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# Through the Looking Glass: Barriers and Coping Mechanisms Encountered by African American Women Presidents at Predominately White Institutions

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THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: BARRIERS AND COPING MECHANISMS  
ENCOUNTERED BY AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN PRESIDENTS AT  
PREDOMINATELY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

by

Maria Baxter-Nuamah

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requirements for the degree  
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Dr. Maria Baxter-Nuamah

This dissertation has been examined and approved by the following members of the  
student's committee.

April, 15, 2015

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Dr. Barbara Wilson, Advisor

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Dr. James Grabowska, Committee Member

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Dr. Jerry Robicheau, Committee Member

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By

Maria Baxter-Nuamah

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Maria Baxter-Nuamah, Ed.D., Educational Leadership, Minnesota State University,  
Mankato, Minnesota, 2015

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify factors (experiences, career paths, and barriers) that influence the career advancement of African American women administrators in higher education. African American women's experiences in higher education are molded by both external factors and internal factors specific to "traditional" social roles within and outside of the university. This qualitative study examines the personal and professional growth of five African American women who rose to executive leadership positions as presidents at predominately white colleges or universities

There are five main themes in this study. First, African American women who aspire to senior level administrative positions in higher education must be educationally prepared and credentialed. Second, African American women aspiring to senior level administrative positions must be aware of their individual abilities, strengths and biases. Third, African American women on a career path to senior level administrative positions within higher education should obtain a mentor. Fourth, African American women wanting senior level administrative positions in predominately white colleges or universities must develop coping strategies to defuse the inherent institutionalized double oppression of racism and sexism that is prevalent in the higher education arena. Fifth, African American women who reach the senior level of higher education administration

must be willing to reach back and nurture the African American women who follow them.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to:

My mother, Majel Y. Baxter

My daughter, Mymique Baxter

My grandson, Malik Baxter

&

My eldest brother, Billeigh H. Riser

## Acknowledgements

I find it ironic that I am finishing my dissertation to obtain my Educational Doctorate at sixty-five years of age. Ironic because, I like the women I was fortunate enough to interview for this study, wish I had done it sooner. I'm near the end of my professional career, so I really do not know if having achieved this personal milestone will have any effect on what I have left of a career in higher education. Ideally, I will have the opportunity of "reaching back" and being able to mentor and nurture younger African American women who aspire to senior level leadership positions within the academy of higher education.

Thanks must be given to Minnesota State University, Mankato because it is here that I really experienced what "the glass ceiling" is all about, and how hard it is to climb the brick wall created inherently by institutional racism.

The following acknowledgements are made to thank those who have helped keep the box covered while supplying me with the needed weapons to engage the enemy and win fight if not the war.

I give honor to God for holding me when I was too tired to stand on my own feet and strengthening me when my earthly realities became burdens. I would be remiss if I did not thank "my man of God" Bishop Wayne Randolph Felton, who I believe was placed into my life to help me evaluate and develop my personal life while enhancing my professional career. This man of God is young enough to be my son, but wise beyond his years, and spiritually blessed. I am proud to call him my "spiritual father."

My thanks to my biological family for their love and unending support. The legacy of (Great) Grandpa Jackson and (Great) Grandpa Hoage, the academic tenacity of



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Thanks to the exceptional individuals who let me use their backs to climb on as I tried to climb the wall and to those who cracked the glass ceiling so I could get a glimpse

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Finally I want to say to all of you who drive down this highway after me, the road may not be paved, there may be potholes, it may not be clearly marked, there may be road blocks and detours, there may be stop signs, you might even have a skunk or two you have to run over. Go slowly, check your map frequently, and make sure that both headlights are working. It may be a long trip, but as long as you arrive safely, it doesn't matter if you are a little late.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to identify factors (i.e., experiences, career paths, and barriers) that influenced the career advancement of African American women presidents at predominately white colleges or institutions. This chapter gives a brief overview of how African American women's experiences in higher education are molded by both external factors (i.e. a university's history of hiring and retaining faculty of color) and internal factors (i.e. childhood experiences) specific to "traditional" social roles within and outside of the university (Etter-Lewis, 1997).

To understand these factors we must examine professional growth from the personal viewpoint of African American women who lived it. Women are significantly underrepresented among higher education presidents. According to Lapovsky (2014) only 26% of the college presidents at the regionally accredited institutions in the United States are women; this translates to about 1,000 women out of 4,000 presidents. According to Powell & Butterfield, (2002); Regan, (2001); Richley & Lingham, (2004) women face numerous obstacles such as sexism, marginalization, invisibility, double oppression and discrimination when attempting to obtain administrative positions in higher education. Lapovsky (2014) states that common barriers to more women becoming college presidents include: First, diminished ability to move into leadership positions due to a lack of opportunity and support; Second, women aspiring leadership positions face discouragement and sabotage; Third, because of the absence of role model leadership, there is in part a lack of identity; and Forth, expectations are different for women and men.

According to the United States Census, in 2005 there were 2,459,900 females employed in higher education. In 2009 the number of females working in higher education had increased to 2,782,100. It seems logical that the number of females in post-secondary senior level administration would also increase. The reality is that a similar increase in females in senior level administrative positions has not been seen. Having the qualifications and the desire, are not sufficient to gain senior level administrative positions in higher education. Women still lag behind in upper level positions, (Catalyst, 2004; Jackson & Phelps, 2004; King & Gomez, 2007). Reports reveal that white women are outpacing women of color in acquiring new leadership positions and the pay that has been traditionally reserved for positions dominated by white male leadership. Recent research has concluded that African American women are clustered, overwhelmingly, in lower ranking positions throughout our nation's institutions of higher education (Amey, Vanderlinden, & Brown, 2002; Crawford & Smith, 2005; Green & King, 2001; Logan, 2006; Owens, 2004).

Women face insurmountable opposition such as marginalization, sexism and discrimination when it comes to securing an appointment to a senior level administrative position in higher education, especially African American women who experience the double oppression of sexism and racism. (Johnson-Jones, 2009; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Waring, 2003). Race and gender for African American women render them invisible and visible at the same time. They are counted (visible) when it comes to statistical reporting but discounted (invisible) when it comes to intellectual or academic ability (Amey & Van DerLinden, 2002; Bradley, 2005; Hamilton, 2004; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). The numbers of African American women in administration positions across the range of educational

systems is on the rise but these gains represent only a small step toward achieving real demographic balance in senior level administrative representation in higher education .

African American women in higher education research tends to be few in number and aside from statistical reports, most focus on undergraduate education (Etta-Lewis, 1997). Because of this, the experiences of African American women have not been copiously researched or documented and women of color have been excluded from the career development literature. There is a deficit in the literature on career development involving African American women but research is slowly increasing that focuses on this population. Miller and Vaughn (1997) communicated their opinion that African American females who are either functioning at or aspiring to senior level positions in higher education must learn from the past while dealing with the present and future. In order to increase the disproportionate number of African American women in senior level administrative positions and encourage African American women to seek senior level administrative positions, it is beneficial to document the successes and coping mechanisms experienced by women who have obtained the position of college or university president. According to Carnevale (1999) how these women perceived their experiences, the obstacles they encountered and the mechanisms they developed to aid them in achieving administrative success provides a window of understanding into race and gender as they are played out in one of America's most vital professional, cultural and educational arenas that of higher education.



## Chapter 2

### Review of Literature

This chapter looks at African American women in the United States and their struggle for survival and identity within a dual oppression that includes racism, and sexism. The chapter will also dissect the societal structures such as marginalization stereotyping, discrimination and intersectionality that limit, delay or prevent African American women from ascending to the presidency of a predominately white college or university and how the “glass ceiling” directly and indirectly effects the career advancement of African American women.

Inequality has been found to be a product of historical and societal patterns. The existence of barriers like sexism, discrimination, oppression, marginalization and racism can create the impression that women are deficient in skill achievement and personality characteristics desirable in administration (Stokes, 1984). Women seeking educational administration careers find that, equality of the sexes is an illusion (Weber, Feldman, & Pohling, 1981). Tarver (1992) offers additional critical analysis of the higher educational system by suggesting the current system was structured under a different social and economic reality for a different type of faculty member— head-of-household, one male wage earner, with a stay at home spouse. This social construct which is outdated, still survives at institutions in the higher education system, from community colleges to research universities (Anderson, 2004; Malveaux, 2005; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Powell & Butterfield, 2002; Richley & Lingham, 2004).

The 1960's and the Civil Rights Movement increased awareness of policies excluding women and minorities within our society. 1960's Federal legislation was

implemented in the 1960's to address racial and gender inequality across professional occupations and educational opportunities. Laws, such as Title VII, The Equal Pay Act, Title IX, and The Equal Opportunities Amendment, and policies related to Affirmative Action were enacted to ensure that women and other protected individuals were objectively considered for employment and educational opportunities. One of the first pieces of legislation for women, related to sex discrimination was The Equal Pay Act of 1963. This regulation prohibits wage discrimination to women and men performing substantially equal work in the same organization. Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 soon followed prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or sex.

### **Glass ceiling**

Glass ceiling is a term that was coined in 1984 by the media and describes the artificial plateau, beyond which women and other protected class individuals are denied the opportunity to advance to administrative positions in higher academia (Cotter, Hermnsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001). Women have known about glass ceilings in executive suite and throughout all levels of the workforce long before the Wall Street Journal highlighted the problem in March 1986. Thousands of qualified women and minority men are routinely denied top level jobs in corporate America. Instead of calling it racism or sexism; we call it the "glass ceiling." The metamorphosis of the "concrete wall of exclusion" into a "glass ceiling" preserved positions of power and influence at the top of organizations exclusively for white heterosexual men (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Glazer-Raymo, 1999; Vanneman, 2001).

This familiar glass ceiling is tragic and shortsighted, because the world has an increasingly urgent need for more qualified leaders (Barsh, Cranston, & Craske, 2008). In 1976, Pswlitschek believed that women who have moved into administrative positions are deviant from the female norm. Women have been socialized to experience achievement and satisfaction vicariously by functioning in a supportive capacity commonly resolving conflicts among family responsibilities, career aspirations, and the perceived characteristics of leadership before attaining their own career goals (Tibbetts, 1979). The glass ceiling is a primary reason why the percentage of presidents of color is so small, reinforcing inequalities created by gender or racial differences not explainable by other job relevant characteristics (Quinta, Cotter, & Romenesko, (1998). There is a significant absence of African American women leadership at colleges and universities (McFarland, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999). For the absence is to be corrected, African American women must find ways to overcome the glass ceiling (Cotter et al., 2001). There is a need for studies exploring ways in which African American women can navigate the glass ceiling and circumvent long-held biases to establish a place of leadership for themselves. The findings of such studies might encourage higher education boards of trustees who serve as gate-keepers to selection, to change their misperceptions and provide opportunities for diverse senior level leadership (Harris et al., 2011).

Cole (2005) argued that even though some women of color have broken through the glass ceiling, this does not mean that the three Ws—white, western and womanless is not still the presiding spirit of the leader in American academia. She noted that “because we are in the house does not mean that we are truly invited to the table” (Cole, 2005, p.

14). And further stated that women of color, even if they reach a high-level rank, do not get equal pay or tenure, and are fewer in number than white women. Nelson's (2012) research confirmed that African American women have a unique set of complex issues to manage which often causes them to overextend and overwork themselves into a black hole. Studies on African American women as members of two subordinate groups in America society says African American women continue to fall between cracks of black history and women's history. Historians have assumed that whatever is reported about black men applied with equal validity to black women and that the history of white women covered black women as well. This tendency is evident in most of the reports on the college presidents. There is no doubt that African American women in leadership roles face barriers to advance to the college/university presidency. However, when they emphasize strategic career choices and remain undaunted in their vision, African American women who "stand to [their] full height" (Reagon, 1982, p.490) continue to chip away at the glass ceiling that leads to the presidency.

### **Components of the glass ceiling**

#### **Double oppression**

Much of the scholarly literature on African American women focuses on the double oppression of sexism and racism that African American women are forced to endure while being rendered invisible within the higher education arena (Baraka; 1997; Collins, 2009, 2001, 2000, 1998; Evans & Herr, 1991; Fisher & Koch, 1996; Goodman & Jones 2003; Patitu & Hinton 2003; Locke, 1997; Johnson; 1997; Stroud, 2009; Wolfman, 1997). How the United States higher education system responds to the continuing obstacles African American women are facing is examined using the research of

knowledgeable academicians who have researched issues of marginality, sexism, racism, and struggles that African American women have experienced to maintain personal and professional identity. (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Grimes, 2005; Harley, 2008; Hughes & Howard-Hamilton 2003; Niemann, 1999; Petitt, 2009; Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer & King, 2002; Rusher, 1990; Tedrow, 1999; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001).

African American woman in the United States have had to struggle for survival and identity within a dual oppression that includes racism and sexism (Hudson-Weems, 2001). American society tends to place its citizens into boxes based on physical attributes and culture. The problem with this practice is that protected groups, not fitting into the dominant society's conception of race, become marginalized, invisible, foreign, and un-American (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The origins of some of these perceptions can be traced back to the 1800s, when negative commentaries about African Americans were commonplace. In addition America has long been preoccupied with issues of identity. Despite all of African American women's successes and accomplishments, the African American woman has been defined by outright mythology that started on the plantations of the Deep South several hundred years ago and persist to this day (Nelson, 2012). All the myths and stereotypes used to characterize African American womanhood have their roots in negative anti-woman mythology (hooks, 1981). An examination of the barriers mentioned in the literature pertaining to African American women in higher education career advancement include gender and race and fit into the categories of sexism and racism (Aguirre, 2000; Bagilhole, 1993; Benokraitis & Feagin, 1995; Bieelby & Baron, 1984; Deaux & Kite, 1987; Edwards, 1997; Edwards-Wilson, 1998; Fisher & Koch,

1996; Grover, 1992; Konrad & Pfeffer, 1991; Rouse, 1999; Sandler, 1991; Scheurich & Young, 1997; Shakeshaft, 1989; Williams, 1986; Wilson, 1996; Yewechuk, 1992).

### **Racism**

Researchers Amey, Vanderlinden, & Brown (2002), Crawford & Smith (2005), Green & King (2001), Logan (2006), and Owens (2004) reveal the societal structures limiting, delaying or preventing African American women from becoming president of a predominately white higher education college or university. Research traces historical evidence of racial and gender bias while exploring the issue of marginality investigated by Nelson (2012), Delgado & Stefancic (2012), Diggs, Estrada & Galino (2009), Stanley (2007), Hudson-Weems (2001), Collins (2009). hooks (1981) explains the part misperceptions, stereotypes, and myths play in the development of racism and how that racism affects the career development of African American women.

The literature confirms the following barriers to the advancement of African American women to senior level positions in higher education according are: racism, sexism, double-outsider status, exclusion from formal and informal networks, ineffective diversity programs, and unwelcoming institutional environments or climates. The bias of racism is considered to be systemic, permeating all aspects of the institution. Racial biases viewed to be operating on conscious and subconscious levels, disadvantage African American women while favoring white Americans. Finally, the more recent studies reviewed indicate that gender and race discrimination, the two major positionalities identified as obstacles to an African American woman's career progression, show no signs of adjustment in the foreseeable future (Smith-Latimore, 2009).

Because the institution of higher education's inherent structures lie beyond and remain unchanged by diversity efforts, the African American women's visibility is not welcomed beyond the margins despite the fact that visibility is essential for career advancement in the institution. People of color are hired to do programs as long as they stay on the margins and do not interfere or intrude into the essence of the institutional structure. However, that high level of visibility is only permissible within the marginalized context of the diversity issue. Predominantly white institutions often have written mission statements about equality and democracy but typically do not realize such ideals in their own organizational structure and culture (Stroud, 2009).

### **Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is defined by Delgado & Stefancic, (2012) as the examination of race, sex, class, national origin, and sexual orientation, and how a combination of these factors play out in various settings. The notion of multiple consciousness suggested by Delgado & Stefancic (2012) holds that most of us experience the world in different ways on different occasions, because of who we are. The intersections of race and gender are always present at multiple levels of oppression that can and does inhibit African American women's emotional wellbeing. Historically the American culture hierarchy and the invisible system of white privilege are the primary impediments to African American women leaders rising to the top ranks in educational administration. St. Jean and Feagin (1998) assert that negative comments and actions that African American women receive from white women are as numerous as those endured from white men, and that those comments are another way whites manipulate or demean the status and lives of African American workers. By ignoring or rationalizing away issues related to sexism and

racism, institutions of higher learning are creating workplace environments that allow race and gender to create institutional barriers that disproportionately affect African American women aspiring to and who have already achieved leadership positions (Logan, 2006). Women of color face exclusion from informal networks, inadequate institutional support, and challenges to their authority and credibility (Nelson, 2012). Moore, 2008). African American women often face the double jeopardy associated with the intersection of their race and gender which leaves them vulnerable to effects of racism and sexism or what Sue calls microaggressions (Sue, 2004, 2005; Edmunson, 2003; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Sanchez-Hules & Davis, 2010; Turner, 2002). Microaggressions are defined as brief and commonplace, daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, either unintentional or intentional, that communicate derogatory, hostile, or negative racial or sexist slights and insults toward individuals of color.

In a study by Bova (2000) fourteen African American women shared that they faced significant challenges and obstacles as they attempted success or advancement to a higher level position. The African American women agreed that all faced double jeopardy: being black and being female. The gender impact has proven to be a critical variable in these studies, but race had an equal or greater impact on the findings. An African American woman's work environment is often filled with lack of support, lack of respect, and isolation. In the absence of campus-based support systems, the lack of a sense of belonging, and limited collegiality, the family church and peers have helped the African American female develop direction in work-related concerns (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). Faculty of color, specifically African American women, have a number of potential barriers as they enter a patriarchal, predominately white institution. No



matter how much a black woman attains, she is still subject to the scrutiny that she may not have arrived on her own merit. (Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001). African American women are viewed as the product of targeted initiatives, which generate unworthy, handout attitudes, having them fall victim to societal perceptions that they are incompetent. These women are continually challenged to prove that they do not have their job-or kept their job-because of affirmative action, opportunity hiring and/or tokenism (Harley 2008; Niemann, 1999). Victims of racial discrimination often suffer in silence or blame for their quandary. Stories provide voice and reveal that others have had similar experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). The gender impact has proven to be a critical variable in these studies, but race had an equal or greater impact on findings. Very few studies have focused specifically on African American women senior level administrators in higher education (Grimes, 2005; Rusher, 1990; Tedrow, 1999).

### **Marginalization**

African American women administrators face issues of marginality in various forms of discrimination and struggles to maintain personal and professional identity (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Stanley, 2006). In both black and white communities African American women continue to be perceived as receiving unfair promotion through affirmative action (Edmondson, 1995). The double marginalization that African American women face makes it difficult to determine whether the reactions and behaviors directed at them are due to race, gender, or a combination of both (Sue, 2005; St. Jean & Feagin, 1998). St. Jean & Feagin (1998) found that in the majority of cases of gendered racism against African American women, the women concluded that the discrimination was due more to race than gender.

When African American women achieve a senior level position it is often credited to special treatment. The special treatment is considered a by-product of affirmative action efforts to balance gender and race representation across all professions in American life (Anderson, 2004; Lindsay, 1999). The idea that an African American women has to rely on special treatment and does not achieve senior level administrative positions on her own merit, is degrading, humiliating and without proof (Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Turner, Myers, & Creswell, 1999). These women are continually challenged to prove that they do not have their job-or kept their job- because of affirmative action, opportunity hiring and/or tokenism (Harley 2008; Niemann, 1999). Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence or blame themselves for their predicament. In predominately white institutions issues of marginality, along with discrimination, and hurdles maintaining personal and professional identity are prevalent (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo, 2009; Stanley, 2006). African American women experience incidences of exclusion and marginalization several times every day, regardless of their role or status in the institution (Stroud, 2009), however the complexity and consequences of marginality in the academy increase when race, ethnicity, and gender intersect (Moffitt et al., 2012)

### **Stereotyping**

Gender and leadership have always been stereotyped. For women of color a common attribute is their ability to triumph over challenges as well as barriers. In overcoming challenges and barriers, they build characters of strength, persistence, and resilience, which become part of their repertoire on how to achieve success in their roles as administrators (Jean-Marie, 2006).

Stereotyping and preconceptions of women are primary factors that impede the ability of women to rise to the top of institutions of higher education (Knapp, 1986). African American women have difficulty overcoming these biased perceptions. Edmundson (2003) described the problem this way: “There are no reference points, no models of African American women in authority positions for white colleagues to draw upon. Rather, the most persistent images of African American women ingrained into society were either negative images or images of African American women in subservient roles. The language combined with actions of white colleagues suggest they define African American women first as black and women before seeing them as managers and executives.”

Bradley (2005) speculated that part of the problem regarding how African American women administrators are perceived is a product of long-standing stereotyping. Bradley’s research focused on the perceived stereotyping that negatively affects the African American woman’s professional life. Thus African American women holding administrative positions may be expected to be warm and gracious and subjugating their own needs and desires in order to support others or, conversely may be seen as angry, domineering, demanding, and threatening. Bradley (2005) suggest that stereotypical narratives are easier to put into play when white faculty and administrators have limited exposure to and experience with African American women as peers in the workplace.

### **Discrimination**

Fisher and Koch (1996) acknowledged that gender and race affect the selection process of executive leaders. Fisher and Koch also express the opinion that for a presidential candidate to be female has been a challenge, and even more so for African

American women aspiring to this executive leadership position. Critical race theorists build on everyday experiences with perspective and viewpoint coming to a deeper understanding of the way Americans see race. Critical race theorists are storytellers who believe that stories have a valid function. Stories give people voice and reveal that there are others who have experienced or are experiencing a similar situation. Stories name a type of discrimination; once named, it can be combated (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Holmes (2001) feels that there is a long history of various forms of discrimination in America against African American women, and it is virtually impossible to conceive that traces of deep rooted sexist ideologies do not permeate institutions of higher education. Grimes (2005) observed that because African American women view the world through a different cultural, contextual, social, behavioral and linguistic prism than white women, the failure to take this into account renders findings of studies questionable in terms of their applicability to an African American women. King (1988) contended that race and gender have independent effects on the status of African American women. She feels that effects of these types of discrimination are not equivalent. She argues that “each discrimination has a single, direct, and independent effect on status, wherein the relative contribution of each is readily apparent” (p. 297). African American women have found themselves “marginal to both the movements of women’s liberation and black liberation irrespective of their victimization under the dual discrimination of racism and sexism” (p. 299).

It is generally agreed that African American women face double oppression as women and as people of color (Wilson, 1989). The problem with gendered racism is that it is only felt and understood by those who have been immersed in it. It is also true that

dual oppression causes the deleterious effect of isolation (St. Jean & Feagin, 1998). In a study conducted by Dr. Shorter-Goodman & Charisse Jones (2003), entitled the *African American Women's Voices Project*, the impact of racism and sexism on African American women was addressed. The dominate theme heard throughout the study, was that African American women in order to survive, have developed behavior, attitude, or tone to satisfy the dominate culture who find African American women hindered by their race or gender. This constant changing is known as "shifting" and many times is done without the individual even knowing that she has shifted.

Clearly many African American women who pursue careers in higher education administration encounter discrimination. This can be particularly lethal because it is often buried and left unexamined (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). African American women often find themselves in what is referred to as a "victim bind," which occurs when the institutional structures and political culture of the academy create and shape their career patterns and images (Locke, 1997). Systemic racism can be considered the most serious obstacle faced by African American women in higher education (Hughes & Howard-Hamilton, 2003). In a study by Petitt (2009) African American females in leadership roles in academia are influenced by the experiences of racial oppression and dismissal perpetrated by white colleagues. Ruderman, Ohlott, Panzer and King (2002) and Greenhaus and Powell (2006) report that multiple roles are related to enhanced leadership skills. Their research has provided at least partial support that women leaders committed to multiple roles seem to be satisfied with their lives, have a strong sense of self-worth, accept and acknowledge multiple aspects of self-meaning they have some understanding of themselves and their own complexity. Racism and sexism constantly displayed as

violations of civility from colleagues and institutions can undo the leadership of African American women (Petitt, 2009).

To obtain successful leadership status as a professional in higher education, Jones & Komives (2001) articulate that African American women must reconcile the great demands of their professional lives with the demands and expectations of their personal lives. African American women must learn to balance career, family, and community commitments. Becks-Moody (2004) add support to Jones & Komives by stating that research shows in order to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal life, African American women generally rely on support from family, community, and the church.

### **African American Female Leadership**

Although African American women have had significant personal gains in accessing leadership positions in institutions of higher learning in the United States over the past 20 years, their executive leadership status has not been elevated. Despite the efforts of legislative measures and judicial proceeding, African American women are still entangled in a perpetual crusade to be treated equitably while remaining underrepresented within the senior-level of administration in higher education (Hamilton, 2004).

Researchers Nelson (2012), Lloyd-Jones (2011), Logan, (2006), Malveaux (2005), Anderson (2004), Nichols and Tanksley (2004), Edmondson (1995), Tarver (1992) and Gaetane and Lloyd-Jones (2011) share their insight into how expectations that involving leadership can affect the aspirational goals of African American women ascending to senior level administrative positions. “Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth,” Bass (1981, p. 2). Bass also noted

there are likely as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have endeavored to define the concept. Few studies exploring the development of women leaders in academia, as well as existing college or university presidents is available (Madsen, 2007). This void in the literature makes it difficult to see a clear picture which outlines previous preparation, career paths, experiences, and assessments of barriers that African American female community college and four-year institution presidents have experienced to ascend to the presidency (Harris et al., 2011).

African American women's leadership is challenged with functioning in a culturally paradoxical setting that influences the perception of her effectiveness as a leader regardless of her individual leadership ability (Stroud, 2009). Because of this immersion, the very existence of leadership engulfs controversy and politics for most any leader. Bass (1990) simplified this theory by explaining that leadership can be the source of stress and that stress occurs when the situation is complex, ambiguous, and unclear. Using the above rationalization African American female administrators are categorized in a "double jeopardy" status work in complex, ambiguous and unclear situations.

African American women administrators are 'outsiders-within' because they are women working in the white or male-dominated world. They are aware of at least two perspectives, that of the dominant culture, and that of the less privileged. Collins (2001) supports the 'outsider-within' ideology, noting that African American women's ideas should be placed "in the center of analysis...not only to honor those ideas, but to encourage white feminists, African American men, and others to investigate the similarities and differences among their own standpoints and those of African American women."

## **Combating the glass ceiling**

### **Leadership styles**

According to the Center for Women's Intercultural Leadership (2009) and Burns (1978) African American women must first practice leadership styles that are participatory and transformational in order to gain successful leadership opportunities in the institutional environment of higher education. New and different ideas must be developed that come from a collective continuum not from an individual perspective. The cracking of the glass ceiling which eventually will lead to the collapse of the glass ceiling must involve team building and realistic group work (Gostick & Elton, 2010). African American women in leadership roles, will have to utilize their natural tendencies of nurturing/motivating other African American women (Valverde, (2011 p. 65).

Hernandez & Morales (1999) contend that African American women understand how debilitating a climate of negativity can be, and by remembering their personal experiences of moving up in higher education, they can identify what needs to happen to engage staff members to make a greater contribution to the whole higher educational system. Hernandez & Morales also feel that it is important for African American women to apply the same formula to the institution that helped them advance individually, that is, turning adverse conditions placed upon them into behaviors that helped them overcome and succeed.

### **Infrastructure**

Second, African American women must lead to create a new infrastructure on college and university campuses. Predominately white colleges or universities have both ethnocentrism and institutional racism intertwined into the fabric of their foundation



which can be unraveled if there is a team approach to snagging the threads which the structure of higher education is woven (Valverde, 2011). Ethnocentric institutions are described as places where single-minded belief exist. Where one group's set of values should be the standard for the entire institution and that all persons whose cultural values may be different should be put aside and the values and norms of the group in power should be enforced (Grant & Landson-Billings, 1997).

### **Mentoring**

Third, Valverde stated African American women in senior leadership roles need to add two elements to their already heavy list of responsibilities: mentorship and sponsorship. Both of these elements are a means to help individuals advance in the administrative ranks. Even though these responsibilities add more weight to the already burdened African American woman, these responsibilities are not for the purpose of duplicating themselves like white male "good ol' boy system" was designed to do. African American women have to increase their numbers in order to spread on a wider basis, participatory and transformational leadership, styles that promote greater engagement, trust, and cooperation while fostering team building.

Wilson (2004, p. 138) in a qualitative study examining the career developmental experiences of nine senior-level African American women working in community and technical colleges found that the majority of the women acknowledged mentoring experiences that contributed to their career advancement (Wilson categorized the mentoring experiences of the study participants as foundational and career-related. The experiences encompassed the pre-career mentoring experiences provided by parents, high school teachers and counselors, and spouses. The career related mentoring experiences

were the experiences that occurred from college through employment from mentors such as college personnel, co-workers, and previous employers. Wilson (2004) observes that the mentoring experiences reportedly enhanced the participant's identities and self-worth, provided positive role models, and planted the seeds of "you can be whatever you choose to be." Wilson concluded that the foundational and especially career-related mentoring experiences significantly impacted the upward mobility of careers of participants.

Mentoring enables women to proactively address the tangible and intangible inequities that continue to exist.

In another qualitative study, Thomas (2004) examined factors contributing to the career succession of African American women to executive leadership positions in two-year colleges. Mentoring was identified by four of the five study participants as significantly contributing to their career development. Even the fifth participant acknowledged that she believed mentoring would have enhanced her career. According to Thomas the women emphasized that mentoring develops management and supervisory skills, builds confidence, motivates towards excellence and aids in identifying career opportunities (Johnson-Jones, 2009).

Mentoring is currently the vanguard for strategies used in career advancement. Indvik (2004) points out that one of the most critical types of relationships for career advancement is a mentor relationship in which a senior individual provides task coaching and emotional encouragement and sponsors the protégé within the organization. Caffarella (1992) characterizes mentoring as "an intense caring relationship in which persons with more experience work with less experienced persons to promote both

professional and personal development” (p. 38). It is interesting to note that Caffarella emphasized that the mentoring relationship should be a ‘caring’ one.

Mentors can play a vital role in the career and leadership development of new employees and to individuals who desire to advance their careers, particularly for women and faculty of color (Dixion-Reeves, 2003; Sorcinelli & Yun, 2007; Tillman, 2001). Mentoring both inside and outside of academia is critical for enabling women to access key leadership positions (Grove & Montgomery, 1999; Holmes, 2004, Jackson & Harris, 2007; Madsen, 2007; Tatum 2008; Vaughan, 1989). Knowledgeable mentors can help individuals by sharing their experiences. They can teach their mentees to read between the lines, anticipate challenges, troubleshoot, and provide unfiltered feedback on what an individual does in a particular situation. A good mentor also can introduce individuals to key players and possibly let the individual tap into his or her network. Stalker (1994) suggests two basic functions of mentoring: relationships and outcomes.

According to Bowman, Kite, Branscombe and Williams (1999), the principal role of mentors in education, according to, is to model how to succeed in academic settings and to provide emotional support, encouragement, and a trusting environment during the career development of the protégé. Crawford and Smith (2005) add that mentors share values, career counseling, information, and advice, and socialize the protégé to the rules and culture of the organization.

The most effective mentoring relationships arise naturally among individuals who share similar qualities, such as culture, sex, race, ethnicity, background, and interest (Rhode & Kellerman, 2007). Mentoring according to Tillman (2001) facilitates the emotional, and social adjustment to institutions in which women faculty of color often

face alienation and isolation. In this manner, positive mentoring experiences can advance the careers of African American women. Mentoring relationships are particularly crucial for African American women faculty at predominately white colleges or institutions since they can help offset the challenges that the women will likely face as they move up the academic ladder (Cooper 2006; Gregory 2001, Locke 1997).

Sponsorship is not the same as mentorship. Sponsorship is actively identifying a person for a leadership position higher in the organizational structure. An important facet related to sponsorship is networking. Networking is the new term used for the old concept of “It is not important what you know, but who you know” (Valverde, 2003).

### **Summary**

African American women’s experiences within higher education are molded by external factors (for example, a history of hiring and retaining faculty of color) and internal factors (such as childhood experiences) specific to “traditional” social roles within and outside of the university (Etter-Lewis, 1997 Dr. Josie Johnson (1997) says that “an African American woman has a set of obstacles and barriers that get in the way of her working as a senior level administrator. The negative attitude that exists in the larger society regarding the role of women in our society, the resistance to females that exists among today’s academic community and that these challenges are compounded by being an African American.”

It is important to analyze distinct experiences of African American women in academia and increase the awareness of the double marginalization that they face on campus. In addition, studying the experiences of African American women presidents at predominately white colleges or institutions may reveal successful strategies for thriving

and surviving that maybe useful to other women of color as they advance professionally (Wilson,2012). Issues of marginality as well as various forms of discrimination, and struggles to maintain personal and professional identity are prevalent in the literature on African American women (Diggs, Garrison-Wade, Estrada, & Galindo 2009; Stanley, 2007; Woo 1985). Nidiffer (2001) feels that women endure countless tangible inequities, such as fewer resources, fewer opportunities and sexual harassment. This study takes a close look at the personal experiences of five African American women leaders in higher education leadership positions who have ascended to the presidency of a predominately white college or university. The chapter discusses what African American women need to do to breach the glass ceiling using transformational leadership styles, which will help to create a new infrastructure on college and university campuses. The critical role mentoring plays in the advancement of women leaders was also examined.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter will discuss the method and theories used to conduct this research. A qualitative approach was used to describe the personal and professional perceptions, wisdom, and experiences of five African American women serving as presidents of predominately white colleges or institutions. Delgado & Stefancic (2012) say that by using a qualitative tool to describe the way of life of a particular group of people from within a given culture creates understanding of their culture and communicates not only what happened, but how it happened and how members of the group understand and interpret what happened. This study combines Critical Race Theory which builds on everyday experiences, stories and viewpoints of those being studied to create a deeper understanding of how race has affected them (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), black feminist theory which is a combination of academic thought and political activism by black intellectuals using examples of lived experiences (Collins, 2001, hooks 1984), and ethnography which Mehan & Wood (1975) describe as a method of describing a social group from the group's point of view. By utilizing critical race theory to understand the everyday experiences of the five women in this study, incorporating their perspectives and the power of their personal stories to gain a deeper comprehension of how race and gender impacted the development of their careers. Black feminist theory encourages African American women to create self-definitions and self-evaluations that support positive and deter negative images (Wheeler, 2002). Collins (2001) also supports the usefulness of identifying and using your own point of view in conducting research

because ideas expressed clarify the position of the individual, especially individuals who are in touch with their own marginality in academic settings.

Collins (2009) and hooks (1984) emphasize that African American females have made use of their marginality, their 'outsider within' status to produce black feminism and black feminist thought that reflects on self, family, and society. hooks and Collins utilize slightly different approaches to defining African American women as 'outsiders' and 'insiders' but they support the same basic concept. hooks (1984) uses as her base an integrated feminist theory developed from experiences of white, middle-class women, then inserts and builds upon the ideas and experiences of women who have awareness of both margin and center (African American women and women of color), believing that the use of feminism as theory can be productively used by minority women, providing a perspective other than that of the white middle-class woman. hooks (1984) states, the aim of black feminism is not to benefit any specific group of women, any particular class or race of women. Collins (1991, p. 22) views race and gender of African American women from a historical viewpoint and relates it to the present. She suggests, black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for African American women. In other words, black feminist thought encompasses theoretical explanations of African American women's reality by those who live it.

To interpret the experiences of African American women, Collins developed a frame work with five key dimensions that characterize black feminist thought: First, core themes of a African American woman's standpoint; Second, variation of responses to core themes; Third, the interdependence of experience and awareness; Fourth,

consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint; and Fifth, the interdependence of thought and action. Through these five measurements, the challenges of African American women in higher education need to be understood, respected, and discussed, just as the challenges of the dominant culture have been expressed. Krupat (1993) notes research needs to be based on the reality of our existence as we experience. More than any other research method, ethnography allowed the researcher to enter the world of the five participants in the study and observe how they made/make sense of the world around them (Timmermans & Tavory, 2007). Reinharz (1997) contends that ethnographic researchers bring self and also create a self in the field; the created self being the product of the interactions, norms and social setting of the participants on the selves the researcher brings to the field. Using the participant's personal environment provided a level of comfort and familiarity for the participants.

Wheeler (2002) defines a black feminist as an African American woman who historically believes that female descendants of American slavery share a unique set of life experiences which include a combination of racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism which is distinct from those of black men and white women.

### **Research Questions**

This research was designed to identify the factors that impeded the career advancement and success of the five African American women presidents. The following questions served as the baseline for this research:

1. What barriers were encountered by African American women presidents at predominately white colleges or universities?



2. How did these women respond to the barriers they encountered as they ascended to president at a predominately white college or university?

### **Research Design**

Creswell (1998) suggest that every research study should be initiated by identifying the research design and the philosophical worldview that influences the researcher's study and selection of the strategy for inquiry. For purposes of this study a variety of theatrical approaches were used to enhance the evaluation of results.

Ethnographic, Africana womanist theory (Hudson-Weems, 2001), and critical race theory combined with black feminist theory served as the conceptual framework

Qualitative study has long supported the use of a variety of frameworks to gather personal perspective and gain a full, clear picture of the topic of investigation. Locke, and Silverman (2000) suggested that qualitative research allows an investigation to support an understanding of social situations, roles, events, groups, or interactions. Foss and Foss (1994) suggested using personal experience as a tool by which a higher level of appreciation is created through the researcher's personal experience in the research:

The data of personal experience in feminist scholarship usually assume the form of women's personal narratives about the events of their lives, their feelings about those events, and their interpretations of them. They reveal insights into the impact of constructions of gender on women's lives, their experiences of oppression and coping with resisting that oppression, and their perspectives on what is meaningful in their lives (p. 39).

### **Sampling Design**

This study was based on the reality of African American woman presidents as they lived it; allowing them to reflect on self, family, society, and the cultural and traditional values which presented them either factual or perceived obstacles, and the coping mechanisms they developed to persevere. By using a semi structured interview format, the participants were allowed to answer not only the specific questions I asked but also provide their opinions beyond the parameters of those questions. This type of open-ended solicitation of data could not be achieved in a research design that was quantitative, or in one that required numerical analysis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). The purpose of this research was to compare the personal and professional perceptions and experiences of the five African American women serving as presidents in predominately white colleges or universities. Moustakas (1994) explained, qualitative studies typically use relatively small samples to produce a detailed, rather than exhaustive and generalizable understanding of the phenomenon (Bryman, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Creswell (2002) conveyed the importance of selecting participants purposefully for qualitative studies based on the need “to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (p. 193), rather than seeking to generalize to a population. The selected method helped me gain a deeper understanding of the five participant’s lives and barriers that they met and overcame. It also investigates the influences their experiences had on achieving their senior level administrative positions as president at their prospective colleges or universities.

Moustakas’s (1994), method of selecting a sample of an accessible population was determined to be appropriate for my research. It included a modified method of analysis involving the following steps: (a) listing and preliminary grouping

(horizontalization), (b) reduction and elimination, and (c) clustering and thermalizing the invariant constituents (core themes). Additional steps included (d) final identification of the invariant constituents and themes by application (validation) and construction of (e) an individual textural description of the experience and (f) an individual structural description of the experience. The final step involves construction (g) a textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of experience.

### **Participants Identification**

Two names from the Minnesota Chapter of the Association of Black Women in Higher Education (ABWHE) were identified. These two potential participants fit all of the selection criteria that I used to select the participants for this study from those two Minnesota ABWHE members I anticipated that participants (six to ten) will be suggested for the research. This method of selecting participants is called snowball sampling. Snowball Sampling is a method used to obtain research and knowledge, from extended associations, through previous acquaintances. “Snowball sampling uses recommendations to find people with the specific range of skills that has been determined as being useful.” An individual or a group receives information from different places through a mutual intermediary. Snowball sampling is a useful tool for building networks and increasing the number of participants. However, the success of this technique depends greatly on the initial contacts and connections made. My using the above method with the contacts made through the ABWHE proved to be inadequate for this research. Using a contact that I had been given from a senior level administrator outside of the ABWHE, I was able to create a list of twenty three potential participants.

After the potential participants were identified, an introduction letter outlining the purpose and process of the research study was sent to the proposed participant asking for them to notify me by e-mail if they were willing to participate in the study. After two weeks I sent out an additional request to the proposed participant via e-mail or U.S. mail if e-mail contact information was not available. Of the twenty three initial request letters sent out, I received only one outright refusal. Two of the identified potential participants eliminated themselves from the study because they were presidents at historically black colleges or universities. One potential participant agreed to participate if her input was really needed (sample size not met). Five potential participants agreed to be interviewed, and the remaining fourteen potential respondents did not respond.

The target goal of five participants represented an acceptable sample size of lived experiences for this research. Patton (2002) stated, “There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” (p. 244). Other scholars, such as Groenewald (2004), regarded 2 to 10 participants as sufficient to reach saturation for a qualitative study, and Creswell (1998, pp. 65, 113) recommended “long interviews with up to 10 people” for a qualitative study. For this research, the selected five African American women who were presidents at predominately white colleges or universities represented an acceptable sample that provided a saturation size for the study. Respondents who agreed to participate in study were contacted via United States mail, and sent a letter of selection, information on the logistical elements of the research and interview, a consent form which they were to sign and a self-addressed envelope to return the consent form to me.

### **Geographic Area**

The original geographic area considered was Midwest with the following states designated for research: North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois and Michigan. This geographic area was identified because preliminary research indicated a large enough sample could be found within these boundaries. Additional research revealed that the identification and selection of African American presidents at predominately white colleges or universities could not be limited to a specific geographic area because the geographic limiting the area would not be sufficient to produce enough potential participants, and geographic area was modified to include the entire United States.

### **Qualifications**

All participants had to be female, African American, at least 40 years of age and employed as president of a predominately white college or university. This study included no irrelevant disqualifying criteria to select or eliminate participants, such as, marital status, culture, religion, background, or sexual orientation.

### **Data Collection**

A consent form was obtained from each selected participant which informed them of the purpose, interview procedures, a request for potential times and dates to schedule interview, outline of questions and the risk before the research began (initial interviews).

The following areas formed the foundation of the interview.

- Obstacles: Colleagues, environment, position responsibilities, racism, sexism, family, factual or perceived.
- Coping: Techniques used to conquer and prevail over the obstacles presented.

The names of all respondents and their institutions have been eliminated to maintain anonymity. Because of the distance some of the research participants to my location, all interviews were done via Skype (three) or using the phone interview format (two). Notes were originally to be taken at time of the interviews (if visual) so that nonverbal responses of participants to the questions could be documented. Since not all of the participants could be visually observed, I made the decision to not include non-verbal responses so that all interviews could be evaluated on the same scale.

Initially one hour interviews were scheduled with each participant. Because this was a qualitative study, it was difficult to define categories and themes before conducting the actual interviews. All interviews were digitally recorded and sent to a secure and bonded organization for transcription. When the transcriptions were returned to me via a secure network, I took out or changed any identifying information of the participant, and used numbers to identify each interview. Transcripts of the interview were sent to the individual participant via U.S. mail for their scrutiny. Once transcripts were approved by the participants, I was ready to code the information.

As data was collected, I implemented a color coding scheme to facilitate my identification of emerging themes and patterns. Four of the five interview transcripts were submitted for verification to the individual research participants. I was given permission by the fifth participant to forgo submission of her interview transcript.

### **Data Analysis**

The protocol of the interview was the main element that guided this research and ensured that valid data and meaningful information were provided (Birnbaum, 1992). An interview protocol was submitted to the participants prior to the interview. The main

goals of the interview protocol were for university, advisor, and organizational review to protect the interview subjects from questions that could create stress or discomfort and (b) to give and guide protocol for conducting interview and focus groups (Birnbaum, 1992). Moustakas (1994) stated that, in the course of collecting data through interviewing, the researcher should not presuppose anything. Like any instrument, according to Moustakas, the researcher has to be a part of the test of validity and reliability to capture the entire situation. The process includes listening, observing, understanding, and describing the holistic situation. Moustakas maintained that explaining this process facilitates replication of the study. Using descriptive writing and maintaining a paper trail of the process used will assist in addressing of the research.

### **Reliability and Validity**

The use of reliability and validity are common concepts in quantitative research and are frequently considered in the qualitative research paradigm. Therefore, reliability, validity and triangulation, if they are relevant research concepts, particularly from a qualitative point of view have to be redefined in order to reflect the multiple ways of establishing truth in qualitative research. Creswell (2003) posited, “The internal validity of a research study shows the extent to which its design and the data it yields allows the researcher to draw accurate conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships within the data” (pp. 103–104). For qualitative studies, the generalizability is limited. Creswell stated, “The intent of qualitative research is not to generalize findings, but to form a unique interpretation of events” (pp. 158–159). This research study is designed to determine common elements that can be applied or generalized, contributing to the

elements of accession, as perceived by the five African American women who have succeeded to the role of president. Advantages of qualitative research methodology.

The usage of a qualitative method is appropriate for this study because the number of African American women in senior leadership positions at predominantly white institutions is small that the use of a statistically based research-design would be problematic. A quantitative method, such as a survey, would produce unreliable results because of the small sample set (Leedy, 1993). On the other hand, the small sample size for this study makes a qualitative method, such as interview, more realistic and provides the opportunity to gather deep understating of the participants.

The qualitative researcher who looks, listens, and flows with the social currents of the setting can be expected to acquire perceptions from different points of view. Interviews with each participant at individual times and places will validate shared experiences. Comparing and contrasting interviews and perceptions to the same subject are likely to produce clearer understanding by triangulation than any single perspective, such as that of a quantitative test or battery of test (Dooley, 1990). Interview data is observational data, and as such is less structured than quantitative research, yet provides the benefit of being flexible, spontaneous, and open-ended.

### **Disadvantages of using qualitative research methodologies**

Because qualitative methodology interacts and develops relationships with the participants, it is often difficult to separate the research from the research process. We as individuals are products of our environment and as such, everything we do and say affects others. When qualitative methods are incorporated in a study such as this, the researcher has to account for those consequences, unanticipated or otherwise. By using



qualitative methodology I ran the risk of being biased by feelings, loyalties, or antagonisms generated by the setting and participants within this study. To minimize the risk of biases each participant was asked the same questions, in the same order and from a script that was provided to each participant before the interview, participant observation was unstandardized, as a result, observations were prone to random measurement error and, thus unreliability. Measurement validity can be no greater than measurement reliability, and since the observations are non-quantitative, it was difficult to estimate the extent of unreliability. The use of the participant's personal feelings, curiosity, hunches, and intuition to explore and understand the topic being researched was intentional (Dooley, 1990). To enable a clear understanding of common terms utilized within this research, a list of definitions has been provided.

#### **Definitions of terms.**

1. *African America/black*: Used interchangeably. Of or relating to Americans of African ancestry. The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, Third edition.
2. *Afro-centric*: From an African cultural perspective.
3. *Barriers*: a) Something immaterial that obstructs or impedes; b) Something that separates or holds apart. The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, Third edition.
4. *Caucasian/white*: Used interchangeably. A member of a racial group of people having light skin coloration, esp, one of European origin. The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, Third edition.

5. *Discrimination*: a) The act of discriminating; b) Treatment or consideration based on class or category rather than individual merit. The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, Third edition.
6. *Ethnography*: A general method for describing a cultural group.
7. *Feminism*: Belief in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes. The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, Third edition.
8. *Gender*: Sexual identity or categories. The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, Third edition.
9. *Glass ceiling*: A common term used to signify the invisible nature of the barriers to advancement of women in male-dominated institutions, from corporate to academic life (Alicea, 2003).
10. *Institutional Racism*: When an organization remains unconscious of issues related to race or more actively perpetuate and enforce a dominant racial perspective or redress (Singleton & Linton, 2006).
11. *Marginalization*: Marginalization is defined as any issue, situation, or circumstance that has placed an individual outside of the flow of power and influence within their institutions (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).
12. *Milieus*: The surroundings or environment that an individual lives in and is influenced by. Encarta Dictionary.
13. *Microaggressions*: Brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that

communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative insults toward people of color. (D.W. Sue, 2014)

14. Predominately White Institution (PWI): is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which whites account for 50 percent or greater of the student enrollment.
15. *Racism*: The belief that race accounts for differences in human character or ability and a particular race is superior to others. The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, Third edition.
16. *Sexism*: Sexism is prejudice or discrimination based on gender (New Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1989).
17. *Shifting*: Developing behavior, attitude, or tone in order to satisfy societal “normal” behavior. (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).
18. *Stereotyping*: A conventional, formulaic, and oversimplified conception or image. The American Heritage College Dictionary, 1997, Third edition.
19. *Women of color*. Limited to women identified as African American, Hispanic, Native American, or Asian American as defined by the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009).

## **Chapter 4**

### **Interviews**

This chapter will give voice to the five participants involved in this study. It will document their personal, academic and professional development as they successfully achieved senior level administrative positions as presidents of a predominately white college or institution. This chapter will support what Jean-Marie (2006) affirms about common attributes women of color share in their ability to triumph over challenges and barriers. In overcoming these challenges and barriers, they build character of strength, persistence, and resilience, which become part of their repertoire on how to achieve success in their roles as administration (Jean-Marie, 2006). Women of color face challenges in their personal and professional lives, particularly as they enter positions of status and authority and have to draw on their strengths to overcome adversities (McCray, 2011).

This study will share how the five participants in this research triumphed over their challenges to become their prospective institutions leading administrator. Jackson and Harris (2007) surveyed 43 African American female college/university presidents who indicated that a primary barrier was exclusion from informal leadership networks. Other barriers identified were exclusion from top management positions and the lack of a mentor. Gooch (2009) interviewed five female African American community college presidents. The individuals in her study said that they achieved the position of college president by being “in the right place at the right time,” after they “had paid their dues” as serving in administrative positions within the community college arena. In an interview conducted by Asumer (2009), it was found that 100% of those interviewed had not

actively thought about becoming a college president until someone in a position of authority encouraged them to seek this position.

The names of each of the five African American presidents of predominately white colleges or institutions that I interviewed for this study have been changed to protect their identity. I have identified them by months during the year and added Dr. to their name. There are two reasons for adding the prefix Dr., first is that within the African American community, individuals are raised to always show respect by not calling a person whom they respect who is older than them by their first name and second these women have earned that title. All participants were asked the same questions, with very little deviation from the IRB approved script that was provided them prior to the interview. A list of the interview questions is provided in appendix

### **Participant # 1: Dr. April**

Dr. April felt the person she is today came from the fact that she grew up in a family that was extremely supportive and had high expectations for her. Her childhood was spent in a small southern town where integration was nonexistent. Her education from five years of age until twenty was in segregated schools. Even though her education was segregated, she felt that she received a strong education. Her parents, who were both college educated, supplemented her education. It was not until the age of twenty when Dr. April went to graduate school that she experienced an integrated educational environment. During her college career, Dr. April went straight from undergraduate studies to graduate studies.

Because of her work ethics she was fortunate to receive a full fellowship to attend graduate school where she received a Master's of Science Degree. A visiting faculty

member at her undergraduate college knew of a program that provided a full fellowship for minority students and encouraged her to apply. Dr. April applied and was one of those selected to receive the fellowship which included, tuition, room and board, plus a stipend.

Her first professional employment was at a private, historically black (HBCU), liberal arts college, where she worked for thirteen years. She then went to work at a public community college. Her work ethics of doing the best that she could with every job she was given, and remembering to just do her job, provided her with relationships and guidance from individuals who helped create the opportunity for her to advance.

When I asked Dr. April what she felt her most important accomplishment was, she said “It was celebrating her 40 years of marriage and raising four daughters, three who have graduated from college and one who will graduate summer of 2014.” She said “it was expensive, and sometimes I wonder how we did it, but we did.”

Another accomplishment Dr. April highlighted was going back to school to get her doctorate after raising her children. She felt that at a time when many people are thinking about retirement, it was important for her to get that doctorate. It was so important that she worked full time, took care of her family, and graduated with her doctorate within six years.

Dr. April credits her professional climb after earning her doctorate to an African American male college president. As president of the college he worked with a predominately white population inside and outside of the college. His professional ethics included giving individuals opportunities to grow personally and professionally. “I credit him for the opportunities and accomplishment that I was able to make. He was the kind

of person who would share knowledge with you without feeling like he was talking down to you or reprimanding you, but he would give you advice.” She feels that having someone with his expertise and manner was a blessing. Given the opportunity to do things over again, Dr. April said “it would have been nice to get her doctorate earlier” so that she would have had a longer time to serve as the president of a college.

When asked about why there is marginalization and so few African American women in advance to higher education senior level administration, Dr. April said “I think a lot of it has to do with the fact of where you might be, what kind of support systems you might have or not have in place.” She also said “sometimes it’s because we haven’t had the opportunity to get fulfilled in the educational requirements that are needed.” “The fact that some people tend to dismiss us, like this can’t be real. There is still a stigma that sometimes we walk in front of people, and they have this perception that because of who we look like, we must not have the ability to do the job.”

Dr. April feels that to change this hurdle in higher education we need to start helping each other. We need to find time for each other. She said “I don’t seek out any notoriety or fame, or anything like that. I think it has to start with each other, helping each other. Then when and if the time is there to support someone in a situation, then do that.” We can’t be hesitant to give our support. Some people just aren’t going to change, we have to just keep moving forward.”

When asked to share any negative experiences that she felt comfortable sharing, she reminded me that she had grown up in a small town in the south, and had experienced many things because of where she lived. She described an incident that she had experienced years ago, but still stands out for her. As a faculty member she and some

others were having trouble with some students on campus who were of a different culture. Their culture was one where the males maybe somewhat more aggressive than we are accustomed to. Because she was female they didn't take well to her reprimanding them. They would retaliate, not physically, but sometimes verbally. She would have them leave the building telling them that they were not welcome if their behavior didn't change.

Looking for resolution, she said she was looking for support from the Vice President of Student Development to ask "what can we do together to help this behavioral issue?" Instead of a helpful response, he turned to her and told her that her staff (who happened to be all white), "were racist." Then he told her "she wouldn't know racism if she saw it." Dr. April said he never really answered her questions, and felt that he just didn't want to rock the boat.

Dr. April felt demeaned by the Vice President's actions and comments. She felt he was dismissing her because he thought she didn't know any better because she was an African American female, or just because she was female. She said "his comment was one of the most hurtful things a white male could tell a black female."

Dr. April also shared "that sometimes her voice is not heard in meetings. She can be sitting there with the best ideas in the room, but they aren't heard until someone else brings up the same idea. The room is usually filled with white men. She said she has learned to not let situations like that bother her, as long as what she is trying to accomplish is accomplished. Further Dr. April stated "even as president of a college it still happens, and happens regularly." Dr. April also expressed that she has learned to just keep going in challenging situations like never being invited to be a part of the



backdoor conversations, or “when people in the community are surprised when she introduces herself as the college president.”

The main stressors in Dr. April’s life come from things that she doesn’t have control over. Things like her state being in dire straits and not paying their bills on time. The state pays bills on a quarterly basis, which means if enough money doesn’t come in (which occasionally it doesn’t), operation of the college suffers. She says “you can do some things, but some things you can’t do anything about. You think about them, you’re concerned about them, but you just have to say, let’s see what we can do to address them, and you have to take care of yourself, so you don’t carry things to the point where you just worry yourself into an ulcer. It’s not worth it. You have to use stress in a different kind of way.”

When things get rough one of Dr. April’s favorite things to do is shop. She says her husband who happens to be a Baptist minister doesn’t understand the need for another pair of black shoes. She also enjoys going to Sunday school to learn. She says that being with other people who have the same kind of lifestyle is relaxing for her. She enjoys just going to church and listening to the songs, the sermon and praying. She says it helps her. On her drive to work she listens to a gospel station to remind her of who she is, where her strength comes from, and how she will make it through the day. However, she says she is not the “first lady of the church” type, which means that she would be participating in most of the church activities. Dr. April says that her husband was the one called to pastor the church, she was called to be president of the college.

The advice that Dr. April would give other African American women is be prepared, go to school and get the preparation that is needed for the path you want to

travel. Develop a support system. Look for a mentor, someone that you feel comfortable talking to. Be honest and true to yourself. Ask questions that you need to find answers to. Not every position is right for everybody. If you realize that you are in an institution that may not be as supportive as you would like them to be, find another institution. Be open to opportunities so when they present themselves you are ready to take advantage of them. She kept telling herself “this is an opportunity I have. I’m going to do the best job I can at this.” Sometimes people plot and scheme to get to where they are, but that doesn’t always work. If you are given an opportunity, make sure that you do the best job that you can. Be fair to people, treat people at all times with respect, work hard and show up. Dr. April feels that it is alright to aspire to be president but it is important to remember that every one, every job is important. It is not just the president’s position that makes the college, every position does. Regardless of where or what job you have within the institution, make that position a strong one.

### **Participant # 2: Dr. May**

Dr. May felt that the foundation of her development came from to very specific nurturing elements in her childhood. First, was the fact that she had two parents who had good values and high expectations for her and her siblings to make something of themselves. Growing up she really felt that she had no choice but to try to move forward in her life and do something that was of value, not only for herself, but something that would be of value to others.” Second, when she was three and her family moved from a rural setting into an urban setting. The family had a neighbor who was an educator and spent a lot of time with her. Dr. May would sit with her while she developed lesson plans or tests that she was preparing for her classroom. She shared that the neighbor would

involve her in what she was doing to make sure Dr. May was doing it right and because her neighbor liked challenging her. The third nurturing element that shaped the person Dr. May is today, was to be that her mother and a very close friend of her mother who she was named after were musicians. She had an early introduction to music and the arts. Dr. May feels that her appreciation for the arts and things that have an aesthetic nature are those things that helped give her a perspective on things that are not just black and white.

When talking about her most important accomplishment Dr. May said that it was completing her doctorate. It was an important accomplishment because in her family education meant a lot. To achieve a terminal degree not only meant something to her but to her mother and father too. The amount of work that goes into this achievement sometimes is lost on others. Her siblings don't "get it", and she didn't really have a "celebration", at least with her family. They acknowledged her obtaining the doctorate, but didn't really internalize what that accomplishment meant.

Dr. May gives credit to the person over her doctoral program for helping her grow professionally. She feels that his influence in the Community College Leadership Program (CCLP) and his belief that community college leaders needed to have specialized training was a factor of why she went into the doctoral program. He encouraged all of the students in the program to consider the highest form of leadership that they could attain. In the world of community colleges, that leadership would be at the level of president or chancellor. Dr. May wanted to teach in the college's Community College Leadership Program. She said she originally never really thought about becoming a college president. Being a faculty member of the CCLP and actually getting

into the classroom at the graduate level was a stepping stone for her career. She felt that in order to do the best job teaching individuals to be college leaders she had to become one herself. Dr. May has served as the president of two colleges and was the chief administrator at another community college. She maintains a close connection with the classroom by teaching classes when asked to do so by neighboring universities.

The fact that Dr. May didn't see any other women in administrative leadership within the higher education arena, didn't deter or interfere with her movement up the administration ladder. She feels that she was from a part of the country where oftentimes she didn't see people of color doing things. She determined very early in her life that just because she didn't see somebody of color doing anything, didn't mean that that "thing" wasn't accessible to her. Dr. May feels that education is something that comes naturally to people of color. She said "we are often the teachers, educators and role models within our communities, but not necessarily the person running the organization unless we are in a primarily all-black neighborhood." She said generally, visible leadership will stop with high school and the principal being the highest level person seen. In college there may be a counselor or two that are people of color, or an occasional department dean. There may also sporadically be a vice president or even more infrequently a president. It is her personal opinion that African American women, do not move toward positions of leadership because we just don't see that as the ultimate goal. We stop short of seeing senior level administration as the goal.

When asked about what she thought could be done to change the shortage in higher education of African American women in senior level administration, she says it's not going to be an easy job. We need to inspire our children, especially our children of

color, not to look at television to provide obtainable goals. Children are buying into the commercial hype too easily, and parents are not doing some of the things that they need to do at home. She feels that some of the younger generations of parents have not been taught “grown up sense. They missed out on getting some of the values that older generations were exposed to. She commented that “a big detriment is our neighborhoods. The neighborhoods are breaking down.’

Dr. May noted segregation gave her access to people in her community up and down every street she walked during her youth. The people looked like her, and didn’t have any expectations that she couldn’t do something because she was African American, that reality is different in integrated neighborhoods because people make assumptions about their neighbors based on their background, language and so forth. Dr. May believes that those are the kind of things that keep our youth from seeing the possibilities that they could have for themselves. The way our neighborhoods are constructed today are also a contributing factor. We pull up into our driveways and into our garages and go in the house. We don’t interact with each other. Individuals are left to believe what they see on television and what they read in the media because we are not interacting with that person as much as they might do if neighborhoods were just constructed differently.

Dr. May described a negative experience, that she says still continues today as a professional. Sometimes her colleagues, especially her white colleagues with biases about people of color, underestimate her. They underestimate the power of perception that people of color have. “People of color have an inner guiding voice that keeps us safe. It has kept us safe since slavery. It is a kind of inner compass that guides, especially in settings where we are outnumbered.” Dr. May mentioned that sometimes

she feels that her colleagues think she does not understand operational procedures as well as they do. Her colleagues try to go in a certain direction that is different from what she might prefer, so when she rolls them back by clarifying the issue, they are shocked that she knew something was amiss. Dr. May says that “it” tickles her when this happens, and she wonders if they really think that she was just given a degree or that she has gotten this far without having some real knowledge or ability to navigate the terrain. Dr. May also feels that if they tell her something, even directly, that she is not to even think about it. That she is not to weigh it, assess it, or decide whether she wants to use all or part of it, or none of the information. They seem to think that what they are giving her advice and guidance and have the last word. In reality then she uses the information to think about how to incorporate setting an ultimate direction for the college or in making a particular decision.

When Dr. May doesn't do exactly what people think she should do, based on their input and guidance, she finds that they get provoked and develop attitudes. Dr. May is not a person to raise her voice or get into heavy arguments with people in a work setting. She prides herself on not being dragged into becoming the “person that they think all black people are, which is angry.” She says she is a big woman and that she refuses to succumb to the perception of being the big, angry black woman. Her counseling background has given her skills that she uses to deescalate a situation or individual. Dr. May believes that sometimes people are sucked in by the fact that they expect her to have no control, and that she can be persuaded by the loud person coming at her. She says, “None of that works on me.”

Primary stressors in Dr. May's life tend to be the reality of her responsibilities as president of a college. She says moving from one meeting to the next without having any time in between to collect her thoughts and prepare. Not being able to detach from the meeting she just had, and gear up for the meeting that she is transitioning to. She feels that there is always something. That her job responsibilities are constant, and that she is always on the move. She shared she "did not expect to be so sedentary", sitting in a chair to work has really been hard on her. The sitting has given her sciatic nerve conditions that she did not have before becoming president of the college. When Dr. May realized that the nerve condition was not going to go away, she experienced a whole new level of stress. Before this being able to just get up and walk was the norm for her. She acknowledged the fact that age may be exasperating the situation to some extent, but her therapist told her that the constant sitting and not being able to stand, move and stretch was a contributing factor to the sciatic nerve condition.

Dr. May feels that her role as president is hard and tasking. She did clarify that it was not physically tasking, but mentally tasking because she is always in a thought process. She said that "she hardly has any downtime when she is not thinking about something related to her role as president whether it is a community activity or an internal activity." An additional emotional stressor is the fact that she has colleagues who undervalue the countless hours she spends focusing on how to do her best as president and a person of color in an unsupportive environment and shared that she feels really stressed out when other people of color don't value what she does.

To cope with the stressors Dr. May recently decided to get involved in some social organizations. Having been a sorority girl in her undergraduate college days, she

reactivated her membership in her sorority. She is hoping that the enjoyment she felt as an undergraduate will transfer to her membership in a graduate chapter. She says that right now all they seem to want is money and that can cause another type of stress. Dr. May loves the arts and is now making sure that she has time to engage in attending musical concerts, dance performances, or an occasional art show to keep this “part of her being” nurtured.

Dr. May’s advice to African American women who are interested in pursuing a career in higher education administration is to have confidence in their ability and really believe that they can do it. She related a story about herself during the interview. She said that she was the fifth and youngest child in the family. The older siblings were always picking on her, and sometimes even the kids in the neighborhood would pick on her. All that negativity has a way of breaking a person down. She said that we as individuals need to take responsibility for remembering to build ourselves up. We need to have confidence and believe that we can accomplish whatever goals we set for ourselves. Dr. May would like African American women to seek out individuals who have already achieved what they are interested in achieving, spend time with those individuals to learn about the responsibilities involved in that position, and understand how that particular individual got there. She feels that it is important to seek the expertise of others that are doing the work that a person is interested in, and not to limit that search to just individuals of color. Seek advice from whoever is willing to give it. One of her most valued mentors was a white male who was a vice president for instruction at a college in California. She said she was in a mentoring program and he was the person she was paired up with. He provided her with a wealth of information



that has proven to be valuable to her and her professional development. Dr. May said she felt that they had a close relationship, he never once seemed shocked to have her as his mentee. When she realized how willing he was to share information with her, she asked him question after question.

Dr. May says it is important to be willing to put in the time. An individual has to stay on task and not show up for things unprepared. Doing the homework is an essential part of preparation. She said unfortunately the need still exists as a person of color to do more, because we have to be better than whoever is there as our competition. Being over prepared is not the worst thing that could happen. She expressed her feelings that over preparation might actually be the element that makes a person the best equipped to handle the work that needs to be done. Dr. May recalled she has seen individuals who are marginally ready for a leadership position step into that position and crash and burn within a year or two. Sometimes they are easily manipulated by individuals in their environment and when a person has a bit more experience it's not as easy for that manipulation to occur.

When asked if there was any additional information that she would like to share, she said that most of the research on African American women in higher education leadership is being done by African American women, and that there is still room for more research to be done. Knowing more about who we are will help us better understand the path that we as African American women are choosing. Being able to get a sense of what the terrain is like is really a smart thing to do. Dr. May said that sometimes taking a risk and not letting other's influence your decision is the right thing for an individual to do. She remembered people telling her not to take the presidency of a

collage in a particular state, and she did anyway. She said that this decision proved to provide her with one of the most positive work experiences she has ever had. Dr. May said if she hadn't made that choice, she would have really missed out on something important in her career.

**Participant #3: Dr. June**

Dr. June was raised in a two parent household, the oldest of five children. She says that the family was "very, very poor", but they didn't know it. Raised in a two family house bought by her father and uncle after World War II, having a large family gave them a sort of community within itself. Her playmates were her sisters, brothers and cousins.

Dr. June said that from the very beginning, even though by cultural standards she was not considered particularly pretty (the standards at the time were white features were exclusively beautiful), both her mother and father told her she could be absolutely anything she wanted to be. Her siblings and cousins were only allowed to play in the morning. At noon they had to take a bath, then sit down and read on the porch while the other kids continued to walk in the grass. The adults would sit with them and talk to them about books. They would talk about what they were going to be when they grew up. Being young, she and her siblings thought that the whole routine was ridiculous, but it set the tone for who she wanted to be. It assured her that she was not limited by money, by circumstances, by race or her gender.

Being divorced while her children were young, Dr. June felt that raising her two sons was her most important accomplishment. She said "even though it sounds a bit Machiavellian, I wanted to be certain that as black men they were "nerds." I didn't want

them to follow the path that my husband and I had followed. I married a doctor. I was a lawyer. I wanted them to get joy out of their lives. Being an actor and a director with Actors Equity, she took them to all of her rehearsals. She took them to Europe. She surrounded them in the arts. Presently one of her sons is a director in Hollywood, and the other is a musician, recording engineer and professor of music. She feels that she did her job, helping them to find joy without money being the focus.

Dr. June said that “most of the people around her were trying to choose professions according to how it moved them economically out of a certain strata into another.” She said it was important that her children wake up every morning excited to go to work because it was more play than work. The money would follow, and it has for them.

Dr. June could not identify just one person who had helped her career professionally. She felt that there were many, most of which were men. She says that her primary mentees are men. She says she does mentor some women, but that they are given to her specifically. She feels that individuals who are given to you are yours. She believes that a person shouldn't go looking for people that are yours because they have already been given to other people. Dr. June said she has always felt like she was in the backseat of a vehicle moving forward in the journey. She does not feel like she was driving, that the things she needed were placed before her. An example she shared was that when she started her doctorate program an African American man from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender community was ready to help and guide her to get her both in and out. He was in place when he needed to be. She said “you can get into a PhD program, but you have to make sure you're getting out.”

Dr. June said that an African American woman showed her that African American women did not have to be competitive. She said she had never been in a situation where there wasn't competition about men, clothing, looks, or something. Dr. June said that this individual mentored her right away. She was suspicious and wondered to herself why is she helping me? Why isn't she keeping me from getting what she has? Dr. June said that the woman basically said to her "are you crazy? I'm tired. I can't do all this work. I want you to come up. I want you to enter this guild, I want you to help. We are not in competition. I don't have your mind, you don't have mine, let's go." Dr. June commented that it was so refreshing to run into an individual like her. In Dr. June's opinion, she was the finest biblical scholar in the world and just happened to be working at the seminary around the corner from her mother's house.

She walked into an academic institution not even knowing what it was. They asked "if I was a lawyer?" She told them "yes", but also told them "she wanted to attend a seminary and did not have enough money to go." She said the institution told her not to worry about it. Dr. June said it turned out to be one of the wealthiest Presbyterian seminaries in the country and they gave her a scholarship that kept her in food for the whole three years, and completely covered her expenses for her PhD program. Dr. June shared that her law degree was a complete scholarship, allowing her to could keep her children with her. She expressed that she had been led and guided by individuals (both men and women) who were placed into her life at the time she needed them.

Dr. June shared an experience with me about something that happened on her professional climb to be president of an academic institution. She said she was so angry at God because "it just didn't happen." She was one of four finalist for a presidency on

the West Coast. Dr. June said that they were down to her being announced as the president of that institution, when the Asian faculty called her out of the room and told her about some financial concerns that were unfixable. She said she walked back in to the room with the full intention of ignoring the information she had just been given and taking the job. When she was asked, “ASturen’t you glad we chose you?” She said she heard herself say “I’m not so sure.” Dr. June kept telling herself to shut up, but she said she was unable to keep quiet. She asked the search committee why they would hide those kinds of figures from her and announced to them she needed to go to the airport, she was withdrawing from the search, and she went home.

Dr. June said she sat in her office on sabbatical for a year and thought why did I do that? What’s wrong with me?” She had been Dean before and had to come back to the institution as a professor. Dr. June felt humiliated from having to go from the leader of a department to being a professor following another Dean’s direction. However she soon learned that she hadn’t stayed at that institution for herself, she had stayed because two of her students needed her to stay. Both students had been mentored by her for five years. During that one year, one student died at the end of fall semester and the other died the end of spring. Each student had been in her class doing remarkable things, and they all would talk late into the night. She expressed that “sometimes God puts you some place and it’s not about you.” Dr. June said it wasn’t about her at all. It was about those two students. She felt that she was placed in their lives to walk them to the door of the Trinity. “Both students had nobody, no families, nothing.” When they were released from this earthly existence, she felt so was she. Within 30 days, out of the blue she was

called to interview for a presidency position. Within 30 days she became president at that institution.

When I asked Dr. June if there was one thing she would do over again if she had the chance, she candidly said it would probably be to make better choices in men. She said she “tends to be very 12 year old---you’re nice, I can fix you.” Dr. June said even with her not always making good choices in men, she was glad that she had her children. Explaining to me that her father was quiet, strong, and supportive had had a strong influence on her life. She felt she was always looking for her father in the men around her. Dr. June said she chose quiet, quasi-depressed, dysfunctional men. She said she learned the hard way that quiet doesn’t always mean healthy.

Dr. June believes that one of the reasons that there are few African American women in leadership position within higher education is that the pool to draw from is limited. If there is less to draw from, you are naturally going to have fewer at the top. Another reason for the marginalization is because higher education has been the playground of white men. She feels it belongs to them and gets passed down to them. The majority of the institutions are white, the Board of Trustees are white, and the Board of Trustees choose their leaders. They are going to choose individuals that they feel comfortable with. Dr. June said “that the only reason that we (women) are being allowed to run these institutions is because they are broken into pieces. It is not just African American women, its” any women. The women presidents that Dr. June knows were called to the institutions when the economic crisis hit, the enrollments started dropping, endowments started losing, when the deficit started rising, and when the destruction

deficits were such that schools were teetering on closing. Then the minority presidents were called.

Dr. June quoted Dan Alshire from the Association of Theological Schools, when she was asked about fixing the inherent flaw in the higher education system. “Seminaries are what white people thought the future would look like. They are built for white people to study white theology to serve white churches. That is what they were built for. We were not in mind.” Dr. June said the only way to change the discomfort of the nation for people of color is to become the majority, which should happen by 2040. “The kind of things that happen to me in my position happens to all women in positions of power. It’s just unbelievable. The discomfort of the nation with its own misogyny, its own racism has not been abated. It’s just become subliminal. It used to be overt. It has gone underground. It’s still there. Are things better? I don’t know. If you figure the poison is better unseen, then we are better.”

Dr. June feels that racism will come out no matter what higher education liberal institutions do. Liberal white institutions are some of the worst because they do not think they are, so they don’t change anything or learn anything either. Earlier in her career when she became a dean, the institution she was at had a very liberal white president who had seen her skill and told her “I have to be president and I need you as dean.” The board of trustees, all white and Southern, said “no they needed a national search.” Dr. June said “fine” and went back to her responsibilities. When they finally started getting vitas, hers was so far beyond what the board was receiving, that several board members stated “this is racist”, she is so much more qualified.” The rest of the board finally admitted it, and agreed to Dr. June becoming dean.

Dr. June said “leading a white faculty when you are a black dean is horrific.” She said it was her training as a lawyer and a litigator that guided her through the rough times. She said “when I go to battle, I don’t play. I don’t lose.” They did everything they could to undermine the operations and I still was successful.” “When I began, the institution was white. It is not a white institution anymore. The student body is 75 to 80 percent black. There now is a black male dean, who I had to fight the institution to succeed me.” Dr. June explained that the whole time she was in the position of dean, her job was to act as intermediary and take the weight. She did what he wanted done, she fought the battles he wanted fought and she integrated when he wanted to integrate. These were things he could not do. Dr. June said “the president and she played good cop, bad cop.” Functioning under this scenario proved really hard for her. It was hard on her blood pressure and it was hard on her emotionally.

It became difficult to leave the institution when she was ready to leave because the faculty would call ahead, to where ever she was a candidate in a search and say “she’s a hellion, you don’t want her, she is mean, she’s this, she’s that.” The opportunities would just evaporate. Dr. June became rebellious. She told God she was going to pierce her ears four times, then after thinking about it decided that three was a holy number. Talking to God she told him “now you cannot make me president. I’m going to put big earrings in my ears, really weird ones. I’m going to buy nothing but jeans, and I’m going to look as weird as I can. I’m out, I’m done. Do what you need to do.” She said she put all those earrings in her ears, and went about her work. Within 30 days, she was president, she was stunned. Dr. June went to the interview with the earrings in her ears, and told herself she wasn’t even going to worry about the interview or the people



interviewing her. When the interview was over, the trustees had said “fine.” Dr. June said that “it was weird and quirky and that she was actually a better candidate for them because she looked a little weird. She said the search went so quickly that the faculty didn’t know she was in a search. By the time they knew anything, she was the president. “God has a way of fulfilling destiny. I knew I was going to be leading an institution, I just didn’t know how, I was ready to give up.” She had told herself that all she had to do was “stay black and die.” She didn’t have to do anything, it just happened.

During the interview for the position she now holds, she said they (trustees) brought in the best money men they could find. They started asking her questions about accounting and she answered them all, they were stunned. She turned things around and started asking them questions about their audits and letters from their auditors along with structural deficit. Dr. June said they sat there and looked at her astonished. She said they’re reaction read “how does she know this”? When she was offered a salary, it was below what they had paid the previous president. She told them “no.” Dr. June had done her homework and knew what they had paid her predecessor. She had looked at the nonprofit tax form that had been filed by the institution. She asked them “why they would start her at the salary that they started the previous president at ten year ago?” Dr. June told them she was sure they should be able to find someone who would take the salary offered, but it wouldn’t be her, she then thanked them. Dr. June feels that there is always a presumption that you can be tricked, outmaneuvered, and that an individual doesn’t know how to negotiate. She does not think they do this to white men. Dr. June disclosed that in her contract it said that if she wanted to go on vacation for longer than one week, she had to ask the board chair and say “Mother may I”? She couldn’t imagine

that requirement being asked of a white male president, she once again told them “no.” Dr. June said that they rewrote the contract, but she told them she didn’t like it. She told them that they were trying to bring her to an environment that was not particularly friendly and that according to the way the contract was written they could fire her, paying her for two and a half years in a four year contract. The trustees told her they could not change the contract and she told them to get another candidate. The trustees came back with the revisions she had requested. They had figured she was a diversity hire and was “going to lie down, and go along to get along.”

Dr. June told the institution that she was not going to preside over their mess. That consensus was over, that decisions were going to be made and that she was going to be the one making them. She told them “that if anybody doesn’t like it, to let her go. She had a contract, and did not mind getting paid to be sitting on a beach. They were going to allow her to do it her way, Dr. June said she was going to be like a white male president, not a short president, not a girl president, not a black president, she was going to be the president.

When she assumed her position as president she experienced problems with white faculty not wanting to follow her leadership. Insubordination was not uncommon at the beginning. Because of this insubordination she said she had to get rid of her dean immediately. They looked at her black face and decided she couldn’t know more than they knew, no matter how many degrees she had. Dr. June told me that the main stresses in her life are the ones she puts on herself. She has high expectations for herself and the people who work for her. If there is a deadline she meets it, she likes to be right and in order, feeling that is the only way to succeed. She also feels that a person can’t run

through life in sloppy fashion. “The stress comes from wanting to meet my expectations, not theirs. My expectations are far higher than any they would have for me.”

To combat stress Dr. June says she likes to play racquetball, lift weights and run in the gym as if something is chasing her. She says she falls in love again and treats each day as a new beginning. Saying she can’t do anything about her failures or her shortcomings yesterday, but each new day she can try to greet each opportunity with success and do the very best for the institution that she can.

Dr. June is wiser now and knows that she cannot affect long-range change. She mentioned Walter Wink and his book, *Un-masking the Powers*. She explained that basically he says “that institutions are faulty. Institutions can be redeemed, but they have a spiritual inferiority. If you don’t address that inferiority, you can’t change anything.” Wink feels that there is an angel of every institution, every household, everything that is an organization. The problem with the angel of the churches and institutions is that they don’t want to change. They believe that their job is to hold everything exactly as it is, good or bad. He uses the Book of Revelation to validate his beliefs. He says “that Jesus doesn’t go to any of the normal hierarchy or administrative hierarchy, he goes to the spirit of the church, to the angel of the church.” That is what Dr. June wants to do. Dr. June says that there’s a spiritual inferiority that is held over the institution. Until an individual addresses it spiritually, nothing changes, nothing. She says she does her work hiring and firing and pushing her institution toward diversity along with other things and she is also praying and addressing the angel of the institution saying “you must let go of what you knew. God wants something new here.”

Dr. June says that what she has learned is that she is stretching the organization. Using an analogy of a rubber band, she feels that as soon as she leaves, the organization will snap back, but it will never go all the way back. Change is incremental according to Dr. June. She says that all she is doing is stretching an organization that doesn't want to change. According to her, no institution wants to change. An individual can stretch them as far as they can, and then they have to let go.

She doesn't consider herself an ordinary leader. She feels she is a change agent. She says she has gotten into places, changed it both spiritually and actually, she then she moves on. Dr. June feels that an institution can only stand so much change before it breaks apart. She believes change is a cycle, she has seen it work over and over again. She does not want to be that president that presides on normalcy in decline, she wants to be the president that changes everything and hopes it remains.

When giving advice to other African American women, Dr. June says "pay no attention to the circumstances. Pay no attention to the endowment in the money. If you have chosen to lead, it is a gift that brings such life." She says that "this is the hardest job she has ever had to do, but it has given her life. We (African American women) are like David who slayed Goliath. We are unlikely leaders of these broken and dying white institutions. We have a particular point of view, we bring nerve and audacity along with braveness. She says she is courageous beyond belief. Not always smart, but courageous nevertheless. We bring something to these institutions that will change them at their core. It's only seeing how we lead." Dr. June says "she doesn't lead like a white male. She knows how they lead and could mimic it, but that is not her." She gives credit to her mother for her leadership style, she leads with strength and she make decisions. If her

decisions are wrong, then she reassess and goes in a different direction. Dr. June shared she is not going to stand frozen in time like most institutions with everybody being afraid to take a step. She says, “Knowing that you can have a leadership style that comes out of your culture and out of your upbringing, is useful.” “It is by God’s spirit that we save the higher education institutions, if they can be saved, but we also have to remember that we did not break them.

**Participant # 4: Dr. August**

Dr. August felt that the person she is today was shaped by growing up in a poor family. She told me there were not a lot of material things while growing up but the knowledge that education would be her passport to life was a constant. From the beginning she knew she had to obtain a college education. Dr. August believed she had to work hard and that people would not judge her by the color of her skin but by the content of her character. She knows who she is and also that people hold her to a different standard than they hold a lot of other individuals because she is an African American woman. Dr. August has a clear understanding of what the expectations are and knows the single element that separates her from others is education, not just education but advanced education. She considers her most important accomplishment academically and professionally being able to oversee, raise money for and build a new comprehensive community college. The community college is the only higher education public institution in the state, and had a price tag of \$203 million. Dr. August added with pride, “Being able to impact the lives of thousands of students in a new state of the art, visibly present institution located in the proximity of an internationally renowned research university is my greatest accomplishment.”

Having been asked many times about naming a person who had helped her professionally, Dr. August very quickly replied she had many people who had been influential in her life. Not necessarily helping her become president, but being there and making her feel good about herself, helping her make the right decision to take the steps that she has taken and make the choices she has made. They encouraged her and were there to help when she fell off, slowed down, lost her way or confidence. Dr. August said the thing that resonates with her “is that anything she has accomplished has been because God was put first in her life.” She believes that promotions come from him. An inspirational saying personally guides her thoughts: “If you know the keeper of the keys, you don’t have to know key people.”

When thinking about what she might do over if she had the chance, Dr. August said “not to be unapologetic about her accomplishments.” She believes it is probably because she suffers (to a certain degree) from a syndrome that many women suffer from. A syndrome she calls “the imposter syndrome.” “Asking myself do I really deserve this? Even though I know I have worked for it.” Dr. August says “women second guess ourselves, resulting in sometimes losing ground, causing us to go back and rebuild because we are not as confident in ourselves and our abilities as we should be. If she could change one thing in her life, it would be to reprogram the mental block she feels she sometimes has, which has forced her “to get beyond so she can keep moving forward.’

When examining the factors contributing to the marginalization of African American women in leadership positions within higher education, she expressed there are many reasons, one of them being “the imposter syndrome.” African American women

don't allow themselves to realize their full potential. They don't think they are worthy or don't have enough people telling them that they are worthy. Another reason shared was because of family. Dr. August said that "sometimes it's difficult, especially for African American women because it's been inculcated in our female youth, you get so far, you're the little woman let the little man be the head." She explained we (African American women) don't want to create any conflicts in our relationships, and sometimes our families hold us back because we just can't accept what our accomplishments may do to family members. What happens if we become the breadwinners, the most significant person in the family, the one that has aspired for "greatness" and then has achieved that "greatness." Dr. August shared an additional concern which is lack of confidence. "We just don't have the self-confidence that we can do it." She feels some people don't want that level of stress in their lives. Dr. August said "she can tell you it is very stressful being at the top because as she tells her staff, the higher you go up within an organization, the closer you are to the exit sign." Some people just don't want to be that close to the exit.

Dr. August expressed that in order to change the system, we have to be honest with women. We need to talk about success. Making sure they understand that success is obtainable, they should try to aspire for what they want, understanding realizing that some of the pitfalls they may fall into calls for them to put on their "jacket of courage." Being aware that when things get tough, they have something that they can rely on to help them move forward. Surrounding themselves with a network of other women who have "made it" and have them be honest with them about some of the things that they've

experienced, so that a person can protect themselves from either going through it or cover themselves with something that's going to protect them as they go through it.

One of the most negative experiences that Dr. August went through was when she was an executive vice president at a previous job. She allowed her joy to be stolen. She was in an environment where she was the second person in charge, respected by all of her colleagues and staff. The president of the college resented her because of that fact. He was a white male, who took every opportunity to make things difficult. He allowed himself to be influenced by an African American male and an African American female who she felt were both incompetent. The president was always trying to make her feel less confident than she knew she should. Dr. August found herself spending so much time second guessing herself, wondering, validating, or needing to be validated in the decisions she made confirming the decisions being the right ones. She turned to her faith and belief in God, knowing that He puts adversities in your life so when you come out of them, you will be a much stronger person as a result. Sometimes individuals who share cultural similarities provide us with the highest hurdles, particularly if they see what you've accomplished, want it and are not willing work for it. They don't have the educational requirements or the experiences needed to do the job. Because of jealousy or not being supported themselves, they will try to undermine you. Dr. August says she tells women "that we should be propping, posting, pasting, and gluing each other up." She feels that because there aren't that many African American women who have made the climb successfully, we need to be proud of any sister or woman who can and has achieved something.



She heals with the negativity by remaining very positive. Dr. August didn't allow herself to stoop to their level. She made sure that the people who mattered within the college were people that would back her up no matter what. She formed good relationships and maintained those relationships, with many people. She relied on her faith along with support from her family to carry her. Even though she was successful before, when the opportunity came, she moved on to become more successful than she was previously.

If Dr. August had the chance to do something over, she wouldn't. She feels that adversities make an individual stronger. She commented that if she hadn't gone through some things, she would not have learned from those situations that provided her with very valuable lessons. Dr. August said that "you have to make sure that you know the people who you trust because everyone that you trust is not trustworthy." She also said "don't assume that because a person is the same race as you that that person is your friend and is looking out for you because that's not always the case."

At 6:30 am Dr. August goes to the gym every day to relieve stress, she gets a massage as frequently as she can, goes to church and prays over whatever the stressor is and tries to have a confidant or what she calls a "soul mate." She defined a soul mate as a friend, a lady who you can bare your soul to and tell her anything, this is a shared action. Each knows to give the other encouragement, advice and love as they go through the storms of life. Dr. August suggest that every woman should have a "soul mate," a friend, confidant, a person that they can feel comfortable with sharing whatever needs to be shared, knowing that the advice given by that "soul mate" is given out of love and nothing else.

Dr. August feels it doesn't matter who or where you are professionally in life, you've got to make sure that you try to keep everything that matters to you personally intact. Her family matters deeply to her. Sometimes she just needs someone to talk to about family issues that impact what she does and what affect it might have on her at work. She said her husband matters a great deal to her. At times she needs the support of someone to help her think beyond, he's not doing what I really want him to do helping her to find ways to cope. Dr. August says her soul mate tells her all the time that "she has to change the channel." She has learned "how to change the channel and accept people for who they are and what they are, knowing they can't be her, they won't be her, and she still has to love them anyway".

When asked what advice she would like to share with other African American women, she said she would tell them to follow their dream. There is a saying Dr. August shared with her daughter and a son when they were young:

Of all sad things of word or pen, the saddest of these is "what might have been." Don't ever wait and look back over your life and feel regretful because you didn't do the things that you wanted to do and could have done and should have done because it will take away your joy. You've got to go for the rainbow when you have it in your sight. You've got to strive for the best or get whatever you cannot of life when you have the opportunity. When opportunities present themselves to you, you have got to take them and use your faith in others to help you do what's necessary to be successful. We don't have a lot of opportunities in our lives. When opportunity knocks, you have got to open the door.

Dr. August closed the interview by sharing something she has learned from experience. “You have to get up every day with the attitude you’re going to be and do a little bit more than yesterday. Your ultimate goal is to be a part of this earth and living in this world.” She says what she “tries to do is to make everyday a day toward her legacy of what she wants people to say about her when she is no longer on the job or when she moves on... I’m going to make a better yesterday, and I’m going to try to make tomorrow better than today.’

#### **Participant # 5: Dr. September**

Dr. September’s development as a leader started early in her career as a faculty member in an institution which had an African American woman as president. Dr. September looked at this woman as a visionary leader. She watched and learned from her about leadership. The president had given what Dr. September considered a really dynamic presentation to the college about strategic vision, and she could see her role to play in that vision. During her time as president she challenged me extensively. Dr. September said “I moved forward with ideas that accelerated my area, accelerated me into administration, from there it was my launching pad.” It was those early experiences that Dr. September had with this African American president that were building blocks to her career.

Dr. September learned about higher education politics watching her mentor move from the ranks of the faculty to the presidency and then through political turmoil. Dr. September shared she had to step up and coordinate the campus African American community to speak on the president’s behalf. Her mentor was eventually removed but Dr. September was able to learn from the inside about how higher education politics

work. Learning about politics early has helped her navigate the political waters and stormy seas as her career developed. Dr. September left that institution because the politics were so vicious. She made a big leap from her home town and state, leaving behind a position she had held for six and half years. Dr. September felt fortunate to move into a position having a chancellor who was also a big thinker and a visionary leader. The chancellor took her under his wing where she was able to experience international travel, partnerships around the country as well as globally, and about national educational policy. The chancellor was Caucasian and she cared for him dearly. Having him as a mentor took her to another other level completely. Dr. September did not feel that she would have had enough qualifications to be president had she not spent six years under his watch.

Describing her most important accomplishment Dr. September was thoughtful. Being able to run a National Center with a membership of thirty-four colleges in twelve states, with all the big automakers from Asia, Europe and the United States. This work helped her develop partnerships in those countries, which enabled her to be recognized by the National Governor's Association and the Departments of State and Education. She said "those things brought me onto a big stage." Dr. September said all of those accomplishments came before she had finished her doctorate. She did what she called "an upside down degree." Doing the work before the degree, she considered the degree the "glass ceiling." If she could have done things differently, she said she would have completed her doctorate earlier. She shared being in a doctoral program previously but she was just too busy, explained that moving through leadership a person is always busy. It doesn't get any better, it gets worse. Dr. September felt that if she had finished her

doctorate earlier, she probably would have been on a leadership path earlier. Feeling “things” happen for a reason and though she could not really say with certainty that her career path would have been different, she felt that “things” happened the way they did for a reason.

Dr. September said that “there are many factors that contribute to the marginalization of people. There are always biases out there.” She feels that if a person works hard, they can get past those biases and it does not matter that biases are there, somebody will accept you. “There are people that want to accomplish good things and do good work, for the right reason.” She made reference to a State College System Chancellor she feels has made a commitment to diversity; but more importantly, has set goals for the state system as a whole. He saw her being able to contribute to the “big picture” with a unique mix of college and university presidents throughout the state. Returning to the original question about marginalization, Dr. September said “that most individuals do not start in a college’s student affairs office with the idea of becoming a college president. African Americans tend to start and end their careers in student affairs. Faculty want someone that has been down the academic path.” She says becoming the president of a college is a process, people do not realize that you need to be nominated. You just don’t see a presidency and say “I think I’ll apply for that.” It comes with reputation that somebody has shown proven leadership and is willing to stand up for you. She also said a lot of African American college presidents she has met, especially within the community college arena, in larger urban areas propel each other to the presidency. They belong largely to minority organizations, and they take care of each other. In the rural areas it is harder for the same reason.

In reference to curbing the marginalization found in higher education, Dr. September said that a twenty year old organization of African American presidents called the President's Roundtable had worked to propel African Americans through the pipeline. The organization started with community colleges, but she feels that universities need to adapt this type of mentorship organization. "Mentors can bring you up, show you the past while enlightening you on a few critical areas. You have to have somebody to tell you what you need to know. You have to have somebody who is going to tell you because they *love* you- in *love* they will tell you."

Dr. September has had to adjust to some very recent negative experiences because of a change brought on by her new position as president of a college in a different setting. She says she has some faculty that are trying to throw her under the bus. They're using racial words of what she calls a "dog whistle." But she feels that individuals who feel insecure dealing with a person of color can really make a reason, and ethical reason why they're upset. She said "they play the race card. It is just a card they play. So if there is nothing else to say, they can say that and hope other people join in." Dr. September disclosed that she had one person who did not want to give her a recommendation for her current presidency, it was her current supervisor. He doesn't know that she knows that he wanted to throw her under the bus. She credits the chancellor for not being like the rest of the good old boys, and allowing her to be blackballed.

As president, Dr. September says she handles negativity by taking the high road. She says "people are doing things based on their fears, their interpretation of what they think you did, what has been said. You have to always remain positive. You always have to explain the big picture and take that high road. It is just part of the job. I don't

care what color you are, I don't care if you're purple, if you're not ready for that, you're not ready to be president.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion

Two research questions guided this study:

1. What are the predominate barriers encountered by African American women, seeking to obtain upper level administrative positions within post-secondary education at predominately white institutions t.
2. What are predominate ways these women coped with the problems and/or situations they encountered on their professional climb to senior leadership.

Table 1

*Interview Questions:*

1. What events in your life helped shape “you” today?
2. Who do you consider the most important person in helping you become who you are today?
3. What do you consider your most important accomplishment?
4. If you could do one thing over in your life, what would it be and why?
5. Will you please share any negative experiences (that you feel comfortable sharing with me), that involved cultural, racial, or gender issues?
6. How did you handle the experience/situation?
7. Would you have done any
8. What do you consider stressors in your life?
9. How do you relieve the stress in your life?
10. Is there any other information that you would like to share with me?

This chapter will discuss this study’s research relating to the research questions and the similarities of previous research examined in the Chapter 2. Five African



American women presidents were interviewed for this study, all were exceptionally gifted and seasoned individuals. These five women shared attributes as well as some common experiences, but they were all uniquely different leaders. The discussion chapter will present similarities and differences in the general attributes of these women. It will then discuss the two research questions guiding this research study with application to the stories presented by these women.

### **Similarities and Differences of Participants**

Collectively the participants had over 200 years of experience in education, over 150 years in higher education, and over 100 years in higher education administration. The five African American female presidents lived and worked in a different parts of the continental United States. One was located in the west, two were located in the east, and two were located in the Midwest. The participants represented, one four year institution, one community and technical college, and three community colleges.

The social construct consisting of one head-of-household male wage earner, with a stay at home spouse that is an inherent part of the structure of higher education institutions (Malveaux, 2005; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004; Richley & Lingham, 2004) was an underlying if not direct contribution to the career development of the five African American presidents who participated in this study. Becks and Moody (2004) along with Jones and Konives (2001) discuss how African American women must learn to balance their professional and personal lives in order to successfully obtain senior level administrative leadership in higher education. Wilson (2004) stated the experiences of pre-career mentoring provided by parents, high school teachers, counselors, and spouses along with the career related mentoring experiences that occurred from college and

employment which enhanced the participant's identities and self-worth, providing positive role models while implanting the concept that the only limitations individuals face are the limitations they place on themselves.

Table 2 documents variables in participant's lives that helped to develop their individual and collective personalities.

Table 2

*Life Events That Helped Shape Individual Personality*

Education		Childhood Family Income		Mentors		Religious Structure	
Category	Freq.	Category	Freq.	Category	Freq.	Category	Freq.
Childhood Support	5	Poor	3	African American Male	2	Childhood	5
Experienced Segregation	4	Middle		African American Female	2	Adult	5
Adult/Family Support	4	High		European Male	2		
Excellence Demanded	5	Unknown	2	European Female	0		

When asked what events in the participant's lives helped shape who they are today, four of the five women indicated that they grew up in a very supportive two parent household. Dr. May said "she had two parents who had good values and high expectations for her and her siblings to make something of themselves. Dr. April felt the person she is today is that she grew up in a family that was extremely supportive and had high expectations for her. The fifth participant interviewed, did not mention early childhood.

Academic expectations within all five of the participant's families were set very high. Dr. June said that from the very beginning, even though by cultural standards she was not considered particularly pretty (the standards at the time were white features were exclusively beautiful), both her mother and father told her she could be absolutely anything she wanted to be. Education was not just emphasized, but embraced.

Three participants indicated they came from low income backgrounds and one inferred it. Four were raised in the south and attended rural or segregated schools. Dr. June was raised in a two parent household, the oldest of five children. She disclosed that her family was "very, very poor", but they didn't know it. She was raised in a two family house bought by her father and uncle after World War II, having a large family gave them a sort of community within itself.

All participants shared strong religious beliefs. Dr. August turned to her faith and belief in God, knowing that He puts adversities in your life so when you come out of them you are a much stronger person. Dr. August said the thing that resonates with her "is that anything she has accomplished has been because God was put first in her life." She believes that promotions come from him.

Discussing individuals who had a direct effect on the participant's career development path towards being a chief administrator at their college or university, participants shared information on the mentors they had or have. There were three pieces of advice that all five participants mentioned. Obtaining a mentor for them was important. Dr. April credits her professional climb to an African American male college president and Dr. June shared an African American woman showed her that African American women did not have to be competitive.

Table 3 documents personal accomplishments that participants were proud of.

Table 3

*Personal Accomplishments*

Personal Accomplishment	Frequency
Marriage	4
Raising a Family	5
Completing Doctorate	5
Employed While Student with Family	3
Institutional Change Agent/Affecting Thousands of Individuals	3

When asked what accomplishments participants are most proud of these women leaders responded that they felt that marriage and raising a family were at the top of their list of personal accomplishments. Being able to be “change agents” that directly affected or changed the lives of individuals within their institutions and surrounding communities and completing their doctorates. Dr. April felt her most important accomplishment was celebrating 40 years of marriage and raising four daughters who have all graduated from college. An accomplishment Dr. May shared was completing her doctorate. She felt that this was an important accomplishment because in her family education meant a lot. Dr. June felt since she was divorced while her children were young, successfully raising her two sons was her most important accomplishment.

The responses that these five African American leaders shared give us insight into the barriers to success faced by these women and coping mechanisms developed to successfully obtain and sustain an executive leadership position in an institution of higher education.

## Barriers to Success

Table 4 details barriers that the participants encountered as they successfully obtained positions of leadership in higher education.

Table 4

### *Barriers to Success*

Barrier	Frequency
Number of African American Women in senior level Administration	2
Impostor Syndrome	2
Exposure	1
Politics	1
Racism	4
White Male Dominated Environment	3
Lack of Support	2
Lack of Opportunity	2
Misperceptions About Ability Based on Gender	5
Misperceptions About Ability Based on Color (race)	4
Invisibility	5

Barriers caused by marginalization continues to be a concern within higher education senior level administration. Participants shared their opinions on variables that contribute to the marginalization. Dr. April said “I think a lot of it has to do with the fact of where you might be, what kind of support systems you might have or not have in place.” She also said “sometimes it’s because we haven’t had the opportunity to get fulfilled in the educational requirements that are needed Dr. June believes one of the reasons there are few African American women in leadership position within higher education is that the pool to draw from is limited. If there is less to draw from, you are naturally going to have fewer at the top, the marginalization is because higher education has been the playground of white men. Dr. August feels African American women don’t

allow themselves to realize their full potential. They don't think they are worthy or don't have enough people telling them that they are.

Table 5 lists mechanisms that the participants developed to cope with the barriers encountered as they successfully obtained positions of leadership in higher education.

### **Barrier Coping Mechanisms for Success**

Table 5

#### *Barrier Combatants*

Barrier Combatant	Frequency
Surround self with Support	5
Belief in a Higher Power (God)	5
Helping Each Other/Reaching back	5

It was necessary for the participants to develop methods to combat the barriers they encountered on their ascent to senior level administrative leadership. Coping mechanisms used by the participants were varied. Dr. August shared an inspirational motto that personally guides her thoughts. *If you know the keeper of the keys, you don't have to know key people.* Dr. April feels that we need to find time for each other. She said "I don't seek out any notoriety or fame, or anything like that. I think it has to start with each other, helping each other. Then when and if the time is there to support someone in a situation, then do that." We can't be hesitant to give our support. Some people just aren't going to change, we have to just keep moving forward."

Table 6 documents negative experiences that the participants faced during their ascent to academic senior level leadership positions.

Table 6

#### *Negative Experiences*

Negative Experience	Frequency
Professional	
Lack of support from white male senior administrators	3
Comments from white male senior administrators	2
Student Racial/Gender Biases	1
Jealously	2
Lack of support from persons of color	3
Not included in 'backdoor' conversations	4
Voice not being heard	
<i>Professional meetings</i>	2
<i>Community</i>	2
Personal	
Lack of family understanding professional growth	1
Lack of family understanding personal growth	1

Participants were asked to share negative experiences that involved cultural, racial or gender issues. Common negative experiences shared by participants include not being in “backroom conversations” and lack of support from white male senior administrators and other people of color in the institutions. Dr. April shared that sometimes her voice is not heard in meetings. She can be sitting there with the best ideas in the room, but they aren’t heard until someone else brings up the same idea. The room is usually filled with white men. Dr. April also shared she “has learned not let situations like that bother her, as long as what she is trying to accomplish is accomplished.” Dr. May described a negative experience saying “sometimes her colleagues, especially her white colleagues have biases about people of color, they under estimate her. They under estimate the power of perception that people of color have.

Table 7 identifies factors that produced stress for the participants as presidents of predominately white colleges or universities.

Table 7

*Stressors*

Stressor	Frequency
Presidential responsibilities	4
Personal expectations	2
White faculty	3
Health issues	2
Things that cannot be controlled	1

The participants in this study shared conditions which caused stress. Dr. April's stressors come from things that she doesn't have control over. Dr. May says "the fact that she has colleagues who undervalue the countless hours she spends focusing on how to do her best as president and a person of color in an unsupportive environment and when other people of color don't value what she does" causes her stress. Sometimes individuals who share cultural similarities provide us with the highest hurdles, particularly if they see what you've accomplished, want it and are not willing work for it. They don't have the educational requirements or the experiences needed to do the job. Because of jealousy or not being supported themselves, they will try to undermine you. Dr. May also identified that the reality of her responsibilities as president of a college cause her stress. She says moving from one meeting to the next without having any time in between to collect her thoughts and prepare. Not being able to detach from the meeting she just had, and gear up for the meeting that she is transitioning to.

Table 8 articulates examples of how the participants handled stressful situations.

Table 8

*How Participants Deal With Stress*

Method	Frequency
Know when to 'let go'	3
Direct stress a different way	1
Shop	1
Faith	4



Exercise	2
Join organizations	2
Music	2
Artistic outlets	3
Other	1

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All of the participants had their own ways of handling or reliving their stress levels. Common methods of dealing with stress are faith and artistic outlets. As president, Dr. September handles the stress of negativity by taking the high road. She says “people are doing things based on their fears, their interpretation of what they think you did, what has been said. You have to always remain positive. When things get rough one of Dr. April’s favorite things to do is shop. She says her husband who happens to be a Baptist minister doesn’t understand the need for another pair of black shoes. Dr. April said “you have to take care of yourself, so you don’t carry things to the point where you just worry yourself into an ulcer. It’s not worth it. You have to use stress in a different kind of way.” Dr. August goes to the gym every day to relieve stress, she gets a massage as frequently as she can, goes to church and prays over whatever the stressor is and tries to have a confidant or what she calls a “soul mate.” Another stress relieving method for Dr. August is using her faith to cope with presidential responsibilities like going from meeting to meeting without a moment to breathe and lack of support from staff, students and community.

Table 9 discusses advice that the participants would give to other African American women about obtaining senior level leadership positions in higher education.

Table 9

*Advice for Acquiring Leadership Positions as African American Women*

Method	Frequency
Be prepared	
Education	5
When opportunity presents itself	5
Find a mentor	5
Be honest	2
Be fair	1
Respect others	1
Work hard	4
Be on time	1
Follow dreams	3
Always be fair	1
Confident in personal ability	5
Take advantage of leadership training	2
Learn to navigate conflict	2
Networking	5

The African American women presidents discussed advice they would offer other African American Women. Dr. May said “it is important to be willing to put in the time. An individual has to stay on task and not show up for things unprepared. Doing the homework is an essential part of preparation.” Being confident in one’s own ability was another piece of advice that all five women emphasized. Another piece of advice offered by Dr. May to African American women was to have confidence in their ability and really believe that they can do it. Dr. August offers another consideration for African American women seeking executive leadership positions and that is, have a clear understanding of what the expectations are and knows that the single element which separates candidates from others is education, not just education but advanced education.

All five participants suggested that networking was important. Dr. September talked about a twenty year old organization of African American presidents called the President’s Roundtable which has worked to propel African Americans through the pipeline. The organization started with community colleges, but she feels that colleges

and universities need to adapt this type of mentorship organization. Dr. June suggest, “Develop a support system. Look for a mentor, someone that you feel comfortable talking to. Be honest and true to yourself. Ask questions that you need to find answers to.”

Working hard was another common topic discussed by participants. Dr. May felt that her role as president is hard and tasking. She clarified that it was not physically tasking, but mentally tasking because she is always in a thought process. Dr. June said (talking about the presidency) “this is the hardest job I have ever had to do, but it has given me life. Dr. August communicated, “You have to get up every day with the attitude you’re going to be and do a little bit more than yesterday... I’m going to make a better yesterday, and I’m going to try to make tomorrow better than today.”

Finally, three of the five participants felt that it is important to follow our dreams. Dr. May said “Sometimes taking a risk and not letting other’s influence our decision is the right thing for an individual to do.” She remembered people telling her not to take the presidency of a collage in a particular state, and she did anyway. She said “That decision proved to provide her with one of the most positive work experiences she has ever had.” Dr. June explained she has high expectations for herself and the people who work for her. If there is a deadline she meets it, she likes to be right and in order, she feels that is the only way to succeed.

### **Concluding Comments by Participants**

In closing Table 10 organizes concluding interview comments by participants.

Table 10

*Things That Would Be Done Over*

Method	Frequency
Obtain Doctorate earlier	4
Make Better Choice of Spouse	1
Nothing	0

Looking back over their career and personal development paths participants were asked, “If they could do one thing over, what would it be? Most of the participants indicated that they wished that they had obtained their doctorates earlier.

The five participants in the study felt that leadership is a blessing and that none of them really had being president of a higher education institution in their early career development plan. Dr. September said “most individuals do not start in a college’s student affairs office with the idea of becoming a college president...becoming the president of a college is a process, people do not realize that you need to be nominated.”

## **Chapter 6**

### **Recommendations**

In conclusion, there are five summarizing findings from this study to increase the likelihood of success for African American women on a career path towards executive leadership in higher education. Be educationally prepared and credentialed, know yourself, find a mentor, develop coping mechanisms to handle barriers and reach back and help others. These elements are essential to African American women leaders pursuing executive leadership positions.

#### **Obtain Advanced Degrees**

First, African American women who aspire to senior level administrative positions in higher education must be educationally prepared and credentialed. Because of higher education's inherent perceptions about African American Women and their leadership ability, African American women must prepare themselves academically, obtaining advanced degrees while developing leadership skills through leadership training that will provide an ethical framework that allows us to successfully be the senior administrator at a college or university.

#### **Know Yourself**

Second, African American women aspiring to a senior level administrative position must be aware of their individual abilities, strengths and biases. It is important for African American women to know their strengths and weaknesses, because individuals on the "outside" will use knowledge of those strengths and weaknesses to undermine professional development. Knowing who we are as individuals will help to insulate us against the negativity that is found within the system of higher education.

**Identify a Mentor**

Third, African American women on a career path to senior level administrative positions within higher education should obtain a mentor. A mentor can help them develop an understanding of the complexities of leadership in higher education and introduce them with opportunities to gain the experience and exposure needed to obtain a presidency at any college or university.

**Develop Coping Mechanisms**

Fourth, African American women wanting senior level administrative positions in predominately white colleges or universities must develop coping strategies to defuse the inherent institutionalized double oppression of racism and sexism that is prevalent in the higher education arena. Having to constantly adjust to the microaggressions that are a result of institutional racism and sexism that exists can and does produce stress. Being able to manage stress enables the individual to successfully maneuver situations that emerge in leadership positions such as president of a predominately white college or university.

**Reach Back and Help Others**

Fifth, African American women who reach the senior level of higher education administration must be willing to reach back and nurture the African American women who follow them. Forming a network of educated, nurtured and self-confident African American women is necessary to ensure that when opportunity presents itself there is a viable “pool” which the academic arena can pull.

### **Recommendations for Additional Research**

It is my personal belief that the African American women who have achieved senior leadership positions in higher education have a unique culture of their own, defined by the common experiences and barriers that they share/d.

While equality and equity in higher education for African American women desiring to navigate the academic waters to senior level administration is not on the horizon, there is need for additional research on the caustic atmosphere that is inherently woven into the fabric of higher education. Study also is needed to provide predominately white colleges or universities with documented research that can be used as a baseline for policies and procedures to be developed working towards a more inclusive higher education system.

I suggest that higher education (via the government) designate money, time and resources to conduct research into creating and constructing opportunities for leadership advancement for under-represented individuals. There is a desperate need for studies that provide examples of beneficial reporting menus and techniques for colleges and universities to incorporate into their structures that document inappropriate, negative, and caustic working environments that directly affect the faculty and staff of the academic institutions. There should be a reliable, viable way to hold individual higher education institutions responsible and accountable for the environmental and psychological hazards that exist within their establishments. On March thirteenth, 2015, Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) aired a feature on their six o'clock news that focused on the racial climate on college and university campuses. This broadcast discussed the continuing racial polarization that continues to be prevalent on college and university

campuses across the United States. This polarization is inherently built into the foundation of predominately white colleges and universities and permeates the institutions conversely in how administration, staff and students handle the inequality of racism and sexism on their campuses. This broadcast was not only timely for me it was validation that higher education has to put more effort into becoming more inclusive.

I have been employed within a higher educational system for over two decades. During this time period I have personally observed a lack of African American women in senior level positions within my state's higher educational system is alarming minimal. My personal ambition to become a senior level administrator within the state's public higher educational system, made me question why this under representation and underutilization of African American women continues to be common place. I felt a need for higher education to be informed of barriers that may impede or hinder the successful acclimation of African American women to senior level administrative leadership positions. Collins (2009) says "African American women need wisdom to know how to deal with the "educated fools." African American women being a subordinate group cannot waste time because our objectification as "Other" denies us the protection that white skin, maleness and wealth confer. This otherness is compounded by an individual's multiple identities. When factors such as sexual orientation, race, or class are combined into a female body, additional weight is also added. Having so many identities to encompass and different hats to wear makes it far more challenging for African American women to survive" (Vargas, 1999, p 365).

Both knowledge and wisdom can be gleaned from the experiences of "Seasoned" African American women. Knowledge and wisdom along with experience have been



used by African American women as the key to our survival. Having knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate. Lived experiences as a criterion for credibility commonly is used by African American women. Phyllis Green feels that there is a need to depend on the experiences of others for guidance.

I have been fortunate to be employed at one university for the past quarter of a century. I've been able to obtain a Master's of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling, an Educational Specialist degree and now my Doctorate in Education because of my employment. I have also had the misfortune of experiencing firsthand how institutional racism and sexism can and do effect an African American women working at a predominately white university. Advancement within the institution regardless of qualifications or tenure are extremely rare and for the most part non-existent for African American women. While I have been able to gain personal and professional recognition by faculty, staff and the surrounding community, the institution seems to only recognize me when I can "serve" it in a non-threatening and subservient position. To the institution I am invisible. I have no voice and am part of a number that is used to justify the institution's perceived commitment to having a diverse faculty and staff.

I have had mentors both male and female and both white and African American. These mentors have helped me develop and supplied me with opportunities to grow professionally and personally. However even with the growth that my mentors have provide me, the institution because of its inherent institutional structure of racism (not so much sexism) has made what looks to the "outsider" as a glass ceiling, what I as an "insider" would call a bullet proof glass ceiling. In my years of employment I have

witnessed microaggressions as well as outright negative comments detrimentally affecting the academic and work environment at the institution. I have learned to deflect them, deal with them and direct them into a “covered box” (which occasionally has to have the lid put back on) so that I have the strength to consistently and constantly fight the battle to “survive.”

### **Conclusion**

In this study I interviewed five African American presidents of predominately white colleges or universities capturing stories of their journeys to successful executive leadership positions. The lessons learned are invaluable. These women shared five key factors young African American women should consider as they enter the higher education arena and engage in leadership positions. This research contributes more than uncomplicated knowledge and skills for career advancement. This research shares captured stories that young African American women must hear and internalize to mentally and emotionally prepare for, and handle, the experiences they will likely encounter in their professional leadership journey. When our stories are shared we build a foundation of wisdom. We need both skills and wisdom to effectively address the racial equity issues confronting higher education institutions today. I am anxiously looking forward to a time in the future, a time when more African American women leaders will be navigating the path to change institutions of higher education.

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## Appendix A



August 22, 2013

Dear Barbara Wilson:

Re: IRB Proposal entitled "[488516-4] Through the looking glass: Barriers and coping mechanisms encountered by African American women presidents, in predominately white institutions located in the Midwest."

Review Level: Level II

On the consent form the name of the IRB administrator is incorrectly spelled. You may correct the spelling of his name without submitting an amendment/modification to IRBNet. Please make no other changes.

Your IRB Proposal has been approved as of August 22, 2013. On behalf of the Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB, I wish you success with your study. Remember that you must seek approval for any changes in your study, its design, funding source, consent process, or any part of the study that may affect participants in the study. Should any of the participants in your study suffer a research-related injury or other harmful outcome, you are required to report them to the IRB as soon as possible.

The approval of your study is for one calendar year less a day from the approval date. When you complete your data collection or should you discontinue your study, you must notify the IRB. Please include your log number with any correspondence with the IRB.

This approval is considered final when the full IRB approves the monthly decisions and active log. The IRB reserves the right to review each study as part of its continuing review process. Continuing reviews are usually scheduled. However, under some conditions the IRB may choose not to announce a continuing review. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at [irb@mnsu.edu](mailto:irb@mnsu.edu) or 507-389-5102.

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for maintaining signed consent forms in a secure location at MSU for 3 years. If the PI leaves MSU before the end of the 3-year timeline, he/she is responsible for following "Consent Form Maintenance" procedures posted online.

Cordially,

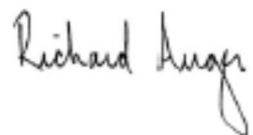
A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Hadley".

Mary Hadley, Ph.D.  
IRB Coordinator





Sarah Gifers, Ph.D.  
IRB Co-Chair



Richard Auger, Ph.D.  
IRB Co-Chair

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Minnesota State University, Mankato IRB's records.

## Appendix B

Letter to Identified Potential Participants

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Address

State

Date

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Maria Baxter-Nuamah and I am a doctoral student in the College of Education, department of Educational Leadership at Minnesota State University, Mankato in Mankato, Minnesota. I am currently seeking potential participants for my dissertation study: **Through the looking glass: Barriers and coping mechanisms encountered by African American women presidents in predominately white institutions located in the Midwest.**

The focus of my dissertation is the process of advancement for African American women in leadership positions in higher education institutions. Participants in this study must meet these criteria: hold a position of president, work in Midwest higher education institutions, and be self- identified as African American.

Your name was given to me by \_\_\_\_\_ as a potential participant in this doctoral research study.

I would be honored if you would agree to be a part of my research. Please let me know at your earliest convenience whether or not you are interested. You can contact me at: [maria.baxter-nuamah@mnsu.edu](mailto:maria.baxter-nuamah@mnsu.edu). If you are agreeing to be a part of this research if selected, please state that you are agreeing to participate at the time you e-mail me your response.

From the responses received, I will build a list of potential participants that have agreed to be a part of the study, and purposefully select 5 participants to interview. Selection will be based on institution size and a balance of public and private institutions.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Maria Baxter-Nuamah, EDLD Candidate  
Minnesota State University, Mankato

## Appendix C

Letter to Selected Participants

Dr. \_\_\_\_\_

Address

State

Date

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for agreeing and giving your consent to be a part of my dissertation study: **Through the looking glass: Barriers and coping mechanisms encountered by African American women presidents in predominately white institutions located in the Midwest.**

I will be interviewing 5 African American presidents in predominately white Midwest four-year higher education institutions. Each interview will be recorded, notes taken, transcribed and coded to identify barriers and coping mechanisms experienced by individual participants in the study. The coded information from each interview will be sorted into themes and then compared to find patterns.

The interview questions are related to barriers, colleagues, environment, position responsibilities, racism, sexism, family (factual or perceived), and coping techniques developed by each participant as they successfully reached the position of president at a predominately white Midwest post- secondary institution. After transcription, each participant will be asked to verify the information. The transcript will be sent to you via UPS, so that the transcripts can be tracked and their receipt validated. After the data collected is analyzed and the doctoral research is complete, I will send a copy of the completed project to each participant. All participants interviewed will remain anonymous in all publications and presentations that result from this research study.

Please contact me at [maria.baxter-nuamah@mnsu.edu](mailto:maria.baxter-nuamah@mnsu.edu), or 507- 420-7750 (cell) 507-389-1024 (work) with three dates and times that would fit into your schedule, or if you have any questions.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at the above contact information.

Again thank you for agreeing to be a participant in my study.

Maria Baxter-Nuamah, EDLD Candidate  
Minnesota State University, Mankato

## Appendix D

### Interview Script/Questions

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Good (morning, afternoon) Dr.\_\_\_\_\_. I would like to thank you for granting me this interview. As you have been informed, I am presently working on my research portion of my dissertation. The title of my Dissertation is: Through the looking glass: Barriers and coping mechanisms encountered by African American women, post-secondary senior level administrators, in predominately white institutions located in the Midwest. Your name was given to me by\_\_\_\_\_.

This interview will be recorded and I will be taking notes as we talk. This interview will take approximately one hour. The second interview will be schedule with you after all participants have been interviewed once. The second interview will be more in depth, and be narrowed down to areas or themes that the first interview after transcription and coding identify.

Questions will depend on information given by participant. Participant will be encouraged to answer questions in a narrative format). When possible the same questions and format will be used with all participants.

11. Please state your full name, your title, the name of your college or university and how long you have held this position.
12. Have you held any other senior level administrative positions either at this institution or another? Please name positions \_\_\_\_\_ and institution\_\_\_\_\_.
13. Please tell me about developmental experiences in your childhood.  
(questions will be related to information shared).
14. What events in your life helped shape “you” today?  
(questions will be related to information shared).
15. Who do you consider the most important person in helping you become who you are today?  
(questions related to information shared).
16. What do you consider your most important accomplishment?  
(questions related to information shared).
17. If you could do one thing over in your life, what would it be and why?  
(questions related to information shared).
18. Will you please share any negative experiences (that you feel comfortable sharing with me), that involved cultural, racial, or gender issues?  
(questions related to information shared).

19. How did you handle the experience/situation?  
(questions related to information shared).
20. Would you have done anything different?  
(questions related to information shared).
21. What do you consider stressors in your life?  
(questions related to information shared).
22. How do you relieve the stress in your life?  
(questions related to information shared).
23. Is there any other information that you would like to share with me?  
(questions related to information shared).
24. Are there any questions that you would like to ask me?

Thank you again Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ for allowing me the opportunity to interview you. When I have transcribed this interview, I will supply you with a copy to review and, before the information is coded and analyzed with the other interviews.

## Appendix E

### Interview Consent Form

This research project: **Through the looking glass: Barriers and coping mechanisms encountered by African American women, post-secondary senior level administrators, in predominately white institutions located in the Midwest.**

This research project is in partial fulfillment of Maria Baxter-Nuamah's Educational Doctorate Degree from Minnesota State University, Mankato.

I understand that the purpose of this qualitative ethnographic study is to document personal and professional perceptions, along with experiences of African American women serving in senior level positions in predominately white Midwest institutions. The research questions are based on the following:

3. What are the predominate barriers encountered by African American women, seeking to obtain upper level administrative positions within post-secondary education at predominately white institutions in the Midwest.
4. What are predominate ways these women coped with the problems and/or situations they encountered on their professional climb to senior leadership.

I understand that the research involves being interviewed. I have been informed that the interview will be divided into two approximately one hour interviews. The first interview will be coded for themes and the second interview will research the themes developed in the first interview. The second interview will take place after all participants have been interviewed once.

Ms. Baxter has informed me that the interviews will be recorded and following the interviews, she will transcribe the interviews. A copy of the transcriptions will be made available to me following the first interview for my verification, and following the second interview for clarification. I also understand that I have the right to remain anonymous. I understand that I will also receive a copy of the completed research project.

By signing and dating this consent form, I am agreeing to full participation in the above named research project of Maria Baxter-Nuamah.

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Signature

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Date