The Untold Story: African American Women Administrators' Alchemy of turning Adversity into Gold

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Abstract
As we approach the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the globalization and privatization of the academy is destabilizing the patterns of university professional work developed over the past hundred years (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). To grasp the extent of changes taking place and to understand the forces of change on women in the academy, it is important to focus on women administrators in this equation. African American women administrators in particular, and women of all historically underrepresented racial groups in general, must deal with the unique challenges of singular discrimination in terms of race and gender and then the intersectionality of the issues of racism and sexism in terms of feelings of isolation, perceptions of lack of trust and support, and tokenism and struggles over power and influence (Collins, 1991; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Camblin 1998; Moses, 1989; Mosley, 1980; Sandler, 1986; Sandler & Hall, 1991; Shavlik and Touchton, 1986).   The purpose of this study was to collect qualitative information, beyond basic preparation and readiness for a senior level administrative position, that related to support, success and other career enhancing achievement factors. These factors are connected to family and community support systems, informal and formal professional networks, and the ability to navigate and negotiate effectively within professional and higher education environments.

As we approach the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the globalization and privatization of the academy is destabilizing the patterns of university professional work developed over the past hundred years (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997). One of the major changes that has taken place as a result of globalization and privatization is that faculty, who were previously situated between capital and labor, are now positioned squarely in the marketplace adjacent to administrators who have been living with the stressors and pressures of market-like conditions for more that 25 years (Ibid). To grasp the extent of changes taking place and to understand the forces of change on women in the academy, it is important to focus on women administrators in this equation. Defining academic capitalism as the combination of effects of globalization and privatization on institutions of higher education or in other words the institutional and professional market or market-like efforts to secure external monies, this study will discuss what possible alchemy can be made to turn currently employed coping strategies of women from historically underrepresented (racial) groups in (American) higher education into the gold of success strategies.

As the discussion pertains to African American women administrators how does one discuss entrepreneurialism when we are either still dealing with or dealing with again the most basic issues residing at the nexus of racism and sexism? Despite great advances in terms of access, many African American women administrators still find themselves working in an environment they perceive as chilly. This perception of a "chilly climate" refers to a lack of acceptance or sense of isolation which typically results in a lack of respect and/or challenges to these administrators' power. These challenges which they fight against, their survival or coping techniques and more recently success strategies which are currently employed, and several recommended refinements of these success strategies will be explained at length later. African American women administrators in particular, and women of all historically underrepresented racial groups in general, must deal with the unique challenges of singular discrimination in terms of race and gender and then the intersectionality of the issues of racism and sexism in terms of feelings of isolation, perceptions of lack of trust and support, and tokenism and struggles over power and influence (Collins, 1991; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Camblin 1998; Moses, 1989; Mosley, 1980; Sandler, 1986; Sandler & Hall, 1991; Shavlik and Touchton, 1986).

While African American women have been integrally involved in higher education since the first quarter of the 20th century, few studies have been dedicated to examining their lives as administrators. Moses (1989) states that, "Black women have been participants in higher education for more than a century, but they are almost totally absent from the research literature; rarely is the impact of racism and sexism on black women in academe examined" (p. 1). Though researchers are beginning to examine the experiences of African American women

administrators in higher education, the focus of the majority of studies remains on students and faculty.

Over the last several decades, African American women have moved into more senior administrative positions in predominantly white institutions of higher education (hereafter referred to as "PWIs"). The challenges that African American women encounter and the coping mechanisms they utilize to successfully manage the conflicts as professionals in higher education have not been adequately studied primarily because there is such a high cost in revealing such personal struggles and such personal pain connected to the challenges of African-American women administrators face as they pursue advancement and promotion. This study contends that organizational womanists (especially in higher education) are a specialized type of change agent. This study concludes with the contention that there are great benefits to the ***transformational agency of organizational womanists*** and recommends refining the current strategies employed to manage conflict to create innovations to accelerate the possibilities for advancement and promotion.

The term Womanist was coined by Alice Walker in 1983; Womanism (as coined by Patricia Hill Collins in 1991) is an epistemology derived from an amalgam of collective experiences "used generally to represent the cultural, historical, and political positionality of African American women, a group that has experienced slavery, segregation, sexism, and classism for most of its history in the United States", (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2002, p.72) It is typically used interchangeably with *black feminism,* which is why albeit grammatically incorrect, to properly frame this paper I must confess that in my mind womanism is a verb—or at the very least an

adverb which describes the actions of womanists. Based on a consistent and shared experience of the convergence of several types of oppression (racism, sexism and classism), Womanists tend to have a unique (yet common to each other) world view and understanding that: "oppression is an interlocking system, providing all people with varying degrees of penalty and privilege… individual empowerment combined with collective action is key to lasting social transformation" and the importance of fostering humanism in order to secure the liberation of all people (Ibid.).

Many researchers suggest that four main problems for African American womanist administrators stem from the issues of perceptual bias which provide resistance to women's intellectual capacities from being used to their fullest. At the intersections of racism and sexism one finds: 1) under-representation and isolation leading to tokenism, 2) lack of power and respect leading to lack of influence and authority, 3) prejudgments of inability, incompetence and overly demanding families, and 4) sex segregation of work and gender spill over leading to inequities in or retarded advancement, promotion and pay at male dominated institutions (Anderson, 1989; Haslett, Geis and Carter, 1996, Hinton, 2004). These points are evidenced in Lucy Slowe's[1] career

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[1] In 1922, Ms. Slowe became the first dean of women at Howard University, a position she held until her death in 1937. In her new position, Ms. Slowe immediately established contact with the offices of deans of women at other major universities, and studied their procedures and adapted them to the needs of Howard. She was helped by Dr. Romiett Stevens of Columbia University who had developed the first course for deans of women in the United States. Ms. Slowe maintained close ties with Columbia for the rest of her life and often delivered lectures at that university. The responsibilities of her position were varied. In addition to her duties as educational advisor on women's affairs, she was responsible for the housing of students and for seeking funding sources and (or) employment. She assisted in the organization and execution of student government and helped plan community liaison projects. One of the principal accomplishments as dean of women was to persuade the board of trustees to establish the women's campus on Fourth Street. Ms. Slowe also inaugurated the famous Christian Vesper service at Howard and the Women's Dinner in the fall. In addition to her responsibilities as dean of women, Ms. Slowe was a professor in the department of English. A visionary, Ms. Slowe began in 1933 emphasizing the importance of education for all women and advising that Black women, in particular, study economics and government so as to have the necessary knowledge to improve the social conditions of all Black people. Recognition of the exceptional career of Ms. Slowe was part of the program of the 70th anniversary convention of the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors in 1986. A plaque honoring Lucy Diggs Slowe, America's first Black

and demonstrate that quite often women in coeducational institutions were and are forced still to "expend large amounts of energy and political capital to secure small gains, or to merely survive" (Anderson,1989, p.292). As the first Dean of Women and the highest-ranking female at Howard University, Slowe persisted in constant battle to have the needs of women students and faculty addressed as legitimate concerns.   She struggled to be heard and regarded much of the "heterosexist campus culture as detrimental to women students" (Ibid., p.286). Slowe fought sexism and blatant gender discrimination by developing a community of women scholars who were taught to be activists and women committed to improving the educational attainment of African Americans.

The then President of Howard University, Mordecai Johnson, vehemently disagreed with Slowe's positions on what courses and rights female students should be given and refused to support that the position of Dean of Women should be elevated in status and power by giving Slowe a comparable salary to her male counterpart or giving her office comparable funding to others of equal levels of responsibility. The resistance Slowe faced was in direct opposition to her efforts to expand institutional policies to advance women in higher education. President M. Johnson stripped the status of her title conferred by taking her off of all policy-making councils, moving her office to a building next to a dump, and trying to force her to live on campus. Even though these events took place between 1922-1937, I have gone back 84 years to refer to these events specifically because they could easily describe similar current events. Slowe's career

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dean of women and first Black member of the National Association of Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors is displayed in the organization's headquarters in Washington, D.C. Lucy Diggs Slowe died on October 21, 1937 after an illness of two months. Two buildings located in Washington, D.C. have been named for her: the Lucy Diggs Slowe Hall of Howard University and the Lucy Diggs Slowe Elementary School.

demonstrates the strictures imposed on professional women in male dominated institutions. These restrictions continued until collective action began to forge change through the civil rights and women's rights movements (Anderson, 1989); however, we are having the same kind of conversations and are forced to make the same kinds of arguments all over again today. A brief review of two of the seminal studies in this area demonstrates the repeated positioning.

Studies of African American women administrators in the 1980s and 1990s began to examine the relationship between changes in America's social, economic, and political climate and the increase in the number of African American women administrators. Mosley (1980) found that many of her study participants commented on "the double jeopardy of racism and sexism" (p305) as barriers they faced in academe. Moses' (1997) review of the literature and statistical data confirmed what Mosley's 1980 study on African American women in higher education revealed.   Moses (1997) found that both PWI and HBCU institutions were especially chilly climates for African American women administrators and faculty. Furthermore, Moses' discussion showed that African American women and men were stereotyped and are perceived as less qualified because they were perceived as beneficiaries of affirmative action initiatives and not themselves meritorious. Therefore, African Americans in higher education perceived that their Caucasian colleagues treated them with disrespect. Moses (1994) expressed similar experiences as the Chief Academic Officer in the California State University System.   She stated that racist and sexist stereotypic perceptions were manifested when faculty members consistently checked with the president to verify his support for her decisions.   Moses (1994) and Richards (1994) affirmed that African American women administrators have to work harder and produce more than their Caucasian male counterparts to be taken seriously.   Moses (1997) concluded by stating "the double burden

of race and gender continues to adversely affect the upward mobility of women of color, despite their qualifications and experiences" (p.55).

Ramey (1995) surveyed 80 African American women administrators who were at dean level and above in four-year institutions. The purpose of this study was to determine if these women perceived any obstacles or barriers as they advanced, whether or not they had role models, and what kind of support systems were in place to help them cope. In Ramey's (1995) study, fifty-three percent of the respondents, who held positions of dean or higher, listed racism as an obstacle or barrier as they ascended to their positions of leadership at PWIs. Women in Ramey's (1995) study pointed to instances when promotion opportunities were presented, male colleagues, with comparable experience and degree attainment, would get the job. One woman stated that it took her ten years to reach the same level as her male colleague with almost identical human capital. Certainly, there could have been other factors. In Ramey's study racism was perceived as the major reason why African American women were not promoted as rapidly as their male counterparts and Forty-one percent of the respondents listed sexism as the most important barrier to advancement. Ramey's (1995) findings suggested further that these women faced such barriers as family issues, perception of incompetence, lack of authority, limited opportunities for networking, and isolation.

Miller and Vaughn (1997) examined the corporate workplace experiences of African American women executives in business, law, medicine, and education through two separate studies in the same year using a contextual multi-level organizational model. They conducted qualitative analysis of the contextual and ecological environments in which African American women executives

experience success and confront barriers. Miller and Vaughn (1997) asserted "regardless of context, African American female executives encounter universal experiences that are institutionalized in America's workplaces" (p. 184) and revealed that despite the area of work or profession, discrimination continues to dominate the interactions between women and men in the work place and that these interactions are often shaped by racial perceptions.[2] The findings of these studies determined that racial and gender biases were major obstacles and a common experience.

As women's presence in higher education administration has grown, so has the number of historically under-presented women in other professional arenas also grown. One such study, The Black and Ethnic Minority Woman Manager: cracking the concrete ceiling by Marilyn Davidson and Paul Chapman (Sage, 1997) investigated the problems, pressures and barriers faced by black and ethnic minority female corporate managers in the United Kingdom in the 1990s; it determined that black and ethnic minority female corporate managers face similar issues to those listed above that are barriers to African American women higher education administrators. The theoretical framework used by Davidson and Chapman may be useful and pertinent in shaping educational research design. Davidson and Chapman examined women of a similar cohort and agegroup, studied the childhood and past and current experiences of the women mangers in their study in order to highlight what they termed as the "double negative effects of sexism and racism." (1997). Davidson and Chapman effectively discussed the double negative effects of the discrimination these women faced and added to that the fact that they had

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[2] It should be noted that while most of the participants in the Miller and Vaughn (1997) study were African American women administrators at PWIs, other scholars assert African American women also face sexist attitudes and gender inequities at historically Black institutions (HBCUs) as well (Moses, 1997; Ramey, 1997; Williams, 1986; Noble, 1993).

fewer role models. Davidson and Chapman went on to discuss the role conflicts linked to developing relationships at work, the issues involved in acquiring appropriate management skills, and finally the effects of double negative discrimination on career development. Davidson and Chapman assert through their research that black and ethnic minority women managers are much more likely to encounter a ceiling made of concrete rather than the "glass ceiling" of their white counterparts.

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Even the most current literature confirm these sentiments (Patitu & Hinton 2004) and add to the literature contentions that pigmentation of skin color has a negative impact on workplace performance evaluations and inequities in salaries, lack of support, and low expectations by upper-level administrators as obstacles for career development (Patitu & Hinton, 2004, Abney and Richey, 1991; Johnson, 1991 cited in Rusher, 1996). In sum, African American women administrators throughout history have experienced great hardship in their effort to penetrate the racial and gender caste systems that exist within the administrative structure of higher education. Furthermore, the historical research shows that the experiences of African American women in the academy are shaped, in part, by the systemic indifference and/or hostile relationships encountered with their peers. As a result, African American women administrators developed coping strategies to resist being destroyed by various systems of oppression.

Research in the 1980s reported on African American women administrators' ability to survive in hostile working environments by making adjustments in relationships and role performance (Myers, 1980; Harry, 1994). Myers (1980) studied African American women managers in Mississippi and Michigan and found that these women could handle a large number of roles by relying on religion, relatives, and other women networks as sources of inspiration and social support. The 75 women Myers (1980) studied indicated that they have a daily routine of prayer and reading of inspirational materials for encouragement to achieve the objectives expected of them.

A similar study was conducted by Harry (1994) with African American women entrepreneurs. The purpose of this study was to assess the effects of demographic characteristics and attitudes about locus of control on coping behaviors. Harry (1994) surveyed 525 African American women business owners with a 20% response rate, utilizing a 24-item Likert-type locus of control scale, ways of coping forced binary scale, and a background questionnaire. Based upon the research, Harry (1994) defines coping as any effort, psychological, physical, or behavioral, to manage a stressor. "Psychological coping may involve thinking, planning, evaluating or palliative measures to manage the environment. Physical coping involves any changes that take place in the body. Behavioral coping is engaging in conscious efforts and activities to improve stressful situations" (p.31). Harry (1994) found that most of the participants had more externally oriented locus of control beliefs and utilized self-control, sought social support, and used "planful" problem solving as ways of coping.

Moses (1997) discussed the kinds of mentoring and support systems that assisted women to cope with the feeling of "otherness" in the academy. Moses (1997) used her own experiences as a senior level administrator as well as the findings stated in secondary sources to demonstrate which issues impact women's work performances. She found that racism and sexism were stressors that caused African American women administrators to devise instantaneous ways to cope with attacks to their ability, suggestions they are incompetent and when they suffer burnout (Ibid.). One of the most significant observations that Moses made was that a tremendous amount of time and energy is expended on coping strategies rather than utilizing their time to perform the tasks for which they are paid and held accountable (Ibid.). This kind of

stress has caused African American women administrators to retreat and to make themselves less visible, especially when they are forced into dead-end positions that require them to serve all African American students and student affairs.

Coping for African American women administrators in higher education takes on many forms. Often, "African American women experience stress because of their efforts to do twice as much [work] to accomplish tasks better than expected" (Wolfman, 1997, p. 163). Other stressors involve marginality, "a type of lonely existence, functioning at the edge of the group, a status that can lead to many dysfunctional behaviors" (Wolfman, 1997, p. 163). Although African American women may appear to be marginal from the perspective of the dominant culture, these women are centered in their own groups and families. This diametric view does not necessarily add stress to African American women administrators' lives, and their participation in group, family, church, and community can add to their ability to cope (Patitu & Hinton, 2004). The church becomes a "restful haven and a source of spiritual and emotional energy" (Wolfman, 1997, p. 165). Expressions of faith and religion, through participation in church related activities, also contribute to the success and survival of African American women in higher education. Additionally, church is typically the place where leadership skills are first taught and tested (Farmer, 1993; Moses, 1997; Wolfman, 1997).

Many of the survival skills described above are associated with factors that precipitate successful careers in higher education. Success factors, which translate into a certain level of respect and authority and influence, advancement, equity in pay, earning tenure, and juggling family and professional responsibilities, concern all women in the academy regardless of race, ethnicity,

and/or sexual orientation (Patitu & Hinton, 2004, Miller and Vaughn, 1997). Much of the literature has lead us to believe that this is all there is in terms of recommendations for access to or for garnering power, my research gives some insight that there is something more.

Possible Refinements

Over the past four years (late 2001-present) I have interviewed, held focus groups, women's networking meetings, and surveyed 74 African American professional women with varying backgrounds. This research employed taped interviews, note taking at focus groups and networking meetings, document analysis (primarily of resumes/Vitae, and meeting minutes), and participant observation. The qualitative methodology used in this study included pattern matching, looking for recurring themes found in responses and/or repeatable regularities, and negative case analysis (Patton, 1990). Data were sorted into meaningful units and then reconstructed into meaningful groups. Specific categories arose from the data itself and as the categories emerged, patterns developed. The patterns were shaped and reshaped until themes or factors arose (Goetz & LaCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The purpose of this study was to collect qualitative information, beyond basic preparation and readiness for a senior level administrative position, that related to support, success and other career enhancing achievement factors. These factors are connected to family and community support systems, informal and formal professional networks, and the ability to navigate and negotiate effectively within professional and higher education environments. According to the data culled from the participants, racism, affirmative action, unfair recruitment practices, lack of role models, mentors and networks are major career influencing factors.

Pattern matching showed a division of five categories with perceived factors. Of particular note were the factors that were apparent within the category of professional growth. The respondents

felt that they controlled career path factors such as conference attendance, continuing education, maintaining managerial skills, and risk taking. However, they stated that promotions, political connections, supportive colleagues, mentoring, role models, and networking were factors that for the most part depended upon others, in many instances, they believed that persons who were needed to support these professional growth factors were either unwilling and/or did not see the need for respondents to be assisted. Sixty-six (66) of the seventy-two (72) respondents thought that although the above professional growth factors were important in obtaining and maintaining a successful career, they were for the most part not available to them. The participants felt that the lack of meaningful support for these career factors hindered their career growth.

Five major categories, individual's profile, career choices, career patterns, organizational characteristics, and professional growth were apparent from the data gathered for this study (see Table 1). Of the five categories, professional growth was the most instructive in determining what influenced African American women administrators' career paths. Within the professional growth category, factors were divided into barriers and facilitators. Barriers and facilitators were further defined as those described solely by the participants and those found in prior research that were reinforced here (see Table 1).

Barriers that were uncovered are: Affirmative action, institutional racism, lack of role models, lack of mentors, lack of networking, and unfair recruitment practices. In summary, some respondents:

1. Lamented that affirmative action is not effective in maintaining its original intent due to some challenges, such as reverse discrimination and the emphasis on diversity, which contributed to the weakening of affirmative action laws.

2. Emphasized that the combined effect of institutional sexism and racism is the most detrimental factor in hindering their career progression.

3. Stressed that the lack of role models, mentors and networking are major hindrances to not only African American women administrators but also detrimental in recruiting

African American women to their respective professions

The following list describes the factors this research showed influenced African American women administrators' careers. This model will help with career implementation programs that have as a goal to recruit and to retain African American females for leadership positions in academic institutions.

1. Administered budgets over $200,000;

2. Attended professional conferences;

3. Continued their education, e.g., continuing education and management courses

4. Had prior relevant experience

5. Worked beyond the minimum required hours, equated to "long hours"

6. Had viable professional and personal networks and political connections

7. Worked at public institutions

8. Took risks

9. Had supportive colleagues, family, and friends

Finally, one surprise factor was that working in a public institution was a facilitator that was uncovered in this study. All of the participants who worked in public institutions had better salaries, more sympathetic (cooperative) staffs and larger budgets.

Table 1
Five Major Career Path Categories

Factors	Individual's profile	Career Choices	Career Patterns	Organizational Characteristics	Professional Growth
Barriers (uncovered)	♦lack of Education ♦ lack of preparation ♦ Gender + Race	♦Prior Experience	♦ Age became an administrator ♦lack of professional or personal network ♦Lack of role models	♦lack of opportunity for advancement or better networking ♦Unfair recruitment practices	♦Sexism + Racism ♦Lack of role models ♦Lack of mentors ♦Lack of networking
Barriers (Reinforced)	♦Gender ♦ Race	♦Network of Influential People	♦Years as administrator	♦Budget ♦Staff size	♦Gender ♦Race
Facilitators (uncovered)		♦ Role Models and Mentoring		♦Public institution	♦assist others to network ♦ Mentor others
Facilitators (Reinforced)	♦ Expected Education ♦ Expected Preparation and Work history ♦ Appearance of motivation			♦Affirmative action ♦Conference attendance ♦Continuing education ♦Membership in professional organizations	♦Affirmative action ♦Conference attendance ♦Continuing education ♦Membership in professional organizations ♦Mentors ♦Networking ♦Political Connections ♦Prior work experience ♦Promotions ♦Publications ♦Risk Taking ♦Role Models ♦Supportive Colleagues/ Family/Friends

Mentoring, networking and support groups are tools which typically are used to serve our self-interest. They provide contact, connection, joy, commiseration, laughter, scarcism, support and refuge (Patitu & Hinton, 2004, Beauboeuf-Lafontaine, 2002). Using these tools in this way—separate and apart—they keep us as the "insiders outside". By this term it is meant that our whole true selves are kept to ourselves, protected and far from the harms of the academy.

There are lessons to be learned from the kind of support that African American administrators receive from family and friends and other external sources; this is a recurring theme in the literature relating to their success and survival (Wolfman, 1997; Farmer, 1993; Moses, 1997; Miller and Vaughn, 1997; Myers, 1980). Due to the fact that many family members have experienced similar situations and can relate to a limited extent, they understand (somewhat) the need and obligation for "othermothering". By reclaiming nurturing as a form of resistance to various forms of oppression; it helps clarify one's purpose and gives strength and courage (Beauboeuf-Lafontaine, 2002). One of my informants defines and illustrates how "othermothering" assists African American women administrators help themselves, others and students cope with "hostile" environments by stating:

> One of the relationships I hope we as Black women can maintain and share is that of the family. The family I speak of is one of the most influential forces in the African American community and is vital for our survival...it is not the nuclear family necessarily, not an individual burden, but of an extended community taking care of one another—whether or not there are children involved—it is a continuing exchange of favors, reciprocity, whatever is needed, whatever is nurturing and provides the strength to face another day. …Otherwise, I'd be plum worn out, plum worn out long ago.

Wolfman (1983) found that many African American women create surrogate families when their jobs are away from their respective families. These new family connections tend to alleviate much of the loneliness and alienation these women face in predominantly White institutions. She interviewed a woman who stated, "I would be very lonely here if I didn't have some people to turn to. I have created a family. I cling to my [African American] friends here who do have families. I have become very close to them...it makes life more bearable" (Wolfman, 1983, p.164). The women in my study viewed "othermothering", their "deconstructed maternal" as inherently Womanist. This ideology and the intensly personal relationships that resulted represented their profound commitment to the well being and survival of all black people on campus.

Many of the women administrators in my study, like many of us, choose to totally separate their personal and professional lives and use these tools as separate and individual tools for out practice. This move for separation is understandable, given the presumed risks involved to self preservation and protection of sanity. Rarely, do we seek intentional collaboration or integration of personal and professional lives to develop a new voice speaking from a unique perspective.

This vantage point at the nexus of our cultural gifts, or **transformational agency of organizational womanists**, can give new insight on political positioning, information technology, connections and other specifically sought outcomes. In addition to intersections, juxtapositioning of these mentoring/networking/support groups can yield additional benefits such as access to external factors that influence life internal to

campus, entrepreneurial activity, clarity in our moral compass, new language (and therefore, new thoughts) and hopefully better communication, additional support and laughter. Several participants came out during our group sessions. For these participants feelings of relief and satisfaction came from being able to express the whole truth about what made them feel marginalized. These informants found that being out was empowering and they were able to garner power from their decision by being able to openly address issues and to fundraise in new markets open to them.

These personal accounts inform that African American women cope with hostility by creating a new voice of expression. This is not to imply that there were no repercussions for coming out, however, coming out can offer one step in a process to gain greater clarity and can help lesbians deal with the pain of racism and sexism in the academy. Bennett-Alexander (1997) and Monifa's (1997) personal accounts of their careers as out African American lesbian faculty members discussed the benefits of being out, and having a high level of visibility in lesbian and gay communities and student interactions. Bennett-Alexander, who publishes in the area of race, gender, and affinity orientation, takes the opportunity to use her professional research to "provide food for thought for the academic community" (p.22). Neither Bennett-Alexander (1997) nor Monifa (1997) spoke of negative repercussions for being out. Bennett-Alexander (1997) states that she is completely glad to have made the decision to be out... "I think it benefits me and my colleagues and the students" (p.22).

These kinds of benefits are particularly apparent when trust is present in this "chosen family" of support groups and networks (whether they are proximate or not). When language is contextualized through this kind of intensely personal connection, thereby mandating a high level of trust, real problems can be thoughtfully dissected, examined in a safe environment, calculated risks can be taken, and real work can be accomplished. One informant advised, " I get my best thinking done and quite often the most accomplished when I am in that space with my network of professional friends who have become family." Another advised, "I don't always get lots accomplished *per se*, what I do find is that I always walk away with a new way of looking at a problem. I would call the use of these groups a way of enhancing my portfolio of contacts and a vehicle to refine skill sets." Like Miller and Vaughn (1997), my study adapted a contextual model of transformational agency of organization for African American women administrators. The othermothering and professional support network aspects of this model suggests that such networks are critical to these women in "making both personal and professional decisions as they move through the workplace culture" (Miller & Vaughn, 1997, p. 182). Miller and Vaughn (1997) assert that participation in such networks is vital to African American women's survival and success in predominantly white institutional environments; I would contend that othermothering and support networks are transformational for both the individual and the organization.

The alchemy of turning survival techniques into success strategies is described in terms of the discipline of the transformational agency of organizational womanism. If you take womanist caring (which is the amalgam of maternal, political clarity, ethic of risk

and commitment to social justice) and add honest, candid and thorough discourse, and intentionally collaborative support networks you have the recipe to bring the outsiders in and create a stronger feeling of connection and belonging.

Conclusion

Based upon the research, African American women have established creative strategies for managing professional, institutional, and societal challenges. Yet, African American women administrators will continue to have to protect themselves with a support network that include positive feedback from colleagues and peers, family members, and friends. Such a network, according to these studies, is the key to retention, promotion, and excellent job performance (Rusher, 1996; Fanner, 1993; Moses, 1997). Studies suggest that African American women have been able to cope because they have relied on religion, relations, and women networks as sources of inspiration and social support. Yet, even with the best-developed coping methods, African American women administrators struggled with internal self-doubt, low self-identity problems that affect their ability to make informed decisions due to stress from racism, sexism, and heterosexism (Myers, 1980; Harry, 1984; Moses, 1997; Bennett-Alexander, 1997; Miller and Vaughn, 1997). These internal struggles inform this field of study of the necessity of feeling of belonging, as an integral part, of a campus community and a greater community of scholars and practitioners in higher education. Using their cultural heritage and gifts of other mothering and communication to stay ahead of the curve through entrepreneurialism and finding their way to the "inside" of the culture they can transform the environment as a primary agent of change.

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