HERSTORY: INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING IN UPWARDLY MOBILE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

by

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(ABSTRACT)

The intricate dynamics and tensions of social histories--the realities of adversity--and anticipations of African American women greatly inhibit many of them from reaching their potential. Despite the adverse experiences, African American women have succeeded in achieving socioeconomic upward mobility. Their ability to defeat the odds has drawn attention to their patterns of adaptation and the process by which transformative experiences evolve. There is a strong need for qualitative research focusing exclusively on the early learning experiences of African American women and the transformative learning process; since studies of this topic are limited and most of them relate to a particular characteristic and its development.

The purpose of this study was to examine the transformative learning processes of African American females who, despite their lower class origins, transcended the negative social and economic forces inherent in their backgrounds, thus moving beyond the status of their parents. Mezirow's transformative learning model, perspective transformation, was the conceptual framework guiding this inquiry. The research questions for this study were:

1. How has a small selected group of African American women from lower

socioeconomic backgrounds been able to break the particular poverty cycle that their parents endured to become upwardly mobile achievers?

2. What transformative learning process did they engage to overcome specific obstacles in order to attain a higher level of socioeconomic mobility?

3. To what extent are the steps of perspective transformation descriptive of the process as experienced by the women in this study?

A multiple-case study design was selected to accomplish the objective of the research. Participants were recruited through informal requests and referrals. Eight women were selected from an initial pool of twelve potential participants. The data were gathered through in-depth personal interviews and analyzed using Ethnograph coding software.

Data were presented in descriptive narrative case study profiles. Four categories of major themes were identified as common among the participants: (a) a value laden upbringing, (b) productive self perception, (c) influences of others, and (d) significant mobility experiences. Findings revealed only a partial experience of transformational learning from these women. A strong maternal influence led to the indoctrination of life-long values and beliefs consistent with a process in which mothers and grandmothers had begun but were unable to complete. This intergenerational transformative learning process passed down to the next generation, in this study. Results revealed upward socioeconomic mobility and a decline of the poverty cycle. Recommendations for educators and future studies were addressed.

DEDICATION

This is the true joy in life,
the being used for a purpose
recognized by yourself as a mighty one;
the being a force of nature instead of a
feverish selfish little clod of ailments
and grievances complaining that the world
will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to
the whole community and as long as I live
it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.

I want to be thoroughly used up when I die,
for the harder I work the more I live.
I rejoice in life for its own sake.

Life is no "brief candle" to me.
It is a sort of a splendid torch which I have
got hold of for the moment, and I want
to make it burn as brightly as possible
before handing it on to future generations.

George Bernard Shaw ~

To my mother who initiated my transformation process, my husband Freddye Sr., who kept the faith and was always there, and to my son Freddye Jr. whose smile and love for life kept me focused.

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I wish to thank my eight African American sisters who willingly shared their private thoughts, feelings, joys, and sorrows in an effort to recapture their early life history of experiences, influences, opportunities, and adversities on their journey from abject poverty to high levels of upward mobility. You recounted a considerable amount of pain and your willingness to reveal intimate details so that others may benefit, made this research happen. I am deeply indebted. Your stories were my guidepost that led me to piece together my own history and seek beyond my own perceptions of how other African American women have been able to transcend adversity and experience upward mobility.

So many others have helped in some capacity to produce this document. Foremost among them were my family, my husband Freddye, Sr., and son Freddye, Jr., who supported me through the five years it took to complete both my masters and doctoral program. I was guided by my faith and the belief that our never-ending love for each other would prevail despite the adversity. Leaving me alone with my computer was a great sacrifice. Through all my frustrations, you never failed to remind me that "Winners Never Quit." To my Mother whom without, the intergenerational transformation process that continued through me may not have occurred. I love you always. This one is especially for you and your encouragement through my life-time of lows and highs which often carried us into the midnight morning hours. To my Sister Clarrisa who voluntarily bailed me out when I was unable to transcribe data; and toTanika and Beverly who pitched in as substitutes by providing their technical expertise. To my editors who

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Noted as a prize winning journalist, Mair (1994) reveals in Oprah Winfrey's biography the struggles and successes of a woman with determination that exceeded societal barriers and has allowed her to celebrate the journey of her heritage. Oprah, like many African Americans who have achieved upward mobility in a predominantly white culture, is ever conscious of the struggles she has confronted to experience the fullness of life that this democratic nation proclaims for its people. Born illegitimate, abandoned, becoming a victim of rape at an early age, and living life on the wild side, Oprah expressed the belief that African American women have and will always be faced with the challenge of coping with: (a) their African heritage, (b) gender, and (c) a society dominated by white males. Being African American is a central endeavor in Oprah's life. She holds different views of race and inequalities. Somewhere within her past she has learned to confront and move beyond the stereotypes, myths, and experiences that have hindered so many others. Mair (1994) suggests that if Oprah Winfrey can achieve success in this society, then other African American women should have no excuse. This thought provoking notion raises the question: In what ways can Oprah's experiences--in which she advanced from a lower socioeconomic status to higher mobility, and the transformative learning process through which she experienced and overcame adversity--speak for other African American women? The foundation of this question may lie in the experiences of other African American women who have moved beyond adversity to achieve mobility.

Background

Despite the differences in experiences by African American women, race and gender are common social structural issues in American culture. Caffarella (1992), an Associate Professor in educational leadership, has extensive interest in the psychosocial development of women. In particular, the idea of gender, which she reflects has always been a part of feminist theory and is socially constructed rather than an internally driven intrapsychic process in women's experiences. Women have been socially constructed by the traditional theories of adult development, theories that do not inform the knowledge base of the theories and ideas related to women and their development. To capture a true picture of their experiences, Caffarella calls for a more critical or feminist approach to integrate the literature on women.

Another theoretical perspective comes from Chafe (1977), a professor of history who has advanced his perspective against the traditional social controls in societies that continue to perpetuate gender inequality. He contends in order to understand the chances oppressed women have of improving the basic conditions of their lives and how they respond to the traditional ideas of their "place" in society, the voices of women need to be heard. Scholarship that captures the experiences and struggles of women from their perspective, as they have lived and survived to break down gender-based barriers is needed.

Recognized for her work in Black studies, Scott (1982) presents a feminist perspective about the problem of understanding the experiences of African American

women. She stated that the experiences of African American women, which has been further exacerbated by research that minimizes their key roles in American society, such as major caretakers in their homes, and presents a narrow perspective of their experiences in history. Furthermore, men have written the preponderance of literature about women. Thus, patriarchal sentiments have dominated the theoretical frameworks that view African American women (and men) as outsiders to the American experience (Scott, 1982). Therefore, some literature may reflect racial and gender-based biases (e.g., Anderson, 1993; Belenky et al., 1986; Caffarella, 1992; O'Barr & Wyer, 1992; Tomm & Hamilton, 1988). Conceptual frameworks that are sensitive to the experiences of African American women and the ways in which gender and race related issues bear in non-familial contexts such as societal institutions have been underdeveloped.

Subordination of African American Women

Adult educators Hayes and Smith (1994) add another feminists perspective to the field of adult education as they evaluate the past perspectives of women who have influenced the practice and research in the field. They examined a total of 320 articles from six journals in adult education. They sought to clarify the trends of previous research, the influence of feminist contributions to the literature, and to establish the value of future research. Findings from a systematic analysis of major adult education journals indicate that over the past twenty-three years, there has been a small increase in the percentage of literature that focuses on women, gender, and educational programs. This suggests that feminist scholarship is influencing the research in adult education. Despite

the increase, research on gender characteristics does not clearly indicate a significant degree of influence from a feminist perspective. There is a lack of attention given in adult education literature relating to significant factors such as gender, race, and class in creating diversity among women's experiences. Limited documentation reveals how these issues influence and hinder upward socioeconomic mobility and the transformative learning experiences of African American women. More specifically, Steele (1993) contends that being African American places an individual in a position of being treated inappropriately based on stereotypes associated with race. Steele states that many African American females (not exclusive of African American males and other minorities) must endure social, economic, and environmental conditions that are at best indifferent and at worst hostile. They learn that institutional infrastructures do not necessarily promote nor value their differences. Thus, bearing the effects of gender and race places a double responsibility on African American women. It is a responsibility that takes a psychological toll on an individual's sense of self (Jamison, 1992). Continual and oppressive conditions that serve as racial barriers may damage an individual's self-esteem.

Ellis Cose (1993), editor and essayist for Newsweek magazine and author of The Rage of the Privilege Class, identifies the social and emotional traumas that African Americans experience because of institutional racism. He states that African Americans experience and cope with "the dozen demons." In his book, he identifies them as the unpleasant consequences of race and sex oppression. These emotions include:

1. The inability to fit in. Minority candidates experience screening criteria that is not

applied to Whites when prospecting for employment. The general assumption is that Whites fit in and minorities do not;

2. Shattered hopes. Individuals become disillusioned as they notice colleagues of the dominant culture with less experience being promoted passed them;

3. Faint praise. Experienced when Whites see and evaluate an African American as different from others of her race. Acceptance is based on their favorable attributes;

4. Coping fatigue. When they achieve success, an African American may experience social isolation and that individual has to count on the very people who find it difficult to recognize her worth.

5. Pigeonholing. Within an organization, they may promote an African American to positions based on race. In some corporations, jobs are classified by color. Some positions were considered best handled by African Americans where their talent was relevant only to the extent that it concerned African Americans and other minorities. Other positions were reserved for Whites;

6. Identity troubles. Attempts at advocacy typecast and label minorities. The strategy employed to advance oneself is to abandon any hint of a racial agenda;

7. Self-censorship and silence. Voices are stilled and silenced when sensitive racial issues are raised; fear that chances of advancement could become a concern. Fear of an emotional explosion also becomes a concern that can lead to self-imposed silence;

8. Mendacity. From an unwillingness to acknowledge racial biases, minorities cope with

the organizations self-deception, particularly when claims of color blindness are spoken with an unwillingness to acknowledge racial bias;

9. Collective guilt. This defines the entire race based on acts of unregenerate crooks. An African American is being burdened with the responsibility of accepting the burden of African Americans who misbehave. White middle class people do not accept the responsibility of the White criminal population;

10. Exclusion from the club. Efforts to educate and assimilate certain dominant values do not open doors. Realization of symbolic and realistic notions that there are private clubs that cannot be joined;

11. Low expectations. In society, achievement is defined by the color of an individual's skin and its limitations. Even after achieving a high level of success, feelings of self doubt linger and thoughts of doubt about improving your potential resurface. No matter how prepared an African American is to compete in society, there are always feelings of self doubt even with a person who believes that she will not become a victim of failure;

12. Presumption of failure. Sees failure as the reserved privilege of an individual White male and an African American's failure is conceived as a collective failure. Reluctance to fill a position with an African American because of prior failure is a real fear for many White employees. To compensate for that fear, there is a tendency to fill the position with an over skilled African American employee for personal insurance. Thus, for many White employees, the individual failure of an African American translates into the collective failure for all African Americans (Cose, 1993).

Cose suggests that African Americans perceive these demons as the direct result of the unpleasant consequences of race and sex oppression. Using an example of the African American manager, Cose relates the following scenario about salient features:

> It is to understand among other things, what a Black financial manager feels upon being told that a client is uncomfortable with his handling an account, or what a Black professor goes through upon being asked whether she is really qualified to teach. For many Black professionals, these aren't so much isolated incidents as insistent and galling reminders that whatever they may accomplish in life, race remains the most salient feature as far as much of America is concerned (p. 57).

This type of confrontation is a reality for African Americans. Cose paints a realistic picture of the one common denominator for African Americans. Irrespective of their accomplishments or lack of it, color will be the determinant of an African American's limitations.

Knowing that their social and educational achievement cannot prevent them from experiencing discriminatory practices, many African American women will avoid or relinquish the challenge. As noted in Hewstone (1989), people find themselves in a state of "learned helplessness," identified in a depression model that emphasizes internal attributions of failures that occur when people have learned over time that they lack control over the consequences of their actions. Moreover, there may be some preconceived notions that even if they felt some internal control, others will influence the outcome. The struggles of African American women against the odds have been

innumerable, particularly in the midst of social and economic deprivation, sexism, and racism (Peterson, 1992). As constant barriers to their upward mobility, Peterson (1992) supports the notion that many women have positioned themselves to accept the limitations that these obstacles present; thus, in a subtle way, some women may retreat. However, there are areas of research not fully recognized for their theoretical merit, which provide examples of many women who have defied the odds. Some women have shaped their lives through acts of quiet dignity and determination with action that included adapting to change and accommodation (Zinn & Dill, 1994). The move of some women beyond gender and race barriers may reflect differences in their values, attitudes, behavior, ways of thinking, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Social Origin and Pattern of Social Mobility

For the past twenty years, the National Urban League has informed America about the state of Black Americans. Their insight continues through the efforts of Robinson & Tidwell (1995) as they shed light on the problems and conditions of African Americans. Their intent was to assess the conditions that both hinder and influence socioeconomic mobility in the life of African American youth, economic self sufficiency, and racial inclusion. They noted that the persistence of racial barriers forces many African Americans to abandon their hopes and ambitions of achieving equality and respect. They support the 1995 findings by earlier evidence reported over a decade ago in Thompson's (1986) research on the Black elite.

In an examination of continuing discriminatory practices against African Americans,

Thompson suggests that negative barriers continue to persist despite the advancements that many African Americans have achieved. Thompson stated that frustration and embarrassment cause many to give up their pursuit of social and economic mobility. Moreover, lack of persistence among African Africans, particularly those from a lower socioeconomic background, dims the prospect of surpassing the social status above that of their parents. As a result, the offspring are continually faced with disadvantages.

As reported in Thompson's review of previous studies, previous predictions of socioeconomic mobility by the offspring depended upon their childhood socioeconomic status. He comments that in the past, critics have shown that societal expectations of offspring experiencing more social mobility than their working class parents put them at a severe disadvantage with respect to socioeconomic mobility. Essentially, if you were born into a lower socioeconomic class, chances would be that as an adult you would remain in it. As shown in Thompson's (1986) research, some may fall into that expected pattern of socioeconomic immobility, and many will not. In fact, the results of Thompson's research indicate that contrary to expert observations and predictions, African Americans from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are transcending social and economic barriers and achieving upward mobility.

Defying the Odds

According to Thompson (1986), upward mobility was measured by the degree to which the status of the offspring is superior to the status of their parents. The basic hypothesis suggests, " . . . the greater the educational and occupational level of the

parents, the greater will be the educational and occupational achievements of their children (p. 27)." Chances are that if you are born into a middle class family with superior levels of educational and occupational attainment, your parent's achievement profoundly influences your opportunities for success. Stated from another perspective, Thompson said that early predictions suggested that, "Children from economically poor homes where the parents have received below-average schooling have relatively limited chances of educational and occupational success as adults (p. 27)." Despite the odds, many African Americans have defied and continue to defy this notion of limited opportunities based on childhood socioeconomic status. Thompson adds that many are offspring from parents who averaged only an elementary education and whose income was within the poverty index. So, despite inequitable opportunities, the experiences of some African American women leading to improvement in their socioeconomic status are worthy of attention. There is a need to hear from more women who have overcome adversity to achieve socioeconomic mobility. Different perspectives could lead to other choices in the way African American women can change their life circumstances. In order to gain a better understanding of African American women's ways of doing we need to ask is: Why are some women more successful at challenging and confronting adversity while others are inclined to accept defeat? What conditions contribute to their success?

According to Brim (1992), experiences, situations, or events that influenced women in their earlier years are transformed in their later experiences. The process of transforming takes into account the individual's actions, significant others, and their

personal standards. As history bears a witness to the challenges African Americans have faced, it would not be presumptuous to suggest that today, African American women are becoming consumed by a desire to accomplish more in life (Chellis, 1992). Some women have faced extraordinary challenges in the midst of social and economic deprivation, racism, and sexism. Their ability to confront life's challenges despite adversity draws attention to the root causes of their success and how they defeat obstacles in order to reach their desired state of being (Hill & Jones, 1993).

Transformative Learning

Some African American women have defied the odds and moved beyond barriers that impede socioeconomic mobility through the process of transformative learning. To some extent, it is presumable that the concept of transformative learning is universal, in that it can be examined in a variety of forms from such perspectives as gender, race, domination, and subordination. As an ongoing process, it has been suggested that a conceptual model of transformative learning can bring an individual to an understanding of the world as permutable and without boundaries (Group For Collaborative Inquiry, [GFCI)], 1994). GFCI presented a transformative learning model related to individual development and social change. As suggested by GFCI, understanding comes from transformations which they define as the " . . . progressive liberation from the limitations of the constructs we have come to use in order to make sense of the world" (p. 171). Individuals learn to realize that these constructs are not truths but a way of structuring their experiences. According to Group For Collaborative Inquiry, the constructs are only as important and

powerful as people allow them to be. They said that upon recognizing this reality, the result is that individuals become increasingly able to move among multiple constructs without embedding themselves in them.

With respect to individual perspectives, the issue of developing a critical reflective mindset could affect the individual's perception of self. In addition, it could affect how that individual develops behaviors to take actions and achieve success. Considered as a comprehensive, idealized, and universal model, Mezirow's (1994) perspective transformation learning theory involves an individual's awareness of her conditions and the reasons why of experience. He posits that it is a time in an individual's life whereby she begins to engage in introspection and critical self-reflection. She begins to reflect on the basic assumptions of her earlier years that could lead to a transformation of perspectives. Learners move away from their uncritical nonreflective view of the world toward one with more meaning (Mezirow, 1991). While Tennant has criticized his theory (1994) for its individual focus away from the social dimension of adult learning, it is precisely this shift to an individual perspective that was the basis for using Mezirow's model as the conceptual framework for this study. Moreover, Mezirow's (1994) framework for perspective transformation has been widely discussed in the adult education field but limited in its application to the African American female population.

A sequential learning process, perspective transformation begins with a disorienting dilemma that perpetuates an enhanced level of awareness in the person as she reflects on the problem and explores ways to solve it (Mezirow, 1991). Briefly, the phases have

been identified through Mezirow's (1991) empirical studies and restated in his 1994 article, Understanding Transformation Theory, to include: (a) a disorienting dilemma, (b) self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame, sometimes turning to religion for support, (c) a critical assessment of assumptions, (d) recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and others have negotiated a similar change, (e) exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, (f) planning a course of action, (g) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, (h) provisionally trying out new roles, (I) renegotiating relationships and negotiating new relationships, (j) building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, and (k) a reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's new perspective. It is within this theoretical framework in which a learning process is captured in the reflective stories of African American women.

Statement of the Problem

It is noted in the review of the literature that research differs as to the factor or attributes that African American women employ to overcome adversity. Studies that have addressed the transformative learning of African American women who have broken the poverty cycle and have achieved upward mobility are not complete in their evaluation that assesses a transformative learning process through which an individual changes her perspective (Boyd, 1993; McAdoo, 1988; Peterson, 1992; Scott, 1991). Researchers are finding agreement that further work is needed to examine the critical thinking and

transformative learning constructs from the perspectives of: gender, race, domination, and subordination (e.g., Dill, 1983; Hooks, 1992; Hayes & Smith, 1994; Hemphill, 1994; (Kreisberg, 1992; Peterson, 1992; Scott, 1991; Steele, 1993; Tennant, 1994; Walker, 1994). Considering the conditions inhibiting some African American women from experiencing upward mobility, this research is focused on the early life experiences and learning process by which African American women from backgrounds of limited opportunities could surpass the socioeconomic levels of their childhood. Using Mezirow's (1991) model of perspective transformation as a guide, this study seeks to illustrate and understand the process.

This study is significant as it represents an area of transformative learning that is limited in its scope of understanding of the early life experiences of African American women who achieved mobility despite their circumstances. Although there have been many success stories, research is limited that focuses on the individual process of changing their life's circumstances. This case study approach will address the issue of how their success accounts for a change in their world perspective in which they realize the possibility of achieving a higher standard of living beyond that of their youth. If the process of perspective transformation helps account for the success that some of these women have achieved, then a better understanding of their strife for upward mobility, may give insight into ways other African Americans can redefine their lives.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the transforming life experiences of African American females who, despite their lower status origins, have transcended the negative social and economic forces in their backgrounds, thus moving beyond the socioeconomic status of their parents.

Research Questions

This study explores, from a subjective perspective, the transformative learning that has shaped the comparative beliefs of African American women who have transcended social and economic barriers from their lower socioeconomic childhood background to achieve upward mobility. The research questions guiding this study are the following:

1. How have a small selected group of African American women from lower socioeconomic class backgrounds been able to break the particular poverty cycle that their parents endured to become upwardly mobile achievers?

2. What transformative learning process did they employ to overcome specific obstacles in order to attain a higher level of socioeconomic mobility?

3. To what extent are the steps of perspective transformation descriptive of the process as experienced by the women in this study?

Significance of the Study

Many minorities, particularly African American women, are experiencing increasing levels of upward socioeconomic mobility. However, this does not take into account those who have remained in abject poverty. Implications from this study could be significant for women who aspire to move beyond existing barriers because it documents a detailed account of the process by which a number of specific women could achieve upward mobility. An understanding of this process may enable adult educators to design interventions that would prove beneficial to this group's success in achieving upward mobility. Furthermore, the results of this study could provide the basis upon which adult educators could encourage this population to involve themselves in these forms of educational activities. If education and training are tailored to the specific needs of this population, more individuals would be encouraged to participate in learning activities.

These results could be helpful in future studies in bringing awareness to educators of the diversity of experiences and the transformative learning processes that facilitate change. Additionally, knowledge gleaned from this study can inform an individual's vision (to the extent that the individual may have had similar experiences), and what the individual can learn and take away from the stories may provide insight into their own related experiences. African American women may reap the benefit of reflecting on their past and present experiences and see future possibilities of growth. Educators and other facilitators of adult learners could be helpful in educating African American women and other women as well, who face barriers that they deem to be insurmountable.

Definitions

The following is a list of relevant terms and how they were defined to describe important concepts, actions, and attributes in this study:

Critical reflection refers to the assessment of the validity of the presuppositions of one's meaning perspectives, and examination of their sources and consequences.

Critical self-reflection is an assessment of the way one has posed problems and of one's own meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1990, p. xvi).

Intergenerational transformation is a learning process that the daughter experiences upon knowing how and why she should and could change the outcome of her life in spite of negative forces operating against her. This process begins with a previous generation and is passed on to the daughters from the mothers, grandmothers, surrogates, or other maternal figure.

Lower class or lower socioeconomic status is having an income at or below the poverty level.

Meaning perspective refers to the structure of the assumptions that constitute a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of an experience.

Meaning schemes are specific beliefs shaped by habitual expectations (e.g., food to satisfy hunger) that are an individual's explicit rules of interpreting (Mezirow, 1990, p. 3).

Middle class is the relative rank of occupation and income (Thompson, 1986, p. 128).

Perspective transformation refers to the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and

feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon this new learning (Mezirow, 1991).

Racial and gender-specific barriers refer to obstacles encountered by African American females that are both gender and race related.

Reflection refers to the examination of the justification for one's beliefs, prior to making a decision to take action in addition to reexamining the strength of their strategic plan used in problem solving.

Success is a change in an individual's socioeconomic status to a status higher than their parental families.

Transformative learning refers to the "process of learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experience. Learning includes acting on these insights" (Mezirow, et al., 1990, p. xvi).

Upward social mobility refers to the degree to which the status of adult children is superior to the status of their parents. Key indicators of social status are level of schooling, rank and prestige of occupation, and annual income (Thompson, 1986, p. 27).

Summary of Significant Findings

Tavris (1992) suggest that " . . . the way we label and explain our problem is important because the explanation that women choose to account for their difficulties lead

to different courses of action" (p. 128). Of equal importance is the knowledge gained from the experiences of other women that could provide a vision of past and future possibilities to other women based on their own experiences; women who doubt their intellect and capabilities. Hearing the experiences of other women could possibly raise their level of self-esteem to the extent that they may believe more strongly in themselves and their ability to achieve success. The findings provide insight into the early background of African American women, in which the transformative learning process enabled them to surpass the poverty level of their childhood and the process by which they experienced a transformation.

A significant finding of the study reveals an intergenerational transformational learning process that begins with a previous generation. Evidence is consistent with the view of a perspective transformation that did not begin with the study participants, but was, in part, the result of a previous generation's inability to complete the process for themselves. An explanatory model was developed consisting of four interrelated themes relevant to achievement of mobility, each necessary but not sufficient for the process to complete. Two themes were related to fundamental beliefs instilled at an early age: a value-laden upbringing and the development of a productive self-perception. Two themes related to specific opportunities that affected their lives in meaningful ways: influences of others and significant experiences crucial to mobility.

Mezirow's model was used as a conceptual guide for gathering data in this study. It became clear through the analyses of the data that at some point in the early lives of the

participant, each experienced a turning point in which they began to assume responsibility for their lives and their future desires. This turning point was an experience, situation, or event, that directly affected these participants. Subsequent to the experience, the participants made a strong effort to refocus on the educational values. Evidence of a disorienting dilemma or questioning of their beliefs was not manifested. As previously noted, the first and third steps of Mezirow's model, a disorienting dilemma and the questioning of inculcated beliefs, values, and behaviors, were not identified as the beginning of a perspective transformation. Evidence that the process was, in part, a continuation of a previous generation's desire emerged from the data. Consequently, the researcher began to focus on an intergenerational transformation, a transformative learning process that began with a previous generation and was passed down to the participants in this study.

Through further analysis, evidence revealed the mothers lived out their unfulfilled life goals in the desires of their daughters. The mothers of the study participants were aware of their limitations and encouraged their daughters to surpass the socioeconomic conditions of their youth. Conversely, the daughters recognized their mother's limitations. They saw that their limited opportunities were based on situational or environmental circumstances, not based on their potential. Consequently, with the mothers' influence and desire for their daughter's success and the daughters desire to please their parents, the process of transformation continued and was completed in the generation represented in this study.

In an attempt to gain additional insight into the uniqueness of these women and a transformative learning process that may have begun in a previous generation, I contacted the participants to entertain the possibility of interviewing each participant's mother. For reasons out of the researcher's and the participants' control, obtaining information from the study participant's mothers was not possible. Of the eight participants, one mother was deceased, two had Alzheimer's disease, and three were unavailable because of geographic locations and other circumstances. One participant reported that her mother never shared anything about her life, not even the name of her biological father. One participant considered volunteering her mother. However, given the nature of the interview and the information this participant shared about her mother, I felt it would be an uncomfortable experience for the mother knowing that I had become privy to abusive events in her daughter's childhood years. In addition, the daughter stated that the pain remains and she keeps her mother at a distance, not wanting to become vulnerable to her powers ever again. Despite this minor setback, I continued to analyze and interpret the data and the intergenerational transformational theme continued to be a link to the transformative learning process. They detail evidence supporting an intergenerational transformational learning process in Chapter V and VI of this study.

Limitations of the Study

A qualitative design was used to facilitate the discovery of detailed information about the transformative learning process of African American women. This could not be

accomplished through quantitative analysis. The focus was on the value of transformative learning in facilitating a process of socioeconomic upward mobility in African American women. Most subjects are often unaware of the underlying motives that drive their actions. Therefore, methodologies should be applied which allow for such an important disclosure of these motives. In-depth interviews which recount their problems and adaptation processes toward discrimination, but also reveal their transformative learning process and strengths are needed. By looking at learning through a critical, reflective, and transformative process, personal perspectives can serve as a useful and relatively unobtrusive vehicle for bringing African American women's value systems and expectations for interpersonal behavior to the surface.

The spoken words of the study participants were relied on for the primary source of data. Qualitative research is a method that can yield a rich data base for the study of phenomena such as perspective transformative learning. Nevertheless, recognized limitations of the study exist. These included the following:

1. The data offered theoretical insights into the phenomenon being studied. However, the results are restricted to the participants in the study. The traditional notion of generalizing the findings to all upwardly mobile African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds cannot be assumed.

2. The results of this study are based on the self-reports and self-perceptions of the participants as they reconstructed and reported experiences in their early lives. Although there was no way to evaluate whether stories were factual, they were accepted as truthful.

3. The researcher limited the selection of respondents to African American women who met the criteria. Participants' were referrals of friends or personally known to the researcher.

4. This study did not look at participants who achieved mobility by receiving wealth from other generations and did not consider African American women who have not achieved mobility who may have had similar experiences to the women in this study.

Assumptions

Within recent years, case study research has become more prevalent and widely used in education. This increase in prevalence could be due to increased interest in holistic multidimensional approaches to studying a phenomenon. While various studies have been done in identifying successful coping strategies for African American women, this study assumes that transformative learning would be a useful conceptual framework in understanding the process by which these participants have overcome obstacles that impede their mobility.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized as follows:

Chapter I discusses the background of the problem, purpose of the study, its significance to the field of adult education, and what the researcher expects to gain. Also, included in this chapter are definitions relating to the study, research questions, and

assumptions guiding this study. In addition, background information is provided that summarizes the significant findings from analytical and interpretive research activities.

Chapter II provides a review of the literature relevant to the overall research scheme and theoretical framework as outlined in Chapter One. Relevant literature in this study will include documented findings and writings related to African American women's success and upward socioeconomic mobility characteristics and processes. Other important literature which shows that existing exploratory works and research provide sufficient knowledge for the framing of this study are also presented.

Chapter III focuses on the research method, design, sample population, selection procedures, and techniques used to collect and analyze data. Background and demographic data of the participants are also provided. The researcher uses a multiple case study research design. Also provided in this chapter are study questions, data collection and analysis procedures, and the purpose for using the research design.

Chapter IV presents the narratives of the participants. The researcher's comments of deliberate misrepresentation of data are at the end of the narratives.

Chapter V presents an in-depth analysis of one study participant representing the common themes. Also included are the outlier themes unique to a particular participant and not seen as common to most of the study participants. Discussions of the findings are provided therein.

Chapter VI presents the summary of the study including the methodology, discussion of findings related to the research questions, questions this research raised, and key

conclusions to the research. Recommendations and the researcher's concluding comments will capture the essence of this study with implications for educational practitioners.

CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

In recent years, many studies have been exploring life experiences of African American women surviving in a society laden with racial and gender-based barriers. Historically, African Americans have existed in socioeconomically discriminating and oppressive conditions that have been barriers in attaining any meaningful level of socioeconomic mobility. Despite these obstacles, some African American women have been able to move beyond adversity and experience upward socioeconomic mobility.

Educators Zinn and Dill (1994) note improvement in educational and occupational opportunities. They suggest that although empirical evidence shows improvement in the educational and occupational conditions that lead to mobility. However, evidence continues to show how African American women have long suffered and continue to suffer from the dual disadvantage of race and gender discrimination, particularly in the labor force. This research was based on the premise that upwardly mobile African American women from lower socioeconomic childhood backgrounds experience increasing degrees of socioeconomic mobility as a result of a transformation learning process. More specifically, this research concerns itself with the early life experiences that influenced African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to want to achieve and the transformative learning process that led to upward mobility. However, research results that lend themselves to the process of transformation in overcoming these

negative social and economic forces inherent in their background have not been presented. Despite this gap in the knowledge, sufficient research exists to provide a knowledge base upon which to frame this study.

The purpose of this study was to examine the transformative learning process of African American females, who despite their social origin have prevailed over those social and economic forces inherent in their backgrounds, thus moving beyond the socioeconomic status of their parents. This study examines the lives of upwardly mobile African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to gain an understanding of why, how, and when these women realized they could transform their lives and move beyond the level of poverty they experienced in their childhood family.

This literature review is divided into three sections. The first section provides a brief account of the demographic issues concerning upward mobility that have constrained the lives of African American women, and continues to be constrained experiences of many African American women. Section two examines what can be learned from a feminist critique and includes feminists' perspectives of transformative learning for personal, professional, and social advancement and enrichment. The final section addresses the concept of transformative learning and Mezirow's (1990) Perspective Transformation model. His model is used as a guide in developing an understanding of how some African American women could triumph amid adversity.

African American Women and Upward Mobility

According to Zinn and Dill (1994), the structure of African American families can be characterized by a diverse and transforming pattern change as they struggle for existence, viability, and self-worth under the realities of societal constraints. As editors of Women of Color in U.S. Society, they examine a collection of original essays consisting of race, class, and gender experiences of women of color. Despite empirical evidence, they found consistent patterns of subordination, racial oppression and sexism; all contributing pressures felt by African American women (and other minorities) who continue to be constrained by limited opportunities in their lives. They suggest that race, gender, and class affects the experiences of everyone. Consequently, pressures create disadvantages and unrewarding consequences for African American females who are affected by inequalities.

According to Thompson (1986), many African Americans are living in the most isolated and poorest neighborhoods and consequently have no power to escape their circumstances. Historically, he contends that to survive against societal pressures in the past, African Americans were able to adapt to the conflicting economic, social, physical, and psychological demands of society to meet or improve the socioeconomic needs of the family. However, the ability to adapt to societal pressures does not account for those who face the same barriers and live imprisoned by their perceived realities. Thompson posits that the lack of attention given to the deteriorating conditions will reflect upon the nation as a whole as the conditions will only continue to escalate. He contends that any effort

directed at improving the societal ills of African Americans must address the economic conditions in the total community. It is understood that women may find themselves more often than not as single heads of households, and earning lower pay with higher education. What in fact affects the African American woman is reflected in her total community and family as a whole.

To facilitate the process of economic self sufficiency, many constitutional guarantees were enacted that contributed to the increase of mobility levels. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion, or national origin contributed to removing the issue of physical appearance from interfering with upward mobility. Title IX prohibits discrimination based on gender in education and Executive Order 11246 requires state and local governments to engage in affirmative action. Yet, despite the guarantees, socioeconomic disparity continues.

Landes, Foster, and Jacobs, (1994) insist that, although many constitutional guarantees have opened educational and occupational opportunities, many African Americans fail to realize their potential. Moreover, they declare that although many African Americans hoped that legislation would assure equality for all Americans, prejudice remains a major obstacle for African Americans in American society.

Staples (1991), a leading authority on African American family life, addresses the issue of change in the life of African American families over the past thirty-five years. In his article, The Political Economy of Black Family Life, statistics reveal that the direction of change has remained the same for all racial groups in America, though more negative

with respect to African Americans. Thus, according to Staples, despite alleged positive gains of the sixties and seventies, poverty and oppression continue to plague the socioeconomic mobility of African Americans. He contends that the ability of African Americans to cope with adversity and transcend barriers has been a valuable skill, particularly in overcoming educational and occupational racial and gender-based barriers to achieving upward mobility.

Geographical Mobility

The literature reveals that geographical transitions create better opportunities for many African American families when relocating from the rural South to more industrial areas. According to McAdoo (1988), not all African American families are successful in achieving their transitional goal, but many have attained improvement of their lives. The desire for greater resources, a better life, and education for their families precipitated the movement. However, the extent to which a transition was associated with mobility advancement depended upon the existence of a support system. According to McAdoo, a move that isolated a family from their support networks would not be beneficial, considering the fact that support networks affect on a family's ability to achieve socioeconomic upward mobility. Thus, when one African American family moved, finding a chain of relatives and other networks moving to the same area is usual.

Educational Mobility

From a historical perspective, social and economic advancement has been predetermined by the level of education and profession of the heads of the household.

According to Thompson (1986), experts in the behavioral sciences believed that any hope to advance their status would be contingent upon the educational and occupational achievement of their parents: that is, the higher the level of educational achievement and occupational advancement of the parents, the greater the opportunities for the offspring. Conversely, the lower the educational achievement, the offsprings' chances are limited in improving beyond the socioeconomic status of their parents.

Thompson (1986) found that, contrary to the predictions and observations of other demographic experts, many African Americans have transcended the negative social forces inherent in their backgrounds. Consequently, they have achieved a socioeconomic status higher than that of their parents. His research opposes previous predictions and observation, suggesting that this research is out dated and focuses primarily on the difficulties encountered by slaves during their struggle of survival against the odds.

Thompson's comprehensive profile of African American college graduates reveals that African Americans have aspirations to succeed, despite the senselessness of racial stereotypes. In addition, the desire to succeed surpassed the level attained by their parents and the college participant's level of expectations. He accredits their achievement to the espoused values of education passed on through the generations. He adds that the level of educational attainment increases as more African Americans come to realize the value of education as a vital means in achieving equality. For example, sixty-seven percent of the participants in Thompson's study came from backgrounds with the parents' annual income earnings not exceeding ten-thousand dollars. Twenty-two percent earned between ten-

thousand and twenty-thousand dollars. Given the background status of his college participants and their current achievement, Thompson's study dispelled the myth that socioeconomic advancement of the offspring would not differ greatly from that of their parents.

Education has been reported to be an essential factor in improving an individual's life but not a guarantee to economic success. Offering greater opportunities for advancement and improvement in the quality of life, society places great emphasis on education. Without education, a person faces greater obstacles in a competitive American society (Landes, A.; Foster, C.D.; & Jacobs, N.R., 1992). Other researchers concur that education is the basic nutrient for African Americans and its acquisition gives African Americans a way to secure a better future-- an opportunity to "open doors" otherwise closed to the uneducated (Hill & Jones, 1993; Landes, et al., 1992 &1994; McAdoo, 1988; Thompson, 1986).

As women became consciously aware of the importance of education they were motivated to increase their level of attainment. Landes et al. (1992) reported that as a result of this increased awareness, women have earned a large percentage of college degrees after completing high school. In 1992, women received fifty-seven percent of associate degrees and fifty-two and one-half percent of the bachelor's degrees. At the graduate level, women earned fewer degrees. In 1980, eight percent of African Americans were college students. By 1991, the percentage increased to ten and one-half percent out

of the fourteen million students enrolled in colleges or graduate schools and in 1992, they accounted for twelve percent.

McAdoo's (1988) research emphasizes that life circumstances, educational programs, and socialization of African Americans, all create barriers that impede educational achievement. She contributes this to insufficient preparation of youth in their socialization process and educational programs that lack resources to covey the learning instrumental in their development. However, she explains that some African American families have acquired the basic education and skills needed for socioeconomic mobility, despite the force of discriminating and oppressive barriers. Recognizing that few African Americans are the recipients of inheritance, McAdoo said that the economic mobility for each African American generation is gained by the encouragement and support of others and their belief that their efforts would make advancement possible. She states that economic security does not happen in a vacuum. It is an extension of support received from family and community networks. The efforts of many individuals create opportunities that contribute to the recipient's achievement.

From another perspective, Sandler (1987) asserts that overt barriers between women and their ability to secure equal educational opportunities have diminished greatly. She contributes this decrease in obvious barriers largely to the fact those female students now have access to institutions once denied to their mother and grandmothers. However, despite these advancements, educational barriers remain. These barriers continue to render the experiences of females less meaningful than their male peers. For instance, she

reports an increase in college enrollment in the 1970's and 1980's. In 1987, she reported that women outnumbered the males. However, she adds that the findings may not represent the total portrait that reveals many are unable to complete college and the majority attend community colleges that do not offer the skills needed to improve upward mobility.

Linking the concept of self-image and education, Boyd's (1993) research analyzed the realities and issues in the lives of seven African American women. She presented a vision for healing, self-renewal, and personal growth through messages of rebirth and renewal of self-esteem. Her participants shared their personal life perspectives in a variety of circumstances, such as their perspective on education. Concerning their response to education, Boyd found that the way African Americans are educated, failure or being pushed out of an educational system comes as no surprise. She contends that a system that is not designed to include African American women is contributes to the lack of educational attainment. Moreover, for those who do excel academically, the transference of the educational process to their own real life experiences is difficult. She stated that African American women feel stripped of their identity when they realize that educational institutions are not reflective of their culture and experiences. Consequently, a subtle message is given that "Blacks do not exist" (p.59) when history, literature, and science are void of their experiences, culture, and needs. She adds that this message in which African Americans are taught to believe history as taught by the dominant culture, is a message of assimilation into society that begins in the early years of school. Coupled with the fact

that when given enough messages that are descriptive of their invisibility, then the system, which should have been the great equalizer, has in reality, fallen short.

Sandler (1987) identifies 30 subtle ways on how faculties treated female students differently from male students. These included behaviors such as making more eye contact with men than women, being more attentive to men, interrupting females more when they speak, and calling less upon females were a few ways. Sandler stated that if continually done, were found to lower the self-confidence of female students. Sandler hypothesizes that lower classroom participation, lower academic and career aspirations, and inhibitions of the overall learning process can be the detrimental consequences of these oppressive practices. These injustices contribute to feelings of helplessness, causing some women to either redesign, or regroup, and even retreat from excelling in their professional goals. Some families even reinforce their children's perspective as they relate the reality of their own unemployment, underemployment and failures of other family and community members. According to McAdoo (1988), it makes it easier for individuals to abandon any hope of achieving beyond their present existence. McAdoo sums up educational attainment by stating that mobility is limited when cultural dimensions and devaluation are part of the experienced realities of African Americans in educational institutions. Social and environmental conditions make it hard for many African American students to obtain advanced degrees.

Workplace Mobility

In an overview of the state of Black America in 1994, Robinson and Tidwell (1995) reported on historical documentation illustrating how African American women have been disadvantaged in the labor force. Facing double discrimination of race and gender, employment opportunities and advancement of African American women remain disproportional--with African American women receiving a high concentration in low-skill jobs that pay less. As suggested by Higginbotham (1982), to understand fully how women have coped and continue to cope with adversity, the reality of demographic data must be explored and presented. Higginbotham believes that the areas of employment, education, and socioeconomic status must be understood to approach a conclusive view of womanhood with respect to their mobility.

According to Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW) (1990), the economic prosperity of the 1960's brought new options and old problems for African American workers. Capitalizing on the changes in the composition of the labor force that shows increases in the labor force and professional attainment, African Americans improved their overall economic positions. Today, there is a profoundly different picture for women in employment. For instance, over the past 30 years, the opportunity to enter other fields such as management and non-traditional occupations outside domestic work has increased. WOW recalls that African American women improved their occupational status and earnings at a faster rate than African American men as some women took advantage and benefited from affirmative action programs. They suggest that this increased

representation have contributed to substantial gains in income allowing many to experience improvement in their socioeconomic status.

Conversely, some researchers have reported that despite significant progress since the mid-60's, African American women have not been given equal opportunities fully to develop as they face barriers to their socioeconomic advancements (Allen, 1990; Boyd, 1993; Dworkin & Dworkin, 1982; Robinson & Tidwell, 1995). Allen's (1990) paper discussed the status of African American women relative to White women and it was reported that African American women have historically been at a greater disadvantage in the labor market than their White counterparts. She suggests that the interaction of race and gender-based discrimination have prevented many African American women from achieving meaningful mobility that would place them in a position of independence and away from the constraints of poverty. Allen (1990) reports that although African American women have upgraded their occupational positions, they remain substantially under-represented in the highest paying occupational categories. Allen found that the unemployment rate is two and one-half times the rate of their counterparts and for those who work, weekly earnings are ninety-one percent less than that of White females. Discrimination has limited the opportunities and advancement of African American women thus, widening the gap between them and other non-African workers. Allen stresses a need for vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws to close this gap and lessen the effects of racial and gender-based biases in the workplace.

Dworkin & Dworkin's (1982) research reveals that African American women see race and gender as their principal challenge, particularly in the workplace. The treatment in the organizational structure is reflected in income levels. Dworkin & Dworkin reported that in the 1970's, median income for males was $10,123 a year and females earned $3,941. The increase in median income continues to be lower for women, who have averaged a fifty-nine percent increase compared with the sixty-four percent increase for males. For African American women, weekly earnings are not only much lower than males, who average $253 compared with their $147, but White women as well who earn $157. The disparity of income on all levels in the organization is another adversity that African American women experience from the handicap of double minority status. Given the informality and ambiguity of upward movement to the highest levels, African American women believed their destiny to be as dependant upon their ability to persevere and challenge those structures that deny access to higher levels of management.

The most recent statistics on the status of African American women concurs with the previously mentioned data. As reported by Robinson & Tidwell (1995) in The State of Black America 1995, African American females are still under-represented in white collar positions and highly over-represented as service workers and the earnings have not kept pace. Their research reports that in 1993 the earnings of African Americans are seventy-seven percent of the earnings of Whites, down from the eighty-two percent in 1975. Thus, economic survival for African American women has been a constant struggle and its impact on upward economic mobility has negative consequences as they find themselves

locked out of opportunities that contribute to significant mobility experiences.

Boyd's (1993) qualitative study of African American women and self esteem, reveals that the participants were aware of the fact that they outnumber other women in the workforce and continue to be underpaid for their services. She concurs that while the status of African American women has improved significantly, with respect to their history, disparity in their wages and opportunities for advancement continues to be an issue. African American women who attend college earn the lowest wages when compared with men and White women who exceed their earning. The result of this inequality is manifested in their lack of independence and continual decline of significant economic mobility. He states,

> Affirmative Action and the women's movement offered us the illusion of inclusion in the job market by allowing us to move through a few corporate doors instead of the kitchen doors. However, the highly visible positions of receptionist, secretary, and office clerk are often the lowest paying positions and rarely are stepping stones for advancement (p.116).

Boyd (1993) believes discrimination and exploitation are the causes of this inequity and the process continues. According to Boyd, " . . . being given impressive titles and lofty positions without adequate wages is analogous to being handed a china plate that's been licked clean" (p. 117-118). The difficulty arises when African American women find themselves unable to feel secure about themselves in positions that deny them the power and respect given to others. Consequently, as "survivalist," African American women

have learned to mask their thoughts and feelings concerning injustices that are evident in workplace situations (Boyd). Conversely, African American women lacking adaptation skills become victims of only societal controls and self-imposed barriers that prevent them from challenging the inequity or from seeing other alternatives.

The educational and employment mobility gap has decreased and has, in part, allowed African American women to improve their socioeconomic status, and geographical transitions that may contribute to their chances of achieving upward mobility (Allen, 1990; Boyd, 1993; Dworkin & Dworkin, 1982; McAdoo, 1988; Robinson & Tidwell, 1995). Despite this, African American women remain the lowest paid employees and the lowest in achieving significant upper level positions that include meaningful security (Robinson & Tidwell, 1995). Data in 1992 show that educational advancement for African Americans is twelve percent of the overall population, and has steadily increased from the 1980's eight (Landes et al., 1994). The employment gap has, in part, allowed African American women to improve their socioeconomic status, although African American women average the lowest income in comparison to men and White females. In 1989, African American women with four years or more of the college earned $26,726 while their White female counterparts earned $27,436 (Landes et al., 1992). Despite past short comings of exclusion and inaccurate representation in education of the African American woman's voice in history, changes are now taking place in educational institutions. More schools are addressing multi-cultural issues (Boyd, 1993) and issues from a feminist perspective so

that the experiences of African American women and other minorities are shared in the learning process (Staples, 1991).

Thompson (1986) submits that it requires more than educational opportunities and employment advancements to open doors toward achieving upward socioeconomic mobility for African Americans. Many young African Americans have become less willing to accept the inferior work and job conditions their parents settled for (Thompson, 1986). Sensitivity to the nuances of racism has kept African Americans alert to its various forms and distinctions. Although progress has been made in the last three decades-- overt racism is not as visible and tolerated--African Americans still feel stagnated in their constant struggle for equality. The African Americans' perception of the educational system--as an opportunity structure for mobility-- influences their response to schooling. Subsequently, despite the barriers, many have managed to look beyond race, question institutional practices, and became more vocal in bringing awareness to behaviors perceived as racial and gender specific. Furthermore, engaging in strategic action to cause change in the system, African Americans began to pave the way toward better socioeconomic opportunities (Thompson, 1986).

McAdoo (1988) offers an empirical approach to understanding the demographic patterns of upward mobility in African American families. She examined the extent to which African American families' involvement within the extended-family network help or hindered their upward mobility. She addresses the issue of characteristics of mobility patterns of upwardly mobile African American families. She found that certain cultural

patterns such as extended family and support networks were vital to the valuable life of African American families. She defines these networks as interactions between relatives for " . . . exchange of emotional support, goods, and services. . . ." (p. 159) and believed this pattern extended throughout the various classes, newly mobile, middle class, and middle class for two generations. In this study, McAdoo reveals the external factors that contributed to changes in socioeconomic patterns of mobility for African Americans. She believed that the extended family was more than a "coping mechanism" (p. 159), and cultural patterns were maintained throughout the generations. Using a random sample of urban and suburban middle-class families with school-age children and parents above the age of twenty-five with some college education, McAdoo traced three generations of their geographic, educational, and occupational mobility. Data was obtained from five hour interviews, involving a total of 178 units that included 305 parents. There were 131 fathers and 174 mothers.

McAdoo's (1988) hypothesis was supported when it found no differences between social classes of origin in the amount or type of help received from extended families. The cross-generational findings showed that if the individual is born poor, she probably could not move from abject poverty into middle-class. Initially, the finding was not inclusive. There was an indication that some had, but when further analysis was done, the educational level was higher than the criteria established. McAdoo's findings supports previous research. She found that higher levels of education for African Americans were not financially beneficial because they received lower payoffs for their efforts. Without

equitable returns for their achievement, African Americans have been unable to pass on surplus financial support to subsequent generations. Therefore, the effort of an individual or family was a key factor in the attainment of mobility: Drive and perseverance would be the determining factor in how well an individual could sustain any challenges along the way. Specifically addressing upwardly mobile patterns in lower status African American families, the examination revealed that education and achievement were often impossible without the support of the extended family. As for the cultural patterns, McAdoo found that the support of the extended family was crucial to countering the effects of the vulnerability experienced by African American families. This research concerns itself with the transformative learning by which African American women, from lower class backgrounds have moved beyond the barriers, despite the negative socioeconomic forces that might impede their ability to continue.

A Feminist Perspective

To identify how women have become successful, an examination of individual perspectives is essential. According to Caffarella (1992), studies that examine the voices of women have been primarily drawn from a White perspective, thereby limiting generalizability to other groups who are culturally different. Caffarella concurs with Scott (1982). Scott notes,

> Most studies of women's experiences have narrowly defined the experiences of women, leaving many needs unmet as evidenced by the state of the social

literature. There must be more examinations of African American and female experience that are sensitive to the ways racism and sexism impact upon them. This would entail the development of theoretical frameworks that explore the roles of women in all societal institutions and provide an action-oriented strategy to raise questions about the nature of many commonly held beliefs (pp. 87-88).

Scott (1982) calls for a more integrative approach to study the experiences of African American women in non-familial contexts that would give added value to the research on African American women.

To empower adult learners, O'Barr and Wyer (1992) edited a collection of original works from both graduate and undergraduate learners that are descriptive of their personal experiences with racism, feminism, sexuality, relationships and classroom experiences. The study was conducted between 1986 and 1990. Sixty students (which included nine women of color and five men) contributed to the journal. The journals were descriptive of the feminists critiques that focused on: exclusion and access, content and canon, and challenges to the assumptions of higher learning. The students charged that in higher education, subtle discrimination often goes unnoticed. They maintained that without studying, the empowering aspects of women, the absence of the feminists' perspective, would reinforce the rigid gender role norms that have silenced women. They contend that when the norms are the subject of women's studies, what has been previously unspoken takes on a new meaning. O'Barr and Wyer define feminism as:

A perspective with as many variations as there are people who call themselves

> feminist. It is not only a body of knowledge. It is a perspective on the process of building knowledge. It is not a training program in how to dominate men. It is a perspective on the subordination of women (p. 42).

The call for a more integrative approach to studying the experiences of women comes from other sources (Caffarella, 1992; Hayes & Smith, 1994; Hooks, 1992; O'Barr & Wyer, 1992; Sapiro, 1986; Scott, 1991).

In Hayes & Smith's (1994) reconstruction of existing literature, they inform us that:

> The existing perspective on women in adult education literature is clearly limited and the limitations are more apparent in the recent and earlier literature. The lack of attention given to significant factors such as class, race, and culture in creating diversity among women's experiences is troubling (p. 217).

They state that a call for scholarship that overcomes the limitations of previous perspectives is warranted. They suggest that new insights gained about women, gender, race, and other constructs will inform adult education and many other disciplines.

Including a feminist perspective in the classroom is just one possible way of understanding the transformative learning of women. According to Hooks (1992), the information gleaned from feminist scholarship sheds light on how some women have developed. It provides information about how they have enhanced their potential to overcome the boundaries of perceived limitations and the insight they

have gained from the experiences of others. These factors are crucial to their development and understanding of life experiences based on their cultural realities.

Hooks (1992) contends that, for many African American women, communicating their own experiences and hearing their own voices is not easy because of past education and training experiences. Realities of racism, sexism, and class exploitation ensure that other groups will not seek out the habits of African American women's ways of being. She emphasizes the importance of African American feminists committing themselves to scholarship that provides information and knowledge to other African American women.

Hooks refers to the process of "critical pedagogy" (p. 56), the sharing of information and knowledge, as crucial to the development of African American women. She speaks of her own female subjectivity, raising the question of how women stimulate awareness of issues and what has helped to change the way women are perceived and subsequently change. She believes those African American females (especially students) who are searching for answers about the social formation of identity want to know how radical African American women think and survive. Therefore, openly sharing their personal experience ensures that women will not be made into an image that is not representative of their lives. Using her life experience as an example, Hooks contends that when African American females learn about their lives, they also learn about their mistakes, contradictions, limitations, and strengths.

When information is shared, women are helping each other learn how to grapple with contradictions in the critical thinking process. It was this very process of critical pedagogy that television talk show hosts, Oprah Winfrey, seized upon the opportunity to grapple with a contradiction in her life. During an interview in January 1995 with Patrice Gaines, author of Laughing in the Dark, Oprah Winfrey spoke to her guest on how she willingly challenged the status quo, going against the norm for self-serving interests. Despite Oprah's popularity, in retrospect, she revealed that after the publishing of her book, Oprah Winfrey: The Real Story, she continued to suffer in silence from making a choice in her earlier life experiences to smoke crack cocaine. It was not until Gaines speaks of her personal involvement with drugs during this televised interview that Oprah revealed her own experience with drug abuse. Having done so, she immediately began to experience what she perceived to be a sense of freedom from that haunting past. Essentially, this experience suggests that knowing and hearing from others who have shared similar experiences, the "confessional narratives" (Hooks, 1992, p. 59) of women like Oprah can give testimony of the process of transformation as they struggle to emerge from self-inflicting and oppressive patterns of behaviors to achieve upward mobility.

Engaging Feminism: Selected Studies of the Transformative Learning of African American Women Transcending Adversity

To understand and appreciate what it means to be a socially mobile African American woman, Peterson (1992) emphasized the necessity in recalling the life perspectives as experienced by African American women, who bear the burden of being minority and female. As a consequence of this double burden, they have been subjugated to adversity that may impede socioeconomic advancement. Given this, African American women have had to employ many strategies to cope with societal norms that are not always beneficial to their own life realities.

As suggested by Higginbotham (1982), the issue of their adaptability and resourcefulness in the face of difficulties calls for more research from a perspective that seeks to reveal the complex lives of African American women within a framework that is supportive of both positive and negative feelings. She contends that understanding it from the experiences of African American women (their subtle courage and power in triumphing over adverse conditions) is important. These experiences reveal the transformative learning process of African American women and their coping strategies that have helped them succeed.

Strategies and Processes of Transformative Learning

The review of the related literature suggests several themes considered to be key concepts constituting essential ingredients that define and characterize success in upwardly mobile African American women. The emerging themes provide a feminist

approach to transformative learning. That is, a personal perspective of the survival strategies and the transformative learning processes of how African American women have overcome barriers to obtain their self-defined goals. This synopsis reveals the strategies and processes of how some African American women could cope with and move beyond adversity. As a word of caution, given the limited nature of the subjects included in the various studies, the findings are not to be generalized to all women.

Habits of Survival. Scott, (1991) examines the biographical histories of four African American women and their habits of surviving and adapting to a racist, patriarchal society in the context of family life, community, society, and each woman's personal identity. She found that telling the story of overcoming adversity was within itself a powerful and transformational experience, that her participants likened to having burdens lifted off their shoulders.

Based on her study of four successful African American women between forty-six and fifty-two years old, Scott hypothesized that habits were their unexamined ways of behaving. Success was conceptualized based on African American cultural achievement equated with the acquisition of higher education, increased personal and family economic opportunity and cultural assimilation of white values. According to Scott, their stories provide direction and a model for learning about African American women within the matrix of race, gender, class, and history. She finds that their experiences were inclusive of family, community, institutional

structures, nationhood, and spirituality. Their lives were influenced by these surroundings and their level of participation within them.

Scott (1991) identified two key strategies that African American women employ to survive in adverse situations. First, there is the habit of survival, a strategy used in response to pain and suffering. The habits were the tools used to overcome or confront the burden of poverty and double discrimination in workplace, school, and in the women's liberation movement. Her study revealed that the main habit of survival for the African American women was abandoning feminism in the workplace, academic arena, women's movement, media, and corporate culture. In the workplace, her subjects recognized that they had internalized limitations that made efforts toward challenging sexism difficult and risky when compared with what they could lose. Her participants claimed that speaking up against sexism threatened their bosses and co-workers, and alienated their African American brothers.

Through weaving stories from these successful women, Scott contends that this habit of survival is an additional obstacle that [African American] women have to overcome. The consequence of hiding feminist perspectives also contributes to the poor self-image that women often experience. Equally importantly, Scott argues that when African American women hide their feminism, they relinquish a potentially strong alliance against sex discrimination.

Scott identifies the second survival strategy as the warrior mode. This habit is employed by the participants because they view their world as a continuous battle in

which they must be prepared on some daily bases to ward off attackers. As a consequence of this belief, they incorporate survival tactics passed down from previous generations. As Scott suggests, "it is a way of keeping good times going" or prolonging pleasure. When women are taught and practice this habit to perfection, it eventually becomes ingrained in their behavior, and as time passes, becomes an unexamined and unquestioned tradition. Scott adds that it becomes deeply rooted in the African American culture that when questioned about it, the usual response from women is, "its just the way we do things" (p. 11).

According to Scott (1991), the limitation of the warrior mode is that it does not properly fit the contradictions that are the present realities of these women. Findings suggest that these women become confused with the reality of their opportunity to make choices. This ingrained habit of perceiving the workplace as a constant battlefield becomes an obstacle for African American women to overcome.

In analysis of her data, Scott questions the use of habits in overcoming adversity. Her participants expressed having to give up part of themselves to improve upon their present condition. She concludes that women need to redefine their survival strategies by moving beyond cultural constraints to liberation, a process of identifying habits, acknowledging the pros and cons, and making the appropriate choice. It is through choice that African American women can emancipate themselves. Scott (1991) concludes that mere survival is not enough. African American women need to begin to become critically reflective of their

experiences and how they have come to feel, behave, believe as they do. Scott said, what is needed is a transformation beyond the mere habits of survival to the extent that African American women could dismantle individual and group oppression to experience both internal and external success. Scott (1991) believes that if the ingrained behaviors continue to be ignored, habits of survival that once liberated African American women from oppression will become their self-imposed barriers. As a consequence, they continue to prevent themselves from realizing their potential and pursuing opportunity for true mobility.

Self-esteem and Coping. Myers (1986) investigated two major constructs: self-image and the ability to cope. Myers claims these constructs to be essential in overcoming emotional degradation. Self-esteem and coping were critical factors involved in understanding this concept of self-image. In addressing the dilemma of the African American women in a male dominated society, Myers argues the false assumption that unemployed women have low self esteem when compared with female heads of households and married women who did not work. Interviews with 400 African American women comparing female headed families with families headed by their male partners between 20-years of age and 81-years of age revealed that the unemployed women had as much self-esteem as those who were employed. Central components to maintaining African American woman's image are family members, and significant others (other African American females, mother and father substitutes, church). For these women, their significant others were sources of

support that enabled them to cope with unpleasant situations and barriers.

Myers' (1986) findings showed a relationship between significant others and individual achievement. As a result, the interrelationship of support and encouragement received from their significant others is vital in maintaining their self-worth and coping abilities. That is, the ability to cope with racism and sexism was based on their sense of worth and the opinions of significant others. Myers said that a recommended strategy for success is realizing that any of the many roles women fulfill in life should not be evaluated based on the importance society places on it. According to Myers, success should be determined by the roles important to the individual.

In this study, both female-heads of families and females with mates felt their position in the family structure gave them a sense of worth as they fulfilled a goal deemed important. Whether a working married woman, working head of household, or mother, fulfilling the familial role was a measure of success that defined African American women's self-worth. Given the situations that these women are confronted with, she suggests that determination and perseverance are the emotional strengths characteristic of African American women and their coping strategies that help them succeed.

Successful completion of a goal in the midst of adversity defined success for the African American women in Myers' research. She concludes that successfully coping with racism and sexism and the emotional degradation depends on the

opinions and support they received from people that were meaningful in their lives. This success involves receiving a self-evaluation from significant others. The importance of relationships and connection to others was central to their ability to cope and move beyond the changing circumstances that created ambiguity in their lives.

Self-Will. Peterson (1992) conducted a study on the attributes of "will and success." Her study presents a portrait of the self-willed African American woman and success. She reports that the strengths of African American women who have defied the odds are well documented and have been celebrated since slavery. Peterson contends, that the determination of these women-- their will or inner strength--should not be taken for granted, given the problems that plague African American communities. She believes that the lives of African American women cannot be defined and measured by values based on theories and concepts framed from the perspective of the dominant culture. As Peterson cites, previous theories have only served to subjugate and suppress women and other minorities. Peterson believes that an understanding of the will of African American women can only be validated by their oral traditions--the self-told stories of their life, relationships, and beliefs that serve as reference points for what African American women do. Self-will has allowed the individual to see herself in a new perspective.

The purpose of Peterson's investigation was to gain an understanding of the relationship between the self-will of past successful African American women and

successful women today. She wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and influences that allowed them to have an impact on history.

To accomplish Peterson's purpose, data was obtained from interviews and by employing the traditional hermeneutic process of interpretation to extrapolate from four literary novels. Themes of will were then compared with themes that emerged from the interviews. She searches for themes of self-will from the writings of the following African American female authors: Zora Neale Hurston, an anthropologist, novelist, and a force behind the Harlem Renaissance who inspired other great writers; Alice Walker, Mayo Angelou, and Toni Morrison. Self-will was defined by Peterson as the characteristic that gives African American women the courage to confront their conditions and overcome barriers to success.

Peterson shares from the literature the life stories and common themes collected from fifteen of the thirty stories submitted for her research project. The African American women, between the ages of thirty and ninety-five, had overcome obstacles of poverty, racism, or other crises. Peterson contends that the themes extracted from the writings of four novelists are the link to understanding African American women. She found that many themes were applicable to some women (e.g., love, friendship, faith, motherhood, dreams, patience, practical wisdom, and vision) but not representative of all the themes essential to understanding African American women.

The findings reveal the experiences and influences that are important for the development of a strong will (particularly in African American women). These experiences were identified as: the will to survive, struggle, and resistance of the forces of oppression developing a real sense of freedom. Family relationships, the mother-daughter bond, African American women as sisters, deep spiritual awareness, and cohesion in the African American community were the themes that emerged from the interviews. They deemed to be essential structures in the development of a strong self-determined woman.

In this study, Peterson (1992) identifies three essential elements in the development of the concept of self-will: freedom, power, and self-determination. Power deals with the relationship women have with themselves, God, family, peers, and community. Shared power brings comfort and allows women to act and express themselves knowing that affirmation will be based on who and what they are. Self-determination comes from women knowing that only they have the responsibility for determining their individual paths. Peterson suggests that "the [African American] female ability to define herself comes from a belief that no human has the right to define another"(p. 86). Freedom focuses on the ongoing struggle women face. Peterson defines freedom as "the ability to alter situations by reinterpreting them" (p. 87). She states that freedom does not mean doing as one wants. Freedom implies that "human ability to exists, not merely as animals, but as animals who have

the ability to coexist with one another (p. 87)." She presented this interpretation of freedom:

> To the extent that we as human beings continuously struggle to bridge the gap between what we are and what we desire to be, and then in making an intentional effort to cross the gap, knowing the only alternative is staying where we are, that we feel provisionally free (p. 87-88).

Peterson (1992) concludes that it is through exercising our self-will--our power, self-determination, and freedom, that African American women can move closer to becoming the person they aspire to be. Since many are returning to school and enrolling in adult education programs, Peterson believes that an understanding of how African American women in the past were able to confront and overcome barriers, would benefit adult educators in understanding the development of strength and will.

A Personal Transformation Through Self-Empowerment. Chellis (1992), the author of Living With the Kennedy's, probes into the lives of women who have overcome adversity and offers an approach to transformative learning. Chellis conducted an in-depth study on eight women who had triumphed over adversity from: alcoholism, heroin addiction, a crippling accident, homelessness, life after divorce, and a woman who suffered from an environmental illness. The purpose of her study was to discover why some people overcame traumatic experiences and others did not. She found that these women, who did not know each other, shared a

common process of change. The themes that emerged from the data suggested a personal transformation through the process of self-empowerment. She contends that there is a connection between receiving and giving support which forms the basis of the concept of self empowerment. Empowerment derives from being receptive to changes and giving support to others that helps the person maintain her own sense of empowerment. Chellis warrants that self-empowerment is about "becoming powerful," (p. 2). She insists that through this process, women can overcome barriers, achieve personal success, and manage challenging circumstances. Chellis chronicled the survival techniques from the self-told stories of eight women who wanted to gain control over their lives and learn the process in which this learning occurs. She declares self-empowerment to be an essential way in which women overcome barriers, achieve personal success, and manage challenging circumstances throughout their lives. She advances the theory that self-empowerment progresses through five stages identified as: accepting, networking, choosing, shifting, and mentoring.

1. Acceptance. This stage of the process leading to empowerment. Change can only become possible after acknowledging that there is a problem and accepting responsibility for actions.

2. Networking. This stage occurs when a person seeks appropriate assistance, encouragement, and guidance. This is an important part of the process because support affects results thought the change cycle and makes success viable which in

turn improves ones' self-esteem or self-value. Improved self-value allows women to become open to choices that can lead to change.

3. Choosing. Choosing occurs when women take responsibility for their choices and not attributing the lack of choice to others. They are able to recognize other alternatives that they were unaware of when they played the victim role. This chance to choose reveals the transformation of their lives now and what they can become through choice.

4. Shifting. This fourth stage has been identified as a process by which an individual makes a series of beneficial choices that propel a positive change. Recognizing beneficial choices and acting upon them places women closer to their goals. According to Chellis when barriers appear, they can be confronted. This positive shift means letting go of the past and maintaining the change.

5. Mentoring. This stage involves empowering others in order to maintain change.

Chellis (1992) suggests that an empowering example is "someone whose triumph over particular circumstances is potent enough to cause a transformation in another person. Often this transformation begins when victims give hope, perhaps for the first time, and believe that they too might change" (p. 20).

Chellis contends that a major strategy for women in society today is to gain mastery over the process of empowerment. She upholds that the self-empowerment stages guide the process of change and are significant while overcoming adversity.

Chellis declares that the survivors possess the desire to share with others--their triumph over trauma. However, reaching out to others involves sharing their stories of overcoming adversity. Sharing connotes a commitment to others and sustaining power over victories.

Summary of Transformative Learning Strategies: Turning Stumbling Blocks Into Stepping Stones

The history of family life among African American people is most often viewed as a history of struggles through obstacles and hardships. The literature suggests diversity among the transformative learning constructs, strategies, and processes in which African American women have moved beyond adversity. Move over, the patterns for achieving success are as diverse for women as are their experiences.

Past scholarship is replete with vivid recollections of the trials and tribulations of African American women. Conversely, research abounds with endurance strategies as scholars are turning their attention to individuals and processes of overcoming obstacles, embracing the notion that more African Americans are "turning stumbling blocks into stepping stone" (Billingsley, 1992). Billingsley's premise is that within many families, there is an individual who has endured the barriers of life. Often gone unnoticed, they have turned these barriers into stepping stones that enhance their sense of self and the well-being of their family. Consequently, individual's are able to move from mere survival to higher levels of

achievement and status. As recent research seems to indicate, patterns of surviving in the midst of adversity involve processes of empowerment, habits of survival, self-esteem, self-empowerment, and self-will.

According to Billingsley (1992), obstacles exist throughout the social structure. This review of the literature suggests characteristics that have helped some African American women overcome adversity and move toward more challenging and positive life experiences. The literature review provides an understanding that there are many transformative learning theories of how women defeat the odds. Some researchers (e.g., Myers, 1986; Peterson, 1992; Scott, 1991) focused on individual characteristics that have helped women survive. Empirical data from McAdoo (1988) gives evidence of background family demographics and upward socioeconomic mobility. Collectively, the research gives evidence of diversity in the transformative learning experiences, constructs, strategies, and processes in which African American women have worked through dilemmas. McAdoo's (1988) empirical study identified unique patterns of moving beyond barriers toward some aspect of achievement. Peterson (1992) revealed the theme of self-will and its central components of power, self-determination, and belief in freedom that have helped great women of the past and present move beyond adversity.

Chellis (1991) revealed the receiving and giving aspect of personal transformation. Despite the limitation for generalizing inductive studies, three major themes emerge: a need of scholarship that listens to the voices of experience, the

transformative learning process of women, and the theme of variability.

1. The major common assumption within these works is the limited representation of the female perspective in scholarship that reflect their interests, values, and potentials. Peterson (1992) says that much of the adult learning theories developed by adult educators have been culturally specific, reflecting the values of the dominant culture. The disparity in these theories and patterns of practices in education is that they do not serve all adults who attend educational programs. Furthermore, the issue that the theories-in-use is really culturally specific, is seldom addressed. As Peterson and other theorists (e.g., Caffarella, 1992; Hooks, 1992) concur that generating cultural specific theories is necessary to develop additional theory that will address the marginalized populations. The literature suggests a need to have certain levels of various characteristics such as will, and self esteem. It also reveals that the patterns for achieving success are as diverse for women as are their experiences (Chellis, 1992).

2. A second important theme is the transformative learning process is the way in which these obstacles are confronted and overcome. Linked to this process is the way African American women value themselves and receive emotional support from significant others. Evidence shows that there is sustaining power in interpersonal relationships and their role in influencing self esteem and self-empowerment.

3. Finally, a theme of variability emerged from the research. Recognition of alternate choices is seen as the way to overcome adversity and the strongest choice

is, believing in the strength of your own self will as a means to triumph over adversity.

A Transformative Learning Process

Some researchers (e.g., Hooks, 1992; Hull, 1982; Kreisburg, 1992; O'Barr & Wyer, 1992) have recommended that to provide a broader perspective into the insights of women's experiences, a critical perspective should be employed. It should consider the social and economic dynamics in both their personal and professional lives that play a part in their upward mobility. These philosophical ideas have been espoused by theorists (e.g., Caffarella, 1992; Hooks, 1992) who seek ways to help the adult learner develop more critical and reflective ways of thinking. Hooks (1992) believes that we all have the abilities to be reflective thinkers and she charges that when we do not reflect on our tacit understandings, we limit ourselves to adapting to other actions that can accommodate our feelings.

One way of understanding how people are able to make sense out of their world is through interpretation. This brings us to a conceptual model of transformative learning. Group Collaborative Inquiry (1994) defines transformative learning as an:

> Ongoing process that brings individuals to an understanding of the world as permutable and without boundaries . . . An understanding comes from transformations . . . Transformations are defined as the progressive liberation

from the limitations of the constructs we have come to use in order to make sense of the world (p. 171).

Mezirow (1990) defines it as: "The process of learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow for a more inclusive discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experience" (p. xvi). Mezirow's model of perspective transformation is a transformative learning reflective model.

Used in this study as a conceptual guide, the researcher's rationale for selecting Mezirow's model lies in the fact that it provides a concise framework for analysis of the data in this study. Mezirow's (1990) contribution to adult education helps broaden our perspective about learning. His concept of perspective transformation (a critical paradigm) is a unique domain to learning when an individual begins to challenge the orthodoxies. Mezirow (1990) asserts that part of the domain of adult learning involves questioning those cultural assumptions about those fundamental relationships and institutions inculcated in us.

Mezirow (1990) asserts that the process of critical reflection triggers transformative learning and the primary function of this adult learning process is "validating what is known" (p.18). Through critical reflection, individuals can begin to examine how they have inculcated these unquestioned norms and begin to challenge these assumptions. He maintains that, not having to accept the dominant way, people will begin to envision how their life can be different. As Mezirow

states, meaning schemes, and meaning perspectives that are not congruent with existing beliefs become transformed.

The perspective transformation model is considered by some to be comprehensive, idealized, and universal with respect to generic structures, elements, and processes of adult learning (Mezirow, 1994). It assumes that an individual's transforming experiences undergo a series of eleven phases from an individual perspective. It is this very assumption that has drawn criticism from adult educators.

Tennant (1994) is aware of the acknowledgment that Mezirow has received for his contribution to the social dimension aspect of adult learning. However, Tennant argues that the process of perspective transformation does not address the social dimension of adult learning. Tennant suggests that the theory always involve critical reflection and the focus is on the individual aspect of transformative learning and adult development that involves self-reflection. Little importance is given to the social aspect of adult learning whereas Tennant believes the social dimension to be an important aspect to adult learning. In addition, he posits that there is a distinct difference between meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Mezirow's model of transformative learning always implies critical reflection. The difference lies in what is considered normative stages (expected stages) of development and development that implies a developmental shift.

Mezirow (1990) understands the diversity of views on the individual and social dimensions of adult education. However, he sees the process as progressive

beginning with the individual perspective. He upholds the belief that the individual perspective transformation process must begin first. Taking some type of action is expected and according to Mezirow, after a change in one's self-perspective, it may come as social action. He advances that at some point, political action could occur.

This process of perspective transformation gives affirmation to strategies proven effective in building character besides providing an understanding of the educative behavior of the study participants. Mezirow's model of the perspective transformation proposes that people begin to move away from their uncritical non-reflective view of the world toward one with more meaning. In becoming self-reflective, the person will invariably become aware of other alternatives. The model is being used as a conceptual framework to guide the inquiry in understanding the transformative learning of African American women who, despite their lower status backgrounds have moved beyond adversity to experience upward mobility. The phases of a perspective transformation are:

A disorienting dilemma. An experience, situation, event, insight or other dilemma that does not support existing beliefs and behaviors.

Self-examination. Self-examination causes a person to have feelings of guilt or shame. May turn to religion for support because of the inconsistency in ways they have been doing things to what their true feelings are today.

Assesses Assumptions. Critically reflects on past beliefs and behaviors. Causes

that person to begin to question ingrained beliefs and how certain beliefs and ways of doing became.

Awareness of Discontent. The individual begins to recognize and understand the reasons why by sharing feelings with others and realizing that they have experienced similar feelings when faced with a dilemma. The individual comes to an understanding that the process of transformation is shared and others have negotiated a similar change.

Exploration. Individual begins to look for alternate choices, options for new roles, relationships, and actions.

Action. Individual plans a course of action.

Implement Plans. The individual begins to discard old beliefs and replace with new ones, the individual acquires knowledge and skills for implementing plans that are consistent with present beliefs and behaviors.

Acquiring New Roles. The individual provisionally tries out new roles

Renegotiating. Mediate relationships and negotiates for new roles.

Self Confidence. Process of renegotiating continues until a more comfortable fit is found. This is a process of building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

Reintegrations. A reintegration into one's life based on conditions dictated by one's new perspective (Mezirow, 1994).

The intent of this study is to gain an understanding of the transformative learning of upwardly mobile African American women from lower class backgrounds. Through a process of critical reflection on past histories, it is the researcher's intent to facilitate a discourse in an attempt to extract transformative learning that reflects the participants in this study and their ability to move beyond adversity.

As suggested by Hooks (1992), African Americans should collectively study their experiences from a feminist perspective. This process would facilitate the closing of gaps in a structure that, has not promoted democracy. By "hearing the voices" of other women, the events in their lives and their place in the world, an individual can gain insight into how they can learn from the ordinary, and their everyday experiences. It is these voices and their experienced realities that educate.

Summary

African American women share experiences of adversity with all women. However, the double burden of race and gender additionally oppresses and excludes African American women, thus contributing to existing discriminatory barriers. For many, this double burden is overwhelming, and expectations to move forward grow bleak. Yet, there are those who have moved beyond barriers to greater social and economic mobility. Overall, the focus has been transforming life in order to move beyond adversity and experience some degree of success. Overcoming adversity

and succeeding has been illustrated in many forms of the literature, from habits of survival (Scott, 1991); developing positive self-esteem (Boyd, 1993; Myers, 1980), self-will (Peterson, 1992) and transformative learning through a process of self-empowerment (Chellis, 1992), among others. Transformative learning themes continue to evolve and one of the more common themes that resonate throughout the transformative learning process is the ability to choose. Choice gives women alternative ways of moving beyond obstacles. This study will extend our understanding of African American women and socioeconomic mobility by examining the experiences that they encountered that were specific to their transformation experience. Thus the focus is on ascertaining a better understanding of the transformative learning of African American women and the learning process through which this change from poverty status to upward socioeconomic mobility occurs. The goal is to permit the voices of these women to be heard as clearly as possible, while simultaneously seeking to identify and explore common themes and patterns in the transformation process. Thus, Chapter IV and V will include long excerpts from interviews to maintain the uniqueness and integrity of individual responses while simultaneously identifying patterns and theoretical implications of their words and experiences.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

Introduction

The first part of the method section introduces the purpose for the study, primary goal of the study, poses research questions, introduces the design method used to answer the questions, the unit of analysis, and the conceptual framework that guides the study. The second section will address: data collection, sample size, sample demographic and background data, data analysis, validity issues, and limitations of the study.

Research Design

Purpose of the Study

At the time of this study, my decision to pursue research along the parameters established was based upon the limited research on the transformative learning process upwardly mobile African American women from childhood backgrounds of diverse poverty levels. In addition, I wanted to know more about this group of selected women who I perceived to typify by own socio-historical childhood background and present socioeconomic position. The goal was to understand better how this selected group of African American women overcame adversity. Thus, interviewing upwardly mobile African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds presented a unique opportunity to gain knowledge from their individual perspectives. They could shed light on childhood factors that were considered important in their transition out of various

degrees of poverty and into significant levels of increased socioeconomic mobility. This would provide insight into the transformative learning they engaged to achieve mobility despite inherent limitations.

Before embarking on the study, my assumptions involved particular attributes such as locus of control and leadership skills. However, with four decades of experience as an African American female and limited research addressing the questions raised in this study, I was compelled to look deeper. Experiencing the standard of living that defined the background criteria for the selection of African American participants in this study, I felt that concentrating upon attributes would be limiting. That is, it would not provide the understanding of the upward mobility process of transforming the participant's lives for future opportunities. In other words, how did these women transform their lives to experience upward mobility? The purpose of this study was not to test hypotheses but to discover and explore significant experiences, events, or situations that caused the study participants to want to change their circumstances in life. Essentially, I sought an understanding of what was given or experienced by study participants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that inspired them to achieve mobility beyond the limited boundaries of their childhood existence.

Research Questions

Since the nature of this inquiry requires an exploration of subjective perspectives, the following research questions were used to guide this study.

1. How has a selected group of African American women from lower socioeconomic

backgrounds been able to break the particular poverty cycle that their parents endured to become upwardly mobile achievers?

2. What transformative learning process did they employ to overcome specific obstacles in order to attain a higher level of socioeconomic mobility?

3. To what extent are the steps of perspective transformation descriptive of the process as experienced by the African American women in this study?

Design of the Study

As I discovered in the review of the literature, there were already resources written by people focusing on the attributes of African American women (e.g., Billingsley, 1992; Boyd, 1993; DeJarnette, 1992; Giovanni, 1994; Hooks, 1992; James & Farmer, 1992; Peterson, 1992; Scott, 1991) as key variables in overcoming barriers. I was interested in knowing what was given or experienced in their earlier life that influenced the direction of their lives. Therefore, I needed a design that would not be limiting in providing a deeper understanding of these upwardly mobile African American women and their transformative experiences. Upon reflection, allowing the transformative learning process to emerge from the data showed more promise of illuminating the early life stories of these upwardly mobile African American women and of making a contribution to research.

In my opinion, an approach outside of letting the design emerge would place limitations on the inquiry. For example, if I based my inquiry solely on attributes, insight into the lives of the participants may be limited as to the information I sought and the responses they gave. Allowing the dialogue to flow based upon their perceived life

experiences would provide a more holistic picture. With qualitative research, the basic assumption is that subjective experiences of individuals are of more benefit in an in-depth study than objective facts (Merriam, 1988). An understanding of the obstacles that the participants in the study have overcome draws attention to their insights, discoveries, and interpretations.

The qualitative method used in this study is the case study approach, an intensive descriptive analysis of a phenomenon or unit. The case study method focuses on a single entity and it serves to "reveal the properties of the class" that are being investigated (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p.371). This study was not designed to test hypotheses but to discover and explore factors, which are significant, and to provide new ground on which future research can be done. In this study, I seek to understand the transformative learning of African American women who, despite their lower class origins, transcended the negative social and economic forces inherent in their backgrounds, thus moving beyond the socioeconomic status of their parents. My intent was to describe and analyze those early life experiences and the process of transformative learning that were common among upwardly mobile African American women in this study.

Focusing on their transforming experiences supports the notion as suggested in Merriam (1988) that by concentrating on a single phenomenon rather than testing a hypothesis, a more holistic description and explanatory interpretation in context can be unveiled. According to researchers (e.g., Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984), qualitative case study inquiry is an effective means of educational evaluation because it

explains from an inductive nature, meaningful links and patterns in real-life interventions that are absent from survey and experimental research. Multiple case studies allow the investigator to build a general explanation from the discovery of meanings and patterns unique to each individual case, increasing the understanding of how variations in life experiences can affect emerging theory. A quantitative approach is concerned with facts, predictions and causal factors. These do not take into account, the subjective nature of the study participants of interest.

In this research, the case study method captures variations within three major aspects of the participants' childhood experiences. These experiences include the extent to which the sustaining influences and experiences of the participants early childhood upbringing, education and early work experiences influenced them to break the boundaries of the poverty cycle experienced by previous earlier generations. The rationale for focusing on their early life experiences was based upon the belief that an early life upbringing is a determining factor in influencing who and what a person becomes in adulthood. The influences in these areas account for their expressed autobiographies.

Conceptual Framework

Besides the early life categories, the conceptual framework for this study was guided by Mezirow's (1990) Perspective Transformation Model. The model served as a guide and it allowed me to focus the interviews within a transformative learning process. In the event that participants disclosed information that required more descriptive data, the phases of Mezirow's model were used as a guide to solicit a more detailed response from

the participant. It was not the my intent to follow the Mezirow's model sequentially.

The process of probing for more detailed information was used for the three main areas of focus. It was beneficial in eliminating hundreds of codes that could have been identified if the interview had not honed in on relevant aspects of the participant's life stories. Therefore, the coding process was simplified into meaningful early discovered codes, patterns, and categories. As a result, it limited my exposure during the coding process to broad categories of information that could have otherwise become unmanageable.

Given the nature of this study, using a multiple case study research design was appropriate. A quantitative design would not capture the intricate aspects of the experiences, events, and influences that motivated the African American participants to achieve upward mobility. In addition, case studies are not designed to generalize to a population. Researchers suggest (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Yin, 1989) that this design is useful to the development of theoretical propositions.

Data Collection Techniques

The methods employed to collect the data involved the following techniques: Telephone screening and preliminary interview protocol, the unit of analysis, sample selection process, in-depth personal interviews and observations, a background and demographic survey questionnaire, and follow-up telephone interviews for additional data and clarification of data.

Preliminary Screening Process

Conducting a preliminary telephone screening process and addressing interview protocol focused on the following aspects of my inquiry and data collection:

1. Participant Informed Consent Form. This form explained the rights and role of the participant, identified the researcher and the intent of the study. Signatures were required of all participants;

2. Agreement of Confidentiality Statement. This form assures protection of the participant's identity by using pseudonyms as ethical concerns are likely to arise during the interview process. It is important that I am aware of the need to protect the identity of the participant and maintain an ethical standard of confidentiality;

3. Demographic Survey Instrument. Solicited background and demographic criteria guidelines from participants;

4. Telephone Protocol. Logistics of availability; number of interviews; length of time for each interview required; location, place, and time of the interviews; and the nature of the interview process and the format of interview questions were given, in addition to addressing other concerns of the participant involving the study.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for this study was the African American woman. Each woman was recruited from referrals and through my own contacts. Basic criteria were established that served as a guide in the selection process. According to Boyd (1993), many women have never had the opportunity to explore their total uniqueness of strengths and untapped

potential, thereby making it difficult for them to express how they feel and think of themselves. These potential participants were screened for eligibility and willingness to participate.

Selection Process: Criteria and Sample

The women in this study were from demographic backgrounds of lower socioeconomic status who, despite adversity, were able to transform their lives by breaking the poverty cycle they experienced during their youth.

I deliberately chose participants that fit the criteria established in this study. One study participant took two months before she decided to participate. It took lunches, and informal "girl talk" sessions before she consented. She explained that although she met the guidelines, she expressed the need to get to know me first. Aeisha had to feel a certain level of trust before she could reflect upon her life.

In this study, the level of trust an interviewee felt influenced the depth of sharing the participants engaged in. I felt that to be true of six of the eight participants. During their interviews, I perceived a level of comfort, openness, and honesty that were not significantly present in two referrals. The two women were referred to me after hearing about the study. Upon meeting the criteria and consenting to be a participant in the study, we did not meet again until the scheduled interview. Therefore, we did not get to know each other and I perceived these women to be very guarded as to the type of information they share. In the future, when conducting this type of study, I would prefer to have a "get-to-know-you meeting over lunch" with the study participant prior to audio taping the first in-

depth interview. It is my opinion that time spent together prior to the taping could eliminate or break down barriers that may have the potential to undermine the validity of the information being shared.

Acceptance of the study participants was predicated upon African American women meeting the established criteria, in addition to, availability, resources, and time. The sample selected as qualified participants included these professional categories: five governments, one private industry, and two business owners. Realizing the uniqueness of each participant's life experience, it was my intent to identify their common threads.

Selection Criteria.

The general rule in grounded theory is to continue the interview process until theoretical saturation occurs in each category (Glaser, 1978). Initially, a pool of twelve African American females were identified through referrals or my personal contacts, who met the required criteria for the study. The basic criteria were established for the screening and selection process pertained to African American women who met the operationalized definition of upward social mobility. In addition to being an African American woman, the participants had to experience growing up in a lower socioeconomic environment. I did not control for single parent and intact family structures nor married women, single and divorced women.

Purposive Sampling Process

In qualitative research, general guidelines do not exist as to the sample size. The general rule of grounded theory is to continue sampling until no new data emerges or

theoretical saturation of each category is reached (Glaser, 1967). Until no new relevant data emerges, the exact number of participants cannot be determined. I decided to select eight African American women as participants in the initial sample, with the realization that the number could be higher or lower than what I had defined.

Unlike quantitative research where probability sampling is more applicable, a purposeful sample is more supportive of a qualitative paradigm. The focus is not on the representativeness of the study, but on the assumption of understanding and gaining insights. Purposive sampling requires that the investigator establish the criteria, bases, and the necessary standards to justify subjects being included in an investigation (Merriam, 1988). The sample size in qualitative methodology and the selection of study participants was based on the insights and richness of information this study sought. This study sought a better understanding of the early life experiences of African American women and the transformative learning process that contributed to their ability to overcome the poverty cycle of their parents in order to experience upward mobility.

In-depth Personal Interviews

The process of preparing the interview began with preselected open-ended questions to get the dialogue flowing. As participants reflected upon their experiences, new questions were asked based upon their responses. These questions were unique to the participant at the time of the interview and not structured to be asked chronologically in each individual case study interview. Most often, it was only necessary for me to give an opening question and the participant could begin and continue her story through her

early childhood years, early education experiences, and early work experiences. For each case study, the interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis. Therefore, the guide merely served as a basic checklist during the interview process to ensure the interviewees captured the relevant aspects of their early life experiences and influences. I learned early in the first interview not to interrupt the flow of the participant's story, particularly after I was told, by a participant, "I knew you were going to ask that question. But let me finish, don't interrupt." Except clarification and in-depth explanations of what I perceived to be key a reflection of interpreted experiences, I kept a low profile during the recollection of the participant's early life experiences.

The advantages of interviewing in this study were as followed: (a) I had control of the process with respect to asking questions, and I could probe for further details and ask new questions when discrepancies, clarification, or new emerging themes dictated additional probing; (b) questions varied from participant to participant according to their life experiences and the themes that were emerging during the interview process; (c) and participants were free to respond to the questions without limitations. As suggested by Merriam (1988), the asking of questions, probing for details, and looking for common categories and themes is the basic procedure by which coding is accomplished. The interview was followed by transcribing, coding, and analyzing the data for emerging themes and patterns using an Ethnograph computer software package for qualitative research.

Follow-up Telephone Interviews

After transcribing the data, converting it to the Ethnograph computer software package, numbering the data and printing it out, I read the numbered transcripts several times before beginning the code mapping process manually. I inserted by hand written observation notes taken during the in-depth interview and after reading the data, began the open coding process. I discovered many codes and after deciding which codes were useful to this study, I could sort them into modified comprehensive themes, patterns, and categories. Follow-up interviews became necessary for all the participants in gaining a full understanding of their experiences. The primary focal points for the second interview consisted of: obtaining more information concerning emerging theories perceived to be useful; clarifying previously recorded interview data that showed some discrepancies, and adding additional information that the participant recalled after the completion of the in-depth interview that could be essential to the process of capturing a holistic view of their transformative learning process.

The second interview(s) took place over the phone. During that process, I listened carefully and typed responses and new information into the computer. In conducting an interview over the telephone, I found that it did not allow me to observe the facial and body expressions of the respondents. I typed responses to the questions I had prepared prior to the follow-up telephone calls. In addition, I typed new information into the computer. Participants were aware that I was transcribing the telephone interview at the time of the call. During one conversation I was told, "I know you are taking all this

down, so I'll slow up for you." Telephone interviews lasted an average of twenty to thirty-five minutes. The telephone interview was beneficial in that it provided the participant time to reflect upon the process. Most of the participants had more information to add to the previous data and there was a need to clear up some parts of the transcript that they did not detail. All material obtained during this process was combined with the previous data for a complete analysis of the data.

Background and Demographic Data Survey

Prior to the taping of the interview, the participant was asked to complete a background and demographic questionnaire (see Appendix B). The participants background and a demographic questionnaire (see Table 1-Participant's Background Survey Data) solicited information about the participant's childhood family background, educational level of achievement, and career patterns. Family background included factors such as level of education for parents, occupation of parents, birth order of siblings, and the type of environments in which the participants grew up (see Table 2 - Participant's Family Demographic Survey Data). A synopsis of the data is provided below.

Profile of the Participants

There existed a similar pattern to the family history of the participants and growing up poor. Each came from lower socioeconomic segregated backgrounds and lived with parents who worked in nonprofessional service positions ranging from homemaker to domestic workers and from mechanics and drivers to sharecroppers, and in one instance,

Table 1. Participant's Background Survey Data

NAME	AGE	MARITAL STATUS	# OF OFF-SPRING	HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED	PRESENT TITLE	YEARS IN CURRENT POSITION	ANNUAL INCOME
TIFFANY	50	Single	0	MA 1973	Inspector General	8	57,000
CARLA	57	Married at 28 yrs. old	2	MA 1995	Procurement Analyst	5	85,000
DIVA	40	Married at 26 yrs. old	3	Juris Doctor	Division Coordinator	1	49,000
DIANE	45	Single	0	Post Doctorate	Research Analysis	10	59,000
AIESHA	48	Divorced (Married at 19)	1	MA 1991	Division Chief	7	62,000
YVONNE	48	Single	0	MA 1992	CEO President	< 1 (<= less then)	100,000
GERRY	42	Divorced (Married at 27)	1	MA 1978	Director of Accounting	7	80,000+ benefits
MIMI	41	Married at the age of 36	0	MA 1984	Early Childhood Educator	1.5	50,000

Table 2. Participant's Family Demographic Data

NAME OF SUBJECT	AGE OF PARENTS M	AGE OF PARENTS F	PARENTS' HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED	TYPE OF WORK OF PARENTS	LIVING AREA TYPE OF DWELLING	NUMBER OF SIBLING MS	NUMBER OF SIBLING FS	BIRTH ORDER
TIFFANY	85	D	Grade school	M-Domestic F-Store window dresser	Single Family (City dwelling)	1	2	Last
CARLA	Both parents deceased		M - HS F - HS	M- Homemaker F-Railroad	Single Family rural farm area & city dwelling	6	3	Firstborn
DIVA	63	D	Both Parents Completed High School	M - Teachers Aide F -Mechanic	Single Family (city dwelling)	2	1	Firstborn
DIANE	89	D	Both Parents Completed High School	M - Sales F-Carpenter	Single Family (city dwelling)	0	1	Lastborn
AIESHA	69	71	8th & 12th	M- Homemaker F - unknown	City Apartment public housing	2	2	4th child
YVONNE	71	D	8th & 11th	M-Cafeteria F-Trucker	City apartment than county	2	0	Firstborn
GERRY	82	D	3rd & 5th	M-Domestic F-Share cropper	Rural farm & city house	11	9	Lastborn
MIMI	61	U	8th	U	M-Domestic	Rural farm & city apartment	4	2	Firstborn

M = Mother, F = Father, U = Unknown, D = Deceased,
MS = Male Siblings, FS = Female Siblings

a carpenter was another similarity. Four of the participants' mothers were domestic workers, one mother worked in a cafeteria, and two other participants' mothers were homemakers during part of their growing up years. Another participant's mother was a teacher's aide. One participant's father worked for the railroad and another was a truck driver. Another participant remembers her father doing carpentry work and another was a mechanic. Two of the participants did not have fathers in the home and another participant's father was a sharecropper.

The educational level attained by their parents ranged from third grade to the completion of high school. Three participants' reported that both parents completed high school. Five of the participants' mothers did not complete grade school--three went as far as the eight grade, one stopped in the third and other said her mother stopped in grade school but was not sure of exact grade level. Five of the participants lived in single family homes in segregated environments and two of the five reported that their parents owned their homes. Three came from southern rural segregated areas and the remaining women grew up in city dwellings. Three lived in apartments at some point in their early years, in which two were identified as the inner city projects.

The average number of siblings in the household ranged from 1 to 20. Four of the participants were firstborn, three were the youngest and one was born in the fourth position out of five children. Two participants were in their fifties. The oldest was 57 years-old and the other was 50 years of age. Six participants were in their forties. Two

were 48 years old at the time of the interview, and the remaining were 45, 42, 41, and 40 years-old.

At the time of the interview, three of the participants reported that they were married, two were divorced, two had remained single and childless, and one married participant has remained childless by choice. Two of the participants married in their mid-twenties, one married in her mid-thirties, and the divorced participants married at the age of nineteen and twenty. Of the five who had married, three of them had one child, another had three children and another remained childless by choice. Not included in that number was an infant of one participant who died within six weeks after his birth.

All of the women earned degrees above the bachelor level. Six had received their Master's Degree, one a Juris Doctor, and another reported a total of eleven degrees including a Doctorate of Philosophy and three post doctorate degrees. Their professional attainment ranged from government leadership positions, to private industry, to entrepreneurs. Their senior level achievements in the workplace ranged from an inspector general to division chiefs, coordinators, and divisional directors, to CEO's and presidents of self-owned enterprises. At the time of the interview, the participant in a private industry was a candidate for the vice president position of her division.

The length of time in their present positions and income level varied among the participants. They could attribute this in part to the length of time in their respective positions. The range was less than one year to ten years of service. Four have been in their particular organization an average of seven to ten years, one has put in five years of

service, and three have served one and a half year and under in their respective positions.

The annual income of the participants employed in government positions ranged from 49,000 to $80,000. The participants earning $49,000 and $50,000 had been in their respective positions for one year and one and one-half year. The government participant with 10-years of service earned $59,000 and the participant with eight years of service had an annual income of $57,000. The participant reported an annual income of $85,000 with five years of government service.

In private industry, one participant's earnings at the time of this interview was reported at $80,000. The entrepreneur showed an income level of $100,000. Each participant expressed a level of satisfaction in their current professional positions and realized that they were still climbing the ladder of success. None of the participants felt they had reached their maximum level of mobility and were optimistic about their futures.

Data Analysis

Introduction

The goal of this study was to examine the experiences of selected African American women who, despite their lower socioeconomic origins have transcended negative socioeconomic forces to achieve increasing levels of upward mobility. The aim of the data analysis was the identification of patterns and themes that existed in the data for each participant as they revealed their life stories in three areas: early childhood upbringing, education, and work experience. Inductive analysis was the essential process

of generating theory, emphasizing the link between the development of theory from the examination of the data. Theory development was gleaned from the analysis of the narratives. Before the narratives could be constructed for analysis, transcribing, coding, and categorizing the data from the transcripts had to be completed. The data analysis process is discussed below.

Transcribing the Audiotapes. The interviews took place at Northern Virginia Graduate Center of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and in the participants' home and my home office. The participant chose each location. At the Graduate Center, interruptions and time constraints impacted the interviewing process. This interfered with the meeting and broke the interviewer-interviewees' ability to remain focused. Interviews conducted in the home environment created a more pleasant atmosphere for conducting in-depth personal interviews, as the participants seemed to enjoy reflecting upon their experiences. Home interviews lasted an average of one to two hours longer than those conducted in the college setting.

The interviews were conducted between the months of March 1995 and August 1995. A three-hour block of time was set aside for the taped recorded interview. However, this time extended as much as five hours, primarily because once the process began, the interview continued until the participant or interviewer became satiated. Additional time was spent during and after the taping in which I recorded observations of the participant's reaction and additional information (not recorded during the taping). Often, substantive detailed information was obtained after the taping stopped as

participants continued to recall in more specific detail significant events, experiences, and activities from their early life histories. Many key points were expressed and mental notes were taken and added to the data. Some unrecorded dialogue was information that some participants felt uncomfortable in discussing while being recorded. I reassured the participants of the signed contractual agreement and my ethical responsibility to protect their identity and confidentiality.

Prior to the recording of the interviews, all the women were given a general direction of the three basic areas of focus for the taped interview. Descriptive in-depth explanations were encouraged and I probed for more detailed responses at appropriate times. I made a conscientious effort to refrain from interjecting my own perspective in order to eliminate the possibility of suggesting to the interviewee approval or disapproval of their beliefs, behaviors, experiences, and opinions.

Each interview was conducted and analyzed before undertaking another case study. The data were transcribed, labeled with major codes and themes, during a thorough analysis of the transcripts before conducting each remaining interview. Following the completion of each in-depth interview, professional transcribers were used to transcribe data. Before transcribing the data, each typist signed a confidentiality statement (see Appendix A- Research Assistant's Agreement of Confidentiality) to comply with the anonymity agreement. A total of for and one-half interviews were transcribed by typists using a word processing package. After they transcribed and returned each document, the data was read throughly before converting the document to a usable Ethnograph

computer software form. After the second interview, I took over the transcribing process as I later found that it would be economically and personally beneficial to transcribe the data. I spent too much time trying to piece together missing words that may have been unclear on the audiotapes to someone who wasn't familiar with or part of the data collection process. In addition, I found that my involvement in the transcribing process put me much closer to the data while converting it from the audiotapes into a word processor software package. It also gave me a keener insight and depth of understanding that guided me in the coding process of selecting, focusing, and simplifying the data.

Ethnograph and Coding the Data. The Ethnograph computer software program was used and I coded, modified, and sorted data into analytical categories. At times, I found this process to be annoying and ponderous, as I often approached the process by hand coding the data on paper, followed by typing it into the Ethnograph computer software. Usually, I found myself preferring manual labor--the pencil and scissor technique of coding and categorizing data, that was then put in a table form. Reducing headings to codes would often lose meaning and at times, deciphering codes became a problem. Thus the most effective way for me to condense the data into themes and patterns and analyze it was to present it in chart form.

Follow-up Interview and Reading of the Transcripts. After reading through the transcripts, choices were made about which data to code, summarize, and analyze for emerging themes and patterns (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Unlike receiving the data with parts of the interview missing due to inaudible words, I could make follow-up calls to the

participants for clarification of data and to resolve inconsistencies while I was transcribing each individual's interview. When reporting the data, identifiable features, such as organizations, schools, and names were omitted. The participants were given a copy of their interview data after the typist transcribed it and follow-up calls were made for additional information. Findings were not made available to the participants.

Data Reduction and Identifying Themes and Patterns. The purpose of the qualitative data analysis was to identify, code, and interpret the data. To do so, I had to identify major patterns and themes that I could extract from verbatim transcribed interviews. During the interview, the participants were asked to recall experiences from three areas of their early life history: childhood upbringing, early educational experience, and early work experience. This allowed me to extract data that reflected significant others, activities, and experiences in their lives that they perceived to have beared on their upward mobility achievement.

While analyzing and interpreting the data, I found that creating categories required an intensely intimate conversation between myself and the data. I was living their stories repeatedly in my mind. The coding process began using the codes developed in the first in-depth interview as a guide for subsequent interviews. This included data from the family, school, church, workplace, and other community environments. Initial codes were: (a) socialization, (b) self identity, (c) traumatic experiences, (d) barriers (e) survival strategies, and (f) career aspirations (see Table 3 - Initial Code Names and Abbreviations).

Table 3. Initial Constructs and Abbreviations

Codes	Names
SOC.	**Socialization**
SOC.C	Childhood Socialization
SOC.E	Environment
SOC.CR	Cultural Resources
SOC.LR	Learning Resources
SOC.SS	Support System
SOC.FE	Family Expectations
SOC.LTS	Life tools
SOC.FV	Family Values
SOC.NEX	Negative Experiences
SOC.PEX	Positive Experiences
SOC.SP	Spiritual
SOC.ED	Education
SOC.INF	Information
SOC.WE	Work Ethics
SOC.OPP	Opportunities
SOC.SA	Social Activities
SOC.L	Lineage
SID	**Self Identity**
SID.C	Characteristics
SID.P	Profession
SID.MS	Marital Status
SID.R	Race
SID.S	Sex
TE	**Traumatic Experiences**
TE.M	Medical
TE.S	Surgical
TE.P	Painful
TE.DLO	Death of loved one
TE.D	Discrimination
TE.LO	Lack of Opportunity
TE.RM	Racism
TE.M	Molestation
TE.AB	Abandonment
TE.W	Welfare
BAR	**Barriers**
BAR.C	Communication
BAR.A	Awareness
BAR.WP	Workplace Environment
BAR.OS	Organizational Structure
BAR.E	Education
BAR.P	Professional
BAR.R	Racism
BAR.S	Sexism
BAR.LS	Lack of Support
SS	**Survival Strategies**
SS.PK	Prior Knowledge
SS.S	Symptoms
SS.SSY	Support System
SS.SAS	Self-Assessment
SS.R	Resources
SS.AC	Alternative Choices
SS.R	Religious
SS.C	Confrontation
SS.WD	Withdrawal
SS.FO	Focus on Others
SS.CON	Consequences
SS.SAC	Sacrifice
SS.BE	Benefits
SS.CC	Career Change
SS.PSD	Problem Solving

The codes were modified during the analysis of ensuing interviews for umbrella themes. These were the codes that were most descriptive of the participant's childhood upbringing and Table 4 - Modified Code Names and Abbreviations).

Member Checking and Data Verification. In order to develop codes appropriate from the data collected, I repeatedly read the transcripts repeatedly again. The transcripts of each participant, reflective memos, observation notes and member checking were all part of the coding and analytical process. As a means of systematically organizing the data from the transcribed interview document, I followed what Glaser and Strauss (1967) identify as a comparative method of analysis. This process required naming each event, issue and occurrence to compare for similarities or differences with subsequent data, and developing appropriate codes and categories for conceptualizing the data from the transcripts.

Data were coded throughout the collection process. As new information emerged the codes were modified. The first process involved open coding. As stated above, data were named and placed in a variety of categories through the process of open coding. This task of open coding could be accomplished in several ways: word-for-word, sentence-by-sentence, or by each paragraph. Upon first attempt, the data was coded sentence by sentence. Using these multiple sources of data, I initially hand wrote codes perceived to reflect each individual account of their life story. Initial categories were identified through the sorting of the sentence codes and from parts of Mezirow's Model.

Table 4. Modified Code Names and Abbreviations

Code	Name
GROW	**Growing Up**
GROW.PE	Family Expectations
GROW.FV	Family Values
GROW.I	Family Insights
GROW.E	Education
GROW.R.	Religion
GROW.WE	Work Ethics
GROW.CD	Diverse Environment
GROW.SP	Exposed to Successful People
GROW.SE	Segregated Environment
GROW.	Nurturing
INDIV	**Individual Attributes**
INDIV.SC	Self Concept
INDIV.V	Values
INDIV.B	Behaviors
INDIV.BL	Beliefs
INDIV.LC	Locus of Control
INDIV.SG	Set Early Goals
INDIV.DG	Delayed Gratification
INDIV.ASP	Aspirations
NET	**Networks**
NET.RM	Role Models
NET.EF	Extended Family
NET.F	Family
NET.FR	Friends
NET.T	Teachers
NET.C	Community
NET.M	Mentors/Advisor
EXPER	**Experiences**
EXPER.P	Positive
EXPER.O	Opportunities
EXPER.NO	Negative Role Models
EXPER.D	Discriminating
EXPER.G	Gender Biases
EXPER.R	Race Based Biases
EXPER.A	Abuse
EXPER.W	Welfare
EXPER.LS	Lack of Support
PROC	**Transformative Learning Process**
PROC.FP	Family Preparation
PROC.SAC	Sacrifices
PROC.SB	Setbacks
PROC.SR	Self-Reflection
PROC.C	Consequences
PROC.O	Opportunities
PROC.W	Withdrawal
PROC.CF	Confrontation
PROC.FO	Focus on Others
PROC.CC	Career Change
PROC.AC	Alternate Choices

Being overwhelmed by the enormous amount of codes under each category, transcripts were re-coded following the paragraph coding format.

Data were coded throughout the data collection process. The combined multiple sources of data from the open coding were renamed and placed under variety of categories through the process of axial coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), axial coding is a process that allows open coded data to be dismantled and put back together in newly defined ways by making connections between the categories. Some codes and words were taken directly from the transcripts while others reflected my own vernaculars. A list of all the labels was then constructed using a word processing computer software package. The next step was to find general categories that would house related codes under one umbrella. In order to develop these categories that were unique to the research questions and each participant, I reexamined each coded transcript and extracted categories that most appropriately housed the represented codes. All codes reflecting one another were grouped together. This was done to further synthesize the data into meaningful interpretation, in addition to, increasing my understanding of the experiences of these successful African American women.

Another important aspect of the coding process is the identification of theoretical interpretations from the variety of data sources used in this study. The emergence of themes and theories was a sign of increased in-depth interpretation and insight into the data. Moreover, it was key to the final analysis and of the document and is defined by

Strauss and Corbin (1990) as a process of data analysis by which the researcher is moving toward theoretical sensitivity. It is identified as a key attribute of having insight into inductive analysis with the capacity to understand, give meaning to the relevant data gathered in the collection process. This was a weeding out process given that I could extract the most relevant data related to the purposes of the study. In this study, theoretical sensitivity allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the transformation learning process of the study participants.

Descriptive Narratives. Through repeated readings of the transcripts, I narrowed the data into more descriptive headings that allowed me to submerge data from paragraphs under a more inclusive heading. Examples of some categories were: Value-laden upbringing, productive self perceptions, influences from others, and significant mobility experiences. This helped organize the coded interview transcript data into descriptive narratives of the study participants early life transformative experiences.

Narratives provide a backdrop for each participant's early childhood, early school, and early work experiences. Direct quotations are used to show the participant's own syntax and diction. The long excerpts from interviews are included to maintain the uniqueness and integrity of individual's responses. At the same time, I could record and extract identifiable patterns and theoretical implications from their own words and experiences. This phase of the data reduction process involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data obtained from the initial coding of the transcripts (see Appendix E). My personal impressions and observances of their

nonverbal communications are reported in the construction of the narratives. I inserted observation notes about emotional responses and physical responses noticeable during the dialogue.

Identifying Emerging Thematic Study Propositions. During the second phase of the coding process, I wanted to capture recurring themes that were unique to each participant. To do so, statements that were profound or were recurrent in patterns and perceptions in terms of the influencing experiences and events identified by the participant were organized into study propositions or subthemes (see Appendix C - Participant's Study Propositions). These were later merged under an umbrella concept that had a broader meaning enabling me to further reduce the data. The initial propositions and themes were developed from the recurrent statements and patterns in the first in-depth interview. These were modified, by a constant comparative analysis of each individual interview. As a result, I could identify common themes from the repeated analyses of each data transcript. Verbatim statements from the transcripts, when applicable, were placed with the propositions to link and substantiate the data for similar analyses. Propositions labeled supported have been identified in the narratives and unique to that individual study participant. Potent propositions were presented for each participant. This process helped build the descriptive narrative of each individual while simultaneously bringing to the forefront, a common transforming process that led to upward mobility.

Modifying the Themes. Twenty-two common themes emerged and were analyzed in terms of the framework of the study. As a result, I had to code, recode, and sort ideas and themes that belonged under a broader category. This process was followed by identifying a category that would include related themes. As a result, four core concepts (categories or themes) were developed that parented the numerous themes that emerged from the data. I could synthesize the twenty-two study propositions (subthemes) under four major concepts and display under two core themes.

Peer Debriefing. As the analytical process was ongoing, I saw a need to seek feedback from my peers who had insight into qualitative analysis. In addition, feedback was sought from my committee chair and members, and doctoral students who periodically attended a coding study group usually conducted once a week in the early evening both prior to undertaking this research project and during the process of data collection and analysis. During the coding sessions, each participant presented their data responding to how their process of coding and analyzing had evolved. Solicited and unsolicited feedback was given during this time. The study sessions proved to be invaluable by helping me develop a deeper understanding of the inductive analysis process for the identification of emerging themes, patterns, and core concepts.

Validity Check. The ongoing process of rereading the transcripts, was purposefully intentional in that it helped to maintain the validity of the analysis of the data. Its importance lies in the fact that researchers may come into the process with preconceived ideas that can bias the way information is perceived and reported. By following these

basic procedures in collecting and analyzing the data, they reduced my personal influences to the extent that I did not restrict my findings solely to my own interpretations.

Summary of the Research Method

The design of the research placed emphasis upon: the motives, intent, and purpose of the study, the research questions, the interplay of the data collection and analysis process, the researcher's theoretical sensitivity, and the writings. The design included in-depth interviews, telephone follow-up interviews, and a demographic and background questionnaire. The in-depth interviews were conducted with eight African American females who met the criteria of the study. The interviews were recorded to capture the perceptions of the participant's early life experiences in the following areas: childhood upbringing, purposeful self perceptions, influences of others, and social mobility experiences. Questions guiding the interview were open-ended, semi-structured, and designed to get the dialogue flowing regarding the purpose of the research. Questions were presented to elicit understanding of the experiences, events, situations, and influences in the participants lives that inspired them to seek a life different from that of their youth. Open-ended questions allowed participants to respond in-depth to their life experiences that would help me understand the early life experiences as perceived by the participants. The interviews also yielded personal background and professional demographic data. Spontaneous questions arose during the interview process.

The initial three-hour interview was conducted between March 1995 and August 1995. A second follow-up interview was required of all the participants for clarification of inconsistencies, garbled transcripts, or new and in-depth information during the analysis of the data. I assured to all participants of anonymity. Each participant was sent a copy of their transcripts. Findings were not mentioned.

To avoid the questioning of critics as to the reliability, validity, and understanding of the study, I employed multiple methods of data collection and analysis. My ability to maintain objectivity was supported by using multiple perspectives. However, I clearly saw that having similar backgrounds as the study participants, placed me at an advantage in terms of understanding, analyzing, and interpreting the data from the transcripts of upwardly mobile African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

The research design involved the triangulation method, the use of diverse methods of data analysis. In-depth and follow up interviews, questionnaire, observation, peer debriefing, and member checks were the multiple sources of data used by me to confirm emerging findings. Upon collecting the data, it was coded, categorized, and compared for common patterns and themes related to the early life experiences and the transformative learning process of upwardly mobile African American women considered influential in their lives. As a result of this, I was able to identify an overarching theme inclusive of a transformative learning process. It was my intent to promote an understanding of the early life transformative learning process that

motivated the participants in this study to achieve various levels of upward socioeconomic mobility.

In Chapter IV, the narratives of each participant are written. Following the narratives, Chapter V provides an in-depth analysis of one case study to present the common themes and patterns that emerged for the data. Chapter VI will summarize the study, discuss the findings as they relate to the research questions, and provide recommendations for educators and future research.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTIVE CASE STUDY NARRATIVES

Chapter III detailed procedures that I followed in selecting participants and the manner in which I conducted the study. It also included background demographic profiles of the eight women selected. This chapter presents the descriptive case narratives of the eight study participants, the synthesized responses to the interview questions. The narratives provide a backdrop for each participant's early childhood, early school, and early work experiences. Direct quotations are used to indicate the participants own syntax and diction. This phase of the data reduction process involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw data that I obtained from the initial coding of the transcripts. A sample of a coded transcript is provided in (Appendix C - Study Themes and Propositions). This section does not include an analysis. However, I report my personal impressions and observances of their nonverbal communications.

Each narrative begins with a brief introduction into the participant present background. The introduction includes the following specific elements: a narrative title; the participant's feelings about participating in this study; a description of their demeanor and appearance; current age and occupation; and some of my own reactions during the interview.

To maintain confidentiality and anonymity, each participant is identified by a pseudonym. Minor changes or omissions have been made to the material when identifying

features of individuals and institutions are obvious, in particular, when the participant is well known to me and very private information has been revealed under the agreement of anonymity. Several participants told me they were revealing, for the first time, information that they had never disclosed. They felt comfortable in sharing, knowing that their identity would not be revealed in any manner. An in-depth analysis and interpretation of one narrative is presented in Chapter V.

Tiffany

"What a Man Is, Is in His Blood"

Tiffany, age 50, is the inspector general for a government agency. She has been working in this position for more than eight years and expressed satisfaction with her current role in the organization. When I first contacted her over the telephone for an interview and explained the focus and objective of my research, she seemed very interested and eager to participate. For about a half hour we talked about my dissertation and prior to the conversation ending, we established a date, time, and place for the interview.

In anticipation of the interview with Tiffany, I shopped for fruit and snack crackers prior to our meeting. We met in the counseling room in the Education Department at Virginia Tech's Northern Virginia Campus. She helped me in setting up snack foods and making sure the tape recorder was operating. Prior to starting the interview, students who were scheduled to use the room interrupted us. Having to relocate to a secretary's office, I decided that reserving a room to avoid any interruptions during the interview process would be equally important the next time. Before the interview began, Tiffany asked about receiving a copy of her taped interview or a transcript. I agreed to send her a copy of the interview data after it was transcribed. She was interested in becoming a part of this research and in a very articulate voice began to tell me about her early life experiences as she snacked on cheese and crackers.

Early Childhood Experiences

Tiffany grew up in a rural, segregated, yet close knit neighborhood of homeowners. According to Tiffany, her family environment was a place where her parents strongly emphasized learning-- parents who were unable or unwilling to complete high school. Recalling that neither of her parents completed high school, she stated that her mother performed domestic services for White people and her father worked as a store window dresser. According to Tiffany, it was this very type of work that her mother wanted to shield her from.

At an early age, Tiffany knew she was special. She describes her childhood as full of wonderment, love, hugs, and kisses. She felt loved by her family members and her neighbors. Being the last born of four children, both her parents and older siblings treated her favorably. However, this special treatment was only from the perspective of being the baby of the family. She recalls vividly the cultural upbringing and behavioral values instilled in all the siblings, for these were the values that were the hopes of her parents. In particular, the challenges and sacrifices her mother endured motivated her to forge a better future for her children. This made an indelible impression on Tiffany. She recalls:

> We knew that our mother was making sacrifices. Without her ever mentioning it, we knew that instinctively. However, it was bridged by her hope in the next generation, meaning us. And it was the pride that she instilled in us that we were just as good as anybody else. And that she was just as good as anybody else . . . Wherever she went in the marketplace, she was highly respected because of the

way she carried herself. And she exuded elegance and sophistication. . .What a man is, is in his blood. We are an offspring of our mother and father, who were very upright people. They were socially acceptable. They were culturally in tune. . .and they were leaders for us.

Without a doubt, Tiffany's recollections did not belie her persona. Like her mother, she too exuded elegance and sophistication. Cultural beliefs and behaviors were the weekly conversation piece in the Tiffany family--a family that she identified as full of love, hugs, and kisses. Early the values clearly instilled in Tiffany, by her Mother, were predominant in her daily actions and desire to succeed. According to her mother, not marrying, pursuing an education, and being the best you could be professionally was the "way out." In a time where tradition ruled, Tiffany did not experience the pressure of marrying and settling down to raise children. Instead, her mother strongly emphasized the importance of education for future success. In fact, Tiffany describes herself as a leader and motivator, guided by her mother's motivating instructions. For example, they instilled it in her to "leave the men alone and get an education first. . .study and get prepared. . ." Furthermore, Tiffany's strong desire to inspire and motivate others would not have allowed her to lose her focus. Coming from a strong spiritual background, Tiffany said "I would never get involved with someone on a personal basis for my own personal gain. I would never use anybody for any reason."

At a time when traditionally young women were encouraged to marry, she "didn't marry for the benefit of using some man just for my own social guarantee or to satisfy

society's norms." Although her two sisters married at an early age married, that was not part of the value system that Tiffany would let guide the course of her life's journey.

It was her mother's desire that her children should and would experience a better future without the degradations experienced by other African Americans, and what her own mother experienced as a domestic. According to Tiffany, her mother came from a lineage of domestic workers, stating:

> Her parents were domestics too--but they were highly cultured Black people of their day of the late eighteen hundreds. And her grandmother knew slavery and her mother and father did not know slavery and worked for White people. They worked for a certain class of White people and always had the kind of rapport and respect from that population that maybe most other Blacks did not have for whatever reason and I would submit to you that it was because of the way they carried themselves--they were not bowing and scraping to White people and "yes'em and nos'em" to White people. They were just normal speaking, acting people who had their backbone squarely between their shoulder blades and they addressed their segregated world in that manner.

Tiffany believed that it was a respectable way for others to interact with her parents and for her parents to treat others. She said that her parents "told us to do that."

To pave the way for that future, Tiffany, recalls her mother made sacrifices. By washing and ironing for White families she could be at home with her children to give them the cultural guidance and education she felt paramount for their future success.

Tiffany posits that this was her mother's driving force and sacrifice for her children. She did not want to see her children digging ditches, or cleaning homes. Tiffany defines her mother's life as, ". . .a life of service. . .always doing something for other people and not for money." She said that her mother imbued in her enormous commitment to the value of education and learning.

Tiffany's parents often emphasized the value of education and the importance of it could be identified through the sharing of life experiences and from her parent's perspective and what the future would hold for her if she made the right choices. The stories that her mother shared relating to her experiences in life, according to Tiffany, were, "the knowledge of things to do, not to do, and things that would be consequential because of it." Thus, despite limited education and socioeconomic status, Tiffany's mother raised her with a strong desire and appreciation for learning that stemmed from her mother's desire that education was the focal point of her future would take.

As foretold in stories, Tiffany's mother's experiences and choices in life were limiting and this is something that she did not want for her children. Coming from preceding generations of domestic workers, it became her responsibility to move Tiffany beyond the boundaries of her childhood life toward a future that would be devoid of domestic labor. It was to become the life-tool and the foundation of her social and cultural upbringing. Quite often during the interview, Tiffany emphasized her cultural upbringing and believed that this was her advantage over her neighborhood peers. Not only was the importance of education emphasized among the female offspring, Tiffany's brother was also strongly

encouraged to learn and to set his sights on higher education. Tiffany vividly recalls,

> My mother wanted us to get educated. She was a great believer in education because she knew from her upbringing that if Black women and Black men did not get an education, they couldn't make it in the White man's world of which she knew we were going to be in the thick of.

Sharing life experiences gave Tiffany greater insight into her mother's childhood experiences and reasons why parental expectations were often emphasized. Tiffany often heard her mother's life stories of many other African Americans. She recalls,

> One of the stories was the agony she suffered in seeing Black men digging down in holes with White men standing over them telling them what to do while they did no work in the heat of the day. She felt it was demeaning and immoral. . .and another form of slavery and suppression of the Black man and she hated it. She worked very hard to send $75 dollars a month to [college] so that her Black son would not be in a ditch digging with some White man standing over him and she made sure that he did that.

This story was one that Tiffany had a vivid recollection. As she reflected, she said that the hurt her mother felt was projected in the way she reminded Tiffany to go after her goals. When reflecting on the role models in her life, the most valued was Tiffany's mother. She admired her mother's strength and her ability to command respect from all people. According to Tiffany, it was the life stories spoken by her mother that laid the foundation for her and guided her path. These were the values that she upheld and carried outside the

home environment. The reinforcement was within and outside the home as the wondrous things that nature provided enlightened her.

Early Educational Experiences

Tiffany was a loner in school. She enjoyed that part of her day, walking the seventeen blocks to school, observing the wondrous nature surrounding her and making up stories as she went along her way. She characterized herself as a leader and motivator. She had a thirst for learning and was interested in all subject matters, particularly, nature. Tiffany believed the outside world symbolic of the freedom that every individual should possess. Outside, she was free to dream whatever she wanted.

In the fifth grade Tiffany experienced what she termed her "spiritual awakening." She marks this period as the birth of her "quest for learning about Catholicism." Role models for Tiffany extended beyond the family into the educational setting. Not ashamed of her background, she articulated that:

> The people that we saw in the totally Black environment would not tolerate out of us, then, what people are tolerating out of students today and lifestyles. . .it was a different world. . .a world were people we had as role models who are all Black people in an educational setting or in the halls of pedagogy that wanted us to walk uprightly and be able to fit within a society that they knew we would eventually have to fit into with dignity, and honor, and squared awareness.

Tiffany saw this as preparation for her adult life. She felt her community typified

educators (not in the literal sense) outside the school environment who took part in raising the children who would one day lead them.

Tiffany began to work at the age of fifteen, upon entering high school. Her first experience was working during her summer months in a college cafeteria and commented that she applied her best efforts. Upon graduation, she was unable to attend college due to limited finances. Like her brother who attended college, she had to work to finance her education. An option for her was the seminary and it was her experience there that plummeted her into the education arena. Entering the seminary was a preparatory to college. For that three-year period, she was exposed to other mentors who encouraged her to enter the field of education by way of substitute teaching when she was not taking courses at the seminary and was free to take on this challenge outside her own education.

Tiffany spoke of other influences in her life. She stated that these were people who made changes or caused her to want to do things. She identified them as teachers in high school, educators in the seminary, neighbors on the street who would say hello and give encouraging words as she they saw each other.

Tiffany also recognized her own inner drive and sense of purpose as an internal motivator. She was a dreamer and taking long walks alone was the perfect time for Tiffany to meditate on life. She commented in this manner:

> I walked, sung, and prayed on those long walks to school, up and down those hills, around the highways and byways. I had an inner voice within myself that

spoke with me and to me and kept me going because I knew my destiny and I still know that my destiny even to this hour has not been fulfilled.

The destiny revealed to Tiffany related to college. She stated that she knew that she would eventually attend college, although then money was lacking. It was her belief system that sustained her during, what she believed to be, temporary delays.

Tiffany posits that she never worried as her spiritual beliefs and faith governed her thoughts and actions. Directing her thoughts back to the fifth grade, she recalled a significant event, ". . .being given a little Catholic prayer book that caused an explosion of light go on in my soul, in my mind. . .marking the beginning of my quest for learning about what Catholicism was." This was not a part of her families' practice, however, Tiffany felt it was part of her destiny as she later learned that her father's grandmother had him educated at an early age in Catholic school. Thus, is supported her belief that, "Who a man is, is in his blood." Tiffany strongly believed that some innate link would determine whom a person became in life. For instance her brother is a physician and she stated that it was his fate because someone three generations down was a physician. She calls her journey a "long and arduous one, a long and inquisitive one, a long and contemplated one," unaware of how her parents would feel about her decision, since she came from strong southern Baptist roots. Nonetheless, it was a journey that she obsessively pursued.

Early Work Experiences

As previously mentioned, Tiffany began working during her high school years. An important element of her childhood upbringing was the value of work. She points out that

they taught her to work and to be responsible. She recollected her father's forty years of service and remarked:

> And my daddy drank some whiskey, but he was up Monday morning to go to work. . .never missed a day of work but once in his whole 40 years, and that was one week out with a cold. He never missed work. And he drank. He gambled. He taught us how to gamble. He taught us how to drink. He taught us how to survive.

Tiffany believed that her father's inability to cope with life such as it was, was best handled through drinking. It was his relief and despite the drinking and gambling, he was still functioning in the family as head of the household. According to Tiffany, she inherited his strong work ethics and she recognizes it to this day.

Tiffany endured a pattern of adapting in the workplace for twelve years, from substitute teaching to working in various private industries and in the military. The various positions she held did not bring her the satisfaction that she needed. Until Tiffany secured a position at her present organization, these previous occupational experiences after high school and college varied at a level below her aspirations. Whether impaired by an illness, or faced with constraints or barriers, her satisfaction in what she was doing did not come until her later years. Not even in the military, as she was confronted with barriers that she felt were too threatening to her life. Consequently, she experienced a traumatic separation from a career that she felt she was destined to retire in. After that separation, Tiffany experienced temporary depression while trying to establish

herself professionally. She would secure a position in various organizations until opportunities within the government became available with an equitable wage. Other than teaching during her down time and between interviews, Tiffany became a car salesperson. She describes her position as satisfying because she was "giving someone something that they wanted." Later, through the encouragement of "lighthouses" (mentors) Tiffany went back to college to complete her degree. Employment opportunities began to open for Tiffany when a mentor informed her of the openings in the government. Somewhat excited she applied for various positions with skepticism. She said this about her interviewing experiences,

> I interviewed twice with this little lady who was looking to fill. Here we go again. It's a parallel here. We are looking to fill a thousand slots with minorities from all over the country. We need them to go into these jobs because we have not fulfilled our government obligation under the order of Affirmative Action for the [ABC] Company.

They offered Tiffany the position and for two months, she experienced many barriers. She said, "they did not want me and I later learned that my boss was very envious of me because of my education and military background and the way I handled myself." Tiffany further adds that her experience and exposure to gender and racial discrimination caused her to become emotionally and physically ill. Upon returning to work, she was terminated from her position. As she reflects upon that job, she stated,

> They mistreated people. I was first-line management and they did not train me.

> harassment. And belittlement--and if you were in a court of law, badgering. They were angry because they had to be forced to do something they didn't want to do, and they didn't think I was worthy of the doing. . .I was greatly penalized for what I didn't know and what I didn't quickly grasp, that the White men who had other White men to show them along the way to do. I was a woman. . .They did have double standards.

When I asked Tiffany what she did to persevere during challenges, she responded primarily by saying that she takes the focus off herself and gives her service to others. She explains:

> What I did to offset that, I just reached out to the people that were around me and motivated people. I began to motivate others, and I began to give of myself separate and apart from what they were giving to me. It's a strange paradox about some of us that when we are most suppressed and most kept back, we begin to give. We begin to give of ourselves. Black people are some of the most loving, most charitable, giving people in the world.

Tiffany's way of coping with this type of experience was to maintain her moral uprightness and never sink down to their [White males] level. She knew and spiritually believed that she would ultimately reach her goal and she patiently worked and provided service to others until better opportunities presented themselves. Tiffany later adds that, ". . .the greater satisfaction comes in knowing that I have done something special for somebody." This desire she credits to her parents whom she characterizes as service oriented, always

doing for others, and not for money. According to Tiffany, it has made her more compassionate, more understanding, and more empathic to the needs of others. It caused her to be more committed to serving others.

As the process of redressing the wrong was underway, she never failed to give her service to others. The strategy that Tiffany followed would vary, depending on the situation. Keeping a journal was one of her ways of coping with uncomfortable situations. It was something that her mother taught her as a child, to write it down when you cannot express it otherwise. She kept the journal, remained in the situation and readied herself if something else would surface. Other times she would confront the situation and face the consequences and through it all, she would not abandon her purpose in life. What she identifies the most with, are the solid ethical principles of work, education, love, and giving back to the community. She could overcome anything that life had to dish out spiritually and morally.

Right now, Tiffany has reached a position in which she "enjoys her job." The thing she enjoys the most is having a voice, power to make a difference. She said,

> I enjoy being of service to people and I'm in a service organization and in a service position. I deal with people one-on-one all day long -- various needs that I can fulfill. The position has power. So, it allows me to get into things.

Finding her place in the professional world became satisfying when she realized that she could "touch people's lives." Tiffany would not have it any other way, after all she adds, "I am a people person."

Aeisha

"Believe in Yourself"

Aeisha was anxiously waiting for me to arrive at her home to begin the interview. Having telephoned her ahead of time and arriving ten minutes past the expected time, she immediately reminded me that being punctual was one of her qualities and was important to her. Without defending my position, I concurred with her and apologized for the delay. Before my arrival, Aeisha had prepared a lunch for us. Eating gave both of us the time to begin the interview process. Prior to conducting the interview, I took time to reflect on the process and allowed her time to have any concerns entertained.

Without hesitancy, Aeisha began the interview by explaining her initial reluctance to be a participant. Not that she didn't meet the criteria, but because she found it necessary to bond with me prior to telling her life experience. It was during my prior brief visits to her office that trust had begun to develop between us. I thanked her for her honesty and as the interview unfolded, I understood her position.

Presently the division chief in a government agency, Aeisha, at the age of forty-eight stated that she had just competed her first, yet to be published novel. Coming from a background of abject poverty, transition, and unhappiness, she survived against many odds, such as mental, physical, and emotional abuse. Despite the abuse she has preserved to become very ambitious and determined to fulfill her destiny. She explains:

I feel that we come here with something unique and it doesn't matter what the

> circumstances in which we grow up, it doesn't matter who the influences may be in our lives, if that thing which we came here with is strong enough, and if we can get in touch with ourselves through quietness, through prayer, through meditation, through some belief, it will be revealed to us. That's where the determination, the belief in oneself, that's to me where it comes from.

With strong determination and an internalized belief in her ability to accomplish set goals, she believed, "that anything I wanted to do, I could do." Beyond that, she pursued life based upon her spiritual foundation believing that, "having a daily relationship with God whether I go to church every Sunday or not. . ." was part of her upward mobility process.

Early Childhood Experiences

At an early age, Aeisha recalls being given up by her mother who was experiencing a separation and subsequent divorce from her biological father. Nonetheless, being removed from the birth parents and living with someone else was not a unique experience for the siblings. Placing the children in other environments was history repeating itself since Aeisha's mother, was an orphan until the age of eighteen when she married due to an unplanned pregnancy. Her mother was "raised by White European American foster parents who taught her etiquette, manners, and how to speak very nicely," according to Aeisha.

Aeisha's older sister was given to an aunt prior to the birth of subsequent siblings. It was Aeisha's understanding that her mother's decision to give up custody of her first born was to provide better opportunities for her in life. The aunt was in a much better position

to raise Aeisha's sister. This took place prior to the birth of other the children, including Aeisha. Upon her parent's separation, Aeisha's siblings remained with their paternal grandparents.

She recalls being told that at the age of six weeks she was given to a lady to be raised. Her mother subsequently removed her from that home around three years of age as her mother sought to keep her away from her father. She had fond memories of the first foster home, feeling loved and being part of the family. The lady's older daughter and husband treated Aeisha as if she were their child. She was adored, encouraged, and given basic family values. She became their traveling companion. Aeisha really felt loved.

Things changed for Aeisha when she was removed from the home and placed under the care of another married couple with grandchildren. It was in this second foster home that life as Aeisha recalls it was like "serving time."

> I remember growing up feeling as though I was serving time, I had no idea of serving time . . . what I mean is remember I wasn't a child. I wasn't allowed to play and laugh, you know those kinds of things so it was a lot of silence for me.
>
> A lot of time of just waiting and having no idea what I was waiting for.

Aeisha tried to contain her emotion as she spoke of the life that she endured when her mother took her from her surrogate keepers. The second foster home she describes as a prison. Aeisha characterized her stay at this foster home as one with daily beatings, limited and visits by her biological mother, and emotional abuse by the lady of the house who "believed that children should be seen and not heard." She experienced this when:

fed leftovers, mistreated by the grandchildren, not given toys to play with, not being allowed to laugh or talk, and knowing that she was unwanted. It was only the love of the man of the house that gave her some comfort, often returning from work and bringing gifts to her room at night. Her happiness was in feeling that someone in the household liked her. Later in life, she realized that night visits to bring her gifts and cookies and visiting the bathroom with her was actually her "Paw's" way of sexually abusing her body. This was something that she suppressed until his death during her early years of high school.

When Aeisha's mother could secure an apartment in the projects, she gradually bought the children home. This was a gradual process. Not knowing how to raise and care for children, the siblings visited their mother on weekends and in the summer. Two older siblings remained with the mother while Aeisha had to return to her surrogate family.

Upon returning permanently to her mother during her elementary school years, Aeisha realized that she was different from her other siblings. Her mother was able to secure employment doing domestic work services, so that she could be home with her children after school. For a while, things appeared normal in her household, being reunited with her siblings and feeling for the first time that they loved her as an equal. However, not knowing how to laugh or play, she filled her early years with tears and silence as she continued to experience abuse in the home. The feeling of love was soon replaced by loneliness and a stronger desire to fit in and be loved.

Early Educational Experiences

Aeisha grew to love her siblings and felt they respected her despite her differences. She also realized, at an early age, that there would be no bonding with her mother. Her emotional side was expressed in school. School for Aeisha was a release from her home inhibitions. In elementary school, Aeisha became the talker, charmer, leader, and liar. To avoid any form of punishment, particularly beatings, she would lie, no matter the situation. Her peers become her support system and the mothers of her peers offered her guidance and encouragement. This was also true for her elementary school teachers who took an interest in Aeisha.

As for the teachers, she felt she could manipulate them as well. In elementary school Aeisha characterizes herself as:

> A social organizer in the fourth grade. I was very devilish in elementary school and it was because the teachers liked me, because they had known my sister and brother before me and they gave me a lot of breaks. I did have an extremely innocent face. By the way, I was smart. Yeah, we gotta include that too.

Aiesha was encouraged that the teachers' recognized her educational abilities. She said, "with little effort, I could be an average student and this was above that of any of her family." This encouragement and attention became a desirable part of her school life.

Things changed as Aeisha entered middle school. Transferring to a school where the students had a reputation for their deviant behavior, changed Aeisha's outgoing spirit that she developed in elementary school. Again, she became withdrawn and avoided

relationships with children that she perceived to be "bad." She bonded with peers of a spiritual nature. These were the young people who participated in church activities and carried themselves in such a manner as to be recognized for their spiritual growth. This led her to spend most of her free time in church on the weekdays, beyond Sunday services. Invariably, Aeisha began to see that she wanted to have a different life--a life unlike her mothers. She inculcated her mother's values of education, honesty, and respect for adults. However, despite these values, it was during these school years that she realized she never wanted to be like her mother, whom she characterized as "argumentive, a cusser, and provocative dresser." Thus, turning toward religion and dressing very conservatively was her way of taking charge of her own life and becoming respectable.

It was the image of Harriet, the woman of the television program Ozzie and Harriet, that she wanted to project, not the vixenish image that her mother exhibited. Upon the death of her "Paw," the man who raised her at an early age and brought her gifts, she spoke up about her molestation. She was able to voice to her mother, for the first time, that life with him was abusive. Aeisha felt no sorrow upon hearing of his death, only bitterness at knowing and recalling his betrayal of her in her most defenseless state of her being. At that point, Aeisha realized that a deeper wedge separated them.

As she entered high school, Aeisha remained withdrawn both inside and outside her family environment. The older siblings had started their life on their own, outside their mothers care. Consequently, the support and encouragement that nurtured Aeisha

dissipated. Her friends in school and social activities were limited. Home alone with her mother, she realized that,

> There were very few times where I can remember her happiness unless she was in relationships. Nevertheless, most of the time, she was either angry, cussing, or upset about something. I don't think I ever realized how much of a buffer my sister and brother had been until they were moved away from home and I was there with her.

Her mother's feelings did not change. The bonding did not take place and the mean provocative spirit of her mother prevailed, despite Aeisha's attempts to win her mother's love.

In the ninth grade, she decided to leave home when she turned eighteen. Aeisha had "no real plans other than I would get a job." One thing that she vowed to do was to complete high school. This was something that her mother wanted of her offspring, but more important, it was Aeisha's innermost desire. It was in the 12th grade that she realized that she was not properly prepared for higher education. She recalls the situation:

> College was never an option. I didn't think I could afford it. I never prepared for it. My mother, having completed the eighth grade in her life, her goals for her children were all to graduate from high school. That was a monumental achievement. Counselors, teachers, that kind of thing, there's a social economic way that people look at you. I was growing up in the projects and so consequently, counselors didn't spend or waste a lot of time with those kinds of

kids talking about college. They just let you do the best you could.

Aeisha was not financially nor academically focused to attend college and did not experience to opportunity of having a role model or counselors to give her an educational perspective as to college in preparation for a brighter future.

Having moved away from home at the age of 17, she often tried to bridge the gap and build a relationship with her mother. However, despite her efforts, her failure to win the love of her mother left her heartbroken and aware of her hatred toward her. Aeisha often wondered, "Why does she hate me so much?" and likened her mother's concern for their relationship or lack of it as an obsession that her mother enjoyed. To ease the pain of her mother's cruelty, she received the love of surrogate mothers when she was out of the home. These women bought comfort to her and tried to encourage her to take responsibility for her life. They made her feel special instead of inferior. At the age of 23, Aeisha severed the ties with her family, putting all her love into her baby daughter. She wanted to give her what she could not get from her mother. Reflecting upon her daughter's birth, she revealed that:

> When she came, it was just the most special thing that had ever happened in my life. I'm sure I didn't worry about anything. There was no concern whether or not I'd be able to raise her. I knew I was going to be different with my daughter than my mother had been. Well, for one, my daughter was going to know that I loved her and that she was very special to me.

It was this gift of life that gave her the voice to give her mother an ultimatum. She made

one last attempt to win her mother's affection. This time, the roles had changed as she placed the burden on her mother's shoulders. She left the decision up to her mother, the very person who confessed hatred for her daughter. She commented,

> I basically just gave it up. I had continued until that time and I don't recall what had happened. Nevertheless, it was a long distance phone call and we were talking. I said to her, you know all of my life I tried to get you to love me and I no longer care. You make the call. You either be my friend or you and I don't need to speak ever again in life and it was the most exhilarating and freeing feeling I have ever had in my life.

The long history of abuse ended with a telephone call. Aeisha said that this was only after many failed attempts to anchor the mother-daughter relationship she so needed. Aeisha surmised,

> Perhaps it was not the best thing I could have done because it meant that I had to give up all love for her totally. . .I lost everything [respect] for her. I no longer was going to allow her to do that to me. I just couldn't afford it any longer. If that meant never talking to her again, it was ok. What happened as a result of that though is that I've never been able to relax with her. I always had my guard up. I know that she could hurt me more than anyone. My mother made me suicidal. She made me feel worthless. She made me hate the sight of myself and I didn't want to ever give her that much power ever again.

Aeisha explains that the decision to refocus her energies on the her own responsibilities

was spiritually driven. Her responsibility ceased as she disconnected from the process of bonding that she sought all of her childhood and young adult life. She said,

> A whole lifetime exposure to church and bible reading is all there is to help us through the trying (difficult) times. We are all too often not taught how to communicate from some spiritual bases. God expects greater things from those of us who profess to understand.

Aiesha realized that her ability to get through the tough times was not something that she managed on her own. It took someone more superior and that was her God. She said she had made that decision a long time ago. It took the birth of her daughter before she was able to let it go.

Early Work Experiences

Realizing her own potential, her biggest goal was to complete high school, find a job and leave home. In pursuit of her goal, this initial period of job hunting positioned Aeisha for her first experience in discrimination. Her desire to secure a job led her to a major furniture chain store that advertised a position in the newspaper. She was the first one at the door and was told that they filled the position. She was disappointed and for the first time ever, she felt discriminated against. Aeisha perceived that:

> The only reason that they did that was because I was Black and I don't recall having any other, ever being discriminated against before. I grew up in a Black neighborhood, Black schools, whatever. That was so blatant that I knew it.

Aeisha wasn't angry, only disappointed that they would not allow her to demonstrate that

she could speak clearly, and could do the job. She felt they were denying her even the opportunity.

A second experience of racial discrimination was working in an all White corporation. With just one other Black person, she realized that she did not fit into the corporate culture. The employees did not move toward making her feel like a part of the organization. She realized that her race made her different and set apart from the rest of her co-workers. Further, marriage placed other barriers upon her such as spousal expectations. Within a short period after going to work, she went through ten jobs and it was her husband's interference that created the roadblocks. Despite these initial experiences with the workforce, Aeisha went on to secure positions in the clerical field.

After many experiences in clerical positions, being unfulfilled by its seemingly mindless structure, she became driven to seek a professional position. This became paramount to her existence following the death of her infant son and subsequent divorce from her physically abusive and alcoholic husband. She became the sole provider for her daughter and was determined to give her the best. Knowing that the odds were against her because she was lacking a college degree, she used her ingenuity to work her way up the ladder to success. Many co-workers and supervisors, particularly African American females supported her efforts. She worked hard and diligently, seizing every opportunity to work on assignments outside her clerical responsibilities. Aeisha created special projects for her respective organizations, requested and experienced job enrichment to develop her talents professionally, and often carried work home, such as special projects

assigned to her apart from her clerical responsibilities. These special efforts forged a better future for Aeisha. Employers often gave her the opportunity to grow professionally by expanding her clerical responsibilities to management level assignments. Her ability to complete any task given was remarkable and she consistently received feedback for her efforts. Aeisha doesn't credit her upward mobility to her childhood upbringing. She always knew that she would be different from her mother, not based solely upon having a high school diploma which she found limiting.

Not being able to attend college placed her at a disadvantage in competing for professional positions however, her spiritually and strength of her abilities helped her keep alive her goals. It was her perceived inner drive of control and support that she received from surrogate mothers, friends, colleagues, and superiors in the work environment that helped her persevere through the multitudes of obstacles she faced throughout her childhood and early adult life. She characterized herself as being able to influence others and promote her abilities based on her skills. Aeisha had a belief that she could obtain professional status in the work environment from her efforts and ability to recognize opportunities. She believes that these characteristics were hereditary--something that no one could give nor take away. She stated that:

> I saw it in myself in spite of my lineage because I think that there have been kids whom they have molested at three years old who stopped growing. I think that when a mother hates her child that there have been children who've stopped. I believe I came here with something that no one or nothing was going to make

me not love Aiesha, and believe that she had something. And that's what I meant and I'm going beyond parents. I'm saying that there is some universal thing that we are born with and that our parents have helped to cultivate it. They can nurture it, but it came with us is what I'm saying.

No matter what adversity came Aeisha's way, she remained committed to her goals. Her character of inner control and spiritual guidance strengthened her ability to endure obstacles. Aeisha felt that her destiny was inevitable--that it was going to happen.

Carla

"I Was Not Ashamed of Being African American"

Carla is a fifty-seven-year-old procurement analyst for a government organization. She has been in her current position for five years and now earns an annual income of $85,000. She is currently married and has two children. Carla became a participant in this study through a referral. Upon my initial conversation with her to check screening criteria, given the results, she agreed to be a participant. We set a date, time, and place before the conversation ended. We set a Saturday morning appointment at a time when both were free and interruptions would be minimal at Virginia Tech's Northern Virginia Campus. Additionally, I suggested that she dress comfortably because I scheduled it for Saturday.

The atmosphere was casual, and before the taping, we both made a visit to the Graduate Center Book Store for beverages. I thanked Carla for her participation as we began to share information about ourselves and families before the interview. Although she was assured of anonymity, I perceived this to be an important part of establishing trust. Not having the privilege to make her acquaintance prior to our session, I wanted Carla to feel comfortable. I was able to achieve this objective by giving her some insight into some of my early life experiences growing up as an African American female. Carla began the interview focusing on her home environment on the farm and her responsibilities as a child.

Early Childhood Experiences

One of the first topics Carla responded to was the impact of her parent's socioeconomic status on her perception of self and achievement as an African American female. She addressed the issue in relation to her upbringing and socialization. Carla was the firstborn of 10 children, 6 brothers and 3 sisters. She grew up on a farm with strict disciplinarian parents, particularly her mother. Her father worked the farm during the farming season and the railroad in the winter. Her mother was a homemaker and was always available to provide for their needs. As stated by Carla, "when we came home from school, she was there; see us on the bus in the morning and see other people's children on the bus. She was a strict disciplinarian."

Carla's siblings respected her position as a first born. If Carla gave them instructions, they would do the task for they viewed Carla as their second mother. Her siblings were aware of the consequences if she informed their mother of any wrong doings. According to Carla, they preferred dealing with her rather than their strict disciplinarian mother. She was "not the type of mother who would say, I am going to tell your dad you did so and so. She would deal with us herself."

As previously stated, it was Carla's mother who instilled values upon her children. Carla's mother stressed the value of morality--being honest in all that you do and say. For Carla, this became manifest in her relationship with others. She said that speaking untruth was something that she could not do. She describes this value in the following way:

I felt I could not tell a lie. Because my mother would say, if you tell one lie you

have to remember that lie because you will eventually have to tell more to support that one. And that is a bit of a strain to have to remember what lie you told. If you tell the truth, there is not a problem.

As Carla explains it, immediately she knew the value in being truthful, even when the consequences of her actions led to punitive results.

Another value instilled in Carla was that of respect for others. Her mother encouraged her to, "treat other people the way [I] wanted to be treated, just basic decency." Not only was this a common family practice, it extended into her social world. She gave the following example, "If another kid had something and you wanted it, you did not just snatch it and say, I am going to take that. You would have to ask, may I have that?"

The strongest value instilled in Carla was religion. She describes her religious and spiritual growth in this manner:

> When I grew up, I started teaching Bible school in the summer to the little kids. I taught Sunday school in a regular Sunday school class as a teenager. So religion was a very, very important part of our lifestyle. We spent a good bit of time at church, in fact. Not only did we go to church on Sundays, but we had the Wednesday night prayer meetings that I remember very, very well. . .that was one of the strongest values.

As she reflected upon her childhood years and early grade school, she describes her mother as a very dedicated church worker who believes that God had a plan for all of His

children and that His plan was constantly working no matter what they did. This was the philosophy adapted by Carla.

Early Educational Experiences

Carla grew up in a segregated school system. What she remembers most about school was not being athletically inclined and getting teased often because of her petite size. She recalls this part of her educational experience in junior high and high school as a frustrating period. At a time when athletes were becoming popular, she did not fit in. Although Carla excelled academically, not being athletically inclined left her feeling unfulfilled and unable to compete. Consequently, Carla continued building upon her athletic possibilities to eradicate the feeling of failure in sports and the isolation it brought. In high school, after trying out for many different sports, she found her niche in softball. This gave her a sense of accomplishment and as expressed by Carla, ". . .that is when I started feeling as though a person needs to be very well-rounded. You need more than just the academics. You need to be able to do other things, and mix and mingle well with people." To date, she added that golf and bowling have become a leisure pastime for her and she indulges in the activities often.

Besides that minor frustration, Carla characterized her high school years and college as "wonderful." One of the things that happened to her in high school was the opportunity to move to another town with her godfather to attend a high school that he thought was better than the high school in her hometown. Her parents agreed to the move, a situation that Carla never fully understood. When she questioned her parents about it they

responded by saying that "the school is so much better and you are going to be living in a home with academicians." That part was understood, since her godfather and his wife were both principals. It was this period in Carla's upbringing that she realized her life would be different. It was this transition that opened opportunities for her. I asked about what was going on in her life when that insight came to her and whether living in her godfather's household had an impact on her perceived change. She explains in this manner:

> In that household was, Mr. Somebody and his wife, both principals, and his mother-in-law, who had retired from the school system as a principal. So it was like I'm surrounded by a learning experience all the time. And it was very dynamic and it really made an impression on me.

The difference was significant as opposed to being at her parent's home. What impressed Carla was the sharing of their knowledge, involving her in the process. She stated that:

> It was different because what they talked about, say at the dinner table, was different. The activities they were involved in were different. When we traveled, I was their little prize. I mean, I was just considered really special because I was bright, and intelligent, and they loved to show me off.

She contrasted this with her parents' home explaining that, ". . .at home I was all those things as well. Nevertheless, I was the oldest child and I was always helping and doing things with siblings." Carla identifies this period as the turning point for her. She recalls:

> By the time I was in the tenth grade, I said to myself, I'm going to really do well

in school because I want to go onto college and get a degree, so that I don't ever have to look forward to working on a farm as long as I live. They depended on me for a lot of things, being the first born. My mother expected me to be a second mother to the younger siblings. My father expected me to be by his side. And, so, I felt as though they were expecting too much from one person or one thing. And, of course, I did not see a way out of that, except to -- I mean, I could have left home, runaway from home, perhaps. Which is what my brother, the first boy who was born, thought about doing and ultimately did leave home after graduating from high school. Still, my mother was so high on education and dropping out of high school was never an option for her children.

She spoke of her parent's potential to do greater things and the limited opportunities that became their barriers. Carla reflected:

I could tell that my parents, both of them, had the potential to have become somebody great but the opportunities were not there for them. Because my mother always emphasized education, I thought that I had to go on and do well in school and look to higher education for two reasons. I mentioned this earlier, to please them and to ensure myself of the options at least to demand a decent salary doing something other than working on a farm.

The prospect of doing farm work was no longer a part of her life after Carla relocated in the city. It was in the hands of others, a job that Carla was not responsible for in her new

environment. The extent of her responsibilities was to get out of bed, get dressed, and go to school.

Carla received encouragement from her parents and her godfather. Her mother took upon herself the responsibility to see that her children excelled in school. She was constantly reminding them to do their homework. Consequently, Carla always knew she had to do well. Her performance earned her the valedictorian status for her high school class plus a scholarship to college which she said "helped my parents tremendously."

The interview moved toward her feelings growing up as an African American woman, an issue that Carla felt was tough to respond. This was because of her exposure to predominantly Black environments from elementary school through undergraduate school. She recalls that not much thought was given to her ethnicity because of her environment. Not until after graduating did she notice the differences in the way people treated African Americans. Although she calls these differences "major" she quickly points out that "I never felt ashamed of the fact that I am an African American."

The respect Carla has about herself stems from her childhood upbringing. She spoke about her self perspective:

> My parents made us feel as though we were as good as the next person. We were as capable as the next person and that was one of the reasons my mother hammered away at education so much. Her thing was with the capability you have if you just apply yourself, you can get out there and compete with the best of folks. You do not have to worry about somebody saying that she falls short

because she is an African American or because he is African American, he cannot do this job. So you can prove that you can do it."

This kind of reinforcement increased Carla's level of self esteem. Thus, in Carla's early years, she did not recall or experience a lot of things that made her feel bad about whom she was. She felt life for her was quite good until she was "exposed to real true racism," an incident that she remembers sometime in the seventh or eight grade. She tells of her experience at a restaurant in the South while in town shopping. She recalls:

> One of the things that made me feel bad as I was growing up in the south was when we would go shopping in town and if we wanted to have something to eat, we could not go sit down in a restaurant or even at a little lunch counter. There was this one little place with a door for White folks to enter. They could sit down and eat inside and they had a window for African Americans. You had to go there, order your food, and stand there. They handed it (food) to you out this window, and you paid them through the window. You'd take your food and walk away. You would either go sit in your car, or sit on a bench in the park somewhere. It bothered me so much that I would just tell myself I was not hungry when we were shopping.

The first time that she spoke about her feelings toward discrimination was in her college years. She shares this experience:

> One day when I was a first year student in college, I had come home and my mother, my sisters, and I were shopping. My mother wanted to get something to

eat and she wanted to go to this place. And, I said, I will not go there, Mom. And, she said, why. And, I said, because I don't like the way they treat African American people.

Carla threatened to go inside the restaurant and her response agitated her mother. She recalls that conversation that followed.

> If I go--if we go, we are going inside. She said, oh no we're not. I said, well, then I'm not going. I refuse to have them hand me a hot dog or fish sandwich through that little window. And, she said, well, we'll get one for you. You just go sit in the car. And, I said, mom, I don't think you understand. I think we need to impress upon these people that we are people, too. And I don't want their food if they are going to treat us this way. And, she said, well, honey, you can't change these things overnight. I agreed with that but, I said, we can start making the change.

I asked Carla if she prepared to take action. She commented that her strategy was to walk into the restaurant together, the four of them. Not knowing what would or could have happened, she thought walking in as a group would make an impact. She admitted that she wasn't ready to walk in the restaurant alone but she was willing to try it. Thinking about the consequences, she said,

> I figured they would say, we don't serve colored people in here, because that's what they have said to other folks. And I don't know where that would have taken us. I probably would have spoken up and said something. My mother

would have probably grabbed me by the hand and yanked me out of there. I don't know. Yet that was my way of saying, I do not like this. It bothers me, and I would rather go hungry, than to deal with this.

Carla has challenged other discriminating situations. She spoke of riding the bus:

> There were times that I sat midway the bus, just to see what would happen. Once, I sat midway on the bus, and this woman looked at me and said, Are not there seats in the back of the bus? And, I said, I don't know. I'm here. I'm over here. Then she left me alone.

Another time Carla found herself walking out of a department store because the clerks were "rude and nasty and don't believe in providing a service." She was in the store for a long time and had not been serviced. Feeling frustrated, she decided to put the merchandise back and shop somewhere else. It was obvious from Carla's tone that she did not enjoy revisiting this period of her life. She said that:

> If I had to stand and wait and people would come up after me and get served and I saw this happening, I would just say, Okay. I don't need this item. I would go put it down and walked out of the store and I would not go back.

Carla was not very tolerant of discrimination. In her youth, she preferred not to have something if it meant going to the back door.

Early Work Experiences

At work, they characterized Carla as an achiever as she often finished assignments and sought more challenging things to do. Upon leaving college she went to work at her

aunt's agency in New York that provided service to needy people. She continued with this throughout her college summer breaks. Upon graduation, she took a job at a New York University in the business department. According to Carla, this was, ". . .an opportunity to do graduate work and work full-time. . .It was an opportunity as a staff member, you did not pay full tuition." This was the beginning of her advancement to professional positions. She enjoyed her work, getting to know people through telephone conversations and often, upon meeting them face to face, there was an initial reaction to Carla being African American.

> They would say things like, Oh, you are--and I would say, yes. Well, Dr. [Just] didn't tell me that -- that -- that you were -- yeah. And they could hardly say the word, you know. It was like ah, ah, what a shock! And what they didn't say--and I knew what they wanted to say was--you don't sound like a Black on the telephone. There were a few of them that did that say to me. Well, I don't know, because I have had many people -- in fact, I had someone say to me just recently, You have an unusual accent. I cannot tell if you are from Chicago, or New York, or where you are from. And, I said, Maybe it is because I have lived in so many parts of the country. I don't think I have an accent that is peculiar to any part of the country. Do you?

Carla was able to survive uncomfortable situations during her professional endeavors. Instances of such encounters did not damage Carla's self esteem nor her desire to achieve. She never lost the focus. According to Carla, she had the foundation ingrained in her and

she knew that her mother gave of herself so that she might experience a better life. This was something that she has always carried with her and excelling in her profession was expected. She never let her race limit her thinking about the opportunities available to her as a person.

Diva

"Let My Merit Prove Myself"

Several times, Diva and I have been present at meetings involving crime prevention in our respective county. Additionally, I got to know her more personally as she attended a leadership program. It was during this time that I approached her as a potential candidate for this research. Meeting the established criteria, I asked why she wanted to become a part of this study. Apart from wanting to be of assistance to me she replied:

> From this study, you can see a true portrait of what the African American woman goes through. A lot of us tend to see career, title, and status, and we think that none of us when we are successful, go through any experience or problem. I also think the information will be useful. Statistics can tend to be skewed. Sometimes when you have real actual life figures, it could really show a clearer picture. It also could be a device through the research to help another African American woman, such as myself.

Unknowing to Diva, it was a rewarding comment to begin an interview as she captured one of my purposes for this study. I wanted it to be of benefit to other African American women who have walked a similar journey and find their goals to be unattainable.

Diva completed basic demographic information before the interview began. At the age of forty, Diva is currently employed as a division coordinator in a government agency. Through a recent promotion, she has currently been employed in this position for one year

at a salary of $49,000. Married at the age of twenty-six, she is the mother of three children. Presently, she holds a Juris doctorate degree.

Early Childhood Experiences

Diva grew up as a child believing in self-love. It was a characteristic that she reflects upon as her philosophy about her being. At an early age, Diva stated that "I was not going to love anybody better than I love myself." Today, as she reflects upon it, she reveals that looking over her life, it did have its negative consequences.

Diva grew up in a small town environment outside of a major city in New Jersey with her parents and three siblings. She was the oldest daughter of a mechanic and teacher's aide. Diva learned early about trials and tribulations. One of the first she spoke about was the separation of her mother and father. Both believed in marriage without divorce. It was to be a sustaining relationship until death. Diva had this value instilled in her. She recalls, ". . .I look at how sociologically they raised me and one of the things they raised me upon is that you have a husband or wife. You stay in that relationship." After the mutual separation of her parents, Diva saw life changing. Neither of her parents remarried, divorce was not moral and maternal and paternal family ties were never broken between them. Each extended family often, actively involved themselves in Diva's upbringing. For Diva, the value of family became an inculcated belief and pattern that she worked hard to emulate as an adult. She explains in this manner:

> My father had the philosophy that he would only get married once. I think my mother must have had that philosophy because as a result, they never divorced.

My parents ended up being married up until the day that my father died. . .So there were never any severed ties between my paternal side of the family. However, they lived in separate homes. Yet, it was still a wealth of the blessing of the maternal and paternal experience. My father was very active in our lives. And as a result of that, I think it bought an idealism to me in relationships.

Diva adopted this idealism she speaks of from her paternal family, a family with a strong spiritual foundation, belief in family, and love one for another.

My paternal family believes in Jesus Christ and they have always believed in Him and they are a loving family and one thing that they stress is family. That's family, you are not supposed to be belligerent. You are not supposed to fight each other. You are supposed to show love always.

This closeness was not expressed on the maternal side. Growing up, Diva was aware of the bickering and lack of closeness from her mother's family. It was totally unlike the involvement and nurturing she experienced on her father's side of the family. As a child, Diva recalls being raised to be polite and mannerly. She tells of the value instilled in her to appreciate education. She recalls:

We knew certain goals were aspiring to us. We all knew that you needed to complete high school. If you do not complete high school, you have to do something. But most of us knew you completed high school and you go on to pursue higher education, or at least a trade. So even my first line cousins, they were the same way, we all accomplished certain goals.

The value of education is a strong part of her family heritage. Her mother comes from a family of nine children. Her grandmother was very instrumental in teaching her children. Consequently, the women were expected to achieve and work hard. Given this, at an early age, Diva sees education as a vehicle to have a better life and recalls being told that "knowledge is very powerful." Diva's mother emphasized the power and understanding of education. Diva recalls in this manner:

> My mother always stressed to me as a woman, and she stressed to all of us, she always stressed that, "You don't have to be an Albert Einstein. I don't care if you know how to do a geometric formula. I don't care if you know calculus. But what I do care about is to be involved. Read the newspaper. Look at news. Don't be so ignorant enough that you are intellectually unsound because you can be so intellectual that you are no good to anyone. Be knowledgeable enough that you know what life is telling you and you know how to put a direction in your life.

Diva believes it was her grandmother's aspiration for her children to become college educated. Diva's mother did not complete the level of education her mother desired. Diva realized that college was a preordained mission--a requirement. The first college graduate in her mother's family was her mother's youngest sister, a person Diva describes as her second mentor due to their closeness in age. She aspired to be like her aunt who was educated and admired by the family for her achievement. Besides her mother's desire

that she continue her education beyond high school, it was also Diva's desire to emulate her aunt.

As a child and young adult, Diva's special bond with her mother developed into an open relationship. She felt comfortable discussing any issue with her mother, whom she identifies as her first mentor. For Diva, this was a positive experience in her development. Others may not have seen it from that perspective. She explains:

> I sometimes would just go in the corner and there were different issues that I could open up to her. My mother's siblings thought that she was too open. They thought that she allowed me to express myself too freely, too willing, so back then when I was coming up, I was known as sassy. They thought that I would be the wild one out of my cousins who were the same age. They thought that I would probably end up being the teenage pregnancy person. But believe it or not I wasn't. They thought I would not be the virgin. I was.

Despite their predictions, Diva grew up in a family environment where individuals' showed a lot of love for one another. Much to her dismay, she found later in life that others did not share her values. This presented problems for her later, particularly when she began to form relationships.

When I asked her about what impact of her parent's socioeconomic status had on her perception of self and achievement as an African American female, she spoke of the tradition family television version of The Beaver. Ward Cleaver, the father, was the bread winner. So from this perspective, she believed that the male was the breadwinner, the

responsible entity--a problem solver and an individual considered reliable. Upon reflection she says that it was "naivete" for African Americans, given their limited exposure to role models. She did see herself different, in that her parents owned their home and rented out part of it which bought in extra income. While her father's profession did not give him "honor like an African American working in a post office," owning a home placed them a step above those without one.

The concept of the male as the responsible entity changed early for Diva when her parents separated. Although her father remained "very active in her life," she became more accountable, often running errands as early as six years old that required her to travel by bus alone. As the firstborn, often responsibilities were placed upon Diva. According to Diva, she was the one who was expected to achieve because of her thirst for knowledge and maturity in "the sense that she knew what she wanted." Additionally, Diva began to sense a difference in her life from that of her parents when she entered college. She said:

> I knew it [life] was going to be significantly different because my parents didn't go to college. Both were high school graduates but they always stressed to their children to do better than what we have done. So when I first entered college, I had attained a step that my parents never attained. So I knew right then, that little bit alone should make a significant difference, just the fact that I was pursuing a higher education which would open job opportunities a little different from what my parents had. So I knew that my lifestyle could be significantly

different from theirs in that sense. . .I realized that I had it one step ahead of them. The door would open at a different level.

The level Diva refers to is that above a homemaker and skilled blue collar worker. It was specifically her mother's desire that she improve upon her chances in life--chances that would allow her to compete with others in the better professions equally.

Early Educational Experiences

Diva was aware early age that her mother wanted her to excel academically--to excel beyond the point she had reached. By traveling at a young age to places outside her community and being exposed ways of living and influenced from her cousins, her appetite for knowledge increased. She recalls:

> I like seeing and exploring something different. And it might have started with my love for reading and books because in one place that I can get lost and that's still today where I go into my own world, is a book. I tell everyone that. But I think I also at a young age had a thirst for knowledge because when I was six years old I had told my mother I wanted to go to school. My cousins influenced me at a very early age. They were older than me and they all were getting ready, my aunts would dress them up for the first day of school, that my mother had to dress me up every year from the time I was a toddler, saying that I was going to school until it was time for me to start school because I would cry. I wanted to go to school.

This marked the beginning of Diva's independence and thoughts of being a teacher.

However, the idea of teaching did not last long. Exposure to entertainers on television soon became an idea. She was exposed to the media and entertainers whom she perceived to make a lot of money, because they were on television. At this point, she became attracted to the material things in life. Entertainment was something she desired to do but realized she lacked the talent to sing. Nonetheless, this independence was difficult for her mother to accept, particularly when her other children were still very dependent on her. Diva was always willing to go or do something on her own.

In elementary school, Diva recalls that her mother shielded her from racism. She monitored her relationship with White children, not wanting Diva to be subjected to "degrading or demeaning things." It was not until later in life that Diva experienced injustices.

While in junior high school, experiences outside the home also had an impact on Diva and who she has become today. Diva grew up wanting material things and early on she realized that becoming a teacher would not provide those since their wages were low. Diva desired the better things in life and her goal as a child was to have them as an adult. Her teachers influenced her and she admired their position of power. However, she saw the limitations of becoming a teacher. This belief was based upon her experience as a babysitter. That position was a deciding factor against teaching children for Diva. Although she earned extra money as a babysitter in her early teens, she readily admits that the "children got on my nerves." This experience was not very rewarding and as a result of it she stated that, "I always tell women if you don't want to turn a young woman away

from motherhood, don't allow them to babysit because I do believe it affects a woman's decision on whether she wants to be a mother or not."

As a result of her experience, she buried the idea of being a teacher. She found that her nerves and the energy of children were deadly forces. She gave up the idea of teaching children and turned her attention toward teaching adults. However, it was a visit to the prison system with a friend that affected her. The reception they received upon entering the jail was traumatic. She explains:

> The correctional officer was very nasty. I knew in my mind that there was no way he could look at us and see that we were nothing but young people that we were teenagers. He said you had to be on the visiting list . . . I was not on the visiting list . . . so I had to sit in the waiting area while she went to see him. Now I'm looking at a big large man, probably six feet, six-two at the time, burley, White man. At the time I did not realize it but I know it now from studying and being in the business, he probably had no more education than we had, being very nasty. So as I am sitting on the bench in the waiting room, what I see is a White man dragging a group of Black men, who were young in chains and all I kept hearing was this clanging door going clang. It was funny because of the way that they talked to the individuals bothered me . . . for me, what I saw was racism. I did not see the jail system. I did not see crime. I saw a group of young Black men being trained and White men talking to them, very belittling.

Diva grew up in an environment where they taught her to treat people the way she would

want others to treat her. It disturbed her to see White men verbally abusing African American men.

Another traumatic experience for Diva was during the riots in 1967. At thirteen years old, she recalls seeing pictures in the newspaper of African American children on the street with blood and hearing that during the riot a mob killed a White police officer. Diva remembers the make up of the force. She stated:

> I do not remember the police force being Black. The only Black police officer I remember ever experiencing in the first police officer, now this is the irony of it all, was my uncle who was a police officer and he left the force because of the racism. They never defined that, but as a child I recall seeing his uniform hung up and that was in the fifties. However, it never dawned on me that my uncle was probably the first Black police officer.

Besides that, she describes the experience and explains how this period of strife transforms her thinking about future careers. According to Diva:

> The traumatic thing for me was a group of us children, I was thirteen at the time playing. I was sitting out on our front porch, but there was a group of children playing double dutch and hop scotch in front of the yard and a police officer rode by with a double barrel shot gun and said to the children, I am going to count to three, and if you are not on the porch I will blow you away.

This became Diva's turning point. She realized that she could make a difference. Seeing the jail scene just made her realize that there is an injustice in this country. Because of this

experience, her decision to pursue Criminal Justice or Criminology in college was born.

Diva was able to enter college on a scholarship. She chose one away from home because she enjoyed traveling and knew that traveling outside her environment was an opportunity to be exposed to different walks of life. Coming out of high school and college, she characterized herself as a positive thinker. Although, at times she behaved egotistically, she believed that "a lot of things that I could obtain as an individual as an African American woman depended on me." This belief stemmed from her childhood broken home and the fallen belief that men were responsible, reliable, and would take care of any problem. Diva found the burden was shifted to her mother; she was always there regardless, the father would come and go. This was not what she perceived to be the right thing to do. A father and mother were supposed to be a part of the family, not living apart. Diva made it her goal in college to find out what difference she could make. She said:

> I always had a love for humankind and I was raised that you are here in life for a purpose and you should make the difference. I was trying in my college years, to find out what difference could I make. Even if I turned one person's life around. If it were something, like a kind word, I felt that was my responsibility.

The important years for Diva were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, a period that she describes as breaking the bond of dependency, coming into adulthood and making decisions. In college she found herself challenged by her peers to do drugs and

date, but her upbringing persevered. She chose to follow the values that her mother had instilled in her. Diva recalls:

> Peers were trying to influence and direct. That is when I realized that people were although you are of the same race and ancestry, do not necessarily mean that you think alike and your value training was alike. That is when I realized that you would not do this, but someone else would do that. I was raised with manners. In college I realized that people lived anyway they wanted and a lot of it relates to their training. College opened my eyes to how other people lived.

The results of her decisions led Diva to take up a "social worker" role. She felt a need to help others. She also felt she would and could stand firm on her beliefs and be a team player simultaneously. Peer pressure would not win over the influence her mother had on her. According to Diva, "mother always taught me that you have a mind of your own, use it." Consequently, her peers, cousins, and family members knew she would do right. She explains her position as such:

> I was a person that realized that you could also learn, not just from your own experiences, but you could learn from others . . . I knew that if you stole a candy bar, possibly you could get caught and go to jail and I knew I did not want to go to jail. That was the worst thing you could do in my family. So I would never take that risk. I did not want to see whether I would get away with it or not. Some people go over that risk. I never did want to go close to the edge like that. Peace was very important to me. I valued peace. So a lot of risk taking in

those college days to me meant that you could risk the loss of peace and I did not want to risk the loss of Peace so I did not take on those things.

In college, they pressured Diva about sex. Out from under the shadow of her mother she began to question the values instilled in her as a young child and what she was feeling and believing in college. She reflected in this manner:

> Here you are now living alone, with your mother and father not watching you and here is a guy saying everyone is doing this and then you have friends who get into it and you are like, what do I do. The benefit I had then was it was one side that said I did not want to be laughed at but there was also my value which said, I need to be involved sexually when I am ready for this because my parents talked to us openly about sex and the responsibility of it. I also had in the back of my mind, the consequences of you could reproduce because of this. Then my dreams would go downhill. Sure people said you could raise a child and go to college but I knew it was hard. I knew that achieving my goal was harder.

Diva's goal was to complete her education and advanced studies. The strength of her relationship with her mother help sustain her primarily through the rough times.

Law school presented another challenge. Diva found it to be intimidating and demeaning. However, this once a shy child had become an extrovert. Additionally, during this period in her life she had developed an acceptable level of self esteem and ability to compete against the odds. She found that she had to work doubly hard in an environment that was pro-male.

Early Work Experiences

Work ethics were instilled in Diva by her mother. She was a believer in "whatever you do, be the best at it." Diva believes that these work ethics and wanting to emulate her aunt's success helped to pattern her career after she completed law school. She obtained a position in what she describes as a "White racist company that did not practice affirmative action." She experienced competition from the White males and females. As a result, she became submissive to authority, toning down her radical spirit that had characterized her upon graduating law school.

The change in her behavior was not out of fear of losing her position. Her choice was based upon the work ethics instilled in her. She took the position for economic reasons only. This was not the career path she had envisioned. Despite the obstacles, she maintained an ethical standard of performance. She describes her philosophy by stating:

> Whatever I do, I'm going to try to do my damndest at it and be good at it. And through my work abilities, that's what will promote me and that's what has promoted me. . .And it is a fact, who you know gets you ahead. But I am not one of those people. . .I always say let my work, let my merit prove myself and that is really what got me where I am today. It's not because of someone I know. . .I am also a team player and I cannot stress that enough. Most people are not team players. Most people are willing to tell you what they are not going to do before they can do. I believe you can do. Try it first before you give it a failure. I am willing to try. A lot of people in the work force are not. That is

the dilemma for any African American woman. Any European woman. But for the African American woman to me, we have to work harder. We have to do twice as much as that White woman. We have to do twice as much as that White man.

Working according to ethics, her abilities, and not letting race be a conscious barrier, enabled her to begin her climb up the corporate ladder.

Mimi

"Like Your Differences"

Very early in life, Mimi learned that being disciplined and fulfilling parental expectations was the norm in her household. The firstborn of nine children, she grew up on a farm with her mother and stepfather, never knowing her biological father. As an early childhood educator earning $50,000 annually, Mimi lives in suburban Maryland with her husband of five years. By choice, she has remained childless. She has strong family ties and during the interview, she revealed that she is trying to bridge the gap that has been a thorn between her and her sixty-one-year-old mother.

We made ourselves comfortable on the family room floor of Mimi's home for this interview. At the age of forty-one, Mimi reflected on her present life as an educator and what it was like for her growing up in the South. Speaking in a very soft voice, this petite African American woman, with smooth ebony skin, began the interview by first explaining why she chose to participate in this study. She began by sharing what this study meant to her. Mimi stated that she believed sharing her story could help other African American women--those who feel that they are all by themselves when faced with adversity. She believes the information that she shares of the adversity she experienced may, "give insight to African American women who may find themselves in situations that block them from reaching their potential goals or do not have belief in their ability to reach a desired goal."

In response to success, Mimi believes that it is a life long process rooted in principles, spirituality, and discipline. She explained that having strong principles, spiritual guidance,

having a vision and, establishing early goals for direction is the foundation that has guided her life. Given these principles, she describes herself as a successful woman at this phase in her life. Farther, she believes that at this stage, she has not maximized her potential about what being successful means to her.

Early Childhood Experiences

Mimi's life began on a sharecropper's farm in a small town in Alabama. Reared in a small house without plumbing, this two-room house was home for her mother, stepfather, and four siblings. Her mother was a domestic worker and she described her as a hard worker with the expectation that the children would go to school and help on the farm. As children, they learned to stick to their mother's "ridged rules [with] discipline kinds of expectation." This involved working in the house, garden, or in the fields picking cotton--a chore that she really hated. She commented that if given a choice she would not have picked cotton. Reminiscing on this experience a little later in life she avowed that, ". . . I would make sure I would never be in that type of situation again." By the age of twelve or thirteen she decided that her life would be totally different from her early childhood. On a positive note, Mimi suggests that she became very disciplined at an early age and took a serious interest in her education. It was her parent's expectation that she complete school, particularly her mother who had advanced to the eighth grade before leaving school to help her parents.

Mimi experienced an unexpected separation from her mother and stepfather at the age of seven. Without an explanation, they sent her and her siblings to live with her

grandmother where she remained until her beginning teenage years. Because she spent much time with her grandmother, this was not really a transitional period. However, to ease the resentment building toward her mother, her grandmother helped the nine of them to understand why her mother left.

It was Mimi's grandmother who instilled a strong educational, cultural, and spiritual principles within her. She learned that basic things existed in the African American culture to give her the strength to do what she needed to achieve mobility. According to Mimi, it was her grandmother who, ". . .instilled in us to like ourselves and that we were different. We should like our differences . . . and just because we are poor, you do not have to be uneducated and dirty." Repeatedly, her grandmother reminded her of these strongholds, embedding in Mimi everlasting character. Given this, she grew up believing that, ". . .no one can take away your dignity if you have dignity . . . If you respect yourself, then you will not allow anyone to disrespect you." Mimi's grandmother instilled these values in Mimi by the age of twelve. Besides attending church on Sundays for reinforcement of instilled values, on a daily basis her grandmother reminded all the children of these values. This was primarily because of the environment they lived in. Although they were economically poor, she knew that they could have love and respect. By the time she moved south to rejoin her mother, she had a strong spiritual base, principles, and some sense of where she wanted to go.

Life was a little different for her in the North. For the first time, she lived inside an apartment with running water and indoor plumbing. Mimi believed that her mother lacked

the strong work ethics of her grandmother. Somewhere between the age of twelve and thirteen, Mimi was returned to her mother. Her mother had two additional children by a man other than her stepfather. Furthermore, she depended on social service for support. Mimi discussed her feelings toward her mother receiving welfare and food stamps from the state.

> I just hated it. I hated it. I had to go to the store and use food stamps. That probably was the most degrading experience that I can recall . . . I just felt that you were taking something and based upon just living with my grandmother all that times, you didn't have to take. . .I just felt you needed to--you should work.

For four years, Mimi carried that resentment until her mother obtained domestic employment cleaning hotels.

Mimi spent most of her time studying or playing. After having raised three of her younger siblings while living with her grandmother, Mimi no longer accepted that responsibility in her mother's home. As Mimi recalls, her mother's activities contradicted the values instilled in her at an early age. She felt her mother should contribute to the family income by working. Because she had children outside wedlock, it was Mimi's opinion that she should take care of them. Living with her mother was a turning point for Mimi. She decided not to put herself or her children in that position as an adult.

Subsequently, the mother-daughter relationship never developed for Mimi. She contends that it was due to her mother's experiences, lack of spiritual growth, and lack of discourse about her past. Mimi stated that her mother would withdraw and could not

express or share her experiences. Even when Mimi, at the age of thirty, asked about her biological father, her mother did not respond. Mimi felt that her mother loved primarily because she took care of her basic needs such as providing food. Also, she took some interest in her education, nicknaming Mimi as the "school person." In addition, she would not let any of her male visitors sleep over, in the event harm might come to her daughter.

Outside of that maternal support and encouragement, she recalls her mother expressing feelings about being deprived of being able to finish school. Her mother felt that her life could have been different if they had not taken her out of school to help on the farm. Her mother stated, ". . .If I had just had a chance to go to school, maybe I would have done things much differently." It was only then that she understood her mother's bitterness about being deprived of her schooling while her younger sister and brothers were encouraged to complete high school. Mimi had been in college for one year when her mother began to take adult education courses. Mimi recognized that her mother was assuming the responsibility to fulfill her lifelong desire to earn an education. This would earn her [Mimi's mother] the respect that other family members received.

As previously stated, Mimi's mother did not share her early life experiences, emotions, or feelings. Mimi shared her intimate thoughts and problems with her close friends or she primarily worked them out alone. For example, in a situation with a male companion, she found herself in an abusive situation at the age of seventeen. She did not seek out advice. She decided to remove herself from that relationship. As a result, her independence moved her closer to God, whom she depended on for help in any situation.

She usually based decisions on gathering information from friends and than analyzing the situation to see what was best for her. Her explanation is as follows:

> It was usually a process of making decisions because I didn't confide in my mother or I did not run things past her. I decided. It was first when I thought of whether it was the right thing for me, was it going to be harmful to me in any way and then again, calling on the Lord.

Early Educational Experiences

By the time Mimi moved North with her mother and new siblings, she was between the age of twelve and thirteen. This was the period in which she gained insight into values and experiences different from her childhood upbringing. She found children her age to be disrespectful of adults and participated in "adult" activities such as sneaking into bars and nightclubs. Her grandmother taught her to respect her elders and she learned early that she did not want to lead that kind of lifestyle, particularly given her spiritual nature. Given the spiritual upbringing, she did not want to disobey God's word. She decided to remain a child, not succumbing to peer pressure in the community and school environments.

When Mimi started school in the South, the school room was a little segregated house with small classes and African American teachers. They doted over her educational talent, giving her praise and encouragement. Thus, her value for education deepened and she enjoyed attending school and coming home to study. She was responsive and obedient to the teachers and describes the environment as very pleasant. She noticed a difference in the North during her seventh and eighth grade classes. For the first time, she

was under the instruction of White teachers, placed in larger classes, and the attention she grew accustomed to in the South was lacking. Despite the differences, she recalls her grandmother reinforcing the value of education in order to secure future opportunities. She recalls these words from her grandmother, "You need to go to school to get an education because knowledge is something that no one can ever take away from you. You will have it for life." Mimi doubted that her grandmother ever attended school. One of her mother's brothers could not read. As previously mentioned, her mother was one of the oldest and was unable to complete school because they needed her on the farm. However, she knew that if you had an education, you could do something with your life.

Mimi excelled in school, earning honor roll grades. Her teachers and counselor recognized her accomplishments and encouraged her to participate in various programs. At home the family called her a "school person" thinking she would become a professional student. Her mother gave her little encouragement but Mimi felt she was supportive in her own way she was supportive of her.

During her middle and high school years, peers identified Mimi as a "square" because of her accent, appearance, and her desire to be her own leader. She did not want to follow the crowd. Her peers did not know that she was really very shy and had low self-esteem which developed because of her move away from the farm to the city environment. A way of dealing with her shyness was to remain a square that allowed her to distance herself from the "hip" crowd. Being different was her self-imposed barrier that prevented her from interacting with people. Because of this treatment from her peers, she developed

independence. She did not want to participate in illegal behaviors to fit in or be accepted by her peers. The few classmates that she did bond with were those who were also identified as "square." Nevertheless, Mimi received more pleasure from their friendship than succumbing to peer pressure to engage in conduct that was incongruent with her beliefs.

Toward the end of her senior year, Mimi did not see college as an option. Because of lack of finances, in senior high school, Mimi thought that after graduating she would become a secretary. However, in June, a counselor approached her about obtaining a scholarship because of her grades and assisted her while securing the scholarship and grant funding. It was then that Mimi realized that she had a chance to attend college. Despite her mother expressing her doubts and suggesting that it could not be done, Mimi completed all her forms, made traveling arrangements, obtained housing, and enrolled at college.

Mimi perceived the transition to college as a difficult move. She felt unprepared and incompetent among her peers in her first semester at college. Because of what she was experiencing, feelings of quitting weighed heavily on her mind. Consequently, she found her grades dropping while trying to adjust to an environment of fifty thousand students of which four thousand were African Americans. This was far different from her experiences in high school with a 75 percent representation of African American students. Because of this transition she felt very uncomfortable, particularly when she often found herself in classes where she was the only African American.

Referencing an ugly experience, she explained that during her second or third years, a professor told her, ". . .You should not be here because you are not good enough." After confiding in other African American students who had experienced similar denigration while enrolled in this professor's writing class, she was encouraged to continue her studies at the college. Mimi contends that the professor's remark made her much more determined to excel in his class and graduate from the University. She began by approaching the professor to find out just how she could improve her writing skills, in addition to seeking assistance from tutors at the University. Except this experience, Mimi found other professors more encouraging and this gave her the motivation to finish her program of studies.

Early Work Experiences

The first real work experience was during Mimi's second year in college. She worked two jobs while attending college to help defray the cost of her tuition. One position was in a retail store and the other was in child care facility on campus. Working in the child care center influenced her to move in the direction of her current profession. She describes this as her turning point and it brought to light her love for children. Before this opportunity, Mimi had no clue of what direction she wanted to take. Upon graduating in Early Children Education, she returned to her hometown, accepting a position in the public school system as a home visitor family counselor and teacher. She was encouraged to earn a Master's degree because of her experiences with co-workers who had higher credentials. According to Mimi, this decision put any notion of marriage and having

children on hold. Her focus became self-centered. She noticed that they respected the women who had obtained master degrees. She believed that "the more education you had, the more apt people are to listen and to hear you." Mimi sought that level of respect and entered graduate school. Upon completion of her graduate program, she became the director of an educational program for underprivileged children, in the 1980's in her hometown. She experienced success and gratification in her chosen field. Besides striving for respect, it was an opportunity for her to give back to her community, a value instilled in her by her grandmother. Mimi considered herself a "helper" and shares this work ethic:

> We had to help other people--the elderly--we had to help. So since I can remember, I have been a helper. I had been there for other people, even as a volunteer. Because I knew that I could help someone and by me helping someone, then they in turn could help someone else.

Today, she enjoys her position as an early childhood educator of a funded educational program and realizes that small sacrifice can reap beneficial consequences later.

In bringing closure to the interview process I asked Mimi what made her feel good and bad about being an African American woman. She responded in this manner:

> What made me feel good about being an African American female is the tremendous amount of strength that I have always felt that African American women have. I think I saw that in my grandmother. I always felt that we [African American women] appeared to have a strength that no other person has. My grandmother was an independent woman raising nine children. I remember

> because I valued and saw that as a kind of unique strength for African American women. Symbolic of warrior-like strength, it enabled us to carry on. The things that made me feel negative about being an African American woman is not being able to recognize the strength that our culture has given us and not being able to rely upon that strength based upon our culture. Such as there are probably no other nationalities that have such a strong value of honesty and respect and trust as the African American culture. When I see kids and adults not understanding that there are some really basic things in our culture that we can stand on to give us the strength to do whatever it is that we want to do it suggests that we have not imparted that information.

Mimi's response is based on the values that her grandmother instilled in her that guided her through adversity toward opportunities to improve her life. As she reflects upon her mother's dependence on public assistance, she recollects a saying, ". . .Things that come easy, you don't want." Mimi believes that good things came out of her working extremely hard. She frequently maintained two or three jobs for a short period of her life. She contends that, "that was the sacrifice she made to achieve her goals." She said: "I just felt that I had to work hard and that good things would come. They may not come today or it may not come two years from now, but they will come." That is how Mimi looks at things and it has been her way of measuring her accomplishments. She said that she had not actualized her ultimate success and that there are many more levels to achieve.

Yvonne

"You've Got to Be the Trailblazer"

When I spoke with Yvonne about participating in the study, she was more than eager. We have known each other since 1991, when we both were struggling to complete our master's degree at a local university. I had often the opportunity to interact with her both personally and professionally.

On the morning that I met with Yvonne, she was in a great entrepreneurial spirit. She was just returning from her morning jog and was celebrating her recent consulting contracts with a well-known firm. I could understand her excitement given the fact that her business was less than a year old. Yet, in such a short time, she had accumulated large contracts from her previous consulting experience. I congratulated her on her professional achievements as we talked very briefly about her new venture before beginning the interview.

Early Childhood Experiences

Yvonne is a single, forty-eight year old entrepreneur who shared with me that she always wanted to work for herself. Later I found that she made her decision early in life. She grew up in an urban environment with an intact family. Both parents and her two brothers lived in the home. She describes her home environment as loving--they shared feelings both verbally and physically [hugs and kisses].

The oldest of three children, she grew up in an urban environment with a very strict and domineering father. He was a truck driver and a mother who stayed home during her

early school years before taking employment in a cafeteria. In her household, she knew her father held the power whether present or absent from the home. Yvonne's mother would reinforce any decision her father made whether she agreed with it or not. It was in these early years that Yvonne realized she would have a different life. Neither one of her parents had completed high school. Her mother went as far as the eight grade and her father stopped in the eleventh grade.

When I asked Yvonne what impact their socioeconomic status had on her perception of self and achievement as an African American, she quickly pointed out that she realized her father did not have professional status as a truck driver. But her father always pointed out to her that he may not get the recognition that a teacher may receive or another white collar worker. However, his labor earned him comparable, if not more income. This took a little while for Yvonne to understand, given the fact that in her childhood she recognized the difference and kind of respect "white collar workers" received as opposed to "blue collar workers." They did not give the status to her father and the class difference was apparent, something that she realized she would want later in life.

Yvonne realized a difference between the men and women in the family. When I asked her to share some other things that she saw traditionally that men were inclined to do that she would not, the focus went to her father's job outside the home. Speaking about her father during her childhood, she said:

> I saw the difference in the household where my dad was the breadwinner and by being the breadwinner he had more say. He gave my mom money and we went

to the grocery store. Sometimes she thought it was not enough and all those other kinds of issues. So that helped me to think--well--I want to be so that I can make the money myself and have a say over my money. When she made money she had say over them. But, what I saw was it just seems as though you have less power if you weren't bringing in money or if you weren't contributing financially.

Although her mother held the responsibility of the household, her dad possessed the buying power, according to Yvonne. She realized that: ". . .If we wanted anything we went to my dad. But see the dynamics in the household between my mother and my father. . ." Yvonne contributed this difference to gender suggesting that it had a "lot to do with making money." Her brothers, who today, are unionized blue collar workers, made more money early in their employment history. After college, Yvonne who considered herself as a white collar worker, did not have the earning opportunities that the men in her family had. She said that "it took me a longer time to catch up with what they were making or to surpass them."

Differences were not only in earnings. She also recognized gender as a factor. She reflects:

I found out myself as a child and I did not know I was a woman's liberator as a little girl because I remember playing outside one day and people were talking about getting married and things like that and I remember as an elementary school kid, I would say things like I don't see why I have to change my name. I

remember saying those kinds of things, as a little girl. I don't know why I have to change my name. If I get married, I am going to have to marry somebody with the same last name. I cannot see why I have to change my name.

This recognized difference stemmed from her mother's submissive position in the home. Essentially, at a young age Yvonne came to the realization that the difference between her parents was significant enough to decide how her life was going to be. She explained:

> The realization came when I got a little bit older. I just knew the difference. So one of the things that I had decided was I was going to make my own money. I was going to have a say. Those kinds of things were just as important to me. What I did not also want to be. . .was very submissive.

Perhaps that was the driving force behind her was mother's emphasis on the value of education. When growing up, Yvonne said that: ". . .One of the things my mom always taught me when I was very little, she always felt that education was very important. I didn't know at that time, a little later I found out the importance of it. . ." Books, newspapers, reading, and the library became an important aspect of her upbringing. Sunday mornings, the siblings received a part of the paper to read. With great emphasis placed on reading and learning Yvonne remembers how others were interested in her future. She explains that:

> When I was little, I think my parents and my aunts and uncles always prepared me for college. I knew that my parents had not attended college. I thought that they were working class people and if you wanted to rise above working class

then what that required was going to college to get a good education so you could get a job to do more or do better.

She further adds:

I was always told that I could do anything that I wanted to do and I believed that. My mom always said, Where there's a will, there's a way and you can do it. No one has ever told me as I was growing up that there was anything that I could not do. People always wanted to know, yeah go ahead and do it. Anything I can do to help you let me know. No one has ever told me, no you can't do anything. You can't do that or you are not capable.

Living in an economically diverse neighborhood was important to Yvonne. She said she grew up in a community that was "pro children," influential in their lives, and very positive. Church was a part of her youth. Yvonne was always there. For Yvonne, the changes her mother made were many. From Baptist to Catholic, and Jehovah Witnesses to Methodist, she became overwhelmed at the transitions and later ceased to attend church when she left home. It was not until most recently that Yvonne came back to the church because of her mother's belief in God. It was the encouragement from her mother and father and significant others that gave Yvonne her sense of self and achievement even when her beliefs differed about tradition such as "confession" in the Catholic church.

Early Educational Experiences

Reflecting on early educational experiences, Yvonne recalls how her mother was always available and active in her schooling. She traveled with her to school by bus and

was there when she finished for the day. She recalls one incident in elementary school when her mother didn't show up and without panicking, she flagged down a taxicab. Not knowing her address, she pointed the way to her aunt's place of business and later joined her mother.

Yvonne's parents moved in her late elementary school years from the city to the suburbs. Yvonne did not feel comfortable with this transition. This move from the city to the suburbs troubled Yvonne because she was leaving a community that she enjoyed. It was later that she realized that her physical development was part of the reason. She reflects in this manner:

> I remember as a child I had developed a lot sooner than a lot of people in my community and I had some incidents when I was playing outside. People would drive by in their cars and yell out little comments and things and I was in elementary school. My bosom had developed a lot sooner. My aunt and my dad's sister had moved out into this neighborhood. Then my dad just moved on out there and I think it was the best decision for us.

Other than her physical development presenting problems for Yvonne, she perceived the transition to a new segregated school as traumatic. They asked that she repeat the fifth grade. Yvonne found it difficult to deal with and despite her voiced objections, her mother agreed that repeating the fifth grade would be in her best interest. As Yvonne reflects about this transition, she believes it to have been beneficial. She comments that she was more prepared for junior high school as a result of the decision made between her

mother and school administrators. Besides this setback, Yvonne benefitted by being in a school environment that was nurturing and influential in increasing her self esteem.

Another insight for Yvonne was realizing the prevalence of discrimination. After moving to the suburbs, she realized that she was attending a segregated school and the White schools were not available to African Americans. Being shielded from discrimination by her parents left her bewildered over this sense of difference. Despite this setback, Yvonne felt in control of her destiny and believed that it was her merit that would determine her future, not the color of her skin. She explains her position:

> It's just that they had brought up and nurtured me to the point where I knew that I was smart. I knew I could do things and. . .it was just determined on my own ability. I have never felt that the external environment would control what I could do in my life. I always felt that I would be the determining factor on anything I wanted to do.

At this point in her life she was comfortable with who she was as a person, not her Blackness. She realized that things were changing for her and perceived the different life she would have as an adult. She suggests one of the reasons for her belief of being different because she always knew that she would go to college. This was the value "programmed" in her from her parents about education. She states:

> I don't know how I can explain it. I always knew that you went from, at least the way my mom was telling me, you went from elementary school to junior high, from junior high to high and from high to college. I never thought of it any

other way so I guess somehow they programmed me, I don't know how that came about, but I never questioned not going to college. . .[Mother] started me out reading and explaining to me what the progress. . .you're in the first grade, now you go to second grade and what the progression was. But I never thought of not going to college.

Apart from that she knew that her success was important to her parents and believes that their move to the suburbs was in search of better opportunities for their children. Yvonne recalls that, "It was just important for us to succeed. I guess it goes back to being the first born. You have to be that trail blazer, set an example."

Yvonne went to school all year round. Her mother had her participate in extra curricular activities in elementary and junior high school. She became characterized as a "leader." High school was a place she really did not want to revisit although she learned a lot. Yvonne contends that it was "too much peer pressure." She explains:

There was the peer pressure because when I think. . . for me I never really thought about me being a Black woman or anything else like that when I grew up. I knew the pressure of being a girl. And a lot of that came in with the attitude about sex and how you carried yourself. So for me, it was growing up, I was always reminded of my gender. . .from the boys . . . rom my parents. You're a girl. You sit a certain way, those kinds of things.

The issue of femininity was deeper than just a reminder. It lowered her self-esteem, and caused her emotional conflict relating to gender. She came to the conclusion that she

hated being a girl, particularly after an incident with a neighbor. In the fourth grade, Yvonne became a victim of sexual abuse by her neighbor, a friend of the family. To this day she had remained silent about it, with an understanding that her father would have killed the man. She further added:

> There was a time when I was young like that. I just hated being a girl. I just really, really hated being a girl because by being feminine it just drew so much attention because I developed so young I just really hated it. I thought it was just terrible. I was just so . . . I don't know.

When Yvonne's father told her that she was "just as good as her brothers" she began to view her femininity positively. She gives credit to him for encouraging her. She said:

> He forced me to become more assertive in my womanhood and not just be limited by just what you think women do. . .the feminine side. So he just pushed me on out there and he constantly pushed me in doing things like that. So part of who I am today has a lot to do with his encouragement of doing something non-traditional of women. He always rooted for me in doing those kinds of things.

Two experiences in high school gave Yvonne her first lesson in ethical behavior. She ran for President of the Student Council Office and lost to a male opponent who made campaign promises that were impossible to fulfill. From this she learned that disseminating the truth will not always win others over. Finding ways to promote herself and distribute information more appealingly, without lying, would be a stronger approach

to politics. The other experience was competing for cheerleading and not being selected because she was not a part of the teacher's group. She realized that it didn't matter what you could do, but who you knew.

As to redressing the wrong, Yvonne just accepted it as a learning experience without taking action. She recalls:

> I didn't do anything. I just accepted it. I didn't like it. I didn't think it was fair but. . .I think what I had learned about myself from then to now is that I have learned to become more assertive. At that particular time, I was not as assertive to say, hey, I didn't like this. What about that? I was really hurt by that.

Yvonne found life at a woman's college to be a very "nurturing experience" with many African American female role models holding leadership positions. This opportunity gave her a real sense of purpose and that was "knowing the importance of [my] role in giving back to the community." She described her experience in the following way:

> That's when I really found out about being an African American woman. What is the world like for you? What are the challenges out there? That really instilled in me that our strengths and all the things African American women have done, can do. It really helped prepare me for coming out to the work environment. There are some things for which nothing can prepare you.

Early Work Experiences

When asked about her perception of a socially mobile African American woman, Yvonne related it to her work experiences. She defined it in the following manner:

> What that means to me is that you're constantly climbing. I feel like I have actually done that in my life, from the number of jobs that I have held. Many times I looked back and a number of my friends who have been on a job for ten years and everyone is very stable. . .But with me I have been constantly searching. I find it to be fulfilling in terms of the different types of jobs that I have held. I think they all had led me to where I am today, owning my own business.

That did not come easy for Yvonne. The obstacles she encountered such as age and communication barriers and overt racism had its impact on her. However, experiences of racism brought her closer to God and back to the church--something that her mother wanted for her always. It made her stronger and more determined to fulfill her own dreams, become her own boss. She smiles as she reflects upon some of her work experiences and her determination to persevere. Expressed in her own words she explains her sustaining power:

> With a lot of good self-esteem, knew who I was. I felt good about me so I think had I experienced it different I might have said well, what is wrong with me, but by the time I realized it, I had enough self confidence to deal with it. I had enough self-pride and enough self-esteem to say well hey, I am just as good as anybody else. My dad has already told me.

Diane

"Be All I Can Be"

Our initial visit was after business hours on the Northern Virginia Campus of Virginia Polytechnic State University. Diane didn't want any special setup and after a brief get acquainted introduction, we headed for a room reserved for the interview. Having been introduced by a friend, upon our initial meeting, Diane did not resemble a woman in her mid-forties. I realized that at the age of forty-five, her appearance and style were that of a much more mature woman. Her external looks also complemented her demeanor, as I found her to be deliberate and very animated in her speech and expressions. Moreover, having acquired as she identifies them, four bachelors, three masters, and four doctorate degrees, I was eager to learn more about this educational over-achiever and her pursuit of upward mobility.

Early Childhood Experiences

At the time of her birth, Diane's parents were in their mid-forties and her only sibling was a sister, thirty-one years her senior. For all intents and purposes, she considered herself the only child of middle-age parents. From the onset, Diane's initial response to the kind of relationship she had with her older sibling was articulated in a solemn manner. She declared, "I never had a sister. . .I never had a friend, buddy, or pal relationship with my sister." It became apparent to me during this part of the interview that Diane was not comfortable talking about her sister. I noticed that her speech became swifter and she began to shift in her seat when I asked if her sister had offspring that she bonded with as a

child. Diane responded with a quick "no" and abruptly changed the focus of the interview into a dialogue about her parents and the relationship she had with them. Diane describes her parents as, ". . .strict and the meanest people God put on the face of the earth." As with her sister, she describes the relationship that she had with her parents to some extent detached. The atmosphere was not that of love, but one with many rules, limitations, and expectations. Because of their strictness, Diane grew up with a deep-rooted aversion toward them. Asking her to be more descriptive of her statement, she said that her attitude was based on not allowing "her to have her way," as a child. Mainly, Diane was referring to not being allowed to stay out late like the other children did in her neighborhood. She saw no reason why a grade school child could not stay out and "play until nine, ten, or twelve at night like other people." She was always told to come straight home from school unless engaged in an extra curricular activity.

Within her home environment, they did not allow excuses. She followed instructions to do something quickly and her parents did not tolerate foolishness. As a reminder of the standard of behavior expected of her, her mother constantly told her,

> ". . .when you get so old that you cannot abide by the rules and regulations, there's the door." It was this kind of reinforcement by her parents in which she would conjure up thoughts about leaving home, "running away from those folks."

These thoughts prevailed throughout her childhood, graduating from college and beginning her first teaching assignment in a junior high school, her perception of her parents had changed.

Diane's claim of dislike for her parents changed during the initial interview. To move away from her sister as a topic of the interview, she smiled and said, "My father, I absolutely adored and worshiped him and emulated him in every way I possibly could." She enjoyed learning and credits her father with instilling this gift in her and many values she has carried with her throughout her life. In preparation for a better life, she said that her father, ". . . gave me a deal of wisdom and my mother reinforced that wisdom. . . in a practical sense."

Diane didn't realize until later that her parents were preparing her for the future by the type of toys she received. According to Diane, "they were toys that would prepare me for life, whatever avenue I took." For example, her mother taught her how to make doll clothes for her doll house. Her father taught her how to make dolls. They were teaching her to care for [herself] if she were not able to purchase these things. If she could not buy the dress, she could purchase the fabric to make it. Beyond developing her skills, her mother taught her discipline, how to manage herself in relationships and her father taught her stamina. Her grandparents reemphasized and reinforced these principles. They reinforced what her parents taught her and that was to be honest, truthful, respectful, and just.

Diane recalls her mother recounting her own life experiences as an African American female growing up and the obstacles that she confronted both educationally and in the work environment. Diane said her mother was "constantly filling [her] with that." Her parents exposed her to a variety of professions and professionals, surmising that seeing

other avenues of life would give her something to reflect on when the time came for her to decide upon a career path. Diane said her "godparents influenced her," a Jewish family who employed her mother as a domestic worker and as Diane states, later becomes friends of her parents. Diane would often accompany her mother to work and had the opportunity to see life from another perspective. As she described it at the age of six or seven, "my godparents were billionaires." It was this godfather who taught Diane the value of money. She believes that he had so much because he would never to give it away frivolously, as she often asked him for money. According to Diane, if you had to ask, have a legitimate reason why he should lend. Thus, this became her aspiration, to one day become a millionaire as she suggested to her mother and godmother during this early phase of her life. Upon reflection, she sees that her mother was trying to "keep me on track as I was in school, get the education."

Early Childhood Education

Diane's perception of her teachers influenced her initial decision to avoid teaching. Although her parents taught her "to respect her teachers the same as they respected her," Diane felt that "it didn't take much to be a teacher." She believed that, "All you have to do is just walk in the classroom and say good morning class, all right take the roll, and page 22, Johnny, start reading."

Reflecting upon the values her mother impressed upon her, she recalls being told, "You don't have to like the teacher, the subject, the other students. . .You don't have to like anything, but you are [in school] to get an education and learn." Her father said:

> When someone thinks enough of you to tell you something that will benefit you, give them the respect and respect yourself to listen. You may already know, but listen. If you can use it, take it and use it. If you can't, put it in your hip pocket and sit on it because the day is coming when you will need it.

She admits that later in life, she grew to appreciate her teachers while attending college. She learned that their role required them to be prepared and preparation time carried them far beyond the school hours.

Diane describes herself as being "eager and energetic" to start school. Before attending school, she claims to have had a vast degree of interest in everything. Thus, upon entering school, she stated that she was ahead of her peers, as she was already familiar with the basics. When she entered the first grade, she could read, spell, and write her name. In addition, she knew the alphabet and arithmetic operations such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. She could recite her phone number, parent's names, and knew her next of kin. She credits her mother, who was a homemaker at the time, with spending "too much" time with her in those developing years before attending first grade.

Her early preparation did not prepare her for what she experienced until the third grade. She received poor grades in school and always wanted her mother to read to her and disliked doing her homework. It was during this time in grade school that they learned that her vision was impaired. A confirmation from the doctor verified this fact and with only 15 percent of her vision left, they sentenced her to wear thick lenses. Diane

states that kids laughed at her and quickly added that it did not bother her because she could now see. This experience inspired her to become an optometrist. However, she placed a barrier in front of herself, believing that optometrists had to have "perfect sight." Diane read the books but never matriculated to that level. But she knew that she was "going to be all I could be." When her relatives asked the question, she always had the same response, "all I can be." She didn't want to be in the same line of work as her mother. She hated that her mother did domestic work. She felt that her mother should keep her own house, not have anyone call her by her first name, or keep her busy needlessly "just to get their monies worth of work out of her." At the age of four she said, "I was not going to be a maid or clean house or be a domestic worker. I knew that."

Diane knew that life would be different. She told her mother that when she grew up she would, "get a good education, a good job, and White folks are going to be washing my floors, if I decide to let them in my house." She did not want to be tied down--something that her father taught to her. He wanted her to develop your talent in several areas in the event that one would not be open to her. Diane contends that, "There is no one thing because I am too gifted and too talented to tie myself down to one particular thing." She later suggests, that her "thirst for learning" came from her father. As previously mentioned, she emulated him in every way. It was her father who taught her not to waste time. She was constantly told by her father that, "How you use today determines how tomorrow uses you." He said:

Don't allow others to waste [your] time, and don't waste other people's time. . .

you can sit and waste your time today, you can play around, you can not pay attention. But the day is coming when you will be accountable for that for which you were exposed.

Diane had interest in a variety of educational fields such as photography, medicine, computers, and teaching among others. However, her father wanted her to focus on those things that interested her and not to waste energy on things that would not benefit her in the future such as education and learning. That is, he suggested she learn a trade because if she could not get into her profession, at least she would have something to fall back on. The primary principle she learned was that of "listening." Her father impressed upon her the benefit of listening. He explained in this manner, "Get your direction, then you know where you are going." He was conveying to his daughter the message of learning to listen to people who know a little bit more. He told Diane that she needed to do this so that she could start on the right track.

Things began to change for Diane after she left her parent"s home and took on a position in the school system. It was then, that she came to value the love her parents shared with her in preparation for her future after she graduated from college and began teaching. Diane came to believe that it was a terrible thing to run off without direction, not knowing where she was headed, what she was suppose to be doing, and how she got there. That was wasted time, something that her father told her early not to do or let others do to her. Thus, in school, she worked to improve upon her strengths and her weaknesses. As a child, Diane, "was always [taught] to build herself up, to make

[herself] better than she was." It wasn't coming out as the "best." Diane was concerned with, "learning the lesson if there was one to learn." She opted not to take the easy way out. Consequently, she came to enjoy the challenge of gaining knowledge in a variety of areas. Thus, she satisfied her thirst for learning in addition to equipping herself with the necessary skills for future technology.

Diane remained focused on her educational pursuits because she knew that it would lead to better opportunities in the future. College was not the thing to do on her father's side and on her mother's side of the family she recalls maybe one or two cousins attending college. Diane states that they expected that her generation would go to college. She felt each generation should progress and do more than the previous generation. She said of her parents, "Why would they sacrifice and suffer to give me what they didn't have if I am not going to do any more than they did. There must be a reason that they went through this." Diane recognized that she had to move beyond what she was experiencing.

Like many other African Americans, Diane did not escape the realities of race and gender-based discrimination. Beginning in her late teen and college years, she either experienced or witnessed a preponderance of discriminatory practices. Her mother told her always to be on guard because the White man will belittle you and convince you that you are nothing and not as good as them. She witnessed "racial ignorance" and the degrading of African Americans in the education system, community, and the workplace. She didn't take heed to her mother's position of "not being able to do anything about it." In fact, she said she refused to accept it. When it came to confronting a discriminating

situation, Diane was at the forefront, demanding to know why such and such was happening to her relative or friend or co-worker.

What I found interesting was she would "take up the cause for other people" while letting others treat her anyway they wanted. When I asked about this she said only recently did she come to that realization. She said she always knew that there were "many other avenues and if that door closed." With that, Diane changed the subject and began to speak about her opportunities to earn a Master's degree while working for a bank. Within this environment, her competitiveness escalated and she wanted to be number one in whatever she competed. This was her livelihood she was competing for which was unlike her childhood value of building herself up better than what she was. If Diane didn't see herself as the best, she was "out the door."

Diane simultaneously worked and attended college, eventually earning a number of advanced degrees. It amazed me at how a forty-five-year-old woman could accomplish so much in so few years. I asked them. Diane responded by saying she had earned four bachelor degrees simultaneously. Through further questioning, she became a little more specific and said that they only awarded her one degree although she had majored in four different areas of education. When employers presented or Diane created opportunities for herself, she said she capitalized on them. She believed her thirst for learning was insatiable. She obtained degrees while working at different organizations and some employers covered the cost of her tuition. She didn't elaborate long on such a great achievement before she changed the subject.

Unlike racial issues, being an African American female was not a problem for Diane. First, she saw herself as an American, stating that she didn't know enough about her African heritage. Second, she recognized the difference between male and female and said that any experience whether positive or negative helped rather than hindered her growth. As she grew older, she became more conscious of her gender and the hiring practices within society. These experiences gave her the determination that anywhere she wanted to walk, she would walk. If a person had a problem with her because of her gender, she said, "that was their problem and not mine." She was there to learn and move on.

Early Work Experience

Diane approached her work like she did learning. From banking to a communication network, the educational system, and the students within the system, if she could not be her best because of adversity or perceived limitations, Diane sought other professions. Thus, this was the early pattern of Diane's career and educational experiences. After ten years of working in her secondary fields, with the help of colleagues, she was able to fulfill her goal of obtaining government employment. From there, she created opportunities for herself to advance both professionally and academically. What she has learned from her experiences is, ". . . if you want it, then want it and get up off your south end and cut a path." For Diane, constantly stretching her imagination and dreaming cleared a path upon which she walked. Diane wants people to perceive her as one who is faithful in preparing to acquiring, maintaining, and expanding. That was the only way she knew she could accomplish her dream, a dream of being more progressive than her parents.

GERRY

"Never Define Yourself By Color"

Branded as a bright child, the more praise Gerry received, the harder she worked to excel in her academics. The last born of twenty-one children, at the age of forty-two, Gerry began her interview by saying she had just completed another chapter in her life. Referring to a pending divorce from her husband of fourteen years, Gerry stated that she had weathered the storm and ha truly been transformed upon realizing that she had forgotten her fourteenth anniversary date. Declaring that her time for moving forward has begun, Gerry thanked me for giving her the chance to tell her story.

To get away from home and potential interruptions, Gerry and I met at my home office for the taping of her interviews. She talked about her status in life, believing that success was important to her. She said, "I always thought that I would be successful . . .I wanted more than what surrounded me within my childhood."

Gerry is an attractive woman in her forties with a copper tone tan and hair to match her complexion. It's hard to picture this little girl growing up on a farm without indoor plumbing--working in the fields with parents who were sharecroppers until her later grade school years. Always "en vogue," she dressed in a tailored ecru linen short suit with gold accessories to compliment her attire. She has come a long way from that little girl who received hand me down clothes and did not get her first dress until she was in the fifth grade. She spoke softly as she reflected upon both positive and negative experiences that contributed to who she has become today.

As a single and divorced parent of an eleven-year-old son, Gerry views her life now as the happiest it has ever been. She is currently serving as the Accounting Manager of a large medical organization and being considered for the Vice President of Accounting position. Gerry has currently served seven years with this company, moving up the ladder and now earning a salary of $80,000 plus benefits. She holds two Bachelors of Science degrees, a Master's degree in Accounting, and has credits toward a Master's Degree in Guidance and Counseling.

Born in a small town in North Carolina, Gerry left her southern home on a 4-year scholarship to attend undergraduate classes at an upstate New York college. It was at that period in her life that she became her own woman, the leader of her own destiny. She states that she was "surviving off the values instilled in her by her mother."

Early Childhood Experiences

Raised on a southern rural farm and the last born of twenty-one children, besides her parents, Gerry had plenty of siblings to admire. While they doted upon her, it was the wisdom of her mother who influenced her life's direction to achieve a socioeconomic status above her childhood living conditions. Gerry described her parents as "full of wisdom" and proud people with a strong spiritual base, despite their limited educational background. She characterized her mother as the communicator and her father as the silent partner who worked hard to provide for his family. Although he talked very little, Gerry recalls her father saying that "actions speak louder than words." She perceives this to be his way, "action rather than words." According to Gerry, her father led by example.

It was Gerry's mother who emphasized the notion of being able to obtain more out of life. While she did not necessarily know what the "more" was, she nonetheless set her sights on having it, always keeping in mind the values instilled in her by her mother. She recalls her mother telling her to: "Never ever define yourself in terms of color . . . If you first define yourself as a child of God who just happen to be Black, then I am sure you will be successful in this world."

It was Gerry's mother who encouraged her to achieve more out of life. According to Gerry, her mother believed that a better life existed and she helped prepare her children by instilling some basic values. As Gerry recalls, they told her that to be successful she should, "Always make God number one in your life. . . and have good work ethics. " Additionally, her mother told her that: "You will do a lot of hard work depending on yourself. Have good work ethics. Be honest no matter what you do. Be honest to yourself. Your word is your bond." Besides "not defining yourself in terms of your color," these are a few of the values that Gerry has carried with her in her lifetime.

I asked Gerry if her mother shared her life experiences regarding race. She responded by saying that she did not recall her mother ever discussing her experiences related to race. Upon reflection Gerry could see that her mother experienced many difficult times. However, she said that her mother, "was never a complainer, didn't talk about how hard life was, and she was not someone that would blame others for her position in life." Moreover, Gerry never asked the background of her parents, which she contributes to her self-centeredness and lack of exposure to racial difficulty. In hindsight, she believes that if

race had become a problem for her, that may have warranted the possibility of asking her Mother about her experiences. Gerry strongly believes that her mother had instilled in her how to overcome and relate to racism through the principles that they gave and her mother's actions. Trying to understand what her mother had gone through never became an issue. She also feels that her mother shielded her from racist experiences so that she would not become bitter. Gerry believes that her mother learned to turn the other cheek through her spiritual background. It was her wisdom in terms of how to deal with obstacles when striving for upward mobility. In Gerry's household, they truly emphasized education. To begin to focus on better opportunities, Gerry became aware early that education was an important part of the process.

Early Educational Experiences

Having matriculated to the third and fifth grade respectively, Gerry's mother and father nonetheless believed in the value of education. They often stressed to their children that it "would be the key to their success." Gerry enjoyed making her mother proud when she earned good grades. However, receiving encouragement was only part of her drive to succeed academically. Outside her academic ability, it was witnessing the experiences of her older siblings that reinforced her drive to become successful in life.

While in her early years of grade school, Gerry observed repeatedly the struggles of some of her siblings. Because of seeing their struggles, she was determined "more than ever," not to follow their same path. That path led them to marriage right out of high school, babies, living in their own little house, and often experiencing spousal abuse.

Aware of their limitations, she wanted even more to be different. She didn't want a marriage right out of high school as her siblings settled for. She describes the life of her siblings in this manner:

> My sisters were grown and my brothers were grown when I was small. Some of them didn't have good lives and I made up very early in my mind, from first grade forward that education was the way to have a better life. I made up in my mind then that I was going to educate myself such that I could have a better life than my sisters and brothers that I saw.

As Gerry explains their experiences, she recalls her mother saying that: "If you got a good education, you could be anything that you wanted to be and you could go further in life than what you may be seeing here."

Gerry realized that her parents were not "economically prepared" to send her to college. It was the same situation that her older siblings faced. As a result, they did not see advanced education as an option. As Gerry explains, she just wanted to go on to college and from there she anticipated getting a good job once she graduated. Given her desire, she began to capitalize on opportunities that came her way which was secondary to her own academic initiative.

First, Gerry wanted to excel in school. The more praise she received for her accomplishment, the harder she tried. She enjoyed the attention and praise from significant others as they recognized her academic achievement. Because of her academic standings, she positioned herself to become a recipient of a 4-year scholarship and her

mother's contribution to her college education came in the form of "care packages."

Second, she encountered the mentors in school, sometime around the fourth grade. These relationships developed when she moved from her rural southern farm to a dwelling in the city. She characterizes this move as a traumatic experience. The isolated life that she was reared in on the farm became totally different for her at her city location. One positive difference was living in a dwelling with running water and indoor plumbing facilities. On the negative side, she realized how different she was and the children in school pointed out those differences. They brought to her awareness that she was a Southern girl from an economically impoverished background and was materially poor. Detailing the experience, she said:

> I remember my first day at school, some kids laughing because of the way I dressed . . . I didn't have my first dress that was really my dress Marsha until I was in the fifth grade . . .All of the clothes I wore were hand-me-downs . . . But even in that point and time being poor materially, we didn't have the clothes and I remember the little girls laughing at me.

But given the values that her mother instilled in her, despite being ridiculed by her peers, she did very well in school. In addition to her socialization, she always had in the back of her mind "to do well in order to move on to a better life." With the guidance of her fourth, fifth, and sixth grade teachers, whom she contends "took her under their wings" she was motivated to excel. They took the focus off her appearance and challenged her intellectually. According to Gerry, their ongoing praise helped her progress upward. She

said, "They always gave me praise of how proud they were of me and the more praise I got, the better I wanted to do. The better I wanted to do, the more successful I wanted to be." The praise from her siblings, reinforced her encouragement. She stated that their closeness and lack of jealousy for one another's accomplishment created an environment for her to grow with a deliberate focus--living a better life. Gerry said that she was very fortunate in to have mentors in her life who loved her. Gerry gave credit to her siblings and teachers as the mentors in her life who "overly loved" and "spoiled" her.

She realized that life would be better after her move to the city. She now found herself in an environment with teachers as neighbors. Attending church on Sundays exposed Gerry to a mixture of professional people such as lawyers, teachers, and doctors. Given this, she realized that she had many career alternatives. She explained:

> I could aspire to be like that and because then I was branded as a bright child, I got much reinforcement from my family, teachers and counselors. It carried through and made me want to be successful. When you get praise for making good grades and you get that reinforcement from your family and people in the community, you want to continue that.

Gerry further adds that may be the value described by the Ashanti proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." She grew up in her early age, after the fourth grade, with the village raising her. She stated that this extended family was very influential in her life.

In high school, Gerry faced integration for the first time in the tenth grade. She experienced good relationships with her White teachers. She remembers in particular the

relationship she developed with her math and science teachers, both White males. It was her math teacher that helped her obtain a scholarship to attend college in the North. These same teachers offered to take her to the school for an interview. However, her parents declined their offer believing that once out of her hometown, she would no longer be in their control. They were certain that an African American female traveling with two White males would invite trouble.

Like the teachers, Gerry experienced the same kind of relationship with White students who were members of the honor society and other clubs she joined. She contends that she could relate to diverse cultures because of the value that her mother instilled in her. Her mother told her, ". . .never ever define yourself in terms of the color of your skin. Because once you define yourself in terms of the color of your skin that is limiting to you."

Gerry was determined to attend college. To get there, she realized that by excelling in her educational studies, the opportunity would present itself. Knowing that her parents could not afford to send her, she excelled in high school and graduated cum lade. She earned a full four-year scholarship to attend college at a University in the North. Initially, college life was difficult for Gerry. According to Gerry, it was a "very frightening experience." Being away from home for the first time with an understanding of life as she knew it did not prepare her for the difficult decision she soon faced. Her first experience came on the second day after her arrival. They ridiculed her and laughed at her appearance. The fashionable wardrobe that Gerry worked hard for after school was

not considered "in style" in this Northern University. In her hometown people admired her and in high school they knew her as the "fancy dresser." At the University she felt alienated. Thinking of herself as "the best thing since sliced bread," she realized early that she was out of her league. Gerry describes this as a sobering experience, because at the age of 14 she worked to buy the clothes her mother could not afford.

Secondly, she had a very difficult time on a campus of ten-thousand students with a small minority of African Americans. She estimates the African American population around two-hundred students. For the first time, she witnessed racial tension between the Whites and African Americans. This was something that she had not experienced. To avoid being alienated from her African American peers, she joined the revolutionary talk. She lied about disliking White people and how they had done African Americans people wrong. Not wanting to express her true experiences and feeling insecure, Gerry joined the bandwagon of the marches, sit-ins and, the planning and plotting of administrative takeovers. Her participation became meaningful to her later when she could see that although she did not experience overt racism, it did exist in America.

Reflecting upon her childhood she realized that she avoided looking in the direction of racism. She did not want to face it. As she recalls, some White young women did not want to associate with African Americans and attended class early so that they could take up the front seats. In the clubs, Whites did not want to hold meetings at her home as they did for their peers. Gerry believes that her experience at college awakened her consciousness to the realities that she did not want to face. Additionally she feels that her

lack of exposure to what the world was like from her mothers' perceptive did not give her an accurate perception of reality. Consequently, her grades suffered in the classroom and her self esteem lowered. In the classroom, Gerry began to believe that her concerns and questions would be considered as trivial compared to the questions raised by the White students. Also, she felt the subject matter was over her head. Comfort for her came only when she involved herself in the African American experience of Black awareness.

Two events really disturbed Gerry as she recalled her college experience. First, to fit in Gerry began to lie about what her life was like at home and things that she did. This was something that Gerry did not feel good about and as she reflected upon it in momentary silence her eyes became watery. The second thing was how she became pregnant by her best friend's boyfriend and had an abortion during her second year in college. When I asked about her decision to end her pregnancy, she said:

> When I think about it, it wasn't a hard decision, to have the abortion. I had much remorse afterwards because of my spiritual upbringing . . .I was so scared to death that if my mother knew that I was pregnant. . .and that was the motivator for me to go on and have the abortion. I felt that I would have been letting everybody down in the community, all of these mentors that I talked to you about, the teachers, my family and community.

The fear of letting down all the individuals that believed in her abilities made it easy for Gerry to end her pregnancy. For Gerry, betraying her best friend was the most traumatic experience of her life and expressed her feelings in this manner:

I regret that, very much in my life and if I have one regret, it would be that I did not honor my friendship with her and I chose to have an intimate relationship with him over her. That has been another transformation for me.

To date, she has denied the truth to her mother. Because of her behavior, she lost her best girlfriend and needed police protection out of fear of reprisal. Shortly after the destruction of her property by her girlfriend, Gerry subsequently decided to move off campus for her own safety.

Early Work Experiences

As previously stated, Gerry began working at the age of fourteen, primarily to satisfy her personal needs. Upon entering college and transferring after completing the second year, she had to forfeit her full scholarship because of a life treating situation that she allowed to happen. Upon returning to her hometown she moved in with one of her sisters. The family rule was once someone left home they cannot come back. So, Gerry had to obtain employment to survive and to complete college.

It was not easy for Gerry working long evenings and weekends as a cashier. Nevertheless, the $800 would help her to complete her studies. When she felt like giving up, she always reminded herself of the people whom she would disappoint. She continued and graduated from a North Carolina college cum laude with a degree in psychology. Thinking that the world was waiting for her, she applied for a social service position. Asking about the pay, she became hurt knowing that her degree could only earn her $400 a month. She describes her reaction.

I honestly could not understand that. That hurt my feelings because I thought the world was just waiting on me to finish school. That just didn't make sense to me. Why did I bother going to school to make four hundred a month when you didn't even need a degree and as a cashier you could make eight-hundred dollars a month?

Gerry questioned whether she had made a mistake pursuing a career in the social sciences and what she could do with it at the Bachelors level. She discovered that it would take many more years of studying to become a psychiatrist and realized she didn't know what she wanted to do about a career. Her goal then became to find a good paying career that could support her because she knew that she could not return home.

She did not have much guidance as to career choices. She recalls the guidance she received from her high school counselor.

When I think back to high-school, I had a White counselor. I remember her telling me that I didn't need to go to college. That I would make a good secretary somewhere and so I didn't get much encouragement as to career counseling. I just knew that I wanted to go to college. I was going to college and I knew that I could do well once I got there. But I wasn't sure about what I wanted to do.

Gerry decided to return to college, keep her cashier position and, pursue a Master's degree in guidance and counseling. After completing twenty hours, she began to investigate salaries of school counselors at this level. Finding it no better than a teacher's

salary and still following the wrong path, she changed to the business field and earned a degree in accounting. The Dean of the college gave her direction in the field and in how to obtain scholarship funds. With the stipulation of having to prove herself about grades the first semester, she excelled in her courses and received funds for the duration of her studies. Upon graduating cum laude, she received several job offers because as Gerry contends, she was one of the better students in accounting. She chose to go to an oil company as an accountant making fifteen-thousand dollars. At that point, Gerry believed her independent life began to develop. Later, they offered her an accounting position within a major medical facility in the Washington Metropolitan area and for the past seven years has worked her way up the ladder to experience significant socioeconomic mobility.

Researcher's Comments

I wanted to retire Diane's interview from the roster of eight participants after my first interview. I just had a gut feeling that she was not being totally honest several times during the interview. Call it intuition, or sixth sense, it appears that she built walls around her for the initial interview and follow-up. I felt as if she prepared or rehearsed what she was going to say with an invisible script. Much pontificating occurred during a four and one-half hour interview. Signs of a real activist for human rights characterized her behavior when it came to the rights of others. When the focus was on Diane's personal feelings, actions, concerns, the story and the response were noticeably different. Several times during the interview she would brush off probing questions when I asked for more specific detail. At that point, she would refocus on an experience or event that puffed her up. At times, when I wanted to focus on her feelings regarding certain experiences, I noticed gestures of discomfort. For instance, when I probed for a deeper understanding of the non self-imposed adversities that had an economic impact upon her, she would shrug her shoulders, pause while blankly staring at me, and respond nonchalantly, "I've never thought of that. Maybe I didn't give a damn." She would than abandon the subject by suggesting that we go back to covering an aspect of her life, such as earning eleven degrees. She may have perceived this as more pleasurable and felt that it commanded the attention of the listener.

Essentially, she was cautious of everything she said, and was careful not to bring into the interview the image of vulnerability. Events and experiences did not add up in the

sense that several contradictions became apparent: father's background, mother's work experiences, number of higher level educational degrees, relationship with peers and her attitude toward them, and opportunities for future advancement. Follow-up on these and other inconsistencies did not favor the study participant. I received different responses during peer debriefing sessions and thoughts from several committee members. Overall, I was told to look for a deeper meaning. After many readings, the transcripts revealed something very interesting and that is, the more she talked, the closer I seemed to be getting to the real Diane. I sensed that her barriers were breaking down and the once perfect warrior was beginning to show a shadow of vulnerability. At one time, I expressed to a debriefer, that had I continued for a few more hours during the first 4-hours of interviewing, the outcome may have produced different responses to questions restated. Follow-up calls did not deter Diane from giving information that made her look like the hero.

Diane projected an aura of confidence and a "no nonsense" person. But her voice and the experiences shared were that of a person with varying degrees of insecurity in her abilities. I came to the conclusion that this was her way of living up to the expectations of her parents. Diane stated that her mother was not convinced that she earned another degree--a post doctorate degree. In asking why her mother would doubt her achievement, Diane's response was "she did not get an invitation to the graduation" and she opted not to believe that her daughter had received a fourth Doctor of Philosophy degree.

CHAPTER V
RESULTS

INTRODUCTION

Thematic Analysis of a Transformative Learning Process

This chapter examines the major themes that influenced a selected group of African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to achieve upward mobility and the transformative learning process that guided their actions. Particular emphasis is placed upon their early life experiences, events, and insights that caused these women to transform their lives by breaking the generational cycle of poverty.

I considered a theme powerful if it was unique to a particular woman or shared by others. For example, a common resounding theme illustrative of Gerry and conveyed by her mother was, " . . . never define yourself in terms of color." Gerry believed that this was an important principle in her upbringing. The philosophy behind it helped her focus on her goal of upward mobility achievement, rather than physical characteristics that would hinder her mobility.

The analysis of the transcripts allowed me to give form and structure to the unique experiences. In this chapter, I fully detail and explain, with much specificity, the common themes and patterns that are illustrative and supportive of all the participants. This process was conducted by walking through each theme that emerged from one participant and linking the common themes and coding. While I recognize the uniqueness of each

participant's experiences, my intent was to present the common themes and patterns that emerged through the analysis and interpretation of the data.

Analysis of Themes and Concepts

As indicated in the previous chapter, twenty-two themes emerged from the analysis and interpretation of the data (see Appendix D). Themes were collapsed into four general categories (themes). This further reduced the data and served as the core concepts for conceptually related themes. I categorized the twenty-two subthemes under the core concepts that were most consistent with their meaning. This became necessary when some overlapping of themes occurred during my approach to building support and evidence of their validity to the assumptions underlying this study. Besides that, I was able to identify the similarities, individual uniqueness, and organize emerging themes into broader conceptualizations. Through further analyses and interpretation of the data, overarching themes emerged that encased the core concepts under two thematic features. Upon final reflection and analysis of the features consistent with the core concepts, I identified a major theme which served as an umbrella theme that encapsulated all the themes that emerged from this study.

Themes that emerged from the data in shown in Table 5. They depict interrelated and interdependent features of a learning process. Beliefs and opportunities are the two core concepts that emerged and under each concept are two categories of themes and their related subthemes. Beliefs are more consistent with the value laden upbringing and productive self perception themes. Opportunities best depict the themes of influences and

Table 5
Transformative Learning Concepts and Themes

BELIEFS	
Category I	**Category II**
Value Laden Upbringing	**Productive Self-Perception**
Basic Lifelong Values	Positive Self-Esteem
Work Ethics	Goal Driven
Morals	Early Exposure
Religious and Spiritual Beliefs	Sense of Purpose
Educational Achievement	Internal Locus of Control

OPPORTUNITIES	
Category III	**Category IV**
Influences of Others	**Significant Mobility Experience**
Positive Role Models	Adverse Self-Inflicted
Support Networks	Adverse Non-Self-Inflicted
Early Influences	Positive Fortuitous
Negative Role Models	Intentional Design
Maternal Influences	Coping Experiences *

* Coping is a combined category of three themes: spiritual coping, insulated coping, and using others as a means of coping.

significant mobility experiences. Both beliefs and opportunities represent the pivotal influences and enlightening experiences which were critical links in the lives of these upwardly mobile African American women.

In analyzing the themes, the reader may notice that I may repeat some verbatim transcripts from Chapter IV. This was done for illustrative purposes only. An in-depth analysis of Gerry's early life upbringing and experiences will shed light on the common themes shared by all participants in this study. More specifically, the model that evolves from this research will provide insight into the transformative learning process as experienced by the African American women who participated in this research.

BELIEFS

Category I: A Value-laden Upbringing

If values are defined as those characteristics of one's life that are important and have worth, then values were particularly instrumental in Gerry's process of achievement. The direction in life that Gerry took appears to have been largely related to the values instilled in her by her mother. During her interviews, she placed the greatest emphases upon being influenced by her respective family, church, community, and school. The themes illustrative of this category are labeled as: basic lifelong values, spirituality, morals, work ethic, and educational achievement.

Gerry credits her childhood experiences as the major basis for her present abilities, knowledge, and position in life. She consistently talked about the extent of her

relationship with her mother and the life tools ingrained in her to help her excel in life. The following illustration given by Gerry sums up this perceptive.

> As I reflect upon my life, I can see that the vision my mother prepared me for was instrumental in my development and ability to achieve. Those were the years in which my foundation of principles were developed and inculcated in me which I carry with me to this day. She instilled values and morals in all of us. I always felt loved by both my parents, particularly my mother who was a very strong God fearing woman. She always encouraged [me] and she always said that I know that there is a better life out there. She was a very proud lady and always instilled that in us.

Gerry maintains the belief that what she received from her family when growing up enabled her to become who she is today. Her parents (more specifically her mother) inspired her. The transformative learning process began with words of encouragement, love, and instilling a belief within Gerry that despite her present limitations, nothing was impossible. She could become whatever she aspired to be.

The themes illustrative of the basic lifelong values became evident as Gerry reflected upon her childhood principles by stating, "I am still surviving off the values my mother instilled in me." To say that Gerry may not have ever questioned her childhood values would be an unsubstantiated assumption from my perspective, although she did distinguish between the value of education and career choices. It is apparent that the values given to Gerry has in part guided her path beyond poverty to achieving significant mobility.

Subtheme A: Spirituality/Religious Belief --
"Always Make God Number One In Your Life."

Religious and spiritual beliefs were an important influence in Gerry's upbringing. She grew up with parents whose beliefs were deeply rooted in their spirituality. Gerry's mother's spiritual leadership helped shape her basic belief system. In fact, religion played a significant part in her nurturing. She confirmed this perspective by crediting this value to her present belief. Five years before this interview, she rededicated her life to God, bringing back into focus the value instilled in her by her mother. She stated, "The number one reason that I am so happy and peaceful in my life right now is that I am reconnected and have rededicated myself to God and church . . . it is my source of being."

In Gerry's youth attending church was beneficial to the extent that it provided an opportunity for Gerry to be with other peers, adults, and parents of diverse professions and experiences. Some of these same people (teachers, neighbors, friends) became influences in her life. Thus, her early childhood religious exposure reinforced her belief that life could be different. The strength of that value is the motivation behind Gerry's rededication and active involvement in the church (i.e., singing in the choir, attending several services throughout the week). This preceded intermittent periods of church attendance that begun after she moved to the North in her young adult life.

Family was also instrumental in developing the basic belief system of the other participants. The subjects religious and spiritual beliefs were raised during the interviews without my solicitation. Tiffany, Yvonne, and Carla spoke at length about their strong

religious upbringing--it being ingrained within them by their mothers. Diva differed to the extent that she adopted her spirituality from her paternal grandmother. Mimi's spiritual belief was shaped by her maternal grandmother because of the mother-sibling estrangement in her early years. Upon her return to live with her mother at the beginning of her teenage years, she said, "I had already learned the basic foundation." Aeisha, given her childhood upbringing, did not receive this foundation from her mother. It was learned later from a classmate she befriended in elementary school. At that point in her life, religion became part of her basic belief system.

Diane was the one exception to being raised with a strong religion foundation. Greater importance was placed upon having strong work ethics--advice primarily instilled in her by her father. Unlike the other participants, religion was not a self-initiated reflection of her past as she recollected her childhood upbringing. Religion and spiritual growth may not have been considered an important influence in her life and her achievement during her upbringing. Unlike the other participants, Diane's only reference to God was through statements such as "Thank God or My God." This may or may not signify spirituality or religious roots. I perceive this to be merely an unconscious idiom. Many people speak in that way without thinking or meaning.

Subtheme B: Morals -- Gave Us the Wisdom to Move Forward in Life

Moral guidance instilled in Gerry as a child primarily placed emphasis upon her self image, character, and her ability to succeed. As she reflected upon principles she received from her mother, she stated that she was given "the wisdom in terms of how to deal with

[life's adversities and opportunities] going forward." For example, to alleviate the negative effects that African Americans endured by virtue of their skin color, Gerry recalls her mother telling her, " . . . never ever define yourself in terms of color . . . be honest no matter what you do. Be honest to yourself. Your word is your bond."

Gerry characterized her mother as "a very proud lady" and said, "she instilled (a sense of pride) in us." Gerry was always reminded that "beyond the farm, there was something much better." Gerry learned early to define herself based upon her own uniqueness and not "what society has dictated . . . " She stood by the survival principle of, " . . . whatever comes in your life you are still able to survive, meet all the challenges and not be afraid."

The significance of characterizing yourself outside of color was an important principle. It developed in Gerry and other participants the belief that they could do and become whatever they aspired. Ingraining this notion early in youth contributed to their positive self-concept and belief in their ability. Consequences for inappropriate behaviors were also felt, such as deliberately being dishonest. This has had a lasting effect on Gerry. She indicated that being untruthful to her mother about a pregnancy and abortion has been a constant conscious memory. She identifies it as one of her two regrets in life. As previously mentioned, the other regret was allowing herself to betray a friend which led to the conception of a child by her best friend's boyfriend.

A moral foundation was common in the other participants as well. Tiffany defined morals as "knowledge of the things to do and not to do." All the women understood the consequences that any of their actions would dictate. Diane expressed this in terms that is

descriptive of their understanding. Her mother told her, "When you get so grown that you cannot abide by my rules and regulations, there's the door."

Subtheme C: Work Ethic -- Depending on Yourself

Primarily, work opportunities were from domestic duties to laundry for the participant's mothers in this study. Some participants realized that their parents lacked the education and necessary skills that would give them access to opportunities beyond domestic services. Most found this a circumstance of the choices made in their lives. However, the values instilled in Gerry from her mother and others influenced her belief that education would lead to greater opportunities and these opportunities would take her out of poverty. Gerry began to realize that she had the control to design her future.

Having a sense of control over her life and taking the responsibility very early developed, as Gerry inculcated the value of work. Her mother told her to "work hard and depend on yourself." Work became a necessity for Gerry before and during part of her college years. Gerry employed a high standard of achievement in the work environment as part of her transformative preparedness to a better future. Work gave Gerry the material things in life that her parents were unable to give, such as fashionable clothing. Not getting her first dress until late in grade school, caused others to ridicule her. Realizing that she could do something about her appearance, at the age of 14, Gerry obtained employment. She was then able to begin to build a fashionable wardrobe that drew the attention of her peers, friends, family, and community. In school, peers began to notice

and compliment her stylish dressing. A change in appearance brought Gerry respect from peers and an increased sense of pride and self-confidence.

Working during college became an academic necessity. Additionally, it was the vehicle by which Gerry and other study participants could supplement college funding and obtain post-college careers. Whether or not the decision to work at an early age was a conscious one or not, at some point, Gerry realized that she had to take care of herself and focus on her future.

It was not surprising to see the value of work instilled in the participants in this study. Like Gerry, at an early age of three, Mimi worked in the fields on a sharecroppers farm picking cotton. Later, in her teens, like the other participants, she worked to supplement tuition cost or earn extra money for her personal use. As the offspring of parents with limited resources, their only means of obtaining things beyond what their parents could provide was to seek employment.

Aeisha treaded a different professional path. It was challenging and required great effort, creativity, and strong work ethics. Without a college degree, she developed strong work ethics that helped propel her from clerical positions into professional management. Working against the odds, her creativity and desire to be challenged in the workplace contributed to her current professional status.

Subtheme D: Educational Achievement

As indicated in the literature, African Americans have highly valued a good education. While it does not guarantee success, it has often been perceived as a way out

of poverty. At least for African Americans, it was seen as a key for narrowing the gap between the races (Landes, et al., 1994). For generations, this belief has been passed down to offspring. The participants saw the value of it early in their upbringing by their parents and knew that opportunities were limited without it. Consequently, the recognition that education would at least open doors of opportunity were substantive enough for them to set their sights high on education.

A high standard of academic performance was essential to Gerry. The data analysis revealed that achievement motivation was obviously a deep-rooted one from childhood on. Gerry sought advancement through her educational achievements. Her mother valued education very highly and she imparted that information onto Gerry. She had no choice when she reflected upon her families limited resources. The early recognition that college would be the ultimate opportunity to conquer upward mobility was her reality. Gerry says, "My mother spoke the words [and] her actions back them up . . . [She] always encouraged me . . . She taught [me] that education was the way that [I] could have a better life." Thus, she believed that she "had to do well [education] in order to move *onto* a better life."

Whether or not Gerry, after completion of high school, would attend college was not an issue. She had no choice when she reflected upon her families limited resources. Her parents could not provide financial support, nonetheless, it was the standard of her mother's words of wisdom in her value laden upbringing. It was Gerry's awareness that would bare the burden of gaining entrance into college. Coupled with her desire to go,

they motivated her to achieve high academic standings as a way to earn entrance into college.

They highly valued and passed the generational belief that education was a way out of poverty to the offspring. Whether given by the mother, father, grandmother or surrogate, their insight into its value was a result of the belief and hope of previous generations. The educational value inspired the participants to do their best. Gerry and some of the other participants realized that they had to do well in order to live up to the expectation of those who believed in their ability to make something out of their life. For some participants, the educational belief was that their best work academically meant the opportunity to receive a scholarship to attend college. All knew that without it, college would not be a possibility. As a result, their efforts paid off whether directly or indirectly. Some came in full scholarships or employment or both that contributed to the cost of tuition.

Out of the eight participants, Aeisha did not earn a degree until around the age of forty. During her high school years, it was not an option. She recalls, "my mother's desire was for her kids to complete high school." Aeisha knew that college could provide much more, but the encouragement was not there from her mother or the counselor's in school. They saw her as a kid from the projects and according the Aeisha, time was not wasted on kids from publicly subsidized environments.

Except for Aeisha, all of the participants were able to attend college either directly after high school or after working a couple of years to finance their way. Whatever their

opportunities or lack thereof, they knew that college was the way to a better future. Aeisha earned a Master's degree in her early forties after taking six months to complete her professional portfolio that exempted her from the bachelor's degree program. Although she did not earn a college degree until she was well established in her professional career, she believed that a college education would earn her respect and unlimited opportunities. This conviction remained well after she had achieved socioeconomic upward mobility.

Category II: Productive Self-Perception

Values may influence how an individual responds to an experience and her ability to take risk. If Gerry lacked confidence in her abilities and potential to succeed, she may not have had the inner strength to move beyond adversity in her youth. However, I found an interrelationship between Gerry's ability to take risk and her self concept. Believing in the strength of her ability to combat obstacles inhibiting upward mobility played a critical role in some decisions she made. This strong sense of self identity echoed within the analysis of the data.

From the family and community support and encouragement, Gerry showed an increasing belief in her own abilities to become a successful adult. She recalls the encouragement and support she received from her mother and other influences. As a result, it conditioned her to believe in her ability to make her life superior to what she was experiencing as a child.

For example, Gerry's mother encouraged and reinforced the following belief, "Never ever define yourself in terms of color." Consequently, Gerry developed a positive self concept at an early age. When her peers laughed at her clothes, rather than withdraw, she took the initiative to earn resources that gave her control over her appearance.

Additional analysis supporting a positive self concept pattern revealed generational distinctions that were very critical to Gerry's self image. Gerry's mother was able to impart wisdom to Gerry in terms of self-appreciation and self-respect. These lifelong values and morals, in part, motivated Gerry to focus on her talents and not her physical identifiable features as determinants in what she could become. The mother wanted to shield her daughter from the scars of discrimination that were race related. She also imparted to Gerry the wisdom to cope with any situation--training her as a youth to believe that she could be anything she wanted to be.

Giovanni (1994) supports this premise by suggesting, "If you take the racial world on your shoulders, you will not get the job done" (p.106). For example, each participant addressed the issue of race and suggested that it was not something that they would let stand in the way of their goals. They taught them to like themselves at a very early age. Giovanni contends that if you dealt with yourself as an "individual worthy of respect," then will others come to respect you as warranted. She believes that this image of "self" frees an individual to work toward becoming what they want to be.

Subtheme A: Positive Self-Image -- "Never Give Up"

The development of an individual's self-perception begins to form in their early life experiences, risks, and responsibilities. Gerry's image of self was first built upon a firm foundation of love from family. She maintained it through the support she received in her earlier school experiences. Her certainty of her efficacy to become successful in life, seems to have originated in her childhood family, community, and religious environment. She recalls all the attention she received which weighed heavily on who she has become. Gerry said, "I was overly loved" and "the more praise I received, the better I wanted to do." Not only did the support give her a productive self perception, it allows her to triumph over adversity.

These experiences worked together to nurture and reinforce her self esteem and the importance of basic values and responsibilities, such as educational achievement. Gerry had to believe that she could achieve. More important, she had to have the willingness to accept that responsibility at an early age. The pride and love her parents and family expressed were an important factor in the enhancement of her self-esteem and self-determination. Again, we see the influence that begins through her mother, siblings, and then extended outside in the church and school environments.

The impact of a positive self perspective occurred because of these African American participants becoming responsible early in their childhood and encountering different experiences and meeting different people. Most often, it was related to the encouragement and support they received from their families, mentors, and role models.

Subtheme B: Internal Locus of Control -- "I always knew I was Smart"

Life values influencing Gerry's decisions in life helped to instill in her the belief that she could control her destiny. That she could shape her life differently from that of her parents and siblings were a motivating factor in her transformative learning process. Through encouragement and praise, she became more driven to become the independent successful person others envisioned. With the exception of two participants, this is descriptive of the way other participants characterized their mothers or other maternal figures. Gerry describes it in this manner, "My mother was a very proud lady and she instilled that in me . . . I was always told that I was a bright child . . . I always thought that I would be successful." Gerry was guided in life to be successful and accountable for her future. The opportunities were made clear and it was her responsibility to act upon them. She did not define herself by "color" but always had the belief that she has the internal control to develop her talents that would best meet her self-defined goals.

The finding suggests that as the participants' level of responsibility increased, so did their self-esteem and internal locus of control. In addition, it became an expectation of the participants. For seven of the participants, their life stories were reflective of their assurance that they were loved. One participant did not receive this early in life but later developed a relationship with a surrogate mother who motivated her to succeed as they often talked late at night about live and how things could be. All of the participants liked the attention and encouragement they received. It was a major part of their motivation and ability to succeed. They took great pride in the effort they put into achieving good

grades, and in their ability to complete a task no matter what the challenge. The participants believed that their talents would lead to their academic success and opportunities for mobility.

Subtheme C: Goal Driven -- "I Wanted to Be Independent"

Early endowment of life values empowered Gerry to respond to self-managing her desires in life effectively. Gerry took responsibility for her life early because she had developed a belief that her academic abilities would lead her to success. One finding in this category suggests that along with an early foundation of perceived abilities, Gerry had to have the will to take action. Early preparation for future advantages initiated a prioritized strategy toward personal change. The development of Gerry's personal perspective speaks to the other study participants. All felt that they had control over their environment and as Mimi stated, "as long as you had some sense of direction, you will keep yourself on track." This was true of the participants except for Aeisha, who later in her youth began to adopt a positive, internal locus of control, and goal oriented productive self-perception.

One other point that deserves attention is how Aeisha developed a positive image of herself. Giovanni's (1994) words speaks clearly to Aeisha's perspective of her early life. It was what she did not get that influenced her to achieve. She did not get the love, respect, encouragement, and support from her mother. Apart from feeling loved and accepted by her siblings, the early years of Aeisha's marriage were spent trying to win the approval of her mother's love. Unlike the other participant's who had a bond with their mother or

maternal grandmother, Aeisha didn't experience that bond (except from infancy to three years old with her first foster family) until she adopted a surrogate mother later in her teens. It was then that she developed an appreciation for who she was and begun to view herself from a positive perspective. Aeisha's personal perception changed from "I was just serving time" to "I just don't accept no when I want something."

The ability to have some control over the direction their life took resulted in increased self-determination. Responsibility led to early defined goals. Being goal driven at an early age helped make them a product of their present environment. The participants' perception of their ability to take action and early preparation for future opportunities was a foundation upon which they set priorities for personal change. All of the participants had come to the realization that in order to move beyond what they were experiencing, sacrifices would have to me made. Included among them were: delaying marriage, family, children, or sacrificing their personal time in developing relationships so that they could complete their educational goals.

Subtheme D: Early Exposure

As stated in the previous chapter, the early influence of the mothers, and their value laden foundation was the life long preparation needed by the participants. The love within the family environment prepared them for the things they would ultimately face in society. The church became another exposure that reinforced the early spiritual values that the mothers' greatly emphasized in their daughters. They knew that life would be difficult and they wanted their daughters to be better prepared for future opportunities of mobility.

Subtheme E: Sense of Purpose

Finding their purpose early in life was instrumental in the participants developing goal driven behaviors. The experiences, maternal influences, and developing a positive self-concept enabled them to internalize the belief that they could control their destiny. Consequently, they developed an early sense of responsibility and the more responsibility they assumed, the greater their ability to take control over their life. They became more receptive to opportunities and took steps to make things happen that would move them in the direction that best served their purpose.

OPPORTUNITIES

Category III. Influences From Others

The expectation of other influences also shapes an individual's perception of self and her chances in life in the community. Family members, friends, teachers, and others of influence may prompt an individual as they help shape how that individual will think of herself and her life chances (Chafe, 1977; Boyd, 1993). Gerry explains how the influence of others motivated her. She said, "When you get praise [from your achievements] not only from your family but from people in the community, you want to continue that." For Gerry, enjoyment, pleasure, and a stronger desire to achieve was precipitated by the recognition, feedback, support, and encouragement she received from others. She stated that it was satisfying to be the center of attention and receive recognition by her family, friends, teachers, and people in the community.

Subtheme A: Maternal Influences -- "Mother Was Always There to Help Me"

When Gerry reflected upon maternal influences in her life, it usually related to their mother's pioneering (transforming) spirit. She was a woman who used her motherly instincts to develop within Gerry the spirit of self-achievement-- that she could succeed beyond the socioeconomic poor environment of her youth. This is in contradiction to past traditional thinking that Thompson (1986) referred to as erroneous misconceptions and that is, if you are born into a lower-class environment, the general belief it that you will remain in it. As evident, this is not true with Gerry and the other participants.

Looking back, Gerry could see that her mother had experienced a hard life. Having been a prisoner of her limited environment, she made sure that Gerry would not fall into her footsteps. Gerry stated that her mother was "never a complainer" and "would not blame someone else for her position in life." In fact, Gerry said, that her mother "never talked about how hard life was." Instead, she instinctively set priorities to take the responsibility upon herself to instill in her daughter upon lifelong values that taught her how to succeed and cope with adversity. Gerry said, "She just gave me the wisdom in terms of how to deal with [life] going forward." Gerry painted the image of her mother as a strong independent woman dealing with major changes that she wanted for her offspring. She urged her daughter to pursue the higher educational goals that would open more opportunities for her in the future. It was also Gerry's desire to do better in life. She recalls:

> We were reared on a farm. My parents were initially sharecroppers in a rural area in the South. It's a point in my life that I would never go back to in terms of the hard work that we had to do. But although we didn't have many material things, we have never been hungry in my life. I have always felt loved by both my parents.

Gerry's mother dreamed a different life for her children. With a third grade school education, she made it her responsibility to encourage Gerry to do better. She did not want Gerry to experience the same life as she experienced and it was her ongoing desire to see that her daughter would have a better life. She wanted Gerry to have more than what her mother had to offer her in her childhood. She urged her daughter to prepare herself for a better future. That early preparation came in valuing education and moving beyond high school to college. Her mother knew that this was the beginning of the process that would expose Gerry to upwardly mobile opportunities and choices upon which she may not have otherwise capitalized.

Most illuminating in this study was the mothers' impact on the transformative learning process which appeared to be the vital key that facilitated the process of breaking the poverty cycle. This finding revealed that the participants identified with their mothers or another maternal figure as a role model and strong influencer in their upbringing. They picked up the messages of opportunity that their mother's imparted and made them a permanent part of their life. The messages involved values, abilities, and experiences. Only one of the subjects reported emulating a father figure who was in the household, only

to the extent that she wanted to have the same kind of power he possessed as the head of the household over her mother. Another participant revealed that her father was a "no nonsense" person and wanted her to develop a trade in the event she would not be able to work in her desired profession. Most of the participants have this strong maternal connection because their mothers were most instrumental in their development and the fathers, if in the home, were somewhat detached. All of them reflected upon their mother's guidance as most instrumental in their achievement, particularly those whose mothers were home during a good portion of their childhood.

Subtheme B: Positive Role Models-- "I Had a Lot of Positive Role Models"

Gerry was reared with a lot of influences in her childhood upbringing and credited them for being important in her life. She recollects that as a baby and the youngest of twenty-one children, she " always received much encouragement from my mother and my siblings." She contends that "the more encouragement I received for family, friends, community, the more successful I wanted to become." Gerry said, "My mother always express her feelings and give feedback such as, that's very good darling."

Gerry had many role models that she could emulate, particularly after her parents' relocated to the city. Aside from her family members, she received much reinforcement from teachers, lawyers, doctors and other professionals who attended her church. Given this exposure, Gerry believed that she "could aspire to be like [them]." She explains that these people "branded her as a smart child" and this reinforcement made her want to continue in excelling in her studies. Consequently, she feels that the support and

encouragement she received from the whole community strongly influenced her life. She likened her experiences with role models to the Ashante Proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child." An example of a vicarious experience happened when Gerry was having adjustment difficulties with her elementary school peers after moving to the city. Her elementary teachers helped her take notice of her potentials and to ignore the limited resources that provoked ridicule from her peers. The teachers took her under their wings and encouraged her to focus on her studies. They were very generous about praising Gerry and she stated that, "The more I got, the better I wanted to do." Given this, she fortified her internalized belief that life would be different from that of her childhood experiences.

Subtheme C: Negative Role Models --"I Never Wanted to Put Myself In Her Position"

In the sense that positive role models could encourage Gerry, she also benefitted from the positive decisions from others who at one time or another gave her encouragement. She illustrates this point by the life styles of her siblings who were not only both positive and negative role models in her upbringing but very instrumental in the positive direction her life took. They contributed to her internal locus of control perspective while settling for a traditional life of limited education.

Spousal abuse witnessed by Gerry in her siblings' families confirmed her conviction of not taking that same path. She was referring to her siblings' decisions to not to attend college which may have related to situational or institutional barriers (e.g., lack of money,

high cost of college education). This was the first real life external experience that caused her to take a serious interest in excelling academically. It authenticated the given notion that education was the initial key to opportunity and success. It was their subordination to limitations that motivated Gerry to become a follower of the values instilled in her by her mother.

Subtheme D: Support Networks

An extension of the support and encouragement that the participants received came from others outside the family. In the findings, they did not seek the orientation of the support networks. However, the closest ties of support were from women. The participants' spoke of the early influences in their lives and the data revealed that strong ties came from the mothers and grandmothers. Aside from them, there were other relatives such as aunts and siblings in the immediate family. Outside of the extended family, were other female figure heads from the community, school, and church. These were extensions of the influence and guidance the participants were receiving from their mothers. Support networks were an instrumental part of the participant's growth during their educational years. Asking about their health and well-being, giving praise for recognized achievement, and keeping them on track when conflict surfaces reinforced the desire in the study participants to continue to do their best. They appreciated the attention they received and were encouraged by it.

Support networks were not just outside the family, it was found between generations in this study. The support link continued with the mothers, grandmothers, and other

relatives. This is consistent with McAdoo's (1988) research on the transgenerational connection with families. Although the study showed that upward mobility is contingent on the financial support of the extended family, the link that draws it toward the finding here is the interdependence that mothers and daughters shared both directly and indirectly. McAdoo's study differs in the notion that individuals from lower socioeconomic status would be unable to achieve any significant degree of mobility because of limited resources being passed down. These upwardly mobile African American females from lower class backgrounds achieved significant mobility although monetary support from extended family members was not available.

Subtheme E: Early Influences

The early influences in the life of most of the participants began within their respective families. A strong message that comes across about early life influences is the significance of the mother's strength and the messages she conveyed of opportunity. The message conveyed was being responsible for your life and the choices that you make. Choosing to move through life through the mother's pioneering spirit resulted in choices that positively impacted upon their success. The belief that their mothers or other maternal figures perceived the participants as special was carried throughout their lives. Their mothers pushed them to excellence and that encouragement continued with teachers and other role models.

The participants recalled the influence of the mother, recognized her sacrifices, and limited opportunities in life. As a result, they desired to make their mother's (or surrogate,

other maternal figure) proud of them. As stated by several participants, they wanted to make their mother's proud and they had to do their best. One of the conscious mission of the mothers' was that ongoing encouragement. The teachers gave the participants the special attention that they needed which ensured the building of self-confidence.

Category IV. Significant Mobility Experiences

In this study, five types of experiences were identified that were considered significant subthemes within this category. These significant mobility experiences were identified as (a) adverse self-inflicted, (b) adverse non self-inflicted, (c) positive fortuitous, (d) positively intentionally designed, and (e) coping. As the data revealed, whether or not the experience directly involved the study participants or took place in another contexts, the outcome of such an event was causal to their decision to take action by taking serious interest in their future, such as academics. The outcome of the decisions Gerry made would be a determinant in her future An illustration of theses experiences of Gerry, is representative of all the participants in this study.

Subtheme A: Adverse Self-Inflicted

College life presented a different source of internal conflict with Gerry. She understood what it meant not to honor what you believe in and to live outside of your moral beliefs. Actions would lead to experiences of self-inflicted adversity. Outside of her home environment for the first time and away from the family and community that was always present to give her encouragement, she faced identification, educational, and

scholarship adversity. For example, within the first three days of life on campus, she recognized that she was not a class above the rest of her peers. In fact, she explained that "my [stuff] wasn't all that and the girls on campus let me know real quick." To alleviate her fear of being different [economically] and desperately wanting to fit in, she lied to her peers about her background. She explains the position she took, "I remember misrepresenting--actually lying Marsha about what I had done in life . . . because I wanted to fit in . . . I knew I was lying. I didn't feel good about it."

Another experience happened in the classroom. As a cum laude high school graduate, Gerry began to feel inferior to the White students on campus. Thinking that the questions they asked were far superior to hers, she withdrew in terms of her participation. This resulted in a downward spiral of her self esteem and competence. Ultimately, as Gerry continued on a path of self-imposed adversity, she annihilated her best friend's trust. Becoming pregnant, having an abortion based on her own decision, having to move off campus, forfeiting two years of her four year scholarship, and moving back home in hopes of completing college was the outcome of the choices she made while on campus. She explains in this manner:

> This is all a part of my development and where I am now . . . I have never shared this experience [abortion] with anybody . . . I convinced my mother that it [pregnancy] was not true . . . and I have this one regret, and that is that I did not honor my friendship with her [roommate].

Gerry understood what her mother meant when she said, "Be honest no matter what you do. Be honest to yourself. Your word is your bond . . . "

> Some choices that Gerry made were based on the expectations of others. She said, It wasn't a hard decision to have the abortion. . .I had a lot of remorse afterwards [abortion] because of my spiritual upbringing. But I was so scared to death that if my mother knew. . .I would be letting everyone down in the community. . .I had to go forward, and I could not do that with a baby.

Aborting a fetus was easier than letting her mother, family, teachers and other supporters down. They had expectations of Gerry and she wanted to live up to those expectations. Equally important was her need to achieve and reach her goals. Consequently, she had to forfeit a four-year scholarship, transfer to another college, and seek employment to continue her education. She said, "I knew that I could not go back home and I must be successful. People were depending on me to be successful . . . That is what I did."

Subtheme B: Adverse Non Self-Inflicted -- "Peers Laughed at My Dresses"

The outcome of Gerry's siblings experiences played a part in Gerry's transformation process. As she described the value of education instilled in her by her mother she stated that "some of my sisters and brothers did not get the message." She recalls, " . . . not all of my sisters and brothers took advantage of the advice mother was giving . . . " Whatever the reason, the one value [educational achievement] that she strongly believed would get her away from the life she experienced on the farm they did not or could not follow. She says as a consequence some of this her siblings faced limitations.

> Some of them didn't have good lives . . . there was spousal abuse . . . and as a result of this, I made up in my mind, and I am certain that it was from the first grade forward, that because my mother had told me that education was the way to have a better life . . . that my life would be different.

Gerry referred to the abuse some of her siblings experienced as a turning point. As a result of the abuse and her family's living circumstances, it triggered her desire to advance in her academic goals in order to improve her position in life. Although this was not an experience to cause Gerry to reflect upon her inculcated values for congruency, it did confirm and reinforce the value of education. She did not want to settle for marriage before going to college. She believed that college would be her opportunity to secure a position in the workforce that would be financially beneficial.

Subtheme C: Positive Fortuitous or Blessed Outcome

Sometimes things can happen without an individual conscious effort and can be considered as a fortuitous or blessed experience at some point in her life. As the data reveals, the importance of an early life transition, such as relocating, cannot be under emphasized. This came for Gerry when her parents moved to the city although initially it was perceived to be a very frightening experience. The relocation from an isolated rural environment to the city opened many potential opportunities that indirectly or directly had a positive impact upon Gerry's socioeconomic mobility.

The little discomfort Gerry experienced as a result of her parents' decision to relocate from their poor rural isolated southern environment to the city was real, however was

superseded by opportunities and exposures that later had a great impact on her future success. This transition engendered mentors, role models, and opportunities to excel academically.

The move exposed Gerry to many people of diverse backgrounds and professions that strongly influenced the direction her life took. One experience given is with her fourth grade teacher who refocused Gerry's attention on her abilities and not the limited resources [clothing] that caused her to be laughed at by her peers. She tells it in this way:

> And being materially poor, [I] didn't had the clothes and I remember the girls laughing at me. All the clothes I wore were hand-me-downs . . . But the teachers took me under her wings and motivated me from that point forward . . . They all gave me praise of how proud they were of me.

In addition, Gerry credits her upbringing that helped her remain focused on her goals stating that, " . . . [Mother] was a very proud woman and she instilled that in [me] and when I got to school, I did very well . . . " Gerry believed that she was very fortunate in life to have so many people care about her. She said, "I was overly loved . . . there were lots of mentors in my life . . . who helped me become who I am today."

Subtheme D: Positive Intentionally Designed

Making a decision to quit toward the end of a master's degree to start another program that offered a better future both professionally and financially was a short sacrifice Gerry was willing to take. She desired to be financially independent and was more than willing to return to school. She directed her attention toward another master's

degree and after inquiring about a scholarship was able to create an opportunity to earn one. The opportunity was based upon the outcome of her academic efforts. Gerry became successful with this positive intentionally designed experience after completing one semester and earning a 4.0 grade point average, one point above the expected 3.0 average. Her efforts and initiative once again helped her stay on course and put her one step closer to reaching her goal.

Subtheme E: Coping Activities

Coping activities [experiences] in this study related to the strategies employed that helped the study participants overcome an adverse experience or situation. I would directly relate Gerry's specific coping experience to the foundation upon which they raised her and her purpose in life. This is illustrative of all the participants as they drew upon their previously stated childhood value-laden foundation. Despite the activity, the principles held them together through the coping process.

To bring closure to significant mobility experiences, Gerry's decisions were not always congruent with her desires and as a consequence, she faced adversity. In spite of the experiences, it was very noticeable that she did not lose sight of her purpose and what it would take to fulfill her goals. Changes became necessary and choices had to be made. They had given her the foundation that helped her persevere. Gerry best sums up her ability and will to succeed in this statement, "My mother gave [me] the wisdom in terms of how to deal with it [adversity] going forward." Although each participant's experiences were unique to them, the outcome was the same. They had been given enough in their

upbringing not to dwell on adversity and to move beyond it. That is what each participant had mastered. As they told Diva, "you have a mind of your own, use it."

Other Themes

There were additional themes that emerged from the data less descriptive of the common themes identified as relating to most of the participants. Nonetheless, these themes are unique to some participants and important enough to address in this study. These include the theme of overcoming gender obstacles, race, and the father's influence upon the lives of the participants.

Gender As an Obstacle to Overcome

The gender issue was perceived as an obstacle by Yvonne in her childhood. She realized that the male was superior and always in control. If her father asked that her mother do something, she would comply whether or not she agreed with the decision. Although the mother was a great influence in this participant's life, she lacked her own voice and according to the participant, had no power. As a result of the experiences she witnessed and the control her father had over female figures, the participant aspired to be like her father. A decision not to marry and give up her birth name was spurned by the participant's feminist feelings and beliefs. Yvonne stayed focused on her academic achievements and desire to become a white collar worker and future entrepreneur. With support and encouragement from her mother, input from her father telling her that she could be anything she wanted to be professionally, Yvonne was able to refocus on

educational objectives which resulted in personal and professional upward mobility. She now is CEO and President of a management consulting firm.

Although the other participants commented at some point about gender issues, they never saw it as an obstacle that interfered in their early childhood development. As one participant reported, her mother instilled in her to focus on her education. Marriage was something she could worry about later. Her mother said, "get an education first to be able to take care of you." Thus, Tiffany was able to do so when confronted with a gender issue in her adulthood.

Race

Besides gender, race did not factor into their ability to achieve, in their early years. Most of the participants' believed that the value instilled in them was to be proud of who they are. This kept them focused on their abilities and not the color of their skin. This is not to suggest that they did not, at some point, become aware of their differences. The strong principles instilled in the participants led them to think and believe that they are just as good as anybody. As a result, the participant's shared that they did not internalize the notion that they were limited because of their race, but instead were driven by their talents and beliefs that their abilities that would prove their merit. Being able to cope with the issue of race was an invaluable belief that helped the participants get through early adverse experiences at work. This contributed to their early work successes and being able to cope with experiences that may have threatened their mobility.

Father's Influence

Half the participant's stated that their fathers' contributed in some way to who they are today. The single participant's who never married, said their father's were hard workers and taught them how to survive. One participant said, "My parents did everything for [me], in hopes of me doing something with my life." Another grew up emulating her father's work habits and another said that her father helped her to get over the anxiety she felt about being a female. Another participant commented that, "My father gave me a great deal of wisdom and my mother reinforced it." All said that their father's contributed to their mobility through words or by actions.

Summary

All of the participants recognized that certain goals were inspired upon them and irrespective of whether the biological family contributed positively or negatively. The values received from other maternal figures, in part, guided them on their journey toward upward mobility. Thus, the transformative learning process began with what they gave them: lifelong values, words of encouragement, loves, and praise. The beginning is reflected in the transformative learning process that was first experienced in the home.

A common denominator for influences in the lives of these participants has been the African American woman. Most of the participants recognize the mothers, grandmothers, or surrogate mothers as their principle role models and mentors whose basic foundation of principles and beliefs ignited their desire to become someone special. Instilling lifelong

values within these participants at an early age was traditionally seen as the task of the mother (grandmother, surrogate mother). Whether or not the participant came from a stable family environment or a single parent environment, the responsibility to inspire and motivate offspring was assumed by the female head of the household. They considered it their responsibility to help their daughter move beyond their childhood environment. The consistency of it instilled in the participants a belief that they could become whatever they aspired to be. Moreover, the participants are living off those same values. The early installation and reinforcement of basic lifelong values were important training in forming the participant's character.

As I continued to interpret the findings, with these participants, early influences and experiences aided in the goal-driven behaviors of the participants. Their stories began to paint a picture of the influential guidance and leadership of mothers, grandmother, siblings, surrogates, role models, and others in the schools, churches, communities, and work. Based upon the thematic findings, many interdependent themes contributed to the process of upward mobility. The mother's pioneering or transforming spirit was the initial influence and motivator for the participants. The mother's were the first to guide and instill within their daughters, the belief that there is a better life than what they are experiencing and they do have control over making that happen. Thus, they began to develop a strong sense of self-control over their lives. Developing a positive self-concept was a critical link to the transformation process. All of the participants received support, encouragement, praise, and opportunities for growth through the assistance of African

American female figureheads. Following the maternal influence and guidance the participants received ongoing dosages of support and encouragement from others.

Finally, the significant mobility experiences were both positive and negative. The transformative learning from various experiences, in part, led to the participant's achieving upward mobility. Whether a result of their own actions or the result of someone else, the experiences moved the participants closer to their goals. They never abandoned their purpose, even in the midst of setbacks because of desire to live up to the expectations of others and to fulfill their own dreams was a stronghold in maintaining their goal driven motivation. Despite the participant's direct involvement or indirect involvement, the outcome was the same. Each participant showed a consistent pattern of adapting and moving beyond the experience. Thus, they were able to remain focused on their purpose and that was to achieve upward mobility.

From the analysis and interpretation of the interview data, this chapter focused on the emerging themes that were common to the participants in this study. An illustration of those themes was identified through a process of in-depth analysis and interpretation of the data from one of the eight study participants. Included in the analysis were explanations of significant differences as interpreted from the data of all the participants.

The analysis and interpretation of the data revealed themes that define the participant's early life upbringing experiences that influenced them into the direction their lives took. As a result, themes rooted in the early life upbringing of the participants that led to upward mobility, extend our understanding of how these African American women

view their early experiences and the transformative learning process that moved them beyond adversity. In response to the research questions, a discussion of these findings are presented in Chapter VI in response to the research questions.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

INTRODUCTION

The intricate dynamics and tensions of social histories--the realities of adversity--and anticipations of African American women greatly inhibit many from reaching their potential. African American women share with all women adverse experiences that for this area. That these women have managed to defeat the odds drew attention to their patterns of adapting and the process by which transformative experiences evolve. A summary of the factors reflective of a process by which the participants have transformed their lives is presented in this chapter. This includes the following areas: summary of the research design, discussion of research questions and findings, additional findings and recommendations, conclusions, and the researcher's comments about this study.

Summary of the Research Design

As noted in the literature review, previous research focused on barriers and attributes to explain why some African American women achieve success and why some are not able to overcome adversity. This research looks backward at the early life experiences and the transformative learning process through which some African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have moved beyond adversity to achieve upward mobility.

Conceptual Framework

Mezirow's (1991) transformation model proposes that an individual's confrontation with a disorienting event will cause them to question their inculcated values for congruency with their existing beliefs and begin to move away from their non-reflective ideologies toward more meaningful ones. Moreover, to complete a change in perspective, the individual will go through a series of steps to transform life experiences that impede and simplify an individual's ability to move beyond a potential problem. As a guide during the interview process, the model was useful in identifying the experiences and influences that led to an intergenerational transformative learning process in these African American women.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this study was to look at the early life experiences of African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds considered to be pivotal influences in motivating them to achieve higher degrees of upward mobility. There was not an assumption that the participants had experienced a transformational learning experience, but the study was designed to uncover a process if it did, in fact, occur.

Research Questions

The following research questions addressed the purpose of this study:

Question One: How has a selected group of African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds been able to break the particular poverty cycle that their parents endured to become upwardly mobile achievers?

Question Two: What transformative learning process did they employ to overcome specific obstacles in order to attain a higher level of socioeconomic mobility?

Question Three: To what extent are the steps of perspective transformation descriptive of the process as experienced by the women in this study?

Design of the Study

To answer the study questions, I designed and conducted a multiple-case study. The early life experiences of upwardly mobile African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds covered three aspects of their life: (a) an early childhood upbringing, (b) early education experience, and (c) early work experience. They were posed as significant periods for the participants to reflect upon, up to the point when they perceived that socioeconomic mobility would no longer be a problem. My decision to pursue research along the parameters established was based upon the desire to know more about the population of women representative of the sociohistorical background that I perceived to strongly influence the direction my own life took in my childhood years.

Sample Selection Process

Participants were recruited through informal requests and referrals. I identified an initial pool of twelve women, from which eight were selected. These women resided in the Washington Metropolitan area, which includes the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia. The participants worked in various government institutions, private industries, and were self-employed. Qualifying criteria was limited to: (a) upwardly mobile African American women from lower socioeconomic background and (b) parents

with limited or no education above high school who worked in menial jobs such as domestic labor and low status service oriented positions. Using pseudonyms and changing identifiable information maintained participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection. I gathered the data through in-depth personal interviews and coded using Ethnograph computer software. I obtained background data on each participant prior to the interview which included each participant's educational and professional development. The in-depth interviews were the primary data source for this study and usually lasted an average of three to five hours. I audiotaped each interview, transcribed, and converted, using Ethnograph computer software. The interviews were informal and were conducted in natural settings: offices, homes, and educational settings. The preselected questions served as a guide in exploring the contexts, processes, and interactions of the participants. Depending on the participant, the interviews unfolded in a variety of ways. For those with whom I had established a personal relationship, they did not try to avoid unpleasant memories and their openness and honesty was apparent.

After the taping of the interview, each participant continued to share their life experience. I listened attentively, taking mental notes. I then transcribed information on the computer immediately upon my arrival at home, along with the observation memos recorded at the time of the interview. If the participant appeared distressed or if she became emotional at any point during the interview, the researcher noted it.

I used the telephone to conduct follow-up interviews. The content of the interviews featured the early life experiences in the participants: upbringing, education, and early work experiences with a specific focus on the influences, experiences, and instructions given. This was purposefully done to create a story consistent with their growing up years. By conducting the interview within these structures, I could organize the data so that it facilitated understanding and knowledge. Follow-up interviews were necessary and enabled me to: (a) do member checking after the documents were transcribed and sent to the participants, (b) clear up garbled data, (c) obtain information and receive information by which both researcher and participant could clear up inconsistencies, and (d) obtain new information that the participant may have recalled after the in-depth interview. I made an average of two follow-up calls to each participant. One participant required four follow-up telephone interviews. The methods I used in gathering the data for this study provided me with an increased familiarity into the personal and professional lives of the study participants and were a vehicle for triangulation.

Coding and Creating Categories. The purpose of the qualitative data analysis was to identify, code, and interpret the data. To develop codes appropriate from the data collected, I repeatedly read the transcripts. The coding process began using the codes developed in the first in-depth interview as a guide for subsequent interviews. I modified these initial codes to develop categories that were unique to the research questions and each participant. The next step was to refine the categories further by looking for appropriate constructs that would house related codes and further reduce the data. I

referred to the modified codes during the analysis of the interviews that followed for codes that I closely related to the emerging constructs.

Data analysis. Following the interview, I examined data for each participant under the three categories of early life experiences. My first level of analysis focused on the elements identified as important to understanding a transformative learning experience. These were factors that they identified as contributing to the spirit of achievement in African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. I found myself immersed in data. As a result, I sorted the information as I derived it from the interview transcripts and presented it in descriptive narrative case study profiles. I extracted verbatim transcripts from the data and I wrote each narrative in such a manner to allow the voices of the women to be heard. Results of the study identified major ideas and common themes and a process of transformative learning that facilitated their desire to achieve. During the write-up process I regularly sought my peers, colleagues, and professors familiar with qualitative studies for debriefing. The information shared from their insights was very useful. Their ideas allowed me to stay focused, see other options and ideas that we had not entertained, and weed out interpretations that were unconfirmed.

The categories and themes that emerged from the data were presented and they represented the second level of data analysis. To isolate the personal themes that emerged from each participant, I looked for the major thematic connections within these stories when analyzing and interpreting the data. I considered a theme a recurring statement and

I extracted it from the data. This process helped build a case for each individual while simultaneously bringing to the forefront, a common transforming process that lead to upward mobility. I identified four interrelated categories of major themes as common among the participants: (a) a value-laden upbringing, (b) productive self perception, (c) influences of others, and (d) significant mobility experiences. I further analyzed the data that enabled me to extract two core themes, (a) beliefs and (b) opportunities that became the overarching themes for the four categories. Beliefs included the following categories, (a) a value-laden upbringing, and (b) productive self-perception. Opportunities housed the categories, (c) influences of others, and (b) significant mobility experiences.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Question One: How has a selected group of African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds been able to break the particular poverty cycle that their parents endured to become upwardly mobile achievers?

A combination of interdependent factors (life long values, self-perception, influences, and experiences) influenced these African American women to move beyond the barriers of their youth and achieve mobility. A transformative learning theme constituting the early foundation of inculcated messages of beliefs and opportunities that taught the participants how to move forward is shown in Figure 1. Whether given by their mother, grandmother, or surrogate mother, it was their early childhood value-laden foundation that brought comfort and resolution in their lives during periods of adversity. This would allow them

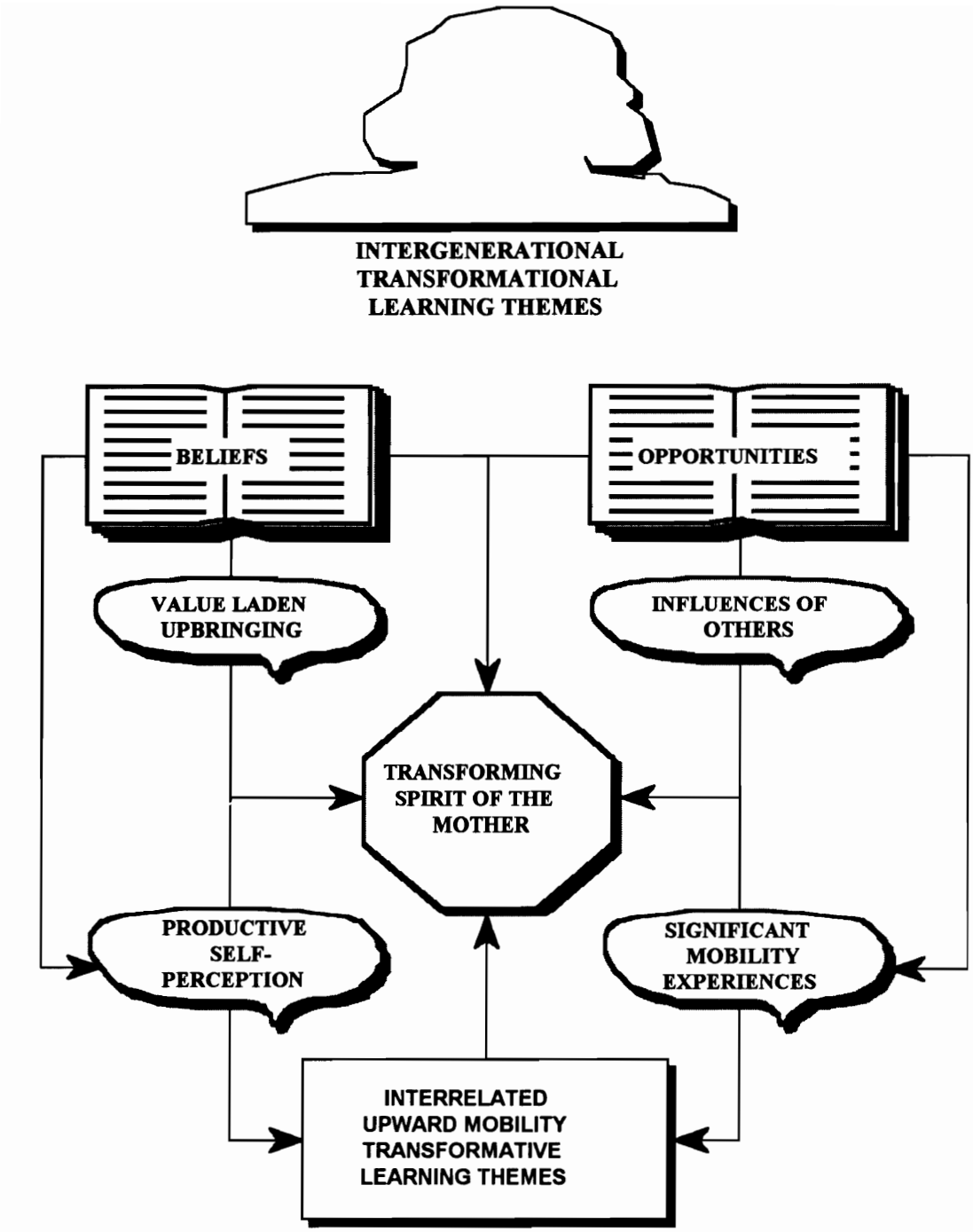

Figure 1. Intergenerational Transformational Interrelated Upward Mobility Themes

to maintain their goal-driven purpose. This message of beliefs and opportunities embraced by the African American women in this study piloted them to a more productive and upwardly mobile future.

The primary "sphere of influence" in the lives of these participants has been the African American woman. Most of the participants recognized their mothers, grandmothers, or surrogate mothers as their principle role models and mentors. It was their foundation of principles and beliefs that ignited their desire to become someone special. Additionally, early influences and experiences strongly influenced the goal-driven behaviors of the participants. The mothers were the first to begin preparing their daughters for a better life than what they were experiencing. They aided in developing a sense of self-control and the need to become responsible for their future success. Thus, they began to develop a strong sense of self-control over their lives. Developing a positive self-concept was a critical link to the transformation process. All of the participants received support, encouragement, praise, and opportunities for growth through the assistance of African American female figureheads. Following the maternal influence and guidance the participants received ongoing dosages of feedback. The feedback given suggest that the maternal figures, mentors, and teachers were sensitive to the needs of the participants by their desire to live up to the expectations of others. The participants' accomplishments were reinforced with praise and positive sense of self-control over their lives. Increased competency was a result of the influence and opportunities they obtained.

Another finding is the diversity of social mobility experiences. The participants were exposed to experiences that resulted in both setbacks and advances. The diversities of experiences were considered significant in their desire to achieve. The themes of adversity reveal that, despite the situation, it did not deter the study participants from reevaluating their priorities and staying focused on their goals. Often these experiences were the turning point in the participant's lives and reinforced their beliefs, and their drive to achieve a better life.

A strong message that comes across about early life influences is the significance of the mother's strength and the messages she conveyed of opportunity. The message conveyed was to become responsible for your life and the choices that made. Choosing to move through life through the mother's pioneering spirit resulted in choices that positively influenced their success. Their mother's pushed the participants to excellence and that encouragement continued with teachers and other role models. As one participant stated, "it takes a whole village to raise a child and that is how I grew up." Thus, they reflected the learning that transformed their lives in their self-told stories--stories that painted a picture of the influential guidance and leadership of mothers; grandmother; siblings; surrogates; role models; and others in the schools; churches; communities; work; and the opportunities that resulted because of these interpersonal and interdependent connections. This process is depicted in Figure 2.

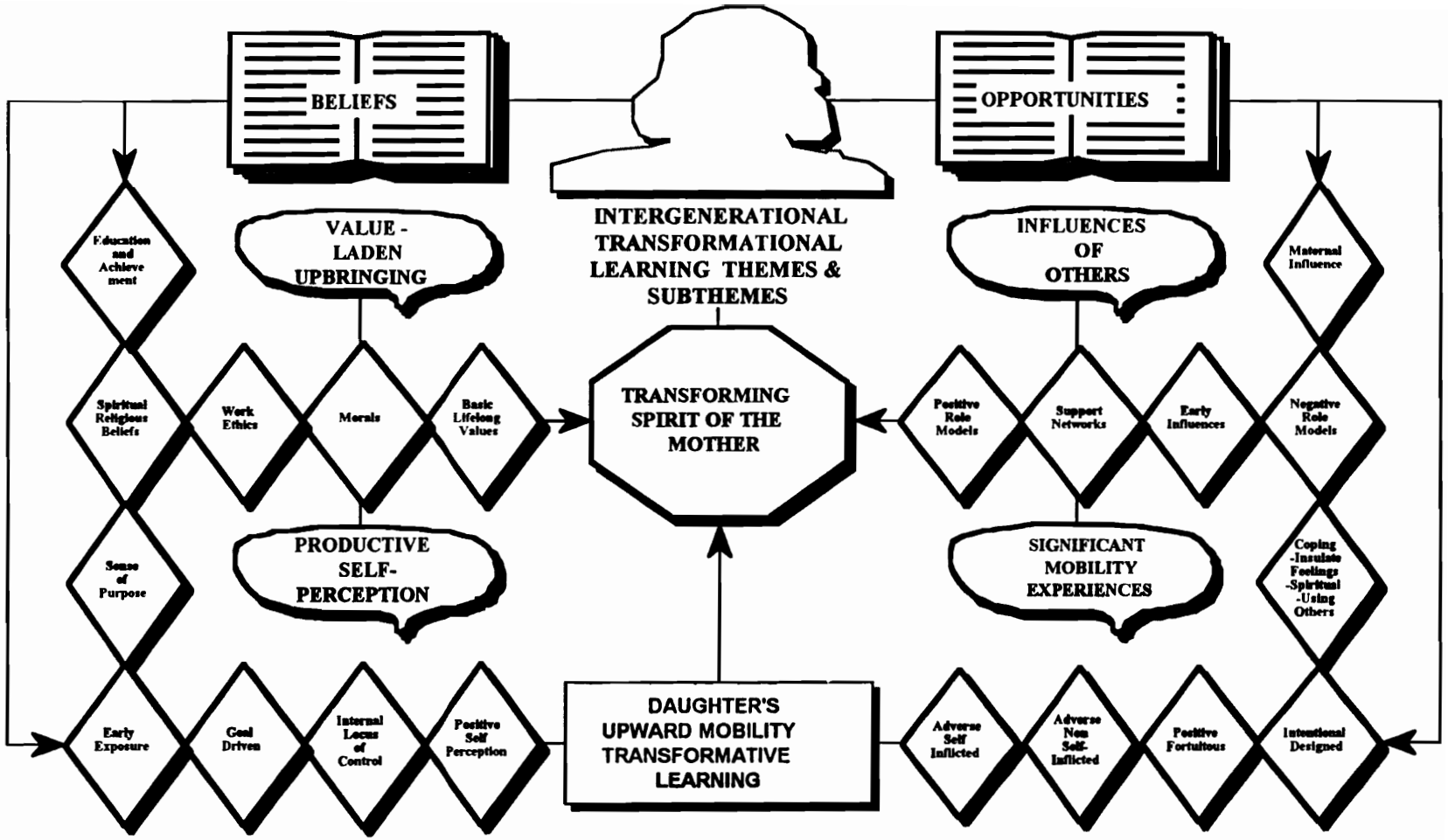

Figure 2 . Intergenerational Transformational Learning Themes and Subthemes

Question Two: What transformative learning process did they employ to overcome specific obstacles in order to attain a higher level of socioeconomic mobility?

The transformative learning process suggests that an individual will take action because of exposure to an insight, event, or experience. Conditions leading to a change in perspective or reinforcement of a previous objective may be a result of that individual learning and understanding that certain given circumstances could create oppressive and limiting opportunities. Consequently, the individual may refocus on a prior goal and take action that will affect an individual (interpersonal) or social change that is based on present desires and beliefs. For example, a grandmother raises the participant on a strong foundation of values, beliefs, spirituality, education, and work ethics that have guided the course of her life.

Upon relocating to her mother's home in the city, she becomes totally disillusioned with the living conditions and the dependent expectations of her mother. She contends that her mother "should take care of her own responsibilities." Instead, the mother exposed the participant to: the projects, public assistance, food stamps, and an "unmarried mother having babies by different men." The experience of buying groceries with food stamps and watching her mother become dependent upon others "because of the decisions she made in life" helped this participant refocus on her educational goals. Moreover, it reinforced her motivation to become self-sufficient so that she would not face the possibility of accepting those same conditions in life. Thus, from an interpersonal perspective, the participant could move beyond the limitations of her early life

experiences. Progressive upward mobility was based upon early learning and actions that productively effected a change. As supported in the literature (McAdoo, 1988), upward mobility is a progressive process that begins at a point prior to the upbringing of these lower socioeconomic status, now middle-class, African American women.

A key finding of this study suggests that perhaps the transformative learning process that inspired the African American women in this study may not have begun with the participants, but was part of a intergenerational transformation process of interdependent influence. That is, the mothers were the initial and constant influence in their daughter's lives preparing them to take action against adverse experiences, insights, or events, (i.e., situational, environmental) that for some African American women became a self-inflicted or non-self inflicted dependent barrier that impeded upward mobility. The process begins with the family and a transformation is completed through a sphere of influences and opportunities that the participants experienced in their early years.

As previously discussed, the participants indicated a variety of opportunities which were instrumental in their success. Their primary source of influence began within their family environment. They derived their sustaining motivation from various internal and external influences and experiences. Given insight to different experiences, it was the awareness and willingness to accept responsibility for the future at an early age. Coupled with the ongoing support network, the participant could carve a path that led to progressive steps of upward mobility.

As children, the participants' early responsibility became that of fulfilling the

expectations of others. In a sense, they were working for others who disseminated basic knowledge, a starting point, and expectations of their future success. In this study, they instilled a foundation of beliefs and values in the participants that led to desires and expectations of a different future. This could become a reality through early preparation and responsible actions. As the result, actions taken received favorable approval from others and were beneficial to the participants. In time, they became more conscious of their ability to make a difference in their future life. The foundation of guiding principles that ended the poverty cycle was a major part of the transformative learning process. Delaying gratification was a sacrifice that many participants' realized. They did not want marriage, or raising their family to interfere with their educational endeavors. One participant in particular said that, having an abortion was easier than to disappoint her mother, siblings, mentors, and role models. The expectations of others and their desire to achieve became the driving force behind the participants' ability to experience upward mobility. An interdependence of beliefs and values, social mobility experiences, influences of others, and a productive self perspective, depicted in Figure 3 were all critical parts of the model representing the process of transformationthat ultimately led to upward socioeconomic mobility. The process consists of these elements: (1) early preparation and mother's influence, (2) locus of control and self-perception, (3) reflective insight and transitional experiences (turning point), (4) refocus and reaffirm a prior goal, (5) ongoing reinforcement, encouragement, support, praise, (6) setbacks and delayed gratification, (7) back to basics revisit early foundation of principles and purpose, (8) internal and external

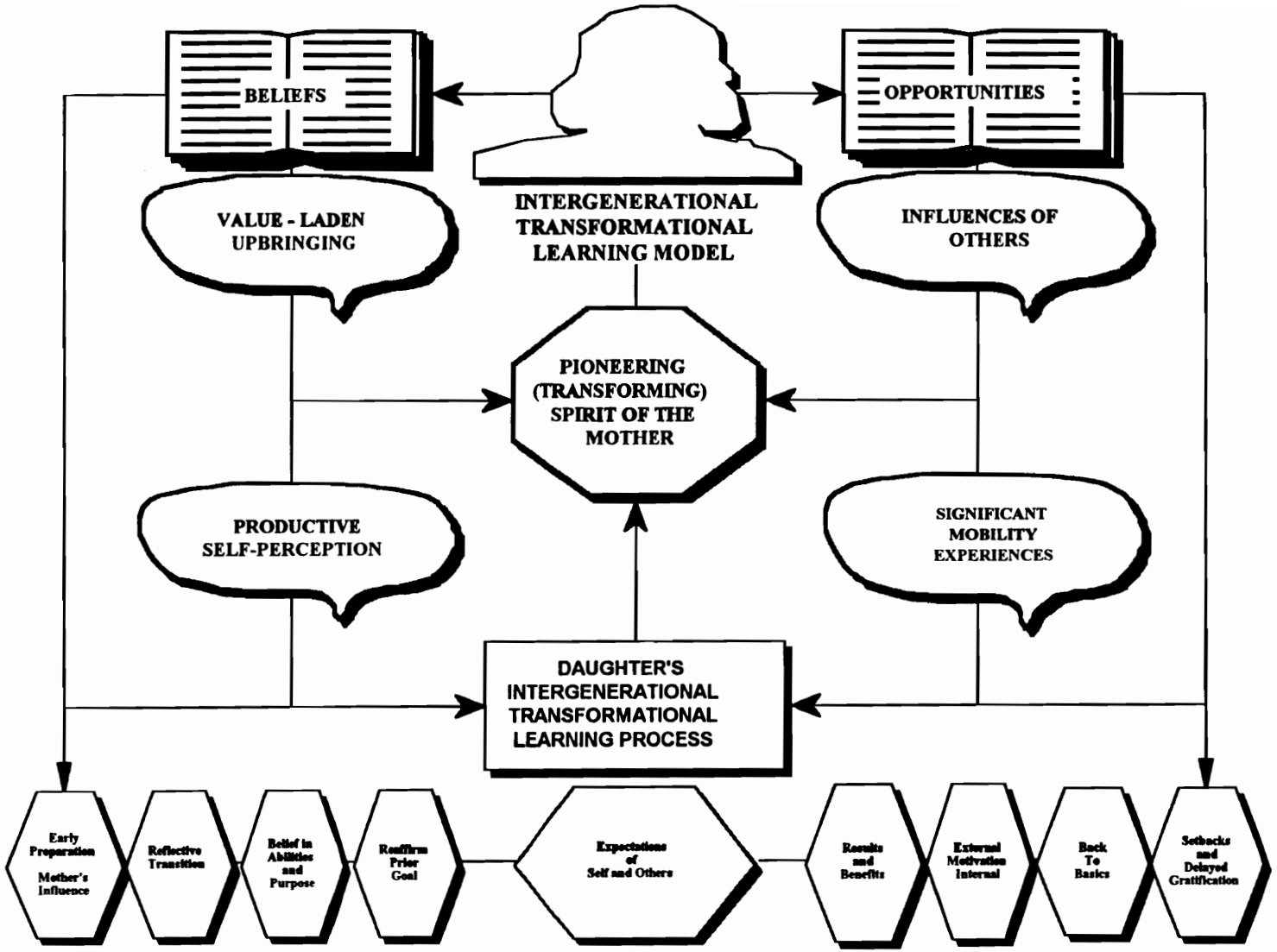

Figure 3. Model: Intergenerational Transformational Upward Mobility Learning Process

motivation, and (9) the results and benefits (consequences). The model consists of action and interactional strategies that contribute to the participants transformative learning process that facilitated mobility. Purposeful, goal-oriented strategies began with the mother or significant other maternal figure or surrogate. This prepared their daughters for better future opportunities that could advance their socioeconomic status as adults. Strategies were both purposeful and reflective. Reflective insight was a turning point, a transitional period when the women refocused on an existing goal. The consequences of their action and interactional strategies taken in response to a particular phenomenon had certain outcomes or consequences. For example, the participants believed education was a means to achieve mobility. They acted upon this knowledge and belief so that some could earn a college scholarship that enabled them to go to college. Education then became a condition of socioeconomic mobility. As a result, the action strategies of the participants and other influences, experiences of socioeconomic mobility were realized.

Question Three: To what extent are the steps of perspective transformation descriptive of the process as experienced by the women in this study?

Findings revealed only a partial experience of a transformational learning process by the women in this study. There is no direct evidence that a perspective transformation occurred with these study participants. Nevertheless, if it is descriptive of what was found, it would be that the mothers went through the first few stages of the transformation. Aware of their own limitations, the mothers realized that they could help someone else (daughters) by preparing them better than they were prepared. A strong

maternal influence led to the indoctrination of lifelong maintenance values and beliefs that showed a strong consistency with a process in which mothers and grandmothers had begun but were unable to complete.

Experiencing a disorienting dilemma, feelings of guilt and shame, and critically challenging presuppositions were not revealed as a part of the participant's transformative learning process. Analysis of the participants' transcripts reported participant awareness that their mothers sacrificed and faced both obstacles and limited opportunities because of their early life experiences, decisions, and opportunities. The mother's lack of opportunities may have been directly or indirectly related to factors in their early lives that did not allow them to reach their own potential as the participants suggested. Despite their childhood family socioeconomic conditions, the process continued through the mother's guidance and was actualized by the success their daughters achieved. Professionally and financially, these women overcame the barrier of a poverty-stricken life style to fulfill not only their dreams but the dreams of their mothers as well. It became evident in this study that the mothers positioned themselves to give their daughters the humanity to excel in life.

It was not my intent to prove or disprove that transformational learning occurred. However, the findings give evidence of an intergenerational transformational learning process that involves early preparation for future opportunities. Preparation begins within the participants' homes, primarily with the mothers and extends to a network of influences who, in part provide avenues in which the participants can change their life circumstances.

In this study, the participants began somewhere in the middle of the stages. If in fact a perspective transformation occurs from an intergenerational perspective, then it must take into consideration that it may be a progressive or chance process of undergoing a perspective transformation at some given point, based on desire, influence, and outcome. That is, at some point, the process extends beyond the generation of its origin.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

A major finding of this study was the number of unanswered questions it raised. Examining aspects of their lives outside their personal experiences only compounded the complexity resulting from the number of interdependent factors contributing to success. These created many alternative hypotheses whose examination was outside the scope of this study. These questions pertained to the: (1) social contexts--socioeconomic opportunities during the Civil Rights struggles, (2) differences in socioeconomic mobility among the siblings and birth order, (3) the character of the poverty experienced by the participants, and (4) the issue of socialization and transformative learning. These unanswered questions were a result of the outcome of this research and not a gap in the study. A brief discussion of these significant issues follows below.

Social Context--Civil Rights Struggles and Socioeconomic Opportunity

Some may argue that the changing world African American women grew up in the 1950's through the 1970's was a unique period in that it provided a key of opportunities to

a lot more people. For the participants in this study, the social context in which they grew up and to some extent through which their mothers' developed was, in part, characterized by governmental actions during this period that included supreme court cases, legislation, and social programs.

During the 1960's when these African American participants were growing up, the government passed the Civil Rights Act and other constitutional guarantees. They enacted these laws to ease some barriers against women and other minorities that contributed to their upward mobility struggles. Undoubtably, most of the women in this study benefitted from the social context created by the Civil Rights movement, even if they did not directly attribute their success to affirmative action policies. Affirmative action may have provided an entre' for both educational and employment opportunities, but success depended on achievement through the participant's own initiative and effort.

Nobles (1988) has written extensively on the African American family and community. He speaks of how the issue of racism masks the understanding of the African American culture and lets the assumption of racial inferiority go unchallenged by researchers. Conclusions are being drawn from the accomplishments of middle-class African families that the gap between African Americans and Whites has closed. Nobles believes this to be a false image that suggests that African Americans are no longer victims of poverty, racism, and all have benefited from the civil rights struggles. He believes that this false perception of the African American family has in many ways hindered and lessened the gains of the 1960's. There remains a perpetual state of disadvantages that

reflect ongoing discrimination and oppression of the African American family.

This study was based upon the events, experiences, and situations that the participants' reported to be instrumental in influencing who they are today. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other guarantees of racial and gender equality were a brief consideration for some participants in this study. I should note that the participants did not mention the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Affirmative Action, or other legislation as a "significant" factor in their achievement. In fact, it was the opposite in which a couple of the participants called these interventions more "window dressings" than sincerity by the government to eradicate the root of discrimination. For example, once a position was obtained through Affirmative Action, participants felt they were left hanging. That is, once inside, the transition was difficult for many who did not receive the support and training that they deemed valuable to becoming productive employees.

As stated by the participants, during their upbringing, they were taught the value of self-worth based on competence and ability. References to race were based on the participants learning to like their differences and taking pride in their Blackness. For these participants, the Civil Rights struggles may have led to an increased awareness of the racial truths that their parents experienced and shielded from them. On the one hand, the enactment of laws may have consciously allowed them to envision the potential of experiencing significant socioeconomic mobility. However, the death of key leaders during this time may have affected the efforts that the government publicly sought to achieve--as many African American women may have abandoned their hope and

approached (if at all) the notion of equitable opportunity with skepticism and distrust. Given this, a study designed to address this issue is worthy of attention. A study of interest would be to look at African American women who report the Civil Rights Movement as an influential factor in the opportunities that they could capitalize upon and therefore saw the worth of them in bringing about equality in both educational and workplace environments.

Socioeconomic Mobility Between Siblings and Birth Order

Another alternative hypothesis this study raises is why other siblings did not achieve the same level of mobility. Some might argue that maybe birth order has something to do with achieving mobility. In this study, most participants were firstborn and lastborn in their families. One explanation would suggest that the firstborn would have a higher achievement motivation which would create an alternative hypothesis for explaining their mobility. For the participants in this study, the family experience tended to be characterized by geographic and economic mobility suggesting that younger siblings (in some cases) may have had more potential opportunity for success. This may be a result of the parents developing better parenting skills. A mother is not necessarily the same when raising all of her children. These participants had other learning experiences besides parental influence. Geographic transitions and experiences outside the home (in different environments and with diverse people such as ministers, teachers, mentors, role models, friends) may also account for their mobility. Although this is an interesting question, this study was not designed to address this issue. However, this study creates a complex

picture of family constellations that could be covered by additional studies focusing on these dimensions.

Character of Poverty Experienced by the Participants

Another alternative hypothesis was the character of the poverty that the participants experienced and how this may have affected their ability to achieve. It was noted in the narratives that some participants experienced more debilitating levels of poverty than others. However, despite the character of their particular degree of poverty, common interrelated factors were found among the participants and were identified as significant to their upward mobility experiences. Since each of these participants experienced socioeconomic upward mobility, there was little evidence of the relevance that the quality of poverty had in this study. The effect of how much poverty the participants grew up in was emphasized with respect to their environment and family background. Although some grew up in abject poverty and others may have experienced lifestyles in blue collar family environments or single parent households, this study did not seek to find how the different kinds of living conditions and the intensity of them affected these women. It was beyond the scope of this study to sort this data out.

A study addressing this issue would provide an enriched understanding of their learning process and its relationship to economic conditions. It is possible that someone would be at a level of poverty that precludes them from experiencing significant mobility. For instance, in this study, several participants indicated that a transitional move from the rural south to the north exposed them to opportunities that they may not have had

otherwise. From this, it is speculative to suggest that there might be some level in which an individual may not proceed. A minimal requisite level of economic stability to give children the opportunity that they need to succeed has not been shown in this study and remains an additional question for future research.

The Issue of Socialization and Transformative Learning

As an additional finding, an alternative hypothesis is that the participants' learning was a result of successful socialization efforts. Whether or not it was an intentional socialization process by the mother and other people, it ended up being a learning process for the participants. As previously stated, a transformative learning process suggests that an individual will take action because of exposure to an experience or event which may change her perspective or lead to refocusing on a prior goal and taking actions toward a new one. The participants in this study became responsibly active in their planned goals.

In this study, it was assumed that a learning process had taken place in these African American women who achieved significant socioeconomic mobility despite their particular lower status backgrounds and adverse experiences. If the socialization issue is pictured as a passive one, then participants in this study were not passive recipients of parental interventions. Findings indicate that the participants were active, not passive, recipients of learning activities in which they may have responded to issues, events, and what people said to them. They also engaged in self-reflective initiatives to do something about it. They did not function as sponges, absorbing and not actively participating in shaping their future chances of experiencing significant upward mobility. Consequently, these

participants made a fundamental change that caused them to think differently about their world and become actively involved while changing their present circumstances. This is the one thing that distinguishes transformative learning from passive forms of learning. Additional research with respect to the effects of providing intentional socialization activities could be very informative to elucidate this issue. These additional findings point to recommendations for further research on these issues.

There is no particular service that could carry the burden of solving all the problems that a particular group may experience. As one participant reported, "It takes the whole village to raise a child." Each share a degree of responsibility in the upbringing just as educators, practitioners, and researchers bare the responsibility of providing learning environments and resources that facilitates learning in all people. Additional recommendations that emerged out of these findings are specific to adult educators and human resource practitioners.

Educators

Studies about women should focus on the experiences of women, their commonalities, and what and how factors account for their similar or different successes. An understanding of what other women have experienced may reduce the fear and validate the reality of another woman. In turn, educational institutions should be held accountable for the inclusion of the experiences of all people into the curriculum. As educators, facilitators, or employers, we must work together to ensure that equitable opportunities

exist for all people. Programs that increase the awareness of barriers and lack of initiative are just as important as having programs that create avenues of change.

Human Resource Practitioners

Educational and training tools can be designed based on life as experienced by African Americans and classroom learning environments should create an atmosphere conducive to the learning based on processes related to African Americans. Practitioners can look into the kinds of interventions that could be developed to help mothers or daughters or both develop the skills and knowledge base to go through this process. African American parents could be involved in the design of the learning environment and class content to include experiences based on their realities.

Practitioners need to consider what types of interventions could be designed to address the issue of what mothers can do to further their own transformation and teach young mothers how to raise their daughters to avoid the trappings of poverty. Practitioners can look into interventions that would get mothers to think about how they would be raising their daughters. Take for example 20 - 25-year-old mothers, what kinds of interventions can be designed to get young mothers to see beyond the barriers while she learns how to influence her children? Some African American women may define their problem so that it is inconceivable that it is solved. For example one might say, "I should have promised myself when I dropped out of school that I would go back within two semesters" or "I should have started back to school immediately after my mother didn't need me to help in the fields." Practitioners should look at interventions designed to

reinforce African American women for not having foreclosed their options so that they can explore others.

Strengthening the family may be more beneficial than the focus on a single entity within the unit. If you want to help an individual, the focus should include the family. If you develop a program with an expected outcome of lasting results or permanent change in behavior for African American women, it might be more beneficial to have a program that is inclusive of the total family. Children are not raised in a vacuum and results of an intervention directed at one child in the family would be short-lived because that individual is a product of her of cultural and social conditioning. None of the participants in this study were left alone to produce life opportunities for themselves in an environment that suggested failure. Socioeconomic upward mobility success is achievable and more lasting with a focus on the family unit as a whole and what and how individuals develop in their childhood years, is a determining factor in what they become in adulthood.

CONCLUSIONS

Many African American females from lower socioeconomic demographic backgrounds find themselves unable or unwilling to move beyond barriers, trapped in an environment introduced to them by their parents' situational or environmental limitations. Subsequently, they live in and experience the most impoverished means of survival with parents denigrated to working in domestic services and other lower wage labor positions.

Whether in a two parent family or single female head of the household, meaningful socioeconomic advancement may not be seen as an option.

The African American women participating in this study link experiences, family upbringing, influences, and their own positive self-perspective as factors to their process of transformation. As African American women who have transcended situational and environmental adversity to overcome their lower socioeconomic childhood backgrounds, the central focal point of their achievement points to the need to examine the importance of the extended families and network community. Evidence from this study strongly reveals that moving beyond adversity to achieve any meaningful level of mobility is an interconnected and interdependent phenomenon that has shaped the lives of the African American women participating in this study. More specifically, it is an intergenerational relationship that began with either the blood mother, grandmother, or surrogate mother, who was unable for various reasons to reach her potential in life. Consequently, they did not experience and share in opportunities that could have led to their personal achievement of upward mobility.

The success of African American women brings to light the importance of the family, particularly the mother's efforts of socializing their daughters so that they would be better prepared for future opportunities as well adversities. The mothers were the primary nurturers, obstacle defense preparators, and upward mobility facilitators for their daughters. That is, the mothers could socialize their daughters to compete in society for better opportunities that could free them from the cycle of poverty. Moreover, the

mothers' guidance included an upbringing that enabled their daughters to protect themselves from the negative social and economic forces inherent in a society that discriminates and oppresses African American women. Their daughters were the extensions of the mothers--empowered to break the poverty cycle that the mothers were unable to break themselves. The results of the mother's pioneering spirit that prepared her daughter with ingrained beliefs and values, a productive self-perspective, influence of others, and experiences that led to upward socioeconomic mobility was the completion of an intergenerational transformation learning process. Upon obtaining their goals, the participants broke the poverty cycle that previous generations were unable to. The mothers could experience their dreams of socioeconomic mobility through their daughters.

As previously stated, the development of an Intergenerational Transformative Learning Process connotes an interrelated process of common factors that influenced socioeconomic upward mobility. The process begins with the pioneering spirit of the mother as the facilitator of extending the process of change onto her offspring. Whereas the mother fell short (i.e., education, limited opportunities), she could actualize her dreams through her daughter. The basic ingredients included ingrained beliefs and values that led to opportunities and positioned the participant in the path of subsequent upward mobility.

Second, there is an aggregate portrait of the pivotal influences in the development of African American women. A value-laden upbringing, productive self-perspective, influences of others, and significant mobility experiences and their respective supportive subthemes, together contributed to this intergenerational transformative learning process.

As an extension of the mother's pioneering spirit, responsibility was reinforced by this cycle of interdependent and interconnected extended relationships. The nurturing and support of other networks positively influenced or reinforced the daughter's productive self-perception and value-laden beliefs.

Thirdly, opportunities led to increasing degrees of advancement. Significant mobility experiences and influences from others contributed to socioeconomic advancement opportunities. Despite positive and negative influences and experiences, the ingrained beliefs and early productive self perception born out of the mother's influence and pioneering spirit enabled the daughter to actualize her goals. They advanced beyond the existence of their childhood background to achieve significant levels of socioeconomic mobility. This led to the participants' breaking the poverty cycle that imprisoned previous generations. Hence, the dreams of the offspring and mothers' were consummated from an intergenerational transformation perspective process.

Fourthly, the real power of the intergenerational transformation learning process is what the mother or significant other maternal role model brings to the process. First, the mother recognizes that she has fallen short of her desired goals or expectations given by others. Despite the mother's own limitations, she believes that a better life is still possible. She understands the past and present realities of barriers that African American women face. She continues to work toward a different reality through her offspring, a process that continues with both an early preparation for opportunities and survival skills in a society that perpetuates oppressive and discriminating forms of behavior. If the cycle of

poverty was to be broken, and the transformation completed, then the mother (or other female) becomes a facilitating instrument. Thus, her active role removed potential self defeating perspectives from her daughter and enabled them to achieve mobility.

Finally, the mother is seen as a role model by her daughter. Evolving from the mother's transforming spirit and action, is the interrelationship of experiences from others within and outside the family. Most often, the interrelationship is with another female who is seen as a role model, mentor, and continues to be an influence in the daughter's life. Extended networks in the community churches, schools, and neighboring community reinforce the participant's beliefs in her ability to achieve. The actions of the mother directed toward the future of their offspring become a reality when change takes place. Additionally, the participants' mothers become empowered as spheres of influence for change in their daughter's perspective.

Researcher's Closing Comments

As I evaluated this self-told experience and transformative learning process, I find it quite different from that of studies looking for a particular quality or attribute. I feel the lives of African American women (and other women) are much too complex than an attribute can reveal about a person, particularly since I searched for a deeper meaning beyond my own perspectives. The African American women in this study shared some of their deepest emotions and painful experiences in an attempt to understand "how and why" things happen. Approaching a transformative learning process through a reflective

personal recollection of events was an interpersonal way of understanding the nature of the experiences of others, what meaning they attach, and the explanation they use to explain those experiences. One obstacle I faced during this process was bringing closure to this experience. What I found was the more I involved myself into the data, endless possibilities of conveying different aspects of these participants' lives were emerging. This is a never ending process. There is always another perspective and another approach. What a researcher chooses to do will influence the nature of the responses and the interpretation of them. I had to force myself away from the data, to revisit my intent. I realized that, for the moment, it was all right to bring closure to my intended purpose.

I believe that hearing the experience of another is an inspiring tool in motivating an individual. Upon transcribing several interviews of the study participants, my sister became inspired to make changes in her life as a single parent with three children. nrolling in college and rejoining church, has made a significant difference in her life in such a short time. She has increased her self-esteem and belief in her abilities and Papoose is also working toward raising her earning potential. She said, "some of these women have experienced a lot, if they can make a difference in their lives, so can I." A 4.0 grade point average is evidence of that difference, especially coming from an individual who has undermined her talents most of her life. Would she have done this on her own? I could only speculate but it appears clear that, Papoose gained insight from these self-told stories and based on that knowledge, she decided to change her life to avoid the trappings of oppressive circumstances.

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Appendix A

Participant Informed Consent Form

Confidentiality & Anonymity Statement

Statement of Confidentiality for Research Assistant

Appendix A

Participant Informed Consent Form

Study Purpose and Procedure

The purpose of this inquiry is to provide insight into the lives of successful African American women, a small group of women who have experienced increasing levels of socioeconomic status beyond that of their parents. I am interested in learning about how you experienced challenges and situations in your family, schools, community overcame obstacles in your early life that you perceived to have prepared you for your current life status. This will include your thoughts, feelings, actions taken, and the consequences of your action. Through the discovery of significant transforming events and the process in which they moved beyond challenges, it is hoped that this study will help African American women who find themselves in similar situations, learn and benefit from the actual experiences of ordinary women overcoming extraordinary circumstances.

This study requires participants to engage in interviews and follow-up sessions for data collection purposes. Participation in the study will require your willingness to be interviewed and audio taped. Interviews will be transcribed and will include demographic questions about your parental family background and current life status (i.e., age, education, number of siblings, parents occupation and education achievement level, etc.).

Investigator

The study is being conducted by Marsha E. Jackson, a doctoral candidate at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in Falls Church, Virginia as part of her dissertation requirement under the supervision of Chairman, Dr. Albert Wiswell.

Participant's Signature	**Researcher's Signature**	**Date**

Appendix A

Confidentiality & Anonymity Statement

This study will deal with sensitive information about early life experiences of upwardly mobile African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that caused a change in the individual's perspective, and how they have confronted challenges to experience increasing levels of upward mobility. Therefore, any documented information pertaining to this study will not include your real name. Pseudo-names will be given and every effort will be made to eliminate identifying features from the information you provide. All observations and conversations will be kept completely confidential. The researcher will have the only access to the master list associating your name to the pseudo-name used in the study. The list will be secured under lock and key and after the completion of the data collection and analysis, it will be destroyed along with all audiotapes. Should this research necessitate the assistance of another person (i.e., transcriber, peer member checker, etc.) that individual will be required to sign a statement of confidentiality. A copy of the transcript will be provided to the participant. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you wish to be a participant in this study, and your rights and role as a participant are fully understood, please sign below.

Participant's Signature	**Researcher's Signature**	**Date**

Appendix A

Statement of Confidentiality for Research Assistant

This study will deal with sensitive information about early life experiences of upwardly mobile African American women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that caused a change in the individual's perspective, and how they have confronted challenges to experience increasing levels of upward mobility. All observations and conversations will be kept completely confidential. The researcher will have the only access to the master list associating your name to the pseudo-name used in the study. The list will be secured under lock and key and after the completion of the data collection and analysis, it will be destroyed along with all audiotapes. Should this research necessitate the assistance of another person (i.e., transcriber, peer member checker, etc.) that individual will be required to sign a statement of confidentiality.

I _____ have read the confidential statement. By signing this contractual document, I am agreeing to comply with the request for anonymity and confidentiality.

_____ _____ _____

(Signature of Research Assistant) (Signature of Researcher) (Date)

Appendix B

Interview Guideline Questions

Appendix B

Interview Guideline Questions

Present Life Perspectives

1. How did you come to the decision to participate in this study?

2. How would you describe your life today? What experiences stand out for you when you think back over the past five years?

3. Given your early childhood background, what impact did your parent's socioeconomic status have on your self-perception and ability to achieve?

Education Guideline

4. Tell me about your family life as an African American female when you were in: (a) grade school, (b) middle school, (c) high school, (d) college, and (e) early work experiences. Within each area, what kinds of values were reflected in your African American upbringing?

Self Awareness

5. What was a memorable event for you that made you feel good about being and African American female? Reflect upon different environments: (a) home, (b) school, (c) work, and community as a child, teenager, young adult, professional). How did you benefit from the situation?

Experiences and Action Taken

6. As an African American female, what made you feel bad in these environments? How did you respond to the situation, event, or experience?

7. As an African American female, when did you begin to see that your life was going to be significantly different from that of your parents?

8. As an African American female, what kinds of experiences would you describe as turning points in your life?

9. As an African American female what did you learn from these experiences?

Researcher's Note: These questions served only as a guide. The way interviews unfolded varied with each participant.

Appendix C

Profile of Study Propositions: Common Themes

Appendix C

Profile of Study Participants Common Themes

THEME	TIFFANY	YVONNE	AIESHA	GERRY	DIVA	CARLA	MIMI	DIANE
Success is attributed to the notion of having innate capabilities.	**Supported** "Who a man is, is in his blood." What is in people will ultimately come out based upon were they are from.	**Not Supported** Significant others said in order to rise above blue class, you must go to college.	**Supported** It was in myself despite my upbringing.	**Supported** I always thought that I would be successful. I was considered a bright child. Education would be the key to success.	**Not Supported** Her parents instilled in her that education was the vehicle to a better life. Knowledge is powerful.	**Not Supported** Carla adopted her mother's philosophy that "God has a plan for all His children."	**Not Supported** Grandmother told her that she is different and she should like her differences.	**Not Supported** "How you use today determines how tomorrow uses you. Listen. Get your direction. Then you will know where you are going."
Inter-generational transformation contribute to success Fulfilling Mother's Dream	**Supported** "We knew that our mother was making sacrifices. It was bridged by her hope in the next generation..."	**Supported** Mother played an active role in my educational career. "Being the first born you had to be the trail blazer, set the example."	**Not Supported** "I never received encouragement from my family...I guess nobody gave a damn."	**Supported** Understanding my mother's limited background, "I was encouraged to "set my sights on having something more."	**Supported** Upon going to college, realized the she had reached a level that her mother.	**Supported** My parents had the potential but lacked opportunity. "I had to do well to please them."	**Supported** Grandmother instilled in her, "Because you are poor, doesn't mean you have to be uneducated."	**Not Supported** Mother shared life stories of her experience to "keep me on track as I was in school, get the education."
Competing Process **Proving something to one's mother**	**Supported** Mother laid the foundation. It was up to her to prove her capabilities.	**Supported** Knew that her success was important to her parents. "It was just important that I succeed."	**Supported** Trying to get her mother to love her was a competitive process.	**Supported** Believed that she could make her mother proud by excelling in school.	**Supported** Mother wanted her to excel academically. To go beyond the point she had reached.	**Supported** "Because of the emphasis on education, I thought I had to do well . . . to please them" because they didn't finish.	**Supported** "I will not place myself in the position that my mother is in, not my children."	**Not Supported** Looking at my mother's background, "I felt I had to do more than that because I was coming after.
Exposure to Successful People **Positive Role Models/**	**Supported** People who made changes or made me want to change were teachers, neighbors with encouraging words.	**Supported** In community and college exposure to Black women in top positions influenced her life.	**Supported** Surrogate mother, co-workers, mentors, and friends gave me encouragement	**Supported** "The more encouragement I received from family, friends, community, the more successful I wanted to become.	**Supported** Wanted to be like her aunt who was admired by the family for being the first to go to college.	**Supported** "When we went places, I was their little prize . . . I was just considered super special because I was bright."	**Supported** "My grandmother, teachers and counselors gave encouraged me"	**Supported** Exposed to people her mother worked for and saw how they lived.

THEME	TIFFANY	YVONNE	AIESHA	GERRY	DIVA	CARLA	MIMI	DIANE
Negative Role Models / (e.g. domestic, welfare, blue collar, multiple partners, relatives)	**Supported** Mother wanted to shield her from domestic work and the environment in which she lived.	**Supported** Blue collar worker, didn't receive respect like white collar workers. Wanted the same respect.	**Supported** Mother was always fussing and cussing. "I never wanted to be like my mother."	**Supported** "Some of my siblings didn't have good lives." Did not want to experience the same thing.	**Supported** I was "aware of the bickering and lack of closeness" from her mother's family.	**Supported** "I don't want to ever look forward to working on the farm."	**Supported** Mother on welfare. "I hated it...I felt you were taking some thing."Decided that I would never do that."	**Supported** At four, said I was not going to do domestic work like my mother. "One day White folks will be cleaning my floors."
Support Network (extended family)	**Supported** Would tell their life stories around the table instilling in us things to do and not to do and the consequences of our actions.	**Supported** Beside my parents, I received guidance from my aunts and uncles. "I needed extended families values as well."	**Not Supported** Did not receive support from any family members.	**Supported** As the baby of the family, I received much encouragement from my mother and siblings.	**Supported** Adopted paternal families idealism of family, love, and having a strong spiritual foundation to sustain it.	**Supported** Mother's interest in her excelling and sharing with her godparents increased her self esteem and sense of purpose.	**Not Supported** "Being an independent person, it became a decision-making process of what was right for me."	**Not Supported** Grandparents reinforced values parents taught. "Be honest, be truthful, and respectful and just."
Strong Spiritual Foundation Religious Upbringing	**Supported** Strong Baptist roots came from my mother. Changed in the fifth grade when given a book on Catholicism.	**Supported** "Because of my mothers beliefs, church was a part of my upbringing."	**Not Supported** Developed late in my life. Not instilled in her by her mother.	**Supported** Mother would tell her to "always make God number one in your life.	**Supported** From her paternal family adopted their philosophy of believing in Jesus Christ and family.	**Supported** Spent a good bit of time at church on Sunday, prayer meeting on Wednesday."That was one of the strongest values."	**Supported** "Given my spiritual upbringing, I did not want to disobey God's word."	**Not Supported** Inculcated many values without the emphasis of a strong spiritual foundation.
Feedback and Encouragement (comments about their upbringing)	**Supported** Neighbors would give me encouraging works as they saw me walking to an from school.	**Supported** Was always in my life from parents and extended family.	**Supported** Received encouragement later in life from surrogate mother, despite her mother's negative influence.	**Supported** "Teachers would tell me how neat I was." Kept me focused on my abilities and not my second hand clothes.	**Supported** Mother's siblings told me that I would be the first to get pregnant. They were wrong.	**Supported** Through constant encouragement from her parents and godfather, she knew she had to do well.	**Supported** "I got it through school from my teachers and counselors."	**Supported** Grandparents would re-instill principles enforced by her parents.
Father as the Strong Influence	**Supported** 'My daddy taught us how to survive." Parents "did everything for us, in hopes of us doing.. setting the example."	**Supported** My dad said, "I was just as good as my brothers and I could do anything."	**Not Supported** Didn't meet my father until I was 18. Mother had other men in her life but contributed nothing to my character today.	**Not Supported** Father was not a communicator. "I can't remember if my father ever told me that he loved me."	**Not Supported** Mother instilled in her how she could find her direction in life.	**Not Supported** Mother was a homemaker and "always available to provide their basic needs."	**Not Supported** Grandmother head of household. Never knew biological father. Siblings father had no influence.	**Supported** " My father gave me a great deal of wisdom, my mother reinforced that wisdom."

THEME	TIFFANY	YVONNE	AIESHA	GERRY	DIVA	CARLA	MIMI	DIANE
Motivated By Exposure To An Economically and Culturally Diverse Environment	**Supported** Exposure made her realize that there was so much more in life and if prepared opportunities would increase.	**Not Supported** Noticed inequality in the level of respect given an individuals occupation but always believed in her abilities.	**Not Supported** I was driven by my desire to become a professional.	**Supported** Moving from a southern rural farm to a big city gave her the opportunity to meet different professionals	**Not Supported** "A lot of things I could attain as an African American woman depended on me.	**Supported** Moving to a new city and living with educators "really made an impression on me."	**Not Supported** "Just because you are poor, that doesn't mean you have to be uneducated. That is the key to success."	**Supported** Going to work with her mother when she cleaned homes reinforced within the value of education and a good job.
A Value Laden Upbringing	**Supported** There were life stories that we were suppose to take as knowledge of things to do and not to do..."	**Supported** Taught that anything you wanted to do you could do.	**Supported** Raised by a White family the first three or four years. Taught etiquette, manners and, speaking.	**Supported** As a leader of her own destiny, "I am surviving off of the values my mother instilled in me."	**Supported** "We knew certain goals were aspired to us", the value of education,family manners, and honesty.	**Supported** "My mother stressed in her children the value of honesty, respect and , religion."	**Supported** Grandmother often said, "If you have dignity, no one can take that from you."	**Supported** "When you get so grown that you can not abide by my rules and regulations, there's the door."
Abusive Environment as a Motivator to Succeed	**Supported** Workplace Environment Early work experiences. "When we are most suppressed, we begin to give of ourselves.	**Supported** Workplace Environment Motivated by love, encouragement and, self confidence in her ability when faced with racist behavior in the workplace.	**Supported** Home Environment I was smart. But I did mediocre work just enough to get by to graduate and move out of my mother's apartment.	**Supported** Home and School Environments Witnessed the struggles of her brothers and sisters wanted life to be different for her. In school she was ridiculed by peers.	**Supported** Community Environment Taught that you could learn not only from your experience but from the experiences of others.	**Not Supported** Home Environment I grew up in a strict disciplinarian home. It was a family practice to treat people with basic decency.	**Supporting** Home Environment Re: welfare "I made the decision that I would not live like that in my adulthood. You should work."	**Not Supported** Home Environment When I was growing up, "I hated my parents." They were too strict. But I gained wisdom.
Notion of Control Over Their Environment as Instrumental in Achieving Mobility	**Supported** When faced with discrimination in the private sector, never gave up. Looked in other career avenues.	**Supported** "Have never felt the external environment would control what I was able to do with my life."	**Supported** "I just don't accept no when I want something."	**Supported** Taught to work hard and not to depend on anyone but herself. When distracted, weighed other options for alternative paths.	**Supported** Mother taught her, "You have a mind of your own, use it." Didn't let peer pressure deter her from her goals.	**Supported** Adopted the philosophy that God's plan for all His children "was constantly working not matter what they did."	**Supported** "As long as you had some sense of direction, you will keep yourself on track."	**Supported** Father told me to get a profession and a trade because you need something to fall back on.

THEME	TIFFANY	YVONNE	AIESHA	GERRY	DIVA	CARLA	MIMI	DIANE
Notion that Early Exposure To Discrimination Instrumental in Their Ability to Achieve.	**Supported** Life stories about Black men digging ditches in the heat of day and White men standing over them doing nothing.	**Not Supported** "I never thought of myself as a Black women when I was growing up."	**Not Supported** Education would be the determining factor in her ability to achieve.	**Not Supported** Always told that you should "never define yourself in terms of color."	**Not Supported** It is through my abilities that I will achieve.	**Not Supported** Her parents told her that she was as capable as the next person. "I 'm not ashamed of the fact that I am African American"	**Not Supported** Grandmother instilled in her that "We are different and we should like our differences."	**Supported** Parents told of their experiences and she experienced it at the dentist. Wouldn't treat people like that.
Fortuitous Experiences/ Good Things Bestowed Upon You. Not a Result of Your Conscious Effort	**Supported** Exposed to a theologian who plummeted her into the educational field as a substitute.	**Not Supported** Believed in her ability to create her own opportunities.	**Supported** Opportunity to work outside of her clerical duties which increase her chances of securing professional work.	**Supported** Opportunity to received a full scholarship to cover tuition when she wanted to change her academic focus.	**Not Supported** "Let my merit prove myself."	**Not Supported** With her abilities mother said, "could get out there and compete with the best of folks."	**Supported** Informed of a scholarship to attend college when thought college would not be a possibility.	**Supported** Uncle assisted her in obtaining a position at a Bank after graduating and realizing the strike killed her chance to teach.
Notion of Gender and not Putting Oneself Into Situations Where Gender Becomes An Adversity to Overcome.	**Supported** norms, marrying after high school. Mother instilled in her to worry about that later in life. Get an education first to be able to take care of you.	**Supported** You have less power if you are not the breadwinner in the family.	**Supported** I did not like my mother's voice nor her provocative dressing.	**Supported** Getting pregnant by her best friends boyfriend.	**Supported** Responding to the atmosphere in a male dominated field "The White man can be an idiot, we cannot."	**Not Supported** Never let her Blackness nor her gender limit her thinking about the opportunities available to her as a person.	**Supported** Protected from men by her mother. Didn't want them overnight with her daughters at home.	**Supported** Sees differences in occupations for males and females. Experienced first hand after computer school.
Sense of Purpose **Early Identification of Mission in Life**	**Supported** "Taking the energy that I had and making something of myself and inspiring and motivating others."	**Supported** Realizing the power over others by virtue of their earnings.	**Not Supported** Early life was like serving time. No idea what she was waiting for.	**Supported** Knew the value of education and the opportunities that would be open for her.	**Supported** Became attracted to material things decided she wanted to make a lot of money. Teachers didn't entertainers did.	**Supported** "I want to go to college and get a degree so that I don't ever have to look forward to working on a farm as long as I live."	**Supported** "By the age of 12, I knew that life would be different for me." Finishing school would be a means to an end.	**Supported** Knew that she had to do more than what her parents did as laborers. Wanted to be an "intellectual," not a laborer.

THEME	TIFFANY	YVONNE	AIESHA	GERRY	DIVA	CARLA	MIMI	DIANE
Influences More Predominant At a Certain Phase In One's Life	**Supported** Childhood Years Mother and father were my leaders and mentors	**Supported** Childhood Years Family and extended family in her early years.	**Supported** Teen Age Years Surrogate mother and mentors on the job after graduating high school.	**Supported** Childhood Years Expectation from mother, sibling and, grade school teacher.	**Supported** Childhood Years Special bond with her mother was "a positive experience in her development."	**Supported** Childhood Years New environment "surrounded by . . . a learning experience . . ., was dynamic."	**Supported** Childhood Years "Grandmother instilled in me the foundation upon which I have lived my life."	**Supported** Childhood Years Parents were exposing me to a variety of people & professions for career choices.
Capitalized on Opportunities That Gave Them a Greater Advantage for Achieving Mobility	**Supported** Could not go to college but took an alternate direction by way of the seminary to better prepare her for college.	**Supported** Attending a female college and exposed to Black female leaders gave her a sense of purpose in life.	**Supported** Volunteered for job enrichment -- gaining experience in the whole operation.	**Supported** Changing academic careers to better position herself in terms of earnings.	**Supported** Changing her radical spirt to good work ethics and, not letting race be a conscious barrier meant mobility.	**Supported** Employed at a University gave her "opportunity to do graduate work and work full time" with paid tuition.	**Supported** Accepted the opportunity to go to college when she thought it was not an option financially.	**Supported** Accepted opportunities to further her education while employed in certain positions.
Importance of Education as the Key to Achieving Mobility	**Supported** Learning was strongly emphasized. "Leave the men alone and get an education first to be prepared for future success.	**Supported** To get a respectable job, had to go to college.	**Supported** "Against all odds" without a college degree.	**Supported** Education is the key to success.	**Supported** "Do better than what we have done. . . Knowledge is very powerful." A strong part of her families heritage.	**Supported** Mother said, that with education, "you don't have to worry about someone saying you fall shorts because you're Black."	**Supported** "You need to go to school to get an education. No one can take that away from you."	**Supported** Father said, "go to school to get an education and enhance and garden yourself.
Notion That Insulating Their Emotions to Avoid Confrontation Instrumental in Remaining Focused on Goal	**Supported** In times of strife would turn her energies to others. Take the focus off of the problem until the situation can be resolved.	**Supported** Withdrew from others and avoided relationships.	**Not Supported** When a situation arose, would first do an internal assessment of how she may have contributed to the situation.	**Supported** Concealed her true beliefs and feelings in order to fit in with her peers.	**Not Supported** The strength of her relationship with her mother sustained her through the rough times.	**Supported** Discrimination in restaurants. "It bothers me and I'd rather go hungry than to deal with this."	**Supported** Accepted the label of "square" from her peers to keep her fear of facing up to her shyness.	**Supported** Black females did not want her assistance in class. Annoyed that they rejected her and never again approached them in class.

THEME	TIFFANY	YVONNE	AIESHA	GERRY	DIVA	CARLA	MIMI	DIANE
Spiritual Beliefs as a Coping Strategy When Coping With Barriers That May Impede Upward Mobility	**Supported** "Sustain me through numerous trials and tribulations of life."	**Supported** "I found myself calling on God a lot when this was going on."	**Supported** Through prayer, meditation and, belief in God, good things will come.	**Supported** Told by her mother to, " make God number one in your life."	**Supported** Adopted the idealism of a stong spiritual foundation from her paternal grandparents	**Supported** Ingrained in her as a child and an important part of her lifestyle.	**Supported** "I relied a lot upon my spiritual faith to guide me through the decisions I made."	**Not Supported** A strong work ethic guided her mobility. Being professionally and technically prepare
Using Others As A Means To Justify Your Own Ends	**Not Supported** "I would not use anybody for any reason." My destiny was to motivate others.	**Not Supported** Belief that her abilities would provide opportunities.	**Supported** "I was an influencer. I could manipulate people."	**Supported** Attaching herself to a friends boyfriend to offset the emptiness that resulted from her leaving home.	**Not Supported** Reared on the principle of "love one for another."	**Not Supported** "Treat other people the way we wanted to be treated, just basic decency."	**Not Supported** "Would not marry a person for my own personal gain."	**Not Supported** "Don't allow anyone to waste your time. If they are in your presence for only a few seconds, learn something."
Self Identification **Seeing Life Different At An Early Age Was A Motivating Factor For Success**	**Supported** Early exposure into the lives of Whites and mothers experiences and desires for her children.	**Supported** Gender biases. Life was different between my parents. My father had more say.	**Not Supported** No sense of self. Did not fit in. I always thought that I was backwards and no one gave a damn how I did.	**.Supported** I knew I was smart and was always told that there was more in life for me.	**Supported** The influence of her cousins "increased her appetite for knowledge." At six, desired to teach.	**Supported** Life with her godfather was instrumental in her decision to not to go back to life on a farm.	**Supported** Reflection on life on a farm and picking cotton said, "If I had a choice, I would never do that."	**Supported** Godfather was a millionaire. At age of 6 or 7 witnessed him counting money and decided she wanted to be a millionaire.
Notion That Traditional Norms Was a Barrier To Female Success	**Supported** Thought "being the best you can be professionally was the "way out." Military experience, "They did not want us."	**Supported** "I hated being a girl." Saw inequity of power, voice, and decision making.	**Supported** Realized after earning a college degree, that something else was wrong.	**Not Supported** Because I was smart, I thought the world was waiting for me. I was to self-centered and spoiled.	**Supported** In law school realized that she had to compete in an environment that was pro-male.	**Not Supported** Believed in her potential as an educated person.	**Not Supported** "Having an education would bring you success."	**Not Supported** Awareness of differences helped whether positive or negative. Comfortable in knowing that she had many talents.

Appendix D

Gerry's Narrative of Themes and Subthemes

Appendix D: Gerry's Narrative of Common Themes and Subthemes

THEMES & SUBTHEMES	CODES SUPPORTING THEMES	EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF STUDY PARTICIPANT'S THEMES	OVERARCHING THEME (CORE CONCEPT)
Success is attributed to the notion of having innate capabilities.	GROW: E, FV INDIV: SC, BL, LC, B, NET: F, T	I always thought that I would be successful. I was considered a bright child. Education would be the key to success.	Productive Self-Perception **Positive Self Esteem**
Importance of Education as the Key to Achieving Mobility	GROW: PE, FV, I, E, O INDIV: B	Education is the key to success. "I made up my mind then that I was going to educate myself such that I could have a better life thaaan my sisters and brothers that I saw." My mother said, "If you got a good education, you could go further in life than what you may be seeing here."	Value **Educational Attainment**
Intergenerational transformation contribute to success **Fulfilling Mother's Dream**	GROW: PE, FV, E, R, O, N, INDIV: SC, BL, B NET: RM, EF, F	My mother was ". . .full of wisdom and proude people with a strong spiritual base. . ." Understanding my mother's limited background, "I was encouraged to "set my sights on having something more."	Influences **Intergenerational Influences**
Exposure to Successful People **(Positive Role Models)**	GROW: SP, O, N NET: F, T INDIV: BL	Made her mother proud when she brought home good grades. "The more encouragement I received from family, friends, community, the more successful I wanted to become."	Influences **Positive Role Models**
Strong Spiritual Foundation **(Religious Upbringing)**	GROW: R, FV INDIV: BL, V	Gerry explained that ". . .her mother learned to turn the othr cheek through her spiritual backgoud. It was her wisdom in terms of how to deal with obstacles. . ." Mother would tell her to "always make God number one in your life."	Value Laden Upbringing **Spirituality**
Motivated By Exposure To An Economically and Culturally Diverse Environment	GROW: SE, NR, CR, FE, L, NR NET: T, C, RM	When exposed to a new environment, began to question her abilities.	Social Mobility Experiences **Positive Intentional Experiences**

THEMES & SUBTHEMES	CODES SUPPORTING THEMES	EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF STUDY PARTICIPANT'S THEMES	OVERARCHING THEME (CORE CONCEPT)
Notion that Early Exposure To Racial Awareness Instrumental in Their Ability to Achieve.	GROW: FV, R, WE, SE, I EXPER: PE	Gerry does not recall her mother ever discussing race. She believes that her "mother had instilled in her how to overcome and relate to racism. She was always told that you should "never define yourself in terms of color."	Productive Self Perception **Early Exposure**
Basic Value Maintenence	GROW: FV, FE, E, R, WE, R INDIV: V, SC NET: EF, T, RM	As a leader of her own destiny, "I am surviving off of the values my mother instilled in me."	A Value Laden Upbringing **Lifelong Values**
Abusive Environment as a Motivator to Succeed	GROW: I, EXPER: NE, LO, A, NRM PROC: FP, C, AC, SR	Home Environment Abusive life of siblings experienced with their spouses School Environment Ridiculed by her peers, it was the encouragement she received from her teachers that helped her focus on her intellectual abilities.	Social Mobility Experiences **Adversive Non Self-Inflicted**
Influences More Predominant At a Certain Phase In One's Life	GROW: PE, FV, I, NR NET: F, T	Childhood Years After the fourth grade, "I grew up with the whole village raising me and that was very instrumental in my life." Expectation from mother, sibling and, grade school teacher.	Influences **Early Influences**
Sense of Purpose **Early Identification of Mission in Life**	INDIV: SC, ASP, DG, LOC GROW: O, FV, I	Knew the value of education and the opportunities that would be open for her.	Productive Self Perception **Sense of Purpose**
Seeing Life Different At An Early Age Was A Motivating Factor For Success	INDIV: SC, BL, V GROW: I, O, E, FV, PE, FI	I knew I was smart and was always told that there was more in life for me.	Productive Self-Perception **Early Exposure**

THEMES & SUBTHEMES	CODES SUPPORTING THEMES	EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF STUDY PARTICIPANT'S THEMES	OVERARCHING THEME (CORE CONCEPT)
Notion of Control Over Their Environment as Instrumental in Achieving Mobility	INDIV: SC, B, BL, LC, ASP, PE NET: T, GROW: E, I, PE, O, WE PROC: FP, SR, O,	Taught to work hard and not to depend on anyone but herself. When distracted, weighed other options for alternative paths.	Self Perception **Internal Locus of Control**
Fortuitous Experiences/ The Notion of Having Good Things Bestowed Upon You. Not as a Result of Your Conscious Effort.	INDIV: BL, O	Opportunity to received a full scholarship to cover tuition when she wanted to change her academic focus.	Social Mobility Experiences **Positive Fortuitous Experiences**
Support Network **Feedback and Encouragement**	NET: F, FR, C, T, EF, RM GROW: I, RA, N, NR, SP	As the baby of the family, I received much encouragement from my mother and siblings. "Teachers would tell me how neat I was." Kept me focused on my abilities and not my second hand clothes.	Influences **Support Networks**
Negative Role Models **(e.g. domestic, welfare, blue collar, multiple partners, relatives)**	EXPER: LO, A GROW: I	"Some of my siblings didn't have good lives." Did not want to experience the same thing.	Influence **Negative Role Models**
Competing Process **Goal Driven Proving Something to Her Mother**	PROC: FI, SB, SAC NET: F INDIV: SC, V, B, I, O GROW: E, PE EXPER: LO	Believed that she could make her mother proud by excelling in school.	Self Perception **Goal Driven**

THEMES & SUBTHEMES	CODES SUPPORTING THEMES	EVIDENCE IN SUPPORT OF STUDY PARTICIPANT'S THEMES	OVERARCHING THEME (CORE CONCEPT)
Putting Oneself Into Situations Where Self-Centered Decisions Become An Experience to Overcome.	PROC: SB, SR, SB, AC	Getting pregnant by her best friends boyfriend	Social Mobility Experience **Adversive Self-Inflicted**
Capitalized on Opportunities That Gave Them a Greater Advantage for Achieving Mobility	PROC: O, SR, INDIV: DG GROW. E, SP	Changing academic careers to better position herself in terms of earnings. Delayed marriage and family until she was financially independent.	Social Mobility Experience **Positive Intentional**
Notion That Insulating Their Emotions to Avoid Confrontation Instrumental in Remaining Focused on Goal	PROC: SR, SB, C, AC, FO, W, FP INDIV: DG	Concealed her true beliefs and feelings in order to fit in with her peers.	Social Mobility Experience **Coping**
Spiritual Beliefs Instrumental as a Coping Strategy When Coping With Barriers That May Impede Upward Mobility	PROC: SR	Told by her mother to, " make God number one in your life."	Social Mobility Experience
Using Others As A Means To Justify Your Own Ends	PROC: SAC, SB, C, SR	Attaching herself to a friends boyfriend to offset the emptiness that resulted from her leaving home. Sacrificed her best friends friendship	Social Mobility Experience

Note: Code names for abbreviations are located in Table 4.

Appendix E

Sample of Coded Transcript

Gerry's Interview 1!

MJ: Gerry, we will begin the interview by you defining yourself as you see yourself today. From their we will shift to your childhood and focus on those experiences unique to African American women and when you first began to see that life for you would be different. How did you become the person that you are today?

JR: Okay, but first let me see if I am understanding you correctly. You want me to talk about where I am today, how I got there and then reflect on my childhood?

#-PROC.SR

MJ: Want to reflect on your childhood, your upbringing, the values instilled in you by your parents, what was it like for you with your sisters and brothers, what was it like for you in school K through 12, in college, and your early work experiences? What were (if any) situations that you had to overcome to become who you are today?

JR: Well, first Marsha I really want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to talk about

#-PROC.SR $-INDIV.SC

myself. I think about myself an awful lot but I don't have to opportunity to talk about myself often, so this is kind of a unique experience to me to sit here and reveal some of my inner most thoughts and feelings that have helped shaped my life and helped me to become the person that I am today. Today, I am a very happy person and the reason that I am a very happy person is that I reflect back on my life and realize that I have had a very very happy life. I don't have many regrets in my life and that's good when I think about the way of the world, when I look at some of

the people that I am associated with, some of the people in my family, some of my friends. I can honestly say that I am truly blessed and that I am successful in my own right. I am successful professionally, having been blessed with many good jobs in my life and then at the management level in my organization at this point with the possibility of moving to the senior level. And that is something that we will talk about a little later on in the interview. But also being very successful in my personal life, personal growth and development. I am at this point the happiest I have ever been in my life and that came about at the tender age of forty, a few years

#-PROC.SR

ago when I just stopped and I looked at my life and I decided, what is it that I want to do for the rest of my life. I reflected back in terms of what I had done up to the age of forty, I defined some goals for myself, where I want to go forward. Any I am working toward those goals professionally and personally.

#-PROC.FO

The number one reason that I am son happy and peaceful in my life right now is that I am reconnected and have rededicated myself to God and church is very very important. It is the source of my being at this particular point, my new found personal relationship with God and that has made me what I am right now and I am definitely fulfilled right now, not satisfied, but fulfilled. I had learn the basic difference between those two elements in terms of being fulfilled and being satisfied.

MJ: What would it take to satisfy you?

JR: Well, actually, I have a lot of satisfaction in my life. I

find that satisfaction is short lived, fulfillment is long term.

#-PROC.AC $-PROC.SF

And you know that whatever comes in your life you are still able to survive, meet all the challenges and not be afraid. You can look back and enjoy the small things in life. My focus, my priorities are different. I am no longer that materialistic individual that I use to be. I don't define myself in terms of status symbol anymore or material trappings. I define myself in terms of me personally, not what society has dictated to me in terms of what success should be. Personal satisfaction.

MJ: So, who is Gerry?

JR: Gerry is a very happy, successful woman. Now, in terms of my childhood, as I told you

#-GROW.I

before Marsha, I am the youngest of 21 children. We were reared on

$-GROW.SE %-GROW.NR

a farm. My parents were initially sharecroppers in a rural area in the south. It's a point in my life that I would never ever want to go back to in terms of the hard work that we had to do. But even though we didn't have a lot of material things, we have never been hungry in my life. I have always felt loved by both of my parents. My mother was

#-GROW.R $-GROW.N

particularly very very strong. A God fearing women. She has always been a God fearing woman. She instilled in values and morals in

#-GROW.I

all of us. She and my father both--my mother finished the third grade, my father finished the fifth grade, but there was wisdom. They were filled with wisdom

#-GROW.RA

because I remember at a very early age, I don't remember what the specific age was but I remember my mother telling me, Never ever

define yourself in terms of (the
term used now is African American)
but I am sure at that time she
$-GROW.R %-GROW.FV
used the word color. She said if
you first define yourself as a
child of God who just happen to be
Black, then I am sure you will be
successful in this world. She
always encouraged us, she always
said that I know that there is
abetter life out there and these
are some things that you are going
to have to do in order to be
successful. She said, #1- Always
make God #1 in your life. And
that is where my spiritual base
comes from and I thank her for
that to this day. She said that
you will have to do a lot of hard
#-GROW.WE
work depending on yourself. Have
good work ethics. Be honest no
matter what you do. Be honest to
yourself, Your word is your bond
and those are just some of the
values that I have carried with me
for all of my life.

#-GROW.FV $-GROW.I
MJ: These are values your mother
instilled in you. What
encouragement did you receive from
you father?

GR: My father was not on who
talked, who communicated a lot
with his family. We didn't have
these heart to heart talks but you
knew he was there, you knew we was
supportive. He worked hard making
sure that his family had the best
that he could provided for them.
So, he was not a communicator. Yet
in modern times you could kind of
characterize him as being there
but simultaneously being absent.
$-GROW.I
But, I mean, we played together.
We would have Sunday afternoon,
baseball games. We all had to
work in the fields together,
%-GROW.FV *-GROW.I
harvesting the crops. But the
basic values were instilled in me

by my mom. I would have to clearly say that. He attended church, but my mother was the one who attended church an lived it. You saw it, she preached it, she instilled it in us. My father prayed, oh he could definitely pray and you knew he had that spiritual base also. But in terms of actually communicating, he was not a communicator. But he loved you. He would chastise you. It's real strange because I don't know if I ever heard my father tell me that he loved me Marsha. I don't even in my adult life. But I heard it from my mother. I just kind of always knew that he did. But I never heard him express it in real terms by saying, "Oh I love you."

MJ: Even as a baby:

#-GROW.PE

GR: Even as a baby, I don't remember the words being expressed. Now one of the things

$-GROW.FV

I remember my father saying is "Actions speak louder than words." And so, maybe that was what he was all about, "actions" rather than words. My mother spoke the words, but her actions also backed up the words.

MJ: What was life like with your older siblings? As the last born, what was expected of you that may have been different for your older sisters, middle sisters?

#-NET.F

GR: Well, my mother always encouraged me and all of my siblings-- she taught us that

$-GROW.FV %-GROW.I *-NET.F

education was the way that we could have abetter life. Not all of my sisters and brothers took advantage of that advice that she was giving. But she was real proud when I brought the good grades home and encouraged me.

MJ: Were you rewarded for your academic accomplishment?

GR: My mother didn't necessarily reward me in terms of anything material. But she always verbally expressed her feelings with feedback such as"That's very good darling." She didn't bake me a special cake or she didn't get excited when I made the honor roll or anything like that because my mother had so many children that she didn't focus attention on any particular one.

MJ: Did her words encourage you?

#-GROW.NR %-GROW.I

GR: Oh, I was encouraged by it but the situation that I was in was more encouraging to me. What I mean by that was, I could see--my sisters were grown and my brothers were grown when I was small. Some of them didn't have

#-INDIV.GS $-GROW.E

good lives and I made up very early in my mind, and I am certain that it was from first grade forward, that because my mother had told me that education was the way to have a better life, that I made up in my mind at that point in time that I was going to educate myself such that I could have a better life than my sisters and brothers that I saw.

MJ: You saw as you can recall sometime during the first grade how hard life was for your older sisters, the ones who did not take your mothers advice of obtaining the education? Did they not finish high school? Did they not attempt to go to college? Were they not economically prepared?

#-GROW.E $-GROW.O %-GROW.RES

GR: They finished high school but they could not go to college because my parents could not afford to send them to college.

My parents did not send me to college either. I got a full four year scholarship, directly from high school. But my mother use to send my care packages when I was in college. So, that was the way she helped out in terms of

$-GROW.I

college. But no, my brothers and sisters, many of them did not go beyond high school. At that particular time, the way of the world was to get married, have your family, have your little

*-INDIV.DG

house and that is what they did primarily. So..

MJ: And you did not want that?

GR: I did not want that because

#-EXPER.A

what I saw in some of the relationships that they had--they were in abusive relationships with their husbands or with their

$-INDIV.ASP %-GROW.FV *-INDIV.BL

wives. And I wanted more. I wanted more. My mom use to tell me that there was more out there. She couldn't tell me what the more was but she did tell me that if you got a good education, you could be anything that you wanted to be and you could go further in life than what you may be seeing here. So, I made a conscious decision very early to do that. You know, at that particular point, I wasn't necessarily thinking about the husband. It's just that I knew that I wanted to go on to college. I wanted to have a good job once I finished college and at that particular point that was just about as far as I had gotten in my particular life in terms of thinking. I don't know if I was a long term thinker at that time in my life but I do know that I could see and almost taste that beyond the farm, there was something much better.

$-NET.RM

MJ: What role models were

influencing you at this time other than your mother?

$-GROW.RES

GR: When I was in the 4th grade,

%-GROW.CD

we moved from the farm to the city. That was a difficult move for me because coming from the farm to what I considered at that time to be a big city, for the first time, I lived in a house with running water, I lived in a house with a bathroom inside the house and there were neighbors who I could almost reach out and touch. Before, when we lived on the farm, we were just out in a big rural area. That was particularly frightening. I

%-GROW.RES *-GRWO.EDP

remember my first day at school, some of the kids laughing because of the way I dressed. I didn't' have my first dress, that was really my dress Marsha until I was in the 5th grade. All of the clothes I wore were hand me downs.

$-GROW.I

My mother was a seamstress, in addition to being a sharecropper, she did learn to sew to sew very well and became a seamstress much later on in life. But even in that point and time being poor materially, we didn't have the clothes and so, I remember the little girls laughing at me. I didn't have very many dresses and I remember just wearing dresses to school. I honestly don't remember wearing pants. But, I remember in the fourth grade wearing this red and white polka dot dress and my mother always kept us very clean.

$-NET.T

And the teacher use to talk about how clean we always were and our clothes were always starched and iron. Our hair was pressed because she made us wear a stocking cap on our hair at nighttime and we would go to school and hope that ring wasn't around our forehead. But she was

proud. She was a very very proud lady and she instilled that in us. And then when I got to school I did very well in school. I did well because I think once again I had in the back of my mind that I had to do well in order to move on to a better life. But the teachers, I remember in the 4th grade having a teacher named Ms.

%-NET.MA

H. She took me under her wings and she motivated me from that point forward. Fifth grade Ms. C motivated me, sixth grade Ms. D. They always gave me praise of how proud they were of me and the more praise I got, the better I wanted to do. The better I wanted to do, the more successful I wanted to be and I would come home and share with my sisters and brothers and

*-NET.F

they seemed to be proud. They didn't ever seem to be jealous that I was getting good grades and they were not getting good grades. We are a very close family and I don't remember an awful lot of jealousy in my family and I think it was because my mother treated all of us the same. Now, I have had people tell me that I am quite spoiled and probably in some sense I am. That's probably because my sisters and brothers spoiled me. Not because my mother and father spoiled me.

MJ: You were overly loved?

$-NET.M

GR: Yes, yes. I have been very very fortunate in my life to be overly loved. So, there were lots of mentors in my life. I think

$-GROW.CD

about the children today--when we moved to the city, I lived next

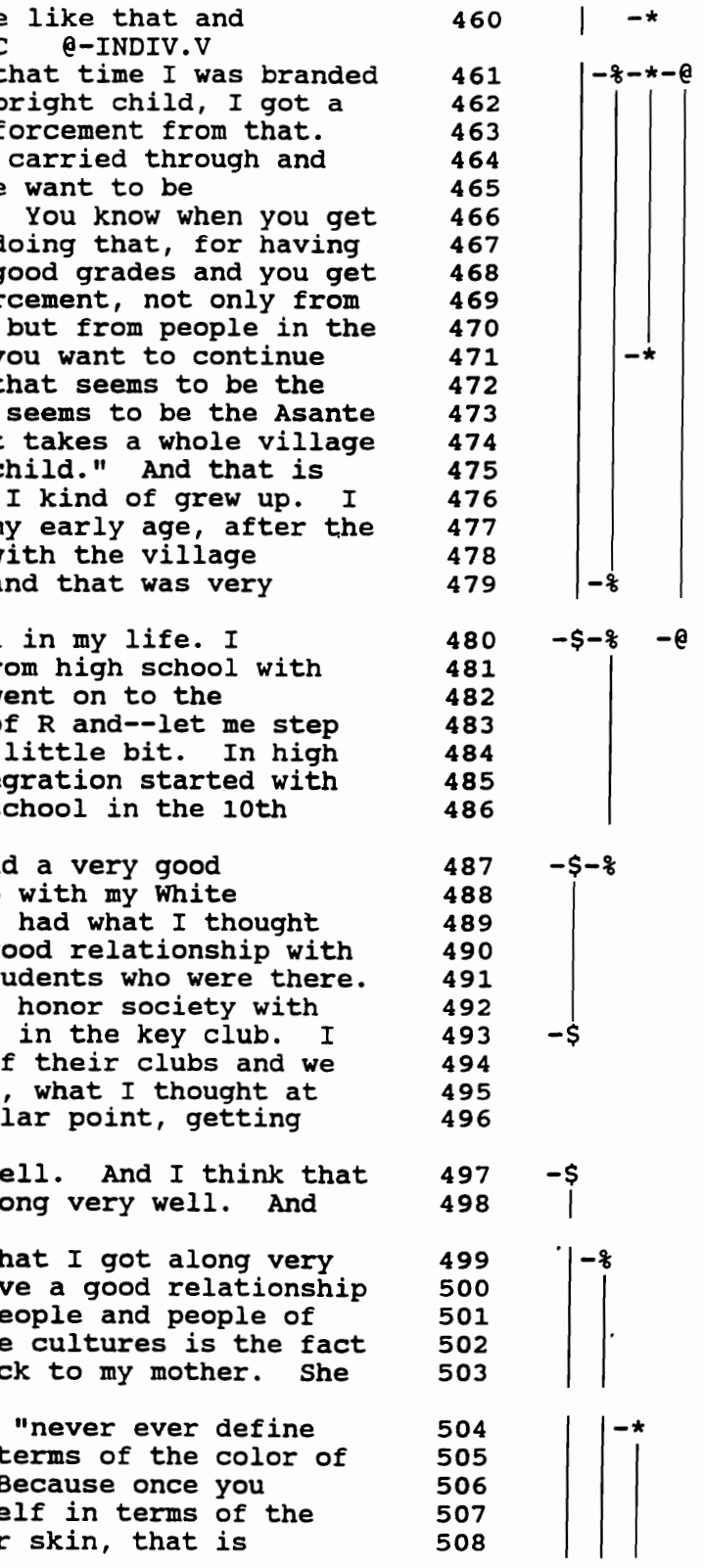
%-GROW.SP

door to a school teacher. I went to church with school teachers. I went to church with doctors and lawyers and people of all

*-INDIV.ASP

professions. And so, I could

aspire to be like that and 460
%-NET.C *-INDIV.SC @-INDIV.V
because at that time I was branded 461
as being a bright child, I got a 462
lot of reinforcement from that. 463
And so that carried through and 464
that made me want to be 465
successful. You know when you get 466
praise for doing that, for having 467
and making good grades and you get 468
that reinforcement, not only from 469
your family but from people in the 470
community, you want to continue 471
that. And that seems to be the 472
value, that seems to be the Asante 473
proverb, "It takes a whole village 474
to raise a child." And that is 475
exactly how I kind of grew up. I 476
grew up in my early age, after the 477
4th grade, with the village 478
raising me and that was very 479
%-GROW.E
instrumental in my life. I 480
graduated from high school with 481
honors. I went on to the 482
University of R and--let me step 483
back just a little bit. In high 484
school, integration started with 485
me in high school in the 10th 486
$-INDIV.B
grade. I had a very good 487
relationship with my White 488
teachers. I had what I thought 489
was a very good relationship with 490
the White students who were there. 491
I was in the honor society with 492
them. I was in the key club. I 493
was in all of their clubs and we 494
seemed to be, what I thought at 495
that particular point, getting 496
$-GROW.FV
along very well. And I think that 497
I did get along very well. And 498
%-GROW.FV
the reason that I got along very 499
well, and have a good relationship 500
with White people and people of 501
other diverse cultures is the fact 502
that I go back to my mother. She 503
*-GROW.RA
always said, "never ever define 504
yourself in terms of the color of 505
your skin. Because once you 506
define yourself in terms of the 507
color of your skin, that is 508



limiting to you. So, I guess in some sense I was kind of naive.

$-GROW.EDP

And I never--we didn't talk about color. We didn't talk about race. But I never ever experienced overt racism until--actually when I moved here to Md.

MJ: Before we get to your recollection of life here, what happened when you left home for college?

$-GROW.O

GR: When I went to college-- I was setting the stage for the fact that there were two White men in my high school year, my math and science teachers. I had a very very close relationship with them. As a matter of fact, my math teacher was the one who helped me get the scholarship at the University of R. He offered to take me there for the interview with the school. My mother and father decided against that. So he did not take me to school.

MJ: Why did your parents come to that decision?

GR: Well, they--I think that they just felt uncomfortable with me being a little girl at that time, senior high school at that time, traveling with two older White men. My mother was very intuitive and when she made up her mind, you just didn't change her mind and so therefore...

MJ: Did your teachers communicate with your mother about wanting to help you?

GR: Oh yes. They offered. They have been to my house. They have sat down and had dinner at my house. They use to come and sit down and have dinner and talk, but that was something that she just couldn't allow because they were within her domain and she could

control that. But once they left the state of NC she wasn't sure what was going to happen at that point.

MJ: Did you have discussions with your mother about her life and how she perceived herself in the world that she was in without reference to race. She instilled in you of not identifying yourself in terms of race. Do you ever recall a conversation about those things that she experienced when you were growing up.

$-GROW.I

GR: No. She never discussed those kinds of things with me. My mother never talked about--my mother was never a complainer. She never talked about how hard her life was. I can certainly look back and see just how difficult it was for her.

$-GROW.I

MJ: Did you ever ask her about her life growing up?

GR: I never did ask. And maybe one of the reasons I never asked was because I had become so self centered. And because I wasn't having a difficult time. Maybe if

%-EXPER.R

I was having a difficult time--getting along with White people--when integration first came, maybe I would have asked those questions. Maybe that was part of my naivete. But I wasn't having a difficult time. She had already given me the bases for how to overcome and relate to racism and so at that time I didn't need to see--try and understand what she had gone through.

%-PROC.FP

MJ: So at that time she was trying to prepare you to overcome that barrier by not thinking of yourself in terms of your race.

GR: Absolutely. And so therefore, we never had those kinds of discussions and maybe if she had shared those kinds of things with me, maybe I would have been bitter and she didn't want that. And so therefore, she didn't share those kinds of ugly overt racist kinds of things that she encountered in her life. As I said, she was not a complainer. She was not someone that would blame someone else for her position in life.

$-PROC.AC

MJ: So, was she saying that you shouldn't create an obstacle if it is not there?

GR: She didn't really talk in those terms but you knew it was her way of relating to you. And I think it all comes from her spiritual background in terms of turning the other cheek. So, that's what she did. She turned the other cheek. She just gave us the wisdom in terms of how to deal with it going forward. So, I went away to college, as I said, that was a very very frightening experience for me at that time.

$-EXPER.LS

Here I was away from home for the very first time in my life. That was my very first plane ride. Boy was that frightening. Here I was at the University of R, I had all this luggage. And here I was, standing on this big campus alone. And I sat there and I wanted to cry and I wanted to get on that plane and go back to NC because I just figured that I was out of my league at that time. So any way, I remember this young man coming up to me and saying, "Well it looks like you need some help getting into the dorm today" and I said well yes, I guess I do. I was sitting on my luggage with tears in my eyes because when that cab drove away, I didn't know which way to go. I was so unprepared

Marsha, really, for what I was 666
going to experience, actually 667
within the next few days at the 668
University. It was akin to me 669
being back to the 4th grade when I 670
moved from the country to the 671

%-GROW.ECD

city. And now here I was from 672 -$-%
home to the city. Of course I 673
didn't know that the University of 674
R was considered up state and when 675
they think about the University of 676
R being up state, they don't even 677
considered it being in the big 678
city. But I didn't know that. 679
All I knew was I was in the state 680
of NY, worlds apart from little 681
old NC. Well, when I got there al 682
the girls--and we will talk about 683
that a little Marsha--Once again I 684
thought I was hot stuff, you know. 685

$-GROW.RES

I was an honor student. Knew that 686 -$
I didn't have a lot of money or 687
anything. But I really thought I 688
was hot stuff and I soon found out 689
about a day or so that I really 690
wasn't all that hot in terms of 691
clothes, I guess. Because that 692
was one of the things that the 693
girls from NY let me know real 694
quick that I just wasn't hip with 695
the clothes that I was wearing. 696 -$
And that was a sobering kind of 697
experience for me. Because I had 698 -%
always, at that particular point 699
in time--I didn't tell you this, 700
but I started working when I was 701
14 years old and so my mother 702
allowed me to use the money to buy 703
the clothes that I wanted to buy. 704
So, in high school I was 705
considered a very fancy dresser as 706
my mother would call it. My 707
mother loved clothes. She was a 708

$-INDIV.SC

seamstress. Now that I was 709 -$
accustom to having and buying my 710
own clothes, I had a pretty nifty 711
wardrobe going to NY and when I 712
got laughed at, that kind of hurt 713
my feelings. But, that is neither 714
here, nor there. It was a very 715 -$

$-EXPER.R

difficult time for me. On a 716 -$

VITA

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SUMMARY OF HUMAN RESOURCE SKILLS

Experience and expertise in the following areas of training and management consulting: leadership and management training, negotiating, marketing, and presentation skills. Extensive customer service and mediation experience. Certified Mediator.

HUMAN RESOURCE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Designed employee orientation training program, computer based learning guide for a word processing manual, and a mentorship training program facilitator's guide for various organizations.

Designed, delivered, facilitated, and co-facilitated a variety of training workshops in both public and private enterprises. Training consist of: team building; peer mediation and conflict management; prejudice reduction; crisis communication and feedback skills; managing change and change dynamics, assertiveness training, and leadership development, among other.

EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

1993-1995 **Graduate Assistant**

Virginia Tech
Fairfax, Virginia

1990 - Present **Associate Director**

Leadership Prince George's
Prince George's County
Human Relations
Commission
Largo, Maryland

1990 - Present **Human Resource Consultant**

ForMos Designs
P.O. Box 4235
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1985-1995 **Real Estate Consultant**

Mount Vernon/Weichart
Upper Marlboro, Maryland

1980-1985 **President/CEO**

ForMos Designs
Lanham, Maryland

VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Maryland Association Leadership Organizations (MALO)
Advocacy Board Member, Bowie State Violence Prevention Program
Mentor, Leadership Prince George's
Training, United Way, United Black Fund
Mediator, Mediation Training

EDUCATION

Virginia Polytechnic Institution & State University

Northern Virginia Graduate Center
Doctoral Studies in Adult Education
Major: Adult Education/Human Resource Development
August 1992 - May, 1996

Bowie State University

Master of Arts - May 1992
Major: Human Resource Development

University of Maryland College Park

Bachelor of Arts - 1973
Major: Sociology