

**MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS AND THE CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF AFRICAN  
AMERICAN FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION:  
EXPLORING INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND GENDER**

by

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**Mentoring Relationships and the Career Advancement of African American Female Administrators in Higher Education: Exploring Intersections of Race and Gender**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2007

Although recent data indicate more African American females are earning academic degrees, the figures do not show gains in their career advancement within the academy, particularly with regard to obtaining senior administrative positions. Although different factors impede their progress, the question remains, if African American women possess the credentials, why are they not holding senior level administrative positions?

This qualitative study examined the developmental relationship of mentoring, frequently viewed as instrumental to an individual's career advancement, and its effect as a conduit for African American female higher education administrators whose dual identities of gender and race places them in a marginalized position in society. Eleven senior-level administrators in Pennsylvania were interviewed. All were members of the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education (PBCOHE), a nonprofit professional education organization whose purpose is to ensure that Blacks and other underrepresented groups in Pennsylvania have access to higher education.

The study examined mentoring relationships associated with African American female administrators' career advancement and construct of success, including the significance of the mentor's race and gender. The construct of marginality was investigated; construed as creative, it elevates the African American female's self-identity; viewed as negative, it situates them as invisible within society. The construct of power was examined in an effort to understand the

restrictions and limitations it had on respondents.

The findings indicate that these African American female administrators felt mentoring relationships had been critical to their career advancement; that the race and gender of the mentor was not as determining a factor as the mentor's influence and reputation; that creative marginality was a "way of life" for them in an effort to maintain a positive attitude; and that success was measured by the legacy they left to others. Substantive recommendations were also gathered from the study, including the need for African American females to stay professionally prepared while pursuing senior-level roles and that institutions must share in the burden of increasing the pipeline for African American senior-level administrators by enforcing stringent search committee strategies to provide diverse candidate pools, establishing retention efforts, and maintaining databases that highlight disparities.

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## **1.0 CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

At the intersection of race and gender stand women of color, torn by the lines of bias that currently divide white from nonwhite in our society, and male from female. The worlds these women negotiate demand different and often wrenching allegiances. As a result, women of color face significant obstacles to their full participation in and contribution to higher education.

–Moses, 1991, p. 1

This qualitative research study examined how eleven senior-level African American female administrators in higher education in Pennsylvania who hold membership in the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education (PBCOHE) experienced mentoring, a developmental relationship which provides a series of functions including supporting the advancement of an individual's career. The study also examined how they secured, or were identified by, mentors who advanced their careers. The study investigated the influence of mentoring relationships for their success in the academy, and whether the gender and race of the mentor was significant within the relationships. The construct of marginality, including both negative and creative connotations, was examined. Green (2006) posits that those individuals who are classified as marginal are discriminated against due to their membership in a particular group and rendered as invisible. Alfred (2001) however, has extensively researched the interpretation of marginality and argues that it can be constructive for Black female administrators. The theoretical perspectives of Ragins' (1997) with respect to

diversified mentoring relative to a power base and also the ideologies of Black feminist thought serve as groundwork for the study. Additionally, the study will add valuable knowledge to the body of literature on African American female professionals in the academy.

The literature clearly indicates that career advancement within higher educational institutions is a complex phenomenon, in part due to the prevalence of its traditional White male-dominated and highly structured culture (Burke, Cropper, & Harrison, 2002; Benjamin, 1997; Rolle, Davies, & Banning, 2000; Stewart, 2002; Thompson & Dey, 1998; Wright, 1981). Green and McDade (1994) argue that female administrators often reach a plateau caused by the structure of higher educational institutions rather than by limitations of their abilities. This is particularly relevant regarding the advancement of Black female administrators in predominantly White higher education institutions, who face additional barriers due to their multiple identities of race and gender.

At the end of the seventies, Mosely (1980) conducted one of the first studies on African American female administrators at predominantly White institutions. The results showed that the majority of the women were in staff positions, did not have mentors, and were uncertain of their career advancement and aspirations within the academy. Mosely concluded that at the time, African American female administrators were indeed a dying breed, an endangered species, shrinking in numbers, with no power or support. The disillusionment of the results warrant more research in this area.

Nearly twenty-five years later, this current investigation is being designed in an attempt to gather new data and to add to the limited research on African American female administrators' experiences in the academy, particularly since much of the research is conducted with faculty and students. Mentoring relationships and career advancement are the prominent themes of inquiry for



the study and will provide possible recommendations for the success of African American females in higher education institutions.

Mentoring relationships have been identified as significant determinants in career success and advancement (Fagenson, 1988, 1989; Kanter, 1977; Kram, 1988; Lunding, Clements & Perkins, 1978; Thomas, 1990). Without mentors who will serve as a conduit for the Black female to progress through senior administration, it is likely that she will remain stagnant despite earning the required academic credentials. The current data for Black females reaching senior administrative roles is disparate; therefore, a research study is warranted to investigate possible solutions.<sup>1</sup>

## **1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

In an effort to contribute to the research on African American female administrators, this study investigated the lived experiences, successes, and barriers of the women as they achieved career goals within the academy and if mentoring relationships were significant. African American women, due to their gender and racial identification are often faced with unique challenges in their career paths in higher education institutions. Although all Black women are not American and all African American women may not share a common stance regarding racism and sexism, the challenges are noteworthy.

Intersections of gender and race in higher education were investigated to inform the study as to the discovery of implications of mentoring with African American female administrators. Cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Both the terms “Black” and “African American” will be used to reference the race of the female administrators in the study. Much of the current literature uses the terms interchangeably (i.e., statistical data references Black, whereas scholarly literature may use both terms).

differences, coupled with the historical, social, and political context associated with being Black, can result in challenges for Black women to advance in senior administrative roles within colleges and universities. Although one of the premises of feminist research and scholarship is to address women's lives and experiences in an effort to give them "voice", African American women reside within a different social location, that of gender and race constructs. Collins (1991) argues that African American women are a subordinate group who experience a different world from those who are not Black and female. She refutes the White feminist tradition due to the oppression that Black women face as a result of their dual identities in society and their unique life experiences often distinct from those of Black men and White women. Schramm (2002) further contends that racism and sexism are not to be viewed as separate issues, primarily since they helped form the cultures and ideologies of the United States and are embedded in the discourses and practices of our institutions. Since race and gender are interrelated systems of inequality based on relationships of power and control, this inequality results in a limitation of growth of the individual, and restriction of relationships, rendering Black women powerless and White men dominant (Schramm, 2002). Race is a contributing factor to understanding the dynamics of mentoring for African American females in higher education.

Historically, mentoring has been a catalyst for both lateral and upward mobility with academe. The literature reveals that mentors influence women's administrative mobility within higher education and can contribute to being hired in senior administrative positions. Mentors can also alleviate the isolation, alienation, and lack of socialization African American female administrators' experience. In order to raise awareness for the need of these women to secure viable mentors, a study to document their lived experiences in the academy is warranted.

Mentoring can provide a critical means of increasing both the number of African American

women serving as administrators in higher education and the percentage of those who reach senior level positions (Johnson, 1998). African American women need the developmental relationship of mentoring for their career advancement. Tyson (2002) argues that African American females typically hold executive administrative positions in higher education within the context of an environment often unwelcoming and unaccepting, unless they are fortunate to have the “right” combination and alignment of credentials, competence, support systems, networks, mentoring relationships, and timing.

Furthermore, the study disaggregated current research which labels women and minorities together, allowing recommendations for implementation strategies, interventions, and guidelines applicable to the academic environment. Additionally, the study provided new knowledge regarding mentoring as it relates to career advancement of African American female administrators in the academy, as well as offered substantive research for institutions where Black female administrators are pursuing academic careers and senior administrative positions. The research study extended voice to the experiences, challenges, and successes of Black female administrators.

Relatively few studies have been conducted to explain the relationship between mentoring activities and career advancement for all women, regardless of race (Johnsrud, 1991). Since the majority of literature relating to mentoring focuses on the business world and males within the business world, this study will add to scholarly literature on African American females. Mentoring can present a feasible tool with which to provide networking opportunities key to their career success. Conversely, the *lack* of mentoring relationships may indeed reduce opportunities and advantages for career advancement for African American female administrators. Current literature does not fully investigate and study mentoring implications for African American female administrators’ career advancement. There is a scarcity of current information about this population of women and how to

positively affect the success of their career advancement in higher education.

Furthermore, although research exists on Black female faculty development and Black student success within the academy, limited studies have focused specifically on Black female administrators and investigated mentoring as an added advantage for their career advancement.

Moses (1989) affirms, “Black women have been participants in higher education for more than a century, but are absent from the research literature; rarely is the impact of racism and sexism on Black women in academe examined” (p. 1). This dilemma partly exists since researchers are often silenced in providing voice to Black women. Guinier, 1998 argues, “...I was admitted but not accepted. I had been welcomed into the so-called mainstream even as I was reminded that I was not part of its flow. My presence was conditioned on my silence. I was present. But I was without a voice” (p. 551). This study is designed to add to the existing field of knowledge concerning African American women who pursue senior-level career advancement in higher education, investigate their experiences of mentoring, and to give them a voice.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Although recent data indicate that African American females are receiving a higher percentage of academic degrees, particularly terminal degrees conferred, the figures do not show gains in their career advancement within the academy in regard to senior-level administrative positions. Several factors exist to impede their progress, however the question remains, if African American women possess the credentials, and often the expertise, why are they not advancing to senior-level administrative positions? Typical answers could be they are not seeking, nor wish to seek higher

positions; they are not afforded the opportunities; or they do not have mentors who will assist in their career advancement. Mentors have been traditionally known to provide advocacy for individuals to pursue higher-level roles.

The overall number of doctoral degrees conferred increased 57% over the ten year period from 1993-94 to 2004-05. The number of doctoral degrees earned by Blacks increased by 131 percent from 1,324 in the 1993-94 period to more than 3,050 in 2004-05 (See Table 1). For Black females, the rate of change for the same period was dramatic. Black women received 4.0% of the total number of doctorates awarded in 1993-94, compared to 8% in 2004-05, resulting in a 177 percent gain. Net improvement at the doctoral level for the same period resulted in 41% for White females, 75% for Black males, and a decrease of minus 3.2% for White males (See Table 1).

Enrollment trends indicate that Black females awarded a master's degree experienced an overwhelming 178 percent increase from 1993-94 to 2004-2005. The rate of enrollment growth for White females at 48%, White males at 27%, and Black males at 126% trailed the growth of Black women (See Table 2).

**Table 1 Enrollment Trends for Doctoral Degrees**

<u>Enrollment for Doctoral Degrees</u>	<u>1993-94</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>2004-05</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent Change 1993-04 to 2004-05</u>
Total	42,966	n/a	52,631	n/a	n/a
Males	26,447	62.0	26,973	51.0	2.0
Females	16,519	38.0	25,658	49.0	55.3
White	26,034	61.0	30,261	57.0	16.2
Black	1,324	3.1	3,056	6.0	131.0
Other Minorities	15,608	36.0	19,314	37.0	24.0
Males	26,447	62.0	26,973	51.0	2.0
White	14,488	55.0	14,023	52.0	-3.2
Black	600	2.0	1,049	4.0	75.0
Other Minorities	11,359	43.0	11,901	44.0	4.8
Females	16,519	38.0	25,658	49.0	55.3
White	11,546	70.0	16,238	63.0	41.0
Black	724	4.0	2,007	8.0	177.2
Other Minorities	4,249	26.0	7,413	29.0	74.4

*Note:* For “Other Minorities” data: Reported racial/ethnicity includes: Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Non-resident alien, and those whose race/ethnicity were unreported. Where ‘n/a’ is noted, indicates the column is showing grand totals only in those designated columns. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall, 2005. Table 274. Doctor’s degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by sex, race/ethnicity, and major field of study: 2004-05.

**Table 2 Enrollment Trends for Master’s Degrees**

<u>Enrollment for Master’s Degrees</u>	<u>1993-94</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>2004-05</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent Change 1993-04 to 2004-05</u>
Totals	385,458	n/a	574,618	n/a	n/a
Males	175,252	45.0	233,590	41.0	33.3
Females	210,206	55.0	341,028	59.0	62.2
White	273,212	71.0	379,350	66.0	39.0
Black	20,826	5.0	54,482	9.0	162.0
Other Minorities	91,420	24.0	140,785	25.0	54.0
Males	175,252	45.0	233,590	41.0	33.3
White	116,358	66.0	147,546	63.0	27.0
Black	6,970	4.0	15,733	7.0	126.0
Other Minorities	51,924	30.0	70,311	30.0	35.4
Females	210,206	55.0	341,028	59.0	62.2
White	156,854	75.0	231,804	68.0	48.0
Black	13,856	7.0	38,749	11.0	178.0
Other Minorities	39,496	19.0	70,475	21.0	78.4

*Note:* For “Other Minorities” data: Reported racial/ethnicity includes: Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Non-resident alien, and those whose race/ethnicity were unreported. Where ‘n/a’ is noted, indicates the column is showing grand totals only in those designated columns. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall, 2005. Table 271. Master’s degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by sex, race/ethnicity, and major field of study: 2004-05.

Yet even more significant is the data reported regarding education as the academic discipline chosen by students at both the master’s and doctoral level. Black females receiving master’s degrees experienced a remarkable 149 percent increase from 1993-94 to 2004-05, resulting in an increase of 7% to 10% for the period; Black men increased by 141 percent; White men, 68 percent; and White

women trailed at 62 percent. (See Table 3). In regard to doctoral degrees in education, the data reveal Black females experienced a 153 percent gain for the designated period, while growth for Black males showed a gain of 125; White females, 9%; and White males dropped to minus 14%. (See Table 4).

**Table 3 Master’s Degrees Conferred in the Field of Education**

<u>Field of Study:</u> <u>Education</u>	<u>1993-94</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>2004-05</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent Change 1993-04 to 2004-05</u>
Total	99,020	n/a	167,490	n/a	n/a
Males	23,053	23.0	38,863	23.0	69.3
Females	75,967	77.0	128,627	77.0	69.0
White	79,211	80.0	129,176	77.0	63.0
Black	6,865	7.0	16,977	10.0	147.3
Other Minorities	12,944	13.0	21,377	13.0	65.0
Males	23,053	23.0	38,863	23.0	69.3
White	18,102	79.0	30,359	78.0	68.0
Black	1,497	6.0	3,614	9.0	141.4
Other Minorities	3,454	15.0	4,890	13.0	41.6
Females	75,967	77.0	128,627	77.0	69.0
White	61,109	80.0	98,817	77.0	62.0
Black	5,368	7.0	13,363	10.0	149.0
Other Minorities	9,490	12.0	16,447	13.0	73.3

*Note:* For “Other Minorities” data: Reported racial/ethnicity includes: Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Non-resident alien, and those whose race/ethnicity were unreported. Where ‘n/a’ is noted, indicates the column is showing grand totals only in those designated columns. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall, 2005. Table 271. Master’s degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by sex, race/ethnicity, and major field of study: 2004-05.



**Table 4 Doctoral Degrees Conferred in the Field of Education**

<u>Field of Study:</u> <u>Education</u>	<u>1993-94</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>2004-05</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Percent</u> <u>Change</u> <u>1993-04 to</u> <u>2004-05</u>
Total	6,922	n/a	7,681	n/a	n/a
Males	2,740	40.0	2,557	33.0	-7.0
Females	4,182	60.0	5,124	67.0	23.0
White	5,166	75.0	5,159	67.0	-0.14
Black	494	7.0	1,206	16.0	144.1
Other Minorities	1,262	18.0	1,316	17.0	4.2
Males	2,740	40.0	2,557	33.0	-7.0
White	2,021	74.0	1,741	68.0	-14.0
Black	151	6.0	339	13.0	125.0
Other Minorities	568	21.0	447	17.0	-21.3
Females	4,182	60.0	5,124	67.0	23.0
White	3,145	75.0	3,418	67.0	9.0
Black	343	8.0	867	17.0	153.0
Other Minorities	694	17.0	839	16.0	21.0

*Note:* For “Other Minorities” data: Reported racial/ethnicity includes: Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Non-resident alien, and those whose race/ethnicity were unreported. Where ‘n/a’ is noted, indicates the column is showing grand totals only in those designated columns. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall, 2005. Table 274. Doctor’s degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by sex, race/ethnicity, and major field of study: 2004-05.

Executive and administrative staff positions for Black females, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education NCES, 2003, 2005) data show they are not moving into senior-level positions in higher educational

institutions as aggressively as they are receiving their academic credentials. According to 2003 NCES data it was reported that the overall total of executive and managerial administrative positions were 176,888. Categorized by 89,348 (51%) females; out of which White females totaled 71,330 (80%); Black females totaled 10,121 (11%). Regarding males, the total was 87,540 (49%); White males, 73,685 (84%); and Black males, 6,857 (8%) (See Table 5).

The 2005 data reveal a total of 190,087 executive and managerial administrative positions. Classified by 97,224 (51%) females; out of which White females totaled 77,038 (79%); while Black females increased from the period 2003 to 2005 by 663 positions and held 10,784 (11%). Regarding males, the total was 92,854 (49%); White males, 77,216 (83%); and Black males, 7,184 (9%), increasing from the period 2003 to 2005 by 327 positions (See Table 5). The number of Black females totaled a mere 6% of the overall executive and managerial administrative positions (190,087).

**Table 5 Full-time Employees at Title IV Degree-granting institutions, by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Primary Occupational Activity: United States, Fall 2005**

<u>Professional Staff Executive/Administrative/ Managerial</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Total	176,888	n/a	190,078	n/a
Males	87,540	49.0	92,854	49.0
Females	89,348	51.0	97,224	51.0
White	145,015	82.0	154,254	81.0
Black	16,978	10.0	17,968	9.0
Other Minorities	14,895	8.0	17,856	9.0
Males	87,540	49.0	92,854	49.0
White	73,685	84.0	77,216	83.0
Black	6,857	8.0	7,184	9.0
Other Minorities	6,998	8.0	8,454	9.0
Females	89,348	51.0	97,224	51.0
White	71,330	80.0	77,038	79.0
Black	10,121	11.0	10,784	11.0
Other Minorities	7,897	9.0	9,402	10.0

*Note:* For “Other Minorities” data: Reported racial/ethnicity includes: Hispanic, Asian Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Non-resident alien, and those whose race/ethnicity were unreported. Where ‘n/a’ is noted, indicates the column is showing grand totals only in those designated columns. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

*Source:* U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Winter 2005-06, Human Resources component, Fall Staff section. Full-time staff at Title IV degree-granting institutions and administrative offices, by race/ethnicity, gender, and primary function/occupational activity: United States, Fall 2005.

The data confirm that Black women have the necessary educational credentials, therefore the responsibility for their advancement lies either with institutional intervention, with intentional diversity search procedures, or with the Black females’ self-identity to acquire mentors for their career success. Although the educational level of Black females continues to rise, their presence in the senior

administrative ranks of colleges and universities remains significantly stagnant. Mentoring relationships can be the conduit necessary to assist in career advancement. This study investigated their experiences, obstacles faced, battles won and lost, and dreams deferred, as well as those realized.

## **1.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework for this study is based upon the following two constructs relevant to the study of African American females: 1) Ragins' (1997) model of diversified mentoring relationships that examines a power perspective; and 2) Black feminist thought from the perspective of various scholars. By exploring these two frameworks in the study of Black female administrators, further understanding of the multiple identities of these women will be made to offer strategies for improvement.

### Ragins' Diversified Mentoring Relationships

In the examination of the influence of the race and gender (of the mentor) on mentoring relationships of Black female administrators in higher educational institutions, the work of Ragins (1997) will inform the study. Her extensive research (1991, 1993, 1994) includes the construct of diversified and cross-gender mentoring relationships within organizations. Ragins (1997) describes diversified mentoring relationships as those, "composed of mentors and protégés who differ in group membership associated with power differences in organizations, [such as] race, ethnicity, gender, class, disability, sexual orientation. The author proposes a framework (see typology in Figure 1) that illustrates the hypothesis that the diversified mentoring relationship, composed of minority members (Black females) and (dominant, White males), results in a greater degree of career advancement benefits for the protégé and will produce a more substantial outcome. This is significant since the

Black female protégé typically has fewer resources for power within the organization than the White mentor. The author defines promotion and compensation as two outcomes for the minority protégé in such a relationship. In male-dominated organizations, such as the academy, the construct of diversified mentoring strategies may involve the pairing of a majority mentor (White male) with a minority protégé (Black female). This mentoring relationship would provide substantial career advancement functions such as exposure and visibility to key individuals, recommendations for promotions and challenging assignments, among others. She argues that the construct of “power” within the relationship is described as influence – who has it, who uses it, and to whom it is beneficial. According to this perspective, Ragins (1997) proposes that the “image of power” in organizations reflects those who have it, therefore incorporating the attributes of the dominant group, such as control and autonomy – to the exclusion of other groups. Along similar lines, minority groups may be viewed with distorted characteristics such as weak or lacking initiative. Furthermore, because the perception of Black females is frequently based on group stereotypes, they are unlikely to be perceived as having power, and less likely to obtain power in organizations.

According to Ragins (1997), mentoring relationships involve two categories of influence: one which is positioned as *internal* to the relationship and focuses primarily on the interpersonal influence, and the other refers to the *external* aspect of the relationship and involves the development of power in the organization. This model will provide the framework in which the study of Black female administrators’ experience of mentoring relationships will be grounded.

Ragins (1997) conceptualizes a sociological perspective on power which defines either the access to, or the restriction of power resources for minority groups. She defines diversified mentoring relationships as those, “composed of mentors and protégés who differ on one or more group memberships associated with power in organizations” (p.489). Minority group membership

can include Black females and majority group membership can include White males.<sup>2</sup>

Ragins (1997) suggests the following indicators of the diversified mentoring relationship:

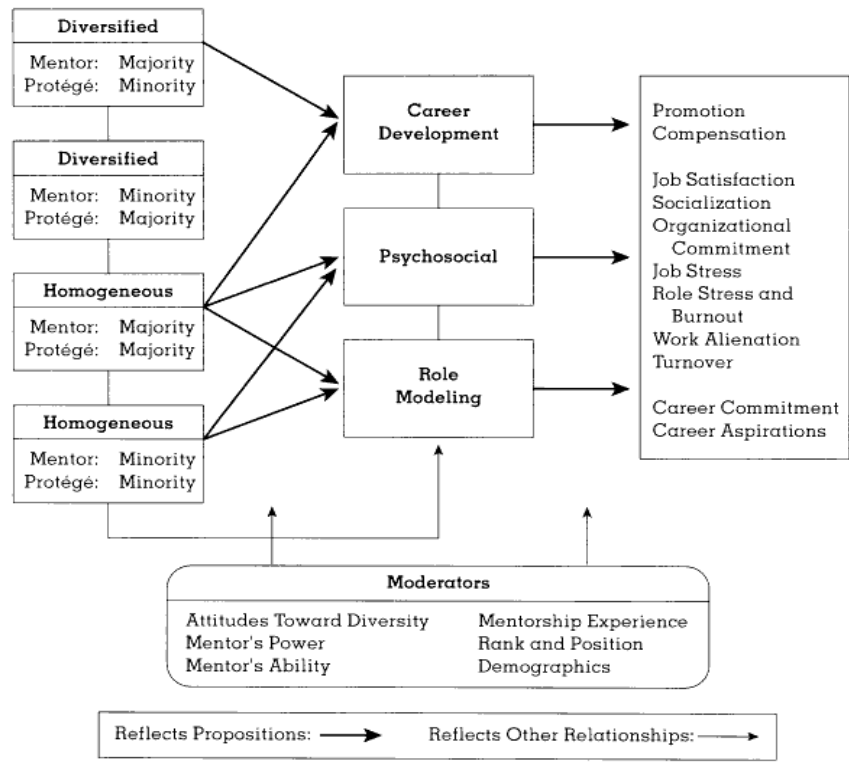
- 1) The composition of the relationship, for example, a majority mentor (White male) paired with a minority protégé (Black female) can identify the functionality and outcomes of the mentor and protégé for desired outcomes;
- 2) Less common is the pairing of a minority mentor and majority protégé. Minorities are less likely to have the power associated with their position than majority members of organizations and also have to develop different resources for power to obtain the same positional power;
- 3) The minority mentor typically starts out with less of a power base by virtue of his or her group membership;
- 4) Minority members' power bases are often more open to attack and therefore less plausible than majority counterparts; and
- 5) Minority members typically need to exert more effort to establish reputable power bases.

Furthermore, diversified relationships involving majority members and minority protégés provide substantially more career benefits than psychosocial functions (Ragins,1997). This study was grounded in a theoretical framework of diversified mentoring, particularly to employ the need for power in the developmental relationship that is often necessary to advance the Black woman's career.

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<sup>2</sup> In male-dominated organizations, this diversified mentoring relationship may involve a dyad composed of a majority mentor (White male) and a minority protégé (female or member of a minority group) (Ragins, 1997). Less common dyads would include a minority mentor with a majority protégé. The author cautions that diversified mentoring relationships are not intrinsically better or worse than those that are homogenous, since each has risks and advantages.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Composition of Relationship, Mentor Functions, and Protégé Outcomes**



<sup>3</sup> The protégé outcomes that are displayed in Figure 1 have all been empirically associated with the presence of a mentor.

**Figure 1 A Framework for Diversified Mentoring Relationships. Composition of Relationship, Mentor Functions, and Protégé Outcomes. Source: (Ragins, 1997).**

## Black Feminist Thought

### *Background of Standpoint Theory*

Standpoint theory has been defined and debated for several years, and refers to women's' unique standpoint in society that justifies the truth claims for feminist theory while providing a method with which to analyze reality (Hekman, 1997). It is posited as a way of conceptualizing from the vantage or standpoint of women's' lives. Winant (1987) further argues that this standpoint would "supply a shared discourse within which to theorize, strategize, argue, organize, and ultimately mobilize forces intent on bettering women's' situations" (p. 126).

Dorothy Smith, a sociologist at the University of Toronto and one of the original standpoint theorists, defends the theory within the framework of the integration of sociological concepts and practices that express social relations (1990). Smith contends further that an 'alternate' sociology construct is vital in order to provide women with the vehicle in which they can express the personal 'insiders' knowledge of their own experiences. This process of knowing will fill the gap between the 'insiders' knowledge and the 'objectified' knowledge produced by traditional sociological practices.

The premise that women need a definitive concept in which to position themselves in an epistemological manner, rather than a mere notion, provides the groundwork for the concepts of standpoint theory. Borrowing heavily from Marxism, standpoint feminists such as Hartsock (1983) assert that 'material life' structures and sets distinct limits to an understanding of social relations and that reality will be perceived differently as material situations differ. Hartsock continues to argue "that while the perception of the ruling group or dominant group is 'partial and perverse,' that of the oppressed group is not, in that it exposes 'real' relations among human beings, and thus is liberatory" (p. 343). Standpoint theory therefore encompasses several distinct interrelational discourses, which cross moral, political terrain as well as epistemological.



The whole notion of demystifying women's alienation within relationships, the workplace, and society in general is not a new phenomenon but was enlightened through the early progress of the feminist movement, notwithstanding a plethora of contradictions and adversities. The professional lives of most women are centered within a male-dominated society and particularly in the academy. In their book, *Women's Ways of Knowing*, the authors are diligent to argue that the silenced nature of women, particularly in academia, is due to the historical male-dominated culture resident there (Belenky et al., 1997). They contend, "*Silent* women have little awareness of their intellectual capabilities. They live – selfless and voiceless – at the behest of those around them...External authorities know the truth and are all-powerful" (Belenky et al., 1997, p.134).

#### *Standpoint Theory and Black Women*

Black women have their own self-defined standpoint – within their own unique experiences. At the onset of the feminist movement, Black women in all walks of life felt alienated yet again, particularly because each time a movement would spring up in society, they would be forgotten once again, particularly in the academy, where constructed knowledge and ideologies reside and flourish.

Although Black feminist ideologies typically focus on the consciousness of liberation, the outcomes for Black females result in the revelation of their persistent strength and resiliency to achieve and become a voice to be reckoned with in society. Even though there is diversity among Black feminist writers, certain premises remain constant. According to Guy-Sheftall (1995), Black women experience a special kind of oppression because of their dual racial and gender identities and their limited access to economic resources and as a result, this double jeopardy has meant that the problems, concerns, and needs of Black women are different in many ways from those of White women and Black men. The author argues that Black women's commitment to the liberation of

Blacks and women is profoundly rooted in their lived experiences and that they must struggle for both Black liberation and gender equality simultaneously.

Patricia Hill Collins, (1997), a leading Black feminist scholar, views standpoint theory as a purely interpretive framework, “dedicated to explicating how knowledge remains central to maintaining and changing unjust systems of power” (p. 375). Collins further argues that since the notion of standpoint theory is primarily based on group experiences, they actually transcend individual experiences. The theory of standpoint is based on a group perspective, one in which groups have shared histories which afford them power, based on their shared location. If this ideology is true, Black females who historically do not have a group perspective of shared power relations, require the benefit of mentoring relationships in order to achieve career success in senior administrative roles. The standpoint theory, relevant to Black women, places less emphasis on the individual than on those of the social conditions that construct the group. Collins (1997) maintains that true freedom occurs when individuals have rights of mobility in and out of groups. This premise would support the notion as to one of the reasons why the continued disparities exist for Black women administrators, who often do not experience the fluidity of movement within senior administrative positions in the academy.

Although the feminist theory of standpoint offers a platform on which to provide voice for the discrimination of women, the Black woman’s standpoint recognizes the vast problematic areas unique to Black women’s political and economic status. Taylor (1998) argues that although Black feminist theory may invoke uncomfortable discussion of racism often emanating from White women [and White men], scholars must continue in their quest to expose the injustices through knowledge in an effort to empower Black women to “create a humanistic community” (p. 251).

### *Beginnings of Black Feminist Thought*

The history and ideology of Black feminist thought is examined as a conceptualization of the social location of the Black female in relation to her career advancement and success. This construct provides a rich approach to the themes and concepts of Black feminist ideologies that shape the Black woman's identity and equip her to resist the negative marginality present in the academy. It allows the exploration of the experience of the Black female administrator viewed through the lens of Black feminist thought, in an effort to provide a clear understanding of her professional life. Etter-Lewis (1993) suggests that Black women, because of their dual membership in society, experience double discrimination. She argues, "The study and interpretation of Black women's lives typically has been subsumed under African American issues and women's issues. However, their unique experiences in history, language, and culture suggest otherwise. So what is true for African American men and White women is not invariably true for African American women" (p. xvi). Thus, the Black female must overcome multiple barriers, particularly in higher educational institutions, which are traditionally structured.

Black feminist thought is not a monolithic, static ideology, and as such there are varied opinions and stances among Black feminist scholars. However, it is agreed that the ideology had its early beginnings during the nineteenth century with Maria Stewart, a freed Black abolitionist and one of the first Black feminists in the United States to champion the utility of Black women's relationships by providing a community for Black women's activism and self-determination. As a self-proclaimed activist, she perpetuated the potential for Black women's activism as educators and advised them to "Turn your attention to knowledge and improvement; for knowledge is power" (Collins, 1986, p. 41). Stewart's core themes of this construct reveal an interweaving nature of race and gender oppression, her belief in Black womanhood with self-defined images, and her sensitivity

to the necessity of community leadership in an effort to affect the well-being of all Black women regardless of their status in society.

Several premises characterize what emerged during the 1960's as "Black feminism":

- 1) Black women experience a special kind of oppression, one that is both racist and sexist;
- 2) The "double jeopardy" meant that the concerns and needs of the Black woman are different than those of White women and Black men;
- 3) Black women struggle for both gender equality and Black liberation; and
- 4) Black women's unique struggles regarding racial and sexist politics and their marginalized status result have given them a particular view of world (Guy-Sheftall, 2003, p.176).

Hunter and Sellers (1998) suggest that Black feminist epistemology is grounded in the intellectual traditions, experiences, and identities of Black women, whose intersections of race and gender are key factors. The authors suggest that since race is a defining construct in American society, and entails the ethnicity, shared history and culture and a sense of 'peoplehood', it represents exposure to the structural inequality and indignities associated with racial discrimination. Black female administrators, in their approach to achieving success in the academy, face similar conditions as the authors described.

According to Collins (1991), three approaches define Black feminist thought. First, the framework is shaped and produced by Black women (although it may be documented by others); second, there are many commonalities of their experiences and perceptions shared as a group; and third, although commonalities exist, there are distinct differences and diversities (such as class, region, age, and sexual orientation).

Collins (1991) further presents Black feminist theory as an ideology necessary for Black women to validate their own self-definitions through alternate locations and epistemologies. Being Black and being female presents another set of issues and concerns with which the Black female must be concerned. Although race and gender are logically separate, they work together in the everyday lives of the Black female, whether one is elevated above the other or not. Valverde (2003) suggests that the double identity of the Black woman can result in being forced to reject her culture, feminism, or both for acceptance, which can result not in acceptance in society, but rather a “temporary inclusion and brief tolerance” (p. 103). Although progress has been slowly attained in the last several years, it remains that the inclusion of Black female professionals within the senior ranks of the academy is particularly difficult, primarily due to the dominance of White males. Fundamentally, the primary concern is defined as a power struggle, a struggle in which White males view the construct of power as non-accessible to others, and as Valverde (2003) argues, the less power they obtain and control, the weaker position they are in. To be clear, all White males are neither sexist nor racist; however, the academic environment remains traditional in this respect. Thus, African American females need to embrace strategies to withstand the sexism and racism displayed in their everyday lives.

Further examination of Black feminist thought reveals that although others have attempted to define and shape the Black woman’s identity, it is important that her self-valuation, self-definition, and knowledge validation replace any negative and stereotypical images. Collins (2000) asserts that this resiliency confirms the self-defined, group-defined Black women’s standpoint does exist, and more importantly that it has been essential to their survival.

Dillard (2006), in her book, *On Spiritual Strivings: Transforming an African American Woman’s Academic Life*, challenges current epistemological positioning by questioning where

African American women leaders' voices reside. She argues that there are patterns of epistemology that can support African American women in an effort to consciously decipher the patterns of leadership, both those situated within political nuances, and personal life.

Spirituality has been woven into the Black woman's life from early childhood, throughout her youth and into adulthood. Since this spiritual wealth has grounded her way of knowing, epistemologically, theories of Black feminist thought provide the 'weapons' necessary to combat racism and sexism faced in higher educational institutions. Dillard posits that African American women leaders can use their experiences of racism, sexism, and other oppressions to inform their leadership – toward positive discourses.

The attributes of self-consciousness, a strong sense of spirituality, determined examination and commitment to struggle, and the ability to incite change becomes a form of theorizing. Eighteenth century educator, Fannie Barrier Williams (1987) explained the fortitude of the Black woman during the height of racial repression as a resister possessing strong will, "As meanly as she is thought of, hindered as she is in all directions, she is always doing something of merit and credit that is not expected of her...she is insulted, but she holds up her head, she is scorned, but she proudly demands respect...the most interesting girl of this country is the colored girl" (p. 151). Thus, tenets of Black feminist thought become the channel whereby Black women can reflect, resist, and grow.

Guy-Sheffall (1986) defines Black feminist thought as the experience of Black women when both racial and gender oppression results in distinct needs and issues quite different than those of White women and Black men, and as such, they must continually struggle for equality. Several other Black feminist intellectuals and writers have created a voice for Black women to continue to build upon their resiliency and the need to establish a process of self-consciousness that empowers Black women to actualize a vision of community and collectivity.

The core frameworks of Ragins' diversified mentoring relationships and Black feminist thought provide the elements to situate this research. By using the theoretical rationale, this study proposes that as Ragins (1977) indicates, the racial and gender composition of the mentor for African American female administrators is critical when considering the element of power base needed for career advancement. Mentoring can provide significant benefits for African American female administrators in their pursuit of career advancement, however the positional power of the mentor is critical in the relationship. Ragins' (1997) purports that minority mentors typically hold less of a power base to advance careers and that this "image of power" in organizations often reflects the control and autonomy of the dominant group. This study will examine how relevant the race and gender of the mentor is in relation to positional power needed for the success of the relationship.

Since Black women, due to their dual membership in society, experience double discrimination, studying their mentoring experiences through the lens of Black feminist thought provides an opportunity to view their uniquenesses, while examining their successes and challenges during their career. Black feminist thought embraces the construct that Collins (2000) describes when Black women are placed in a complex 'outsider-within' social location, which depicts their status as that of possessing the knowledge and intellect to succeed, however not always succeeding. Collins (2000) cautions however, that despite this dilemma faced by Black women, they can however adopt a standpoint of self-definition, self-valuation, self-reliance, and independence in an effort to achieve. The elements of Black feminist thought coupled with mentoring can assist Black women in their career advancement and have profound implications on their success. It is critical to explore in this study how Black women engage strategies to circumvent barriers and also employ strategies to succeed in the academy through mentoring.

In conclusion, Ragins' (1997) diversified mentoring model, provides the framework in which

to identify the relevance of the mentor's race and gender in the mentoring relationship, particularly in relation to the power and influence necessary for career advancement. Also, the ideologies of Black feminist theory were applied to this study to examine the experiences of Black female administrators as they navigate the academy in pursuit of career advancement. The theoretical framework will undergird the examination of Black female administrators' perceptions of mentoring and their multiple identities of being Black and being female in the academy.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions guide this study:

1. How do African American female administrators in higher education institutions experience mentoring, specifically for their career advancement?
2. To what extent have mentoring relationships contributed to African American female administrators' perceptions of success?
3. To what extent, if any, does the race and gender of the mentor influence the mentoring relationships for African American female administrators' career advancement in the academy?
4. What effect do the constructs of negative marginality and creative marginality have on the experiences of African American female administrators in the academy?
5. To what extent does the restriction and limitation of power resources affect mentoring relationships for African American female administrators?



## **1.6 DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Since I employed sampling from the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education, I was limited as to the number of African American females who held senior positions in higher education. Also, the study was limited to those administrators within colleges and universities in Pennsylvania. Although I felt it desirable to include a greater sample size in the study, this did not adversely affect the results.

## **1.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Although all eleven of the senior administrators who were invited to participate in the study agreed to do so, their schedules were extremely busy; which at times delayed the interview process from occurring in a timely manner congruent with the research. Another limitation occurred due to my travel restraints, resulting in the necessity of three interviews to be conducted via telephone.

## **1.8 RESEARCHER'S VOICE AS A BLACK FEMALE PROFESSIONAL**

In elementary school, I received a leadership award, accompanied by a beautifully bound Webster dictionary, which I believe was the very beginning of my pursuit of education, leadership, and affecting social change. It was then the teacher told my mother I would someday become a leader. The end result of that statement would eventually take several years to come to fruition, but has continued its impact on my life. From that day to this, I believe God has placed a deep desire within

me to affect communities and others through education. Further, as an African American female, I feel education is the only genuine weapon with which to fight against the injustices and inequities encountered in life's journeys.

I began my doctoral work a few years ago at the point of my life where I was making a career change. From working in corporate sector, I moved into higher education administration. Having worked in several management positions in industry for many years, I was well aware that educated African American women, including myself, were faced with the ongoing struggles of advancing their careers, often filtered out of the decision making process and ultimately made to feel invisible in the workplace. This occurred during a time when although society deemed it a legal obligation to recruit and retain all categories of people into their companies, without respect to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, and disability, the exclusion of African American women still permeated the corporate environment.

When I began working in the university environment, I found that African American women were experiencing very similar circumstances within the "ivory tower" of the academy. Furthermore, I was aware that mentoring was a viable tool for professional women in both academe and business in their efforts to move ahead. I was fortunate to have had two mentors who played critical parts in my career success while I was working in industry. The research supports the notion that a mentor who provides career advancement will embrace distinct responsibilities within the relationship (Kram, 1983; 1988) and will also risk their positions to further the protégé. I experienced such a relationship with two influential people within the organization. At the time, my supervisor, an African American female, was very instrumental to alert me of the caveats of being thrust into a higher management position, encouraged me to pursue higher educational opportunities, and above all, to stay prepared. My other mentor who was pivotal in my career success was a White male senior-level director who

intentionally supported me, believed in me, and risked the political innuendos associated with what at that time was unheard of, for Black and White employees to collaborate on such an unequal professional level in the workplace. I fondly recall that both mentors played a critical role in my advancement, encouraged me to pursue my dreams, opened doors to key individuals in the corporation and opportunities, and took a serious interest in my future. Without these mentors, and the investment they made in my life, my career would not have catapulted as it did.

In the higher educational setting however, what was lacking in the literature seemed to be a focus on African American female administrators, who unlike students and faculty typically do not experience supportive measures for advancement in their careers. It was then I decided to investigate this dilemma in my research. A qualitative research design afforded me the opportunity to delve into the rich experiences of educated Black women who have achieved a level of success and have a story to tell.

Ladson-Billings (1997) succinctly depicts the African American researcher when she wrote:

I have come to understand that my African-ness does not diminish my American-ness and vice versa. My identity is not an either/or proposition. Rather, it is both/and. In the same way my scholarship and my personal/cultural life are not either/or propositions. I do scholarly work that both challenges and enhances my personal/cultural life. I live a personal/cultural life that challenges and enhances my scholarly work (pp. 52-70).

I feel that although African American women are pursuing and completing academic degrees, they are not yet fully visible within the senior ranks of administration in higher educational institutions. Thus, the focus of my doctoral work has become a passion for me, not only to add to the literature on mentoring, but to generate change in the academy as well. I feel this research study will provide substantive knowledge on the career advancement of African American female

administrators in higher educational institutions. As I wrote the dissertation, I was reminded that investigating the intersections of race and gender for the African American female is a necessary task, reflecting on the articulate words of Anna Julia Cooper, “Only the Black woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me” (Lemert 1998, p. 63). The double identity of the African American female requires her to build upon her strengths and challenge those weaknesses that may hinder her career advancement. Having a strong mentor to provide visibility, encouragement, and the necessary recommendations can be effective as a tool for African American women seeking advancement in higher education.

## **1.9 MENTORING IMPLICATIONS FOR BLACK FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS**

Mentoring has been viewed as a consistent method to assist in career advancement and is a critical component in workplace success (Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Kram (1988) describes mentors as individuals who possess advanced experience and knowledge and are committed to providing upward support and mobility to their protégés’ careers. A plethora of benefits exist for protégés, including receiving more promotions (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Scandura, 1992), acquiring higher incomes (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992; Dreher & Ash, 1990), and more mobility within the organization (Scandura, 1992), which gives credence to the importance of having a mentor.

Black females who hold administrative positions in higher educational institutions can clearly benefit from mentoring to advance their careers. Although mentoring relationships can take on various formats and produce different outcomes, they are critical to career advancement for organizations. Mentoring relationships that lead to career advancement can include opening doors

and creating significant opportunities for the protégés to move ahead in their careers. This can include bringing visibility and credit to protégés in an effort to expose their skills and potential to those influential persons in an organization.

Higher education has experienced a relatively long history of mentoring initiatives. Within the academy, however, whether mentoring takes place in formal programs or informal settings, it typically focuses on students and faculty. For example one of the most successful student-oriented formal mentoring initiatives in the United States is the Meyerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC, 2007). Although it focuses specifically on highly competent African-American students who aspire to become leading research scientists and engineers, the university believes it has a direct responsibility to enable students to achieve by providing the necessary support, motivation, advisement, and social capital with which to succeed (UMBC, 2007).

Faculty mentoring programs are promoted and strongly encouraged in an effort to improve the quality of academic life for junior and tenured female faculty and to offer valuable connectivity within the collegial environment. Many institutions promote these initiatives with successful outcomes to assist faculty with both professional and personal developmental opportunities through workshops, retreats, forums, and other venues.

The void however, exists for African American female administrators who are so often isolated and excluded from the mainstream and who aspire to hold middle and senior positions within the academy. Few, if any programs, formal or informal, exist in higher educational institutions which specifically focus on mentoring African American female administrators to advance their career, provide connectivity with key individuals, and offer strategies for promotability. This is where the intentionality of having a mentor becomes key to their career advancement.

## **1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMINOLOGY**

### **1.10.1 Mentor**

For the purpose of this study, the term “mentor”, although widely theorized and debated in literature, is defined as that of an experienced individual who acts within various roles in the mentoring relationship such as advisor, supporter, counselor, sponsor, and friend to the protégé. The mentor also takes risks for the protégé and maintains an investment in the protégé’s future. This definition, however, is not exhaustive.

### **1.10.2 Protégé**

Protégé describes the individual as less experienced, who either chooses or has been selected to participate in the developmental relationship by the mentor/sponsor for advice, support, guidance, and assistance in career advancement.

### **1.10.3 Black and African American**

Both the terms “Black” and “African American” will be used to reference the race of the female administrators in the study. Much of the current literature uses the terms interchangeably, (e.g., statistical data reference “Black”, whereas scholarly literature may use both terms, “Black” and “African American”).

#### **1.10.4 African American Female Administrators**

For purposes of this study, African American female administrators include those holding a title of dean and above within their respective higher education institutions.

#### **1.10.5 Social Construct**

A term used to denote ways of perceiving, understanding, and often predicting how we think about social interactions and social environment. These thoughts and ways are not fixed, but can be fluid and not static, often dependent upon an individual's social location. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, *The Penguin Dictionary of Psychology*, 1995).

#### **1.10.6 Negative Marginality**

Patitu and Hinton (2004, p. 82) describe the construct of marginality as “any issue, situation, or circumstance that has placed these women outside of the flow of power and influence within their institutions”, as they referenced Black women. The notion of negative marginality becomes problematic and can result in placing the African American female in a state of invisibility, isolation, and exclusion.

#### **1.10.7 Creative Marginality**

The construct of creative marginality can be construed as a positive attribute for the African American female, one in which she is fortified by her confidence, resilience, and survival strategies

to move with freedom throughout the dominant mainstream. From Alfred's (2001) perspective, she purports that because of the "privilege of knowing, watching, seeing, and learning that our marginality affords us, we should use that state of marginality to produce new and positive knowledge about the Black experience" (p. 60).

### **1.10.8 Standpoint Theory**

Standpoint theory posits feminism as a way of conceptualizing thought from the vantage of women's lives (Hennessy, 1993). It involves a strategy to solicit women's perspectives of the construction of knowledge that can shape the structures of power, work, and wealth, including consciousness-raising and the critical exchange of information for women's issues.

### **1.10.9 Black Feminist Thought**

Black feminist thought proposes the stance that some Black women embrace to bring awareness to their dual status of identity. It encompasses the multiplicity and complexity of the experiences of their race and gender in reference to their own worldview and perceptions, and also how others perceive them.

### **1.10.10 Summary**

Research has shown that mentoring relationships are significant determinants in career success and advancement (Thomas, 1990; Kanter, 1977; Kram, 1988). African American females are achieving graduate and terminal degrees at an increased rate and although they possess the necessary



credentials to climb the higher education ladder as middle- and senior-level administrators, their mobility is being stunted. This study will be significant in an effort to identify the perceptions of mentoring relationships which specifically enhance career advancement, as well as identify the obstacles which hinder their success.

The theoretical framework for this study includes Ragins' (1997) model of diversified mentoring, reviewing the impact of power in the mentoring relationship. The study will also be viewed through the lens of Black feminist thought to shape the dual identities and experiences of the Black female.

## **2.0 SECOND CHAPTER**

### **2.1 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

This chapter will explore current literature on the history of mentoring; sponsorship, which is an element of mentoring specific to career advancement; the history of African American female administrators; racism and sexism challenges; and mentoring implications for African American females. The review of literature will also include the construct and meaning of marginality as it refers to the African American experience and the status of African American female administrators in the twenty-first century.

### **2.2 HISTORY OF BLACK FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS**

A rich history of the unique experiences of Black women in higher education administration provides further examination of their voice. (Welch, 1990; Farmer & Farmer, 1993; Howard-Vital, 1989). Historically, these women came from working-class and middle-class roots, some were Southern, others from the North. The commonality they shared was their quest for education, and more importantly, was to give back to others who would follow them, and to build a rich legacy. Clearly, the Black female's self-perception denotes confidence, talent, assurance, resilience, and tenacity to achieve:

True, I am a woman, and I am Black. I ask you to take a painful journey with me. The waters are high and the treasures are buried deep. What are these precious treasures that I long to find and labor for in the walls of the ivory institutions? They are the forgotten achievements of Black women. When I find them, where will I place them; back in stacks of forgotten records, or will they be placed on a shelf where explorers such as I can easily capture the beauty of the Black woman's experience in higher education? (Payton, 1981, p. 223)

The early Black women leaders were significant in part because they developed social networks through their church, family structure, and community. They became pioneers in the relevancy of education and social justice. Regarding social activism, Black women proudly embraced their struggle for liberation from an oppressive society. Allen (1995) notes that "Black female leadership in the United States is a history of their struggle for liberation from oppression. It is a history of collective struggle to maintain cultural traditions in the black community" (p. 60).

Similarly, their passion for education took on a communal role as well. In their research of the history of early Black women educational leaders, Smith and Smith (1992) discovered that Milla Gensen, a Black teacher, held clandestine classes in a school for slaves in Louisiana. It was there that the matriarchal society of Black educational administrators began. Catherine Ferguson opened one of the first schools for poor children in New York City in 1793, and Ann Marie Becraft began the first seminary boarding school in 1805 for Black teenage girls in Washington, DC (Smith & Smith, 1992). These early Black women leaders began a long-standing tradition of mending a fragmented culture in their efforts to rebuild their people through education. (Grimes, 2005). Although relatively unknown, these Black women demanded justice not only for themselves, but for their race and the

greater society.

Although the male peers of their day were making strides, the literature does not always give due justice to the contributions of the strong, educated Black women who resisted, risked, and sacrificed so much to become effective not only for themselves, but for their race. Historically, Black female administrators have also enjoyed a rich tradition of leadership in academe including Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McCleod Bethune, Lucy Diggs Slowe, among others. The dual status of being Black and being female was articulated early in history by Anna Julia Cooper (1858-1964), who spent her life as an educator, earned a Ph.D. at retirement, and established Frelinghuysen University in Washington DC, an evening college for employed adults, later serving as its President. Cooper pioneered and envisioned what is now commonly known as the community college (Keller, 1999). Although she was a visionary who established a higher education institution that offered vocational and lifelong learning opportunities for adults, Cooper also strongly believed in women's inclusion, equal opportunity, and human rights for society. She became a trailblazer in her quest to bring awareness to the dilemma of race, gender, and social justice issues.

In an excerpt from her book, *A Voice from the South*, she posits:

The colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. In a period of itself transitional and unsettled, her status seems one of the least ascertainable and definitive of all the forces which make for our civilization. She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both (Cooper, 1988, p. 573).

Cooper was a strong proponent of racial uplift, an ideology which defined the emphasis on social uplift perpetuated by educated nineteenth-century women and grew out of the recognition by Cooper and other educated Black women of their dedication in becoming advocates for the masses of

disadvantaged Black women of their day. The National Association of Colored Women was established during this time and the women embraced the motto of “Lifting As We Climb,” in a effort to promote the need for social justice and advocacy for all Black people. Even though founded by Black women, Cooper felt the organization would be strongest and most effective to position themselves as an advocate for the entire Black race, both rich and poor. She writes, “Only the Black woman can say when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood...then and there the whole Negro race enters with me” (Cooper, 1988, p. xxix).

Cooper was sound in her support of elevating the Black woman through education and enlightenment to the societal injustices of the era. Although Black feminism had not yet appeared during the nineteenth century, it was clear that Cooper held to the undisputed dignity of her womanhood, voicing her recognition of racial progress and social reform, achieved through education.

Another notable Black female was Mary McCleod Bethune, who founded Bethune-Cookman College in 1904 and was not only an educator, but later became a federal administrator in the District of Columbia (Tyson, 2002). Lesser-known, yet strong contributors and activists for Black female educators were Lucy Diggs Slowe, Fannie Jackson Coppin, and Artemisia Bowden.

Lucy Diggs Slowe was a powerful figure in the history of educated Black females who became trailblazers for their people through education. Slowe was the first Black women dean at Howard University in Washington, DC from 1922-1937 (Perkins, 1996). She made enormous contributions both in the field of higher education and to the Black race and became an outspoken advocate for Black females in regard to their self-determination, their pride, and their educational advancement, in an effort to empower them and strategize their place in society.

Fannie Jackson Coppin made several educational innovations, such as the founding of a

school for industrial arts, and later pioneered the establishment of Tuskegee Institute. Coppin, felt that her success would be attributable for the whole race, and she would not fail in her educational pursuits for Black people because of barriers she faced (Lerner, 1973). Artemisia Bowden was president of St. Philip's College and the first woman in Texas to head a college (Winegarten & Kahn, 1997).

These Black female educators, among others, have left a rich legacy in paving the way for contemporary women who pursue higher education administration. However, although Black females have blazed the trail in higher education in the past, most recent data, as mentioned previously, are not impressive. The majority of Black women administrators hold positions generally concentrated at the lower administrative levels (below dean) (NCES, 2003). It is questionable that the twenty-first century and beyond will enjoy the rich legacy of the Black female trailblazers of the past decades, unless significant strides are made.

### **2.3 HISTORY OF MENTORING**

The literature draws upon a wide range of scholarly research on mentoring and its antecedents. The construct of mentoring is multidimensional in that it takes on several forms, concepts, and roles. Historically, the term 'mentor' has taken on a variety of meanings and connotations throughout the literature. Terms such as Greek god, coach, teacher, guide, pathfinder, leader, pilot, advisor, supporter, counselor, sponsor, caretaker, and friend have been used to describe one as a 'mentor'. Perhaps the best well-known historical account is found in Homer's classic epic, *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus, leaving for battle, asked his female friend, Athena, the goddess of wisdom, to take on the male form of Mentor to watch and guide his son Telemachus. Mentor was charged with advising and

serving as guardian to the entire royal household and had the added responsibility of being a father figure, teacher, role model, approachable counselor, trusted adviser, and encourager (Carruthers, 1993).

Several concepts have since been derived, often to suit the situation and expectation of the mentoring relationship. Mentoring is also recognized as a process by which a wise and helpful guide or advisor uses experience to show a person, the protégé, how to avoid mistakes the mentor made earlier in his career or otherwise help advance the individual in her career. The original perception of a mentor was a protector, which explains the use of the medieval term, “protégé,” literally, the “protected one,” to describe the mentee; however, this is not intended to suggest a mentor always needs to be older than the mentee or protégé (Hardcastle, 1988).

Mentoring is a widely complex term and as a result, suggests a problem in defining the term and its subsets. The literature on mentoring lacks any one comprehensive, yet functional, direction (Bogat & Rednar, 1985; Healy, 1997). Throughout the literature, the emphasis is placed on the strength of the ‘relationship’ of the mentoring process. Caffarella (1992) defined mentoring as an “intense caring” relationship in which individuals with more experience work with less experienced persons to promote both professional and personal development. Other metaphors of a mentor include one who Daloz (1986) expresses as a guide who “leads us along the journey of our lives...they embody our hopes, cast light on the way ahead, interpret arcane signs, warn us of lurking dangers, and point out unexpected delights along the way” (p.17). Thus, the term mentoring has multiple connotations, whether poetic or not. Daloz’s interpretation would depict the mentor as a trusted guide, which in the case of Black women, would provide a means of necessary support.

During the late 1970’s Daniel Levinson, renown psychologist from Yale University, suggested the mentor relationship as one of the most “complex and developmentally important, a man

can have in early adulthood” (Levinson et al., 1978, p.97). Levinson, in studying the adult development of 40 men, found that the mentor relationship was essential in determining both personal and professional success. The mentor, according to Levinson is:

Ordinarily several years older [than the protégé], a person of great experience and seniority in the world the young man is entering. (p. 97)

He further defines the functions of a mentor as:

A teacher...to enhance the young man’s skills and intellectual development. Serving as sponsor, he may use his influence to facilitate the young man’s entry and advancement. He may be a host and guide, welcoming the initiate into a new occupational and social world and acquainting him with its values, customs, resources and cast of characters. The mentor has another function, and this is developmentally the most crucial one: to support and facilitate the *Realization of the Dream*. (p. 98)

This ‘*Realization of the Dream*’ as depicted by Levinson et al. (1978) meant that the true mentor takes on the responsibility and commitment of fostering the protégé’s development by believing in him; sharing his dream; offering his blessing upon the protégé; and creating a space in which the protégé can emerge to define his dream.

It is only within the last three decades that mentoring and sponsoring has been integrated into a woman’s life cycle, since the majority of the research has focused on White males. Gail Sheehy popularized the term several years ago (Sheehy, 1976) when she published, “The Mentor Connection: The Secret Link in the Successful Woman’s Life”, at a time when mentors became a popular topic. Although the importance of mentoring was central to the works of Levinson et al. (1978) and Erickson (1963), it was traditionally described as paternalistic, since men were the participants of the



studies. The mobility experienced by women in an organization can be influenced by mentoring relationships and building networks since the mentor's advocacy becomes an asset for the protégé (Salaria & Rychener, 2002).

Since mentoring is a developmental relationship, the probable question may resonate as to whether gender plays a prominent role. Higher education has typically remained a male-dominated environment, and the numbers are ever so slowly increasing for the entrance of both Black females and White females. Levinson et al. (1978) suggest that in the work setting, a woman typically holds lower rankings, both professionally and socially than the male and advancement to the male's position may be closed to her. By 1981, however, the initial burst of interest in the field of mentoring had diluted. An unresolved issue remained, how to assure that attention was paid so that women received the same quality and quantity of mentoring as did men. The voices and experiences of Black women, however, often remain silenced in scholarly literature. Mentoring plays a major part of the Black female's experience and success, affecting her professional life in the academy, and although the literature is slowly expanding on breaking the silence and embracing the voice of African American women in higher education, there still remains a dearth of knowledge regarding their rich history, legacy, and contributions to society.

## **2.4 SPONSORSHIP – ITS CONCEPTS AND ELUSIVENESS**

Developmental relationships are those that provide needed support for the enhancement of an individual's career development and organizational experience and that, according to Thomas (1990), define a relationship in which "both parties have knowledge of one another and from which both may potentially benefit" (p. 480). The developmental relationships of both mentoring and sponsorship

and their interpretations of the concepts contain a wide range of meanings, which becomes problematic in providing clarity. The field of research on mentoring, however, has progressed to the point of referring to mentors who provided ‘career functions,’ rather than use the term ‘sponsors’ (Ragins, personal communication, February 8, 2007).

The literature on mentoring and its subsets lacks any one comprehensive, yet functional, direction (Bogat & Rednar, 1985; Healy, 1997), and as such, the term ‘sponsorship’ has several implications in the body of scholarly literature. Although a myriad of developmental relationships, including mentoring, sponsorship, role-modeling, coaching, supporting, among others have filled the literature over the last four decades, ambiguity remains in providing clear definitions to the terms.

As Speizer (1981) strongly suggests, scholars need to collaborate in an effort to establish accepted definitions for each concept. The author insists this collaboration must come about by first formulating the roots of the concepts, then and most important, scholars need to conduct methodologically sound research in an effort to provide solid validity for the various concepts. This approach will afford the concepts be considered proven rather than suggestive. Welch (1993) continues the discourse as she writes of the lack of clarity and uniform agreement concerning mentoring relationships, specifically:

- a) The roles a person must assume for the relationship to be identified as mentoring;
- b) The difference between a mentor and a sponsor;
- c) How a mentor normally selects a protégé; and
- d) Whether mentoring occurs differently and with different results for women and minorities. (p. 3)

Sponsorship is, however, a type of mentoring which enhances the career advancement for the protégé, described by Kram (1988) as a developmental relationship that provides a series of functions including: sponsoring promotions and lateral moves (sponsorship); elevating the protégé's visibility (exposure-and-visibility); assisting the protégé in navigating the organization (coaching); shielding the protégé from adverse forces and intervening for her (protection); and providing challenging assignments and support (challenging assignments). These functions are not inclusive since the range within the relationship varies, and depends upon several variables, such as gender, race, work environment, perception, and need of both the mentor and protégé.

The following detailed descriptions of sponsorship, as defined in the literature, will provide a commonality of thoughts surrounding this developmental relationship, so often misunderstood. The first and most well known definition of sponsorship comes from the body of work initiated by Kram (1988) as a component of career functions, those aspects of the relationship that enhance learning the ropes and preparing for advancement in the organization. According to Kram's view, career functions are those aspects of a developmental relationship that enhance advancement in an organization. Kram (1988) suggests the role of a sponsor as the involvement of actively nominating an individual for desirable lateral moves and promotions. Kram (1988) posits that the upward movement within an organization depends on the amount of visibility concerning the potential and competence of the individual and how aggressive it is communicated. According to Kram, sponsorship relationships have several descriptors for both the sponsor and the protégé including; 1) identifies the characteristics and roles of the sponsor which can contribute to the protégé's career advancement, which includes nominating the protégé for advanced positions; 2) identifies the potential risks of the sponsor, including possible loss of their credibility if the protégé fails in the endeavor; 3) provides the potential benefits for the sponsor, such as perceptions of the sponsor having

plausible judgment in mentoring the protégé; 4) identifies the potential risks for the protégé such as, if a sponsor leaves the organization, the protégé's career may suffer, and 5) depicts potential benefits for the protégé, such as accelerated advancement in the organization and opportunity to establish significant relationships to prove their credibility (see Table 6).

Kram (1988) advises that without sponsorship, an individual may well likely be overlooked for promotion regardless of potential and ability. The construct of sponsorship is a high-risk strategy for both the sponsor and protégé's career in most organizations and must be carefully monitored for effectiveness.

**Table 6 Characteristics of Sponsorship, Derived from Kram (1988)**

Characteristics and Role of the Sponsor	Potential Risks and Benefits for the Sponsor	Potential Risks and Benefits for the Protégé
<p><u>Characteristics</u></p> <p>Provides public support</p> <p>Actively nominates the protégé</p> <p>Provides opportunities for advancement</p> <p>Operates within one-on-one conversations as well as in formal decision-making meetings</p> <p>Creates connections with those senior-level individuals who participate in promotion decisions</p> <p>Offers challenging assignments for the protégé</p> <p>Creates a space for the competitive nature of advancement to be navigated</p>	<p><u>Risks</u></p> <p>If the protégé fails, in a challenging assignments responsibility, the sponsor’s credibility may be questioned</p> <p>Others may question to what extent the protégé can thrive and succeed on his or her own without the sponsor’s support</p> <p>May be viewed as exhibiting favoritism in supporting friends and others</p> <p>May be challenged that the best interest of the organization was not at hand</p> <p><u>Benefits</u></p> <p>Through successfully sponsoring a protégé, senior management views the sponsor as having great judgment</p> <p>Credibility is enhanced in the organization</p> <p>Sponsorship recipients may reciprocate the supportive relationships to others</p>	<p><u>Risks</u></p> <p>If a sponsor leaves the organization, the protégé’s career may suffer</p> <p>Since sponsorship depends on interpersonal and political processes, the more who favor the individual, the more successful the relationship will be</p> <p>Questions about favoritism may be raised, which can cause doubts about the protégé’s merit and competence</p> <p><u>Benefits</u></p> <p>Accelerated advancement in the organization</p> <p>Opportunity to prove credibility and performance</p> <p>Exposure and visibility to significant senior administration</p> <p>Opportunity to develop significant relationships for future opportunities</p>

Kanter (1977) offers a description of sponsorship as being a critical conduit to accumulating power within an organization and describes three roles of the sponsor. These include the sponsor as one in a position to *fight* for the protégé, stand up for him or her in meetings if controversy arises, and to promote them for promising opportunities. Second, sponsors often provide the opportunity for entry-level employees to *bypass the hierarchy* in an effort to cut the red tape often perceived as obstacles for advancement. Third, sponsors can provide what Kanter describes as *reflected power*, which indicates to others that the protégé has the backing and influence of the sponsor and their resources.

Jeruchim and Shapiro (1992) suggest that sponsors generally have power within the organization and use the power to publicly support the protégé, put them in the limelight, place his name on a task force or committee or introduce him to influential people. A mentor, as defined by Unger and Crawford (1996) serves as the protégé's advocate in public forums and helps him or her to navigate the department and the university's political environment. Thomas (1990) asserts that the mentor "takes an active interest and concerted action to advance the protégé's career" (p. 479). Fagenson's (1989) study of mentoring found protégés with mentors had more power in the organization than those without mentors. Maack and Passet (1993) allude that a mentor is a senior person in the field who "actively works for your advancement" (p. 117). The mentors may not necessarily be the supervisors or bosses in the workplace, according to Dreher and Cox (1996), however, they are senior persons who are actively interested in developing a person's career. Gaskill (1990) reiterates this position and suggests the mentor be the individual who is more experienced and higher ranking and has assisted in career advancement beyond typical supervisory guidance. Ragins and Cotton (1991) contend that the relationship must involve a high-ranking influential member of the organization who has the advanced expertise and knowledge of the organization to assist in the

protégé's upward mobility and career support. Further, mentoring and sponsorship have been widely determined to be essential in the successful advancement of professional careers (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Kram, 1983; Noe, 1988; Merriman, 1983; O'Leary & Mitchell, 1990).

In conclusion, although the concept of mentoring remains elusive and not succinctly defined, the aforementioned authors agree that the mentoring relationship must be intentional and thoughtfully strategized for a successful outcome. It is critical that the mentoring relationship include honesty and trust and that the mentor have a vested interest in the protégé's success.

## **2.5 MENTORING IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF BLACK FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS**

Career tracks, or the series of positions an individual holds in the institution, are of utmost importance for all females in higher education, including African American females. Movement is often slow and women do not necessarily navigate easily from one position to another. Job requirements and credentials can be so distinctive within a track that even lateral mobility is difficult. Another dilemma facing women, and specifically Black women, is that they seem to be able to build careers in some tracks more easily than others. Moore (1983) suggests student personnel often appears to be quite hospitable to women and minorities, while others, such as academic affairs, have little or no representation from these groups. Thus, they can become trapped in positions, limiting their career mobility substantially.

Tyson (2002) argues that Black women administrators are frequently at the bottom of the hierarchy, holding service-oriented assignments such as the 'assistant to', special assistant to the president or provost, director of minority affairs, affirmative action and compliance officer, human

resources manager, and student affairs administrator. These roles are often not defined, budgets are minimal, and autonomy remains limited.

In his excerpt, “The Peculiar Status of Black Administrators in Educational Institutions,” Smith (1981) argues that most administrators in higher education institutions are classified on the basis of their role and position in the administrative structure, such as line or staff. He defines line officers as managers with administrative authority and direct responsibility for personnel, budgets, and programs related to major university goals and who also hold significant influence, power, and authority within the institution. Staff officers, on the other hand, occupy positions outside the administrative hierarchy and as such, their power and authority is merely based on the knowledge they transfer and their ability to influence those line officers to see the value of their recommendations. He suggests that Black administrators are usually hired as staff rather than line officers and function in consultant, rather than decision-making roles. This is not always the situation; however, it does hold true within many institutions as the norm.

Tyson (2002) insists that unless these women have access to support systems, networks, and mentoring relationships, they remain stifled in their pursuit of career aspirations. Carroll (1982) argues that within the power ladder in academe, the White woman is viewed as to be positioned “two steps removed from the power, but the Black woman is three steps removed” (p. 124-5). Institutions of higher learning have traditionally encouraged White male-dominance in senior administrative posts. Next are White women and Black men, leaving Black women at the bottom rung without the strategies in place to climb the ladder of promotion and upward mobility within their profession.

Is the Black woman’s career success indeed being aborted in the academy, and more importantly, what strategies exist to alleviate the disparity? In their book *Coloring Outside the Lines*,



Mary Gardiner, Ernestine Enomoto, and Margaret Grogan (2000) take a critical look at women who have historically been marginalized within the school leadership environment in an effort to identify the benefits of mentoring relationships. Their empirical study was conducted with fifty-one women administrators who participated in in-depth interviews. Among other inquiries, the researchers set out to discover if mentoring is a gendered and racialized praxis. Although their study was conducted with women holding educational leadership positions, the data collected are beneficial to women in higher education administration. The dataset included fourteen African American women from three states (Washington, Virginia, and Maryland) who described their mentoring relationships. Several challenges and insights arose from the study's analysis, including issues of race and gender and securing mentors whose race and gender were the same as they were. Regarding race and gender concerns, many of the respondents spoke of viewing themselves first as African American, then as female. Several echoed similar sentiments regarding the double jeopardy status they carry which often accompanies the lack of support often needed. For the most part, respondents desired and sought out mentors who were similar to themselves in race and gender. They felt there would be an added opportunity to participate in more in-depth communication, a common dialect, a greater affinity and a desire for role models, if the mentor were similar to themselves. The researchers concluded that race often compounds gender, resulting in a double plague for women of color to seek leadership positions, which can present significant barriers and challenges and slowly erode their sense of self to achieve further career success.

Johnsrud (1991) argues that although women have experienced a modest gain in access to senior-level positions in higher educational institutions, their increased access has not necessarily assured equity. She insists that "achieving equity for women within higher education organizations depends upon parity in career advancement" (p. 120). Parity is indeed an enormous obstacle faced by

Black women in higher education.

Bridges (1996) conducted a study using a sample population of Black college administrators from seventy land-grant institutions to determine their characteristics and perceptions regarding the importance of personal characteristics and career activities leading to career achievement. The study's findings, which also yielded a composite member profile of the group, revealed that mentoring relationships played a critical role in the professional development and career achievement of Black college administrators. The survey included 24 percent females and 76 percent males; 54 percent had a mentor who provided advice; 80 percent had a male mentor; 51 percent felt that mentoring was critical to his or her career achievement; and 86 percent had served as a mentor for other Blacks. Bridges' recommendations included that Black administrators need to identify key individuals in their institution to serve as their mentors for career advice and that suggests that Black administrators currently holding administrative positions should support other Blacks' success. Although this study did not provide data on specific male and female responses, it is clear that Black administrators are in need of mentoring relationships for career advancement.

Black females undoubtedly need mentors who will advance their careers; however, the literature strongly suggest a substantial shortage of sponsors to support their needs. Blake (1999) conducted a study in 1992 with Black female professionals and discovered that a prominent theme emerged regarding a general lack of Black role models to serve as mentors. Furthermore, Black females, when seeking a mentor, will often do so for what Kram (1988) signifies as psychosocial functions (e.g., interpersonal bonds, friendship, counseling, confirmation, etc). In a study conducted by Thomas and Hollenshead (2001), findings revealed that one area in which women of color in academia in general were sorely lacking was that of access to career support from a mentor. Their results also affirmed the view that when mentoring did occur, it was more likely to be a collectivist,

peer approach as opposed to the one-on-one sponsor/protégé model which many White male academics have traditionally experienced.

### **2.5.1 The Social Construct of Power and African American Females**

The perspectives of the construct of power are complex as well as varied. More significant is the effect of power in the African American female experience, particularly in the academy. In this discussion of sponsorship relationships, the construct of power can have instrumental effect on the career advancement of the African American female. Micro-organizational views of power are both dyadic and reciprocal in process (Dansereau, Graen, & Hagg, 1975) and include the individual's ability to influence others (House, 1988). The macro-organizational perspective, in stark contrast, views power as being the property of the position and the organization. It involves control over the employee, information, and resources within the organization (Hinnings, Hickson, Pennings, & Schneck, 1974; Pfeffer, 1981). It is critical to note the implication, influence, and level of power that the sponsor can offer to advance the protégé's career.

How does the African American female, often plagued by gender and race biases, secure this influential *power* position to achieve career advancement? Do mentors hold the key to her successful career advancement? Does gender and race play a role in her mentoring relationships? These are troublesome concerns that burden the African American female. Although these outcomes may be critical, in particular for measuring career advancement, there are drawbacks. Johnson (1998) argues that African American women should mentor one another, primarily since they bring a sensitivity and awareness to build relationships and increase communication with the dominant culture within the academy. She cautions that cross-gender and cross-race developmental relationships are the most difficult to sustain, in which to create connectivity and commonalities and warns that combative

behaviors can arise. However, it becomes problematic when African American females discover a substantial shortage of African American sponsors, male or female, to advance their careers. Additionally, although diversified relationships involving majority mentors and minority protégés provide career development functions, they may be limited in the provision of psychosocial functions. This may in fact be advantageous for the African American female, who finds it easier to seek a mentor for psychosocial functions among peers, community, church, and social events.

Thomas (1990) reported that Black and White managers in business within same-race mentoring relationships, regardless of gender, were found to provide significantly more psychosocial support than in those of cross-race relationships. The influence and power of the mentor is a necessary factor to advance a protégé's career, thus whoever holds the power would be most critical to the relationship. This being the case, it remains questionable as to whether Black women should seek other Black women to provide the role of mentoring for career advancement.

Tillman (2001) reported that both mentors and protégés placed more importance on career functions than on psychosocial functions. Her study, using the snowball approach with a small purposeful sample of Black faculty at two predominantly White institutions, suggests among other findings that protégés felt that they benefited more from the number of career functions than from the total number of career and psychosocial functions and that protégés in the study deliberately separated their professional and personal/cultural relationship with their mentors, particularly when the mentor was White. Additionally, when the mentor chosen was White, this in fact limited the range of functions available for the protégé, and of critical importance, it was found that the "one size fits all" view of mentoring was seriously flawed (Tillman, 2001).

Jeruchim & Shapiro (1992) recommend Black women should have two mentors, each with a different function (e.g., a powerful White male mentor to help advance her career and a Black

mentor, preferably female, to identify with and to provide support in struggling with the White workplace). The Black female mentor could help her developmentally, while the White male mentor's sponsorship could assist in gaining power, provide significant career opportunities, and perhaps combat discrimination in the workplace. Mentors are particularly important for Black females since they can increase her visibility within the organization. Thomas (1990), in his study on the impact of race on managers' experiences of gaining mentoring and sponsorship, found that "Blacks are frequently on the periphery of the information and social networks which emerge naturally in organizations" (p. 482).

In a study conducted by Adkison (1981), it was found that when men do sponsor women in school administration, they usually select women who are passive and nonthreatening or at least those capable of appearing to be passive. The interviews revealed that the women who were indeed successful in gaining administrative positions were those who simply learned to stay quiet and wait. Allen, Jacobson and Lomotey (1995) studied Black school administrators to identify the importance of mentors and sponsors and found that mentors were viewed by respondents as helpful but not essential, whereas relationships with sponsors were viewed as the most critical relationships to be formed for their career advancement. The majority of these studies, however, did not report the race and gender of the sponsors. Although previous research has focused on women and minority administrators within higher education, the presence and career development for Black women administrators in the academy have not been widely documented (Tyson, 2002).

A caveat exists since mentors can often become risk-takers within their own positions and reputations in their approach to mentoring. If the relationship falters, the sponsor may lose credibility, reputation, and influence within the organization. The protégé, in a failed relationship may jeopardize future opportunities, experience feelings of disappointment and stalled career

advancement.

Kanter (1977) considers sponsors as those individuals described as mentors and advocates who hold senior positions in the organization. Additionally, she suggests they perform three critical functions in the developmental process: first, they fight for and stand up for the individual in question, often providing support for their promotional mobility; second, sponsors are enabled to provide protégés the opportunity to bypass the hierarchy of the organization in an intended effort to cut the red tape of upward movement; and lastly, the sponsor can provide *reflected power*. The concept of *reflected power*, Kanter says, is such that the sponsorship element will indicate to others that the individual in question has the support of an influential person and, more importantly, that the sponsor's resources are available to the individual. A caveat of the *reflected power* concept may indeed lie in the perception of the protégé becoming too dependent within the relationship and therefore weakening his stance, and also it may be difficult for the protégé to live up to the high expectations of the sponsor.

Sponsorship can involve actively nominating an individual for both lateral moves and promotions, often taking place with one-on-one conversations, referrals, as well as in formal decision-making meetings. Frequently the informal setting of sponsorship can yield successful results for career advancement for the individual. Kanter (1977) suggests that the informal social network that often pervades organizations, can be critical to career advancement; however she cautions that it is critical that they are long-term and stable relationships for effectiveness.

For Black females, mentorship is even more necessary and advantageous, primarily since they are typically lower on the academic hierarchy rankings, present substantially less numbers within senior academic positions, and have less opportunities to acquire sponsors (Tyson, 2002). Sponsors and mentors who have traditionally been White males have tended to promote other White males, and

as such, the Black female experiences an internal barrier against career advancement. The successful mobility for women has been linked to their acquiring sponsors or mentors, thus it appears to be a critical component in their careers. (Poll, 1978). Allen (1995) also proposes Black women may indeed be the individuals most in need of a mentor or sponsor for career advancement.

### **2.5.2 The Social Construct of Success and Black Females**

“Success in academia depends not only on what you know but also who you know for support, guidance, and advocacy” (Christiansen et al., 1989, p. 58). For African American female administrators, this success may indeed be defined differently. Although there is a marked underrepresentation of African American women in senior-level administration, she may view success in different ways.

Wayne et al. (1998) posits that there are two distinct definitions of the construct of success:

- a) *objective career success*, which includes observable career achievements that can be measured, such as pay and promotion rates, and
- b) *subjective career success*, which includes an individual’s feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with his or her career. (p. 579)

In their study of Black female administrators, Crawford & Smith (2005) described thematic characteristics of the participants as those individuals who were strongly tied to their community, and felt a strong allegiance to their families and friends, which had a profound effect in their sense of career, self-actualization, and overall perception of their life courses. Their success was often defined in making their families, parents, and friends proud of whatever their accomplishments may have been. One respondent recalled:

My parents were role models. My father taught and pastured a church...and my

mother was a professional secretary. This was very influential in helping me understand how one works and keeps it together. My mother was an organized person who taught us how to survive in the black community and the white community. (p. 60)

Smith (1982) argues, in reporting the accomplishments of several Black female administrators, that despite the barriers and obstacles faced, they did succeed. Eleven Black female leaders in higher education institutions were interviewed and surveyed to identify their goals, how they worked to achieve them, the problems encountered en route to their goals, if the assistance of a mentor was a determining factor in their lives, if they in turn served as mentors, and how their presence has made a difference in higher education. The study revealed that the women were all nurtured and encouraged by strong family members and occasionally by professionals; they all possessed a keen awareness of their strengths and a commitment to make a change for the better in the lives of all people, especially other Blacks. Though research indicates that on average, Black females are not rewarded with high administrative positions afforded others with similar preparation, Smith argues that the women in the study persevered in spite of the system and feels that family and professional support (both internal and external to their career), hard work, and preparation were the essential ingredients for career success.

The term *success* can be defined in various ways. Jacobi (1991) notes that the relationship between mentoring and success remains elusive and may mean different things to different individuals; that is, it may be that mentoring is viewed as a *manifestation* rather than a *cause* of success.

Tillman (2001) posits an interesting thought in reporting the findings of her research and found that some protégés and mentors equated a successful mentoring relationship if the protégé was



granted promotion and tenure. In other cases, respondents reported that a successful relationship meant that the mentor and the protégé had a collegial relationship and liked one another. Although several studies were conducted with Black faculty members, their applications and findings are also appropriate to the experiences of Black administrators.

## **2.6 RACISM AND SEXISM DILEMMAS**

The underrepresentation of Black women in higher education administration can be attributed to two prevalent societal dilemmas: racism and sexism. The paucity of scholarly research on Black females continues to place her in an invisible position in the literature, resulting in a need to explore the race and gender interactions in which the Black woman resides. Over four decades ago, writer Ralph Ellison penned the infamous words to describe his existence as a Black man, which can certainly be transferred into the Black woman's experience: "I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...when they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination-indeed, everything and anything except me" (Ellison, 1952, p. 164). hooks (1981) argues that the Black female is by and large invisible, and is concerned with how the "overlapping discourses of race and sex, with the interconnectedness of racism and sexism" (p.64) create barriers and impediments to the success and achievement of Black women, and more importantly, that the one does not promote competition between the oppressive systems.

Racism and sexism are salient factors in determining the Black woman's identity and places her at the confluence of these two forms of oppression. Being Black and being female can often create twin barriers and are often not clearly distinguishable in addressing the mobility of these women.

Racial bias is a societal quandary in which Black women find themselves as administrators in higher education. Affirmative action has its roots in the civil rights movement, where its legal status was confirmed with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This landmark legislation prohibited discrimination in several venues, including institutions of higher education (RBP Associates, 2006). Historically, the premise of affirmative action refers to, “concrete steps that are taken not only to eliminate discrimination, whether in employment, education, or contracting, but also to attempt to redress the effects of past discrimination. The underlying motive for affirmative action is the Constitutional principle of equal opportunity, which holds that all persons have the right to equal access to self-development. In other words, persons with equal abilities should have equal opportunities” (Hillstrom & Hillstrom, 2002, p.1). Affirmative action, however, has not fully provided the opportunities for which Black women can achieve career success in higher education institutions.

Racism has been perceived as the obstacle by which Black administrators have not been able to climb the organizational ladder in the institutions. Hinton (2004) studied middle and senior-level administrators in five different institutions, including (public research, private research, regional comprehensive, urban commuter, and public two-year) and found that race played a more significant role in their efforts to retain their positions and seek promotions. In the same study (Hinton, 2004) found that institutional sexism was evident in that there were no female vice presidents, deans, associate deans, or assistant deans since these positions were held by White males. Patitu and Hinton (2004) purport that since sexism and racism have differing effects on individuals, for most Black women it is not always distinguishable. Whether race or gender discrimination is most paramount for the Black female’s career advancement remains dubious.

Regarding issues of sexism, it is now thirty-four years since Congress passed Title IX in 1972

prohibiting sex discrimination in education, yet women still experience obstacles in acquiring middle and senior administrative positions within higher educational institutions (Hubbard and Robinson, 1998). In a 2006 report from the American Association of University Professors it was noted that women hold only 24 percent of full professor positions in the United States, despite the overwhelming presence of women on campuses over the past twenty-five years (West & Curtis, 2006). Not surprisingly, the report noted that, “women tend to face more obstacles as faculty in higher education than they do as managers and directors in corporate America” (West & Curtis, 2006, p. 4). Institutions would do well to realize that issues of unfairness place serious limitations on their success when they do not take advantage of the larger pool of talent with which to build upon. While the data focus on the professorate and not administration, it is noteworthy regarding issues of women in higher education. Although it is not a new phenomenon, equity for women, particularly African American women, remains in a flux of slow, gradual change. Gains experienced during the affirmative action initiatives of that period are eroding primarily since African American female administrators who entered the academy at that time may now be retiring and not replaced by other African American females.

Social relationships within the circles of colleges and universities require that Black females embrace a consciousness to circumvent the traditional White ‘good old boys network’ and more recently, the ‘good old girls network’, referring to the advancement of White women in the academy. Tyson (2002) argues that since socialization is difficult for Black female administrators and feelings of isolation commonplace, there is a substantial lack of a critical mass of other Black females with which they can bond together.

Isolation is a predicament that many African American female administrators find themselves in that is often accompanied with a plethora of additional responsibilities they must handle (Moses,

1997; Turner & Myers, 2000). Notwithstanding their own job duties accompanying their administrative positions, African American women often face additional tasks, such as participation on diversity committees, mentoring African American students, serving on diverse boards and councils, and other ‘race-conscious’ activities due to their race and gender. Thus they are frequently labeled as the token member of the group, committee, etc., due to their dual status in society. This can become problematic, particularly when it interferes with or impedes effective leadership within their roles in the academy and also the navigation of their paths of career advancement. However, due to their innate need to “lift as they climb”, these women continue to promulgate the message of obtaining an education, encouraging others, whether students, faculty, or staff to succeed, and eventually making definitive contributions to the community and society.

Clearly, race and sex have a significant impact on the developmental relationships that Black women engage in within the academy. This dilemma affects who they choose for sponsors and who chooses them as protégés.

## **2.7 MARGINALITY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALES**

To better understand the experiences of the Black women in higher education administration, it would do well to review the themes of marginality and Black feminist thought, since these constructs provide valuable insight. In an effort to chronicle the Black female administrators’ career advancement as it relates to mentoring for career advancement, one can turn to the literature on the marginality and Black feminist thought. Marginality has several connotations, both negative and creative which will be explored.

### 2.7.1 Negative Marginality

The construct of marginality has a long tradition in sociology and is based on the work of Frable (1993) whose research suggests that marginal people who, by virtue of their physical appearance, behavior, or life circumstances, are classified as *master status* individuals and continually treated as different. Frable (1993) draws on the dimensions of marginality which include invisibility, the aesthetic appearance or uniqueness of the individual, and the difficulty of socialization into the mainstream. This dissimilarity creates a cultural stigma that can have a systematic impact, particularly since American culture designates certain attributes as central to understanding a person's character.

Grant and Breese (1997) provide further explanation by asserting that this marginal status, whether visible or invisible, causes the individual to "create a psychological marginality that enhances the experience of marginality" (p. 192). The authors argue that this approach will eventually increase the gap between the marginalized person and those considered 'normal'.

Marginalization has also been defined as "any issue, situation, or circumstance that has placed these women outside of the flow of power and influence within their institutions" (Patitu and Hinton, 2004, p. 82). Since she is often placed on the periphery, the Black woman's status of marginalization becomes a way of life in her chosen profession, resulting in her attempt to overcome challenges of invisibility, isolation, and exclusion.

One of the conundrums in identifying barriers that African American female administrators experience is largely due to the fact that their presence has not been widely documented. Unfortunately, data that would inform inquirers about the numbers and percentages by types of positions, institutional characteristics, earnings, academic rank, and years of experience are minimal and often aggregated within race and ethnicity government reports (Aleman & Renn, 2002). As a

result, their contributions would seem to render African American women as “invisible” in scholarly literature to some extent. Pollard & Welch (2006) contend that this blatant invisibility posed on African American women as well as other women of color is unconscionable. The authors state:

One of the simplest ways in which women of color are made invisible is through the use of the categories “minorities” and “women” as mutually exclusive of the categories...in fact, the failure to name the various groups of women of color specifically, contributes to their erasure. (p. 9)

As previously noted, African American female administrators remain underrepresented within the academy and often do not fit the characteristics of the majority administrative population within a predominately white institution. Alfred (2001) suggests the negative labels African American women are classified under such as, “other”, “outsider”, “subordinate”, or “deficient”, often carry negative stigmas which imply not meeting the standards of the majority population, mainly, White males (p. 1). She suggests that White males are situated in the center, thus leaving the Black female at the margins.

### **2.7.2 Creative Marginality**

Several theorists argue that marginalization of Black females can afford them certain advantages and result in a positive effect. Alfred (2001) has done extensive research on the interpretation of how marginality can be constructive for Black female administrators. In her study of Black tenured female faculty at a predominantly White institution, she found that because these women had grown up with a distinct sense of themselves as Black people, they developed creative strategies to navigate the academic culture and still emerge with an unmovable and incredible self-confidence.

Results of the study showed that when facing issues of marginality in the workplace, “their positive self-definition was manifested through 1) the rejection of negative marginality, 2) finding a safe space, and 3) the rejection of external definitions (Alfred, 2001, p. 58). Alfred argues that marginality is a state of mind and only problematic if one lacks a strong sense of cultural identity – if one is rooted in her culture and has a definite sense of herself and her place in the culture, she will perceive her marginality as a positive attribute rather than as a handicap. She proposes that this can create a privilege of knowing, watching, seeing, and learning about the world in a different way, and we should use this privilege to produce new knowledge about the Black experience.

Collins (1986) suggests this ‘outsider-within’ position in the dominant culture places us in a unique position that affords us a distinctive view of the contradictions between the dominant group’s actions and the ideologies they embrace. She views the marginalized state of Black women to be a “particular marginality that stimulates a particular Black woman’s perspective” (p. 11). Collins (1986) further argues that Black women can use this ‘tension’ in their cultural identities to generate new ways of knowing and new insights and elaborates, “for many Afro-American female intellectuals, “marginality” has been an excitement to creativity” (p. S15). She asserts that the standpoint of Black feminist scholars, as outsiders within, contribute to contemporary sociological discourse and may reveal subsequent aspects of reality for Black females.

Similar to Collins, hooks (1984, 1989) views marginality as a powerful force for Black women’s survival as she notes:

Being in the margin is to be a part of the whole but outside the whole...this sense of wholeness provided us with an oppositional worldview, a mode of seeing, that sustained us...strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity. (p. ii.)

Marginality, in the truest sense, can serve a purpose of individuality and creativity; however,

as the literature reveals, the African American female's self-perception and self-validation is paramount to her own personal standpoint in producing a distinctive analysis.

## **2.8 AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

### **2.8.1 Institutional Responsibilities**

The organizational structure of the institution plays a major role in determining the career advancement and mobility for women in higher education administration, since universities are typically very traditional and conservative organizations. The attainment of positions within senior-level administration in higher education does not merely require one being equipped with the appropriate credentials, but successfully navigating the institution as well. Kaplan and Helly (1984) argue that as women seek administrative positions, they must not only possess the skills, but 'fit' in with the existing organization and relate to the political, social, and economic structures, which often are not inclusive to women. The authors suggest that since male attitudes and values circumscribe and often dominate the university's environment, the female administrator must not only be comfortable within herself, but become adaptable to operate within sometimes 'alien' surroundings. Consequently, there are many dimensions of career advancement for women within higher education, and these dynamics play a major role, particularly for Black women.

Data on women's careers in higher education administration inform the research that higher education operates within a pyramid structure, where women traditionally reside at the lower level. While these changes are dramatic and depict significant improvement regarding the educational



attainment of Black women, at the same time parity is problematic. As mentioned previously, data reveal that of the total number of women, 10,121 (6%) are Black women. Given the accelerated rate of their educational pursuits and attainment of graduate and terminal degrees, competencies, and qualifications, it would appear that Black females should be positioned to affect the overall administrative pool by possibly experiencing a 10 to 20 percent increase, allowing them to be on a better playing field with White women, White men, and Black men. Whether this increase is accomplished within years or decades, it remains a heightened concern.

Arguably so, these disparities are problematic and reflect the slow progress for the inclusion of Black women into senior-level positions of influence and power within the academy. The pool of competent, qualified Black females is expanding, and institutions bear a great deal of responsibility in assuring the Black female's voice is indeed heard and in not allowing political ramifications to intervene in the selection process, search committee procedures, or excuses of the lack of available candidates. The variables of race, gender, and mentoring relationships shape the future of many Black women aspiring upward mobility in the academy.

Although the author specifically addresses the scarcity of talented Black faculty, Gordon (2004) presents a strong argument that a major responsibility in the dilemma of recruiting and retaining Black professionals in higher education is partly due to the lack of intentional initiatives in place. She is adamant that since the production of doctorates held by women and minorities has grown substantially, it remains the obligation of the institution's search committee to intentionally identify the diverse candidate. She enumerates five criteria that search committee chairs need to follow to obtain a diverse candidate, as an individual:

- 1) Who understands and is committed to the value of diversity;
- 2) Who is willing to do the extra work it takes to find qualified candidates

- who are women and people from historically under-represented groups;
- 3) Who understands, can recognize, and work through the biases that often affect the evaluation of diverse candidates;
  - 4) Who possesses great professional credibility; and
  - 5) Who is willing to partner with the dean's office in hiring practices.

(Gordon, 2004)

Since there is a growing number of Black females receiving doctorates but not a growing number securing senior-level administrative positions, the question remains, as Gordon suggests, is it a "supply issue or a search issue?" (2004, p. 191).

## **2.9 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

This investigation fills a significant gap in the literature on African American female administrators and their lived experiences in the academy. By sharing their lived experiences and perspectives regarding mentoring relationships, the administrators contributed to the legacy of African American females in higher educational roles.

The study was designed to allow the administrators to give voice to their perceptions of the constructs of the study. It allowed the administrators to reflect on their challenges, successes, and goals in the academy. It also provided a forum for the administrators to offer recommendations and ideas for those women who would follow in their paths.

Since the study used qualitative methods, it offered dialogue that enhanced my understanding as an African American researcher, the administrators' understanding as participants, and the readers understanding. Generett and Jeffries (2003) propose that Black women researchers must consider the

places they are reared, their gender, race, class, and ability that play a crucial role in developing and shaping their experiences and also the experiences of their participants. From this tone, I pursued the study defining a substantive outcome to contribute to the body of knowledge on African American administrators.

### **2.9.1 Summary**

The review of literature has focused on the multiple identities of race and gender that Black female administrators in the academy face in their path of career advancement (see Table 7).

**Table 7 Research Questions, Literature Sources**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Literature Source</b>
Q1. How do Black female administrators in higher education institutions experience mentoring, specifically for their career advancement?	Tillman (2001) reported that both mentors and protégés placed more importance on career functions than they did on psychosocial functions.
Q1.a. How do Black female administrators secure mentors for their career advancement and/or are identified by mentors who will advance their career	Blake (1999) conducted a study in 1992 with Black female professionals and discovered a prominent theme emerged regarding a general lack of Black role models to serve as mentors.
Q2. To what extent have mentoring relationships contributed to Black female administrators' perceptions of success?	Wayne et al. (1998) posit that there are two distinct definitions of the construct of success: a) <i>objective career success</i> , which includes observable career achievements which can be measured, such as pay and promotion rates; and b) <i>subjective career success</i> , which includes an individual's feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with his or her career. (p. 579) Black females traditionally define success as embracing family, spirituality, and community.
Q3. To what extent, if any, does the race and gender of the mentor influence the mentoring relationship for the Black female administrators' career advancement in the academy?	Ragins (1997) suggests the most beneficial developmental relationships are experienced when composed of mentors and protégés who <i>differ</i> in their group memberships associated with the established power in the organizations.
Q4. What effect do the constructs of negative marginality and creative marginality, have on the experiences of Black female administrators in the academy?	<i>Negative Marginality</i> : Marginalization has also been defined as, "any issue, situation, or circumstance that has placed these women outside of the flow of power and influence within their institutions" (Patitu and Hinton, 2004, p. 82). <i>Creative Marginality</i> : Alfred (2001) has done extensive research on the interpretation of how marginality can be constructive for Black female administrators.
Q5. To what extent do the restriction and limitation of power resources affect mentoring relationships for African American administrators?	Kanter (1977) suggests that power exemplifies the ability to mobilize forces and use resources to accomplish goals. The author describes it as "Power is the ability to do...and means having access to whatever is needed for the doing. (Kanter, 1977, p. 166) For African American females, this power may be restrictive and thus they are frequently rendered powerless.

Being Black and being female constitutes additional barriers Black women face in their pursuit of middle and senior administrative positions. What emerges from the literature is a clear need for Black females who aspire to senior-level administration within higher education to secure

mentors that have influence and power to help advance their careers. Although several other variables exist in the career success of African American administrators, it is clear that having mentors who invest in them is significant to their progress.

The literature reveals that the construct of success can be defined differently for Black female administrators. The Black female may well view her life and society through the lens of spirituality, family relationships, church affiliations, and community outreach. In their study of Black female administrators, Crawford & Smith (2005) described thematic characteristics of the participants as those individuals who were strongly tied to their community and who felt a profound allegiance to their families and friends. The authors reported that the participants' relationships with family and community had a positive effect on their sense of career, self-actualization, and overall perception of their life courses.

There appears to be no succinct conclusion regarding whether the Black female administrator should seek a Black female mentor or a mentor of another race and gender. What did emerge from the literature was that it is beneficial to have several mentors, particularly those of influence, regardless of their race and gender. Matczynski & Comer (1991) suggest since there are relatively more White males in higher-level administrative positions in institutions, the mentor pools remain largely White and male.

Mentoring relationships which provide specific career advancement support are critical for Black female administrators in their effort to succeed in higher educational institutions.

The literature confirmed that although historically Black women in higher educational institutions held notable positions, this is not the case in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Since the body of research focuses on the benefits of mentoring, its benefit to the protégé, and its correlation to career advancement and upward mobility in organizations, it is of necessity that African American female administrators take

advantage of mentoring opportunities. The construct of power may have an impact on how the African American female administrator navigates the academy in her pursuit of career advancement. What remains problematic, however for the African American female is: 1) having available and willing mentors seek her out; or 2) placing herself in a position to be selected by a trusted mentor. This notion of mentoring is but one viable tool with which the African American female administrator can choose as a conduit for career advancement within the academy. Notwithstanding, her self-reliance, self-validation, and self-confidence must be coupled with earning the appropriate credentials, education, and acquiring a measure of assertiveness to move ahead.

### **3.0 THIRD CHAPTER**

This study used survey methodology with a qualitative interview schedule. I felt this method was appropriate for the sample of African American females in an effort to gather data from their lived experiences.

#### **3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following questions guide this study:

1. How do African American female administrators in higher education institutions experience mentoring, specifically for their career advancement?
3. To what extent have mentoring relationships contributed to African American female administrators' perceptions of success?
3. To what extent, if any, does the race and gender of the mentor influence the mentoring relationships for African American female administrators' career advancement in the academy?
4. What effect do the constructs of negative marginality and creative marginality have on the experiences of African American female administrators in the academy?
5. To what extent do the restriction and limitation of power resources affect on mentoring relationships for African American female administrators?

## 3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 3.2.1 Rationale for Qualitative Design

A researcher uses qualitative inquiry to understand behavior from the subject's own frame of reference (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). This type of research offers a valuable interaction and relationship between researchers and study participants as it frequently contributes to the lives of the participants (Glesne, 1998). Qualitative interviews allow the investigator an opportunity to make discoveries with underrepresented groups. Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue that where quantitative and formal documentation may ignore underserved individuals, focusing on successes and not challenges, interview settings can remedy these omissions and reveal a depth of information, often critical to decision-making. The participants can voice what they think about a topic, what they feel about it, giving them an opportunity to describe their experiences, while at the same time the investigator can reconstruct the various perceptions and make meaning of the results.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), qualitative inquiry affords the researcher a channel to gather relevant knowledge about the social aspects of society, using methods other than traditional quantitative methodology as the primary interpretation. Quantitative data is often used to depict the status of Black females in the academy, however, qualitative methods are also significant in an effort to approach the lived experiences of their multiple identities, through qualitative collaborations. Their voice is often silenced in the literature which is apparent as Generett and Jeffries (2003) note, "The essential nature of qualitative, narrative research is constantly under attack because the methodology attempts to validate individual, often marginalized voices in an academic world that expects measurable outcomes and generalizable interpretations" (p. 8).

In qualitative investigations, the researcher "strives for understanding of the phenomenon



under study... [when] the primary objective is to gain knowledge (data) from the subject's frame of reference" (Mauch & Park, 2003, p. 18). The researcher actually becomes the instrument for collecting data, notwithstanding a partner in the conversation (Mertens, 2005). This type of inquiry also allowed me the opportunity to achieve a deeper level of the valued communication with which to integrate into the study's findings.

I chose to follow Glense's (1998) admonition that qualitative researchers strive to make meaning of data, and as artists, they seek "imaginative connections among events and people, imaginative renderings of these connections, and imaginative interpretations of what they have rendered" (p. 156). This permitted me the freedom to saturate myself with the data I had collected, interpret the data, draw on my own experiences as an African American female, and take on the role of 'meaning maker,' all in an effort to give the reader a deeper insight and understanding of another world. The experience offered me a measure of self-reflection, having earned the trust and confidence of the administrators, as well as being afforded the opportunity to tell their stories. It is anticipated that the reader will acquire new perspectives and insights on some aspect of the African American female as well.

I established collaboration with the participants in order to gain their trust and confidence for the inquiry. Stainback and Stainback (1988) suggest that the basis for judging the quality of analysis in a qualitative study rests on corroboration, to be certain that the research findings reflect peoples' perceptions, which aided in the analysis of the African American female's views, thoughts, and recommendations in this study.

Qualitative data consist of detailed descriptions of situations, events, people interactions, and observed behaviors. The voice and self-reflection of Black female administrators provided contributory information in the research of mentoring. Since interview data can help explain barriers

to promotion for women and minorities, including allowing entrance into the multiple sides of participants' lives and experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), this method provided a rich depth to the inquiry of Black female administrators.

### **3.2.2 Overview of the Pennsylvania Conference on Higher Education**

The study utilized interviews with eleven African American female members of the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education (PBCOHE) as the primary means of data collection.

Additionally, in an effort to inform the study, I drew upon documentation about the PBCOHE (which included the history, background, officers, strategic plan, vision and goals), the IEML (Institute of Management Leadership, a professional development program housed within the PBCOHE), and current PBCOHE membership.

The Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education, Inc. (PBCOHE) is a not-for-profit, (501) (C) (3) organization. In 1970, the late Honorable K. Leroy Irvis, minority leader of the House of Representatives, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, convened a conference of Black college presidents, vice presidents, department chairpersons, directors, teachers, and other political leaders and professionals. The purpose of the conference was to provide needed input into the formation of a master plan for higher education. As a part of the master plan, the PBCOHE was formed, resulting in Pennsylvania's only professional association whose purpose is to ensure that Blacks and other underrepresented groups in Pennsylvania have access to higher education by examining the effect of state and federal educational policies on persons of color in Pennsylvania. In addition, PBCOHE has given thousands of dollars in financial support to worthy high school students and college students through its scholarship program. Moreover, PBCOHE provides ongoing opportunities for minorities

in higher education to pursue their professional, social, and personal development through a network of resources.

Irvis, a former teacher, was a key architect of several landmark education initiatives in Pennsylvania, including the establishment of the state's Community College system, creation of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, and the measure that conferred state-related status on the University of Pittsburgh, Temple University, and Lincoln University, a shift that addressed chronic financial problems at the three institutions.

The PBCOHE is composed of a general membership and executive council, and although it does not utilize a headquarters office, it operates within the virtual setting of the institutions in Pennsylvania which comprise its membership. An annual meeting and conference is held where member institutions convene. The executive council is the policy-making and planning body of the organization and consists of elected and appointed officers, as well as standing committee chairpersons. The general membership is divided into three regions: central, eastern, and western Pennsylvania. Each region elects a regional director, who conducts programs and activities that are of interest to regional members throughout the year. Current membership consists of 135 professionals, 70 males, and 65 females. As more African Americans educators and administrators enter higher educational institutions within the Pennsylvania region, membership is expected to increase within the next several years.

The PBCOHE's Institute for Educational Management and Leadership (IEMML) is designed to provide an opportunity for professionals to gain specific knowledge about higher education and the role leadership plays in academia. Further, it expands on personal vision, challenges, and notions of leadership and provides insight on how to prepare for a major role in higher education administration.

The IEMML is intended for faculty and professional staff who work in higher education and desire to move into administrative positions, mid-level managers who are interested in moving to another level of administration, and other professionals who aspire to higher-level positions within their organizations. The program offers annual workshops including university budgetary processes, performance management, professional development and research, resumes and job seeking, and interviewing skill-building. Workshops are rotated among the membership institutions. Since the IEMML began in 1997, 112 individuals have completed the program, 55 of which were female.

### **3.2.3 Data Collection Procedures**

I secured Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval as required by the University of Pittsburgh prior to the investigation of the study. Data collection began with a pilot study conducted in August 2006, followed by a focus group in February 2007. The actual dissertation study was conducted between June and August of 2007. The pilot study and focus group included participants who were primarily middle-level administrators. For the actual dissertation study, I used administrators who held senior-level positions within their respective institutions in an effort to gather data relevant to the inquiry of how their career advancement to that level was achieved.

Data collected from the pilot study and the focus group will be treated and noted separately in the analysis with either the similarities or differences identified, in relation to the actual study conducted. By conducting the pilot study and focus group, I was able to gather rich data from a

group of administrators who had reached senior rank within their institutions and also to include additional questions I perceived as critical to the investigation and its findings.<sup>3</sup>

### **3.2.4 Rational for the Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study in August of 2006 in an effort to provide preliminary entrance for the actual study. For qualitative research methods, it is highly recommended that pilot studies are conducted to determine the strengths and weaknesses of the full-blown study construction. (Krathwohl, 1988; Meloy, 2002). I used the pilot study as a means of a preliminary practice in the process of collecting and analyzing data. I was also able to modify the interview protocol and approach that was later used (with a different sample of administrators) for the investigation. Mauch & Park (2003) offer several advantages of conducting a pilot study including the following: pilot trials can sharpen the procedures, remind the researcher of the required approval and permission process, assay unnecessary costs in time, and check the feasibility of the larger study. The authors feel the investment of energy in a pilot study can enhance the quality and minimize delays and possible failure of the subsequent study.

Semi-structured, open-ended, tape-recorded interviews were held with eleven African American female administrators who were members of the PBCOHE and who held primarily middle-level administrative positions at higher education institutions. Their ages ranged from 32 years to 63 years old.

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<sup>3</sup> Since the pilot study administrators primarily held middle-level positions within their institutions, I designed the actual study with administrators who primarily had reached senior-level positions. This was accomplished in an effort to investigate the mentoring relationships formulated in their career paths as they had successfully climbed the ladder in the academy.

### **3.2.5 Rationale for the Focus Group**

I also conducted a focus group in February of 2007 (during the PBCOHE annual conference) and invited seven of the original pilot study participants (primarily middle-level administrators) to discuss their views on the *construct of marginality*, which was included in the interview protocol for the actual study. I felt the *construct of marginality* was a substantive element in the study and wanted to hear their views, as a preliminary practice run.

### **3.2.6 Actual Research Study**

I used purposeful sampling to identify eleven participants, all members of the PBCOHE, who held senior-level administrative positions. Patton (2002) describes the design strategy of purposeful sampling as one in which participants are selected because they are, “information rich and illuminative and offer useful manifestation of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 40). Stainback and Stainback (1988) note that purposeful sampling is advantageous when participants are included according to the relevancy of the criteria, based on the emerging research questions and also the researcher’s perception of their ability to contribute to the study.

The administrators were selected in an effort to investigate the mentoring relationships they experienced, and more importantly, the career path they took to get to their current positions. Their experiences, particularly achieving senior-level roles, contributed to the body of literature on African American females and the relevancy of their perceptions of mentoring. Knowledge about their career path yielded valuable knowledge to inform the study of where the inspiration for achievement was derived, (e.g., from their own fortitude to achieve, their families, their professional networks, their spiritual base, their communities, among other discoveries).

The administrators' titles included dean and above, primarily holding senior-level positions. Their positions were those held at primarily at state-owned institutions throughout Pennsylvania, with the exception of one administrator employed at a private institution, one at a community college, and another at an HBCU (Historically Black College or University). The administrators' ages ranged from 40 years to 60 years old, (three did not reveal their ages) and at the time of the interviews, tenure at their respective institutions ranged from 17 to 39 years (see Table 8).

All of the participants held a combination of administrative and non-administrative positions during their careers in higher education departments. This provided a level of diversification and experience as they pursued and reached senior-administrative roles. They were able to build upon their skills throughout the various positions held, in order to enhance their credentials. Also, nine of the participants held faculty appointments either prior to their senior roles in the institutions, or concurrently. Three administrators were single, while eight were married; most had children. Regarding educational background, one administrator held a J.D., one an M.A., five held Ph.D.s, and four held Ed.D.s. To insure anonymity, neither participants' names nor their institutions will be identified in the findings; thus pseudonyms will be used throughout.

**Table 8 Participant Demographical Data**

Administrator Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Degree	Years in Higher Ed. Administration
Alexis	60	S	Ph.D.	35
Greta	not avail	M	Ph.D.	34
Audra	50	M	J.D.	29
Whitney	53	M	Ph.D.	19
Brooke	48	M	Ph.D.	17
Corinne	60	S	Ed.D.	39
Jasmine	40	S	Ed.D.	19
Margo	not avail	M	Ed.D.	38
Crystal	not avail	M	Ph.D.	34
Angela	53	M	Ed.D.	23
Ava	53	M	M.A.	18

Due to the limited number of African American senior administrators within the PBCOHE, the sample for this study was relatively small; however, since the study is a qualitative design, the richness gleaned from the interview data will greatly contribute to the findings. Patton (2002) suggests there are actually no rules in qualitative inquiry, but that the sample size primarily depends on “what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources” (p.244). I continued to interview the administrators until no new knowledge was added to the data (Bailey, 2007). Although the study was not be structured to generalize the larger population of African American female administrators, it will contribute to the scarcity of knowledge and establish causality to inform improvement in higher educational institutions. Even though there are no rules or guidelines for sample size in qualitative research, Patton (2002) posits that it depends on criteria such as: what the researcher is seeking to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what will be useful to the inquiry, what will



have credibility, and finally what can be accomplished within the time restraints and resources available.

As an African American female; although I do not hold a senior-level administrative title within my institution, I was able to relate to the participants' lived experiences and attempted to gather an in-depth view of their various backgrounds, dreams, challenges, survival strategies, and future aspirations, in an effort to discover the richness of their lives in relation to their perceptions of everyday life in the academy. Generett and Jeffries (2003) acknowledge that African American female researchers bring a fuller understanding of themselves and the role they play as agents of social change as they navigate the inquiry with their participants.

Formal letters of intent, along with Institution Research Board (IRB) documentation were sent to the Executive President of the PBCOHE requesting approval for the study. All respondents were requested to participate in the study and contacted; by email; formal letters of request; along with follow-up emails and telephone calls. They were requested to schedule the interviews (either in person or telephone), and were notified that an assistant would be present taping the interviews. I also asked for their comments regarding the research and any other additional information. The interview protocol was sent via U.S. mail to each respondent in a timely fashion to allow their review of the questions and format. Thank you emails were forwarded following each interview, as well as offering the administrators the opportunity to review the findings. I held one follow-up interview that I felt appropriate to inform the study. The administrators were given a small African American artistic token as gratitude for their participation.

The study was conducted using semi-structured, open-ended, tape-recorded interviews. Field notes were meticulously taken to assure clarity. Participants were informed if their interview responses are included in the researcher's dissertation; in an effort to insure anonymity, neither participants' names nor their institutions will be identified in the findings. Pseudonyms are used

throughout the findings. The purpose of the study and the significance of the study as a contribution to the literature on Black female administrators in higher education was reviewed with participants along with the interview protocol.

The study was conducted from June 2007 to August 2007 at each administrator's institution. The interviews lasted from one to two hours in length. As previously noted, I taped the face-to-face interviews; however, the telephone interviews were not taped but extensive field notes were taken. The interview transcriptions and field notes were carefully reviewed, data coded, and categorized into emerging themes to identify common threads of the responses.

There was no need to conduct follow-up interviews with the administrators since the initial interviews yielded extensive valuable data, often far beyond my expectations. I also felt the eleven interviews sufficient and chose to stop collecting data since I had reached a theoretical saturation of information and documentation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) define this theoretical saturation as a point at which the data collected appears complete and integrated and that successive examination of sources yields redundancy in the study.

The process of coding qualitative data and identifying related themes can become a daunting task to undertake. I found the data collected were at times mounting, yet I felt that the richness of the administrators' words outweighed the task of coding. Miles and Huberman (1994) stress that the caveat of qualitative data research is that data overload may occur, however, they argue that the words derived from this type of research render more meaning than quantitative data.

I utilized Bulmer's (1979) concepts to inform the findings of the study. Bulmer suggested that researchers induce themes derived from the literature into their studies and identified several sources to use when incorporating themes into qualitative data collection, including:

- 1) Objective facticity, wherein the researcher presents the ‘real’ concepts of the respondent, such as in the case of this study, the fact that the respondents were Black women;
- 2) A review of related literature and theories;
- 3) The researcher’s own prior experiences, in both a professional and social context;
- 4) The researcher’s own values, used as a source of conceptualization (Bulmer suggests this analysis is located within a feminist framework, “The term feminist methodology would seem to be more political, more controversial, and implying certain personal and/or political sympathies on the part of the researcher” (p. 669)); and
- 5) Incorporating the participant’s own concepts and definitions that are elicited as the research study proceeds.

I used an iterative process of analyzing the data which included two phases: a) preparing the transcripts; identifying, refining, and elaborating on the concepts, themes, and events; and b) comparing concepts and themes across the interviews to draw theoretical conclusions and finally to answer the research questions (Rubin and Rubin, 2005). In order to provide further credibility of the findings, I employed member checking. Participants were requested to review drafts of the interview transcripts for credibility and to provide clarification, comments and suggestions. Three of the nine participants responded with feedback on the transcripts. Corrections and recommendations based on their comments were included in the data analysis. Mertens (2005) suggests this procedure can be formal or informal and is critical to construct reliability of the study.

### 3.2.7 Summary

Although the senior administrative roles differed greatly, the results of the pilot study were useful to strengthen the actual study, particularly in the attempt to provide clarity, link the questions more succinctly to the research, and carefully word the questions. Also, I had the fortunate opportunity to learn from the experience and allow for the anticipation of new comments emerging from the participants. It was advantageous to distribute the interview guide to participants since they all were prepared and eager to advance the interview. The interview protocol, although consistent with the research questions, could have provided a more succinct direction and substance to the interviews.

The focus group afforded another dimension with which to contribute to the earlier interview sessions, thus building upon the study. The administrators, with similar backgrounds, felt a connectedness and sisterhood during the session and applauded me in giving them the opportunity to give voice to their thoughts. Patton (2002) suggests that “the object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others” (p. 386). Krueger (1994) agrees that “a focus group should be carefully planned to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment...the discussion is comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions [where] group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments the discussion” (p. 6).

Several challenges existed while conducting the focus group, mainly due to the inadequate location which did not allow a quiet space for discussion. I felt, however that I had to seize the opportunity to convene the participants within a focus group setting in an effort to gather additional information for the study. Although the participants were asked to review the brief question, I provided an in-depth overview of the construct of marginality to begin the discussion. The participants expressed a high level of energy and eagerness to talk and repeatedly thanked me for the

opportunity to allow them to articulate their thoughts and ideas on mentoring and the linkage to marginality. Additionally, they proposed the idea of holding roundtable discussions for African American women to share their experiences and more importantly, to develop strategies for areas of improvement as it relates to mentoring and marginalization in both their professional and personal lives. It was also very challenging to stay on course with the discussion, primarily due to several diverse opinions which arose among the participants. The experience of conducting the focus group afforded me the opportunity to be more cognizant of the need to keep participants attentive to the questions that I posed and to be considerate of everyone's time restraints.

I felt the interviews conducted during the actual research study provided the means to construct meaning from the African American female whose voice often remain silent in literature. (See Table 9 for Research and Interview Question Matrix).

**Table 9 Research and Interview Question Matrix**

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Interview Question</b>
<p>Preliminary Background Inquiry</p>	<p><u>About You:</u></p> <p>I would like to get started by asking you to tell me about your background.</p> <p>a) Please tell me a little bit about your background. (where you are from, your education, and what led you to pursue education as a career) Optional: What is your age?</p> <p>b) How long have you been at this present institution? How long did it take you to reach your current title, in other words, what was the path?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probe → Would you describe your career path within the academy?</li> <li>• Probe → Does your position involve <u>critical ‘decision-making’</u> where you can create/translate opportunities for other Black females?</li> </ul> <p>c) Were you recruited or did you pursue your current position?</p> <p>d) Describe your current position, primary responsibilities, and challenges.</p> <p><u>About Your Institution:</u></p> <p><i>Data show that African American females are achieving graduate and</i></p>

	<p><i>terminal academic degrees at an accelerated rate, however not moving into higher administrative roles within the academy.</i></p> <p>e). What is your perception of the <u>quantity</u> of African American female administrators on your campus, i.e., if it is sparse, what initiatives exist to increase the numbers? If the numbers are increasing, to what do you attribute it?</p> <p>f). In your opinion, what is the overall <u>climate</u> for African American female administrators on your campus?</p>
<p><b>R.1.</b> How do African American female administrators experience mentoring for their career advancement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do African American female administrators secure mentors and/or are identified by mentors?</li> </ul>	<p><b>I.1</b> What is your perception of mentoring, distinctive to career advancement (often referred to as sponsorship)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe your experiences as an African American administrator regarding mentoring in your career advancement, including your lateral and/or upward mobility?</li> <li>• Did you seek the mentor – or were you selected by a mentor? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Probe→Tell me about your experience of seeking a mentor in your career.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• If you did seek a mentor, what if any difficulties existed?</li> <li>• Do you feel you need multiple mentors for career advancement?</li> <li>• Do you think it is critical in order to achieve career advancement, to secure several mentors?</li> </ul> <p>For instance, a mentor who holds a position of <u>influence</u> – one who has the attributes and ability to influence, promote, and visibly support in the organization.</p>

**R2.** To what extent have mentoring relationships contributed to African American female administrators' perceptions of success?

Additionally, a mentor to provide psychosocial support, on a personal level that enhances an individual's sense of competence, identity, and effectiveness.

- How have these relationships shaped your career and been supportive to you professionally? Personally? Spiritually?
- In what ways do you feel the relationship enhanced your success?
- If you did not have a mentor, how do you feel this could have enhanced your success?

**I2.** Could you talk about how you would define success?

- Probe → In your opinion, how would describe the effects of success for African American females?
- Probe → How do you think success may be defined differently for African American females – as opposed to White females?  
If you have experienced sponsorship, please describe how you think it may have contributed to your success and career advancement within the academy?
- Probe → Do you think your career would have taken a different path without a sponsor, and if so how?
- Probe → Could you tell me in what ways do you feel the relationship enhanced your success?
- Probe → If you did not have a sponsor, how do you feel this could have enhanced your success?
- Probe → In what ways do you feel it could have enhanced your success?



**R3.** To what extent, if any does the race and gender of the mentor influence the mentoring relationships for African American female administrators' career advancement in the academy?

**I3.** Would you tell me your thoughts regarding the relevance, if any, of the mentor's race and gender within the relationship?

- If you have had a mentor in your career, please tell me their race and gender?
- Would you tell me your thoughts regarding the relevance, if any, of your mentor's race and gender within the relationship? How did it make an impact, if at all? Did it make a critical difference in the relationship?
  - Probe → Were you identified by the mentor or did you seek him or her out?
  - Probe → Do you feel the mentor's race and gender hindered or benefited the relationship?
  - Would you describe barriers or obstacles you face now or have faced in the past regarding your role as administrator?
  - How do you feel those barriers have been alleviated by having a mentor?

**R.4.** What effect does the construct of negative marginality, and creative marginality, have on the experiences of African American female administrators in the academy?

**I.4.** From the following information, how would you describe your views on marginality, whether, positive or negative?

The construct of Marginality has several connotations, both positive and negative.

Negative Stigma:

Marginalization has also been defined as, “any issue, situation, or circumstance that has placed [Black women] outside of the flow of power and influence within their institutions” (Patitu and Hinton, 2004, p. 82). Since she is often placed on the periphery, the Black woman’s status of marginalization becomes a way of life in her chosen profession, resulting in having to overcome challenges of invisibility, isolation, and exclusion.

Positive Advantage:

Dr. Mary Alfred from Texas A&M University has done extensive research on the interpretation of how marginality can be constructive for Black female administrators.

In her study of Black tenured female faculty at a predominantly White institution, she found that because these women had grown up with a distinct sense of themselves as Black people, they developed creative strategies to navigate the academic culture and still emerge with an unmovable and incredible self-confidence.

Alfred argues that marginality is a state of mind and only problematic if one lacks a strong sense of cultural identity – if one is rooted in her culture and has a definite sense of herself and her place in the culture, they she will perceive her marginality as a positive attribute rather than as a handicap.

**R.5.** To what extent does the restriction and limitation of power resources have on mentoring relationships for Black female administrators?

**I.5.** Would you describe your perception of resources of power within their institutions, e.g., restrictive or limited access; to key individuals who have power within the institution; and to power you hold in your position?

- Probe → Have your mentoring relationship(s) expanded your power base? Please describe how.

Additional questions which arose from the respondents dialogue during interviews:

Would you describe if you think your race (as an African American female) or your gender(as a female), is a more significant factor in:

- How other people perceive you
- Your current career
- Your current career goals
- and aspirations for career advancement

If you *did* experience a mentoring relationship in your career, how might you have changed it, if at all?

Probe → Do you feel you would have still arrived at your current position *without* the mentor?

- Probe → Please tell me if, as an African American female, the sponsorship relationship has given you a different outlook on your career?

If you *did not* experience a mentoring relationship in your career, do you feel you may in fact be further ahead in your career if indeed you *would* have? If so, would you please elaborate?

Is there anything else that you want to tell me that I may not have asked about?

- Probe →What changes would you encourage at your institution for African American females to advance and/or become more inclusive?

Thank you very much for your time and participation in the interview and your contribution to the study.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe this type of interviewing as cultural interviewing, a strategic method to capture the rich data and learn about a groups culture, background, experiences, and what is to be passed on to the next generation. As previously mentioned, both the pilot study and the focus group added valuable information in preparation for the actual investigation. Interviewing the administrators was an enlightening experience from which I gleaned a great amount of knowledge both about the career paths of African American females and my own aspirations and goals for career achievement. The qualitative investigation afforded me the opportunity to provide rich detail about the lives of the administrators and added to the scarce body of literature on African American females.

## **4.0 FOURTH CHAPTER**

### **4.1 FINDINGS AND RESULTS**

After the established protocol of the interview process was completed, which included the IRB (Institutional Review Board) approval, preliminary selection of participants, letter of request, interview guide, schedule of interview, and travel arrangements, I could finally settle in on the interview process itself. This was quite exciting for me, since I was expectant and hopeful that the administrators would enjoy the dialogue as much as I anticipated interviewing them.

I was eager to hear their stories and they were just as eager to not only contribute to the literature on African American females in higher education roles, but to offer their voice to so many of the challenges and successes they had experienced throughout their careers. I became an active listener in the interviews, making certain that I connected to the intellectual and emotional identity of each respondent. I was cognizant of my own assumptions and views during the interviews and also how my assumptions affected the interpretation of the respondents' words – whether personal, political, or theoretical (Mauthner and Doucet, 1988).

As noted in Chapter 3, data collected from the pilot study and the focus group are treated and noted separately in the analysis with either the similarities or differences identified in relation to the actual study conducted. The design of qualitative research afforded me the opportunity to learn more about my self as a researcher, since I was passionate about the study that I chose to pursue. By

sharing the stories of the administrators, I presented recommendations that can contribute to the literature and alleviate future problems of race and gender in higher education administration.

This Chapter presents the results from the individual interviews and is organized in three sections. Section one discusses the overarching themes collected from the data as relating to the research questions that guided the study. Section two includes the actual conversations (voices) from the administrators' experiences of their careers in higher education relative to the study. Finally, section three presents the administrators' recommendations for strategies for African American females to use in order to successfully navigate the academy and achieve career success.

As previously stated in Chapter 1, this study presented the problem of existing disparities among African American female administrators in obtaining senior-level administrative positions within higher education institutions. The purpose of this study was to explore the intersections of race and gender in regard to mentoring relationships, those specifically associated with the career advancement of African American female administrators in higher education institutions. I sought to give voice to the women who participated in the study in an effort to add to the void of literature on African American women in education and to ultimately create a forum for continued dialogue. The research questions and related interview questions were developed to investigate the experiences of African American female administrators in higher education institutions and discuss their experiences in relation to related literature.

A component of the study was allowing the administrators to contribute their voices to the literature. All of the women felt it an honor to have the opportunity to view their lives in print and to offer reflective thoughts of their experiences. Direct quotations gathered from the administrators' comments added additional richness and gave personal voice to their responses. I chose to include these valuable comments from the administrators. Patton (2002) supports this process and

recommends that direct quotations not only represent people in their own terms and capture participants' views of their experiences in their own words, but also "allows the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented in the report" (p. 503). He continues in describing the raw data of an interview as "the prize sought by the qualitative inquirer" (p. 380). I presented the study's overarching findings interspersed with the accounts of the actual conversations of the participants. I also felt their comments were quite telling and added valuable contributions to inform the study. Bailey (2007) encourages researchers to include "generous helpings of the original dialogue of the participants [since] the original words help them come alive for the readers" (p. 192).

#### **4.1.1 Findings of the Study and Overarching Themes**

The findings represent and echo much of what the existing literature reveals about the African American female professional. Tyson (2002) insists that unless African American women have access to support systems, networks, and mentoring relationships, they remain stifled in their pursuit of career aspirations. Unfortunately, within the power ladder in academe, the White woman is viewed as positioned "two steps removed from the power, but the Black woman is three steps removed" (Carroll, 1982, pp. 124-125). The study will enlighten and inform the reader as to the self-resiliency, survival strategies, hopes, and dreams the African American female embraces.



This chapter will present the findings of the study as designed from the following research questions:

1. How do African American female administrators in higher education institutions experience mentoring, specifically for their career advancement?
2. To what extent have mentoring relationships contributed to African American female administrators' perceptions of success?
3. To what extent, if any, does the race and gender of the mentor influence the mentoring relationships for African American female administrators' career advancement in the academy?
4. What effect do the constructs of negative marginality and creative marginality have on the experiences of African American female administrators in the academy?
5. To what extent does the restriction and limitation of power resources affect mentoring relationships for African American female administrators?

Noteworthy to mention is that the findings in this study are not indicative of national figures for African American female administrators. The study examined female senior-level administrators, all members of the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education (PBCOHE), at colleges and universities within Pennsylvania. Several of the participants' institutions were located in rural environments that may not be conducive or have favorable conditions for African American female professionals to desire to work.

This study examined how eleven Black female middle and senior administrators in higher education experienced mentoring relationships, specifically as they relate to career advancement. The study also investigated the administrator's perception of success in the academy, whether gender

and race are significant within the sponsorship relationships, and the administrator's perception of the construct of marginality.

The salient themes which emerged from the study included:

1) Mentoring was a necessary component in the career advancement of African American female administrators:

- a) Mentors assisted in shaping the administrators, professionally, personally, and spiritually; and
- b) Multiple mentors are typically most common; those for both professional personal needs.

2) The administrators viewed the construct of 'success' through various factors:

- a) Living comfortably;
- b) Being happy with one's life and profession;
- c) Giving back to others;
- d) Imparting encouragement to others; and
- e) Mentors often contributed to their views of success.

3) The relevancy of the race and gender of the administrator's mentor was viewed through several lens; however, it was clear that the mentor should be aware and cognizant of the race identities. Gender issues were not as critical in most cases but still had an influence on the development of the mentoring relationship:

- a) Race appeared relevant for the protégé:

- i) Important that the mentor was informed of the challenges facing the African American female, specifically relating to her career and career advancement;
- ii) Other African American females had a tendency to understand the challenges and applaud the successes that the administrator experienced, often on a daily basis;
- iii) The trustworthiness of White mentors was questionable; and
- iv) Race played a major part in the development and success of the mentoring relationship.

b) Race did not appear relevant for the protégé:

- i) The mentor should be the best person equipped for the relationship; and
- ii) The mentor must have the protégé's needs primary to the relationship.

c) Gender appeared relevant for the protégé:

- i) Male mentors tended to invest more in the protégé; and
- ii) Female mentors tended to relate more to the protégé's situation regarding her career.

4) Administrators felt that the construct of 'marginality' was seemingly viewed in a positive manner and felt they must take measures to maintain that approach:

- a) Maintain a level of self-sufficiency;
- b) Maintain a level of self-resiliency ;

- c) Maintain a level of self-confidence;
  - d) Being aware of others who could be detrimental to career;
  - e) Have a strategy to advance;
  - f) Build and maintain a strong support base; and
  - g) Strengthen coping mechanisms.
- 5) Although the administrators experienced levels of restriction within the power allotted to them, they agreed it was something they continually needed to approach. Those women, who experienced positive mentoring relationships, felt the need to secure a mentor who had the power, influence, reputation, and favor of the institution.

#### **4.1.2 Voices of the Administrators**

I was acquainted with several, but not all of the administrators prior to the interviews, and although I am not currently holding a senior-level administrative position, I felt a kindred spirit with all of the women. Perhaps as an African American female, I promoted a measure of trust and honesty to be built into the interview process. One of the administrators commented that although her schedule was extremely busy, she felt she had an obligation to make time for the interview request, in that she viewed it as an opportunity to help pave the way for others to follow.

The interaction created was what Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe as a “conversational partnership”, which acts as an advantageous in the interview process since it builds trust, encourages ethical behavior, and encourages participation from the respondent. Subsequently, I had to use caution as to not overextend myself with the interviews and had to examine my preconceptions and biases which could have slanted the research. The authors warned that conversational partnerships

involve an obligation on the part of the researcher, and further recommend that the researcher should assure that the respondent is comfortable in talking about their experiences, vulnerabilities, self-images, and other variables. This is particularly true of African American women who traditionally may have experienced racism and sexism in their professional and personal lives.

Throughout this analysis, the reader will gain insight into the life experiences, challenges, and successes of the African American female administrator on her road to career achievement. I began the interview by introducing myself, my professional background, my interest in the research, and the assistant who was present to tape and transcribe the interviews. All participants agreed to have their interviews taped, but only the face-to-face interviews were taped; extensive notes were taken in the three telephone interviews. I informed them that if I use their interviews in my dissertation, I would change their names and respective institutions for confidentiality purposes, as well as offered to send the transcripts to them if so requested.

#### **4.1.2.1 Reflections on Mentoring Relationships**

When I asked the administrators about their perception of mentoring relationships (if they had any such relationships, and how these relationships shaped them, professionally, personally, and spiritually), *having access to a mentor* emerged as a critical and common theme. Nearly all of the women had mentors over the span of their careers who encouraged, motivated, and inspired them and felt mentors were relevant for their career advancement and success. Only one woman did not acknowledge having a mentor.

During the pilot study, the term ‘sponsorship,’ was used, however when I discovered most of the administrators had not been acquainted with the term relative to mentoring, I modified the interview protocol for the actual study by describing the focus as ‘mentoring in direct relation with career advancement.’ This was a worthwhile change as it helped the administrators understand the

interview question. The pilot study did reveal that nearly all of the women had individuals who encouraged, motivated, and inspired them. Seven women expressed that they had individuals who were directly responsible for elevating their careers and providing substantial support, while four did not have such individuals.

According to Kram (1983), the upward movement within an organization depends on the amount of visibility concerning the potential and competence of the individual and how aggressive it is communicated. Without mentoring relationships, an individual may well likely be overlooked for promotion regardless of potential and ability. For the African American female, who frequently faces the challenge of double jeopardy, due to her race and gender, mentoring relationships are all the more critical to her career success.

Alexis\* conceptualized this dilemma when she said, *“The lack of exposure, the lack of mentoring is very, very dominant for us. We don’t get it, we don’t have access to mentors – male or female, or African American women”*. Audra echoed similar sentiments in describing her mentor: *“[she] catches me when I stumble...helps when a sister is getting heavy.”*

Several common threads ran through their stories, including expressions of their cultural responsibility within the field of education, and a strong level of self-confidence.

Corinne reflected on one experience she had while pursuing a higher position in the institution, *“There was another position that I was asking for and a raise. And one gentleman said something to me like, ‘Who do you think you are. You are just Corinne.’ That said, I needed to move. You must have consistency; reputation and identity – this is crucial.”* Corinne left the existing position, was promoted, received the raise, and continued moving up; attributing it to her self-reliance and ability to persevere.

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\* All names of administrators have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

Margo's experience regarding tenacity was somewhat different, in that she felt a greater measure of self-reliance in some instances, "*I rely on myself – I'm more so 'self-reliant' and I'm affected by contributions all along the way.*" Clearly, the African American female's self-perception denotes her confidence, talent, assurance, resilience, and tenacity to achieve as literature confirms throughout the history of African American females in higher education. Trailblazers such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McCleod Bethune, Lucy Diggs Slowe, and others left a legacy for African American women to model.

Nearly all the administrators felt their mentors provided a strong foundation and groundwork for them and helped with survival strategies in the academy, including how to navigate the system. Corinne explained, "[They taught me] *how to forge relationships. How not to get involved with the politics of work. How to be friends, but stay separate. And also the ethic of hard work. Do what you are there to do first, and then add all the other stuff*".

The administrators felt strongly that a mentor continued to shape them, their personalities, attitudes, and future goals and the relationships always had to be cultivated in order to grow. This was particularly important if the administrator had a certain goal in mind to achieve, whether moving up the institutional ladder, gaining more power in the current position, or being afforded the opportunity to assist other African Americans.

Audra explained further that the mentoring relationship must be reciprocal and perceived it as requiring a two-way responsibility, that of mentor and protégé, in order to be successful and productive. She noted, "[Mentoring] *it just helped me...for me it resonated that you never know where you are going to be, where somebody can give you a word, some encouragement, advice, help you. You need to be an open vessel.*"

When I asked the women to describe how mentoring shaped them within a spiritual context, nearly all echoed that a high level of spirituality and nurturing their relationships with God was paramount in their career success. Jasmine reflected how she was strong in her faith when she needed to make a decision regarding leaving a position in the academy and that her mentor consistently encouraged her to remain spiritually grounded, *“So I just put in my notice and said, I’m not going to return. I don’t know what I’m going to do yet. But I’ll figure it out. You know, being a person of faith and knowing that God just takes care of you...and to take that step. I don’t know what’s going to happen but I am really committed to getting this done. So, you know, I need to do it and step out on faith.”* Ava acknowledged a similar sentiment, *“My mentor impacted my life spiritually, personally, and professionally; and now she [her mentor] is a minister; she was always there for me in every circumstance I faced.*

Greta spoke of the influence of spirituality in her life,

*“I don’t wear my spirituality and people don’t know that when I get up in the morning, there are some mornings that are more challenging than others. There are times I have conversations with the Lord and say, ‘I need you with me today.’ ‘Please be with me.’ You feel, it gives you a sense of comfort, um, calm and confidence, you know, it will work out. And so I sincerely feel that I ended up here because I’m supposed to be here. And that it wasn’t for me to be here to do something for me. It was for me to be able to share something that I have um, that can be seen as a talent or ability, or skills. So, each day is kind of like a search for it.”*

Although her initial mentoring relationships were not specific to career advancement, Whitney remarked that her confidence and resiliency was initially derived from the legacy of mother provided, *“My first mentor was my mother; she built the legacy for me; caused me to become well-*



*rounded; feeling good in my own skin; entrusting in myself; and embracing a sense of accountability. Spirituality was central and paramount for me.”*

Angela echoed similar feelings about her spiritual self and embracing her confidence, *“My parents, grandparent, and brothers consistently gave me encouragement – spiritually and it promoted my faith they were strong role models.”*

It tended to keep them grounded, avert challenges they confronted, promoted their faith, and provided courage and fortitude to continue the path. I felt a strong sense of sisterhood with the administrators I interviewed due to my own spiritual base which I felt had a direct correlation to my career achievement, and also in my role as researcher for the study.

I approached the study with the goal of ‘making meaning’ of the data in a manner in which to involve and enlighten the reader by identifying the various aspects of the African American female’s life, which included her personal, professional, and spiritual being. Dillard (2006) elaborates on the relationship between spirituality and African American women and notes, *“In African American communities, what happens in everyday life to individuals within the community is critical to ‘making sense’ of particular actions, expressions, experiences, and community life in general”* (p. 23). To me this has a relevant impact on the perception and outcome of mentoring relationships for the African American women’s career advancement.

Multiple mentors were typical for the administrators, particularly defining those for both professional and personal needs. Alexis commented regarding her perception of multiple mentors, *“There are some mentors who are only one-dimensional and will give you access. There are some mentors who will teach you the ropes but don’t have access. And then there are some individuals that are able to combine both. And you need them all. You need them all.”*

Brook clearly described it as the necessity of having a “*buffet of mentors*” throughout her career. Nearly all of the administrators suggested that mentors should be secured for various needs and reason, be appropriate for sundry situations, and most critical, they should be equipped to contribute to the protégé’s growth.

#### **4.1.2.2 Reflections on the Construct of Success**

When I asked the administrators to describe how they would define the construct of success, nearly all the women, regardless of age or tenure at their respective institutions, echoed a similar sentiment, that of happiness. All eleven administrators felt success was simply being happy in doing whatever task or role they had and accomplishing what they set out to do.

Their plethora of responses was telling in that the pilot study administrators echoed very similar responses regarding their perception of success. All the women were eager to discuss how that success had such a deeper meaning than financial gain, recognition, and achievements. Administrators from the actual study echoed similar responses. Jasmine, felt strongly about her views on success:

*You know, that’s an interesting question. I hate to get all Oprah on you. But I will tell you and it sounds cliché, but its living your best life. For me that’s what it is. It’s living my best life professionally, personally, spiritually. But I know that for me my work has meaning. And it is important but it doesn’t define me as a person. So, my professional identity is a big part of me but it’s not the sum total of who I am. So I want to be a good daughter. You know what I mean. ..All those things... I feel like there are other responsibilities in my life as well as my professional goals and obligations. So it’s. . . for me it’s being the best at all those things.”*

Margo agreed, that success to her meant her ability *“To stimulate people...do good. It reminds me of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31. That’s what success is to me”*. Audra spoke of her experiences of having success as:

*And as long as you are doing what you know to be your best at whatever the task is. Be it something at work or some other project you’ve taken on and taken responsibility for it, give it your best shot. That’s all that God or anyone else can ask of you. And so that for me is success. If I’ve given something my best effort, it doesn’t matter that the product comes out perfect. But I know that I’ve done what I can do to get us there. And that I can be able to look myself in the mirror and say, ‘That was a job well done, because you used the talents and skills and resources at your disposal to do the best that you could.’ But I think that’s one of the things that I really sort of think of as people who are successful. People who take whatever it is they have and make the best of it.*

Although the administrators had reached senior-level positions, all felt that it was never about earning more money. If the money came along with the success, so be it, but most felt the esthetic attitude was more beneficial and long-lasting.

Another distinctive discovery throughout the study was that the administrators felt that success was measured by their level of making a positive influence and difference in the lives of others. I noted the theme of ‘Giving Back’ as recurring and dominant in their responses. They felt that giving back to individuals, their institutions, their student body, staff and faculty, as well as their community was paramount in their lives. Although they prided themselves on being able to assist others, they expressed a humble spirit of giving. Alexis mentioned, *“When I look inside, for me success is will I have made a difference? Will that institution have changed for the better because I*

walked through it with the people who live and work there? That to me is success.” Corinne shared, regarding a former student,

*She worked for me as a undergraduate student, and now has a doctorate and is a school principal. When she was working for me I had a bachelor’s degree and was working on a master’s degree. She said that my influence and my continuing to attain an education, even though I had a job as such, and my training of her on office work and organization [skills] and all this stuff, influenced her to do what she did. Now she is asking me how can she move from public schools to college.”*

When asked if a mentor contributed to their success, the administrators felt that their mentor contributed to both their professional and personal success and played an integral part in their development. The mentor made them cognizant of their culture, their womanhood, and their potential. Although some felt that a mentor did not totally contribute to their climb within the academy, they did provide unconditional support throughout various stages of their career.

Mentors may have assisted in their success, but all eleven of the respondents felt that success went beyond the traditional perception of ‘having it all’. Hill, Bahniuk, and Dobbs (1989) also suggest that mentoring does not determine the success of the protégé, but rather success is multifaceted and is dependent on many variables.

#### **4.1.2.3 Reflections on Relevancy of the Race and Gender of the Mentor**

I asked the participants two poignant questions regarding race and gender. First, their views on the significance of the race and gender of the *mentor*. Secondly, how they felt they were perceived as *Black females* regarding their own race and gender by others (in their institution, or elsewhere). These questions incited lively reflection and conversation with the administrators. They were

anxious to express their views and also their experiences of racism and sexism. They also offered recommendations to strategize and handle any racist or sexist issues they may have faced in their careers and more importantly to share the information with those African American women of the next generation who will follow in their steps.

Ten of the eleven participants in the actual study felt that neither the mentor's race nor gender were significant factors in the mentoring relationships they had. Data from the actual study revealed that the participants felt the most effective and successful mentoring relationships related to career advancement occurred with the individual who "has the power" within the organization; the person who "fills the need", regardless of the mentor's race or gender.

Analysis from the pilot study however revealed that although nine of the eleven respondents felt that the mentor's race did not matter; two felt that it was significant. Regarding their perception of the mentor's gender; eight participants felt it was relevant; three expressed it was not a significant factor in the relationship. Two participants expressed that as a Black female, they felt more comfortable with other Blacks mentoring them and voiced the need to have a mentor who could identify with their challenges in the academy. One pilot study participant shared that, "*the race and gender of the mentor does not matter – since most of the decision-makers do not look like me*".

The differing perceptions (between the pilot study participants and actual study participants) could be resultant from the positions held by the women in the studies; the pilot study participants were largely composed of middle-level administrators; while the actual study participants were mainly senior-level participants. Tyson (2002) argues that since African American women are typically found at the bottom of the administrative hierarchy, they often serve in service-oriented assignments as the "assistant to," presidents, provosts, director of minority affairs, affirmative action, and student affairs departments. Since several of the participants in the pilot study held similar

positions as those described above, this may be indicative of their responses regarding the race and gender of the mentor, although not substantiated.

Ragins (1997) suggests that mentoring relationships involve the influence of securing power resources in the organization to assist the protégé in their careers. The mentor who possesses the power and influence in the organization will reflect upon the protégé's success in obtaining advancement. This can occur by providing a means of navigating political strategies and obtaining visibility necessary to advance their positions. Thus, the mentoring relationship is built upon the mentor's access to power within the organization. Ragins (1997) further advises that diversified relationships, composed of a majority mentor and minority protégé have the capacity to provide career development functions.

Data show that the participants in the actual study do not recognize race and gender as significant factors in their career advancement, which affirms their belief that the individual who holds the power and influence remains critical for their movement within the academy.

Participants from the actual study felt that that most effective mentor is the one best equipped for the need for their career, but also expressed that key factors such as trust, communication, and accountability were critical. They also felt that the mentor must take the relationship seriously, stay in contact, and invest in the protégé's success, regardless of their race or gender.

Corinne advised:

*I think it depends on the reputation of the mentor and the circles that the mentor moves in. So, having . . . how would I say, having a White female or White male mentor who is not well known, who cannot, is not even involved in the main stream*

*of the academy, would not do me any good. Where, if I had a Black female or a Black male who is a publisher, a presenter, has moved in those circles...that would be beneficial.”*

Greta reflected:

*It’s mainly important that the person has a sincere interest in my progress. [Speaking of one mentor she said,] He recommended me for various things, scholarships, fellowships, etc. When he introduced me in front of a group, he would tell people exactly everything about me. When I later became a dean, he said, you’ve done a good job...a really good job. He would go on to comment, compliment, and encourage me...even when I was his equal.”*

Alexis shared that her mentor played a strategic part in her career, *“My mentor was a White male who gave me entrée to advance. He told me he was my ‘agent’.”*

Greta echoed similar experiences as she pursued senior positions in the institution, *“I had a ‘discipline’ mentor who provided guidance and explaining the ropes – he was a White male. He had a sincere interest in my progress. I also sought out the White male dean for guidance – he was complementary and encouraging.”*

Race and gender did not play a determining role when they were involved in mentoring relationships, since they felt they succeeded with the aid of those individuals who were reputable and powerful in the institution.

Regarding the gender of the mentor, one exception during the actual study arose, as Jasmine noted, *“I typically prefer male mentors...they are more giving. I feel it is easier to have a trusting relationship and their advisement and counsel.”*

Tillman's (2003) study of Black female faculty members however revealed that protégés sought out same-race mentors with similar personal and cultural backgrounds who could provide them support in securing promotions and mobility within the institutions. Although Johnson (1998) agrees that African American women have the unique ability to cross racial and gender boundaries in the mentoring process, she argues that the "commonality of backgrounds, experiences, and professional challenges makes the mentor/protégé relationship between African American women especially significant and rewarding" (p. 55). She suggests that African American women mentors have the unique opportunity to share experiences, teach necessary negotiating skills, and build the confidence of other potential African American administrators, thereby increasing their protégé's success, advancement, and ultimately numbers in the pipeline.

In summary, given that success in the mentoring relationship may reside in the amount of power and influence of the mentor, rather than the race and gender of the mentor, the participants in the study did not perceive race and gender as a determining factor in the mentor-protégé dyad in this study.

#### Reflections on Perception of the Administrators' Own Race and Gender

I asked the administrators (in the actual study) if they would describe if they felt it was *their race (as an African American) or their gender (as a female)* that was a more significant factor in three areas: a) how other people perceive them, b) in their current career, and c) as related to their career goals for advancement. Once again, this precipitated a spirited conversation as the administrators were eager to 'voice' their thoughts.

All of the administrators profoundly felt that their race as an African American, was a more significant factor than their gender in the way they were perceived by others. This was foremost in



their professional lives on campus. Several gave instances of racism they experienced while participating in senior-level decision-making, while advocating for their institution, and also in their attempt to be respected with colleagues. They were extremely candid during the interviews and felt their experiences would contribute to enlightenment of other African American women who desire to follow in their paths.

Brooke expressed her views, *“First – I am viewed as an African American...that’s how I’m perceived and looked at.”* She continued, *“It works two ways: I’m often welcomed – catered to – it opens doors; however, I feel intimidated by other Black females and in competition with them, [which results in] betrayal!* Angela mentioned that her upbringing played an integral part in how she perceived herself, *“First – race. Being born in the South contributed to it. Race was always ingrained – early on. [It is like] Taking the ‘Mirror Test’ – color is the first thing you see.”*

Race was viewed as the predominant element by most of the administrators, particularly those who often were the first to integrate the senior administration ranks at their institutions.

Alexis shared, *“There are more white women who are getting in the door. Very few women of color are getting in the door. There are more of us but not significant numbers. But it’s the race thing that hits me first when I walk into a reception.”* Angela strongly felt that, *“Always more about race...race does play a major part. It creates a climate – can’t deny you are Black and often different.”*

When asked about the race versus the gender identity, Greta spoke of feeling alienated as a Black woman:

*Well I can tell you, from college for the longest time, it’s been more about race. I know whenever I go to these [events], when we started that networking... I quit going because I was offended. I can’t connect, you know. You’re not talking in my language. And um, because. . .*

*some of the battles that they were talking about. I had dealt with them in a different way because I was trying to prove a point because I was Black. People expected you to do better. They expected you do to worse. And you were always trying to prove that you were worthy. And I really think as I progress professionally, I focused more on the fact of being a female. And that's because I interacted with females of all races. I've seen my role as being able to help women in any way that I can. I do feel that even this day there are times that I think administrators above me or equal, look at me as an African American female. You'd like to think racism is gone and I think in some ways those people don't realize they are [racist].*

Audra summed it up when she shared her thoughts:

*I think my race sometimes enters the room before my gender. Um, and I think particularly on college campuses like ours, as people have become much more comfortable with women. Um, the gender issue has tended to abate a little bit. Because as a person of color I'm often at sort of cabinet level or sort of inner circle meetings if you will. I'm often the only person of color. So, it's much rarer for me to be the only woman. I think that there are differences between Black women and other women. But I think that to a certain extent issues around race have been issues that I've, more often than not, felt that I was the person who needed to speak up. Because most of the time other people would not necessarily speak for malicious reasons. Because it wasn't a part of their world experience."*

Several of the administrators felt that the gender identity they held could have been detrimental to their career, but they learned to strategize to avoid it from happening. Jasmine reflected:

*As women, I also, think that we get painted into a little box. You know, we're going to be all emotional or we can't handle it, or whatever. It's like no, we can handle it. And I can speak truth to power. It's ok. I'm not going to back down on it. I'll have to go into the bathroom afterwards and cry my eyes out if I feel like I need to. But you know, I'm not going to do that in that setting. I think it's very difficult and as Black women we have all these things to balance, because sometimes in those settings, men want to nurture woman. You know, it's like, 'Oh dear, dear,' you know...that kind of thing.*

#### **4.1.2.4 Reflections on the Construct of Marginality**

I introduced the construct of marginality by explaining the two differing views to the administrators. First, the view of 'negative' marginality that envisions that since the Black female is often placed on the periphery, her status of 'being marginalized' becomes a way of life in her chosen profession, resulting in having to overcome challenges of invisibility, isolation, and exclusion. Second, the connotation embraced by Dr. Mary Alfred (2001) who argues that marginality is a state of mind and only problematic when individuals lack a strong sense of cultural identity to keep them grounded. After discussing the differing views of marginality, all the administrators felt they did indeed overcome various challenges confronting them by approaching them in a positive manner and attitude.

Several discussed using creativity to define a win-win solution to their dilemmas and how they turned their anger into opportunities for change. Alexis described her experience of overcoming the negative marginalization, to her advantage:

*I had been on the Chamber Board for eight years. I loved being on that Chamber Board because you got access to all kinds of information that normally you would not know. And I knew that they invited me because I was a Black woman. And I know*

*that. I'm in the room. I'm at the table and I get to hear all the good stuff and the bad stuff. But I knew every time I go to one of their receptions, I will be there by myself. And you get tired of that some time. You got to tell yourself, 'Alright I'm going to this thing and I know that it's going to be. Ok, put that smile on and walk in there and put on your most gorgeous outfit. Just take over'. You go through those mental exercises.*

Corinne used marginalization as a means to further achieve: *"When you talk about being on the margins and stuff like that, I always use that as a stepping stone for me to get something...like time for special programming".*

The administrators spoke of coping mechanisms they had embraced throughout their career to navigate the institutions. Several were adamant of not allowing themselves to get pigeon-holed. They also felt that maintaining a positive approach allowed them to move beyond the color line. Greta advised: *"As I was saying, I always operate positive. I always look at what can be. I don't spend a lot of time on negatives. And so, having people who will work for you who are constantly negative is not good."*

Jasmine shared an insightful thought regarding her membership on search committees,

*Because it's kind of OK to say that we are marginalized. And I will tell you that there are some incidents where I've been able to do that. I'll tell you when they have occurred most, on search committees. You know, they always need to have [a Black person]! So I figure if you are going to bother me with every search committee in the world, then come on with it. Because I'm going to tell them no, the pool is not diverse enough. This is not what we need. I'm going to argue to say, let's keep this person in with whatever diversity we have. You know, I'm going to challenge that. So during*

*those times, where I know I'm only here because you need a person of color. You know, because of my position and I happened to be a person of color, you invite me to be on all of these. Then I'm going to be your conscious. I'm going to be the person that constantly challenges you to honor your commitment to diversity. They say, (Oh, she's striving.) You know...I've learned to modify in a way that helps folks to understand, you know. I'm jovial. I'm positive. I'm upbeat. But I know what I'm doing. You know. So, it's very interesting because I think people will push you in ways, um, just to kind of push a button. To test you out...I make sure that I am as collegial as possible. As up beat. But I also make sure that, um, you know, people kind of know I'm not a push over. So I can challenge you but I will do it in a very respectful and positive and collegial way. But I can challenge you.*

The administrators' views on marginality echoed the thought that the challenges made them stronger; the obstacles tended to bring forth their resiliency and fortitude to continue, and they were not going to allow a defeatist attitude to decay their goals and aspirations.

The women who participated in the focus group held similar views about the construct of marginality and strongly felt that they had to condition themselves to deal with any negative marginality by using coping mechanisms, self-projecting their professionalism and confronting the situation.. They felt it necessary to call upon others for validation and filter it through before acting out. All of the participants held consensus in that they had to acquire creative ways of dealing with the adversities they faced in the workplace. They created a type of sub-culture in which they could permeate to the 'center' and defy the negative stance of marginality.

Perhaps due to the different positions (middle-level administrators) the focus group members held as compared to the actual study members (senior-level administrators), participants in the focus

group noted that because of the marginalization, the institution loses out on the talent, motivation, and self-determination that the Black administrator possesses. They felt that their hard work throughout their career was not always recognized and left them feeling isolated and often invisible.

Several African American scholars have researched and written on the construct of marginality and the Black female's experience in the academy. Willie (1981) defines marginality as one's ability to live beyond the boundaries of one's own race, social class, and cultural distinctions. Collins (1986) attributes an advantage of marginality for the Black woman to express creativity of her talents. As Alfred (2001) suggests, the Black woman's definition of herself as survivor provides her with the ability to navigate in and out of gender, class, and culture settings and emerge with a strong sense of who she is, instead of accepting marginality as a disability. The respondents in this study did not allow the status of marginalization to stifle their achievements, but defined themselves to adopt a positive outcome even within the dominant groups of the academy.

#### **4.1.2.5 Reflections on the Administrators Perceptions of Power Bases**

When I asked the administrators to discuss their perception of the resources of power within their institutions (e.g., if they were restrictive or limited and also if mentoring relationships expanded their power base), most felt that power and influence came along with the exposure and visibility allotted to them. They had to seek the power bases, usually through intentional networking, both vertical and horizontal, and this occurred both within the institution and within the community.

Nearly all agreed that the primary mentor in their career was one who had the power, influence, and solid reputation of the institution. Several women collaborated with community leaders and constituents to establish the power base as well. Audra spoke at length of her strategies:

*So that I think one of the things that I typically always look at, is try to figure out if there are ways for me to make an impact. And um, there are lots of ways to have*

*power. Because I think of power as not necessarily that which is conferred upon you, but that which you can amass. Because you have people, information and ideas that you can use that as sort of a power and energy to get things done. And it was everything from asserting yourself and committing to volunteer to do things where you can try to make a difference in terms of the way that policy gets shaped, or even being able to network with people who are the policy setters. And sort of thought leaders in the community and giving them the opportunity to have them see things from a different perspective. I guess in some way I'm a proponent of trying to be creative in a positive, um, sense. Um, not being sort of pollyannaish about it or naive but also thinking about fact that life is full of choices and possibilities. You got to choose wisely. So that you are opening doors not only for yourself but for hopefully people who will come after you.*

Audra's comments align with the image of the Black historical educators and activists who embraced the values of Black people in their impact to uplift and encourage others. She felt that to have power was to release it to others and the importance of securing those mentors who the power, influence, and reputation of the institution. As we discussed the construct of power, she also expressed the need to seek the power bases both 'upward' and 'horizontal' across the institution and the community, so as not to miss an opportunity.

Kanter (1977) submits that "power begets power" and that people who hold prestige and status may in fact be more influential in getting the people around them engaged in the work. Since Black women are often excluded from power bases within the academy, mentoring can be instrumental to achieve their goals. Several other respondents agreed that when power was restrictive

or limited in their administrative roles, they would attempt to handle challenges by engaging with a mentor for advice, assistance, and navigation through political hierarchies.

#### **4.1.2.6 Reflections on the Barriers Faced by the Administrators**

When I inquired about any barriers the administrators face in their positions and if mentors had alleviated the barriers, all but one of the administrators stated they faced significant roadblocks within their institution. Several felt that the institutional barriers such as retaining and recruiting minority students, faculty and staff were major obstacles when they attempted to create strategies for diversity. Also problematic was the dilemma of policy barriers, such as federal or state limitations. The mentors they had often circumvented the problem areas and provided strategies to implement.

The most problematic barrier for these women was the mere fact that they were Black and female within a predominantly White-male dominated environment. They mentioned using various strategies to survive, and as one administrator elaborated, “Self-voice’ speaks out for change to occur!” On the other hand, they felt if they voiced their opinions too much, the perception of being an “angry Black woman” could result in significant problems.

They felt that since others were critical of their position, and the responsibility for the series of high-level roles to perform, they were criticized for their management style or manner of handling dilemmas. All agreed that their mentors played an important role in how the administrators survived. Audra reflected:

*I think I've learned a lot just in terms of growing as a professional and I continue to learn. One of the things that I'm always cognizant of is as an African American woman and dealing with mostly with White males, I always have to make sure that I'm not being perceived as being you, know...too militant...too angry, whatever. All those things that are attached to us. I feel you should just do the right thing.*



Greta did not feel that a specific mentor assisted her in breaking down barriers, but she did allude to having a support system in place:

*Another challenge was having people undermine me and make me look bad. It wasn't necessarily a mentor who helped, but people I talked with to take a stand with me. It was nothing I could do until I was freed to take the initiative to make change.*

Some of the barriers faced by the African American female senior administrator lies in the area of not having a sufficient number of women qualify for positions. Alexis shared:

*I've gotten here through a series of support, and now one barrier that is most immediate is that I have all men [working for me] for the most part. Even though I have done all these searches and tried to hire women. Women are not interviewing well and are not coming in, even for me to get them in the door. There're just not doing well. But somebody does need to sit down with women regardless of gender and regardless of race and say that, 'Your're not presenting yourself.' So [as a result], I have a majority of men working for me.*

#### **4.1.2.7 Reflections on Administrative versus Faculty Positions**

The administrators voluntarily offered comments regarding what they viewed as significant differences between administrative and faculty positions within the academy and why perhaps most African American females may not want to pursue senior-level positions. Margo, who had tenure at her institution, felt that faculty enjoy more freedom of their time than administrators and perhaps the absence of women in administration is that women do not always view themselves as administrators.

Others who had been senior administrators for several years at their institution strongly believed that in view of their titles, being a tenured professor had more opportunities and flexibility.

Several felt that administrators often have limited opportunities, resources, and ‘voice’ in the academy. Corinne was adamant when she stated:

*Because administration is a twelve-month job, you don't have as much freedom as you have if you are in the classroom and faculty realms. And generally speaking, the administrative positions don't pay as much money when you add up a nine-month faculty salary plus summer teaching, plus any other consultant opportunities...we don't have time to do consulting. The other thing, administrators don't have the luxury of tenure. When the president calls, or a change in anything happens I'm out...if that is his pleasure. You work at the will of the administration.*

Audra shared that major responsibilities and critical decision-making resides with senior administrators and perhaps that is why many African American females do not pursue those positions due to the high risk factor:

*Some ways I almost like to think of administrators having a little bit more risk factor. Because of the fact that, um, a lot of sort of the operations of the institution ride on the shoulders of administrators some ways more than they do on faculty members. Faculty members' work is incredibly important to the institutions, but you know, there won't be necessarily any notion of a break in their payroll.*

#### **4.1.2.8 Recommendations from the Administrators**

By the end of the interviews, I felt the administrators had enjoyed the dialogue as much as I enjoyed it, and more importantly, that they were allowed to offer the value of their voice. Their responses were often far beyond my expectations and I could sense throughout the conversations that they were appreciative to have the opportunity to reflect on their careers, their personal lives, and their future aspirations. Several were adamant that I include their thoughts in various

recommendations, primarily in an effort to pave the way for those African American women who may follow them. Alexis suggested:

*I would just ask that you produce something that will cause the younger women to take risks. The pipeline looks bad – and if we don't have more in the pipeline – we are in jeopardy of not having a pool of Black females to fill the positions. They must realize they need to be prepared and take the risks.*

One aspect that nearly all of the administrators agreed as necessary was the tenet of guarding their reputation. Several of the women also felt their spiritual base provided the strength to stay resilient and embrace the character needed to succeed. They also felt that as an African American female, they owe it to themselves and to their mentors to handle each situation in a wise manner, to stay authentic, be honest, and be instilled with integrity. Audra felt strongly about reputation as she expressed:

*People forget that in some ways, higher education, I think is a relatively small community in some sense. Nationally even. And so, if in fact I have created a sort of; a little bit of a stir in some place, people hear about it. So when people hear about you they may not know about the quality of your work except by reputation. But your reputation a lot of time, speaks very loudly for you. If you've done good work and made a good reputation for yourself and had a graceful departure. And I tell people, you know, you don't try to burn bridges, unless it's absolutely necessary. And there are too many times where I've seen people of all races and genders, but especially it's painful for me when I see African Americans, or African American women do it.*

They also felt strongly that since Black females are often generalized and stereotyped, they must strategize to force others to remove the stereotype attached to them and avoid being vindictive in order to further their career.

Crystal felt it important that African American females know the importance of collaboration with colleagues, in an attempt to create a positive outcome:

*So, I would suggest know how to work with your co-workers. Know when to disengage...All I can do is give my best advice. Best thinking, best work to help the institutions get where it thinks it wants to go. I mean if it's a poor decision, I will tell you it's a poor decision. But I'm not going to fight about it. So I kind of like decided to let them run their institution as long as it doesn't negatively impact me personally where I can't sleep. Then I disengage. I don't argue any more.*

The tenets of Black feminist thought were interwoven throughout the interviews and the administrators felt strongly that as Black women, they must maintain a level of resiliency and self-assurance both for themselves and for those women who will follow them. They all held a strong belief of what they termed as 'giving back' and being supportive to other Black women in higher education, to their communities, and to students in whatever means they could, all in an effort to continue the rich legacy of Black contributions. The administrators felt this could be accomplished by several means such as staying well prepared, turning their 'perceived' stereotypical anger (as a Black woman) into opportunities for change, staying honest, and approaching situations with integrity and authenticity. Jasmine felt as an African American role model, she should be cognizant to maintain her credibility:

*I'm forward thinking. I keep thinking, how can I enhance my skill set and be the best that I can. Because I want to be on top of my game but I also don't want to be. . . I don't want to*

*miss an opportunity and have somebody say to me, you know, 'We would have hired you for that but you didn't have this one credential,' or whatever. I want there to be no doubt.*

The administrators echoed that they were convinced they had to stay on purpose with their careers and that the mentoring relationships they had were paramount in that development. They felt the best way to remain strong Black women in higher education was to challenge processes not people.

These women took pride in mentoring other women, always remembering their own experiences of how mentors supported and invested in their careers. They emphasized the importance of staying competitive and marketable, staying prepared and current on leadership skills, and always staying ready to be in a position to be recognized for their ability and talents. As Margo described, *"I feel you should use your attributes of your highest ability to your advantage. Use it since there are so few [Black females] in the roles. The challenge is to stay prepared for influence and maintain a positive influence."*

#### **4.1.3 My Reflections on the Results**

When I began crafting this study, I was eager to be the conduit through which the selected administrators would be able to share their stories, their successes and failures, their joys and disappointments. As I gathered the data, I discovered that I was not only making meaning of the findings and translating the lived experiences of these women, but amazingly, as I became immersed in the work, I found new discoveries of my own life. I found that the art of research taught me significant elements of myself as a researcher and was somewhat autobiographical since part of me was mirrored within the work I chose to pursue (Glesne, 1999).

These women were appreciative to have the opportunity to reveal their personal and professional feelings, those of anger and those of happiness. The study allowed them the opportunity to share themselves with me, as researcher, contribute to the literature on African American women, and more importantly, to leave a proud legacy for those African American women who aspire to reach senior-level roles within the academy.

#### **4.1.4 Summary**

This chapter presented the integration of the themes derived from the study with the actual voices of the administrators. Since mentoring relationships are quite elusive and a relatively new area of research for Black female administrators, most of this research has relied on the perceived self-reported data of the mentor and protégé.

The findings clearly demonstrated the need for mentoring relationships for African American female administrators to advance their careers in higher education institutions and that the inclusion of a mentor would benefit their career. Overall, respondents felt that the problematic challenges of invisibility, isolation, and exclusion continue to exist and persist as obstacles in their experiences within the academy. Nearly all of the women adamantly expressed that their resiliency and fortitude were the attributes that caused them to be successful in their careers despite the obstacles. They all felt they were blessed and fortunate to have reached senior-level status in the academy. Most important to them was the responsibility and duty they felt to give back to those who would follow in their paths. They exemplified the nineteenth century adage of ‘lifting as they climb’, denoting the image of successful individuals in a constant flux of helping others to achieve.

The women, although from various backgrounds and educational attainments, shared commonalities from their experiences as senior administrators. Their dissimilar experiences were

overridden by the plethora of stories about the influence of strong mentors who invested in their career advancement. Their double identities of being African American and being female brought them to a place of being a survivor within their profession. The themes of spirituality, giving back to others, remaining authentic, trustworthy, truthful, and honest echoed throughout their conversations. Generett and Jeffries (2003) advocate that, “much of Black feminist thinking reflects an effort to find a self-defined voice that expresses a fully articulated Black female viewpoint” (p.7). The women in this study exemplified exactly that and will indeed leave a rich legacy for those who follow them.

## **5.0 FIFTH CHAPTER**

This chapter presents a summary of the previous chapters, a discussion of the significant conclusions drawn from the study, followed by my reflections on the study.

### **5.1 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RESEARCHER'S REFLECTIONS**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how mentoring, specific to career advancement, affected the experiences of African American female administrators in higher educational institutions and to ascertain how the intersections of the race and gender of the mentor influenced their careers in the academy. Recent data indicate that African American females are receiving a higher percentage of academic and terminal degrees than in previous years, and are not obtaining senior level administrative positions at a comparable rate. Although several variables exist that may contribute to this disparity, this study attempted to add to the knowledge of mentoring relationships for African American administrators and to capture their lived experiences in the academy.

To this end, the following research questions guided the study:

1. How do African American female administrators in higher education institutions experience mentoring, specifically for their career advancement?
2. To what extent have mentoring relationships contributed to African American female administrators' perceptions of success?



3. To what extent, if any, does the race and gender of the mentor influence the mentoring relationships for African American female administrators' career advancement in the academy?
4. What effect do the constructs of negative marginality and creative marginality have on the experiences of African American female administrators in the academy?
5. To what extent does the restriction and limitation of power resources affect mentoring relationships for African American female administrators?

This study used qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of eleven African American female senior level administrators.

#### Summary of the Study

Mentoring relationships have long been a strong determinant for those who wish to move ahead in their profession, (Fagenson, 1988; Kanter, 1977; Kram, 1988; Thomas, 1990), and it was especially relevant to examine the impact of mentoring on African American female administrators. Equally important was to determine if the race and gender of the mentor had a significant effect on the developmental relationships for these women. Since most of the research on mentoring and other developmental relationships within higher education has been conducted with faculty and students, a study was warranted to examine administrators. Furthermore, most extant studies aggregate women and minorities, which does not fully disclose underlying analysis of disparities which may exist.

#### Discussion of the Findings as Related to the Research Questions

The findings of the investigation are organized in relation to the research questions and current literature regarding mentoring.

#### R.1. The process by which African American female administrators in higher education institutions experience mentoring, specifically for their career advancement

The data gathered from this investigation clearly indicate that the African American administrators credited their upward (and in some cases, lateral) movement in the academy to having a mentor. While mentoring was viewed as a critical component to their career success, they felt the mentor needed to have a vested interest for the relationship to be beneficial and that both mentor and protégé must be committed, stay connected, and accessible. They felt it important to identify those individuals in the institution who could assist in their career advancement, rather than wait to be mentored.

The literature affirms that since mentoring, specific to career advancement, has been shown to be a conduit of upward mobility for those individuals seeking growth, personal and professional development, the relationship is essential for African American women in their pursuit to advance in the academy. A plethora of opportunities including receiving promotions, (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Scandura, 1992), acquiring higher incomes (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1992; Dreher & Ash, 1990), and reporting more mobility and visibility within the organization (Scandura, 1992) exist when the mentor is invested in the protégé's career. As Bridges' (1996) data reveal, Black administrators should identify mentors who can serve as career advisors and provide support and visibility for advancement in the academy.

The African American female administrators in this study strongly felt the necessity to have a mentor to provide support, encouragement, and also to assist them in navigating the political culture of the higher educational environment.

#### R.2. The extent to which mentoring relationships contributed to African American female administrators' perception of success

The African American administrators nearly all of whom had reached senior level ranks within their institutions, felt that the construct of success was most predominant in their idea of contentment

within their personal and professional lives, sharing their knowledge and experience in the academy with other females, and providing encouragement to those who aspired to attain senior level positions. Wayne et al. (1998) posit that there are two distinct definitions of the construct of success that include: *objective career success*, measurable by observable career achievements such as pay and promotion rates and *subjective career success*, which includes an individual's feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction with his or her career. The data reveal that the African American administrators in the study held a high regard for the success that emanated not only from the accomplishments they had achieved, but from relationships with their families, other African American females, and the Black race in general.

R. 3. The extent to which the race and gender of the mentor influenced the mentoring relationships for African American female administrators' career advancement in the academy

The findings of the study clearly indicated that neither the race nor gender of the mentor was a significant factor in the developmental relationship. Instead, the relevancy and effectiveness of the mentor/protégé relationship was strongly influenced by the positional power and influence of the mentor. These results are directly linked to Ragins (1997) model on diversified mentoring relationships in which she examines the linkage and effectiveness between mentors and protégés who differ in their group membership. This is relevant, for example, when a mentoring relationship is composed of Black females (who typically have less positional power) paired with White males (who typically have a greater degree of positional power) in the higher education setting of the academy.

R. 4. The effect that either the construct of *negative* marginality, or that of *creative* marginality, had on the experiences of African American female administrators in the academy

The administrators were unyielding in their standpoint that marginality, when imposed upon them due to their race and gender, did not impede their progress to move ahead in the academy. Most had

to reflect quite intently on their ideas of marginality since they were often requested to publicly give their views and perceptions on the challenges of being a senior-level administrator who happened to be Black and female. Also they were frequently in situations that created isolation and uncomfortable feelings; however, they all felt that this exclusion did not define who they were. They expressed a powerful resiliency and self-determination in both their professional and personal lives.

Current literature presented an examination of marginality and African American female administrators within a range of interpretations and can be approached basically in two assumptions. Frable's (1993) work challenges one to consider that, theoretically, when a person is labeled as "marginalized," he or she is viewed as being "culturally stigmatized" rather than "culturally valued" (p. 377). This occurs since people typically pay more attention to negative rather than positive connotations about an individual. Frable continues to note that "stigmatized groups keep these [marginalized] individuals in their place where narrow stereotypes and delineated roles often function as social control mechanisms" (p. 377). The perspective of creative or positive marginality however allows entrance for enrichment to counter-oppose stereotypical attributes of the African American female. The administrators in this study echoed the preponderance of their need to embrace a positive attitude, which in turn promoted a positive climate for the students, staff, and faculty on their campuses. The construction of the notion of creative marginality has long been an integral component of the Black female's identity and has implications for the elevation of her self-esteem, self-determination, and self-validation (Collins, 1986; Grant & Breese, 1997).

#### R.5. The extent that the restriction and limitation of power resources affected mentoring relationships for African American female administrators

The data reveal that since the administrators experienced levels of restriction within the power allotted to them, they agreed it continually needed to be addressed. All felt they were in positions to

create substantial change in the institution, particularly for the greater good of their students, staff, and faculty. The literature shows that a mentor serves as the protégé's advocate in public forums and helps him or her to navigate the department and the university's political environment (Unger & Crawford, 1996), resulting in access to the power structure. *Reflected power* as described by Kanter (1977) is the power, including resources, influence, and support, that the mentor provides to the protégé in a visible and exposed effort to others. The administrators felt having a mentor who held positional power within the institution was a necessary component in advancing their careers.

### My Reflections as Researcher

My experience as a African American female investigating African American females echoed what Neumann and Peterson (1997) assert, that research is a “personal endeavor – experiences within and expressions of a researcher's life” (p. 1). Throughout the interview process, I took a ‘dialogical’ approach which resulted in the women welcoming my research and being generous with their input. This afforded me the opportunity to learn from the participants instead of merely studying them. I found while documenting their experiences that the temporal attributes and strengths of their lives, immeasurably complimented and influenced the tangibility of their professional academic roles. In an effort to create a substantial critical mass of African American female administrators in senior-level positions in higher education, not only must there be institutional change, but the African American female must stay prepared, and remain resilient, even beyond required credentials.

As previously discussed, the study focused on mentoring implications, specific to those functions involving career advancement. Kram (1988) suggests that this type of mentoring relationship is different than one that provides psychosocial functions since it emphasizes specific directives for career success. In this study, however, I discovered that the administrators had mentors who supported them in both career functions as well as psychosocial functions, thus not distinctly

separating the two, but instead, providing a range of functions. This knowledge of their experiences is indicative of the premise held by Black feminist thought, affirming the Black female's ethic of accountability, which as I continued developing relationships with them, found to be noteworthy. Whether they sought the mentor, or were selected by a mentor, the administrators all felt the strong sense of building a collaborative, often reciprocal relationship with their mentor.

I discovered throughout the interviews that although the eleven administrators came from divergent backgrounds, including different geographical and class distinctions, they all embraced the richness of family legacy and its impact on their lives. Long before they knew of the scholarly contributions of the term, 'mentoring', it was a phenomenon they were familiar with as young girls (e.g., to look to others to help them succeed, and when they achieved, to reach back and do the same). I felt the emergence of the phrase that nearly all the women resounded, 'be your authentic self', which they explained further, that in order to achieve success and advance in their careers, they had to remain honest, be instilled with integrity, and stay insightful. These were attributes I felt reflected the heritage of strong Black women, who persevere in spite of the obstacles.

Although each of the administrators held positions that involved tight schedules, they related that they were delighted to participate in the study in an effort to expand the knowledge of African American females and also to offer their experiences and voice to the literature. The study reflected the experience of an African American 'sisterhood' as they gave several examples of reaching out to other African American females who had plans of achieving senior roles in the academy. They all embodied the 'lift as we climb' adage in acknowledging their need to provide connectivity with other Black females to advance in the academy.

As previously noted, although my professional role was not the same, I felt a distinct connectivity as the administrators reflected on their challenges and dreams of success. They, like me

were first-generation college graduates, came from a close-knit family, and were always encouraged as a child to ‘be the best you can.’ Therein a bond was established, which I feel created a level of trustworthiness throughout the interview process. The administrators spoke of seeking out those individuals who could trustfully mentor them along their career path, and how if the path was stalled, the mentor was accessible to stand in the gap for them. As I spoke with each of them, I thought of my own ‘paradigm shift’, how that earlier in my career, my views and perceptions were at a different level since I was in a different social location. I would not have sought out mentors to assist in advancing my career, but waited for them to come to me, however, as I grew into a stronger, more self-assured place of who I am, my vision and self-assurance strengthened. I now have the freedom and confidence to seek mentors of those females or males, of any race, to align with my growth and development to create a better ‘self.’

Although the primary focus of this study was the implications of mentoring for African American female administrators in higher education, it was important to include the significance of the impact race and gender had on the developmental relationships for their career advancement. The interviews yielded reflections of not only their perception of the race and gender of the mentor, but also how the administrators feel they are perceived by others, as a result of her race and gender. The findings were revealing since the administrators all felt their race was more relevant, and as several women pointed out, “my race enters the door first...” These reflections reverberate back to the struggles between Black feminist ideologies and that of traditional feminism as supported by White women. Many of the views that the administrators held were in direct relation to the framework of Black feminist thought, particularly their stance on making an impact on society, through the influence of their positions. They felt blessed to have achieved the roles they held, but what was equally important to them was the influence they could have on their campus and on the greater

society around them. Their mentors, Black or White, played a critical role in both shaping their careers and their attitudes on life.

I included the administrators' perceptions on the construct of success in the study primarily since success is viewed differently by different races, genders, and ethnicities. These women reiterated that their view of success was centered on the premise of doing good, reaching out to others, and living their 'best' life. As they reflected, I found these attributes often did not include financial rewards or recognition, which although noteworthy, did not define them. Frequently the inclusion of having a mentor to advance one's career will in fact include only the temporal benefits; however, I discovered these women focused on a philosophical approach of giving their best in every facet of their lives.

The construct of marginalization, due to its several connotations, has a profound impact on the experiences of Black females. As discussed in earlier chapters, the literature reveals distinct definitions of the term, however, as I interviewed the administrators, I could not avoid reflecting on my own perception of marginality and strategies used (as adopted by Alfred, Collins, and others) to promulgate the image of being a strong Black woman. As the only African American female selected to participate in an executive women's leadership program in my institution, I could identify with being marginalized. However, I approached it in a positive manner when participating in the seminar. This provided an opportunity, not only for the reflection of my own learning of others' experiences, but more importantly, it provided an opportunity to share my experiences with White participants. The dual status of being Black and female is often not understood by the dominant society; therefore, any opportunity to advance inclusion into the experience is noteworthy. This creative marginality diluted the typical frustrations and feelings of isolation often associated with exclusionary practices. The choice of approaching marginality in a creative and positive manner



refutes the dominant society's image of an African American female, thus allowing her the freedom to engage and deconstruct any negative stereotypes.

As an African American researcher, I was compelled to extend the literature that exists on African American female administrators, since historically their '*story*' has been silenced. Although recent literature has made strides to include African American females, there remains a dearth of knowledge. This occurs primarily since scholars who document women's issues are typically founded in mainstream ideologies and evolve from a White feminist standpoint, which does not provide the opportunity to expound on the social location of the African American woman. Hurtado (1996) writes that it is erroneous to assume that the lack of documentation about Black women is a result of the lack of Black writers to contribute to knowledge, but instead that they have faced restraints and criticism. By delving into the rich experiences of the African American female administrators I studied, I felt the contribution to the literature was crafted in a way to elevate the knowledge and to educate and challenge those mainstream contributors who are conscious of the Black woman's culture, her differences, and also her similarities. Houston (1991) echoes this sentiment when she challenges White feminist researchers to "follow us into our world" (p. 1). She asserts it is only by taking this journey that scholars will be cognizant of and eventually reject ethnocentric and exploitative research currently conducted on women of color.

My own reflections regarding the influence of spirituality reverberated with the women in the study. They talked frequently about spirituality being a force with which to combat the ills of racism and sexism, how it keep them grounded, strengthen their faith, and provid a space of courage and support in times of adversity. The mentors these women had in their careers were well aware of their spiritual grounding and respected their standpoint, encouraging them to persevere.

### Unexpected Results

The study revealed that despite earning the credentials and often experience, African American women in pursuit of administrative roles often displayed a lack of readiness. The women in the study were unyielding regarding the preparedness of African American women seeking higher positions and felt obligated to mentor, coach, and assist in their development in an effort to increase the pool of candidates. They believed that although it was dutiful for the institutions to implement strategies to increase the numbers of African American women in senior roles, those women who had attained high-level positions should also maintain a sense of obligation and responsibility to recruit, retain and support others. They held a high regard for their institutions, and although critical of the processes, they expressed they were not negative toward colleagues.

Data from the study suggests that the role of senior administrators is often extremely demanding, particularly difficult for women with families, may cause several relocations, and require professional and personal sacrifice to succeed in the position. This may limit the desire for them to strive for higher positions in the academy.

Mentoring relationships specific for the protégé's career advancement may involve a level of risk. Kram (1988) notes that if the sponsor leaves the organization or loses credibility with colleagues, the protégé's career may suffer. The administrators in the study felt a strong obligation and reciprocity with their mentors, exhibiting a willingness to continue the relationship beyond their career achievements and also to remain accountable.

Nearly all of the women in this study came from humble beginnings, were first-generation college graduates, and were encouraged from their youth to 'be the best they could be' and to 'help others along the way.' They attributed their career advancement and success to this stance that helped them develop strong mentoring relationships with key people throughout their careers.

### Summary

For African American females to achieve career advancement in the academy, mentoring relationships are necessary to provide support and opportunities. Since the academy still remains relatively male-dominated, the domain of power rests therein. When power is restricted, there is no access to institutional patterns, strategies, and decision-making. As a result, the ability to be proactive in accomplishments for the mission of the institution remains embedded within a small, often closed, community of leaders who may not project the diversity of the campus environment. Shaw (2007) agrees that in order for mentoring to be effective, it must also be understood as a “power relationship”, one in which women can perpetuate the feminist perspective of power within institution (p. 9). Mentors can aid in the distribution of this power, and support protégés by showing them effective strategies to balance their career and personal lives and encourage them to be agents of change in an effort to facilitate positive growth on their campuses (Shaw, 2007).

The women in this study were clearly self-designed agents of change in that they felt, through their successful mentoring experiences, they were able to become role models to other African American women and through deliberate efforts of leading by example, they were able to support the next generation of leaders in the academy. My reflections on the study resulted in a valuable opportunity to engage the administrators, learn from them, and also to provide substantive data that can aid in reducing the disparities for African American females who desire to pursue senior administrative positions in higher education. During the study, I discovered reflections about myself, as a researcher and as a professional. I found that although these women came from different backgrounds and academic achievements, and several had achieved stellar awards and recognitions throughout their careers, that we shared a definitive commonality. This relationship I had with the administrators during the study echoes what Reinharz (1983) suggests: that research is an act of self-discovery, as well as a process of learning about others.

## **6.0 CHAPTER SIX**

This chapter will discuss the recommendations derived from the study and further research implications.

### **6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

The data from this investigation suggest that African American female administrators who held senior-level roles in their institutions felt that mentoring relationships had been critical to their career advancement and the race and gender of the mentor was not as relevant a factor as the mentor's influence and reputation. They did, however, reflect that although institutional change is a necessary element in furthering their careers, a level of responsibility rests with African American females to secure and maintain the required credentials and embrace the self-determination to build upon a network of individuals who can provide the mentoring needed for exposure and visibility in the academy.

This study suggests modification and restructure of search committee strategies to recruit African American female administrators. If search committees are not intentional in their recruitment strategies as well as securing diverse members on the committees, African American females who aspire to senior-level administrative positions may not be included in the pool. Gordon (2004) challenges institutions to ponder, is it a "supply issue or a search issue?" thus suggesting that perhaps

the problem lies not in the lack of appropriate candidates for a position, but with the level of intentionality in which the search is conducted.

Although national data on the number of African American females receiving doctoral degrees are increasing, in order to remain competitive in the traditionally male-dominated field of higher education administration, they must stay prepared. The administrators in this study were firm in their belief that African American women must stay competitive, marketable, and resilient to barriers that oftentimes, they place upon themselves. They must continue to take advantage of strengthening their leadership skills, budgetary preparation skills, interpersonal skills, among others, all in an effort to remain established with their credibility, talents, and achievement.

As shown throughout the literature, mentoring is essential for African American females, since it provides access to significant information and opportunities for career advancement. Vaughn (1989) reported that key role models and mentors are major influences for women seeking leadership positions. Likewise, the lack of mentors presents a barrier that closes women out of senior roles.

The participants in this study recommended that African American women should remain aware and cognizant of programs and individuals in key positions who can assist and support them. One participant shared of her attempt to recruit African American females into her institution, and discovered a lack of preparedness was evident, *“I don’t see them preparing themselves to be competitive”*. *“So, I am not sure that that is always a glass or cement ceiling as it is things that we place on ourselves, that prevent us from going higher.”* Several leadership and professional development programs can be advantageous to African American women pursuing advanced roles in colleges and universities, providing mentoring and networking components. In addition to holding the academic credentials of advanced and terminal degrees, supplemental preparation is critical for advancement to senior-level roles in higher education.

The American Council on Education (ACE, 2007), has two programs which provide professional development and support to assist women in higher education who seek to advance their careers. ACE's Third Summit for Women of Color Administrators in Higher Education, (ACE, 2007), addresses the rewards and challenges of a career in higher education governance and provides participants with a forum to explore and reflect on the most promising strategies for the advancement of women of color into senior administrative positions in higher education. The summit builds strategic alliances across cultural and racial groups; provides insights to share and capture experiences and strategies that have successfully moved women of color into senior administrative positions. Additionally, the ACE Fellows Program (2007) offers the opportunity for attendees to engage in a Mentor/Fellow relationship with a college or university president and/or other senior administrators; participate in senior level decision-making meetings at the host institution; and to immerse themselves in the culture, policies, and decision-making processes of another institution. The unique program condenses years of on-the-job experience and skills development into a single year and provides a comprehensive leadership development program for those in higher education.

The Millennium Leadership Initiative (MLI, 2007) is a professional leadership development program designed to strengthen the preparation and eligibility of individuals who are traditionally underrepresented in the roles of president or chancellor in the nation's colleges and universities and to ensure that the next generation of leaders in higher education, reflects the diversity of our nation. The Institute assists individuals to become successful provosts, deans, vice presidents or presidents, regardless of the position one pursues.

The MLI also incorporates a mentoring program in which each protégé is assigned a mentor who provides career advice and guidance during the year following the Institute. Mentors are current or former presidents and chancellors, many of whom are from groups underrepresented in higher

education. All mentors have made a commitment to encourage and guide junior colleagues to advance in their careers. Such a program would provide the necessary development for African American females who aspire to senior-level administrative roles in the academy, while incorporating the element of mentoring for their advancement.

Strathe and Wilson (2007), offer a model of professional development that may be beneficial to African American women in their pursuit of senior administrative roles. The authors propose strategies such as administrative mentoring specifically for women and minorities in an effort to focus on skill-building for contextually based activities. They suggest the development be aligned with the type of institution so as to directly support the needs of the administrator. For example, within a research institution, administrative mentoring would focus extensively on faculty scholarship and research productivity; the management of funds from multiple sources, graduate education, fiscal, budgetary, and administrative management; and building external relationships with community leaders, legislators, alumni, and potential donors. This would be advantageous particularly for African American women who are often excluded from participation in this type of professional development and also collaborations with key constituents.

Institutions interested in increasing the number of African American female administrators should engage in statistical analysis followed by action plans and directives to address disparities that exist regarding the number of African American female senior administrators. Several outreach efforts can be channeled to assist, such as extended professional development opportunities, offering forums to provide opportunities to extend dialogue and discussion of race and gender issues, sponsoring gatherings to bring inclusion of those individuals in powerful positions in the institution together, and providing seed money to host conferences in an effort to showcase best practices of

those national institutions who successfully recruit and retain African American female administrators.

Green and McDade (1991) offer a list of strategies which can be used by individuals seeking advancement in institutions:

- 1) *Conduct a self-assessment.* It is useful periodically to take stock of one's strengths and weaknesses, identify areas for further development, and determine preparation needed for additional or different responsibilities. Those areas include technical job knowledge, understanding of the broad scope of the institution, interpersonal skills and relationships, and record of accomplishments;
- 2) *Create short- and long-term development plans.* It is useful to outline regularly one or two manageable short-term objectives; attainable in six months to a year, in the context of a long-term development plan;
- 3) *Seek assignments that will offer new skills and information.* Committees, task forces, professional organizations, and participation on search committees offer many different learning opportunities and;
- 4) *Keep an eye on the future.* Since leadership positions are not always obtained by following a detailed long-range plan, but often within a loosely conceived plan, being open to new opportunities and new directions is an important part of leadership  
(Green and McDade, 1991, p. 217-218).

Despite gains over the past decades, women and girls continue to be underrepresented in leadership and key professional positions, therefore the American Association of University Women (AAUW) recognized the need for professional development for women. The Leadership and Training Institute (AAUW, 2007) is an organization within the association which offers programs for



women to acquire the skills they need to succeed and assume leadership roles in their academic, professional, and personal lives. The Institute provides experiential programs to promote the total woman: economic self-sufficiency, leadership development, career advancement, and technical skill development. The institute disseminates these resources to a diverse community of students, educators, professionals, and women in every facet of the private and public sectors of society.

Another program designed to benefit minority administrators is The Minority Advancement Institute, a program affiliated with The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). This institute was created in an effort to foster the development of diverse leaders in the advancement profession. The program focuses on management, leadership, and mentoring of advancement professionals of diverse backgrounds; provides strategies to build advocacy within the institution; and explores differences in minority leadership.

Institutions should also provide opportunities where these women can self-identify resources to proactively address their future, identify support systems and mechanisms that can elevate their career, and above all remain resilient to the barriers they face.

Recommendations gathered from the study also included the eminent need for African American females to stay prepared in a holistic manner – professionally (development), personally (healthy mentally, emotionally, and physically), and spiritually (maintain spiritual relationship) in an effort to remain competitive in their pursuit of senior-level positions in higher education administration.

### Implications for Further Research

The mentoring experiences, specific for career advancement, of African American females in higher education can be a complex issue, due to their dual identities. In order for an increase to be seen within the pipeline, it is imperative that measures be introduced to insure that African American

women advance their careers in the academy, not only to their betterment, but that colleges and universities can benefit from diversification. The diversity can be valuable for university staff, faculty and students in an effort to promote inclusion and address underrepresentation of African American females senior-level administrators.

Future research could include an investigation to identify if those African American females who solely follow academic paths in their careers have different experiences than those who pursue administrative careers. Most of the extant research on African Americans in higher education institutions has focused on faculty and students. The process of tenure for faculty can be complex and tedious, therefore a comparative study is warranted to examine the mentoring experiences, barriers, challenges, and successes of those African American female faculty women with those African American females whose careers are strictly administrative.

The use of both quantitative and qualitative methodology would be useful in order to capture additional demographical sketches of the participants, such as length of time to reach current position, number of mentors, head of household status, spouse's profession, number of children, professional development acquired (past and current workshops, conferences, etc.), among others. This mixed methods approach to the inquiry would afford the opportunity to collect quantitative data to measure the respondents' views based on pre-determined items, as well as qualitative data to obtain detailed information in response to open-ended questions.

Cross-validation of other measures, such as reporting data from the academy, from the dyads of mentor and protégé, and from other individuals within the academy would provide substantive data to untangle the myriad of ideas regarding developmental relationships in higher education institutions.

A longitudinal research study of PBOCHE Black female administrators at various points in their careers could be conducted in an effort to track: 1) why they chose their current institution and chose to stay there; 2) their hopes and aspirations of moving ahead; 3) their exposure to mentoring relationships over a designated period of time; and 4) whether they remained connected to the mentor.

A comparative research study of the career advancement of Black males who hold membership in the PBCOHE and have had access to a mentor would provide valuable information. This inquiry would be critical in addressing the Black male/Black female similarities and differences in the academy in regard to advancement.

Due to the fact that the PBCOHE encompasses membership within the three regions of Pennsylvania, including central, eastern, and western, the demographical structure of Black females differs substantially. Future research could include the examination of PBCOHE females in focus group interviews within each region in an effort to gather valuable information and to discuss their experiences, commonalities, and differences regarding sponsorship relationships. This analysis would inform and benefit not only the participants, but the PBCOHE and the respective member institutions as well, so as to develop and implement strategies to move Black females into senior-level administrative positions, thus providing diversity and inclusion in their institutions.

Several other approaches would be useful, such as modifications in colleges and university policies and programs within search committee practices and heightened knowledge and awareness of the benefits of mentoring available to African American women seeking career advancement.

The study could be expanded to a national audience to gather more substantive data. It may, however, be problematic to identify participants since it is often difficult to retrieve accurate data for African American female senior administrators in colleges and universities.

Finally, implications for future research on African American female administrators could include conducting additional types of research that could be beneficial to the institutional mission, goals, and vision and will influence students, faculty, and other administrators in an effort to create a more holistic educational experience and elevate the diversity awareness of the university body.

As previously mentioned, mentoring relationships however beneficial, are also quite elusive and lack a definitive ‘one size fits all’ approach. This ambiguity, however, should not dilute the responsibilities of colleges and universities in recognizing the need of inclusion of African American females into senior-level administrative positions. Whether strategies are accomplished through formal or informal sponsorship relationships with African American females, it is critical to be viewed as an intentional initiative. If institutions continue to operate in a ‘business as usual manner,’ the career advancement of African American female administrators will remain stagnant.

I chose to study women, specifically Black women, in an effort to generate research from their standpoint to be heard. Mies (1999) argues that, “it is only when women can use their documented, analyzed, understood and *published* history as a weapon in the struggle for themselves and for all women will they become subjects of their own history” (p. 81). I sought to discover the meaning these African American women attributed to their experiences of being mentored and mentoring others relative to career advancement in higher education. It was a journey of discovery in how they define themselves, personally and professionally and what attributed to their identities within a familial, community, and spiritual context.

**APPENDIX A**

**PBCOHE APPROVAL LETTER**

April 21, 2006

Dr. Brenda Sanders Dédé  
Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs  
840 Wood Street  
Clarion University of Pennsylvania  
Clarion, PA 16214-1231

Dear Dr. Dede,

I am currently a doctoral student in Higher Education Management, Administrative and Policy Studies at the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. My research will focus on how African American female administrators experience the influence of sponsorship for their career advancement in higher education, the perceived implications of the race and gender of the sponsor, and if sponsorship has contributed to their success.

I plan to use female members of the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education (PBCOHE) who hold administrative positions, as participants in my study. I am requesting your approval, as president of the PBCOHE, for to me to identify and request the participation of PBCOHE female administrators for the study.

This study will be conducted using structured, open-ended, tape-recorded interviews with African American female administrators who hold positions at higher education institutions. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face and via telephone, at an agreed upon location. All responses are confidential and participants' anonymity will be assured. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and disclosed only with their permission. Each administrator's participation is voluntary, and they may withdraw from the study at any time.

Please indicate your approval as requested signing one copy of this letter and returning it to me in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Attached please find a brief synopsis of the study. I can be reached at 412-396-5631 for any questions or comments. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,  
*Erroline Williams*  
Erroline Williams

\*\*\*\*\*

PBCOHE Approval for Study

*Brenda Sanders Dédé*  
Name

*4/28/06*  
Date

## **APPENDIX B**

### **PARTICIPANT LETTER OF PILOT STUDY**

July 6, 2006

Dear Dr./Ms. XXXX,

My name is Erroline Williams and I am currently a doctoral student in Higher Education Management, Administrative and Policy Studies at the University of Pittsburgh in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I am writing to seek your assistance in regard to your participation a research study I plan to conduct on *Sponsorship Implications for African American Female Administrators in Higher Education*. Your participation in this pilot study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this project at any time.

Mentoring and sponsorship are often used interchangeably, however, sponsorship is an element of the mentoring process, and viewed as a critical component to career mobility necessary to advance an individual's career. The purpose of this research study is to examine how the African American female administrator in higher education experiences sponsorship in workplace relationships, how they secure or are identified by sponsors, the influence of sponsorship relationships to their success in the academy, and whether gender and race are significant within the sponsorship relationships. The significance of this research will fill a significant gap in the literature on African American female administrators and their lived experiences in the academy.

Purposeful sampling is used to identify the participants. You were selected for this study primarily due to your significant contributions as an administrator in the field of higher education and your membership in the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education (PBCOHE). I am sincerely hoping you will share your experiences and perspectives regarding sponsorship and your professional life as well.

This research study will be conducted (upon your consent), using one-hour tape-recorded interviews, which are semi-structured and open-ended. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face, at a public location of your choosing, or via telephone. **If you consent to participate in the study, I will contact you by email or telephone to schedule the pilot study interview and provide additional information.** I will assure your anonymity throughout the study and any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and disclosed only with your permission. Realizing that your participation will take time from your busy schedule, it is my intent that the study will provide valuable information, not only to existing literature, but also to the voice of African American professional women throughout our society.

Please email your response of participation to me at [williamse976@duq.edu](mailto:williamse976@duq.edu) by **July 21, 2006**. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call me at (work) 412-396-5631 or (home) 412-795-7779. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Erroline M. Williams



**APPENDIX C**

**PARTICIPANT LETTER OF ACTUAL STUDY**

May 3, 2007

Dear Dr./Ms. XXXX

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in the research study I plan to conduct for my doctoral dissertation in the School of Education, at the University of Pittsburgh. Your participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from this project at any time. The topic for my doctoral dissertation is *Mentoring Relationships for the Career Advancement of African American Female Administrators in Higher Education: Intersections of Race and Gender*.

The purpose of my dissertation research is to examine how African American female administrators in higher education experience mentoring for career advancement and whether gender and race are significant within the relationships. Purposeful sampling is being used to identify the study's participants. You were selected for this study due to your membership in the Pennsylvania Black Conference on Higher Education (PBCOHE) and your significant contributions as an administrator in the field of higher education.

This research study will be conducted (upon your consent), using one-hour tape-recorded semi-structured, open-ended interviews, conducted face-to-face, at a public location of your choosing. I will contact you by email or telephone to schedule the interview and provide the interview protocol as well.

The information you provide will be kept strictly confidential, disclosed only with your permission, and in order to incorporate anonymity, pseudonyms (for participant and institution) will be used for any quotes that may be included in the dissertation. You will also have the opportunity to review a transcript of your interview and remove any material you do not wish to have used by the research. The results from these interviews will be described as part of the researcher's dissertation, and later may be incorporated into a publishable article. You may withdraw from this study at any time, either during or after the interview, without negative consequences. Should you choose to withdraw; your data will be eliminated from the study and destroyed.

Each administrator will receive a small artistic token as gratitude for your participation. Realizing that your participation will take time from your busy schedule, it is my intent that the study will provide valuable information, not only to existing literature, but also to contribute to the voice of African American professional women throughout society.

Please email your response of participation to me at [williamse976@duq.edu](mailto:williamse976@duq.edu). If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to call me at 412-396-5631. Thank you very much for your time.

Sincerely,

Erroline M. Williams

**APPENDIX D**

**IRB APPROVAL**



**University of Pittsburgh**  
***Institutional Review Board***

Exempt and Expedited Reviews

3500 Fifth Avenue  
Suite 100  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213  
Phone: 412.383.1480  
Fax: 412.383.1508

University of Pittsburgh FWA: 00006790  
University of Pittsburgh Medical Center: FWA 00006735  
Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh: FWA 00000600

TO: Erroline Williams

FROM: Sue R. Beers, Ph.D., Vice Chair *S.R. Beers*

DATE: June 23, 2006

PROTOCOL: Sponsorship Relationships in the Career Advancement of African American Female Administrators in Higher Education: Intersections of Race and Gender

IRB Number: 0606033

The above-referenced protocol has been reviewed by the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board. Based on the information provided in the IRB protocol, this project meets all the necessary criteria for an exemption, and is hereby designated as "exempt" under section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2).

- If any modifications are made to this project, please submit an 'exempt modification' form to the IRB.
- Please advise the IRB when your project has been completed so that it may be officially terminated in the IRB database.
- This research study may be audited by the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office.

**Approval Date:** June 23, 2006

SRB:kh

**APPENDIX E**

**FOCUS GROUP GUIDE**

**The Positives and Negatives of Marginality:  
Black Female Administrators in the Academy**

The concepts of marginality (as shown below) will be used as the topic guide for the focus group, with the intent to promote interaction among the participants, act as a follow-up to the pilot study, and lead to a rich understanding for the study.

Marginality has several connotations, both positive and negative which I will explore:

Negative Stigma:

The construct of marginality has a long tradition in sociology, and is based on the work of Frable (1993) whose research suggests that marginal people who, by virtue of their physical appearance, behavior, or life circumstances, are classified as *master status* individuals and continually treated as different.

Frable draws on the dimensions of marginality which include invisibility, the aesthetic appearance or uniqueness of the individual, and the difficulty of socialization into the mainstream. This dissimilarity creates a cultural stigma which can have a systematic impact, particularly since American culture designates certain attributes as central to understanding a person's character.

Grant and Breese (1997) provide further explanation by asserting that this marginal status, whether visible or invisible causes the individual to "create a psychological marginality that enhances the experience of marginality" (p. 192). The authors argue that this approach will eventually increase the gap between the marginalized person and those considered "normal".

Marginalization has also been defined as, "any issue, situation, or circumstance that has placed these women outside of the flow of power and influence within their institutions" (Patitu and

Hinton, 2004, p. 82). Since she is often placed on the periphery, the Black woman's status of marginalization becomes a way of life in her chosen profession, resulting in having to overcome challenges of invisibility, isolation, and exclusion.

Positive Advantage:

Dr. Mary Alfred from Texas A&M University has done extensive research on the interpretation of how marginality can be constructive for Black female administrators.

In her study of Black tenured female faculty at a predominantly White institution, she found that because these women had grown up with a distinct sense of themselves as Black people, they developed creative strategies to navigate the academic culture and still emerge with an unmovable and incredible self-confidence.

Results of the study showed that when facing issues of marginality in the workplace, "their positive self-definition was manifested through (1) the rejection of negative marginality, (2) finding a safe space, and (3) the rejection of external definitions.

Alfred argues that marginality is a state of mind and only problematic if one lacks a strong sense of cultural identity – if one is rooted in her culture and has a definite sense of herself and her place in the culture, then she will perceive her marginality as a positive attribute rather than as a handicap.

Patricia Hill Collins (1989) suggests this "outsider-within" position in the dominant culture places us in a unique position that affords us a distinctive view of the contradictions between the dominant group's actions and the ideologies they embrace.

Alfred proposes that this can create a privilege of knowing, watching, seeing and learning about the world in a different way, and we should use this privilege to produce new knowledge about the Black experience.

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