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Abstract

There is a dearth of African American female faculty members and there are few to engage in mentoring African American female students. Non-African American faculty must facilitate African American female students' academic progress, social navigation and personal efficacy. Developing cross-cultural competencies in faculty members is necessary for this to occur. Garnering an understanding of the experiences of African American female students as they navigate the college campus and their mentoring relationships is crucial to this process. This study explores two narratives of African American females' experiences with cross-cultural and same-cultural mentoring relationships. Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) is used to highlight the differences in the nature and impact of the relationships on the African American females.

Key words: *Cross-cultural, mentoring, African American, women*

Mentoring Experiences of African American Female Students: Navigating the Academy

It is a very culturally distinctive moment in our history; there are a plethora of opportunities for cross-cultural interactions and for university professionals to engage students, from a myriad of backgrounds, in 'teachable moments' (Wankel, 2009). Universities actively focus on diversity, global competency, multicultural awareness, and internationalization. Re-

gardless of valiant efforts, there are some groups that slip through the proverbial crack. One such population of overlooked students is African American females. African American female students, as all other groups, should have positive and edifying experiences during their years on campus. These experiences should be bolstered with the support and guidance of the faculty members with whom they interact. However, African American female face a myriad of unique obstacles while in college (Quinlan, 1999). And many times they do not readily have, or sometimes recognize, the support to assist in the facilitation of their academic progress, social navigation, and personal efficacy.

It is crucial that faculty members develop a keener awareness and comprehension of the experiences of African American females in the Academy. Faculty members must go beyond acknowledging their station as role models, but embrace the probability that many of them will become mentors to African American female students.

This study explores the mentoring experiences of African American females during their collegiate and graduate years and the impact that their mentors had upon their collegiate and graduate school experiences, and personal development. Specifically, the study examined (1) the experiences of African American female students and cross-cultural mentoring and (2) the differences between their experiences with African American mentors and mentors of another ethnicity. The intent of this study is to add to the current literature regarding voices of women in the Academy, especially the voices of African American female students. Hopefully these current voices will spur other women to add their own unheralded voices, so as to create a crescendo that will

allow the African American woman's voice to take its rightful, respected and legitimate place in American higher education.

The Landscape

According to the *Digest of Education Statistics* (NCES, 2012) between 2000 and 2010 the number of females enrolled in tertiary education institutions rose by 39 % and constitutes 57 % of all students; approximately 12 million students. African American students comprise 14 % of the entire student population, which counts for 1.7 million students. The same report states that 79 % of all college and university faculty are White; and 7 % are African American. Of the total faculty in the report, 37 % are female. Bolstering these numbers is Evans' (2007) acknowledgement that African American females make up less than 5% of faculty at universities in the United States. A cursory examination of these numbers makes it extremely easy for anyone to comprehend the miniscule likelihood of an African American female student encountering an African American female professor during their collegiate period. From this perspective, the Academy is fertile soil for cross-cultural and cross-gender mentoring and all faculty members should be prepared and willing to engage in this aspect of diversity.

African American females in the American Academy can testify to many shared experiences. Kandace Hinton, as cited in Nance (2006), states "African American women are as diverse as anybody else. Their stories combined, however, speak to shared experiences" (p. 18). One should ultimately refrain from pitting all African American women into one stereotypical frame, but to critically examine the environment in which they find themselves battling

overt hostility and perpetual miocroagressions (Nance, 2006; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000). There are a multitude of barriers that African American female students, faculty, and staff endure as they navigate our university campuses (Bonner & Thomas, 2001). However, what makes this national scenario even more horrendous is the lack of systems in place to assist and support African American women as they journey through the Academy (Patton & Harper, 2003).

The experiences of African American females in the Academy are markedly different than that of White females, who are members of the dominant culture. This difference is historical and as Nance (2006) explains "Understanding why the experiences of African American women are different from those of other women … is steeped in the historical progression and ideology of African American people in the United States" (p. 19). Thus, having the experiences of African American females stand on its own merit, rather than having the paradigm of White females or African American men as the benchmark is vitally important. Having their voices heard in their own words, expression, and perspectives is critical from a historical and current stand point. Hayes (2012) states that "[s]ince slavery and post-slavery, African-American women were seen as strong, but typically had no voice" (para. 3). This study, holding the ideals of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as its frame, adds the voices of two African American females who are in the Academy by highlighting their voices through their narratives.

Black Feminist Theory (BFT) undoubtedly undergirds any discussion of Black women in the Academy; nonetheless, extensive research exists that attempt to develop a greater understanding of the experiences of women and African Americans separately. However, a cursory understanding of both Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's (1997) Intellectual Development of Women and Cross's (1991) Black Identity Model can assist in fostering an understanding of the experiences of African American students in the Academy. Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's work on the process of cognitive development in women is seminal and extremely significant in the field of women's psychology. Concurrently, Cross and his model are pivotal and seminal in the field of ethnic identity development, specifically Black identity development and acts as a springboard to comprehension of the African American experience. Both models adhere to CRT ideals, since they approach the understanding of their respective groups from the perspectives of individuals by and within the groups. These two theories are important in fostering an initial understanding for professionals, specifically non-Black professionals, of the experiences of women and African Americans.

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule's Intellectual Development of Women

Developing an understanding of the experiences of women is crucial because "Women often have different needs and concerns from their male counterparts" (Quinlan, 1999, p. 32). In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) discuss the five stages of the intellectual development of women. The first stage is silence; a stage marked by isolation and limitations both self-imposed and societally driven. These characteristics do not readily diminish with increased intellectual opportunity. They are usually displayed by individuals seeking

higher education as a product of a disadvantaged background (Belenky et. al., 1997). Received knowledge is the second step in women's cognitive development. During this stage a woman values the specific words within the context of learning. All the while, she views knowledge in a dichotomous manner: African American and White. Also within this stage is the defining of a woman's confidence and her dependency on a majority of social norms seeking acceptance and value.

Subjective knowledge is the third stage and is marked by a woman's sense of internal voice; and her fear of the outside perception of that voice. In the fourth stage, procedural knowledge, the woman utilizes her voice, but only within the context of given social norms. In the last stage, constructed knowledge, a woman utilizes her voice and recognizes the context of her perspective within the learning process. The developmental steps in this theory describe increased gains in confidence, risk taking, self-reflection and worth, ultimately providing the woman an opportunity to engage fully as an integrated member of her academic and social community. Extrapolation from Belenky et al., (1997), Love and Guthrie (1999) identifies many implications for females, especially in a student affairs context. They specifically identify the challenges some women may have in their relationships with authority figures given perceptions of oppression. Thus, mentoring is an implausible option for most women in the workplace, including university contexts.

Cross's Black Identity Model

When considering the experience of African American female students, among various racial identity models, Cross's (1991) Black Identity Model is key. This model

identifies the stages of development as they pertain to racial identity development. Cross' model begins with the pre-encounter stage, where the individual internalizes societal behaviors which suggest that White culture is superior. The individual generally behaves in a manner that distances himself/herself from other African American individuals or cultural markers. The second stage, or encounter stage involves the individual experiencing an event that is racially charged. Faced with the harshness of this experience, an individual may experience the immersion/emersion phase of development, in which an individual chooses to align himself/herself with issues, organizations, and social groups that identify as African American. Internalization requires the individual to look outward, being receptive to those within White culture who are respectful, while continuing to maintain relationships sought out in the immersion stage. The internalization stage is characterized by a desire to act on issues of concern as defined by an individual sense of racial identity. The developmental steps in this theory are dependent on a number of factors, particularly interpersonal relationships, role models, and mentoring.

Mentoring and the African American female student

Mentoring within the university context, is a process whereby students are positively guided, advised and socialized by faculty members so as to develop competencies within a specific discipline and also in a career context (Strayhorn & Terrell, 2007). Mentors become role models, and constant resources of social capital that can assist in shaping the student both personally and professionally. Undeniably, it is an essential component to increasing student success

(Smith & Crawford, 2007). The mentoring process for students helps individuals to feel better connected and invested in their campus, which many times results in greater student experiences and outcomes (Pascarella, 1980).

The scarcity of African American female faculty who can serve as mentors to African American students in college is problematic. Since African American females are not well represented in the faculty ranks and are not as visible on the American college campus it is indeed difficult for African American female students to find a mentor. As a result they seek "alternative sources of support" (Patton, 2009, p. 514). This alternative many times includes an individual from another ethnic background or a male. Therefore, the development of cross-cultural mentoring competence of faculty is a necessary research area.

Understanding the needs, social construction, experiences and perspectives of African American females is unique and requires a keen level of cultural awareness. Patton (2009) notes "African American female mentors had a deeper understanding of the issues present in the Academy and could understand the experiences the [African American] participants faced" (p. 523). Thus any faculty who does not share the background and cultural experiences of their protégés will have to develop an acute awareness of the needs and experiences of this group. Patton continues explicating the multifaceted nature of this mentorship role; individuals in this position must demonstrate expertise in subject matter, as well as comprehend the cultural realities of African American females navigating the halls of higher education.

Methods

All data collection and analysis for this study are based on qualitative research methods. Reddick and Saenz (2012) espouse that "stories told can offer insight for a number of different audiences" (p. 355). Thus, an approach which would utilize the voices of African American females in today's Academy became central in any method the authors decided to use to best highlight the lived experiences of African American female students. Howard-Hamilton (2003) further stated:

Overall, the development and socialization of African American women have been molded and understood within the framework of perceptions and agendas of members of the dominant society. Selecting appropriate theories for understanding the needs of African American women should, however, be based on their cultural, personal, and social contexts. (p. 20)

Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) was chosen as the method of inquiry. SPN is a constructivist research methodology, developed by Nash (2004), which recognizes the personal experience as an effective research approach. It is an alternative style of scholarly writing within qualitative inquiry and is developed in the narrative tradition. SPN uses the power of personal storytelling to harvest data, and to build comprehension and meaning in scholarly research. The narrative writers utilize the first-person to explicate their own experiences. The writing is coupled with reflection of their experiences and encourages the expression of the meaning of the said experiences. Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) state that this inquiry approach discerns itself from others since it presents the actual experiences, and the narrators interpretation of the experiences, as

effective objects of study. Coupled with a Critical Race Theory lens, it is the words and voice of the individuals within an experience that contributes to the value and the robust nature of the inquiry.

Using Nash's (2004) and Nash and Bradley's (2011) guidelines, the researchers developed a series of questions and ideas that established the framework of the narratives. The questions addressed the undergraduate experiences of the African American female participants. Participants wrote their own narratives based on the authors' protocol. All the questions addressed the participants' interactions with faculty mentors both from African American and non-African American backgrounds.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study utilizes the voices of African American female in today's Academy and highlights their current shared lived experiences. Heeding Howard-Hamilton's (2003) declaration that:

[T]he development and socialization of African American women have been molded and understood within the framework of perceptions and agendas of members of the dominant society. Selecting appropriate theories for understanding the needs of African American women should, however, be based on their cultural, personal, and social contexts. (p. 20)

Accordingly, this study is situated in the conceptual framework of both Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Theory (BFT). The method of inquiry being Scholarly Personal Narrative (SPN) is further used to highlight the voices of the African American female participants.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework that recognizes the biases that perme-

ate research, policy and law, even with the intentional efforts towards race-neutrality (Smith, Altbach & Lomotey, 2002). CRT has six tenets that guide it; however, this study utilizes only *Centrality of Experiential Knowledge*. This tenet asserts that the knowledge gained from the experiences of people of color is appropriate, legitimate, and a vital element in the comprehension of racial inequality; and in this case, inequality with the American Academy. Thus, the counter-storytelling element of CRT is a framework that gives credence to the racial and subordinate experiences of this marginalized group (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1989; Parker & Villalpando, 2007). It is central to this study because the voices of the African American female participants are independent of the backdrop of a White dominant paradigm. This perspective recognizes the experiential knowledge of people of color, specifically African American females in higher education.

One central notion of Black Feminist Theory (BFT) is that Black women have "a self-defined" standpoint and they are the most aptly qualified in presenting this perspective (Patton, 2009). Patton states:

Clearly, BFT is relative to this discussion of Black women in the Academy and mentoring. If Black women are to develop BFT, they must first know themselves individually and have some semblance of how their individual selves are connected to the larger collective of African American women. (p. 517)

The stories of African American female students in higher education is pertinent and valuable to truly understand their experiences with cross-cultural mentoring; how the mentoring experience played a role in their development; and how their experience adds to the many other African American female

experiences in the Academy.

Participants

Two African American females, who had previously graduated from their undergraduate institutions and were currently involved in higher education, were selected for the inquiry. Both earned advanced degrees and currently work full-time within a university environment. African American female graduates were chosen over current undergraduates as participants. This was done so participants would have time to reflect on their entire mentoring experience and its meaningfulness to navigating their undergraduate and graduate journeys. Having experience in graduate school and the higher education workforce also allowed the narratives to include longitudinal reflections of their mentoring experiences and contextualize their value. One participant was an undergraduate student of a historically Black college/university (HBCU) and the other an undergraduate student of a predominantly White institution (PWI). Both participants were asked to write their narrative on both their African American mentor and their non-African American mentor.

Participants' Positionality

The narratives were authored by two colleagues of the researchers on this project. The idea of developing narratives of African American females came as a result of various discussions about the experiences that all the African American researchers had as higher education professionals. The participants were two African American female colleagues who became interested in the research team's topic. Even though each individual had a varied background, there were numerous threads and recurring themes that connected the experiences. The researchers postulated that a common voice

of the African American females about their collegiate mentoring experiences may emerge from the common threads recognized during their discussions.

Maher and Tetreault (1993) state that, "Knowledge is valid when it includes acknowledgement of the knowers' specific position in any context" (p. 118). For this study, knowledge was derived directly from the experiences of the participants as African American, female and collegians. Both participants understood that their experiences were unique to them as individuals; however, they acknowledged that their experiences and sentiments may be echoed by other African American female students.

The positionality of the researchers also influenced the study. The researchers were all African American, four of whom were female and one male. The female researchers positively impacted the analysis by ensuring that the tones of the voices remained gender-authentic throughout the process. They ensured that the BFT perspective was used in the analysis. The African American positions of all five researchers safeguarded the cultural relevance and authenticity of the narratives.

Takacs (2003) states that:

Students are empowered because they recognize that they have unique claims to knowledge that others cannot deny. Only I have lived my life; only you have lived yours. This encourages me to listen to you and you to me, as we each have a unique perspective. (p. 29)

Thus, the personal bias that the participants bring to the study is valid and warranted; the true nature of the experience would be void if the personal experiences of the authors were to be altered in any fashion. Thus for this SPN study, the unbridled words of the narrators makes this approach epistemologically sound and authentic.

Data Analysis

The narratives from the two African American female participants are the primary source of data for the study. The approach is emic and focuses on the viewpoint and perceptions of the participants. The emic approach allows for the perspective of the participants being studied to be a major factor in the analysis of the experiences and the cultural phenomena expressed in the narratives.

The researchers did not develop a preconceived framework or item to measure or evaluate. Instead, from the written narrative transcripts, the researchers identified themes and patterns. An open coding approach was utilized to identify repeated themes and patterns.

Narratives

Susan's Narrative

I entered college as a first generation student, although the term was not used at that time. I had assumptions about what I would gain from a degree. I felt that the degree would be my back-up plan, since I aspired to be in the performing arts. My getting a college education began as a means to an end, as my father would not allow me to move to New York to study acting, but he agreed to Chicago. I studied acting and decided to minor in communication. I looked forward to being in an urban environment and more importantly in a major metropolitan city and Loyola University was my ticket. I was very independent, curious yet cautious, and determined to complete my degree program in four years. I was on a mission to do just that because I envisioned a life outside of higher education.

The university consisted of primarily of White students, which was of no surprise,

and posed no issues for me. Having been raised in this type of environment, I was quite comfortable.

I was pleasantly surprised when I attended my first theatre class and my professor was a Black male; he subsequently became my mentor. I had never had a teacher of color, so I was thankful. He was magnificent and had a very controlled speaking delivery, and at the beginning of the semester it was a challenge to remember that he was my professor. When I presented my first monologue and received an "A" with his affirming comments, I knew that I wanted to learn as much as possible from him to perfect my gift. He was a great coach and I grew to understand that I wasn't being taught how to act; I was learning the techniques, which would contribute to my style and approach. He knew how to convey criticism in a way that was easy to understand and apply. His acting notes were invaluable to me, as no other Black male adult, aside from my father provided accolades and encouragement. At eighteen, I felt validated that I had what it would take to be successful. Although I had many theatre classes, none compared to his. He made a conscious effort to push me to explore my vulnerabilities with honesty and to embrace my Blackness as a female actress, and also to see myself undefined in order to transform myself into any character. He was honest about the business of theatre and gave me a foundation; it was up to me to soar. All together, I had a very interesting, eventful, inspiring, and memorable undergraduate career.

Graduate school came about while performing in a theatre troupe after working in a grassroots non-profit, a major credit reporting service, and with a major health care accrediting organization. My mentor was the chair of the Communication Department

and served on my thesis committee. Obtaining a degree in communication would open a different door for me, providing flexibility and a range of options to utilize my skills. Working on my thesis and the process of gaining approval was stressful. My mentor was a White Jewish male, outspoken, well-educated and respected by his colleagues with a research interest in how Black people communicate. Although I respected his position, I respected him as a man with conviction, the ability to lead and the gift of teaching. I took his Interpersonal Communication class, which enlightened me and fed my passion for dialogue with a purpose. He constantly advised me; we spoke about numerous things not just the field of communication. He later provided me an opportunity to conduct an independent study under his direction; this experience fortified his credibility and trust in my abilities. It was reassuring. My relationship with him confirmed my love of theatre and communication and shaped and influenced my performance on and off the stage.

He pushed me to look beyond my current skills and to venture into something new. He trusted and had faith in me; and subsequently asked me to be talent in his educational video based on a book he authored about Black and White styles of communication. I gained experience in cable television, hosting *Minorities in Cable and New Technologies*, and produced talk radio for Chicago Radio Information Services. The experiences coupled with my degrees in theatre and communication greatly benefited me in the field. I was truly fortunate to have had these experiences and wonderful mentors.

My twenty-two years of experience in higher education have been revealing. I equate them to a roller coaster ride, of which I am not a fan. Starting at the top of the coaster, there is the anticipation and even excitement of what to expect from the ride. You lock in with some sense of security, slowly advancing forward. You know you will be tossed about at times, adjusting to the abrupt changes and even experience falling but amongst the screams you recognize that there will come the time when the ride will come to an end. I did, however, begin my experience with the ideology of higher education on a pedestal of reverence. I have been fortunate to hold six full-time positions along with six years as part-time faculty. All of these positions exposed me to various environments, students, operational, academic and external experiences that have shaped my professional life. I utilize the words of my mentors to guide my actions and decisions. Their wisdom, though housed in theatre, translated well into university administration.

Lynette's Narrative

I received my undergraduate degree from a historically Black college and university (HBCU). This was the best experience for me because it allowed me the opportunity to surround myself with other successful African Americans. Developing mentoring relationships with these individuals were automatic and fell into place quite naturally. Often, students have to seek out mentors; this process can be both difficult and intimidating when you aspire to both identify individuals who look like you and also to seek vital guidance about specific career goals. My experiences at the HBCU, specifically being in constant contact with African American professionals alleviated the added task of seeking out individuals who looked like me. This aspect of HBCU life allowed me to focus on my academics

and career path. The second benefit of my experiences at my HBCU is that I felt supported by everyone. It was definitely a holistic environment of support and it was clear that both the faculty and staff at the HBCU were invested in my success.

Some of my mentors were very involved in my progress through conversations and discussions as well as through encouraging me to attend events such as professional conferences. Other mentors were more personal development motivators. Sometimes I wonder if they even knew they were mentors to me. Regardless of the type of mentor they were, I learned several things from them. My mentors spoke about the value of God and spirit, and that I should always be true to myself and never sacrifice my morals and beliefs while on the path to success. They reinforced the idea that I can do anything that I put my mind to and I will experience challenges and hard times and that I should stay the course. Other platitudes that were highlighted were nothing good comes easy; anything worth having is worth working for; always remember your roots; and always give back. I carried the words and wisdom of my mentors with me throughout my graduate career.

I still keep in contact with my mentors and I have learned many things from them. There are two main individuals who were exceptional mentors to me. The first is the African American female graduate recruiter who I met over eight years ago. She was instrumental in my access to graduate school. She was in the position to not only educate me on graduate school and the different academic areas that were available, but she also brought graduate school within my reach and provided the opportunity for me to view graduate school as a viable option for me. She seemed to understand in-

stantly and she was easy to talk too. I am not sure if this instant understanding was due to the fact that we were either African American females; or due to a natural connection. She was from the southern region of the US, which where I too am originally from, so many of our morals and values were similar. She was always there when I needed her.

Even though she was a good mentor as it relates to academics and professional goals, she was also a good personal mentor. I would stop by her office to talk about life and challenges that I was having in the program. She always made time to talk. Many students, including me, referred to her as our "mom away from home." And that is exactly what she was. She checked on me to make sure that everything was ok and she informed me of different opportunities that were available on campus.

The second individual is a male Asian and served more as a professional mentor. After working out of state for a year, this individual recruited me back to the research university to obtain my doctoral degree. I had the privilege of working with him throughout my doctoral studies. I learned an abundance of information from this individual. He was hard-working and socialized me in such a way that set me on a tenure-track faculty path. This individual treated me more as a colleague rather than a student and shared many of his faculty duties with me. While working with him, I was able to attend and present at many professional conferences, became involved in grant writing and publication processes, as well as in research, evaluation, and assessment opportunities. He also nominated me for different awards and exposed me to different aspects of a faculty position. The information and skills that I learned while working with him

are the very skills that I use in my current position as a faculty member. My current research agenda has a running strand of socialization and the role of socialization in student success. I must say – the socialization activities in which I was engaged in from undergraduate to my current role definitely prepared me for this position.

Both mentors played very different, yet essential roles in my personal and professional development. Both relationships seem to happen by chance. I was able to be very candid with my African American female mentor. I did not feel the need to be guarded at all. In fact, I was able to share my thoughts and fears with her without feeling there would be consequences. I was not, however, able to be as comfortable with my second mentor due to the nature of the relationship. The relationship was a working professional relationship and had to be treated as such. I was very fortunate to have mentors for every "season" of my development. These different mentors provided me with a balance that is necessary when pursuing a doctoral degree – or any degree for that matter.

Results

Emergent Themes

It was obvious, from the narratives that stark differences existed in the experiences of African American female students with respect to African American mentors and non-African American mentors. There were also clear distinctions between the nature of the interactions between same-culture mentoring and cross-cultural mentoring relationships. Cross-cultural mentoring relationships primarily addressed the career aspects of the participants, while the same-culture mentoring relationships addressed the per-

sonal and self-efficacy aspect of the participants' lives.

Parental roles of Black mentors

Parental overtones were evident for the participants as they spoke about the relationship with the African American mentors. The referent terms such as "maternal" and "father" were utilized. Both participants viewed these mentors as professionals, but extrapolated their roles to encompass ones that were familial. The idea of closeness, understanding and trust emanated from the narratives; mentors were venerated as they represented an African American who had attained success in higher education. Susan stated that "no other Black male adult, aside from my father provided accolades and encouragement" this extrapolation o the role of the mentor to one that is likened to that of a father alluded to the level of trust, admiration and respect that she had for her mentor. The admiration of which she spoke went beyond the professional, one that impacted her social development. Lynette spoke of her mentor as a mother when she stated her mentor was a "mom away from home." And that is exactly what she was. She checked on me to make sure that everything was ok…" The relationship developed by the mentors to their protégés went beyond the borders of professional welfare but included personal welfare; and the protégés recognized that that aspect of the relationship was unique.

Validation from Black mentors

The status and interaction with the African American mentors also proved to be a source of validation. The themes of validation emerged through the participants' expression of their mentor being affirming, validating, encouraging, and inspiring. One

participant spoke about "embracing her Blackness" as a result of the interaction with her African American mentor. The psychosocial benefits that the African American mentors had on the females in many ways were significant. Both participants expressed their belief that their future success was mirrored by their interaction with their African American mentors. The outcomes from the narratives echoes Owens and Patton (2003) belief that mentors are inspirations to their protégés; African mentors in this study seem to be inspirations to African American protégés.

Diminished Closeness with non-Black Mentors

The overarching theme that emerged from the narratives with respect to African American female students with their non-African American mentors was career socialization. Although trust and respect were expressed from both participants, the level of personal closeness with non-African American mentors was considerably less. The mentoring relationships were very much rooted in the acquisition of knowledge within their respective fields. It must be noted that these relationships also possessed feelings of admiration and awe from the protégés. Nonetheless, many of the actions of the mentors and protégés engaged in were connected to career development and skills for enhancing the students' professional station.

Final Thoughts and Recommendations

African American females make up less than 5% of faculty at universities in the United States (Evans, 2007). Therefore, an African American female student finding a mentor of the same ethnic background and

gender is nearly impossible. White faculty members and university administration should take heed to this dire situation and make serious note of the voices of the African American females on campus. White, and other non-African American, faculty members should embark on fostering a keener awareness of the experiences of African American females in the Academy for it is quite possible that they will become a mentor to an African American female. The number of African American female faculty will not suddenly increase; therefore, it rests upon the shoulders of non-African American faculty to actively learn the social dynamics of African American females, among other groups, and develop the necessary competencies to be effective, positive and impactful mentors.

The voices of the African American female participants in this study add to the dialogue pertaining to the experiences of women in higher education. Understanding the positive effects of the mentor-protégé relationship, as it pertains to assisting students in navigating the Academy is evident (Zachary, 2000). The unique, and multifaceted, experiences of the African American female students on American college campuses must be highlighted in the national diversity discourse.

Universities and their faculty members must become, more rapidly and readily, cross-culturally competent. This urgency is to create an environment where African American female student students will have the necessary support from their faculty for the academic journey. Having a barrage of trusted, supportive, knowledgeable and culturally competent faculty mentors may result in more successful, confident female students. Positive academic and mentoring experiences for African American females

may result in more females deciding to pursue graduate degrees; hence, extending the pipeline of African American females to the professoriate.

Developing faculty members both professionally and personally for cross-cultural competency requires inclusive spaces. Inclusive spaces are environments where honest exchanges can occur and are a necessary element for mentoring to take root. Louis (2008) suggests that the social spaces that university campuses provide must be safe and encouraging to individuals to promote cross-cultural interaction. Thus, administrative buy-in can be the major key in creating microenvironments and safe spaces where faculty members are willing to embark on an ethnorelativistic endeavor. Support by departments, divisions and faculty-peers must commit to engaging individual faculty in reflective, longitudinal and supported approaches to developing cross-cultural competencies that will enhance their abilities as a faculty mentor.

From this current study, the cross-cultural mentoring with non-African American faculty members appeared devoid of deep personal development on the part of the African American female students. The focus and evolution of the relationship is seated in career socialization. However, to assist African American female students navigate the Academy and become even more successful in higher education, faculty mentors need to connect on a deeper, more personal, and impactful level. And the process begins with mentors taking the time to understand the voice; disaggregate the experiences; and comprehend social imbalances exerted upon this sub-population. Faculty members can learn much from the African American female student. Inevitably cross-cultural mentorship has the potential to as-

sist the African American female student garner an enhanced understanding of navigating the higher education landscape.

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