants in all regions of the United States and eight different two-year colleges, so there is definitely diversity in sites and in

participants. As a result, my findings have the potential to be applicable to a wide range of situations and users. In summary, it is important for readers to remember that the primary goal of qualitative research is not generalizability to a larger population, but to provide rich information so that users can make their own decisions regarding usefulness of the study for their own purposes. For that reason, my study provides rich description so that the reader can apply the findings as appropriate to her individual situation.

Reliability

Reliability speaks to the question, "If the researcher conducted the same study, would it produce the same results?" Merriam (2002) defines reliability as the extent to which research findings can be replicated or to whether repeating the study would produce the same results. Merriam and Simpson (2002) caution that in qualitative research, there can be numerous interpretations of the same data, so varying interpretations should not be confused with replication. They stress that a chief concern in qualitative research is that the findings be consistent with the data collected. A question that the researcher might ask is, "Does the findings make sense?"

To ensure reliability in this study, I used triangulation, peer review, and investigator's position also known as reflexivity, researcher's position and researcher bias (all three were discussed under the *Internal Validity* section above), and the audit trail. Adhering to the advice from Guba and Lincoln (1981) and Merriam (2002), I kept an audit trail by documenting and account of how the data was collected, how the categories were developed, and how decisions were made throughout the research process. Since all of theses strategies were utilized, hopefully the reader can feel confident that the research has been rigorous and that the researcher has held reliability as central to the process.

Limitations of the Study

We have all heard the statement, “The more the merrier!” Quantitative researchers who typically depend on larger samples selected randomly (Crabtree & Miller, 1999) likely take the “more the merrier” statement very seriously. Contrarily, qualitative researchers are not concerned with huge numbers but primarily use a purposive sample usually resulting in small samples. Since my research study consisted of eight participants, this could be considered a limitation. I hastily point out, however, that the design of qualitative research is not intended to be generalized to a larger population, but to be highly descriptive in detailing the findings of the research. Readers should not make assumptions that the strategies and negotiations that aided the research participants in gaining their presidential positions will be the same for all African American women. They can, however, use the study results as applicable to their careers.

Another possible limitation to my study is the dynamics that could possibly enter into peer research. Several researchers (Cotterill, 1992; Oakley, 1981; Tang, 2002) have noted the power dynamics in peer research. According to Tang (1992; 2002), when women interview women, perceptions of each other based on such aspects as differences in social, cultural, and personal backgrounds can influence the balance of power relationship in the interview. Merely sharing the same gender is not an automatic source of understanding, camaraderie, or comfort during the discourse of woman to woman interviewing. Thus, the commonality of gender will not assure an effective and substantive interview. Social, cultural, educational, and personal dynamics can slip into the interview process and serve to advance or hamper the dialogue. Oakley (1981) stipulates that typically the objective of finding out about people through interviewing is

best achieved when the relationship of the interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest her own personal identity in the relationship.

Researcher's Statement

Patton (2002) asserts that any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study. Merriam (2002), with a similar theme, posits that before interviewing others, phenomenological researchers usually explore their own experiences to become aware of their own prejudices, biases, viewpoints and assumptions. These prejudices and preconceptions are then set aside in order not to influence the process. I contend that not only phenomenological researchers, but all qualitative researchers should acknowledge and put aside their prejudices so that the research will not be adversely influenced. For this study, it was imperative for me to bracket or set aside my experiences and positionality as an African American woman working in higher education administration.

In every place where I've been employed during my adult career, African Americans have been in the minority in professional positions. Beginning almost 33 years ago at a bank in my hometown and continuing to a state university in my present city of residence, I had the undesired distinction of being what many termed "a token Black." At the bank, I was the only African American employee other than the custodian. At a general hospital, a rehabilitation hospital and a state university, I was also one of only a few African American employees who were not relegated to positions (during that time period) associated with the Black race: custodian, nurse's aide, orderly, and cook. Interestingly, the jobs I held at these sites were not leadership positions and

paid salaries barely above minimum wage; yet they were considered prestigious by many African Americans. In view of my educational credentials and skills, I was underemployed in all of these early career positions.

Although African Americans have made some strides in employment in places such as those listed above, they are still disproportionately underrepresented in leadership positions. Presently, at my two-year college, 60 percent of the student body is African American; yet, African Americans, all female with the exception of one male, hold only 18 percent of the middle to senior level leadership positions. This scenario of underrepresentation of not only African American women, but also African American men in leadership positions, exists at the majority of the 33 technical colleges in Georgia (Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, 1996-2008). In addition to the technical colleges in Georgia, no Black female presidents are represented in the 16 private or public community colleges in Georgia.

Throughout my career, I have observed (in my opinion) that the most qualified candidate has not always received the job offer. It has been my experience that political connections, relationships to financial donors, nepotism, and “who you know” have been factors in hiring. These circumstances and affiliations have frequently worked against the employment of African Americans. In my senior level administrative position, I have been privy to questionable hirings that have negatively impacted African Americans' opportunities for employment and advancement.

It is quite interesting, I think, that the pathway to my first professional position as a technical college instructor was facilitated by a White male who was my supervisor at a state university where I was under employed as a secretary. A few months after becoming

my supervisor, this gentleman acknowledged what he referred to as my "considerable talents to deal with diverse people and situations and the under utilization of my skills in the position of a secretary."

When an instructor position in my field became available at the local technical school (now college), my supervisor informed me of the opening before I learned of it. Opportunely for me, my supervisor's good friend was in charge of filling the position. Soon after being interviewed, I was offered the position. Although I was fully qualified for the position, I believe that being recommended by my White male supervisor and the need for the college to increase the number of Black faculty members played a role in my hiring. At the time of my employment, there were 50 faculty members; only three were Black—two males and one female. The system was acting fairly for that moment by hiring a qualified minority candidate.

After being employed as a technical instructor, I had the opportunity to demonstrate my skills and acquire leadership abilities and was eventually chosen for Department Head, Director, and Vice President at the same college. Although I was qualified for all of the positions I obtained, I assert that learning to negotiate the predominately White male leadership, competence, attitude, timing, being in the right place at the right time, faith, and ironically, race, all intersected for the upward mobility of my career. I include race because the college had no Black administrators and the need for diversity worked to my advantage. The essential administrators had the opportunity to observe my interactions and skills and recognized my contributions in the various positions, I believe, and rewarded me with promotions to the next level.

Let me hasten to add that although I believe race has worked in my favor in obtaining my latter positions, for the reasons I delineated earlier, race has been a contributing factor why many other African Americans have not obtained administrative or even instructional positions. The college has not made much progress in leadership or faculty diversity since its inception over 60 years ago—African Americans represent only 18 percent of administrative positions and only 17 percent of faculty positions, yet the student body is 60 percent African American.

Patton (2002) emphasizes reporting “any personal and professional information that may have affected data collection, analysis, and interpretation—either negatively or positively—in the minds of users of the findings" (p. 566). Thus, I have delineated my previous experiences, and I was ever mindful during the research process to put aside personal assumptions or biases to assure that the research outcome was not compromised in any way by my prior personal experiences. As Peshkin (1988) suggested, by revealing or discussing my subjectivity, I enabled myself to manage my biases, not necessarily exorcise them, as I progressed through collecting, analyzing, and writing up the data. My goal was that the participants’ voices and intentions would be clearly reflected and interpreted and that my readers would feel convinced that my research was not adversely affected by any biases or preconceived conceptions. I feel confident that my research was not in any way comprised by my previous experiences.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the methodology used to conduct my inquiry on understanding how African American women presidents of two-year colleges ascend to the presidency. The basic interpretative design was utilized in this qualitative study. This

chapter further discussed the sample selection, data collection, and data analysis methods. The utilization of the constant comparative method and coding in data collection were given specific attention. This chapter also described the steps that I followed in an effort to assure validity and reliability of the study. Lastly, the chapter delineated the acknowledgement of my biases and assumptions associated with the research topic.

CHAPTER 4

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how African American women community college presidents ascend to the presidency. To thoroughly examine the phenomenon, the following questions guided the research:

(1) What is the typical career path of African American women presidents of community colleges?

(2) What are the common strategies that African American women presidents of community colleges use to negotiate their careers?

(3) What were the salient factors that shaped their career paths?

In this chapter, I give demographic information and present a picture of the eight women who participated in this study. The women, all presidents of two-year public community colleges from across the United States, were purposefully selected and they graciously participated in individual telephone interviews of approximately one hour. Six of the interviews were conducted from the participants' offices and two were conducted from their homes. So that I would have a mental picture of the women prior to the interview, I obtained a photograph of each one—five from the 2005 Directory of the Presidents' Roundtable of African American CEOs and two from college web pages. I had a personal relationship with one of the presidents, thus a photograph of her was not necessary. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and subsequently analyzed to

develop themes that gave insight into the women's ascension to their presidential positions.

The study participants were all married and range in ages from 50 to 60 years. As delineated in Table 1, the eight research participants represent all of the six accreditation regions that are recognized by the United States Department of Education —Middle States, North Central, New England, Northwest, Southern and Western. The New England and Western regions have two participants each and all of the other regions have one participant each. It was my desire to have two participants from each region for a total of 12 participants; however, one region had only one Black woman president at a two-year community college and I could not acquire participation of a second person in the other regions. Still, the eight women represent community colleges throughout the United States of America.

The colleges that the women lead are inclusive of the southern, northern, eastern and western United States and vary in population from 1,700 to 20,000 students. The women's tenure as president ranged from eight months to 12 years. Brief narratives of the participants highlight their individual demographics and give a glimpse into their lives. Table 2 provides a demographic summary including age, highest degree earned, marital status, and number of years as president. For confidentiality purposes, participants have been assigned first-name pseudonyms which will be used as appropriate when referring to the women.

Katie

For 12 years, Katie has been the president of a community college located in the Western United States. The college has just over 200 full-time faculty and 345 adjunct

instructors. Over 18,000 students attend the college which is one of nine public colleges of the Community College District. The college offers classes in more than 75 academic disciplines in 60 vocational and technical fields.

Table 1

Accreditation Regions and States Represented

Regions and States	Participants	Student Population
Middle States: Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania	Naomi	1,700
North Central: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming	Sarah	20,000
New England: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont	Bertha Betty	5,500 5,000
Northwest: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington	Martha	7,000
Southern: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia	Lanette	3,700
Western: California and Hawaii	Mary	8,000

Katie's husband of over 25 years retired as a college professor a year ago and Katie says, "I am eager to join him so that we can continue to expand our world of travel." The couple has an adult daughter who works in the entertainment industry. Katie

is a very light-skinned Black woman with a short, straight hairstyle. In all of the pictures that I have seen of her, she wears a natural-looking, warm smile.

Katie's ascension to the presidency was preceded by several preparatory positions beginning over 20 years earlier in the community college system. She has now devoted 33 years to education in the community college system. Katie, who is between 57 and 59 years old, began as a counselor/instructor being elevated every few years in student and academic affairs encompassing four different colleges. She held positions of Associate Dean and Dean of Student Services, Director of Educational Programs, and Dean and Vice President of Academic Affairs. Katie's education includes a B.A. in Sociology, M.A. in Educational Psychology, and an Ed.D. in Higher Education Administration from UCLA.

Katie's community and professional affiliations include Vice President of a Public Library Commission, board member of a hospital, member of an Economic Development Committee, President's Roundtable; Council on Black American Affairs, and National Council of Negro Women. She has also served as a presenter for various professional and civic conferences.

Betty

Although Betty had retired when I made contact for the interview, her former assistant forwarded my request to her. When Betty e-mailed me after receiving my correspondence and request, she was in the process of relocating to a different state. Betty's house phone had not been installed, still, she graciously agreed, at her suggestion, to an interview via her cell phone.

Table 2

Participants' Profiles

Name	Highest Degree	Age/Age Range	Marital Status	# Years President
Katie	EdD	56-60 (not given)	Married	12 years
Betty	EdD	57	Married	10 years
Naomi	PhD	55-60 (not given)	Married	9 years
Lanette	PhD	55	Married	9 years
Bertha	PhD	58	Married	8 years
Mary	EdD	57	Married	6 years
Martha	EdD	56-60 (not given)	Married	4 years
Sarah	PhD	51	Married	8 months

We made arrangements for a time that would not impact her usual cell phone charges. Betty has a kind, strong voice and from her pictures, appears to be of average height and size and conservative in dress and appearance.

Betty retired six months ago as president of a community college in the New England states. With an enrollment of approximately 5,000 students, the college is considered one of the fastest growing in the Northeast, according to Betty. The college's student population is majority African American and Latino and offers nearly 40 associate degrees and 25 certificate programs. Betty completed her doctorate degree in higher education administration at the young age of 27 at a university in New England; she completed her bachelors and masters degree at that same university.

Prior to serving 10 years as president, Betty worked at five different colleges, in different departments with vastly different positions. Betty held positions such as Vice President for Planning, Associate Vice President for Administration, Dean of Enrollment Planning, Assistant Dean of Community Services, Registrar, and faculty member. Betty explained that because her goal was to become a president, she purposefully took on diverse positions and assignments to gain a broad range of knowledge and experience. Further, at her institutions and within her professional organizations, she volunteered for assignments that no one else wanted.

Betty was a member of several organizations during her career. She was extremely proud to be a member of the Presidents' Roundtable of African American CEOs which is an affiliate organization of the National Council on Black American Affairs and the American Association of Community Colleges. During her last three years as president, she was chair and national convener of the President's Roundtable organization. Additionally, Betty served on a bank board, Governor's Council on Economic Competitiveness, Mayor Commission of Education, NAACP, Regional Business Council, Women's Forum, as well as membership in numerous other organizations.

Naomi

Naomi is the first female and first African-American president at her two-year community college located in the Northeastern United States. The college is situated on over 400 acres of land, has a diverse student population of approximately 1,700 students, and offers on-campus housing. Although the college is a single campus institution, it does offer courses at numerous instructional sites. Naomi has held the presidential position for

nine years. Immediately prior to accepting the appointment of president, Naomi was a Dean at a different college. She pointed out that the Dean was the highest ranking academic officer at the college since there were no vice presidents. Naomi has five college degrees ranging from an associate to a doctorate degree. Her academic professional career began as a faculty member and spans well over 30 years.

Prior to the participant interview, Naomi had just returned from a building dedication; she was excited to have this new facility on her campus. Naomi spoke in a relatively soft, yet strong voice as she talked about her ascension to the presidency. She described herself as being decisive, no-nonsense and very professional. Naomi's tone became quieter as she spoke about persevering through the loss of her only child. She lauds the support that she receives from her husband who is a chancellor in the community college system in her state.

Naomi grew up in the Deep South in what she termed "the Jim Crow" era. She did not reveal her age; however, her education and work history point to an age range of 56 to 60 years. Naomi credits her parents, in part, for her career achievements. She noted that her father had no education and her mother had only an eleventh grade education; still, they encouraged and expected her to matriculate beyond high school. From the various photographs I've seen of Naomi, she appears to be well-dressed. Naomi talked about a time when she went to the campus on Saturday when no administrative staff is usually present. She ran into some of her staff who were surprised that she owned a pair of jeans. She observed that she customarily dresses in a professional manner when working and strives to represent the college in a positive manner at all times.

Naomi is a member of numerous professional and civic organizations including the American Council on Education, Chamber of Commerce, and Workforce Development Board. She has also participated in at least three leadership development institutes. Near the close of the interview, Naomi surprised me by becoming the investigator and questioned my career aspirations. I explained that my goal was to become a president in a two year college. She then recommended that I attend the Executive Leadership Institute sponsored by the League for Innovation which she believed to be the oldest and one of the best for leadership training. Naomi also encouraged me to get involved with Kaleidoscope, a leadership organization for women.

Lanette

Lanette, 54, is the first and only African American female to lead a technical college in her Southeastern state. For ten years, Lanette has been president of her single-campus college which is situated in an urban setting. The college serves a student population in credit instructional programs of approximately 3,700 and is supported by a faculty and staff of over 350. The student body, which is majority African-American, mirrors the racial composition of the heavily populated city in which it is located. The college is contiguous to a community college.

I have been acquainted with Lanette for approximately 15 years. We initially met when Lanette worked as Director of Student Services at the Central Office of our organization in the same state where she serves as president. Lanette is a tall, poised, well-dressed Black woman with a strong, clear voice. She has a smooth, medium brown skin tone and wears her hair at a length that reaches the base of her neck. At every occasion that I have encountered Lanette, she has always been meticulously well-dressed

and well-groomed, regardless of whether in casual or business attire. She has a smile that lights up her surroundings. Lanette conveyed that she is very grateful for the support that she receives from her husband in her professional endeavors; moreover, she expresses gratitude for the support from her teenage son and four adult stepchildren. Lanette, who has four sisters and three brothers, is a native of a small town in a Southern state, considered a part of the "Deep South." Lanette moved away to attend college and never returned to live there.

Lanette describes herself as being capable, competent and confident in her abilities. She believes the aforementioned characteristics propelled her to the position of Educational Director of Student Services, the position she held immediately prior to being tapped for president. Lanette earned her three degrees, culminating with a PhD in Human Resource Management, from three different universities. Her M.A. in Sociology and her Ph.D. degrees were earned in the same Southern state but at different universities. Her B.A. degree in Sociology was earned still in a Southern state, though separated by many states.

Lanette has been a vital presence in her community, serving on many boards and involved in numerous organizations and activities. Lanette served with the Neighborhood Development Association, Workforce Development Council, Chamber of Commerce Board on Education, Coalition of One Hundred Black Women, the RESA Board of Control, as well as other boards and organizations. She has received numerous honors including being recognized for outstanding community service, leadership and vision by the Secretary of State; Outstanding Georgian by the Commissioner of the Department of Labor; named one of her city's most influential women; honored by her

sorority as Trailblazer of the Year; and profiled by a local television station during Black History Month as a preeminent educational leader.

On a personal note, Lanette did not keep the first appointment that we arranged for the participant interview because she was delayed at the doctor's office; I later learned that she had regular visits for cancer treatment. Although I knew of Lanette's cancer, I was not aware of the seriousness of her condition at the time she agreed to be interviewed or at the time of the interview. I am very appreciative that Lanette assisted me even though she was going through difficult times. Lanette phoned me on Saturday, the next day after the missed appointment and apologized for not getting in touch with me. She stated that if my schedule permitted, she would call me back for the interview in an hour after some guests in her home had left. I said that I would call her back to avoid any phone charges to her; we connected an hour later for the interview. About eight months after the interview, to my surprise and to the shock of the majority of her faculty and staff, Lanette died. I attended the three services that were held for Lanette: at her college, at the funeral home, and at her church. It was obvious by the tremendous attendance at all of the services, including the attendance of the top elected and appointed officials in her city, and the many who spoke in her remembrance, that Lanette was highly regarded and will be greatly missed. May her soul rest in peace with the God whom she openly professed.

Bertha

For the last eight years, Bertha has been president of a two-year community college in the Northeastern United States. The college has two campuses and a population of over 5,500 students. Bertha, at 58, has a very gregarious personality and a

warm smile; she is positive, confident, upbeat and exudes energy in her vocal communication. Bertha sports a variety of flattering hairdos in a variety of pictures which, in a small way, supports her contention that she is a "risk taker."

Bertha has dedicated over 30 years to education. She has worked in myriad positions including teacher, Department Chair, Associate Dean, Dean, Executive Vice President, and now President. Bertha believes that she was destined to be a leader. "As a child," Bertha said, "I was always a precocious child. When I was little, they named me Aunt Babe, which meant that even as a child, I was inquisitive and very mature for my age and I was a leader." "In elementary school, when teachers would leave the classroom," she continued, "they would always leave me in charge." Bertha's leadership has spanned from the classroom as a peer leader in grade school to a faculty of over 250 full-time and part-time members and a staff of more than 100.

Bertha, the oldest of three children, was born in the south; she is married and has two adult children. She credits her parents with teaching her the value of education and hard work. Bertha recalls, "We were very poor, but my parents saw to it that all of us were educated, instilling in us strong morals and a genuine concern for others." Bertha, who was Class Historian and a Merit Scholar, graduated fourth in her high school class and went on to be one of three African-American students to forge integration at a university in the mid-states where she earned her first college degree.

Bertha commented that she was extremely elated upon being selected as president of her college; on the other hand, she was saddened by the reality that she would be living alone in another state. The separation lasted five years before her husband joined her on a full-time basis. "My husband would live here in the summers but he didn't stay here

during the year and you're disconnected from your family—that's a challenge; it's a great sacrifice and commitment," she revealed.

Bertha is actively involved in her community through an array of professional, social and civic affiliations. She is a member of numerous organizations and serves on many boards such as the Chamber of Commerce, United Way, Jack and Jill, American Association of Community Colleges, Girl Scouts of America, and various minority and women's organizations.

Mary

Mary is considered the founding president at her community college in a large Western state. According to Mary, in the fall of 2001, she was given the charge of developing a campus with an initial staff of five full-time faculty and ten other employees. Today, the college has grown to 90 full-time faculty and 150 part-time faculty. "We have built an entire institution, every square inch of it, from the design on paper to raising funds to actually building the building," explained Mary. The college, which has a predominantly White faculty and student body, has 8,000 students.

Mary worked at four different community colleges before arriving at the fifth college as president. Her many positions include instructor/counselor, faculty (with various assignments), Student Services Dean, Vice President of Student Development, Vice Chancellor of Student Services and Special Programs, and Vice President of Instruction and Student Development. Mary's myriad experiences were accompanied by different colleges for each position. Mary holds a B.A. in Psychology, and M.S. in Counseling and an Ed.D. in Community College Curriculum and Instruction. Mary's

education and employment have all been in the same Western state. Mary has devoted 37 years to higher education.

At the onset of the interview, Mary apologized for the big gap in making an interview after agreeing to be a participant. She explained that the college had been dealing with some serious issues at the beginning of the semester. I assured her that the delayed time was not a problem; I was just so happy that she agreed to participate. Mary, 57, has been married for several years and has three adult children. She wears her hair in a short, very flattering semi-curly style. She has light brown skin and flashes a welcoming, friendly smile; her voice is pleasant and strong.

Mary's professional affiliations include membership on an Economic Development Board, High School Board, Higher Education Coordinating Council, Association of Community College Administrators, and four Chambers of Commerce. Her leadership has earned her awards and fellowships from the League of Innovation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, National Institute for Leadership Development, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Near the end of the interview, Mary began to ask me questions. She asked how many people I planned to interview and how I chose the people to be interviewed. After I answered those questions, she asked, "Are you looking to be a president?" She then proceeded to advise me regarding the "Black Tax" which she described as African Americans paying extra in terms of double duty and double work in order to receive recognition and advancement.

Martha

For the last three and a half years, Martha, between 56-60 years old, has had the distinction of being the first woman to serve as president of her college. The college serves over 7,000 full and part-time students and employs over 900 full and part-time employees. In addition to the main campus, the college has three other campuses. According to Martha, her institution was named "College of the Year" by TIME magazine in recognition of innovative student services and educational programs.

Martha was my first interview and such a delight to speak with to start the interview process; she was very warm and forthcoming with her responses. Martha has a pleasant, strong voice, and a friendly demeanor. She is married and has two adult children and also grandchildren; Martha expressed that she cherishes the support that she receives from her family. Martha has been in education for over 35 years, all in the community college system. She indicated that retirement is becoming an attractive contemplation.

Prior to becoming president at her present college, Martha was President of a college in another state for eight years. Martha is the only study participant who has held the top position at more than one institution. All three of Martha's degrees, Doctorate in Education, Educational Leadership; Masters in Education, Counseling; and Bachelors of Arts in Education, English and Social Science; are from different institutions. Martha began her career in higher education as a faculty member before moving on to Counselor and Vice President for Student Services before being appointed to her first presidential position.

Martha has consistently been active in her community and affiliated with professional organizations. Her wide range of civic activities and board memberships include Rotary, Urban League, American Association of Community Colleges Commission on Academics, the Presidents' Roundtable, YWCA, United Way, and the Links, Inc. Martha has been recognized for her leadership by organizations such as the Council of Negro Women and the American Association of Women in Community and Junior Colleges.

Sarah

Sarah was appointed president of a community college in the Southwest United States only several months ago. The college has three locations—the main campus which sits on approximately 150 acres, a 75-acre campus, and another location, and a collaborative on the campus of a state university. The 20,000 credit enrollment is the largest student body of all the study participants. Sarah, at 51, is the youngest of the presidents who participated in the study. Sarah came to the presidential position from the position of Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs in a different state.

Of the participants, Sarah was not only the newest president but also the most forthcoming and eager to be of assistance. Sarah commented that she considered it a responsibility to help others achieve because there were so many people who helped her advance in her career. She began her academic career as a business education teacher at the secondary level and moved into the community college system holding a similar teaching position. Sarah advanced through the ranks from teacher to department chairperson, then moving to student services, to assistant dean, associate provost, provost,

and vice president before being selected for her current position. According to Sarah, she purposely accepted committee assignments as well as interim academic and student services positions to gain varied experiences throughout the college. Sarah has dedicated over 30 years to education and has spent 26 years of those years at the same community college.

At the onset of the interview, Sarah apologized for being late for the interview as a result of a meeting that extended beyond the planned time. Sarah spoke in a strong, soft voice, very deliberate speech, with an air of confidence. She wears her hair in a short, natural style. Sarah commented that she "looks her week out" to plan her dress for the many activities that she often attends each week. Sarah has a very pleasing smile which exudes an aura of approachability. Sarah describes herself as a good people person, down to earth, and a good convener. Sarah has two adult daughters and has been married for many years.

In addition to her on campus activities, Sarah participates in various professional and community activities. She holds membership in the NAACP, Chamber of Commerce, National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women, World Affairs Council Board, and the American Association of Community Colleges, in addition to other affiliations. Like Naomi, Sarah also attended a leadership development institute.

Chapter Summary

The eight women interviewed for this dissertation are all unique and extraordinary women. It was obvious to me that they are very positive individuals, and I was motivated simply by the interview responses and participation and the unsolicited advice and

encouragement that I received from some of them. Four of the women hold Doctorate of Education degrees and four hold Doctor of Philosophy degrees. Some of the women commented that they will never forget that people helped them along the journey to earning their doctorate degrees, thus they feel an obligation to help others who are matriculating to earn their terminal degrees.

It was obvious through conversation that the women are confident in their abilities and stand up for what they believe is the right direction for their colleges. Their voices are clear and strong, and they all spoke with a clear and crisp diction. The women all wear pleasant smiles which are often indicative of openness to communication. These women have made it to the top but have not forgotten those who are still climbing.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how African American women community college presidents ascend to the presidency. To thoroughly examine the phenomenon, the following questions guided the research:

(1) What is the typical career preparation of African American women presidents of community colleges?

(2) What are the common strategies that African American women presidents of community colleges use to negotiate their careers?

(3) What were the salient factors that shaped their career paths?

In the United States of America, there are a total of 34 African American women presidents of community colleges plus two acting or interim presidents who were not considered for participation in this study. A sample was purposefully selected from the 34 African American women presidents to include representation from the six accreditation regions for higher education that are recognized by the United States Department of Education. Although the goal was to obtain a minimum of twelve participants, only a total of eight presidents agreed to participate.

As shown in Table 3, five major categories emerged from the data that spoke to the ascension to the presidency by the study participants: 1) Striving and Succeeding through Extensive Preparation, 2) Constructing a Well-Developed Personal Image, 3)

Taking Risks for Learning and Professional Advancement, 4) Race and Gender Discrimination—A *Double Plenty,** and 5) Supported by their Village Community.

Table 3

Data Display for African American Women Ascension to the Presidency of Community Colleges

Themes and Sub-themes
I. Striving and Succeeding through Extensive Preparation
A. Over Credentialing
B. Leadership Development
C. Sustaining Beneficial Mentoring Relationships
II. Constructing a Well-Developed Professional Image
A. Personal Appearance
B. Interpersonal Skills
III. Taking Risks for Learning and Professional Advancement
IV. Race and Gender Discrimination – A *Double Plenty*
V. Supported by their Village Community
A. Family Involvement
B. Reciprocal Community Relationships
C. Faith as a Pillar

Striving and Succeeding through Extensive Preparation

During the interview process with the study participants, it became evident after talking with only the first few women that their presidential appointments were realized

**Double Plenty* – *Double plenty refers to the double oppressionism of race and gender with which Black women have to contend. Double plenty signifies that Black women have "a plenty" to deal with regarding race and gender.*

through deliberate and extensive preparatory actions. The theme of *Striving and Succeeding through Extensive Preparation* was clearly emerging mid-way through the interviews. Every one of the participants hold an earned terminal degree, attended organized leadership training, and most were engaged in a formal or informal mentoring experience.

This researcher grew up with the mentality that, more often than not, we as a people hold a special appreciation for those things for which we go the extra mile, make sacrifices, put forth our best efforts, our energy, and our time. Accordingly, these research participants went the extra mile, as revealed in the data, to reach the pinnacle of their careers. Over credentialing, leadership training, and mentoring relationships were ultimately beneficial strategies in forging the careers of these Black women presidents.

Over Credentialing

Seven of the women in this study suggested that African American women typically acquired extra credentials such as a terminal degree and special leadership certification in preparation for the college presidency. They also declared that their ascent to the presidency was indeed through hard work and that they earned every position that they achieved. Further, a common argument among many of the women was that their careers included a litany of preparatory positions and many years of experience prior to achieving the presidency when compared to the careers of other women and men. The sub-theme of academic over credentialing was present in the lives of seven of the study's eight executive women. The most representative examples are found in the lives of Mary, Sarah, Lanette, and Naomi.

Mary's biography indicates that she spent 30 years in education prior to becoming a college president. Her experiences are vast and include some rather interesting positions as she navigated her career path:

> I've worked in three huge, multi-college districts in the state of California. I've taught or worked as an administrator at five different community colleges throughout the state of California. I have both campus life experience as well as state policy level development. I was the vice chancellor for a state system.

Mary's extensive work experience also spans a variety of positions in student services and academic affairs. She expounds on her diverse experiences:

> I have had administrative experience in both instruction and student services. I have been responsible for every program; for example, within the student services side of the house as well as on the instructional side. I've been in the classroom; I've been a department chair and a vice president of instruction. On the student services side, I've been a counselor; I've held all of the student services administrative positions including vice president of student services as well as at the system state level. I have been the vice chancellor for student services, so I've had campus life experiences from both sides of the house. I've had the state level policy experience. My experiences measure well beyond what the average person has done in their career. I've been in education for 37 years.

Similar to Mary's varied background, Lanette, the only participant working at a college in the Deep South, had a diverse career prior to becoming a community college president. She enthusiastically shared her journey:

> I started out in state government as an education consultant with the Department of Education and from that position I became a coordinator with the Department of Technical and Adult Education; from that position, I became Director of Student Services. While I was in Student Services I had the opportunity to work very closely with the former commissioner. I indicated to him my aspirations to become a president and he started assigning me to various committees in which I represented him at various state government levels and from that, I began to network and just learned a lot. I had the opportunity to be exposed, and when the position became available at [NBC Technical College], the commissioner assigned me there to convert the school from a local level to a state level. Once the school was converted from the local to the state level, I was appointed president.

Sarah, the president who seemed the most eager to participate, started her career path as a business education teacher in the K-12 public school system. After two years into her five years of high school teaching, she had the opportunity to work part-time in adult education. Sarah related that she thoroughly enjoyed working with adults:

> I had a chance to teach in what was called "community education" but it was working with adults in the non-credit kind of courses in the evening,

> so I'd do that in the evenings before I had kids and decided I really liked working with adults. I just loved it! So that's when I started exploring."

Sarah expressed that she wanted to teach full-time in a community college and thus researched the requirements for a teacher. Once she had acquired the minimum qualifications, Sarah sought and obtained full-time employment as a community college instructor:

> After teaching for five years at the secondary level, I taught the next 15 years at the community college level and then there were other positions along the way. I was an assistant director for admissions for about nine months to give them a chance to find somebody. I was an administrative intern under the dean for a year; again, to get a taste of what that job was, so I was doing as much exploring as I could while I was there because I always get an itch about every five years to do something different.

Sarah recommended that Black women should make sure that their credentials are in order because "that is the first place they'll rip you apart." As a consequence, Sarah wanted to earn her Ph.D. degree so that she "could run amongst other people who had a doctorate degree and not be the only one without." Sarah continued:

> At least they can't use that against me, even though many of them do; I wanted to have a Ph.D. and I wanted to have it from a reputable university so they couldn't use that, so I would advise Black women to build up as much as you can in credentials so that they don't have that to use against you.

Naomi, who was just returning from a building dedication on her campus prior to the interview, said that her preparation for the presidency was acquired through academic degree preparation, professional development workshops, and various positions that she held at different colleges:

> I started out at a community college; I taught registered nursing; I became the founding chair of a division at a college in Florida. From there, I moved to Dean of Vocational Educational Health Sciences in another state and then I moved to Dean of Business, Science, Math and Technology at another institution. At that institution, we didn't have vice presidents so the deans were academic offices at that college. Even before going into the community college system, I worked in a hospital and I was in a supervisory position there as well, so some of those skills carried over to the community college leadership positions.

Naomi advises Black women who are aspiring to the college presidency or even to senior-level administrative positions to get their terminal degree. Without the doctorate degree, she argued, all of the other qualifications that Black women might possess will not be sufficient to catapult them over White women and men:

> Get your doctorate because you will need that more than anybody else to get the same job; I found that out in my own journey. You have to have it. Someone else may have a master's degree and get that same job but African Americans, especially women, will just have to have that degree and I always tell them to get the degree.

A majority of the women reported that they believed it was necessary for them to earn a doctorate degree to be able to compete with other women and men. Some were even advised by their presidents to enroll in doctoral programs to be able to better vie for presidential positions. Although not overtly stated, the women inferred that the advice to pursue a doctorate degree was from the standpoint that this would be a need for someone who already was at a disadvantage.

One participant went so far as to comment that she wanted her degree to be from a reputable institution because for a Black woman, "paper mill degrees" would perhaps not be recognized. Every one of the women held an earned doctorate, four with Doctor of Philosophy degrees and four with Doctor of Education degrees. Some of the women also stated that they knew women presidents of other races and men who did not hold a doctorate but all of the Black women presidents that they knew held doctorate degrees. The terminal degree was viewed as the seal that would be needed for advancement to the top position.

Leadership Development

A second category under the theme of *Striving and Succeeding through Extensive Preparation* was *Leadership Development*. All of the women believed that they had adequate experience in leadership through academic preparation and job experience. Still, several participants declared their belief in the necessity to matriculate through formal leadership training in order to have their leadership skills recognized and to be able to contend with men and women. While this sub-theme was present in the lives of seven of the eight women, there were five very representative examples of leadership development in the transcripts of Naomi, Martha, Betty, Sarah and Lanette.

Naomi attended the Cornell University Leadership Institute as well as the Executive Leadership Institute which is sponsored by the League of Innovation. Naomi discussed the value of formal leadership training for Black women and even went on to question this researcher regarding my career goals and my plans for achieving those goals. Naomi suggested that I attend the Executive Leadership Institute or another leadership development program, Kaleidoscope:

> It would be a wonderful opportunity for you just to get in contact with women. You don't have to be a president to go to this; it's for women who aspire to be presidents who are currently deans, department chairs or faculty. They get together and they talk about issues that they face and I think that helped me so much. If you can go to that it would be an absolutely wonderful opportunity.

Martha, the only participants to lead two colleges, honed her leadership skills through numerous leadership workshops instead of attending a leadership institute or leadership program. Martha articulated her leadership training:

> I went to workshops on women in management because women were just getting into things and I learned the whole issue of gender but I learned it from the view primarily of White women because those were the workshops that were being given, those were the women who were moving ahead and so I decided to go over and see what it was they were doing. I joined a couple of their groups and so forth and you know, the Black women who were here said to me, well you're the one to go over there because we have no patience.

Betty, who had retired as president only a month or so before the interview, proffered that she believed a mixture of experiences would be required in order for her to be appointed to the top position of president. Thus, in addition to her terminal degree she sought out professional leadership training:

> It was very important for me to distinguish myself as a leader or a potential leader so I went to the Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education Administration at Bryn Mawr College which was kind of an epiphanal event for me in that I think it really solidified at that point that I really wanted to be a president.

Sarah, the most recently appointed president, said she debated with herself as to whether she really wanted to be a president. She revealed to her president that she was contemplating pursuing a presidential position, and according to Sarah, he suggested that she attend leadership training. “And so he sent me to Boston to the Future Leader Institute sponsored by the American Association of Community Colleges.” Sarah continued:

> So I went to Boston to go through a week-long institute with the support of my president because he said whether or not you get a president’s job, either way you’re going to need what you’re going to learn at the institute. So I went and spent a week trying to make up my mind whether I wanted to go forward with this, did I have what it takes, and so forth. It’s really a good institute because they bring in new presidents, old presidents, chancellors, boards, and you get a chance to practice interviews and so forth. I went through it and when I came home I gave

> several months more thought to it and then I decided, well I'm going to throw my hat in the ring.

When Lanette, the only president with whom I have a personal relationship, shared her aspirations to become a technical college president with her boss, analogous to the response of Sarah's president, he immediately set in motion plans for her to gain the exposure and leadership skills that he believed would be required of her. In addition to assigning her to various committees and allowing her to represent him at various state governmental meetings, he allowed her to attend a leadership program: Lanette commented:

> Dr. [Jones] understood the importance of not having enough women and minorities in leadership positions in state government as well as in the agency that employed him. So there was a special program and I can't recall the name of it but it was an executive leadership program for minorities and women and I was accepted in that program. When I finished that program I knew that I was prepared to be a president.

Continuing with the focus on leadership development, Katie, whose college is located in the western United States, also expressed the perceived need for formal leadership development to further her career in higher education. She attended a two-week program at Harvard University on higher education management. Bertha, another study participant, matriculated through three leadership programs; a leadership training program, a women's leadership program, and a women's leadership institute.

It is just not enough to have appropriate academic preparation, which includes the doctorate degree, and educational experience for a Black woman to be selected for a

presidential position in a two-year college, one must also have formal leadership training; this is what the research participants purport. There may be some validity to their contention since every one of the women participated in some sort of leadership development or leadership training program prior to becoming president.

Unquestionably, strategic leadership development would likely be beneficial to anyone aspiring for career growth, still it seems quite extraordinary that although unknown to this researcher during participant selection, all eight of the women chosen for the research had leadership training. Hence, these women leaders may be on to something in their contention that leadership training is necessary for the Black woman to achieve the position of president.

Sustaining Beneficial Mentoring Relationships

The third and final category under the theme of *Striving and Succeeding through Extensive Preparation* was *Mentoring Relationships.* Several of the women observed that mentors played a critical role in their careers and in their rise to the presidency. Bertha stated that the president at her last place of employment prior to becoming a president herself was indeed a mentor:

> He was a mentor to me in the extent that he gave me a lot of valuable lessons and taught me a lot about how to get results, and he used to tell me, he said, “Bertha, you always have a loaded gun, you have to know when to use it” or something like, “Bertha, when you make some decisions in life, you have to make them and do not put them in writing because your goal is always to have as few fingerprints as possible.” I mean these have been valuable lessons to me in my life as president.

Bertha noted that she was the first African American woman to be the executive vice president at her institution and she believed this fact was instrumental in her boss's decision to mentor her:

> I think we had a strong relationship in the beginning and I think part of what he felt was his role to be a mentor since I was the first African American woman to be the executive vice president under a White male president. I think he felt an obligation and responsibility to help me succeed and so we would meet, we would have lunch, we spent a lot of time together, I would say, in the first years during my time in my position. So he was officially and unofficially my mentor.

Bertha also spoke of a second mentor who spent a great deal of time mentoring her:

> And I had one woman president, her name is [Anne Smith]; she's a college president now; she was my official mentor. She did a good job in terms of exposing me to many things, taking me places, introducing me, helping me to understand who some of the key players were, particularly in higher education in the community college setting, and these things were, of course, very important to me as I pursued my quest for moving up within the community college system.

Consistent with Bertha's comments regarding the significant role that mentoring played in her career, Betty contends that mentoring was likewise a key factor in her career ascension. Betty had the benefit of being mentored throughout her career:

> I think a really important thing in my career was being mentored. I had the distinct pleasure in my career of reporting to some really outstanding leaders who had a lot of patience and a lot of encouragement for me and frankly gave me a lot of opportunities to do things that for them sometimes was even a risk, sending me to some very expensive conferences and meetings that were not necessarily in the budget or beyond what they normally approved. My first real mentor, a male, was the one who just said, "We need to get you into graduate school and we need to get you in a doctoral program." This was at a point, quite frankly, when I wasn't even thinking that far ahead. I have had certainly for sure two mentors who said "this is what you need to do and here's your time frame."

Mary, who has worked at five different community colleges, was very appreciative and fortunate to have a network of mentors, including those whom she sought out. She referred to her mentors as a kaleidoscope of colors and genders:

> I call them a kaleidoscope of colors, including Whites; I have male and female mentors and I still do call upon them. I have two male mentors and one female mentor and I use them as sounding boards. I'm in constant contact with them, at least on a monthly basis. I have a cadre of associates—other CEOs, African Americans and Hispanics, and a few Whites—that we stay in communication networking to share ideas.

Mary communicated that it may be necessary in personal career development to seek out a mentor for yourself if your organization does not arrange these relationships or

if a mentoring experience is not initiated by one who would be willing to serve as a mentor. Mary further suggested that pre-arranged mentor relationships may not result in the right chemistry between the individuals involved:

> I went out looking for my mentors. It's important in terms of a mentor/mentee relationship that there's harmony and balance of thought. So it took me a while to study people and find a good fit in a relationship that I thought would be beneficial for me to grow and develop and to be able to extend that relationship throughout my entire professional career. So the mentors that I have been working with, I've been working with them for 25 years.

After attending a leadership conference, Sarah, who holds membership in several leadership organizations, was resolute that she would pursue a presidency of a community college. She determined the area of the country where she was willing to relocate, the types of districts in which she was willing to work, and the type of leadership that she was willing to work under. Her next step was to go to her president and inform him of her aspirations. Sarah stated that he looked at her with a blind stare for a couple of minutes, evidently not knowing exactly what to say. Finally, he remarked, "What can I do to help?" Sarah related that her president immediately moved to a mentoring mode, mentoring her for a presidency:

> I think that's the sign of a wonderful leader and although he was having a hard time with it, he was still very supportive and I just had so much respect for him; I always did, but especially when he did that. Then I started interviewing for some of the positions around the country and

> ended up here. During my career, I have actually had three outstanding mentors, two White males and one Hispanic male. You would think that I would find other mentors but those are the people who were in my life during those times. They were teaching leaders; they were all educators and so I learned a lot.

Katie and Lanette indicated that they did not have formal mentoring relationships but had people in their lives who were encouragers as well as individuals who they could call upon when they needed advice or assistance. When asked if she was mentored during her career journey, Katie responded that she actually was not:

> I can't point to one person; as a matter of fact, my predecessor really did not get involved in mentoring, other than telling me that I needed to get a doctorate, so, not really. I think I've had relationships where I could pick up the phone and ask questions but there's never been one person. I would talk with people who were in positions before me to learn from them.

Lanette's mentoring experiences were very similar to Katie's. Lanette had a supervisor who acknowledged her desire to become a president and thus presented opportunities for Lanette to develop leadership skills, though he did not deliberately mentor her:

> I had people that were supportive of me. There were no formal mentoring processes but I've had people who called to say, "Look, if you're trying to do this, I suggest that you take this route or you need to do it this way. Why don't you consider this?" I've had at least three

> people and two of them were men and one was a female. It's good to have somebody that you can pick up the phone and say, "I need you to give me your feedback on this. I want to do this. What are your thoughts?" Just having someone to talk to that you have confidence in his or her ability in terms of them guiding you is extremely valuable.

Obtaining and sustaining mentoring relationships was significant in the lives of the participants quoted in the above segment. Even the women who were not mentored posited that they could possibly have acquired knowledge and skills at a more accelerated pace had they been mentored. It was commendable that some mentors stepped up and offered their services once they were informed of the women's decisions to pursue a presidential appointment. Mentors were able to provide the women with valuable information, allow them to participate in learning experiences, share with them their own experiences, and guide them in such a way that the women could avoid some possible pitfalls. Seemingly, being mentored, whether formal or informal, can be a career advantage.

Summary for Striving and Succeeding through Extensive Preparation

Extensive and strategic career preparation with a goal towards obtaining a presidential position in a community college was found in the lives of all of the study participants. I hasten to say that deliberate preparation did not occur at the beginning of most of the women's career but occurred later as they began to move up the career ladder. In some instances, it was the presidents or supervisors of the women who suggested and encouraged them to begin their planning for the presidency. Each of the women earned her doctorate degree, and each attended leadership development programs

or workshops. Further, mentors were invaluable because they provided experiential knowledge that could have taken years for the women to gain from books or leadership training. The few participants who were not mentored had colleagues that they could call upon to seek advice.

At the end of the day, the women argued that they were appointed to their presidential positions and have been successful because of extensive preparation. It is the position of the majority of the women that the Black woman has to be "over-prepared." To a large extent, the need to achieve "validity" at a level that would meet or exceed that of other women and men was a conscious consideration as they navigated their careers.

Constructing a Well-Developed Professional Image

The second theme that emerged as a finding in the lives of the participants was *Constructing a Well-Developed Professional Image*. The women in this study considered a professional image inclusive of personal appearance and interpersonal skills which include such topics as confidence, credibility, integrity, trustworthiness, and ethics. All eight participants emphasized the significance of professional image in their careers.

Personal Appearance

Consciously or unconsciously, we make judgments of people based on appearance without ever having spoken a word to the person. In the professional world of education, and probably in other arenas as well, appearance is based on personal dress, as well as hair, nails and the outer appearance of the body. Lanette, Naomi, Katie, Sarah and Bertha shared their beliefs that a remarkable personal appearance is more vital for Black women than for other women and men.

Lanette, a tall, poised woman, shared her views on personal image: “Yes, you have to look and act the part,” stated Lanette, as she stressed what she perceived as the professional image requirement of a Black woman executive. “You’re always on the stage.” Lanette continued with her contention that Black women need to portray a positive professional image:

> You have to be ready; you have to step out; you have to look right and you have to be able to speak. If you’re scheduled to be on the program, you have to be prepared and if you’re not on the program, you still need to be prepared to say something. A woman can’t get up and do what a man does and stutter and laugh and tell jokes. I don’t do that. When I step out, I feel my dress has to be important, and whatever I say has to be important. We can’t tell jokes like White men; we can’t do that. You can’t tell jokes like White females because people look at you and they look at the way you dress and they look at what you say, and they look at how you network and they look at who you network with, so you’re always on the stage, always. You’re representing women of color to come. You have to remember that. You’re representing women of color that will come behind you and it’s your shoulders and my shoulders on which they will climb, so we have to give them something to look up to.

Approximating Lanette’s views, Naomi also advocates the importance of a positive professional image for Black women, not only in personal appearance but also in interpersonal skills as well. Naomi explained that she has always dressed in a

professional manner, even when she was a classroom teacher. She deems the most appropriate dress to be classic, business wear:

> I'm comfortable in business wear because that's who I am. I'm comfortable dressed that way and when I'm away from the college at functions, I may be casual but I'm not going to be in ragged sneakers and t-shirts and sweats and all of that kind of stuff; that's not me. But I do believe that as long as we are living in this specific kind of world, dress is very important, especially for presidents. I don't think anybody wants presidents to look like the students. It seems to be expected of Black women to dress to a higher standard.

Continuing with commentary from Naomi, the first female and the first African American president at her community college, she argues that Black women are almost expected to be different. At a Kaleidoscope workshop that she attended, one session for women of color dealt with breaking down barriers and stereotypes. One of the stereotypes about African American women, she observed, was that they believe in dressing and hairdos. Naomi said the Black women laughed about it because they didn't think it was a bad stereotype. She went on to say that people expect a certain appearance of Black women. "If they don't see you looking like they expect, they assume something is not right. I do believe we're almost obligated, if you will, to be different; to be respected even, and even at that, sometimes we're not," Naomi observed.

Even before arriving as president at her college, Katie, the longest serving president, had long understood that appearance was fundamental for the Black professional woman. Katie asserts that she has always carried herself and dressed in a

professional manner. Furthermore, she always maintains a professional appearance where she currently serves as president:

> As a woman, and I'll say especially as a Black woman, I think appearance is very important. The faculty here, this is a community college, some of the faculty to me dress less than professional and for some students that's an issue. And that's some faculty, they're always in sandals and shorts and the like; I don't care if we are in southern California. When I walk around campus people know that I'm the president; it's not that I'm overly dressed because I figure they're looking at you all the time and I have a couple of classified women, oh, Dr. [Williams], you look so nice today. Oh [Dr. Williams], you always look so nice, so they pay attention and I think it's important that I look nice and put together when I come to work. I get my nails done; I get a manicure every two week and I get my hair done, and yes, I think it's important.

In harmony with Katie's viewpoint on professional image, Sarah knew that personal appearance was essential for Black women executives. Dressing in what she termed "business appropriate" had been her standard in the cool, northern climate where she spent the majority of her career. The big adjustment came, however, when she received a presidential appointment in an often hot, northern state:

> I usually dress in mostly business suits but when I came here, it was hot; 118 degrees compared to 80 degrees in my previous state. So I try to be real careful about wearing stockings, not wearing stockings, when to

> dress a certain way. I always kind of look my week out so I can mentally at least plan what I'm going to wear to this, what I'm going to wear to that, when is it appropriate to wear red, or whatever. But I've always been picky about that, even when I was teaching and all the other faculty would come in jeans. To me, it was very inappropriate dress; I never let my guard down. And then another thing, I think that growing into a senior leadership position, your appearance has a lot to do with how people see you.

Bertha, who lived apart from her husband for five years after becoming a president, considers personal appearance, personality, and confidence all to be essential for the well-equipped Black female senior administrator. She spoke of being aware of the greater expectations for the Black woman:

> Definitely you have to dress for success. Personally, I've always been an advocate for that. I buy St. John's clothes; that's what I wear to work for the most part. I have on a St. John's suit today; I think it's very important that you keep your hair together, your nails and all of that; but your personality has to blend with that. It's one thing to look good but it's something else to have a personality that's open, honest and inviting to people. You know, you can look beautiful and be stand offish and nobody will even acknowledge that you're around. But you can look nice and feel a sense of pride in yourself and a sense of competence that exudes people wanting to communicate with you and get to know who you are, so I think those are important elements.

Betty, who completed her doctorate degree at the young age of 27, discussed personal image from the perspective of being your own best marketing director, arguing that your image has a lot to do with how people see you as a leader. Betty went on to maintain that we should be marketing ourselves in a variety of ways in order to be self distinguished:

> I think Black women in particular, women of color, have to be very careful how they dress. As much as you like Tara and Beyonce, you don't go to interviews looking like that. There are a couple of women right now that I'm mentoring and with both of them, I'm working on wardrobe adjustments. With one, I'm trying to tell her that all they're mostly doing is looking at your chest and the other one I'm telling her that everybody is trying to see how far up your skirt they can look and neither one really wants to hear. It is standard business attire, especially if you are a woman of color. It can be the latest suit or the latest cut of pants but it needs to look absolutely professional. You need to make a statement about who you are the minute you hit the door.

The participants quoted in the above segment on personal appearance are clear in their convictions that Black women executives are always on stage; thus they contend that the leaders should dress in a manner that will be representative of Black women leaders as a whole. They maintain that other women are not held to the same high standard of personal appearance as is expected of Black women.

Interpersonal Skills

For this section, interpersonal skills are inclusive of a variety of qualities; namely, confidence, integrity, credibility, trustworthiness, ethics, and a sense of self. Interpersonal skills, according to Betty, Martha, Mary, Sarah, and Bertha, are critical for leaders.

Betty, whose college is considered one of the fastest growing in student population in the Northeast, pointed out that Black women aspiring to top level positions need to be well-rounded. She explained that it is expedient for aspiring presidents to be somewhat understanding of current events, such as what is on CNN as well as knowledgeable of the issues of the day.

Betty also purports that being a good listener and having integrity are very important qualities relative to professional image. She suggested that we should listen twice as much as we speak. She stresses having clear values that are unmistakably articulated to others, asserting that people can surmise who you really are by observing your behavior and they can fill in the gaps in a way that can be harmful or helpful. She concluded her remarks on professional image by stating that integrity is also a key element to leadership.

Martha, whose college has four campuses, emphasized that there are myriad issues which leaders are often faced with that start out being little, mild, minimal picks at ethics that can swell into big ethical issues. She asserted these are the things that get us in trouble, so we have to always think about making ethical choices. Martha said, “I’m simply talking about integrity." She went on to say that we as Black women must work hard at building our credibility. She believes that it’s harder for us than for the majority. “You have to be a little more articulate, more well-read, you have to be on top of the

game all the time. I think you work harder at your reputation or establishing a reputation," Martha argued.

In addition to taking into account personal appearance, Naomi, who described herself as being decisive, no-nonsense and very professional, identified good interpersonal skills as critical. She emphasized the need to learn how to deal with diverse people and personalities. "Learn how to negotiate with people, persuade. I think persuading someone to see your point of view is a very strong skill," Naomi stressed.

For Mary, who is considered the founding president for her college, trustworthy relationships are a major consideration in developing or having a positive professional image. Mary cites integrity and credibility as the two fundamental characteristics of relationship building. "Relationships are 65 to 70 percent of the job; it's critical that an individual has the interpersonal skills, the ability to understand human behavior." Mary went on to say that leaders need to be trustworthy, transparent, and be knowledgeable of relationship building.

Sarah, the youngest of the women, discussed professional image from the vantage point of confidence and etiquette. She expressed that a Black woman must have confidence and not be intimidated:

> I don't know quite how to put this but you must have the ability to walk into a room of White men and you're the only other person in this meeting and handle your business. That's so important because so many of us tend to get intimidated when we are in a racial minority in a business setting. You must have confidence. Even though you might be scared to death, don't let anybody else see that or know that unless

> they're your support system because they can help you over that, but definitely carry yourself with confidence. Like I said, I like to have a good time, too, but you have to know when it's appropriate. When I go away with different groups for business, they might be drinking; I don't drink that much anyway but I would limit myself to a half glass of wine just to be sociable. I think you have to be careful to remain in control and I've seen so many other folks who lose control when they've had a couple of drinks. Know etiquette, table etiquette, so you're not picking up the wrong fork among the 20 utensils on the table. My president actually sponsored an etiquette session for the vice presidents, so that was kind of cute.

Bertha, who leads a college of 5,500 students, also considered interpersonal skills to be important in helping to shape the professional image. Becoming a Covey certified facilitator, she stated, helped her to understand more the value of relationships and how those relationships are critical to success. Bertha continued:

> You should have professional relationships to the extent that people trust you, that you have integrity, that your word means something and you keep it, that you're honest, that you're open, that you're non-judgmental, but if you have something to say, you say it and if you have something to do, you do it. You have to be willing to listen to people even if you don't agree with them but you have to show interest in what they have to say. You have to be honest, not in just what you say, but what you do.

Good interpersonal skills can be the key to job advancement. As concluded from the harmony in the women's statements, all other preparations made for career advancement can go unrecognized if the presidential aspirant does not possess qualities such as the ability to get along with others, integrity, credibility and confidence. These qualities can be developed through cognizant and deliberate effort; just as we put forth effort to obtain other preparation for career advancement, we must similarly work to develop and strengthen interpersonal skills.

Summary for A Well-Developed Professional Image

For the Black woman, it was found that professional image is vitally important, even more so than for White women. The presidents came to this awareness early in their careers and they indicated that they make special efforts to maintain appropriate dress and appearance. The data analysis also revealed that the ability to get along with others, confidence, and integrity must be achieved in order to be considered as a serious presidential contender.

Taking Risks for Learning and Professional Advancement

Beyond academic credentials, formal leadership development, mentoring and professional image, the study participants cited risk taking as an additional strategic approach to their careers. To be competitive in almost any situation, one must be willing to take chances. Playing it safe can impede leadership development and hinder the acquisition of experiences that could be beneficial to an individual's career goals. Interestingly, five of the eight study participants addressed the issue of risk taking as an essential component for career mobility; views were shared by Martha, Sarah, Bertha, Lanette and Betty.

When Martha, president of her previous college for eight years, was asked about her journey to becoming a president, she quickly stated, “I am willing to take risks.” She argued that accepting some positions and tasks could be risky but you have to be ready to take chances to demonstrate that you can handle the challenges that come with the top position of president. Martha said she is willing to take a chance on new things, new programs and tinker with them a while. Martha points out that she made a lot of mistakes along the way but learned from those mistakes. "If you don't take the risk, you may be missing a prime opportunity," she asserted. Martha admits that she did not always hold her present opinion of risk taking. She discusses a time when she believed accepting a new position was a risk:

> And then I was working on my doctorate not knowing that there would be a position open, and as I was getting ready to do my dissertation, getting ready for the research, the interim job for the vice president occurred. I pondered whether I could handle effectively a new vice president’s position while working on my dissertation. But once you pass up an opportunity, you never know when or if it will come around again, so I decided that although it may be somewhat risky, you have to take it because if you don’t, then what very well could happen to you is the interest in you or the momentum within the institution is not the same.

Sarah was another participant who pointed out that taking a risk is sometimes required for professional advancement. She thought she had the best of both worlds as a division chair where her responsibilities were half administration and half faculty. Her

president decided that he wanted to eliminate division chairs and create the position of assistant dean which would be one hundred percent administration; Sarah was offered the position. Accepting the position, according to Sarah, would force her to move out of her comfort zone:

> So I had to make a decision. Did I want to stay in faculty or did I want to stretch out or as my faculty say, "move to the dark side" and go into administration"? I must have pondered over that for about a month; my husband said look, you need to make a decision. I was in the union as faculty and I was wondering about leaving the union after being in the union for 20 years and again my husband stepped forward and said, "What's the issue?" I remarked that in the union you're guaranteed… And he stopped me and said, "You're not guaranteed anything. If you don't do your job as faculty, you're going to go and if you don't do your job as administrator, you're going to go." I was typically not someone who would risk something of this magnitude, but I decided it was time to step out of the box. So I decided I'd been in faculty teaching for 20 years and I was going to try out administration full time, so I moved into the assistant dean role and helped to build that position.

In finally deciding to accept the assistant dean's position, Sarah came to the realization that she had been taking risks throughout her career so this was really no great difference, but for could be a greater purpose.

Continuing with the focus on risk taking, Bertha believes the willingness to take risks is especially crucial for a person aspiring to become a president. On three different

occasions during the interview, Bertha brought up the subject of risk taking. When we discussed characteristics of a successful leader, Bertha said, "You have to be willing to take risks." Furthermore, as Bertha talked about particular strengths for administrators, she mentioned that she is not afraid to take on challenges or make decisions. The theme of risk taking flowed throughout Bertha's comments. Not only did she purport that she take risks, but she ultimately described herself as a risk taker.

Lanette, whose student body is majority African American, was another study participant who addressed the need for taking risks. She echoed the viewpoints of Martha, Sarah and Bertha regarding the possible perils of always playing it safe. Lanette said that she was taking a risk by even sharing with her boss her desire to become a president in a technical college because at that time, no Black woman held that position. She had no idea how he would react. "You have to be willing to take a chance. You have to step out. And if you're wrong, it's okay too. If you make a mistake, it's okay, but learn from your mistake," advised Lanette.

Betty, a community college president for over 10 years, has had a wealth of experience in risk taking while working at five different colleges in various positions. Betty was adamant that in leadership one must be absolutely willing to take risks:

> If you don't like to be in a risk position, calculated risk that is, and I have to say for me, a faith-based risk, then you can't expect to be a president because presidents take risks all the time. There's no such thing as a steady state, you're either moving an institution forward or it's going backward; there's no middle ground.

Summary of Taking Risks for Learning and Professional Advancement

Life in itself is a risk, or so we have been told. Americans can attest to the fact that change will happen whether we or willing or unwilling participants and change sometimes involves risk. Let's consider, for example, the current state of the economy, the gas prices, and the two wars. Our leaders are having to take risks to bring about positive resolutions to these critical issues. Risk taking requires us to step out of our comfort zone, hopefully for a greater good.

The women who discussed risk taking understood that sometimes risk taking was necessary in order to move up the career ladder and risk must sometimes be taken to move the college forward such as experimenting with new programs as well as new ideas. Martha said it best, "If you don't take a chance, things will still not likely remain the same; we are usually moving backwards or forward."

Race and Gender Discrimination—A *Double Plenty*

As a Black female, growing up in the South, I have personally witnessed the many faces of race and gender discrimination—sometimes covert and other times overt. This racism and gender discrimination was a part of my life as a youth and continued into my adult life and in my professional career. The women in this study, likewise, all declared that their careers had in some way been affected by double jeopardy, race and gender.

Bertha, whom the teachers would leave in charge of the classroom when they had to step out, says that being a woman of color had its advantages and disadvantages for her. "The advantage was that opportunities existed for qualified, quality women because everybody wanted to shall I say, 'pretend that they were interested in diversity.'" Bertha

went on to say that in her part of the state, women had been more compatible in terms of matriculating in the majority world than Black men. Black women had been more successful, so that was an advantage. Bertha continued commenting on the disadvantage of the combination of her race and gender:

> The disadvantage for me has been that every step of the way, you have to demand respect; you have to work impeccably to make sure people know that you're capable of the job that you're doing and that you have to be stupendous, exceptional, and above average to get the level of respectability that you deserve. No one really questions whether or not you're there because of your skills; they believe that you're there because of your gender or your race in the first place, and you have to demonstrate that you're as competent as, conscientious as, motivated as, and capable as anyone else who holds a job of similar status.

Bertha continued to engaged in lengthy and fervent commentary, reflecting on the role of race and gender in her career. She believes her gender has helped because women sometimes get lumped together, regardless of ethnicity. On the downside, Bertha asserts that it's still a man's world in many ways, so women have to learn how to communicate, articulate, and matriculate with them. Bertha argues that racism is still too prevalent in our society:

> In terms of race, when people look at you, the first thing they see is the color of your skin, not the content of your character, so that's always going to be an issue as long as society has determined that people should

> be segregated according to the color of their skin rather than the content of their character, what they know, and how they can contribute.

Betty, who deliberately sought career exposure by presenting at conferences, is in agreement with Bertha in the contention that race and gender both positively and negatively affected her career journey. Betty articulated that she believes her first administrative position in higher education was a positive consequence of her race and gender. "My boss at that time was looking for an African American female and was actually pretty upfront about it," stated Betty. On the other hand, Betty had some early challenges because of gender bias:

> I think that my gender kind of hurt me probably somewhat earlier in my career where I can remember going after a couple of dean of student positions and just the combination of being a female, and at least in the eyes of some, not just female, but a young female, people could not envision me in the job. Gender counts and race counts but people will tell you that they don't.

Betty concluded her comments on race and gender by asserting that she began to better understand how to use race and gender to her advantage, and as an result, being female and Black have been helpful to her career during the last 15 years.

Unlike Bertha and Betty, Lanette did not reference any advantages of race and gender in her career. She felt that being Black and being a female had absolutely held her back because had she been a White male, she would have been president a long time before. Lanette also argues that she would be at a higher level if she were a White male

or female. Lanette recalls a specific event in her career when she believes she was unfairly passed over for a position:

> I remember clearly I had applied for a position at the Department of Education and it was traditionally only White males who were promoted to those positions and I didn't get the appointment simply because I was a Black female because I was certainly qualified. Being Black and a female didn't help me at all.

Sarah, who taught at a high school for five years and at a community college for fifteen years before becoming an administrator, expounded on how race and gender affected her career. Sarah says that both race and gender were impediments to her career; however race was more salient. "Both get in the way, both are distracting; they see your race before they see your qualifications." Sarah continued:

> You have to remember that there is always going to be people even on your team, but surrounding you that don't want you there, that don't believe you should be there because of the color of your skin, because of your race. Period. So one of the things you really have to do is work twice as hard to achieve the same thing, and you know, that's been proven over and over again. You know when you walk in the room, people are often surprised when they announce you as president. Again, they just can't believe that anybody who looks like me can achieve what I have achieved.

When asked about the possible affect of race and gender on her career journey, Mary, a former counselor and psychology instructor, introduced the issue of the "Black

tax." She explained that African Americans in the United States pay what's called the Black tax. "With the Black tax, in addition to everything else that we as African Americans have to do, we pay extra in terms of double duty and double work." Mary continues:

> I've had to pay the Black tax; I've done every single thing that my White counterpart had to do in terms of education and all the various experiences along the career ladder way. In addition to that, as an African American and a female, I've had to do even more so to prove myself continuously to negate the so called "hire" as a result of any affirmative action or diversity quotas that may have been established to break down barriers. Respect is not given to the fact that I do have the abilities to be able to be in this position. It's just extra things you have to do.
>
> The next thing is gender; they questioned whether I would be able to handle being in an environment that had predominantly males, and White males for that fact, and so participating on various governance positions became a challenge. There were times when no matter how much I had an opportunity to say something, the appearance was that it was not looked upon until a White male made the same comment and then it was taken seriously.

Naomi, who has five degrees ranging from an associate to a doctorate, was questioned as regards to any particular challenges that she faced along her journey to becoming a community college president or since she has been president. Naomi's

response centered around two characteristics that have been with her since birth, her race and gender. She considers being Black and female to be a challenge but yet an opportunity because you learn how to maneuver around the bias situations or confront them head on when necessary. Naomi continued with her remarks:

> I think the greatest challenge for me all through my career is having people to accept me for my abilities and who I am rather than looking at me and immediately deciding that because of who I am that there is nothing to learn from this person. But when you're an African American woman you're going to have to deal from both angles with race and gender. It's a *double plenty* and you have to deal with it. Sometimes you must respond to it and other times you just let it go because people are sometimes not malevolent in what they're doing, they're just ignorant.

When Martha, who spent her entire career in the community college system, was detailing her journey to becoming a president, she declared her belief that a doctorate degree, the education piece, is required of African Americans and African American women in particular, to attain a presidential position. She asserts that Black women are not accorded the same leveraging experiences for education as is open to other women and other people of European descent.

Martha also says that Black women, in contrast to the majority, have to be a little more articulate, more well read, have to work harder at their reputations or establishing a reputation and be on top of the game at all times. In her experiences, Martha maintains that Black women are not understood, their credibility is not always portable, and they

have to work harder at building credibility. Martha shared a personal story when race bias was at center stage:

> In [name of state] the strangest things would happen. My administrative executive assistant sat out in front of me and I had an office; they would come into my office, see me and then ask, or they would leave out quickly and go outside and ask my assistant for me. They were absolutely mystified. Of course, they were surprised to know that I was a Black woman.

The final participant who had commentary on race and gender was Katie, a light-skinned Black woman who came to her college of a predominantly White faculty as a vice president. When Katie came into the position of vice president, the college was under a mandate of diversification by the Board. Even though the timing was good for Katie, she soon realized that there was, indeed, a race issue at the college. She found that the use of the statement, "We have to hire qualified people" implied if a candidate was a person of color, that the individual was not qualified. Katie went on to relate incidents that occurred after she was appointed president where race and gender were barriers for her as well as for some of her female president colleagues:

> I've been in situations and seen male presidents do something, and not only is it accepted, but "oh, that's a great idea" and as a Black woman, I put an idea on the table and clearly I have to work at it harder. I tried to ignore that for a long time but it's true. Similarly, one of the sister campuses has had some issues. There have been three different Black women there, and every single time Black women were presidents, they

> got beat up, unsupported; it was ridiculous. Black male shows up and these folks are falling all over him and I was somewhat surprised and I have to say that's pretty much an African American campus. I think the gender thing can be an issue; at that campus it was gender; it wasn't race.

Summary of Race and Gender Discrimination-A Double Plenty

Discrimination on the basis of race and gender seem to still be rearing its ugly head according to the discourse from the women in this study. All eight participants were simply asked if race or gender affected their career growth; unfortunately, every one could cite instances in their careers where they felt they were discriminated against based on these two characteristics of birth. Some of the women discussed over compensating in other ways, such as working harder, being more competent, and terminal degree credentialing.

Only time will tell whether Black women can believe that they will be judged based on their qualifications, not on their double jeopardy status over which they have no control.

Supported by their Village Community

Being raised in a close knit community where everyone watched out for and supported one another, I completely understand the often heard statement, *"It takes a village."* The women presidents in the research study shared the sentiments that a variety of people were involved in their ascension to the presidency as well as in their sustainability. The village community in this study is inclusive of relatives and friends, colleagues, community, and faith. The narratives from these women that will be discussed in the family involvement topic below clearly indicate the impact that family

can have on career mobility. The dialogue with the women suggest that no matter how strong we are or how independent we may be, no one is an island alone. Thus, anyone who believes they can stand alone risks not achieving the success that they seek or if they do achieve a particular career goal, it might be short lived.

Family Involvement

Family support is quite often the foundation of a successful career and it was found to be so with many of the women presidents. Unlike career-related mentors who give guidance and training to less experienced or younger colleagues from a professional standpoint, family gives support on a more personal basis. In this section, family is inclusive of blood relatives, friends, and professional colleagues who have no official authority in the women's careers. Many of the study participants identified family as the glue that has helped to sustain them during their career journeys. It was Bertha, Katie, Betty, Sarah, Martha, and Naomi who lauded the support that they received from their families during their careers.

Bertha, whose two campuses have a population of over 5,500 students, was very pleased with the encouragement that she received from some significant others early on in her life. "It was first my aunt who was always very supportive and influential, and it was my teachers in high school who saw something in me and encouraged me to take what I called challenging courses. Of course, my entire family has always supported me in my endeavors," stated Bertha.

Bertha praised her husband for standing firmly by her side throughout her career. She was especially thankful that he supported her decision to accept a presidency that would cause them to temporarily live apart. "For five years, we lived in different states

on the west coast and east coast. We're together now, but my husband would live here in the summer but he didn't stay here during the year," Bertha noted. The knowledge that he was not physically with her all those years, but was with her spiritually and emotionally, helped to sustain her during their separation by distance. In addition to relatives, Bertha was thrilled with the continuous support that she has received from the professional organizations in which she holds membership:

> The community college is a pretty tight knit group, particularly for African Americans. We have what is called the Presidents' Roundtable; you don't have to be a president to be in the roundtable but you have to be a vice president and they're all African Americans, primarily presidents, from across the country; and we have a directory. We can call on each other for anything; of course, I am actively involved in that group. I'm also actively involved in AACC, (American Association of Community Colleges); I've been a commissioner in higher education for about ten years, and of course, that consists of 100 presidents from across the country who meet two or three times a year to talk about issues that are occurring in higher education. I'm a member of HICU which is Hispanics in Higher Education; and I'm on the advisory committee, so you see, I have quite a network of support from my colleagues.

Similar to Bertha, colleagues and immediate family gave strength to Katie. When asked what helped to sustain her during her career, without hesitation Katie discussed her husband and colleagues. Katie said that she has her own little personal co-hort since she

is in a nine campus district. “I think sometimes we are too incestuous and I need to be involved a little bit more with my presidential colleagues from other areas,” stated Katie. She is especially thankful to have other women presidents in her district:

> For the last years it’s been wonderful because we actually have five women presidents of the nine campuses. It is very comforting for me to be able to pick up the phone and call another woman president in my district; two of them are African American. The guys are okay, but it’s great to have the women to talk to. . . .The man I’m married to is the most incredible husband in America; he is incredibly supportive. He has just supported every time I changed positions and he does really hold me up and give me a lot of strength and encouragement. On a personal level, it’s him and my daughter.

The narrative shared by Betty, who serves on a bank board, was amazingly akin to Bertha’s regarding family support. They are both members of a community college district, the Presidents’ Roundtable, and the American Association of Community Colleges. Betty believes that these organizations have played a significant role in her career success:

> I’ll have to say that in my state one of the real gifts of the presidency was the network of other community college presidents in the state, all of whom, or shall I say most of whom were tremendous colleagues both on as well as off the job. This was a group of people that I could call on any hour, any day, for any issue. This was a group of people who literally lifted me and carried me a couple of times during my 10 years,

> so between that group and a group that I was and still am involved with called the Presidents' Roundtable, I've had outstanding support. The American Association of Community Colleges is also a great support. From the family side, I have a great family and a fabulous husband.

Sarah, who has a student body credit enrollment of over 20,000 in three locations, revealed that she has a very close knit family. She and her husband have been married for several years and he gives her his full support. "My husband, 31 years now, he's a lot of strength and power and a shoulder when I need it." Sarah also pointed out that she has two adult daughters and it is her desire to do things to make them proud and to also help them set directions for themselves. She is persuaded that her husband and her children are a great factor in her sustainability, especially through tough times.

Martha, whose college employs over 900 full-time and part-time employees, also has a supportive family. Reminiscent of the observations coming from Bertha, Katie, Betty and Sarah, Martha was in concert with her contentions that she is strengthened by her immediate family. "It is so uplifting to know that I can go home and have someone whom I can relax with and get away from the issues of the day. My husband is wonderful." In addition to her spouse, Martha has other family support; she asserted, "I have a very supportive family and we really support and help each other, from my husband, grown children, even my small grandchildren. I have a supportive environment at home."

Naomi, whose college is a single-campus institution, discussed her strength and power base from a fairly different perspective from the other women. She proffered that every now and then when she gets a little down, she only needs to think about how

fortunate she has been as contrasted to the challenges that were met by her parents. The struggles of her parents during tough racial times continue to impact her career in a positive manner:

> I think a lot my ability to overcome challenges comes from my mother; she had to work outside the home and I sort of became a surrogate mother for the other little kids. Growing up watching her with six children and she still left every day and came back and took care of us and my father; and education, we had to do it. That's what she talked about; you have to do it; you're going to school; you're going to do this. So I think a lot of it seeped in, if you will, from watching her everyday and my father as well. My father had no education; my mother did at least go to the eleventh grade, but watching them where I grew up and watching them persevere in all these racial conditions gives me strength to this day.

The role of family involvement in the lives of the Black women presidents was definitely important for the majority of the study participants. Although there were a few interview questions that caused pause for the women, the subject of family was seemingly met with enthusiasm. The women spoke warmly of the associations with their immediate families as well as with the individuals in their affiliate professional organizations. Family was surely a salient factor as the women believed that these were people with whom they could unwind and who unconditionally supported them.

Reciprocal Community Relationships

College presidents are internal leaders for their institutions as well as external leaders in the communities that their colleges serve. It behooves the presidents, then, to make connections with other community leaders, to get involved with community activities, and to be associated with community organizations. The primary purpose of community involvement is to advance the mission of the institution; expectantly, when the president and the college become vested in the community, the community will reciprocate by supporting and promoting the college.

The visibility of the president in the community provides more exposure and support for the college and optimistically greater admiration and respect for the college president. Six of the Black women presidents spoke about their community relationships and the importance of community connections and collaborations.

Katie, whose institution is one of nine colleges in her community college district, is quite involved in her community. She speaks extensively of her community leadership and what she terms "getting her college out to the community:"

> I'm very involved in this community, almost to a…I shouldn't say to a fault. The first few years I became very active in the community. I chaired a hospital board; I was on the hospital board for eight years. I am still on the board of directors for two of the largest business organizations in the valley. I sit on the board of directors for Project Grad, which is a program for one of our high schools that has the largest dropout rates. The mayor has asked me to serve as one of five library commissioner for the city of Los Angeles; there are 71 city libraries. I

> was on the advisory board for the Triple A auto club for Southern California; it's a corporate board and has nothing to do with education but because of my community leadership, they asked me to serve. I have spent a lot of time getting my college out to the community and having the community know more about the college.

When Bertha, who graduated fourth in her high school class, was selected to be the president of her college; she moved to a new community where she did not know a single person who lived there. Bertha said that she to reach out to the community to build rapport:

> I went to churches; I went to all community events; I connected with my sorority, I've done everything to build rapport. I reached out to the community and to the business community and now I see myself as part of the fabric of this community. I'm involved in the church, the government, social organizations. I'm an active member of my sorority, I'm a Link, I was a member of Jack and Jill and other professional organizations. I am a community advocate on causes that impact the community. I'm a lifetime member of the NAACP; I'm on many boards including Workforce Development Alliance Board, Girl Scouts Board, Chamber of Commerce Board, Social Development Commission, and the Arts and Idea Board. I serve on panels, attend events, volunteer my time when needed, serve on scholarship committees, and give out scholarships. As you can see, I'm very active in my community.

Similar to Bertha, Mary also relocated to a state where she had no affiliations. Mary's situation was more complex, however, because not only was she new to the community but she had to also build a college from ground up. She was given the responsibility of developing a campus with an initial staff of only fifteen people—five full-time faculty members plus ten other employees. It was imperative that Mary market her college to the community as well as become involved in the community on a personal basis:

> I needed to move the college into the community so I had to go out and really understand what the community meant. As a result, over time, I have developed close relationships with city officials; I serve on the economic development board; I'm on the chamber board; I'm in the Rotary Club. Whenever there is an opportunity, I'm out giving presentations to a variety of different organizations and agencies to make sure that people see me in two areas: one in terms of being the college president and being able to serve their community, but also living in that community and establishing additional credibility in terms of having a vested interest in that college.

Betty, who has served as president of the Presidents' Roundtable of African American CEOs, is another participant who spoke of the importance of being interconnected with the community. She cites her interpersonal skills and the ability to move among people with ease as one of her major strengths:

> One of my real strengths, no question about it was working with the community. When I came to my institution, one of the things my board

> said to me was that this college, outside of students coming in the door, doesn't really have a lot of connections with the community and that was one of the things that I worked hard at and that paid off with wonderful dividends. We have built alliances with business and industry, with the not-for-profits, with the faith-based community, the legislative community, congressmen, and on and on. One of my goals at the college was to really put the college on the map so to speak, not only in the region, but the state and the nation, and I think I was able to do that.

Sarah, who came to the presidency from the position of provost and executive vice president for academic and student affairs at a different college, has a simple, but logical standpoint on community relations:

> It is a community college; how can you be a community college that delivers what the community needs if you're not in touch with the community to confirm your thoughts or to hear new thoughts that you never thought of. So I believe that half my job is to build, maintain, and strengthen community relations from the mayor to the chamber of commerce to economic development to the university. With all those leaders out there, that helps drive the direction of the community, and the college is a part of the community, so my job is to stay connected with those people. I'm a strong community service person and I believe in giving back.

Last, but just as resolute as the other participants who believe that community involvement is one of the keys to successful leadership, Martha contends that it's even

more important in a smaller community to be involved. She asserts that there are greater expectations for community leaders to be visible and participate in activities for the development of the entire community:

> It's not just your African American community but you need to get to the power of the city, those people who have influence, not just the talkers. You're going to make decisions behind closed doors with government officials, with community based organizations. They need to know what you're about; they need to know what your plan is, they need to know something about the college. When you go out to promote the college, also show an interest in the community by asking what they need from the college. I try to appear at events where I know they're going to be and show myself, my face, bring the administrative staff with me to discussions about what's going to happen in the city and deploy the people all over so that every time they look up, my college is there.

It is evident from the discourse with the women regarding community relationships that they have a clear understanding of their roles in the community. They appreciate the necessity of being visible and vocal on behalf of the college within the community. The Black women presidents can evaluate their sincere answers to the following series of questions to gauge how well the college is performing in the community: How involved is the college with the community? How involved is the community with the college? Is the college serving the needs of the community according to the college's mission statement? What is the reputation of the college in the community?

The college president holds primary responsibility for assuring that all responses to the above questions are favorable. It is imperative, then, that the president as well as senior staff members and other staff have a positive presence in the community and participate in organizations and activities that are designed to move the community forward.

Faith as a Pillar

Faith as a Pillar, the final sub-theme under the major theme of *Supported by their Village Community*, was addressed by all eight participants, although to a lesser degree by one study participant. Faith, according to the women, is trusting and depending on a higher power which is God in heaven. The Black women presidents all talked about their religion, spirituality and how faith has sustained them and continues to give them strength on a day to day basis.

Betty, who interviewed for four presidential positions before she was selected, says that soon after she arrived at her college, she made it known to her college family that she was a woman of faith:

> One of the things that I remember sharing in one of my first meetings of faculty and staff at the college is that my base is my faith, my family and my profession, basically in that order of priority. There's no question that my faith has carried me and sustained me and given me great joy, victory and also absolutely sustained me when things were really bad, and I had some bad moments. But on a day to day basis, it's been about my faith.

When asked about the source of her personal and professional strength, Lanette, the only African American woman president in her technical college system of 33 institutions, emphatically responded, “The grace of God; I’m telling you the truth; it is by his grace that I am even in this position.” Lanette went on to comment that God holds everything in his hands and that we’re here on earth for a reason and God puts us in positions to do certain things, if just for a season. I was not aware that Lanette was struggling with a terminal illness at the time of our interview.

Since our interview, Lanette passed away due to a rare, aggressive form of cancer. Prior to her demise, she demonstrated her faith as an active member of her church. At her funeral, many church representatives spoke of Lanette’s faith and her work in the church, even crediting her with initiating one of the church choirs. The church pastor praised her commitment to church involvement in light of her presidential duties at her college and the myriad community activities in which she participated.

When asked about influences in her life, Sarah, a higher learning commission evaluator, quickly turned her remarks to faith. She believes that God directs all facets of her life. Sarah said that she really had to seek God’s guidance when she was pondering whether to accept a particular position:

> Whenever God has something that’s meant for me to do to move in a direction, I don’t believe you can say no to the Lord. I believe that if it is my time, God will let me know it. I believe that a lot of my steps have been guided by a higher power, so I can just go with the flow, just wait and see what comes and the different things have come, so I just think it was in the master plan.

Mary, who has been in education for 37 years, echoed the convictions that Sarah shared about faith. Mary explained that her inner strength comes from her faith, "I'm very religious; I get connected to the most Supreme Being and certainly my religion helps to guide my career."

Naomi, in agreement with Mary, credits spirituality for the strength that she possesses. Naomi points out that she has a very strong inner strength, stating, "Spirituality is very much a part of my life and without that, I don't think I could have been and can be as strong as I am. It is a very, very major part of my life."

When asked what she considered to be her power base, Martha, whose institution was named "College of the Year" by TIME Magazine, focused her comments first on religion. Martha stated, "I'm very spiritual and religious. I don't bring it to work with me; I try to live it, so there's that center and I'm not to proud to call on that spiritual help.

Responding to the question of what advice she could offer Black women aspiring to the college presidency, Bertha, who was born in the South, talked about God:

> I guess the most important thing is you have to have a personal relationship with God and believe in his power and believe in his word and that will sustain you through difficult times that you're bound to have when you move into positions of power and authority.

Katie, president of a college with approximately 550 full-time and adjunct faculty, was the only participant who did not address the subject of spirituality in response to standard questions from the interview guide. So that I could gain insight into her stance on spirituality, I asked Katie specifically if she had a spiritual base. She responded, "I do and I think the other part for me is my grandparents; I was raised by my grandparents and

they were very spiritually based in terms of their involvement in the church." It still remains unclear to this researcher whether Katie was speaking of her spirituality or that of her grandparents.

Although seven of the eight women were not asked questions about religion, faith, or God, every one of them introduced the theme of spirituality in response to questions such as, "What is your power base?" "Where do you get your strength?" and "What advice do you have for Black women aspiring to the presidency?" It was evident that these are women of faith and rely on a higher power. They are praying women who assert that God has guided them through their careers and still sustains them.

Summary of Supported by their Village Community

These women were surely supported by their village communities during their careers. Family involvement, community relationships, and faith were critical in the career development of the women presidents. These themes were so strong that they seemed to almost leap off the pages of the transcripts. It takes a village to support the college and the president; fortunately, by all indications all participants had a village of supporters.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented findings that emerged after analyzing data from the interviews of the eight African American women presidents of two-year community colleges. Five major themes emerged: 1) Striving and Succeeding through Extensive Preparation, 2) Constructing a Well-Developed Professional Image, 3) Taking Risks for Learning and Professional Advancement, 4) Race and Gender—A *Double Plenty*, and 5) Supported by their Village Community.

The first major theme, *Striving and Succeeding through Extensive Preparation,* responds to research question number one which examines the typical career preparation of African American women presidents of two-year community colleges. It was found that the sub-themes of over credentialing, leadership development, and mentoring were represented in the lives and career paths of the majority of the research participants. The participants argued that unlike other women and White men, they were expected to have terminal degrees and formal leadership training. To be mentored, the women asserted, was beneficial to their careers.

The second major theme, *Constructing a Well-Developed Professional Image*, and the third major theme, *Risk Taking for Learning and Professional Advancement,* present findings to research question two which seeks to identify the common strategies that African American women presidents of two-year colleges use to negotiate their careers. Personal appearance, which emerged as a sub-theme under professional image, was discussed by many of the women who cited an expectation on the part of the professional community for Black women to look different. The women all reported that, in their opinions, they dress in a more professional manner than do other women. Credibility, integrity, interpersonal relations and confidence, in other words, interpersonal skills were purported as necessary characteristics for the Black woman professional. In response to various questions during the interviews, the women talked about taking risks by accepting new positions, relocating, new projects, and generally not being afraid to try something different. They contend that as long as you "play it safe," you may not achieve desired goals. The women also argued that risk taking was absolutely necessary for advancement.

The fourth major theme, *Race and Gender—A Double Plenty* responds to research question number three which seeks to determine the salient factors that shaped the women's career paths. For the most part, race and gender negatively impacted the women's careers. Many of them discussed particular instances when then were denied positions, they believe, because of their race and/or gender.

The fifth and final major theme, *Supported by their Village Communit*y, as does the fourth major theme, responds to research question number three which considers the salient factors that shaped the women's careers. The three sub-themes, family involvement, reciprocal community relationships, and faith as a pillar were found to be significant in the lives of the women. The family, which is inclusive of relatives, friends and colleagues, were people that the participants could depend on for emotional support. Civic, social, business, and other community groups all comprise community relationships. It was deemed critical for the community relationships to be reciprocal meaning that the president is involved in the community and the community is also beneficially involved with the college. The women all professed a faith that sustains them in their careers.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how African American women community college presidents ascend to the presidency. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What is the typical career preparation of African American women presidents in community colleges?
2) What are the common strategies that African American women presidents of community colleges use to negotiate their careers?
3) What were the salient factors that shaped their career paths?

To explore this phenomenon, I conducted a literature review on women in leadership, Black women in leadership, in higher education and in two-year colleges, career development, positionality, White privilege, racism, and sexism, and mentoring.

Eight Black women presidents of two-year colleges participated in this qualitative research study. A minimum of one president in each of the six regional accreditation agencies across America that are recognized by the United States Department of Education participated in the study. The data was collected and analyzed using the constant comparative method. As a result, findings emerged and three major conclusions were drawn that will respond to the research questions.

These conclusions will be discussed in context with the research questions and the existing literature. Lastly, I will give a discussion on implications for practice and also offer recommendations for future research.

Conclusions and Discussion

Based on the findings of this qualitative research study, three major conclusions were reached. (1) The career preparation of African American women community college presidents is different because the women were held to higher standards than their counterparts because of racism and sexism and therefore the women "over achieved" and "over prepared" and "over credentialed" in an effort to counteract these implicit societal forces. (2) African American women community college presidents developed a deliberate yet flexible approach to their careers that was consistently cognizant of managing their images and that was informed by a mentoring collective, and (3) African American women presidents of two-year colleges were engaged servant leaders who constructed and nurtured a politically savvy persona that they used to engage the community as a base and support system.

The Typical Career Preparation of African American Women Presidents

The first research questioned asked, “What is the typical career preparation of African American women presidents in community colleges?” The first major conclusion of the study responds to this question revealing that the career preparation of African American women community college presidents is different because the women were held to higher standards than their counterparts because of racism and sexism and therefore the women "over achieved" and "over prepared" and "over credentialed" in an effort to counteract these implicit societal forces.

Several of the women presidents entered the community colleges with work experiences from various agencies as well as from secondary education. Within the community colleges, their preparation included a host of successively higher positions and sometimes lateral positions in order to gain diverse work experiences. Some women also gained experiences through working at multiple colleges, branch campuses, working at central offices, and volunteering for special assignments and projects in order to be more marketable and more valuable.

The women spoke of the implicit requirement for Black women to exceed qualifications of White women and men. The majority of the women insisted that with this understanding, they endeavored to be more credentialed and experienced than their White counterparts in order to address racism and sexism that were operating on a conscious and subconscious level. Yes, Black women have to contend with double oppression, being Black and female. They are disadvantaged as females in the workplace, according to Heilman (2001), because competence does not ensure that a woman will ascend to the same organizational level as an equivalently performing man because gender bias penalizes women in work settings. They are also disadvantaged because African American women are subjected not only to those restrictions that handicap women, but also to restrictions that target Blacks (Zamani, 2003).

Although I was unaware of the women's credentials and training when they were selected and agreed to participate in this study, it is noteworthy that 100 percent of these Black women presidents hold a doctorate degree and 100 percent participated in formal leadership training prior to becoming a president. Contrarily, only 75 percent of college

presidents hold doctorate degrees and only 17.3 percent participated in formal leadership training (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008).

The women explained that racism and sexism were present in their workplaces; therefore, they acquired extra credentials and leadership training in order to compete with White women and men. Similar to the women's contentions regarding the need for leadership training, Eckel, Cook, and King (2009) reported that African American women who are Chief Academic Officers (CAO), hold the highest percentage for a group participating in formal leadership programs. An interesting note about the position of chief academic officer is that it is more frequently the prior position to the presidency.

The dearth of Black women presidents in my state of Georgia and in the nation as a whole adds credence to the women's claims that racism and sexism might be factors in the slow rise of Black women to the presidency. In Georgia, there are 49 two-year private and public colleges; only one has a Black female president. In the United States of America, there are approximately 1,100 two-year, technical, and community colleges (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008) and only 34 are led by Black female presidents. It is understandable, then, why these Black women presidents believe that they must have credentials that exceed those of White women and men.

The Common Strategies to Negotiate the Women's Careers

The second research questioned asked, “What are the common strategies that African American women presidents of two-year community colleges use to negotiate their careers?” The second major conclusion responds to this question revealing that African American women community college presidents developed a deliberate yet

flexible approach to their careers that was consistently cognizant of managing their images and that was informed by a mentoring collective.

One of the strategies that the women used to learn and to present an image of confidence was risk-taking which involved stepping away from and facing fear in order to learn and grow. We cannot always play it safe because we may "keep what we have" but "not acquire or achieve what we desire." In roles prior to the presidency, taking risks can be started on a small scale with small challenges and as confidence is built, progress toward more important and challenging issues. Certainly as a president, the unknown and untried will be center stage and it will be the responsibility of the president to make tough decisions.

The women spoke to the significance of taking risks in order to gain knowledge and to become more skilled in the workplace. They clearly understood the necessity of not waiting on life and circumstances to work in their favor but to participate totally in their on career mobility. Bertha, one of the research participants, specifically discussed taking risks as a characteristic of a successful leader. Some of the women talked of initially being afraid to take risks but realized that they had to be willing to take a chance on such things as new techniques, new programs, and new career positions to move towards the presidency. Risk taking was definitely employed by the women as a strategy for career advancement. My literature review did not uncover research, studies, or articles that addressed risk taking as a strategy for career advancement. This finding can add to or begin dialogue on risk taking as a strategy that Black women can use to negotiate their careers.

Another strategic approach to career advancement was the utilization of mentors. Many of the women had the benefit of several mentors as advised by Crawford and Smith (2005) and Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998); two of the women were not mentored at all. It is interesting to note, though, that the women who were not mentored believed it would have been beneficial to their careers in revealing knowledge that might otherwise take years to acquire. Consistent with the beliefs of the women in my study who were not mentored, Crawford and Smith found in a study of seven African American women in higher education that they also believed that mentoring would have resulted in greater job satisfaction.

The women who were mentored had informal and formal mentoring relationships. Interestingly, the majority of the women who were mentored in my study were mentored by White males. Since the White male leadership was prevalent in the women's workplaces, it is understandable, then, that the White male was the most common mentor. Mentoring relationships between a Black female and White male can have its challenges but it can also be quite rewarding (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004). Hansman (2003) and Johnson-Bailey and Cervero support this mentoring experience but also warn that the intermingling of race, gender and culture in a mentoring relationship can present challenges. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero had a successful mentoring relationship although sprinkled with diversity challenges in race and gender.

Mentoring surely requires special attention for the career development of Black women. It appeared that in some cases, mentoring began later in the women's careers and only after they expressed an interest in the presidency. It is indeed remarkable that some of the mentoring relationships, for the most part, were willingly initiated by the White

male supervisors once they learned of the aspirations of the women. The need for Black women mentoring was definitely revealed through the literature review (Crawford & Smith, 2005; Hansman, 2003, Stanley & Lincoln, 2005, Wilson, 2004) and through the voices of the Black women study participants. Further, cross-culture and cross-race mentoring are significant because of the dearth of same race and same sex mentors for African American women.

The Salient Factors that Shaped the Women's Career Paths

The third and final research questions asked, "What were the salient factors that shaped the women's career paths"? The third major conclusion responds to this question revealing that African American women presidents were engaged servant leaders who constructed and nurtured a politically savvy persona that they used to engage the community as a base and support system.

Several of the study participants commented to me that the personal appearance and dress of Black professional women are expected to surpass that of the White woman professional. The women proffered that they needed to have a well-developed professional image first in order to engage the community. In other words, they believed that they needed to look attractive, be well dressed, and present themselves with confidence. Although there was paucity in the literature as to how professional image intersects with a Black woman's career, all of the women discussed personal appearance and interpersonal relations.

The Black women in this study believed that beyond academic and leadership training credentials, they needed to have an outstanding professional image. With that in mind, they paid particular attention to their personal dress and interpersonal skills. A

study by Wilson (2004) supports the women's contention regarding interpersonal skills. Wilson, in a study on the career development of African American women senior-level academic administrators, found that her research participants also used interpersonal skills as a strategy to facilitate their careers.

Since this researcher of this study is a Black woman vice president for academic affairs at a two-year college, I can identify with the women because I, too, believe and have had experiences that indicate Black women are held to a higher standard of dress and interpersonal skills than our White counterparts. Like the women, I endeavor to dress and present myself in a professional manner that is clearly recognized by others.

Believing that leadership training organized by White administrators and executives did not adequately address the needs of Black women, a now retired community college president organized a leadership institute, Kaleidoscope, for the sole purpose of addressing the career development needs of women of color. Nealy (2009) commented on the purpose of the institute:

> Over the course of three days, the strengths, weaknesses, attitudes, goals and even the clothing of attendees are critiqued with the intent of improving their prospects in higher education. Women who have already succeeded in reaching the highest ranks in academia lead attendees through rigorous workshops or career advancement, mentorship, networking and effective communication. (p. 7)

Unlike Kaleidoscope, which focuses on leadership in higher education, the National African-American Women's Leadership Institute is open to women in all professions (National African-American Women's Leadership Institute, 2009). Their mission is to give African-American women experiences that develop stellar professional

and personal foundations, stimulate community engagement and foster intergenerational transfer of leadership capabilities. Similar to Kaleidoscope, this organization also emphasizes the professional image. Although research was not prevalent on Black women and personal appearance, the women all concurred that appearance is paramount and these two aforementioned organizations support their contentions.

The women also considered interpersonal skills as important to their career growth. Because Black women have to contend with double jeopardy, they need exceptional skills and exceptional characteristics such as integrity, credibility, ethics, confidence and a sense of self, just to name a few. Further, Black women are expected to be more articulate than other women and men. I have personally witnessed on several occasions members of the White race commenting on how well a Black woman articulated when she was simply using Standard English. Though Black women are expected to be articulate and good communicators, surprise is often expressed when the women meet expectations. This expectation of "speaking well," yet surprise when African Americans do articulate well carries over to the Black male. For example, the news media comment often on President Obama's excellent use of Standard English and communication skills, yet I don't recall hearing commentary on the articulation skills of White presidents, such as Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton who were heralded as master communicator.

The community, to include family, friends, colleagues, business, industry, the political base, and the church were all deemed important in the careers of the women. This support system was vital to the career advancement of the women. In a study to understand the path of Black women to leadership positions, Banner (2003) found that

networking opportunities and personal support systems were career facilitators for the women. Several other researchers reported the centrality of a personal support system for career advancement in the lives of Black women (Crawford and Smith, 2005; Green, 1997; Thomas, 2004; Wilson, 2004).

The women all pointed to family as being one of the catalysts in their ability to remain grounded and content. Although only 83 percent of all college presidents are married (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2008), every one of the women in this study have been married for several years and reported that their husbands were their greatest supporters. The women also reported their children and extended families to be significant in their career satisfaction. Bowman (1995) in a study on career intervention strategies for African Americans, and Beach-Duncan (2004) in a study on career development factors of Black women in the professions both found that in their career histories, Black women place tremendous importance on family.

Another area that the women saw as critical to their careers was networking with their colleagues. The women reported the satisfaction of being able to pick up the telephone to discuss important issues with their Black colleagues as well as getting their ideas, suggestions and recommendations on matters at hand. Catalyst (2006) contends that women of color face "double exclusion" in the workplace because of race and gender and often do not have mentors or sponsors at the workplace. The women in my study discussed the satisfaction of especially communicating with "sister" colleagues because of their similar cultural experiences and the ability to be open and honest without fear of negative consequences.

In addition to family and colleagues, the women were heavily involved in with their community organizations, including social, civic, business, and community. The women listed a host of organizations in which they were involved with the primary focus of gaining community support for themselves and their institutions. The women emphasized that they needed to be politically savvy when operating in the community. One participant entered into a long commentary on the importance of being aware of the power structure within the community and learning how to negotiate within the structure.

Prior to becoming presidents, the women were involved in community activities, community organizations, and made a concerted effort to build relationships with community leaders. As a Black female senior administrator, I understand the significance of being intricately connected with the community. The women indicated that to gain personal support and support for your institution, the business leaders and citizens of the community need to be aware of who you are and what you represent. Literature on community networking would expectantly be highly beneficial to the Black female.

From the time of slavery, faith has been central to the Black female. She was considered beneath White men and women as well as beneath the Black man. She was seen as the nurturer because she was the caregiver not only for her children but for those of the White race as well. She essentially had control over no earthly possessions; but faith was totally hers. Until this day, the Black woman claims faith as her sustenance. The majority of the Black women presidents brought faith into the dialogue during the interviews and seemed to get excited as they talked about their God.

Faith and the church family were found to be significant in the lives of the women. All of them except one talked about faith sustaining them throughout their

careers. The Bowles (1999) study of African American women presidents supports the women's contention that church as community had an immense positive impact on their lives and careers. Tisdell (2000), in a study of varying cultures of women educators found that spirituality is elusive, yet it encompasses and connects all aspects of the lives of individuals. Beach-Duncan (2004) and Wilson (2004), in research studies related to the career development of African American women, also found that the Black women relied on faith as they made decisions that impacted their careers. As a Black female administrator, faith has sustained me and ha been my constant guide as I negotiated my career. I make no major decisions without petitioning God through prayer. Likewise, the women in this study were very forthcoming in professing their faith.

Implications

The voices of the women in this study have been clearly heard by this researcher. The findings from their commentary, the conclusions drawn, and the existing literature interconnect to support the implications for practice. The following information is presented as implications for the colleges and personal implications for Black women.

Implications for Colleges

The first implication for colleges is to acknowledge the reality that Black women face more and greater challenges in academia because of their double jeopardy status. Thus, attempts should be made to address some of the issues that confront Black women such as: being treated as outsiders; keeping them at the end of the line; and discounting the value that they can bring to academia, the institution, and to the students. The system has to step up to the plate and consider the Black woman's credentials and qualifications and make decisions accordingly. For too long, the academic world, as well as other

professions, has awarded “token” positions to Black women for its own purposes without making a real attempt to diversify. While the women can acquire all of the necessary credentials and leadership training for various positions, it will be up to the system to deal fairly with the women. In this study, none of the women sought preferential treatment, only fair treatment. When these women were awarded their presidential positions, they all had qualifications at the highest possible level.

The second implication is that it would be advantageous for community colleges to design leadership programs inclusive of mentoring where Black women are trained relative to their specific needs and are provided the equal access opportunity to formal leadership training. As colleges are becoming more diverse in student enrollment (Chronicle, 2008), a more diverse leadership is warranted. Research has shown that leadership training, diverse job skills, and mentoring are invaluable to Black women so it would behoove the system to create opportunities for the women to obtain the skills to become more competitive for presidential positions.

The final implication is that senior leadership in the colleges needs to be aware of their presentations of equality within the institution and needs to endeavor to promote an environment that is intolerant of the biases promulgated by racism and sexism. This can be done by having formal policies and procedures detailing the institution’s diversity and recruitment hiring policies and accountability measures, both rewards and penalties that encourage participation.

Personal Implications for Black Women

A personal implication for the Black woman from this study is that the Black woman who aspire to be community college presidents need to chart her own career path,

including: gaining diverse experiences in an intentional effort to strengthen her foundation, earning a doctorate degree, participating in formal leadership training, obtaining a mentor, focusing attention on a deliberately fashioned message-driven personal image, and being involved with her communities.

Too often I have heard women as well as men say, "That is not in my job description." Black women who aspire to community college presidencies cannot afford to have this perspective. These goal-oriented women will need to volunteer for diverse assignments in order to gain personal experience as well as to benefit the company, regardless of what's in the job description. Since all of the Black women presidents in this study hold an earned doctorate, it can be inferred that this degree might be an unwritten or unspoken requirement for Black women. Consequently, it behooves the Black woman to attain the doctorate degree so that she will be able to compete at the highest degree level.

All of the Black women in this study participated in formal leadership training; this can be indicative of an expectation for Black women applying to the presidency. The aspiring president should also make special efforts to participate in leadership programs designed particularly for Black women because traditional leadership programs do not address issues specific to Black women (Nealy, 2009). Further, the Black woman will need to seek out a mentor early in her career and not wait for a volunteer mentor. However, despite having a mentor, she will need to take responsibility for her own career mobility.

Another implication that can be drawn from this study is that the Black woman needs to pay attention to her appearance and to her interpersonal relations. In all

likelihood, the woman aiming for the presidency will never be told by those in positions to hire a president that she needs to "beef up" her appearance and interactions. Unfortunately, because of the negative and stereotypical views held about Black women by the general public, Black women cannot afford to dress against professional type. For example, executive Black women cannot fully participate in the popularized “casual Friday” dress code, nor can they violate or break any of the gendered and unfairly biased dress norms that the workplace dictates for women. Hopefully, Black women aspiring to the presidency will gain access to research studies such as this one and utilize the information on professional image.

Lastly, this study implies that the Black woman needs to get into the community early on in her career and make connections, become known, and have associations with the power base of the community.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of my study was to understand how Black women presidents of community colleges ascend to the presidency. Eight presidents at public community colleges across the United States were study participants. It would be interesting to know how the career paths of presidents of four year colleges and universities who grant graduate and professional degrees compare to that of the two-year college presidents.

The research was scarce on the dynamics of risk taking and career mobility; therefore, I suggest the relationship between these two entities be explored. Many of the women commented on taking risks and being willing to take a chance, thus Black women could benefit from understanding how to deal with or confront risk.

My final recommendation for further research is the exploration of interpersonal skills of male and female chief academic officers and the perceived differences and similarities. Since the Black women deemed interpersonal relations as important to their career growth, Black women need more insight into this area.

Concluding Remarks

This research study has explored the ascension of Black women to the presidency. While conducting the research, I sometimes struggled to set my lived experiences and biases aside so that the research findings would not be influenced. However, in this conclusions chapter, I have shared some of my personal experiences. This research experience has been very rewarding.

As I talked with each of the women in my study, I continually relived my own experiences during my career journey where I have been the sole Black senior administrator for over ten years. The career paths and personal lives of Black women surely seem very similar and entangled. Even as I read research articles and books, I would begin to speak aloud, with words such as "I know all about that," and "that happened to me."

I was able to identify with the examples offered in the literature by Black women who related how they have been disrespected by students and colleagues and were only validated when a White colleague affirmed their advice or openly acknowledged them as clearly qualified, capable and intelligent (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Burke, Cropper, & Harrison, 2000; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008). I, too, have often been faced with situations where my comments and opinions, and knowledge were accepted only after being validated by a White male.

The overarching theme of this entire study is the affects of race and gender on the career mobility of Black women. If it were not for the double oppressions of racism and sexism, this study would not be needed. I look forward to the day (in all probability not within my life time) when we can move forward according to the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.:

> I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal." I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. … I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today. (Washington, 1986, p. 219)

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APPENDIX A

CONSENT FORM

Rising to the top: Strategies that African American women use to negotiate as senior level administrators in higher education

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled, "RISING TO THE TOP: STRATEGIES THAT AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN USE TO NEGOTIATE AS SENIOR LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION," which is being conducted by Robbie S. Latimore, 219 Buttercup Lane, Americus, GA 31709; (229) 924-7521, under the direction of Dr. Juanita Johnson-Bailey, Doctoral Advisory Committee Chair, The University of Georgia, Department of Adult Education, 850 College Station Road, 408 Rivers Crossing, Athens, Georgia 30602, (706) 542-2214. I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary. I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of the participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

I acknowledge that the following information has been explained to me:

- The interview will be directly related to the research topic.
- The purpose of the research is to study s*trategies that African American women use to negotiate as senior level administrators in higher education*. Ultimately, this research may contribute to the knowledge and literature relative to strategies that African American women can use to affect their advancement or promotion to senior leadership positions in two-year colleges.
- The procedures are as follows:
    - Each participant will choose or be given a pseudonym and the results of this participation will be confidential.
    - The college and state of the participant will be given a pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality of the participant and location of the college.
    - Participant will participate in one interview for a maximum of two hours.
    - A follow-up telephone interview may occur for the purpose of clarification or additional information.
    - With the permission of the participant, the interview with be audio-taped.
    - The audiotapes will be transcribed, and if necessary; the participant will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy. The tapes will be destroyed immediately after the researcher has completed all requirements for the Ed.D. in Adult Education, approximately June 2007.
- There are no reasonably foreseeable risks, stresses or discomforts associated with the research.
- The researcher will not release this research in any individually identifiable form without prior written consent from the participant, unless required by law.
- The researcher will answer any questions regarding this research at present or at any time during the research. The researcher may be contacted at (229) 931-2004 (day), (229) 924-7521 (evening), or e-mail at rlatimore@southgatech.edu.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all questions to my satisfaction. I have read the consent form in its entirety and agree to participate in the study. I have been given a copy of this consent form. Research at the University of Georgia that involves human participants is overseen by the Institutional Review Board.

Questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The IRB Chair, Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 606A Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail address, IRB@uga.edu.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date Signature of Researcher Date

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about your journey to becoming a college president.
2. How did you prepare for your current position as a college president?
3. What or who influenced your quest for the college presidency?
4. How would you describe yourself as a college president?
5. What characteristics do you believe a college president should possess? How do these characteristics apply to you?
6. Talk about your strengths as an individual and as a college president.
7. Talk about your weaknesses as an individual and as a college president.
8. Describe particular challenges you've encountered in your career as a college president.
9. How have your race and gender impacted your career?
10. Talk about your network of colleagues (those that you feel comfortable and confident in calling upon)?
11. What is your power base?
12. What is your connection to the community?
13. What has been your most rewarding experience in your career?
14. What advice do you have for aspiring Black women college administrators?
15. What else would you like to share that I may not have asked?

APPENDIX C

PARTICIPANT PROFILE INFORMATION SHEET

Participant's Pseudonym:

Participant's Martial Status:

Participant's Age:

Number of Children:

Number of Siblings:

Please list each earned degree and major:

- ♦
- ♦
- ♦
- ♦

Number of Years in Current Position:

Title of Immediate Prior Position:

Number of Years in Two-Year College System:

Number of Years in Higher Education:

Number of Years in K-12 Education (if applicable):

Father's Educational Level:

Mother's Educational Level: