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African-American Females and the Glass Ceiling in the Defense Logistics Agency

Velma Lee Clay
Western Michigan University

AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALES AND THE GLASS CEILING
IN THE DEFENSE LOGISTICS AGENCY

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Velma Lee Clay

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AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALES AND THE GLASS CEILING IN THE DEFENSE LOGISTICS AGENCY

Velma Lee Clay, D.P.A.

Western Michigan University, 1998

This study explores the career advancement experiences of African American women who have successfully broken through the glass ceiling. The term "glass ceiling" refers to artificial or invisible barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified women and minorities from advancing into senior-level management positions. Studies have confirmed that a glass ceiling does exist for African American women and that they are severely underrepresented in top level government jobs, they have less opportunity for advancement, and both gender and race are perceived as factors in their limited representation (MSPB 1992).

What is the Impact of Breaking the Glass Ceiling on African American Females in Senior Level Management Positions? To answer this research question, I interviewed 20 African American female executives to gain insight as to their experiences, lessons learned, successes, failures, and their progression toward shattering the glass ceiling in the

government. I accomplished this study using a qualitative research design with indepth interviews as the primary research instrument.

The executives identified nine factors contributing to their success in penetrating the glass ceiling: (1) survival skills, (2) network/support system, (3) work ethic, (4) mentors and sponsors, (5) a sense of self-worth and self-confidence, (6) spiritual values, (7) balance in life, (8) leadership style, and (9) cultural identity. Three factors out of the nine include characteristics unique to African American women that create a cultural model of success: networking support system, spiritual values, and cultural identity.

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Finally, writing this dissertation has been a rewarding experience for me, ranking at the top of Maslow's theory of self-actualization. I hope to share the knowledge gained with friends, colleagues, and others seeking to reach this level of educational achievement.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The end of legal discrimination and the acclaimed opportunity for vertical mobility for African American women in professional job markets do little to explain the discernible pattern of another form of discrimination. This study will address the persisting limitation on the number of competitively qualified African American women able to attain higher positions in U.S. Government employment--specifically General Schedule/ General Management (GS/GM) 13-15 and Senior Executive Service (SES) positions. This discriminatory barrier is frequently termed the "glass ceiling".

The term glass ceiling refers to artificial or invisible barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified women and minorities from advancing into senior-level management positions (Department of Labor, 1991, p. 1). A study by the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB,1992, p. 37) concludes that the glass ceiling may be invisible but it is real. The MSPB study suggested that the barriers which limit advancement are subtle, bearing no relationship to career decisions or qualifications. As has been historically the case, minority

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women face a double disadvantage based on gender and race. The report concludes: "Their representation at the top levels is even less than that of white women with the same qualifications. Providing a Federal work force reflective of the Nation's diversity became the official policy of the United States with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1978" (p. 1). The act also called for eliminating the underrepresentation of women and minorities in all occupations and at all grade levels in the Federal Government. However, despite this legislative mandate, women and minorities continue to be seriously underrepresented in management positions.

The significance of the glass ceiling is twofold: (1) It acts as a pay cap for women; and (2) in the case of African American women, it serves to maintain social separation between blacks and whites, often resulting in white domination. The overall impact on women as a group is that it effectively cuts the pool of potential corporate leaders by eliminating over one-half of the population, and deprives our economy of new recruits and alternative sources of creativity for policy making and implementation-- the "would be" pioneers of the business world (MSPB, 1992).

The glass ceiling operates in both the public and the private sectors. A report by the U.S. Department of Labor in 1991 was widely recognized as confirming the presence of a glass ceiling in corporate America (Desky, 1991). A glass ceiling certainly exists for African American

women in the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) workplace. Statistics within DLA reflect that there are 4,662 employees in high grade positions and only 178 or 3.8 percent are African American females (DLA Report, 1995).

The 1992 MSPB study found that women are promoted at an equal rate with men once they reach the senior level, but face obstacles to advancement at lower levels in the pipeline. Women in professional occupations are promoted at a lower rate than men at two critical grades, GS 9 and GS 11. As these grades are the gateway through which one must pass in moving from the entry level to the senior level, this disparity has the effect of reducing the number of women eligible for promotion in higher graded jobs. One direct result of the glass ceiling effect is that the agency is paying a cost by underutilizing a critical segment of its human resources and delaying the attainment of an important goal of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, namely, full representation of all segments of society at all grade levels.

In the dissertation, I explore the experience of African American women and the glass ceiling within DLA through in-depth interviews, focusing on those African American women who have succeeded in making it beyond the glass ceiling. I examined my subjects' perceptions of the benefits and costs of breaking through the ceiling, the lessons

learned, their successes and failures, their sometimes checkered progression to penetrate the glass ceiling, and their impact on having achieved the highest ranks within the organization. I selected DLA for the research because I have access to data sources that would not be readily available to outsiders. As Equal Employment Manager for a DLA field organization, my primary responsibility is to implement and monitor affirmative action policies for the organization, thus providing me access to pertinent data.

Statement of the Problem

The percentage of African American women in the Senior Executive Service (SES) and the pipeline to SES is inadequate and affects competition in the global marketplace (General Accounting Office, 1991). Former Secretary of Labor Lynn Martin put the argument bluntly, "if our end game is to compete successfully in today's global market, then we have to unleash the full potential of the American work force. The time has come to tear down, to dismantle, to remove and to shatter--the Glass Ceiling" (Martin, 1991, p. 2). The Government is dedicated to ensuring it has a diverse workforce and equal opportunity for advancement for all employees (MSPB, 1992). Clearly, if women are being denied opportunity for advancement in the Federal Civil Service, the Government is

underutilizing potential skills of a significant portion of its work force. Studies have confirmed that a glass ceiling does exist within the workplace and that African American women are severely underrepresented (MSPB 1992; DOL, 1991). In this report, my objective was to identify a pattern of success for others to follow in moving beyond these invisible barriers.

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of women employed by the Federal Government, an important trend that will continue. According to an MSPB Study (1992), women represent only one-quarter of the Government's supervisors and only 11 percent of its senior executives. Minority women are even more poorly represented in top level jobs. They hold less than two percent of senior executive jobs and only four percent of General Schedule/General Management (GS/GM) positions . Furthermore, minority women are promoted less often than white women, even when they have the same amount of formal education and government experience (MSPB, 1992). A perception on the part of a group of citizens that they do not have equal access to jobs which affect the development and implementation of policy can damage the credibility of the Government in the eyes of those citizens.

The Federal Civil Service is, and should be, concerned about

diversity within its senior level ranks based on the government's role as a model employer, as a representative bureaucracy, and as an organization in compliance with its own laws. These are important objectives as they bear on the legitimacy of a democratically elected Government. The ultimate policy consideration is to provide people from all segments of society equality of access to employment opportunities within the Federal Government and a chance to help develop and implement Federal programs and policies which affect both their own groups and the Nation as a whole.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the career advancement experiences of African American females who have successfully broken through the glass ceiling. The study was accomplished by using a qualitative research design. I interviewed African American women currently employed or employed within the last two years in senior level positions in federal units within the Defense Logistics Agency. I probed how African American female executives developed through their careers and what made a difference in achieving high level positions within their occupations.

The study includes African American women employed in senior

level DLA positions between 1990 and 1995. The primary research question is, "What is the impact of breaking the glass ceiling on African American females in senior level management positions?" To answer this overall question, seven specific questions were addressed:

1. To what do African American women attribute their success?

2. What major barriers did they encounter enroute to their success?

3. How did they overcome these barriers?

4. What impact do they think they make having reached a senior level position?

5. Is there a leadership style that contributed to obtaining a senior level position?

6. What are the costs and benefits of crossing the line? And

7. What advice do they have for those on the other side of the glass ceiling?

Background information included age, education, marital status, children, years in federal government, and career patterns.

Significance of the Study

Little is known about the world of African American women in senior level government positions--their experiences, lessons learned, suc-

cesses, failures, and their progression toward shattering the glass ceiling in the government. Capturing this data is important if there are to be more women entering senior level positions to ensure that government continues to be an equitable and fair employer of well qualified and successful leaders for tomorrow. The study will add to the limited existing knowledge about the African American female in senior level management positions, facilitate institutional changes based on shifting demographics, and provide the potential for an executive development model for career advancement unique to African American females.

Gender and Lowe (1994) explored the issue of what variables should be manipulated to improve the status of women in public administration. I raised the same question in relation specifically to African American women. This study indeed helps to answer the question, "What variables should we manipulate to improve the status of one of society's lowest economic groups, African American women?"

Another dimension of the problem is that assumptions are made about how nonminority women experience the same or different treatment as women of color, but little research addresses this issue. Dr. Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis in My Soul Is My Own (1993) states:

> The assumption is that norms for the larger groups are suitable for the smaller group, African American women. However, their unique experiences in history, language, and culture suggest otherwise. Membership in two oppressed groups alone sets African

American women apart because they experience double discrimination as a result of their dual status. So what is true for African American men and white women is not invariably true for African American women. The notion that African American women are an invisible group on the sidelines that easily can be combined with other groups is a convenient fiction that conceals their power and importance (Etter-Lewis, 1993, p.xvi-xvii).

According to Etter-Lewis and Michele Foster in <u>Unrelated Kin</u> (1996):

Traditionally it has been convenient for researchers and educators alike to regard women as an undifferentiated collective and that this mistaken assumption is unproductive and misleading. No one single group can represent adequately the whole of women, nor can one voice speak for all (Etter-Lewis, p. 1).

She argues that women of color, who by definition experience the double bind of racism and sexism, tend to be underrepresented in research and literature alike. In those rare instances where they are included, they are likely to be at the periphery rather than at the center, added extras for the purpose of political correctness (p. 3).

This study provides data useful for comparative purposes, particularly for career mobility within organizations regarding African American females. Further theoretical refinement is needed so that theories based on one group (such as nonminority females) are not erroneously generalized to all women. Career development is one such area in which models developed on nonminority women career experiences may be inappropriately applied to women of color (Thomas & Alderfer, 1989).

Definitions

For purposes of this study, the following terms are important:

Glass Ceiling: Refers to artificial or invisible barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified women and minorities from advancing into senior-level positions.

Senior Level: Executives with the classification and salary ranges as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Senior Level Executives Salary Ranges

	Minimum	Maximum
GS/GM-13	$53,456	$69,492
GS/GM-14	$63,169	$82,120
GS/GM-15	$74,304	$96,594
SES	$92,900	$108,200*

*This level does not include Presidential appointees and does not include merit pay bonuses.

Limitations of the Study

This study confined itself to interviewing African American women in senior level management positions in the federal Defense Logistics Agency (DLA). This population is geographically dispersed throughout

the United States with a large concentration working in the Federal hub in Washington, D. C. There are 178 African American women in senior level positions within DLA and 80 (45%) are located in D. C.

The limitation is that the purposive sampling procedure decreases the generalizability of findings. This study is neither generalizable to all areas of government nor to organizations outside of government.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the moment African women set foot on America's shores, they have contended with both racism and sexism. During these struggles to survive, they often scaled the walls of one only to confront barriers caused by the other. Jacqueline Jones, author of <u>Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow</u> (1985), comments that:

> Black women's work took place within two distinct spheres that were at the same time mutually reinforcing and antagonistic. One workplace was centered in their own homes and communities, the locus of family feeling. Beginning in the slave era, the family obligations of wives and mothers overlapped in the area of community welfare, as their desire to nurture their own kin expanded out of the private realm into public activities that advanced the interests of black people as a group. In contrast to this type of work, which earned for black women the respect of their own people, participation in the paid labor force (or slave economy) reinforced their subordinate status as women and as blacks within American society (Jones, 1985, p. 3).

African American women have traditionally moved a myriad of obstacles in their quest to succeed. Those obstacles can be summarized as historical stages, ending with the glass ceiling.

Stage One - African Roots and Patriarchal Social Order

The first stage can be traced back to African roots and culture.

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African women were predominantly responsible for keeping the African economy going by creating and dominating the local marketplace. They would hawk vegetables and fruit grown on plots of land that village chiefs allowed them to cultivate. During this era, women were married by the time they were 15, generally did not own any land, and were usually illiterate. Their dominance in dozens of cottage industries was evidence of their business acumen. White male observers of African culture in the 18th and 19th centuries were astounded and impressed by the African male's subjugation of the African female. They were not accustomed to a patriarchal social order which demanded not only that women accept an inferior status, but also that they participate actively in the community labor force (Hooks, 1991, p. 22). Hooks quotes from Amanda Berry Smith, a 19th century black missionary, who visited African communities and reported on the condition of African women:

> The poor women of Africa, like those of India, have a hard time. As a rule, they have all the hard work to do. They have to cut and carry all the wood, carry all the water on their heads, and plant all the rice. The men and boys cut and burn the bush, with the help of the women; but sowing the rice and planting the cassava, the women have to do. You will often see a great, big man walking ahead with nothing in his hand but a cutlass (as they always carry that or a spear), and a woman, his wife, coming on behind with a great big child on her back, and a load on her head. No matter how tired she is, her lord would not think of bringing her a jar of water to cook his supper with, or of beating the rice; no, she must do that. (Hooks, 1991, p. 16-17).

Institutionalized sexism and racial imperialism created the base of

the American social structure. African American women began to empha-
size the "female" aspect of their being which caused their lot to be differ-
ent from that of the African American male. This was made evident when
white men supported giving black men the vote while leaving all women
disenfranchised. No other group in America has had its identity as sys-
tematically stamped out as have African American women. When African
American people are talked about as a group, the focus tends to be on
African American men; and when women are talked about as a group, the
focus tends to be on white women (Hooks, 1991, p. 7). The African Ameri-
can female seems to have no identity of her own.

Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis captures this lack of identity exceptionally
well in My Soul Is My Own (1993) when she writes:

> For despite the range and significance of our history, we have been
> perceived as token women in Black texts and as token Blacks in
> feminist ones. The study and interpretation of African American
> women's lives typically has been subsumed under African
> American issues and women's issues (Etter-Lewis, 1993, p. xvi).

Just as the 19th century conflict between African American male
suffrage and woman suffrage had placed black women in a difficult posi-
tion, so contemporary black women have felt they were asked to choose
between a black movement that primarily served the interests of black
male patriarchs and a women's movement which primarily served the
interests of white women. The black woman's response did not demand a

change in these two movements to gain fuller recognition as a group, but generally allied themselves with the black patriarchy they believed would protect their interests. A few black women chose to ally themselves with the feminist movement. Those who dared to speak publicly in support of women's rights were attacked and criticized. Other black women found themselves in limbo, not wanting to ally themselves with either sexist black men or white women (Hooks, 1991, p. 9).

The failure of black women collectively to rally against the exclusion of their interests by both groups was an indication that sexist-racist practices had effectively socialized them to feel that their interests were not worth fighting for, to believe that the only option available to them was submission to the terms of others. They did not challenge, question, or critique; they reacted. Many black women denounced women's liberation as "white female foolishness". Others reacted to white female racism by starting black feminist groups. While they denounced the macho concepts of black males as disgusting and offensive, they did not talk about themselves, about being black women, about what it means to be the victims of sexist-racist oppression (Hooks, 1991, p. 9).

Scholars have been reluctant to discuss the oppression of black women during slavery because of an unwillingness to seriously examine the impact of sexist and racist oppression on their social status (Hooks,

1991, p. 22). Although the women's movement motivated hundreds of women to write on the "woman question", it failed to generate indepth critical analyses of the African American female experience. Most feminists assumed that problems faced by African American women were caused by racism--not sexism. The assumption that African American women can divorce the issue of race from sex, or sex from race, has so clouded the vision of American thinkers and writers on the "woman" question that most discussions of sexism are inaccurate. An accurate picture of the status of African American women cannot be formed by simply focusing on racial hierarchies. The feminist movement was not sufficiently diligent to make sure that feminism recognized the different ways that women of color experience gender oppression (Hooks, 1991, p. 12).

Stage Two - Black America's Glass Ceiling

There have always been the issues of power and gender within the African American community. In her article, "Power and Gender", (Dec/ Jan, 1995, Emerge Magazine), Linda Faye Williams argues that Black America's own special glass ceiling for women is crystalized in a few statistical snapshots. The NAACP is one example. Although there were more Black men among the founders of the NAACP in 1909, women

continue to outnumber men by more than 2 to 1 in its membership; yet, Black women comprise only 25 percent of the NAACP's board of directors. Although a number of women had held important management posts in the association, no Black woman had served as executive director in the NAACP's 85-year history. The first woman, Mrs. Myrlie Edwards-Williams, however, was elected as Executive Director at the 1995 convention which is a major step forward for the African American community.

If one puts the spotlight on most civil rights organizations, nearly all have similarly failed to appoint females to key leadership positions. Most nationally recognized civil rights organizations, including the National Urban League, Southern Christian Leadership Council and Congress of Racial Equality, have never been headed by a woman. The only exceptions are the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund which appointed Elaine R. Jones as its first female chief executive, the National Urban Coalition, headed by Romona H. Edelin; and the Reverend Willie Barrow, who succeeded Jesse L. Jackson as president of Operation PUSH.

Civil Rights organizations are hardly alone in the dearth of African American women in top positions. For example, according to Williams, African American women vote in greater proportions than do African

American men--nearly two of every three Black voters in 1992 were women. African American women, nonetheless, made up only 29 percent of the Nation's Black elected officials in 1993 and, not surprisingly, were disproportionately located among the lowest positions in local governments. Of the 40 African American members of Congress in 1997, only nine are women (Center for the American Woman and Politics, September, 1997, p. 4).

Similarly, African American women are rare among the higher ranks of Black businesses. Only six of <u>Black Enterprise Magazine's</u> top 100 list of industrial/service businesses have an African American female as CEO (Williams, 1995, p. 65). It is evident that in Black institutions with the most national prominence and power, Black women are still hitting a glass ceiling. According to Williams:

> the cause of gender equity has not been helped by the fact that the chief autonomous institution Black America has run throughout most of its history and which therefore may be the subconscious model for many Black institutions is the Black church. Most modern religions are characterized by patriarchy, and the Black church is no exception. From the start, Black churches invariably were dominated by men. Yet, it should be clear that African Americans who have known oppression, exploitation, and discrimination in its rawest forms, cannot afford continued engagement with American patriarchy (Williams, pp. 63-65).

The African American woman's historical role has been to provide nurturing comfort to her children and family, to hold on even though the world around her may be coming apart. Dr. Chester Williams, captures

this history exceptionally well in four pieces of African wood sculptures from Ghana, Africa, described as The Queen Mother, The Suffering Woman, The Warrior, and The Successful Woman. The **Queen Mother** provides nurturing comfort to her children and family; the **Suffering Woman** reflects her state of personal victorious suffering in attempting to transform the alienating conditions around her; and the **Warrior** fights to get food for her family and unapologetically becomes a co-defender of the safety, dignity, and welfare of her family and families like hers against all threats of human denial. Proudly, in some modern cases, she has become a **Successful Woman,** having achieved economic stability and a balance between work and home. In all the previous periods of her gallant participation in the emancipation process, she is typically seen as having always held something in her hands. She compassionately held her babies close to her bosom. During difficult times, she tenaciously held her limited resources and often inadequate food for her family in her hands. Now, she is seen as holding her own head in her hands, reflecting on her own self image in the complex state of affairs (The Williams' Collection, 1990).

Part of what happens to African American women as a consequence of the patriarchial syndrome is that they are conditioned to think of everyone else's welfare but their own. They are socialized to take care of

children, to take care of parents, to take care of men, and to take care of sisters and brothers.

They rarely give themselves permission to take care of themselves and to reach their full potential or think about the importance of their own development (Williams, p. 64).

Stage Three - Employment Glass Ceilings

The third and final stage has to do with moving up the ladder in government management positions. In a Public Administration Review article, "Through the Glass Ceiling: Prospects for the Advancement of Women in Federal Civil Service", Katherine Naff points out that:

> it is difficult to comprehend that a century ago, the public service was almost exclusively a male domain. When a member of the Civil Service Commission in 1894 asked the Secretary of the Interior whether a woman who had successfully passed the examination could be appointed to the high-paid position of pension examiner, the answer was a curt 'No' (Aron, 1987, p. 22).

She further asserts that such overt discrimination in the federal government has been illegal since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The progress made by women in terms of representation has been impressive. Women now hold nearly half of the white-collar jobs in the executive branch. The focus of those opposed to gender discrimination, consequently, has shifted to jobs in the upper levels of government, since only about one in four supervisors and one in ten executives in the federal

bureaucracy are women (Office of Personnel Management, 1995, p. 52). Such statistics suggest that while employment may no longer be denied to women based on sex alone, some form of discrimination continues to prevent women from moving into supervisory and management positions (Naff, Nov/Dec, 1994, p. 507).

Federal policy makers are concerned about the imbalance in the representation of women and minorities in senior-level jobs. In response to requests from members of Congress, the U. S. General Accounting Office (GAO) has issued several agency-specific and government-wide reports concerning the effectiveness of affirmative employment programs. Most of these GAO evaluations have relied on comparisons between the percentages of women and minorities in specific occupations and at specific grade levels and the percentages of women and minorities in comparable jobs in the civilian labor force. In a 1991 summary of its research, GAO agreed with a statement by then OPM Director Constance Newman that "the percentages of women and minorities in the Senior Executive Service (SES) and the pipeline to the SES are unacceptable (GAO, 1991, p. 40).

The Civil Rights Act of 1991 established a Glass Ceiling Commission whose charter was to conduct a study and prepare recommendations concerning the elimination of artificial barriers to the advancement of

women and minorities, to increase the opportunities and developmental experiences of women and minorities, and to foster advancement of women and minorities to management and decisionmaking positions in business. The Glass Ceiling Commission was by its charter limited to exploring private sector issues. As another part of its research, the commission was also charged with establishing an annual award for excellence in promoting more diversity at higher decisionmaking levels in business. This should have an impact that extends beyond its charter.

Judy Rosener's book, America's Competitive Secret (1995), provides further support for such recommendations. Rosener slams the sledge-hammer of economics against the glass ceiling and thereby changes the tenor of the debate from "what is the right thing to do" to "what is the necessary thing to do" to upgrade the use of all human resources in business. She shows that removing the glass ceiling can no longer be viewed solely in terms of social equity--it is now an economic imperative. She sums up her argument in stating that women constitute an economic resource that can provide a competitive advantage. However, this is very much a secret, and given the low percentage of women in leadership positions in most organizations, it has yet to be discovered.

CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In qualitative research, the literature is used inductively so that it does not direct the questions asked by the researcher. I have followed this approach and this literature review section is used to provide a series of integrative summaries to frame the problem as part of the introduction to the study.

Most of the previous academic research related to career advancement in the federal sector has focused on either "human capital" factors such as age, education, and length of service or on the differences in the attitudes and experiences of men and women. The former analyses have generally relied on data from the Central Personnel Data File (CPDF) on federal employees in order to determine the extent to which salary or promotion rate differences between women and men can be explained by differences in human capital. Generally, these studies have not ruled out the existence of discrimination, because they did not find that the differences in human capital fully explained the variance in men's and women's advancement (Long, 1976; Borjas, 1978; Taylor, 1979; Lewis, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c, 1987). This research supports the suggestion

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that women face barriers to advancement unrelated to their qualifications but does not identify what those barriers may be (Naff, PAR, 1994, p. 508).

The Contemporary "Glass Ceiling"

Several studies have examined the issue of the glass ceiling. In August, 1991, the U.S. Department of Labor released the results of its pilot study of the recruitment and promotion practices of nine Fortune 500 companies. The study indicated that women and minorities are not reaching the top in the corporate world because of informal policies and practices which have the effect of excluding them from consideration for top-level jobs. The report concluded that a glass ceiling does exist, that it functions at a much lower level of the organization than previously supposed, that minorities tend to hit the glass ceiling earlier than women do, and that causes for the glass ceiling vary with the company (Department of Labor, 1991, pp. 3-5). Since 1991, the Department of Labor has included an examination of possible barriers to the advancement of women and minorities in its regular reviews of government contractors (DOL, 1991, p. 25).

A Merit Systems Protection Board Study (1992) found that barriers do exist that have resulted in women, as a group, being promoted less

often over the course of their Government careers than men with comparable education and experience. Other significant findings in the report concluded that women do confront inequitable barriers to advancement in their Federal careers in the form of subtle assumptions, attitudes, and stereotypes which affect how managers sometimes view women's potential for advancement and, in some cases, their effectiveness on the job.

Additional research by the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA 1992, pp. 1-25) also addresses the problem of the glass ceiling in government. This study points out that:

> In state and local government, women were less than a third of officials and administrators. Some of the imbalance may be due to a 'glass ceiling', or institutional barriers that inhibit women from moving into management. But it is also evident that many women are hindered by not having the practical advice they need to plan their career advancement (p. 14).

Morrison, White and Velsor (1990) discusses the double barrier to the top--"the ceiling and the wall". The "wall" refers to women who do manage to break the glass ceiling invisible barrier but often then encounter another: a wall of tradition and stereotypes that keeps them out of the inner sanctum of senior management--the core of business leaders who wield the greatest power. The study examines the factors that determine success or derailment in the corporate environment, shows how

women can break the glass ceiling, and looks at new obstacles on the road to the top. Morrison, White, and Velsor provide provocative insights into important questions such as :

> -Do women have what it takes for senior management in a large corporation?
> -Does a new brand of sexism stop them cold at the top floor?
> -Is it just a matter of time before a new generation of women break through the glass ceiling?
> -What are the real differences between men and women in the corporate environment? (pp. 155-174)

Invaluable advice is also provided from the women executives themselves on learning the ropes in a company, getting the right kind of support, and integrating work and life.

The findings of the study suggested that senior level management will be off-limits to women now in the management pipeline just as they are to executive women today because the barriers that keep women out of senior management will remain. Change takes time--decades-- and the kind of change Morrison et al. view as necessary involves change in institutions, change in attitudes, and change in behavior.

Bullard and Wright (1993) looked at data from 1984 (n=489) and 1988 (n=658) surveys of female executives in state government. They found that women have progressed to top positions in certain types of agencies, but much progress has occurred by avoiding, not breaking, the glass ceiling. By "circumventing", Bullard and Wright mean moving to

the top by going around or outside the glass ceiling through routes such as new agencies, gubernatorial appointment, and interagency mobility. For women, these routes result in shorter periods of service in state government and in the agency they head. By "breaking", the authors refer to large numbers of women taking the conventional path of working their way diligently, perhaps patiently, and effectively to the top. Most notable male-female differences are in party affiliation, age, interagency mobility, career progress, and gubernatorial appointment. The major conclusions of this study were that women have made noteworthy progress in securing top administrative posts in state governments. The proportion of agency heads who are women (about 20 percent) is higher there than in other executive sectors, including the private (corporate) and other public sectors. The female component in state governments, however, still falls far short of equality.

A status report by the U. S. Department of Labor in August, 1992, looked at what has occurred in America to ensure that artificial barriers are broken so that merit can determine the career advancement of talented minorities and women. The overall message is that while progress has been made in the workplace by minorities and women, the commitment and actions that led to the progress must be maintained and enhanced if the goal of full and equal employment opportunity is to be

realized. The report discusses recent research data on workplace advancement, which show mixed results. Department of Labor data on federal contractors show that minorities and women have made progress over the past 10 years. Much of the report concerns the progress of those companies the Department of Labor has monitored through Glass Ceiling Initiative pilot reviews and compliance reviews. These data are presented in anecdotal fashion highlighting a number of examples which show that glass ceiling barriers can be removed.

The report cites the following barriers to career advancement and notes that they warrant greater attention: recruitment practices, lack of opportunity to contribute, performance measures, and mobility. The following methods are cited as successful approaches to removing glass ceiling barriers: tracking women and minorities with advancement potential, ensuring access and visibility, ensuring a bias-free workplace, and continuing placement of women and minorities into entry-level professional positions (DOL, 1992, pp. 4-5).

A comprehensive report by the U. S. Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) released in August, 1996, discusses whether minorities and nonminorities have equal access to Federal jobs and, once employed, whether they are treated equitably. The researchers focused in part on how employees evaluate their situation and conclude that they are not

being treated properly. They view this as a problem to be solved.

When such problems are specifically focused on career advancement issues, they sometimes acquire labels such as "glass ceilings", "concrete walls", or "sticky floors". "Sticky floors" refers to promotion patterns which inhibit advancement from trainee and developmental levels into higher level jobs. Whatever the label applied or measurement criteria used, anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of Federal employees perceive problems with the way they and their colleagues are treated in the workplace.

The most relevant finding from the study relating to the glass ceiling is that on an aggregate basis, minorities in professional positions now appear to be facing more of a sticky floor than a glass ceiling. The negative consequences of this type of promotion pattern on the advancement of minorities are more long lasting than if the disparities were occurring at higher grade levels. Not only are the numbers of people immediately affected greater, but also the process of developing a pool of minorities who are well prepared for future promotions is materially slowed down, since there are fewer people moving up in the developmental pipeline.

The article, "The Three Levels of the Glass Ceiling: Sorcerer's Apprentice to Through the Looking Glass" in DataLine (September 1991, pp. 1-5), discusses three levels of the glass ceiling that exist within

organizations. These levels are: (1) Apprenticeship, (2) The Pipeline, and (3) Alice In Wonderland. The article suggests that a glass ceiling does exist at the level of apprenticeship. Although the immediate economic consequences are not attention-getting (very few apprentices sue), there are serious long-term implications for companies and the country.

The article describes the boundaries of apprenticeship as "the line that must be crossed before an individual is 'in the pack' to be considered for management or leadership positions" (p. 4). During this apprenticeship, individuals are expected to work extraordinary hours, be very deferential, do work for which others take credit, and generally take abuse that clearly will not be required once the apprenticeship is completed.

The second level of the glass ceiling, according to the article, is The Pipeline, which is the range of jobs that are post-apprenticeship, but prior to senior or top-management. The mechanisms implementing the glass ceiling at the Pipeline level fall into three main categories: (1) growth and the obfuscation of the pay cap; (2) denial of credential building experiences, not only exclusion from credential-building experiences, but also the discounting of the credentials that a woman does hold; and (3) use of recruiting services and strategies that unconsciously or explicitly discriminate (Dataline, 1991, p. 4).

The article refers to the third level of the glass ceiling as Alice in

Wonderland because for women who reach it, the rules and relationships seem so dramatically different. They frequently feel as if they have to run as fast as they can just to stay in place; for many, the final outcome seems to be a corporate version of "off with their heads!" In addition to significantly increased visibility, many women at this level experience a sudden, dramatic change in the criteria by which they are judged, thereby resulting in denial of full partnership in a firm or full membership in the senior level management ranks (DataLine, September, 1991, pp. 4-5).

The study suggests that not every organization has all three levels, and sometimes one level is predominant in one part of the organization and not in another. Furthermore, any company that wants to eliminate its own glass ceiling could benefit from analyzing its organization with respect to all three of these levels.

A report by the DOL Glass Ceiling Commission(1995) further documents the existence of a glass ceiling. The study on the top 1,000 U.S. industrial companies and the 500 biggest companies of all types, as ranked by Fortune Magazine, found that 97 percent of the senior managers are white and an estimated 95 to 97 percent are male. The Commission stated that "at the highest levels of business, there is indeed a barrier only rarely penetrated by women or persons of color" (p. 6). The report focused on career advancement issues affecting minorities and

women in the private sector. One of its conclusions noted that corporate leadership cannot make a society culture, gender, or color blind, but it can demand and enforce merit- based practice and behavior internally. The power of stereotyping in the greater society could be substantially diminished if corporations across the board and on a grand scale were to demand behavioral change in how they do business.

The report, "Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital", March, 1995, further documents the existence of the glass ceiling and its effects on women and African Americans. In this study Bell and Nkomo found that African American women and white women had significant differences in career perceptions. For example, compared to white women, African American women felt that they received less organizational support, believed their work to be less significant, felt they had less control and authority, and were less likely to use their skills and knowledge. They also had less positive relationships with their bosses, were more conscious of their racial identity at work, felt less accepted by their colleagues, received less collegial support, and perceived a higher level of sex discrimination at work (pp. 66-67).

Bell and Nkomo, after examining the distinguishing differences in the organizational experiences of white and African American women

managers, changed the metaphor from *glass ceiling* to *concrete wall.*
They explain that white women feel that they are held down by a glass
ceiling. Glass is dangerous and it can injure those who break it, but it
can be broken. Furthermore, glass is clear--those below a glass ceiling
can see through it and learn by observation. They can see those above
and they, in turn, are visible to those who are above the glass ceiling.
Visibility, sometimes known as "face time", is a critical factor in breaking
through the glass ceiling (Good for Business Report, 1995, p. 63).

African American women, on the other hand, feel that they face a
concrete wall. It is almost impossible for a person alone to poke a hole in
a concrete wall. Furthermore, those closed in behind the wall cannot
learn about the organization because they are isolated from the main-
stream of organizational life, and, worse, they are invisible to the decision
makers on the other side. Research findings support the following state-
ment of an African American woman who testified at the Federal Glass
Ceiling Commission Hearing in New York City:

> Yes, there is a ceiling. That's not news in our community. Indeed,
> for African Americans, everyone who comments on it seems to call
> it the concrete wall. But for those of us at the (deleted) we say that
> both of those terms really are descriptions of good, old-fashioned
> racial discrimination in recruitment, job placement, promotions,
> performance evaluations, compensation, and other terms and con-
> ditions of employment (p. 68).

She went on to explain:

For Black women, it is even worse. They are only three percent of all women managers, and women managers are estimated to be less than two to three percent. So, we have a non-existence. We don't even have a wall--no ceiling, no glass to look through. There is nothing (p. 69).

Ann Morrison's "A Glass Ceiling Survey: Benchmarking Barriers and Practices" (1995) presents findings of a survey that asked human resources managers to identify current barriers preventing women and people of color from reaching senior management. The managers gave support to the notion that the glass ceiling involves a variety of barriers that continue to exist to some extent in their organizations. The data suggest that a number of managers did not see a strong connection between diversity and the health of their organizations. The two most common barriers included the preference of existing management to associate with people like themselves (the discomfort factor) and a lack of accountability (Morrison, 1995, pp. 1-57).

Morrison identified five practices that were more closely correlated with overall effectiveness at the management and executive levels included: (1) progress in meeting diversity goals is included in performance evaluation; (2) diversity considerations are included in promotion criteria and decisions; (3) diversity considerations are included in management succession planning; (4) competence in managing a diverse work force is considered in management succession planning; and (5) selection criteria

and decisions include diversity considerations. She concludes that the most prevalent practices did not seem to represent the most promising solutions to the glass ceiling. A recommendation is made to include progress toward diversity as part of the performance-evaluation process.

Comparison to Other Ethnic Groups

The Good for Business Study (1995) also examined glass ceiling barriers and perceptions for other ethnic groups. The study pointed out that there are some commonalities as well as differences between the groups relating to the glass ceiling. For example, Hispanic Americans referred to the glass ceiling as "The Two-Way Mirror". The major barriers identified for this group compared to women and African Americans are: (a) the small size of the pool of Hispanic American men and women who have gained the credentials that are now considered prerequisites for senior management, (b) stereotyping and discomfort with cultural differences that cause white middle-level and upper level managers to be reluctant to mentor and promote Hispanics, (c) isolation from the informal communication networks, and (d) a lack of assignments that provide visibility and interaction with senior managers.

Major barriers for advancement of American Indians are identified as "More Than Glass". This refers to (a) the lack of educational

opportunity which drastically reduces the pool; (b) belief based on bias and acceptance of stereotypes that American Indians are not able to perform managerial positions in mainstream business and, most importantly; (c) a preference on the part of some American Indians to devote their talents to reservation economic development or to Indian-owned and managed businesses that are consistent with their religious and cultural values.

All of these groups experienced a glass ceiling, but varied in their perception of what the glass ceiling represented to each individual ethnic group. However, there were some common characteristics between the groups such as: (a) a reluctance of white managers to mentor other groups, (b) isolation from the informal communication networks, and (c) a lack of high visibility assignments that provide key career experiences.

According to the study, Asian and Pacific American Islanders did not experience these same problems but had to deal with differences with their glass ceiling referred to as "The Impenetrable Glass". For this group there is a widespread acceptance that they are not affected by the glass ceiling and widespread acceptance of the stereotype that Asian and Pacific Islander Americans make superior professionals and technicians but are not suited for management leadership. The study found that the Asian and Pacific Islander focus group participants agreed that there is a

glass ceiling but it was much higher for Asians than for other groups. Although they consider themselves more assimilated and accepted, they recognize that they experience difficulty reaching the top levels of management.

In short, Glass Ceiling Commission studies, testimony presented at the Commission's Public Hearings, and CEO interviews consistently identify stereotypes, along with prejudice and bias, as a major barrier to job advancement for all ethnic groups.

Leadership Styles

Rosener suggests that women and men do indeed tend to differ in the ways they think and act; these differences are real, and they carry over into leadership styles. In her article, "Ways Women Lead", Harvard Business Review (1990), Rosener found that women, on average, exhibited and preferred the interactive leadership style and men the command-and-control leadership style. She argues that the interactive style is particularly effective in flexible, nonhierarchical organizations of the kind that perform best in a climate of rapid change. Her findings did not suggest that one style is better than the other, only that men and women tend to lead differently and that interactive leaders tend to be most successful in nontraditional organizations.

However, she does point out that as long as the command-and-control management style dominates organizations, female-linked behaviors such as consensus building, power sharing, and comfort with ambiguity are considered signs of weakness. These behaviors, judged wanting in comparison to the command-and-control style, were supposedly what made women unfit for leadership roles. She notes that, "ironically, in some organizations men are now being trained to be interactive leaders while women are still hitting the glass ceiling because they are interactive leaders" (pp. 12-13).

Cheatham in his article, "Cultural Influence on Leadership," (1991) scans much of the current literature on leadership looking to see how gender or cultural influences impact leader values or behavior. This author found very little in this regard. Cheatham found this disturbing because, as he says, "a lack of understanding of or appreciation for...differences can produce leaders who are deficient in the attitudes, knowledge and skills that are required for effective functioning in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society." Cheatham suggests readers look to other fields, such as counseling, psychology and the related helping professions to see what progress has been made (Cheatham, 1991, pp. 5-8).

Fierman's article, "Do Women Manage Differently" (1990), suggests that we ought to concentrate on trying to get different races and sexes to

work together without adding to the stereotypes. Fierman believes that those most likely to succeed are not necessarily women, but those of either gender best able to adapt to the tribe's customs. Fierman says if women are as superior in their leadership abilities as some of the current literature suggests, where are they in upper management? She believes that those who choose management as their field have more in common than differences. The best embody stereotypes of both genders (Fierman, 1990, pp. 115-117).

Consequences of the Glass Ceiling

Major findings in the report on the status of African American managers suggest that African American men and women still lag behind White women and men in holding management positions. Over the last ten years, the proportion of African American men and women holding management positions has only ranged between five and seven percent. They continue to be invisible at the very top levels of companies.

Despite legislative mandates to eradicate racial discrimination in the workplace, African American managers still encounter a number of highly interrelated barriers that operate at the individual, group, and organizational levels to restrict their advancement. At the individual level, the foremost barrier to their advancement is subtle racism and

prejudice. They still work in an environment where Whites hold negative stereotypes and attitudes about their suitability and competence for management responsibility. They also experience more overt racial harassment in the work place in the form of racial slurs, racial jokes, and abusive language. Intergroup conflicts and exclusion from formal and informal networks create dynamics on a group level that further restrict their mobility.

Other barriers are embedded within organization systems. African American managers have less access to mentors, are subjected to bias in the rating of their performance and promotability, and are functionally segregated into jobs less likely to be on the path to top levels of management. More recently, corporate efforts to downsize operations have dampened the prospects of advancement for many African American managers.

The study suggests that removing these barriers will require multi-level action on the part of the government and employers. The government must strengthen its enforcement of equal employment opportunity. The government must mandate compliance reviews to investigate the subtle ways in which organization systems like succession planning and performance evaluation adversely affect the advancement of African Americans. Explicit guidelines on racial harassment in the work place

must be developed and issued jointly by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other appropriate governmental agencies. However, if real change is to occur the government must act towards eradicating racism and racial segregation within all major institutions of our society.

The top leadership of organizations must demonstrate its commitment to the recruitment and advancement of African Americans by removing obstacles embedded in personnel practices. Managers must be held accountable for the development of African American managers, ensuring that they receive training and educational programs on race relations for all organizational members. Such training can help get to the root of many of the barriers African Americans experience--racism and prejudice.

In "The Glass Ceiling: Fundamentally about civil rights" (January 1993), it is argued that the glass ceiling is a civil rights problem. The Department of Labor Glass Ceiling Report supports this argument by noting examples of sex discrimination in confirming the existence of a glass ceiling during its compliance reviews of nine federal contractors (1990). These examples included obfuscation of the pay gap between men and women, denial of credential-building experiences, and recruiting services and strategies that unconsciously or explicitly discriminate. The

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importance of seeing the glass ceiling from this perspective is that the glass ceiling is primarily about visibility and power, not separately, but in a critical combination: access to and exercise of visible power. The article further states that in studying the glass ceiling, they found that it is basically acceptable for women and minority men to be visible in companies so long as they do not have meaningful or serious power (DataLine, 1993, p. 1).

Rosener argues that leveraging the talents of professional women will lead to more innovative and profitable organizations. Implicit in this idea is that any country whose businesses fully utilize their professional women—which means including them in top management—will ultimately be more competitive at home and abroad. Barriers that inhibit the advancement of these women need to be removed, shattered, and dismantled for organizations to gain a competitive advantage as we move towards the year 2000 and beyond (Martin, 1991, p. 2). Martin also states that competitive forces will drive the change: "A new work force is already coming. If you don't make it part of your planning in the years to come, it will cost you. The changing composition of the workforce, combined with competition, will encourage organizations to adapt (Martin, 1991, p. 3)." Patricia Harrison in her book, A Seat at the Table (1995), comments that "diversity adds excitement and innovation to the

workplace. When you are searching for potential employees, it always makes good business sense to draw on the largest possible talent pool, without regard to gender or race or religion" (Harrison, 1995, p. ix).

In summary, prior research has indicated that differences in qualifications between men and women probably account for some, but not all, of the low proportion of women in senior levels in the federal government. It has also been suggested that other factors such as mentoring and mobility are important, and that there may be informal policies or practices that hamper women's advancement (Naff, 1994).

The literature on nonminority (white) women and the glass ceiling is substantial. In contrast, the research based on African American women in management is limited. However, the MSPB Study did discuss findings as to how the experience of minority women may be different from that of white women. The report indicated that minority women are disadvantaged both by their gender and their race or National Origin. They are promoted less often than white women, even when they have the same amount of formal education and government experience. They are also *less likely* than white women to believe that they receive the same respect as men, that promotions are based on competence, and that rewards are based on performance.

Most significantly, for the purposes of this study, the report

indicated that minority women are even more poorly represented in top level jobs in the federal government, that minority women have had less opportunity for advancement than nonminority women, and minority women are as likely to perceive discrimination based on gender as on race or national origin. This study in addressing these deficiencies provides a unique contribution to the literature on African American women and career advancement in senior level government positions.

Women in Management

Margaret Henning and Anne Jardim argued in <u>The Managerial Woman</u> (1977) that men and women may enter into the business world with similar goals but they have very different approaches to achieving these goals. They explored what men and women bring to a job and why a young woman in comparison with her male counterpart is often at a disadvantage when it comes to advancement. A main point Henning and Jardim make is that women are raised to think she can become a nurse, not a doctor; a secretary, not a boss; that another person, i.e., her husband, will support her for most of her adult life. These and other influences are only one aspect of the "conditioning" process. They argue that on the job, the impact of difference is real and the authors trace the typical female/male attitudes toward responsibility, pressures,

opportunities for advancement, and the ability to identify a career future within a company.

Henning and Jardim also demonstrate that these patterns are not necessarily fixed. Portraits of the personal and professional lives of twenty-five women who did make it to the top—as vice-presidents and presidents in major industries—identify the qualities and the environment that were conducive to their success and show how competent women can follow in their footsteps.

The study points out that in most organizations the informal system of relationships finds both its origins and present function in the male culture and in the male experience. Its forms, its rules of behavior, its style of communication and its mode of relationships grow directly out of the male development experience. The authors suggest that this cannot be viewed as either good or bad. It is real and they go on to state that what makes this particularly threatening to the future of women in management is that the informal system is at the heart of the middle management function and grows still more critical with every step upward. Few women are a part of this system and most women don't even recognize it exists.

Henning and Jardim found that there were differences in the concept of a career between men and women. They identified late career

decisions, a sense of passivity, and emphasis on individual self-development as the critical factor determining career advancement as distinct patterns of women that create a disadvantage in management positions. Men bring to the management setting a clearer, stronger and more definitive understanding of where they see themselves going, what they will have to do, how they will have to act, and what they must take into account if they are to achieve the objectives they set for themselves. In contrast, they saw that women are much less likely to bring to the same setting the insights, understandings and skills which from boyhood men have acquired and developed among themselves—a mind-set learned, acculturated and socialized which gives men an immediate advantage as they move into management positions.

Patricia Harrison's <u>A Seat at the Table: An Insider's Guide for America's New Women Leaders</u> (1994), discusses what it takes for women to reach their highest levels of success and claim a rightful place at the power tables in corporate America's boardrooms. She provides valuable insights on breaking through the glass ceiling. Her advice suggests that women should: (a) recognize their strengths and build on them to achieve their own leadership style; (b) create a personal network of opinion leaders who will help them reach their goals; (c) identify and develop the most important qualities you need to succeed; (d) achieve success without

sacrificing values; and (e) tap into the wisdom and advice of the Nation's leaders, men, and women.

Harrison's advice is that "the real secret about leadership is that you don't arrive at a seat at the table and then begin demonstrating your leadership ability. You arrive at a seat at the table because the leadership skills you have been demonstrating are now being recognized." She suggests that it is important for women in whatever role they enjoy; employee, housewife, chief executive officer, entrepreneur, candidate, fundraiser, volunteer, to take the leadership reins connected to their lives before they can demonstrate leadership on behalf of their business, their corporations, their constituency, or their community.

Judith B. Rosener, professor at the University of Colorado, looked at executive and entrepreneurial women in a 1990 study for the International Women's Forum. The study affirmed that increasing numbers of women in or out of the corporation were achieving because of their "feminine" traits, not in spite of them. The interesting aspect about this finding is that women who do achieve, believe that they do not need to subjugate who they are in order to succeed, and the higher their aspiration levels, the higher their rewards. This study is just one of many that supports the concept that by knowing who you are and what you want, and by focusing your talents and abilities toward a goal, you can choose a

table, focus on a decision-making seat around that table, and in the process women can raise not only their aspirations, but their changes of moving forward.

Rosener explains why the so-called glass ceiling still prevents many competent women from reaching the upper echelons of management. She analyzes why women and men are perceived and evaluated differently at work, and provides new insight into the feelings of men who are asked to interact with women in new roles where there are new rules. Rosener shows that removing the glass ceiling can no longer be viewed solely in terms of social equity—it is now an economic imperative.

Her main point is that women are different from men, but not superior or inferior, and that the differences women bring to the work-place constitute an economic resource—an added value. She provides evidence to suggest that women create work environments I which people can be themselves and don't have to "fit in" to a one best model of managerial behavior. She notes that women tend to feel comfortable with ambiguity, to be inclusive rather than exclusive, and to evaluate performance in both qualitative and quantitative terms. She further suggests that women push for benefit programs responsive to a wide range of employee needs, and share power and information in a way that is

conducive to shared responsibility. Rosener argues that because of these attributes, the admission of women to what historically has been an all-male domain—top management—results in higher morale, increased pro-ductivity, and greater innovation. She further suggests that America's professional women are the biggest untapped vein of human assets in the world and as organizations struggle to adapt to a rapidly changing global environment, they would be well advised to recognize the link between management strategy, human resources, and the underutilization of women. When they do, "they will have discovered America's competitive secret" (p. 201).

Dorothy Cantor and Toni Bernay's Women In Power: The Secrets of Leadership (1992), identified a leadership equation defining unique ingredients of women's leadership. She discovered three critical elements: (1) Competent Self, (2) Creative Aggression, and (3) WomanPower that make up the leadership equation. They describe Competent Self as protecting women from feeling threatened when taking risks. A Competent Self enables a woman to see the possibilities instead of the obstacles. Even when a possibility doesn't materialize and instead turns into an obstacle, the political woman will be able to draw on her Competent Self for the strength to weather the bad times and then continue to pursue her vision.

The authors define Creative Aggression as taking initiative, leading others, and speaking out. All these attributes are considered positive and they suggest that women need to feel comfortable with aggression and competitiveness. They also suggest that society has tried to temper the word aggression by substituting assertiveness, as if aggression was overloaded with destructive connotations. They argue that Creative Aggression can enhance personal growth if used creatively and wisely.

Cantor and Bernay (1992) describe WomanPower as power used to make society a better place. It is not power for its own sake or for manipulating others. They suggest that women are never going to want to be powerful if we perpetuate the macho male ideal of power. But power redefined to include the ability to make a difference in society for the greater good would no longer conflict with feminine nurturing and caring. They argue that combining the best of both masculine and feminine identities into a broadened definition of power is something that men as well as women can reach for. Society at large can only benefit from male and female leaders who exercise what they call WomanPower.

"You can succeed in business if you'd only behave like one of the boys." That's what women have always been told. In <u>Feminine Leadership</u> or <u>How to Succeed in Business Without Being One of the Boys</u>, Marilyn Loden daringly asserts that women have their own leadership

styles and that they manage most effectively by being themselves and not by conforming to the traditional masculine leadership model. Women no longer need attempt to make themselves over in the image of men in order to succeed. She argues that today, as corporate America reevaluates itself, leadership style is being redefined. Within management, there is growing recognition of the need for more people-oriented skills—a heightened sensitivity to nonverbal cues, creative problem-solving, intuitive management, participatory leadership—the same skills that women have been taught to cultivate since they were little girls.

Loden's book is the first one to focus on women's unique strengths. Clearly defining what she calls feminine leadership techniques, Loden shows women how to bring their natural capabilities into business in order to make the workplace more productive, more spirited, and more humane. Loden is convinced that women are the greatest untapped resource in American business today and feels the time has come to acknowledge the different but equally effective management styles of both men and women.

Patricia Reid-Merritt's <u>Sister Power: How Phenomenal Black Women Are Rising to the Top (1996)</u>, discusses how one by one, phenomenal African American women are breaking through the glass ceiling of

race and gender bias. She posits that these women are the newest architects of America's future and they are setting political agendas, heading major institutions, and shaping corporate strategies. Reid-Merritt defines sister power as the collective spirit of culturally conscious black women committed to principled leadership. They carry their commitment into local neighborhoods, small towns, and big cities and into the citadels of business and government. She argues that black women have earned their positions at the nation's power tables, and for them it is the culmination of years of preparation combined with a conscious decision to accept the responsibility of leadership.

The author suggests that Sister Power is a broad-based movement from the top down and the bottom up. Throughout the country, examples of black women conducting themselves as Phenomenal women in large and small roles are plentiful. She points out that the fact that black women could rise in a society that so severely restricted their opportunities is an inspirational American success story. She goes on to state that their strength and fortitude are powerful examples for everyone. She further emphasizes how Phenomenal women speak proudly of their heritage and faithfully preserve their connections to the African American community. The ability to "rock with the rhythm and go with the flow", she comments, are traits characteristic of the black American experience. The

essence of their being is not for sale. They are solid as a rock and refuse to be deterred from a just and righteous movement (pp. 212-13).

Merritt-Reid suggests that the struggle continues, the battle is still raging, the victory not yet won. The truth, she further comments is that even those sisters who have made it are standing on a tenuous plateau, in constant danger of falling back down the slope. She suggests that as we approach the twenty-first century, America again is faced with the question of the "color line". Added to the unsolved issue of race are a gender line, a justice line, and a truth line. She argues that it may well be that we need a new black woman's movement imbued with the spirit, strength, tenacity, and vision similar to the Black Women's Club Movement that unfolded at the turn of the century (pp. 212-213).

Lyness and Thompson (1997) conducted a study comparing the career and work experiences of executive women and men. Female (n equals 51) and male (n equals 56) financial services executives in comparable jobs were studied through archival information on organizational outcomes and career histories, and survey measures of work experiences. Similarities were found in several organizational outcomes, such as compensation, and many work attitudes. Important differences were found, however, with women having less authority, receiving few stock options, and having less international mobility than men. Women at the highest

executive levels reported more obstacles than lower level women. The gender differences coupled with women's lower satisfaction with future career opportunities raise questions about whether women are truly above the glass ceiling or have come up against a second, higher ceiling (Lyness and Thompson, 1997, pp. 359-375).

In the article "How do you make it to the top? An examination of influences on women's and men's managerial advancement", Tharenou, Lattimer, and Conroy (1994) argue that determinants of managerial advancement have not been well established. Most studies have examined the impact of very specific constructs, such as the leadership motive pattern (McClelland, 1985) and mentoring (Dreher & Ash, 1990). Recently, comprehensive theories of managerial advancement have been developed for women. Using confirmatory modeling, the authors examined a priori models of influences on women's managerial advancement based on recent theories pertaining to women and the applicability of the models to men.

Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) explained women's promotion to powerful positions as shaped by: (a) organizational influences, such as selection and training; (b) interpersonal influences, such as networks and mentors, and (c) individual influences, including personality aspects, such as self-confidence, early background elements (parents' employment), and

non-work role elements (spouse, children). Broad social conditions affect these three levels of influences, each of which interacts with the next. Also using a situation-and person-based approach, Fagenson (1990) proposed three interactive sets of factors influencing women's managerial advancement: (1) gender as internal traits, (2) employing organization as structural opportunities, and (3) institutional system as practices and beliefs. For example, in Fagenson's view the scarcity of women in management may be caused by the interaction between socialized traits, such as women's lower self-confidence; structural limitations, such as gender ratios in managerial hierarchies unfavorable to women; and disadvantageous institutional beliefs, such as the belief that women are not suited to management.

Tharenou's (1990) model made explicit a sequence of relationships explaining women's managerial advancement. Structural factors at a societal level, such as the gender linkage of occupations, influence organizational gender-linked structures. The latter affect women's immediate work situation. Combining with this work situation, the organizational environment, such as selection practices, influences women's advancement. Home roles are proposed to reduce women's work experience, which in turn reduces advancement. Early socialization is thought to influence the development of traits that in turn influence (and are

influenced by) advancement. Tharenou thought, however, that the effects of traits and early socialization are weak.

A key finding is that overall, skills (training, education, and work experience) appear to be the most powerful influences on men's managerial advancement and are better rewarded for men than for women, as previous researchers have found in general (Marini, 1989) and for managers (Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992). However, gender-linked differences occur throughout. The findings suggest that the interaction of the organizational situation (chiefly training), home situation, and personal factors (chiefly education) explains advancement. Women's advancement is less well explained than men's, partly because training has a greater impact for men than for women.

The authors argue that at almost each point in the overall explanation of managerial advancement, gender is relevant. They specifically found that gender appears to influence the career resources and power that enhance managerial advancement, supporting Kanter's (1997) general propositions. Women are at a disadvantage compared to men because of both the less positive impact of training on advancement and the less positive, indirect impact of work experience and education (through training). Women's advancement is furthered by the indirect impact of career encouragement (through training) but hindered

indirectly by the negative impact of home roles on work experience.

Tharenou, Latimer, and Conroy (1994) conclude that organizations need to ensure access to training is not limited for women as part of a pattern of tracking that grooms men more than women for powerful positions. Hence, organizational decision makers need to "fast-track" women through training in the same way as they do men and should ensure that women are encouraged and feel sufficiently self-confident to undertake training. Organizational practices such as seniority accumulation, flexible working patterns, maternal and paternal leave, and child care (Davidson & Cooper, 1987) that reduce the impact of home responsibilities on work experience need special attention. Moreover, women need to ensure that the division of household labor allows them greater work experience than has been typical. Organizations need to ensure that women's human capital contributions of education, work experience, and training are perceived as similarly conducive to productivity as men's, and thus rewarded with similar advancement (Marini, 1989). Moreover, educated women need to be provided as are men, with opportunities for training and development (Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994, pp. 899-931).

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

My approach to this study relies on qualitative research metho-

dology. The assumptions used here were based on Merriam (1988) who

suggests:

> 1. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning--how
> people make sense of their lives, experiences and their structures of
> the world;
> 2. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for
> data collection and analysis;
> 3. Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher
> is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained
> through words or pictures; and
> 4. The process of qualitative research is inductive in that
> the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses and theo-
> ries from details (p. 162).

Additionally, Morse (1991) states that a qualitative design is

appropriate when:

> (a) the concept is "immature" due to a conspicuous lack of theory
> and previous research; (b) a notion that the available theory may
> be inaccurate, inappropriate, incorrect, or biased; (c) a need exists
> to explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory; or
> (d) the nature of the phenomenon may not be suited to quantitative
> measures. (p. 120)

My research question needed to be explored in this fashion because

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little information exists on the topic. I used a qualitative format based on John W. Creswell (1994) and a Marshall and Rossman (1989) recommended model.

The Research Design

The research design is based on a phenomenological approach where each participant's experiences was examined through detailed descriptions of her experiences. The logic of the design is inductive, whereby categories and themes emerge from the interviews. This also suggests an emerging design, not a static design. Categories develop during the study rather than being pre-determined. This emergence provided context-bound information leading to patterns or theories that helped explain why some African American women have successfully penetrated the glass ceiling barriers to senior level positions.

My primary interest was in the participant's perceptions and experiences, and the way they made sense of their lives. The data that emerged was descriptive; primarily reported in the words of the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1990; Locke et al., 1987; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Merriam, 1988). Based upon the characteristics of the qualitative paradigm assumptions, this was the most appropriate strategy for this study since reality was constructed by the individuals involved in the

research situations themselves. Multiple realities thus emerged (Firestone, 1987; Guba & Lincoln, 1988; and McCacken, 1988).

This focus assured that relevant and meaningful data was collected to show what does make a difference in how African American women relate to their experiences and how they learn and progress in their careers.

Epistemological Bases for Choosing In-Depth Interviewing

The distinction between "facts" and "values", or between objectivity and subjectivity, cannot be taken for granted, and the observer cannot be conveniently eliminated. William James (1912) makes a strong case for the inseparability of "subject" and "object". If the observer affects, or contributes to, what is observed, there cannot be such an entity as a pure, objective "scientific fact". Social scientist Gregory Bateson goes further: "There is no objective experience; all experience is subjective." The social scientist looks for "the pattern that connects" and "the notion of context, of pattern through time". Describing the data of naturalistic or field research, he says that "what has to be investigated is a vast network or matrix of interlocking message material" (Bateson, 1979, p. 12).

For investigation of the research problem, I found that a quantitative experimental study could not tell me what I wanted to know: the

realities of the experience of another human being--how that person thinks and feels about that experience. However, I wanted to come as close to "knowing" as possible. I therefore, chose the in-depth interview as my research instrument. The following is a brief exposition of my assumptions and the philosophical positions that supported the qualitative approach to this study.

The distinction between "facts" and "values", or between objectivity and subjectivity, cannot be taken for granted, and the observer cannot be conveniently eliminated. William James (1912) makes a strong case for the inseparability of "subject" and "object". If the observer affects, or contributes to, what is observed, there cannot be such an entity as a pure, objective "scientific fact". Social scientist Gregory Bateson goes further: "There is no objective experience; all experience is subjective" (p. 9). The social scientist looks for "the pattern that connects" and "the notion of context, of pattern through time". Describing the data of naturalistic or field research, he says that "what has to be investigated is a vast network or matrix of interlocking message material" (Bateson, 1979, p. 12).

A significant part of this study on African American females and the glass ceiling was based on the assumption that it is possible to discover motives and meaning of other persons through our connections with them, through their words as they communicate with us, and through our

knowledge of our own words and actions as we see them reflected in others. As we find verification through our own experience and through hearing the repeated experience of others, we come as close as possible to knowledge about other human beings.

The interviews represent a profile of the meaning-making. A profile, as developed by Seidman (1983), is composed from the transcript of an interview series. The words of the interviewer are omitted and the participant's story stands alone.

During the interviews, I listened as the participants reflected on past and present experiences and considered them in relation to the parameters of the interview. I rephrased the questions when the meaning of the question seemed unclear to the participant. Occasionally, I commented to move the conversation to another level or to enhance my understanding; but mainly the words were those of the participants.

Selection of Participants

I considered four general parameters suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) for data collection procedures: the setting (where the research will take place); the actors (who will be observed or interviewed); the events (what the actors will be observed doing or interviewed about); and the process (the evolving nature of events undertaken by the actors

within the setting.

Setting of the study is the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) head-quartered at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and is a component of the Department of Defense reporting directly to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense. The Secretary of Defense reports to the President of the United States as a cabinet member. DLA has 16 field level activities geographically dispersed throughout the United States and Europe under its chain of command.

DLA provides supply support, contract administration services and technical and logistics services to all branches of the military and to several civilian agencies. It purchases supplies for and provides supplies to the military services and supports their acquisition of weapons and other materiel. This support begins with joint planning with the services for new weapon systems, extends through production and concludes with the disposal of materiel that is obsolete, worn out or no longer needed.

The organization performs its worldwide logistics mission with just under 49,000 civilian and military personnel, in facilities ranging from supply centers, to in-plant residencies with defense contractors, to property reutilization offices. DLA is the one source for nearly every consumable part, whether for combat readiness, emergency preparedness or day-to-day operations.

For the purposes of this study, the targeted individuals were African American females in the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) employed in senior level positions with a salary range between a minimum of $53,456 and a maximum of $108,200 (see Table 1). There are 178 individuals in this target population. Of this number, 120 are at the 13 level; 45 at the 14 level; 11 at the 15 level; and 2 at the SES level (DLA Data Bank, August 1994). I interviewed individuals from each grade level, but focused on interviewing individuals at the grade levels beyond the GS-13 entry level. Their experiences provided more insight into what it takes to move beyond entry level management positions. Twenty participants were interviewed for the study as indicated in Table 2.

The participants were identified by using a DLA Data Base Report, as of August 1994, that gave statistical data on location of the selected

Table 2

Participants Interviewed in Senior Level Positions

Senior Grade	Number in Target Group	Number Interviewed
13	120	3
14	45	7
15	11	8
SES	2	2
Total	178	20

participants. From this source, I contacted the Equal Employment Manager or Human Resource Director in the identified location to obtain the addresses and telephone numbers of all individuals falling within the target group. I contacted all identified participants and interviewed those available and willing to share their experiences for the study. My intent was to interview individuals within the group in a variety of the occupational series unique to senior level positions across DLA.

A pilot study was conducted prior to the project. Two individuals were selected to test the methodology of the face-to-face interview and the telephone interview to see if there was any major difference in the data collected. Both interviews yielded the same basic information within the established 1-2 hour timeframes, resulting in no significant changes in the methodology. I randomly selected the participants from the listing of participants in the target group, and made arrangements for a date, place, and time for the interview to be completed. The process worked as expected. Both interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes. The tape of each interview worked well in capturing the information as the participants talked about their experiences. I collected resumes from both individuals. The face-to-face interview allowed me to collect the resume at the conclusion of the interview as well as the demographic information needed. The telephone interview required the individual to FAX me a

copy of her resume and demographic responses at the conclusion of the interview. This was accomplished without any problems. However, I did include the option of mailing the information to me in case the individuals did not have ready access to a FAX machine.

There were some ethical issues involved, such as protecting the identity of co-workers discussed in the interview and certain problem areas that may have been identified within the work area. I assured the participants that I would maintain confidentiality of the data, preserve their anonymity, and use the research only for the specific purpose intended. Each participant will receive a copy of the completed study.

Data Collection Procedures

My data collection technique can be described as a "conversation with a purpose" (Kahn & Connell, 1957, p. 149). I provided a general topic interview structure designed to help discover the participant's meaning perspective but respected how the participant framed and structured her responses.

I used face-to-face and telephone interviews as the instruments for investigation of their experience. The procedures for the in-depth interviews used in this study followed closely the methodology developed by Sullivan and Seidman (1982, 1983). The process can be described as open

but focused. I also used the interpretive perspective of inquiry (Robinson & Sullivan, 1979, 1987). This perspective considers oral history interviews as subjective, socially constructed, and emergent events; understanding, interpretation, and meaning of lived experience are interactively constructed.

Research focus questions were selected based on a review of the literature and were designed to discover how these executives developed through their careers, what experiences were helpful, and generally what is occurring in the careers of senior level women in DLA. The focus questions were used to provide structure to the interview for analytical purposes and are listed here and included in Appendix A:

1. To what factors do they attribute their success?

2. What major barriers did they face?

3. How did they overcome these barriers?

4. What impact do they think they make having reached a senior level position?

5. Is there a leadership style that contributed to obtaining a senior level position?

6. What are the costs and benefits?

7. What advice do they have for others to break the glass ceiling?

I taped the interviews with the permission of the interviewees. I

also took notes in case the recording equipment failed. The interviews were held in a place mutually agreeable to the participant and interviewer, most often in the executive's office. The face-to-face interview setting was Washington, D.C., as this location is the hub of Federal employment and afforded the greatest opportunity to identify and select participants within the targeted population based on geographical availability and funding considerations. Another advantage to using Washington, D.C. is that historically, senior level positions have been filled with transplants from other geographical areas.

McMahan and Rogers (1994) state that:

> ...sensitive interviewers can use their awareness of the existence of
> self-schemas and their experience with psychological aspects of the
> interaction itself to assist in the interview process. As the inter-
> view proceeds, interviewers should pick up verbal and nonverbal
> clues associated with communication effectiveness as well as clues
> to the self-schemas that are important to the respondents (p. 58).

The authors maintain that "the ability to recognize aspects of self-schemas should not only suggest areas for further questioning, but also provide clues to themes that might be used to characterize interviewees' worlds" (McMahan & Rogers, p. 58).

I began the process by telephoning my contact person to obtain a list of all the individuals within the target population. The contact person was part of the target group who held a position that made access to this information readily available. This list was provided, including name,

phone number, location, grade and occupational series. It also contained the FAX numbers and E-Mail addresses of the individuals.

The second step in the process was to identify specific interviewees and obtain their consent to participate in the study. Again, this step was greatly facilitated by an inside contact who was a member of the target group and who held a position within the headquarters office that enabled her to offer support. I contacted her to discuss my need to have access to the senior level African American women for the study. She was highly supportive and arranged to personally open the door for my follow-up contact for the interview. This significantly reduced the amount of "cold" calling I had to do to solicit interest and participation in the study. I had indicated to her that I needed to talk with 15-20 women in this group. She coordinated contacting the members of the group and scheduled tentative appointments around the time frames I had given her for the week I planned to conduct the interviews. She forwarded me a list of interested participants, and I followed up with a phone call to each of these individuals to confirm dates and times and to give a brief overview of the purpose of the study. She also facilitated a focus group session at her home that developed as a result of the interviews.

Each participant was interviewed once. The interviews ranged between one hour and thirty minutes and two hours as each participant

was asked to respond in her own way to the seven focus questions. The maximum two hour timeframe proved to be sufficient time to complete the interview, even allowing for variations in articulating experiences. All interviews were audiotaped. I used a small, inconspicuous battery-operated tape recorder with a built in microphone. The interviews were scheduled five per day over a three day timeframe. Interviews were scheduled during the flexitime hours before and after core time working hours, including lunch hours for the participants. Scheduling was adjusted to accommodate the availability and time constraints of the interviewees. The other five interviews were completed by telephone out-side this timeframe. There was no significant difference in the amount of data obtained whether the interview was face-to-face or over the tele-phone. The main difference was the opportunity for visual observation of the interviewee's office environment that lead to some interesting obser-vations that I have noted in my findings. Since the largest percentage of the interviews were face-to-face, the observations can be generalized as reflective of the overall target group for the purposes of this study.

Prior to the actual interview, I contacted the participants by tele-phone and confirmed the date and time set for the meeting. I had each interviewee provide demographic and profile information on the following: age, level of education, marital status, number of children,

years in federal service, and years in current position. All interviews were completed as planned. A resume was obtained from each participant at the conclusion of the interview to help capture some of the more basic demographic information and occupational work experiences.

<p align="center">Analysis Procedures</p>

The interviews were transcribed to capture the information. Some adjustments were made, such as abbreviating interviewer statements (Rubin, 1979) and omitting details that were unrelated or unimportant to the focus of the interview. Additionally, the data analysis process was aided by the use of a qualitative data analysis computer program called Ethnograph V4.0 (Seidel, Friese, Leonard, July 1995). The program helped me to notice promising data for further analysis. Although the categories of the research provided broad topics for initial coding, the interview data elaborated on the general themes, adding greater specificity to them.

I manually went through the transcribed data to identify themes and patterns common among the interviewees. I organized the data into like categories to review frequency of themes and patterns. Then, I coded the data in a format for the ethnograph software to analyze based on my initial observations. This process helped me develop a code map for the

software to use in searching segments of the data to summarize, synthesize, and sort into meaningful descriptions, patterns and categories.

A focus group was convened at the home of the contact person. The purpose was to gather additional information specifically about the glass ceiling that was stimulated by the interviews. The objectives of the focus group were to define and understand the concept of the glass ceiling, explore the role, impact, and outcome of the glass ceiling on careers, discover the possible cures for glass ceiling barriers, and identify the role of affirmative action. The value of the focus group for the research is that it provided unfiltered comments from a segment of the target population to gain insight into the beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions of the interest group that may help open doors for others to succeed.

Six members of the target group participated in a three hour session. Because of the limited number of participants, this research must be considered in a qualitative frame of reference. This information cannot be projected to a universe of similar respondents. However, for the purposes of this study, the comments are relevant and provide significant insight into the perceptions of this target group. These comments are included as part of the analysis and conclusions.

Point of View

As a member of the target population, I have vested interest in this study as a result of my profession. I manage the Equal Employment Opportunity Program for two field level activities employing 3200 employees geographically dispersed nationwide with headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan. I serve as the principal advisor to both commands and supervise a staff of eleven employees. I successfully moved through the pipeline from clerical to computer programmer management intern to my current GS-13 senior level management position as Director of Equal Employment Opportunity. I was promoted to this position in December, 1988.

I would like to make a statement concerning my own bias, in the form of a short history of the development of my interests and values as they are related to the subject of this research. My mind is not a blank slate on the research questions of this proposal. In fact, my interests, values and close acquaintance with the research problem are the sources of motivation for this study. I have a high level of curiosity and interest in this study based on my professional as well as personal involvement with feminism and equal employment opportunity with respect specifically to African American women. It is such prior involvement that has lead to my interest in this study. I start this study, then, with a

recognition of a "vested interest" in its outcome--not for the outcome to take one direction or another, but with an energy developed from the concerns of my own experience that will sustain the details of the exploration and with the recognition that all scientific investigations begin with the observer's "biased" curiosity.

It is not, of course, possible to keep one's research purely "objective" and untarnished by one's interests, values or presence (Bateson, 1979; Glazer, 1972; Heisenberg, 1958; James, 1912; Johnson, 1975; Matson, 1966; Myrdal, 1969). One must be aware, as William James points out, of ideas that seem especially important to us: "desire introduces them; interest holds them; fitness fixes their order and connection" (James, 1912, p. 15). I was extra sensitive to this predilection in collecting and analyzing the research data by not allowing my personal views to affect how the opinions of others were summarized and incorporated into the study.

CHAPTER V

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Profile of the African American Female Executive

The demographic profile of executive women in the Defense Logistics Agency provides a composite view of what the target group of women are like. They have worked in the federal government an average of 21-25 years, and have been senior level managers 2-4 years. They all have a college education with 20 percent having doctorates, 60 percent masters' degrees and 20 percent bachelor degrees. The average age grouping of the executives is 40-49 years. Fifty percent are married and have an average of two children. The major work experiences were in five occupational areas of work: Financial Management, Human Resources, Corporate Law, Contract Management and Logistics Management. Not surprisingly, most have worked in at least four of these major career occupations, thereby suggesting that a wide variety of experience is needed to reach this level of success.

This section summarizes responses to each of the eight focusing questions in turn.

Focus Question #1: Describe at least three key events in your career that you feel contributed to your success.

Each of the executives stated that at least two of the following factors significantly contributed to her success: (a) mentoring, (b) high visibility experiences, (c) networking/support system, (d) self-worth and self-confidence, (e) survival skills, (f) spiritual values, (g) a strong work ethic, and (h) education/basic credentials.

Mentoring

Mentoring was the most significant factor in the lives of the majority of the executives. Rather than being the token female, these executives seemed to reach out to bring others along in the pipeline. They provided guidance on how to move forward based on their personal experiences.

Personal support was a key component of the mentoring relationships. One executive commented that her "mentor was very concerned about her as a person and that without a doubt the experience with her greatly contributed towards the kind of person she is..." These women collectively always had a supervisor or someone higher up saying, "you are just absolutely sharp and we want you to apply for this position."

These executives also indicated that they found mentoring from many sources. I think this is a key point. Generally, women just beginning their careers tend to look for one individual to meet all of their needs and this is insufficient.

An example from my own experience as a member of the target group validates the fallacy of having one mentor trying to meet all needs over a long period of time. This individual was the person who promoted me and opened doors for growth. Initially we worked well together, but as time went on, I outgrew his ability to provide mentoring support. His management style was not one of empowerment which is the environment in which I work best. It was time for a change and this individual recognized it in time to prevent a permanent breach in the relationship. I found a way to go outside the limitations of my job by volunteering for various high visibility assignments to open up more growth opportunities.

Not all of the executives had successful mentoring. One executive comments that often she was the only African American person at that level so there was insufficient mentoring or role modeling. White males were not willing to provide this experience or support that was available to other people. As a result, she faltered, stumbled a lot, her self-confidence was shaken and her self-esteem level was certainly not where she was functioning at her best. Her experiences tend to support

previous studies that suggest white managers are reluctant to mentor African American men or women (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 45).

These executives felt very strongly about mentoring other black women. They individually had meetings or sessions to share some of the lessons learned that they had experienced. They felt that it is important to make sure that these women begin to appreciate who they are and the kinds of things they need to do to further their own careers. One executive commented that she was "placed in some positions because management wanted to control her."

As a member of the target population, I personally experienced the ability to make a difference for aspiring young women or the need to "step up" and take the initiative to truly help someone understand what it takes to begin the journey to success. I feel it is inherent in my responsibility as an African American female senior level manager who has the power to bring others along in the pipeline and to groom them for success. One example is related to my interviewing a young African American female for a position in my office along with others seeking the position. The African American female was a single parent, came from a background of welfare dependency and was trying to get her first job. She had attended a social service job training program to learn clerical skills to

qualify. She had an intense desire to have a better life and set a good example for her younger siblings. She expressed to me that she would be the first one in her family to have a job and not be dependent on welfare.

I noted that she had seemed surprised to see that she was being interviewed by another African American female "in charge" of the office. When she walked into my office, my first impression was that her dress was too tight, she wore braids and she had on high heels and black stockings accentuated with long, curved nails. She looked more appropriately dressed for an evening out rather than an office interview. However, before the interview concluded, she had demonstrated her skills for the position and her intense desire to work. As she was leaving, she commented to me that "if I don't get this job, would you just please call me and tell me what I did wrong so I won't make the same mistake on the next interview because if I don't get this job, I'm going to keep trying until I do."

Those words changed my mind about not hiring her and caused me to really think about what mentoring is and what I could do to help this young person succeed. I closed the door, invited her to sit down again and told her very directly that she was dressed inappropriately, she was wearing too much makeup, her grammar was poor and to get rid of the braids. I told her I thought her braids were beautiful but when you are working

with white people, you just want to fit in, not stand out at this level of her career. Everything I told her could be corrected and I was willing to help. Then, I hired her. I encouraged her to think of a career rather than a job. That's the way to move ahead. She learned well and received several promotions as she demonstrated her capabilities.

As I reflected upon my decision to hire this individual, my personal thoughts were that white people see the same things I saw in this individual and probably would not have hired her. White people hire other whites, women hire other women; African Americans must hire other African Americans when they are in positions to do so. To do less is simply maintaining the status quo of tokenism. It is no longer acceptable to be the only "one" in a group if one has the power to improve these statistics. African American women are aware that helping people on the bottom automatically helps everyone else. This awareness comes from an understanding of the past and an appreciation of how change comes about.

One executive made a very significant comment in making a distinction between mentoring and sponsoring. She stated that:

> ...sponsorship is even more important than mentoring. The difference is that mentoring is a plan of action or a road map laid out. You can pick a mentor or someone can choose to be a mentor for you. Sponsoring has nothing to do with a road map or performance. It's all about exposure and they will set you up in an image

so that others will perceive you as being that person that is going to be up there.

They will throw the educational part on you as far as mentoring saying if you do such and such you can reach your goal and get on track. But, when they choose to sponsor somebody, that plan goes out the window. They have already tagged you for success and will open doors for you automatically. The young white males come in expecting to be pulled up.

A lack of mentoring was identified as one of the major barriers to success in the study "Good for Business: Making Full Use of the Nation's Human Capital" (1995, p. 8). Clearly, the comments from the executives participating in this study confirmed that mentoring was essential in moving up the corporate ladder of success.

High Visibility Experiences

Previous studies, as discussed in the literature review, suggest that having a variety of experiences leading to high visibility is important to career success (Pipelines of Progress: A Status Report on the Glass Ceiling, 1992).

All of the executives interviewed indicated that a variety of high visibility experiences were important to their success. Many of them were able to prove they could handle difficult jobs by serving as acting supervisors when their supervisors were absent for short periods of time. One executive commented that "the variety of experiences I had helped me

develop a great deal of self-confidence, assuredness, and know how in terms of how to actually get things done." Another stated that high visibility assignments helped her "get the big picture that you cannot get anywhere else."

Unfortunately, people who are not given the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities through acting supervisory assignments or high profile task forces are often thought to be less well qualified than those who have had the chance to perform these assignments. Several executives referred to this as an example of glass walls--situations encountered by people who are not given the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities or sharpen their skills through special assignments. And, in fact, having not had the opportunity to improve their skills means that they probably are less well qualified for promotion. The problem with such conclusions, however, is that they are inherently unfair. Those who did not have the chance to work on the special assignments have not had an equal chance to improve their qualifications, through no fault of their own.

These comments tend to support other studies that suggest visibility, sometimes known as "face time", is a critical factor in breaking through the glass ceiling (Bell & Nkomo, 1990, p. 68). One study found that the denial of credential building experiences, both exclusion from

credential building and the discounting of the credentials that a woman holds, can prevent women from reaching top management positions (DataLine, 1991). Another study found that even though increased visibility may already be a strain, women at this level need to seek even greater visibility outside their organizations through community, professional, political, or other public involvement as a way of ensuring balanced feedback about her success (DataLine, 1996).

Taking on new challenges outside their comfort zones gave the women interviewed here the opportunity to be visible and to demonstrate their capability. As one executive commented:

> I never said no to a project that I was given I always accepted it. I always recognized that I got paid to do a job. I may not have liked it or agreed with it, but I recognized it as an opportunity to demonstrate what I could do.

Networking/Support System

There were visible and important signs of a highly supportive network among the participants. They accepted themselves as African Americans and as women who were willing to share their experiences and knowledge with each other. Their experiences ranged from calling upon a colleague for work-related information to developing long-term relationships with present or former work associates. Many of the executives used their positions to help other employees, particularly women in the

pipeline, to advance up the ladder or change career fields. Studies in the private sector have found evidence that women are often excluded from networks dominated by men, and therefore have less access to information and contacts which would enhance their advancement potential (MSPB, A Question of Equity, 1992, p. 24).

The findings in this study corroborate a study by Irons and Moore (1985) which identified what they termed the three most significant problems faced by Blacks: (1) not knowing what is going on in the organization or not being in the network (identified as the most serious problem by 75 percent of survey respondents), (2) racism, and (3) inability to find a mentor. These African American women executives recognized this fact and they began to develop their own "old girls" network to build a support system that functions similarly to the "old boys" network that continues to exist in the workplace. One executive commented that:

> African American women are beginning to reach senior level positions where they have the power to sponsor other African American women and move them around the organization. This is the only way we can change the color and gender of the pool for policy-making positions.

Another commented that:

> I think enough African American women are getting into leadership positions where they are bringing the right kind of folks along. At some point in time, there is going to be more than just one African American senior manager in the room.

Women managers as a group are also subjected to the isolation imposed by males at work. As a woman in management, the task of breaking into this male-dominated club can prove difficult, and one can be denied social support, contacts, opportunities and policy information (MSPB, p. 25). It has been estimated that a large percentage of all jobs in management come through personal contacts.

The informal relationships enhanced promotional opportunities not only for themselves, but for many others in the pipeline. For example, one executive stated that "working outside of my own sphere has been probably the most significant factor in advancing my career. Every job I ever got in the government, somebody called me. Not the person that owned the job, but somebody else."

Most of the executives strongly agreed that it is important to develop an informal network and support system to increase chances of success. Being a token African American woman can not only mean having no peer support, but also working in an environment which provides no role models in senior level positions. Numerous studies have shown that role models in higher management positions act as important influences in terms of career aspirations for others. One African American executive commented that "you must be kept inside the loop on issues you are held accountable for and that means developing an informal channel

of communication with peers and others that can keep you current on what you need to know."

One executive commented on the importance of the right type of networking:

> I have a stack of cards on the end of my desk. Anybody who wants to can call and get on my calendar. I don't even know who they are but it's making a way for other people. That's why you need to know who people are and you need their number. You need to have a relationship with them so that when you pick up the phone and say this is so and so, they don't say, 'who'?

A great example of this networking power is the fact that I benefited from this perspective for this study. I did not have to go outside of African American women to obtain what I needed. I asked for help in making the necessary contacts and received tremendous support from the group. One executive in particular used her power to help me gain access to the target group. I went to DLA, circulated throughout the building, talked to everybody I wanted to and accomplished what I set out to do--all without going outside the networking group. Networking is indeed a powerful tool when people understand its power and are willing to share.

The value of networking is that it increases access to information or superiors in the chain of command leading to visibility and enhanced promotion potential. These executives believed very strongly in networking, and were dedicated to using their own networks to help others reach their potential.

The perspectives gleaned from these executives support other research that shows that for women at this level, it becomes crucial to re-emphasize peer support and camaraderie. Since this is not available within the company, women need to assign this a high enough priority to take the time to develop peer relationships in other companies and industries. They also need to seek even greater visibility outside their companies through community, professional, political, or other public involvement as a way of ensuring balanced feedback about her success (DataLine 1996, pp. 4-5).

Self-Worth/Self-Confidence

A sense of self-worth and self-confidence were vitally important in the success of the executives in this study. Many of them had a "can do" attitude and were motivated by doing a job well and taking risks that opened up opportunities for advancement. One executive emphasized the need to exude tremendous self confidence in tackling the work so that those who follow can see what it takes to get ahead. She went on to share her story on how self-confidence can open doors:

> When I had my first interview for a senior level position, I just went in and answered the questions to the best of my ability. I did it with confidence because I am confident. I came out in the top three. Then we had to go before the top boss one-on-one for the final interview. His questions were extremely controversial type questions and you really didn't know which way to answer them.

Let me give you an example. One of the questions was 'what's going on in your command that would shock me'? Now, you would never think that you would get an interview question like that. What's political about that is that if you tell him some stuff that is going on that's shocking, you just ruined everybody you work for. Right? I, of course answered the question very well, was careful not to blame anyone specifically. I paraphrased it such that I didn't want any of my people to get any negative feedback, but yet I gave him some things to talk about.

This job is for me and no one else and let me tell you why I said that there is no one who had the perspective that I had on that position. After the interview was over he asked me if I had anything to say. I said very sincerely, yes. My name is on this job. I think that made such an impact at the time, it made him think, 'wow, if she really thinks her name is on that job, how can I possibly give it to someone else'. That is why self-confidence is so important; you have to feel it. you can't do it if you don't feel it.

I got a call after someone was selected. It was not me. Then the director called and said, 'I want you. You knock my socks off! I was just absolutely mesmerized by the way you answered those questions and how well you came across'. He said he didn't have any advice on how to do anything differently. The reason I didn't get picked was because this other person had considerably more years than I did. He said that I should just keep on charging ahead. I found that to be profound, extremely profound. It was the self-confidence.

The above example demonstrates why self-confidence is so important. It is important to feel it. To be self-confident, one must feel as this individual did. Another executive commented that:

You have to be true to yourself and don't give up who you are to fit into a corporate setting or culture of an organization. If you give up who you are, then you lose sight of yourself and this has a tremendous negative impact on your self-esteem.

All of the executives felt that having a high level of self-esteem was

critically important to overall success. African American women must be aware of their capabilities and be willing to use them.

Survival Skills

To succeed in getting to this level of success, most executives agreed on the need to learn about the survival of the fittest. To be in that successful group that is doing things leading to breaking the glass ceiling, one has to decide to accept things that cannot change and deal with some things that are not fair. There are different kinds of communication chains in every organization. It is important to learn what are considered the real communication chains, spoken and unspoken. There are some unspoken chains that exist in any organization and success requires learning what those chains are. It is similar to unspoken grapevines. Learn who is a survivor; who to talk to; who to know; and what to say when talking to these individuals.

The other consideration, commented one of the executives, is that "the survival of the fittest really means that a person who really understands, a person who really understands, a person who stays with the clique and plays the role becomes the fittest. Because they fit the mold, they survive." Knowing the unspoken chains that exist in the organization and learning to communicate with the right people were critical

survival skills to these executives and enhanced their overall success in advancing their careers. Another executive emphasized the point by commenting: "you have to be cognizant that everybody is not on the same sheet of music that you are on, so you have to protect yourself, be able to maneuver in that type of climate."

There is a need to be careful after crossing that line because now one is in the middle. On the one hand, there are employees to be protected and on the other, managers at a higher level expect a lot. To walk that line, an individual has to have respect from employees and management.

All of the executives commented that a survival skill one has to learn is that there are different kinds of communication chains in every organization. It is important to learn what are considered the real communication chains and those unspoken grapevines that exist in order to be successful. One participant stated clearly that "the people you interact with frequently will know that you are not in the clique and will know what you don't know." Others agreed that one has to learn who these people are, learn whom to talk to, what to say, and when to say it in order to achieve success. The bottom line seemed to be the need to learn the personalities of upper management. Another executive went on to comment that:

Survival of the fittest is a person who really understands, a person who stays with the clique and does what the clique wants to be done... backs off when they should, bows down when they are supposed to, become the fittest...You have to really fit the mold and you have to learn what the mold is to fit.

She goes on to state emphatically:

I have rebelled at that mold because it is very difficult for me to fit some of these molds. We still have to deal with the female, the black, the racist, the whole concept that there is a clique that is already in existence and how do you change that whole box. That's one of the things that DLA tried to do in 1993 when they restructured. They tried to get rid of some of the box that existed from the early 1950s. Their restructuring concept was 'let's change that box, put some new blood in the box...see if we can cause some change in the agency.' It changed how a lot of people do things.

You have to become part of that clique and you have to think like the clique while you are in the building. You walk out the door and you are in a new box. It is like, 'I am going in this door and I am going to become a different person and when I walk out, I'll be somebody else.' That's the way it has to be. If you are an individual such as myself--one who has a great deal of pride--it's not easy. You must grow a thick skin. You must accept the fact that you are what you are and we sometimes cause the reaction that we receive from others by the way we act ourselves.

She also emphasized that African American women must be alert, always on their toes, and must sometimes accept decisions even when they disagree. They must become aware of how they present themselves more so than men. They are always being judged by someone and must learn that being at the top sometimes call for them to have to accept arrangements that are not always right or fair, and that is tough to take.

Spiritual Values

A common spiritual bond was a powerful motivator for the majority of the women participating in the study. One executive's comments reflected the spiritual values of the group when she stated that she "owes all of her success to a higher being and her faith is the reason she has been able to achieve success." Many of them attended the same church, lived in the same community by design and met at each other's homes occasionally for philosophic and spiritual discussions. It gave a sense of unity and reflected a level of networking and camaraderie among these successful individuals that was a distinct pleasure to observe.

Many of the executives commented that there are tremendous obstacles to overcome in climbing the ladder of success. They all expressed with great conviction that they needed that extra source of support, strength, and affirmation that their spiritual values provided to overcome the tough times.

However, these women were highly confident in their abilities and established a coping mechanism that minimized the impact of having to be validated by others. This was accomplished by relying on faith and the power of the spirit to see them through, excelling at their jobs, challenging the status quo, and demanding to be recognized for their abilities.

Work Ethic

The majority of the executives commented on the need to have a strong work ethic to succeed. One executive stated that she learned early on to work hard because she "came from a poor family and you don't have the luxury of being lazy." Her work ethic has opened many doors for her. Another executive felt that being able to do it was an absolute necessity for African American women: "You can't come in being merely mediocre. You must demonstrate a level of excellence that is unquestioned. There are fundamental requisites to success in life and this is one of them." In summary, one executive commented, "be focused, be there when you are supposed to be, complete jobs and always take on tough assignments no one else wants."

One executive commented that:

> even as a clerical person I worked very hard, just did my job so well that it was recognized. I was able to get into this field because someone said 'my God, this woman is a producer! She works so hard, let's give her more responsibility'.

Education

Education was mentioned by all of the executives as being important to their career advancement. Over 80 percent of the interviewees had masters' or doctoral degrees. This seems to indicate that successful

African American women recognize the value of having an education to open doors to success. This underscores the barrier to advancement of African Americans posed by the disproportionally small pool of African Americans with the educational credentials required for senior level management positions (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). This was supported by comments from the executives such as "taking on new challenges in education and goal setting ensure you have the basic educational credentials to get in", and "education is clearly a foundation." These comments indicate the high priority these women placed on educational credentials. They refused to allow education to be a barrier to their success.

One executive's comments were very clear on this issue: "Education was a factor in my success. In terms of getting a job in a major corporation, I felt strongly that it was not my education holding me back, but my race."

Another commented that "by challenging myself through educational achievement, I eliminated myself from any limitations that anyone else had set for me". Education is one of the key factors influencing a person's career advancement. African American women recognize that education is a de facto requirement in order to be selected for promotions in government. Although a college degree is not technically required for

most jobs and a candidate cannot be excluded from consideration simply because she or he lacks a degree, those candidates without a degree may find themselves never included in the pool of best qualified candidates from which selections are actually made.

Barriers Encountered

<u>Focus Question #2</u>: What major barriers did you encounter?

Central to any discussion of differences in career advancement opportunities is an underlying assumption that employees who perceive problems in their advancement feel they have hit some type of obstacle or roadblock in their career which is not based on merit. Many of the executives commented that there are tremendous obstacles to overcome in climbing the ladder of success. These executives noted that African American executives face many barriers in career advancement, and they are complex and varied. The most frequently named barriers identified by these women are: (a) racism and sexism, (b) affirmative action, (c) lack of validation, (d) "defined and confined", and (e) personal barriers.

Racism and Sexism

Perhaps not surprisingly, a majority of these women felt that being female and African American hindered their career advancement early on

in their careers. They were promoted less often, even when they had the same amount of education and work experience. Attitudes and stereotypes about women and people of color also made it very difficult for these women to advance in their careers. These included assumptions that women, in general, do not have the necessary qualifications for their jobs. One executive commented that she was "being defined and confined by virtue of my race or sex." These kinds of stereotypes can create an environment that can impact significantly on the overall success of African American women's effectiveness, self-confidence, and job satisfaction.

Another example of the double disadvantage of being female and African American cited by one of the participants is reflected in the comment that "because you are African American and female, the usual rules don't apply to you." She went on to explain that while co-workers may come in late, take long lunch breaks, and consistently miss established due dates, African American women cannot do the same because they will be perceived as nonproductive, untimely, and unresponsive to work requirements. There are two sets of rules: one for whites and one for African Americans and other people of color. For African American women, the double barrier simply means that they must always demonstrate their competency to confirm that they belong.

Racism was a greater concern of these executives than their role as

women competing with white females for career advancement. Nonetheless, according to the Good for Business Study (1995), when compared to the white executives, African American women felt that they received less organizational support, did not perceive their work to be as significant, and felt that they were in positions where they had less control and authority. This perception was illustrated by one executive's comments on a female selection for a top position: "Why would you give the very first mover and shaker position to a white woman? It seems that when it comes to selecting women for key positions, white women tend to get the first consideration."

Other executives felt that early on in their careers, white females benefited the most from targeted career ladder promotions and upward mobility positions. It was perceived that racism played a very strong part in this process and that, as a result, African American women have fewer opportunities to demonstrate their skills and knowledge.

These perceptions support previous research that suggests African American women face a glass ceiling that is much lower than that of white women. As indicated in the Good for Business Study, the glass ceiling for African American women managers is perceived as a concrete wall and those closed in behind the wall cannot learn about the organization because they are isolated from the mainstream of organizational life and,

worse, they are invisible to the decision makers on the other side (1995, p. 68).

African American women also experience a different type of back-lash than do white women. As the other side of the coin, they are often seen as a perfect selection for workplace diversity as related to race and gender. As an African American female, they satisfy both the need for a person of color, male or female, and represent the female gender. In other words, it is believed that for diversity purposes, an employer gets two points by hiring a woman of color—one for gender and one for race— then the employer is getting two for the price of one. One executive stated that:

> There is a perception within the African American community that given a choice between hiring an African American female or an African American male, an employer will select the female the majority of the time because they view them as less threatening. As long as African American women are selected, African American males can be excluded because they can point to the female and say we have a person of color in the work unit.

This mentality certainly exists, and some even claim that African American women are doubly advantaged rather than doubly burdened by their race and gender. Natalie Sokoloff (1992) who has studied African American women in the professions says this alleged "twofer" advantage is a myth. It is one of many myths that flourish when gender intersects with race or ethnicity, creating problems for women of color that white

women do not face.

The findings in this study do not agree with this conclusion. The executives interviewed were very much aware of this perception and suggested that there is some validity to it based on the lack of African American males in the DLA workforce. They were also greatly concerned about this issue.

Lack of Validation

African American women must constantly prove their suitability for executive positions and earn the respect of their peers. Most of the executives felt that they were constantly striving to be validated by the system or by society. One executive commented that "in the management structure, when you sit around a table, white males are constantly validating each other and you think what is this little game going on at this table?" By validation, she meant constantly telling each other how wonderful they are, what a great job they did. Sometimes, as a result of this process, African American women give up on being validated by their white peers.

A good example of this lack of validation was expressed by one executive as she commented:

> My biggest peeve is that if I say something they call me in to challenge me. I have given them an opinion but yet still, it is not good

enough until someone else, usually a white male, confirms. He doesn't know zero about the subject, but they will call him and say, I want to know what you think. Now, I worked the problem, I'm the one who has the expertise, but yet, it is not good enough until it comes from him. It's like they want to refuse to recognize your expertise and knowledge almost across the board in any area.

This executive also observed that "quite a few white males around DLA seem to suffer from a disease called the 'smartest person in the room syndrome', which is, I am the smartest person in the room, no matter what anyone thinks, I am the smartest. They continue to validate themselves and exclude others." The issue of validation continues to be a major problem for African American females in the workplace.

Rosener suggests that women and minorities experience "competency testing" where white males often do not. They must prove over and over again to those with whom they work that they are competent. They must put in extra-long hours, produce more than anyone else doing the same job and, most important, show they "fit" in. Men also have to work hard and produce; but men, particularly white men, are assumed to be competent until proven otherwise. Women and minorities are assumed to be incompetent and continually have to prove otherwise--doubly so if they are minority women.

An article in the Government Executive (April 1996), author anonymous, indicated that black female executives credit hard work, self-confidence and perseverance with getting them past obstacles. They have

to work hard, have to be the best and always, be prepared. The presumption of competence doesn't automatically attach to black women. They must demonstrate their competence time and time again (Government Executive, 1996, pp. 13,21-22).

Role modeling presents the opportunity for others to come to them for advice. This provided the opportunity to give feedback on how the individuals seeking help were perceived and on what they needed to do to sharpen their skills--meaningful feedback for getting ahead. "This is important because one does not always get validated from things one does, particularly women, one just does not get validated," commented an executive. She further pointed out that this is an invaluable role for successful African American females to perform to lend credibility to their own success.

Defined and Confined

There was a general feeling among the executives that there were certain positions within the organization that were acceptable for blacks and women to hold. These were predominantly number two positions such as deputy, special assistant or pink collar positions-- careers where the majority are women. The levels of responsibility are not there. This results in African American women being defined and confined in lower

levels of responsibility in senior management. One executive reflected:

> It's clearly defined that you are not going to be the mover and the shaker. The men aren't having heartburn because you are the deputy of this or the special assistant to someone. They have concern only when you are a key person in the decision making process.

Another executive expressed very strong feelings about limitations being placed upon these executives because they were black and female:

> I think it is absolutely critical for us now, not to focus or even think that we might even be remotely limited by being placed in certain positions...I'll tell you what, there is absolutely no limit for me; regardless of who might think so! Anything I want to do, I can do it when I get ready to do it. I think it is critical for us to think along those lines because these positions are just stepping stones. It is just a matter of getting your foot in the door.

Studies of employment practices of men and women, including the Department of Labor's glass ceiling study, have found that women are more often found in staff positions. It is assumed those are more nurturing kinds of positions. This issue generated so much discussion with the idea of being confined by someone else in terms of what options were available to African American women that the daughter of one of the senior executives, who was present during this discussion, shared a poem with the group that she had written. It captured the essence of the concerns expressed during the dialogue in a visceral way. The poem is used here with her permission:

UNDEFINABLE
Welch Hargrove

Labels, names, abstract definitions, titles, and designations
all mean one thing - limitations. Our society finds its security
in making things small and controllable by labeling limitations.
Yet, this I declare unto you, label me not for I am not what
or who you think I am or was or will be. Limit me not for I
shall be all that I can and want to be.

How dare you say because I am black or white, male or
female, young or old, Christian or Jew, or whatever else
I am or am not that I "belong" here or there or that I can
only be this or that?!? How dare you try to define me - the
undefinable, ever changing being that I am! I am everything
and anything I want to be and grow to be. I belong wherever
I want and come to be.

You cannot define me for your own security to limit me to
your mental underclass society! I was born like any other
and each day renewed with new knowledge, understanding,
and growth. Every day a different person from the day
before and the day after.

I am ever changing and growing - I am undefinable and
therefore, unlimited in what I can do and be. Defined in
life I will never be - only in death will the world attempt
to label my memory - for I am undefinable and unhindered
by the limits of your labels.
And only God knows my NAME.

This unpublished poem is included here to emphasize how strongly

these executives felt about the whole issue of the limitations that other

people try to impose as one climbs the ladder of success. All agreed that

the poem captured the essence of their feelings about being confined and

defined by others.

Personal Barriers

Almost all of the executives mentioned the need to be well prepared and well educated. This allows a foot in the door. They also felt that many of the barriers were set by the people themselves not wanting to take on new challenges or new responsibilities. As an example, personal priorities sometimes had an impact on career advancement for these executives. One individual reflected on such feelings:

> I am not looking for any real promotions right now because my family is my first priority. I am tired. I am working some fairly long hours and my commute is long. Then I have all of the things women usually have to do when they get home; provide for my kids, my spouse. And that is not to say that my husband is not there for us, he is part of the equation. But when you factor in long commutes, long hours in the office, then rushing home and doing all those things you have to do at home, plus planning after hours events for them; it does take its toll.

> You can decide if you want to do all that. Some people may be better at it than I am. I don't want to do anymore than I am already doing. Right now I am contributing to society at work, at home, and in the community. I know this is the price of success but at this stage of my life, I am unwilling to pay this price; I have other priorities.

A different perspective was articulated by another executive as she commented that barriers exist only as one perceives them. She indicated, for example, that she was the only female in a class with seven white men, and all of them had relocated to get ahead. She decided that she was not going to move. Consequently, she was not promoted as quickly.

She asked herself the question, was the barrier that she was black and a woman or that she did not go where necessary to obtain the better job? The others went and every one of them received a job in the target career field.

She went on to say that barriers are only there if one allow them to be. Either go around them or through them, and do not spend a lot of time thinking about them. She suggested that women should not incorporate barriers but should look for ways around them. Many of the barriers that a person cannot get around are erected by the individuals themselves.

One executive stated that filing an EEO complaint was a personal barrier. She feels that filing the complaint created repercussions and had a direct impact in a subtle way on her ability to advance through the system. Although there are such regulations to protect employees from reprisal for filing complaints, research indicates that employees experience reprisal in subtle ways as a result of filing complaints.

Overcoming Barriers

Focus Question #3: How did you overcome these barriers?

All of the executives experienced barriers to achieving success. Most stated that one important way to overcome barriers is to stay

focused. This means not listening to other people predicting failure to achieve a certain level of success. A "can do" attitude is a must according to these executives. Several commented one must know what your barriers are and then figure out how to move around them. One executive proclaimed that:

> Everyone has barriers; blacks have barriers; whites have barriers; women have barriers. You decide how to get around them and just decide that this is life. Barriers are only barriers if you allow them to affect you. I think that is the key in being successful.

She went on to state that "once you get past that 'they did it to me' type feeling, you realize that they just did it and you were there. It is only a barrier if you keep standing there."

Another executive proclaimed that she refused to acknowledge that barriers existed. She persisted in her convictions with an eye towards the particular goal she wanted to achieve. All the executives seemed to feel the need to do whatever is necessary and be ready to take advantage of opportunities when they arise. This proactive approach helps to reduce the number of negatives that others can identify. As one executive pointed out, "then management can't say to you, well, you want to get ahead, but what are you doing to help yourself. You have got to give the system something to show that you are different and really working hard to advance your career."

The majority of the executives agreed that if one is unhappy in a position, find another job that meets one's expectation and level of interest. They cautioned that failure to change jobs may lead to a negative attitude that will start to reflect in one's work and prove detrimental to one's career. Sometimes it may be necessary to move one step backwards to move two steps forward to land a position that allows growth and meets a desired skill level.

Racism was a difficult barrier for many of the executives. As one executive commented:

> You need a strong sense of self-confidence and self-worth to overcome this barrier. I see the weakness in this situation as not me but weakness on this other person's part who has a problem dealing with African American women and minorities. I don't get as much credit or visibility as I might or I should because of it.

"Being well prepared and well educated are essential" commented one executive. "This allows you to get a foot in the door." Other ways to overcome barriers mentioned by the executives were using outside activities to develop confidence, skills, and self-esteem, developing own informal network for information, and occasionally making adjustments in one's attitude about taking on new challenges and responsibilities.

Leadership Style

Focus Question #4: Is there a particular leadership style that

contributed to your success?

The participants were asked if there was a particular leadership style that contributed to their success. The majority of the executives did not suggest a particular style of leadership specifically. However, their descriptions involved words or phrases that indicated people were their primary concern. They all perceived their role as one of providing leadership rather than management. This encompassed helping to define the vision and inviting people to be creative.

The collective comments of the executives suggest that there is a common consensus in their desirable leadership style and degree of influence. It includes high levels of coaching and development elements and facilitating professional growth of subordinates. There was also a general consensus that the military leadership style, i.e., an authoritarian approach, does not work in a civilian environment. This point is very significant since all of these women work in an organization that has a large percentage of military senior level managers.

One executive suggested that each person who is successful must develop her own style. She is an original and cannot make up a style. There are characteristics one can pick up from other people but one cannot copy a style. She also made the interesting observation that "you won't find five people in this building that are people oriented although

they think they are. Being people oriented means that you really care about people." She further commented:

> I didn't say I was people oriented, but I have a line of people coming to see me almost every day; people I don't even know. But I don't go around saying I am a people person--they say I am a people person, I don't have to. And, that is the difference. I don't have to go around saying I am; they say I am.

Sally Helgesen's 1990 study of female managers concluded that women operate most effectively by being in the middle of the action— listening, communicating, and empowering others to act. Helgesen coined the phrase "web of inclusion" to describe what she sees as an alternative to the traditional command and control. Helgesen's conclusions are reinforced by the work of Anne Jardim (1977), Dean of the Simmons Graduate School of Management, who uses the term "centrarchies" to describe a circle-like organization that she believes women tend to favor. University of California professor Judy B. Rosener (1990) describes the leadership style of successful women as "interactive", a model that emphasizes positive interactions with others. Based on her study of International Women's Forum members, Rosener concluded that a "second wave" of executive women are "succeeding because of—not in spite of—certain characteristics generally considered to be feminine and inappropriate in leaders" (pp. 119-25).

At the same time, it must also be noted, as Dawn-Marie Driscoll

and Carol R. Goldberg (1993) point out in <u>Members of the Club:</u>

> Management theories that favor less authority at the top and a more participatory style have been around for a long time...male-oriented cultures as diverse as Japanese companies or Levi-Strauss seem to have perfected the art of participatory management (p. 73).

Participative management and people-oriented styles seem to be the preference of the majority of these executives in describing successful leadership characteristics. Their comments support Rosener's and other research that suggest "women on average, exhibited and preferred the interactive leadership style" (p. 12). Several of the participants indicated that their leadership style was generally participative and situational, as no one style worked the same for every situation.

Leadership and Power

I was surprised to find that the women interviewed in the study did not view their leadership positions in traditional ways of expressing power usually inherent in senior-level positions. The traditional kind of power springs from a title and the ability to reward people in some kind of a formal way. These women tended to develop non-traditional ways of motivating people by using their personal power rather than structural power. Their power tends to be based not on who they are and what position they hold, but what they know and how they can make one feel a part of their team. Their power tends to be based on interpersonal skills.

Several of the executives commented that this is very important "when one has to make quick decisions based on your own intuition." They see power not as a personal goal, but as a tool to get things done.

Benefits of Penetrating the Glass Ceiling/Lessons Learned

Focus Question #5:   What are the positive benefits of having penetrated the glass ceiling? Lessons learned?

Tangible Benefits

The tangible benefits identified by the executives included good pay which provided economic freedom. One executive commented that "there is a point when money is not an issue, but one of the best freedoms is the freedom to control it." The general consensus among the participants was that money is a great liberator and it provides some security for the future.

Intangible Benefits

The executives identified intangible benefits such as having privileges and status, freedom to influence others, the value of being respected in their field, being considered an expert who can get things accomplished, and satisfaction with their work. A key benefit seemed to

be the level of people with whom these executives interacted on a daily basis. These individuals were well connected within the power circle, and they had the big picture. At this level, they have certain responsibilities that they have to execute and these executives liked to play in that arena. One executive commented that "just being at this level, one is exposed to a lot more...one begins to see the possibilities." Freedom of choice in their lives that success at this level made possible was significant to these women. Another executive commented that "the position gives me a platform to say things and to make a difference in other people's lives."

A significant benefit expressed by all of the executives was the ability to empower people and foster good working relationships within the work unit. Most felt they had a highly positive impact on the morale, productivity, and loyalty of their employees.

Lessons Learned

The cost of breaking the glass ceiling can be very political. A general consensus of the group on lessons learned is that everybody cannot be trusted. As an example, an individual can be sabotaged by upper level supervisors, subordinates, and people who want the jobs. As one of these well-placed African American executives commented, "one has to be very cognizant that everybody is not on the same sheet of music that you are

on, so you have to protect yourself." Successful managers must be able to maneuver in climates where there are some people who are not interested in their success and do things that can have an adverse impact on their careers. It may not be as obvious as not being promoted, but being viewed simply in a negative way. Such sabotage can have a detrimental effect on a person's ability to accomplish tasks. There will always be individuals who want to close the door and not let you go to that next level.

Advice for Others

Focus Question #6: What advice do you have for others trying to pierce the glass ceiling?

The success achieved by these executives led to a plethora of advice for others trying to achieve success. The most consistent advice was to learn the politics, learn the rules, and learn to play within those rules. The majority of the executives agreed on the need to make the system work for you, and do what is necessary to go where you want in spite of the rules of the system.

One important point several of the participants stressed is the need to be in the right when dealing with the system. As much as African American women would like to think so, the rules do not apply to them.

When the rules were written, they did not have minority females in mind so these women have to make the rules work for them.

One executive commented on the need not to be too aggressive. She went on to say that "you cannot break the glass ceiling on your own, you have to be pushed or pulled through it. Women often times go from assertive to aggressive too quickly and it just doesn't work in many situations." This executive went on to share a personal example of the mistake she made by being too aggressive when she had the opportunity to be pushed through the glass ceiling and the impact it had on her career success:

> I went on a training assignment for a year and they liked my work so well, they would not let me go back to my old job. They paid me to stay. My immediate boss was not the top person, but she shared with the top person how great I was and the fact that she was going to hire me. They had to increase my duties to the level of pay needed and both went out of their way to make sure it happened. So, I had a great relationship with my immediate boss and got to interact with the top person that helped select me for three years. I got to brief her and do all kinds of high visibility projects. She just thought I absolutely walked on water.

> Well, my boss, who was military, who also absolutely adored me, started to exhibit some leadership styles that really were not good. I really was her favorite child. I, out of everybody, could go in her office and say, you cannot demand that this whole group come in and work the weekend and come in to work the timeframe that you're asking for with no compensation. This was one of those directives where she was saying, come in. I want you working Saturdays and I want you to work from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. No ifs ands or buts about it! You can't come in from 9 to 6, this is it. I said that's just not a smart move. You're going to piss everybody off. They have already worked overtime. Don't do this. She later

on went and did some other really, really bad things. She even made racial remarks. She had a lot of pressure on her. She just started doing some really negative things to the workforce that was having a negative impact on the group.

So, as her confidant, I said this is not the thing to do. She started not listening to me over time. I was like, okay, you're the boss and I just wanted to tell you that this is not a good track to go on. This may come back to bite you later. Then, she started exhibiting some of that to me. I was sort of excluded from all of that stuff before. Then, all of a sudden, she started treating me like she was everyone else, which is the way it should have been all along.

She has said, 'well, we got this special project and for the next 6 months nobody is taking any leave. Not even a day of leave, forget it. The only time you are not to be here is if you are in the hospital'. Well, I finished my project early, which is typical of me. I had literally finished the project a month early. So, I put in a leave slip for a couple days leave. She approved it and then she changed her mind. I said, well, what is your rationale? Is my project not done? Is there something else I need to do? Tell me. I can work my butt off to get it done so I can still go on this trip I wanted to go on. She says, 'I am just not approving it'.

That really bothered me because there was no rationale for it. There was no work to be done. So, I chose to elevate that. Worse mistake I ever made in my life. I elevated it to this person who thought very, very highly of me, this top person. She called me and said, '(deleted), I am so sorry to hear that you've been under that kind of scrutiny'. When I elevated, I elevated everything that had been going on. She said, '(deleted), I am going to call (deleted) right now and tell her she doesn't have to be that hard on you guys. I didn't know she was getting all that pressure from me. I'm going to tell her it's not worth that and I would rather that the whole team project be a failure than for you all to have to go through this stress you're going through'.

It is interesting what happened after that. My immediate boss was so upset that she got called on the carpet that she tried to ruin my career after that. So, I went from a being able to walk on water person to a non-performer overnight. All of a sudden she started scrutinizing my documents. I did what I always did. Suddenly,

they weren't perfect anymore or even close to perfect. They were poor! So when it came down to my evaluation, this happened about 60 days after this incident, she gave me a Fully Successful rating. *(A Fully Successful rating means you are doing your job as required by your position and doing it well, but people with less than Exceptional or High Successful ratings usually do not get promoted to senior level positions).*

That incident, my leave for two days, totally changed my opportunity to break through the glass ceiling at that time. Just that one incident alone. If I would have had the foresight to know that would be the result, I definitely would not have done it. Even though I was clearly right, it was not a smart thing to do. I am still, to some degree, suffering from the incident a little bit. You cannot work at the highest level and have this cloud over your head about this incident.

By the way, it's not this incident that people look at. They look at she's got a Fully Successful rating, what does that mean? Nobody is going to go back and say, oh, that's because she had a run-in with her boss. The instructor told her to cool it and that was the end result. Nobody would ever think that which was clearly what it was all about. That's what I mean by sometimes being too aggressive or not picking the right fight can totally block your chances. Be careful.

This story suggests that there are political pitfalls that a woman has to be aware of in order to succeed. Women have to know what these pitfalls are and learn power moves to counteract the negative impact by making the system work for them. All of the executives agreed that when in an undesirable position, continue to develop, do not become stagnant or complacent and keep exploring opportunities. Most importantly, they all felt that having a positive attitude and being well educated are probably the most significant attributes in terms of moving up the career ladder.

Impact on Achieving Success

Focus Question #7: What impact, if any, do you feel you have made by achieving this level of success?

The executives were asked to comment on what impact, if any, they feel they were making by achieving this level of success. Many of the executives stated very strongly that their presence at the senior level had an impact on policy as it related to workplace issues. The most significant impact is their sensitivity to women's issues and achieving a "workplace- friendly" environment for families. One executive stated that her position "allowed her to ask for childcare and eldercare policies, flexible work hours, job sharing, and cafeteria benefit packages. They also were able to put programs in place that actively recruited women into the pipeline and designed programs to encourage them to succeed. The Program for Developing Managers designed specifically to provide skills for advancement to women in the pipeline was one such program. They are clearly advocates for initiating policies that are family friendly and understand the necessity of having policies that deal with balancing work and family responsibilities. They acknowledge that addressing gender issues is important not only for women but for the organization as a whole.

Another impact is that they were able to reinforce agency policies against racial bias and gender discrimination through proactive measures such as asking the right questions about what the organization could do to increase diversity. They also had input to the institutional agenda for decision making which allowed them to share their perspectives as part of the final outcome on policy decisions.

Most felt that they had opened doors for others to follow. One executive makes the point very well by stating:

> I think when you penetrate the ceiling, you remove all negatives; those ill-advised, preconceived negatives about what your level ought to be or what your ceiling ought to be. Surprisingly, it is up to you to make management believe that they did the right thing promoting you...as far as other people are concerned, it gives them hope. It sort of energizes them every now and then to see someone pierce the glass ceiling. It makes them say, 'got to get back on track, she made it'.

A significant impact for most of the executives seemed to be the opportunity to mentor others by creating upward mobility positions and assuring that other African American women are being selected for those opportunities that have, in the past, gone to men-- particularly white men in the agency.

Collectively these executives feel they changed some minds about preconceived perceptions about the ability of African American women to do a job. They have proven that they have the competencies necessary to be successful and have established the credibility that reflects confidence

in their abilities which in turn sets an example for others.

These executives felt that there were three considerations that were important in achieving success at this level: (1) the ability to impact policy, (2) the ability to help others achieve success, and (3) the ability to move people around in the organization in accord with mentoring and sponsoring individuals in the pipeline.

Affirmative Action

Focus Question #8: Do you feel your agency's affirmative action policies contributed to your success?

This question was an outcome of the focus group discussion and represented a double-edged sword for some of the interviewees. Based on the perception that white women seemed to be more acceptable and benefited the most from policies designed to help women, the African American executives were asked to comment on whether they felt affirmative action policies contributed to their success. The majority responded yes to this inquiry but there were varying perceptions on how much these policies contributed and whether or not the impact was positive or negative in the long run.

The positive effect is that it helped because managers felt as though they needed some African American women in key positions. The

negative effect was that once a minority has been selected, white managers are reluctant to select another minority even though that person is the best person based on overall qualifications. So, in a sense, this type of thinking inhibits the success of affirmative action, resulting in both benefits and barriers.

There were varying perspectives on the glass ceiling. One executive commented:

> The ceiling to every room is really the floor of another room. We have broken through the glass ceiling but there is another one. Every time you move to a different level, the floor of this room is the ceiling of the room below you. But that's not a problem because that is the way life is. There is always another ceiling. Every time you move higher, you see so many more possibilities. The higher up you go and the more you move, your vision changes. So, when you talk about the glass ceiling, that really is your floor now. That is why you do not recognize it so well, you have already gone through it. There is always somewhere else to go...there is always somebody up there trying to keep you from getting there; you are always evolving between the two.

Several of the women commented that through affirmative action they were able to get their foot into the door and then to go on and prove themselves. They also felt that their presence in the management group kept them honest in their discussions and decision making. One individual proclaimed:

> I think that if I had not been a part of the discussion, certain things might have taken place that couldn't take place because I was there and I was there to say, that won't do; you can't even equate the two. It's not that I am a watchdog, but I do think my presence keeps them honest.

Another executive reflected:

> Black women in senior level positions are super sharp and superior
> to most of their counterparts. In these times when you are having
> to do more with less and less people, the talent is going to end up
> being parallel because you are going to be looking at someone who
> is looking for the right solution to the problem...that woman is
> going to be recognized. I refuse to be kept down. I know I have a
> contribution to make and I am going to constantly push for it. If I
> cannot do it, then I am going to find an environment where I can. I
> will not let this glass ceiling hold me back. We cannot ever quit.

Most felt that affirmative action may have played a positive role in their selection. However, they all stated emphatically that they were essentially equal to their competitors and were selected based on their demonstrated value to the organization. The majority consensus was that the impact of affirmative action policies was a combination of two factors: first, that management looked at all the people who were qualified and someone said this person is very qualified and second, that this person brings a female role and an African American perspective to the position.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Nine Model Success Factors

All of the African American executives in this sample had a track record of achievements. They all demonstrated a personal drive to succeed by working hard, taking on tough challenges no one else wanted, and staying focused on their objectives. Other key success factors included the ability to deal with people, coupled with their variety of experiences, visibility, education, upward mobility, internships, and the basic possession of educational credentials. All have committed themselves to mentoring others and serving as positive role models for other African American women aspiring to penetrate the glass ceiling.

These successful women have created a new leadership model that has several distinguishing characteristics, including an unusual perception of decision making through consensus building, hard work, tenacious drive, and a willingness to break the rules. These individuals were willing to overcome whatever barriers existed in their rise to success and were not willing to allow others to define or confine them by virtue of their race or sex.

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The women who follow in the footsteps of the pioneers in this study should benefit from the advice and insights offered. Much of their advice is based on experiences that enabled them to make the developmental leaps that were important to their own success--the challenges of management, the struggle for acceptance as an African American female in the executive ranks, and the dilemma of achieving a balance between personal and career needs. Their advice is placed here into ten general categories. Each was highlighted in various interviews as something that is important for African American women to know as they seek to move into senior-level management positions.

These executives felt very strongly about key factors contributing to their success in penetrating the glass ceiling. The nine model success factors culled from the interviews are: (1) Survival Skills, (2) Informal Network/Support System, (3) Work Ethic, (4) Mentors and Sponsors, (5) A Sense of Self-Worth and Self-Confidence, (6) Spiritual Values, (7) Balance in Life, (8) Leadership Style, and (9) Cultural Identity.

Survival Skills

To succeed in achieving this level of success, all of the executives agreed that sometimes one must learn survival skills. This means that an individual must learn the rules and learn the politics. The person

must become politically aware of the politics of organizational life so necessary for advancement and how these elements impact on career opportunities.

A common thread distinguishes the African American female leadership model. Several executives emphasized that effecting change usually means breaking the existing rules. As one executive commented, "you certainly cannot be an African American woman in this society without thinking and hoping that the future will be better—and I am committed to making it better even if it means being controversial."

To succeed in climbing the ladder of success, one must "make the system work for you and one has to know the rules" commented several of the executives. The general consensus of the group is that the rules do not apply to African American women seeking to move ahead. One executive emphatically proclaimed that "you have got to learn that wherever you go there are sometimes situations that are not necessarily fair and they do not have to be." The way to succeed is "knowing that the system is not what we think it should be but knowing that you can still work through the system by being strong, by staying steadfast, by keeping focused on what you believe inside is the right thing to do."

"You must learn the corporate culture," commented another executive. "There is a behavior code in the organization that is not explained

in your orientation handbook. Often the do's and don'ts of the organization culture are subtle and difficult to define unless someone explains them to you." African American women have to learn the rules--when to speak, when to listen, when to be visible and when to take a step back. It is important for a woman at this level to become comfortable with and knowledgeable about the protocols and systems for making a job change at executive levels.

Informal Network and Support System

A number of the executives emphasized the importance of developing an informal network and support system to increase chances of success. Being a token African American woman means not only having no peer support, but also working in an environment which provides no role models in senior level positions. One African American executive commented that the individual must be kept inside the loop on issues where one is held accountable. That means developing an informal channel of communication with peers and others who can keep one current. She further stated that one may even have to develop an "old girls" network that functions similarly to the "old boys" network that continues to exist in the workplace.

"Cultivate contacts above and below you," reflected one executive.

Build alliances with as many people as possible. One never knows who may be in a position to help an individual move ahead. Let others know about your interests and aspirations. "Most importantly," she continues, "seek out those who have what you want and find out how they got it."

Work Ethic

The majority of the executives stressed the importance of a strong work ethic to succeed. One executive stated she learned early on to work hard because she "came from a poor family and you don't have the luxury of being lazy." Her work ethic opened many doors for her. Another executive felt that being able to do it was an absolute necessity for African American women: "You can't come in being merely mediocre. You must demonstrate a level of excellence that is unquestioned. There are fundamental requisites to success in life and this is one of them." To sum up, another executive commented – "be focused, be there when you are supposed to be, complete jobs and always take on tough assignments no one else wants."

Mentors and Sponsors

All of the executives commented that having a mentor or sponsor was an important element in their success. The kinds of help ranged

from detailed advice to general encouragement and visible assignments. One executive stated that she found mentoring from different sources and that an individual needs a variety of mentors because they all bring different qualities to the relationship. Another suggested that the organization was reaching out to African American women who had demonstrated a certain level of success. The agency had progressive ideas about women in senior positions, and it was a very positive environment. These mentoring and sponsoring relationships greatly enhanced the visibility and success of the executives.

As noted in one executive's comments, African American women now recognize the importance of not just having mentors, but also having female mentors. As a result of this awareness, they are increasingly becoming more aware of the need to be mentors for those who will follow in their footsteps. In developing these relationships and strong bonds, African American women in leadership positions succeed in raising, cracking and finally breaking through the glass ceiling more rapidly.

A Sense of Self-Worth and Self-Confidence

Most of the executives saw a sense of self-worth and self-confidence as extremely important. They indicated that "you must have a sense of your own personal self-worth and self-confidence. Without this, success

will elude the best people if you are not aware of your personal capabilities and willing to use them." African American women have learned that they have the power to create their own opportunities and that their full potential can be released by self-authority, esteem for one's self, and respect for one's group.

Spiritual Values

Spiritual values were an integral part of the cultural model guiding these African American executives. They relied very strongly on faith and the power of the spirit to help them overcome barriers confronting them as they climbed the ladder of success. They created a spiritual buffer zone forceful enough to permeate every aspect of their social and personal lives. Spirituality is the foundation from which these women move through their daily struggles. Their ability to tap into this greater strength provides focus, direction, and inspiration. Each of the women in this study expressed feelings that before all else, they gave thanks to their faith for having been able to achieve this level of success. Without this source of power, these women would not have successfully penetrated the glass ceiling. It made them survivors of the system.

Balance in Life

There was consensus among the executives that overall attitude is probably the most important factor in terms of moving up. One executive commented that "there is always another chain or ladder in your life." There is always something more an individual can do, but one has to want it. She states that some people might be happy with "this is the floor or this is the ceiling. You choose where you are going to be happy. This level of success is really just a platform." The common theme expressed by the executives is that the key to success is being able to overcome the major challenge of having a personal life and still meet the demands of a high-powered career.

Leadership Style

The collective comments of the executives suggest that leadership style is extremely important. Each individual must develop her own style and be an original. There are tips one can pick up from other people but one cannot copy a style and be as effective. Participative management and people-oriented styles seemed to be the preference of the majority of the women. Their overall leadership style most often was situational, interactive, cooperative, inclusive and personal.

Cultural Identity

African American women executives must be able to manage the cultural identity conflict of moving physically, cognitively, and emotionally between being African American female and the dominant White male culture that exists in the workplace. The findings of this study indicate that these African American women executives have found a way to overcome this cultural identity stress and strongly suggest that achieving a balance between the two cultures is absolutely essential to being successful in senior level management positions.

Contribution

The success factors of having a strong work ethic, a sense of self-esteem and self-confidence, keeping a balance in one's life, and personal leadership styles were consistent with previous research on women as a group (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Tharenou, 1990). Three factors are unique to African American women and differs from other findings in the literature: (1) the networking support system, (2) spiritual values, and (3) cultural identity. These factors combine a set of characteristics that create a cultural model of success for African American women.

Networking Support System

This study suggests that African American women are breaking new ground for supportive networks within the workplace. African American women, having finally begun to move into senior level positions of power and influence, are uniting to open up opportunities for other African American women. One of the benefits of having achieved this level of success is that they can bring people in behind them, put people in the pipeline who would otherwise not be there. There was a high level of agreement that being in these positions serves to help others to appreciate that success can be achieved because they know and see somebody who is already there doing it. I both felt and observed the support these women gave to each other within their circle of influence. These women are our new leaders. They will bring new experiences, new insights, and vision to their positions. All are committed to success and sharing it with others through effective mentoring and support systems. This style of networking will bring about fundamental changes that will have a lasting impact in the workplace and society as a whole. These successful women can and are willing to provide a nurturing environment for others. Most importantly, they are expanding their support network to include African American males to ensure they are part of the pipeline to future senior level positions. As one executive states, "we are in this

together and we need to help our black males since they are nonexistent in this workforce."

I observed that these women had developed non-traditional ways of motivating people by using their personal power rather than structural power to expand their networking circle. Their power seemed to be based not on who they are and what position they held, but what they know and how they can make one feel a part of their team. They used this power to bring others together for a common purpose of providing support through their interactive interpersonal skills. This is a very important factor since several of the executives commented that "when one has to make quick decisions based on one's own intuition, you need to know that you have support from your colleagues, if needed." These executives clearly see power not as a personal goal, but as a tool to make their networking and support systems work effectively.

These executives clearly see power not as a personal goal, but as a tool to make their networking and support systems work effectively. One executive captured the essence of having achieved success at this level by commenting, "if you haven't helped someone else achieve their goals, you haven't really taken full advantage of the inherent power to make input to policy decisions identified with senior level positions." Another executive proclaimed:

touching someone's life in a small way and being able to mentor other females is a major benefit of having achieved this level of success...I serve as a role model for other women and take the time to mentor women who aspire to reach the top of their fields.

Studies have found evidence that women as a group are often excluded from networks dominated by men, and therefore have less access to information and contacts which would enhance their advancement potential (MSPB, 1992). Even though an "old girl's" network exists for women as a group, African American women are not an integral part of the network. For African American women, it is crucial that they form their own support system to cope with the double bind of racism and sexism within the workplace. This will help reduce the feelings of isolation and the impact of not knowing what is going on in the organization.

<u>Spiritual Values</u>

The spirituality of these African American women begin with the institutional black church. The belief that a supreme being recognized them as equals to whites, recognized each of them personally as one of his children, and more important, that a supreme being was on their side, served as powerful medicine for frustrated hopes. This belief gave these executives a feeling of psychological and spiritual advantage within their lives.

As a whole, these executives accepted themselves as deeply spiritual beings and understood the essence of the larger natural order of things. One executive stated that "most African American women shared a connectedness with a spirit that is beyond themselves". "No matter what your religion", she further commented, "there is something about African American women that says we know our strength and our power comes from someplace else. I don't tackle anything significant without first asking for guidance and blessings. I think there is a spirituality that connects strong African American women." Their profound spirituality accompanied these women as they joined the senior management ranks and they continued to draw on it for support.

The success models for white women do not emphasize spirituality as a significant element for success. Margaret Henning and Anne Jardim (1977) interviewed twenty-five women executives and concluded that women need to excel in goal setting, planning, problem identification, problem analysis and techniques of problem-solving to be successful (pp. 7-10). Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) explained women's promotion to powerful positions as shaped by (1) organizational influences, such as selection and training; (2) interpersonal influences, such as networks and mentors; and (3) individual influences, including personality aspects, such as self-confidence (pp. 1-19). Spirituality is not identified as part of

these success models for women as a group.

The closest connection to spirituality is Patricia Harrison's positive belief system described in "A Seat at the Table (1994). According to Harrison, a positive belief system is the most critical quality of success. She notes that one must believe that the glass is half full not half empty. It is up to the individual to choose a view of a situation. She suggests that this is a fundamental belief, which anyone can choose to embrace (pp. ix-xvi).

Further evidence that white women do not embrace spirituality as part of overcoming obstacles is Bernay and Cantor's (1992) comment on women in leadership positions that:

> A Competent Self enables a woman to see the possibilities instead of the obstacles. Even when a possibility does not materialize and instead turns into an obstacle, the political woman will be able to draw on her Competent Self for the strength to weather the bad times and then continue to pursue her vision (p. 22).

African American women rely on spiritual support as well as their competency in the workplace.

Cultural Identity

All of these women had developed a deep appreciation of their cultural identity. This was evident from the various African American artwork on the walls in their offices, afro-centric dress, and comments.

Most notable was the sprinkling of African American paintings by artist Charles Bibbs throughout their offices. Bibbs is an internationally acclaimed artist whose work has a common theme that symbolizes the power and glory of the African American culture. His images portray the idea that the glory of a people is in their culture. It is not surprising that these successful women used his artwork to provide a common denominator in defining their identity and shared cultural experiences within the workplace.

Several wore colorful African dresses and jewelry that clearly reflected their African American culture. This is highly significant since many African American professionals in the mostly white workplace understand that habits and lifestyles that are distinctively African American may hurt their career advancement opportunities. As African American women, they face challenges that others do not. This suggest that once African American women have made it to the top, they are freer to express their true identities as African American women without fear of corporate repercussions. One executive emphasized this strong sense of independence, by commenting, "as African American women, we haven't been validated by the system or by society, so we have given up on being validated. We are who we are and we can say basically anything we want across the table."

For these successful African American executives, success seems to be a combination of helping others achieve success through supportive networks, being moved by the power of the spirit, and understanding their cultural identity conflict. They believe that the nurturing traditions of African American culture are ingrained in their cultural memories and collective spirit, and from them comes the source of their strength and the fortitude of their convictions.

Henning and Jardim's The Managerial Woman (1977) points out that "particularly important to the definition of a woman executive's reality is the need to cope with the cultural and social bias she faces at work." There were two points in the careers of the women they interviewed in the study when these biases would prove critical: the point of choice and entry, and the point at which the individual woman reached her highest career level. The first is concerned with the problem of getting the job, and the second with the problem of commanding the job (pp. 63-75). The African American women interviewed for this study not only face these barriers, but also must cope with the issue of their African American culture and maintaining a balance between their roles as women and as women of color in the workplace.

What the Future Holds

"It takes determination, discipline and just a bit of stubbornness to make it to the top when many people believe you belong at the bottom; but if you keep your eye on the prize, you can do it." (Boye, 1991, pp. 69-75).

The women executives I interviewed for this study exhibited determination, discipline and dedication. They demonstrated commitment to the organization and earned a chance to advance into senior level management. Their success stories demonstrate that hard work and talent will be rewarded and promoted.

The success stories of these individuals provide a model for successfully addressing glass ceiling issues. They are pioneers because they will be followed by other African American females seeking to advance to senior level management positions who see a brighter future because they see others achieving this level of success within the organization. One executive reflected that "hopefully, other African American women will feel that they, too, can rise within the ranks of DLA. I believe I have contributed to an overall positive view of women managers in DLA."

Another executive proclaimed:

DLA has a positive environment for African American women. I see a lot of great things in the future happening to a lot of African American women...the talent is going to end up being parallel

because you're going to be looking at someone who is seeking the right solution to the problem.

These executives felt that it was only a matter of time before other African American females in the pipeline will enter senior level management positions. Their mission for the future is to create mentoring opportunities to inspire and motivate others to succeed. They want to teach others the rules of the game and how to use those rules to their benefit. They want to teach others the necessary survival skills to become part of the survival of the fittest pool leading to opportunities for advancement.

The consensus of these successful executives on future perspectives was summed up by this overall insightful comment about being in senior level positions:

> The system can and does work. Use it, improve it to help others; it pays off. If you haven't reached back and helped someone else, then you have not fully taken advantage of the benefits of breaking through the glass ceiling.

The implications for educational policy change are significant because very little is known about the world of African American women in senior level government positions--their experiences, lessons learned, successes, failures, and their progression toward shattering the glass ceiling in the government.

This study has sought to illuminate the realities of how African American women succeed in breaking through glass ceiling barriers, what

difference they have made in achieving this level of success, and what advice and recommendations they can provide to others seeking to move beyond glass ceiling barriers.

The experiences of these women have provided a unique cultural model for African American women aspiring to advance to senior level management positions. The Government should reaffirm its commitment to equal employment opportunity and provide impetus for improving the status of African American women in senior level government positions. This will ensure that the government continues to be an equitable and fair employer of well qualified and successful leaders for tomorrow, a significant number of whom should be African American women.

Implications for the future of African American women in senior level government management positions and the impact on future leadership policies were revealed as they talked about their experiences. Most importantly, this study has provided new connections, insights, and understandings for African American women aspiring to dismantle, to remove, and to shatter the glass ceiling. It has also provided a better understanding of problems of equity in senior level positions.

African American women executives certainly have what it takes to make it to the top, to persevere, to overcome the double-edged sword of racism and sexism. The have opened doors for others to follow with their

success stories and visibility. "Still I Rise," the poem by Maya Angelou

(see Appendix E) personifies the success of the African American female

executive as she fights her way up the ladder of success:

And Still I Rise

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.

Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries.

Does my haughtiness offend you?
Don't you take it awful hard
'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines
Diggin' in my own back yard.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with you hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise

Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.

I rise.
I rise.
I rise.

Appendix A

Focus Questions

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FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. Describe at least three key events in your career experience that you felt contributed to your success.

2. What major barriers did you encounter?

3. How did you overcome these barriers?

4. Is there a particular leadership style that contributed to your success?

5. What are the positive benefits of having penetrated the glass ceiling? Lessons learned?

6. What advice do you have for others trying to pierce the glass ceiling?

7. What impact, if any, do you feel you have made by achieving this level of success?

8. Do you feel your agency's affirmative action policies contributed to your success?

OTHER COMMENTS: Please feel free to make any additional comments that you would like to add.

NOTE: Please provide a resume at the conclusion of the interview and any written notes. I have also included a supplemental demographics information sheet which I need to create a profile of the participants. All responses will be anonymous in the survey

Appendix B

Demographic Information Form

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DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. YEARS IN FEDERAL SERVICE

2. AGE

3. TIME IN GRADE

4. LEVEL OF EDUCATION

5. MARITAL STATUS

6. NUMBER OF CHILDREN

COLLECT RESUME FROM EACH INTERVIEWEE.

Appendix C

Consent Form

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CONSENT FORM

I voluntarily agree to be interviewed for this research project. I also understand that the final results of the project will be anonymous.

_____

Participant Signature

Appendix D

Human Subjects Institutional
Review Board Approval

.

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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: November 21, 1995

To: Velma Clay

From: Richard Wright, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 95-12-04

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "African American females and the glass ceiling within the Defense Logistics Agency" has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you must seek specific approval for any changes in this design. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

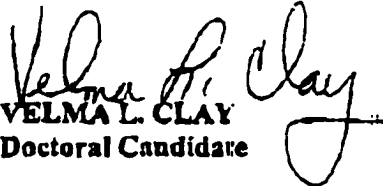The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: November 21, 1996

xc: Peter Kobrak, POLI SCI

Appendix E

Permission to Use Materials

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PERMISSION TO USE MATERIAL

Request permission to use the poem "AND STILL I RISE" by Maya Angelou in my doctoral dissertation for Western Michigan University. Please FAX to Velma Clay, 616-961-5168 or mail to 77 Harriet Lane, Battle Creek, MI 49017. If you have any questions, please call me at 616-961-4006. Thanks.

VELMA L. CLAY
Doctoral Candidate

Permission is granted without fee provided the material you wish to reprint is original in our publication and no separate acknowledgement appears in our book to another source. Full credit must be made to title, author/editor, copyright and publisher.

By: Beth Nevens ___ Date: 2·12·98
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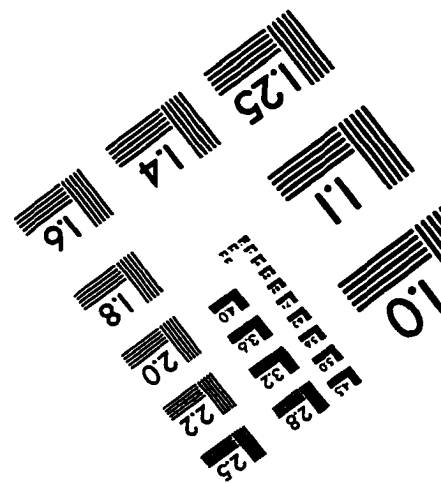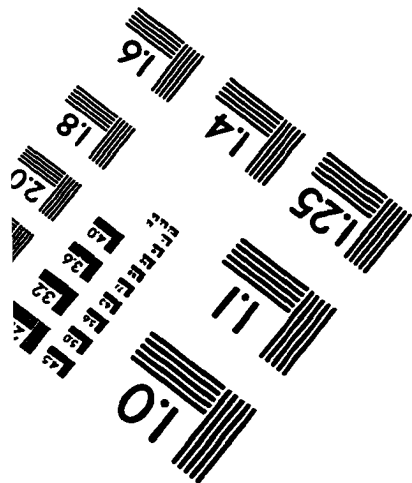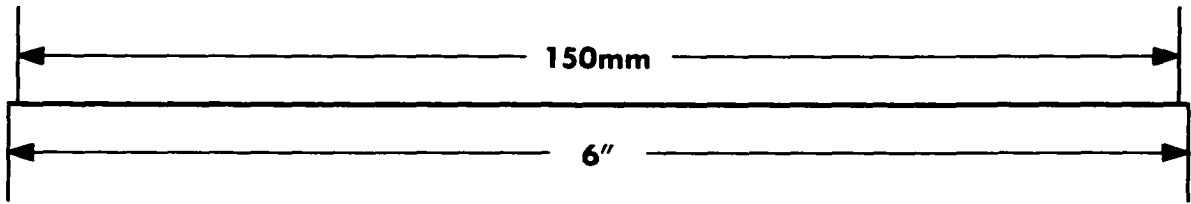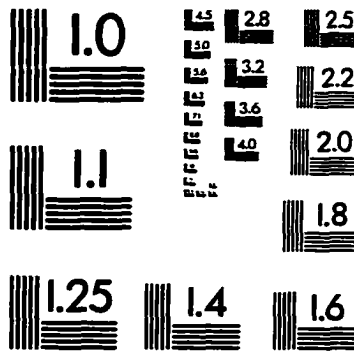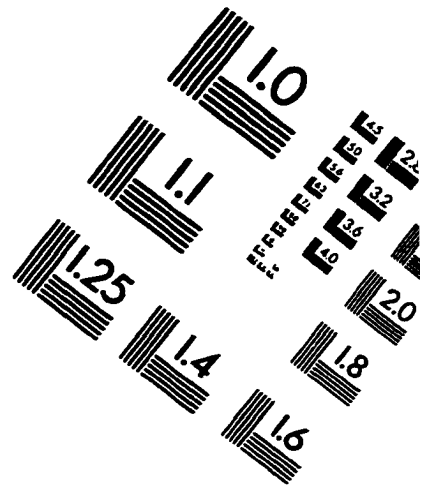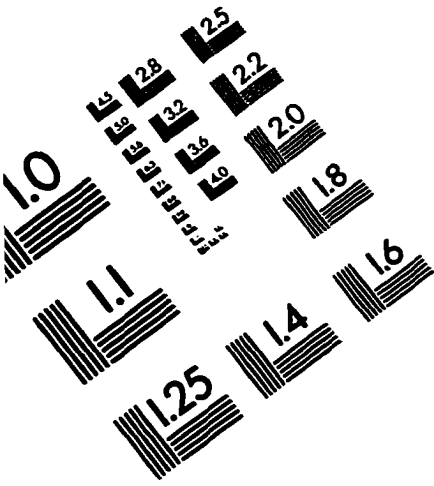
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IMAGE EVALUATION
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