

## **FIRE AND ICE: THE WISDOM OF BLACK WOMEN IN THE ACADEMY**

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### **Abstract**

This article presents the findings from a qualitative research project about a group of Black women scholars who discuss their experiences as academics in a predominantly White setting. The scholars represent fields including anthropology, education, Pan African studies, art education, and language studies. The themes found across the interviews include the value of education among their parents and families, the philosophy of mentoring that they espouse, their commitment to service in and beyond the campus, and their productivity within the rubric that Boyer (1990) described as scholarship of discovery, integration, application, and teaching.

In 1862, Mary Jane Patterson was awarded the B.A. degree from Oberlin College. She was the first African American woman to achieve this level of education (Davis, 1998). By 1999 women made up 34.6% of the faculty in the United States. Out of the total number of female scholars, 3.2% were Black women, and at predominantly White universities, Black women made up 2.2% of the 4.7% Black faculty (Rashid, 2003). One hundred and thirty-nine years after Patterson received her degree, Nell Irvin Painter (2001) wrote about being exhausted from the thought of the existing conditions for Black scholars in the academy. Several Black female scholars continued the theme of the difficult circumstances that Black women confronted in higher education in the next four years (Gregory, 1999; Hunter, 2002; Williams, 2001; Zamani, 2003).

In the face of the overwhelming negative research reports on the status of Black women in the academy, I sought out faculty members who were successful role models within their personal lives and professional fields. By successful, I considered their tenure, rank, and achievement of personal and career goals since they began their journey in higher education. My goal was, as an immigrant woman of Afro-Caribbean descent, to identify the challenges and triumphs that the women scholars had faced so that I could gain insights about living and thriving within a predominantly White academic institution. I also wanted to learn about the support systems that sustained and inspired these Black women to achieve their personal and professional goals. In the words of Jackson and Dorsey (in press), I wanted to learn how these women managed to “survive, reform and/or transform their place and space in the academy” (p. 2). Indeed, like Berry and Mizelle (2006), I wanted to gain insights about the complexity of lives of these women with multiple identities and histories as scholars with family, friends, and lives at home and at work.

## Literature Review

African American women in academia encounter many forms of oppression (Alfred, 2001; Antonio, 2002; Bradley & Holcomb-McCoy, 2004; Gregory, 1999). This is understandable given the context of their representing only about 1% of full-time faculty and administrators in predominantly White institutions (PWIs). It is also sensible if analyzed through the lens of the challenges to workplace equity because these female, minority workers mostly hold untenured faculty status and jobs that are concentrated at low-end administrative positions. Making sense of the experiences of these non-White academicians has led to a large collection of writing in which scholars deride the existing circumstances in which Black women do their work in the academy.

Crenshaw (2000) discussed the negative impact of the interactive nature of race, ethnicity, class, social status, gender, and national affiliation on the lived experience of non-White women. Discussing the experiences of African-American women, Gregory (1999) looked at the factors that affect the decision patterns influencing career mobility in order to understand the journey of these scholars in academia. Jackson (1998) unpacked the complex issues of diversity when it is examined in terms of race and gender and the challenging issues that arise for Black women who negotiate the academic environment. The need to find a mentor, cultivate the relationship, being sincere in the process of developing the affiliation, and finding departmental support for the mentoring network (Jordan-Zachery, 2005) brings into focus the thorny issues of learning to successfully navigate the academic environment as a minority person. The coping mechanisms that Black women adopt within traditionally White institutions, recent changes in their status, struggles over power, the intersection of race and gender, and the significance of voice in making these women's stories available for others' enlightenment are presented by Myers (2002). Finally, Tack and Patitu (1992) examined the literature on minority faculty and the issues with which they contend from entry through tenure and promotion and into the post-tenure years.

Among the pitfalls enumerated for Black women, like other non-white women, are issues of isolation, poor institutional fit, lack of support, and/or cultural and social differences (Smith, Wolf, & Busenberg, 1996). Gregory (1999) cited several scholars who describe the conditions of African American female faculty as being among the lower ranks, non-tenured, slow to achieve promotion, paid less than Black male and White female colleagues, in traditional disciplines, and mostly employed in 2-year institutions (Brown, 1988; Reskin & Phipps, 1988; Zumeta, 1984). Researchers like Aguirre (2000), Gregory (2001), Thomas and Hollenshead (2001), and Turner and Myers (2000) have reported that the hostile work environment, including conditions of racial and gender bias, impedes the recruitment and retention of African American faculty.

### The Context of Black Women's Academic Lives

After the Kansas desegregation of schools decision in 1954 (*Brown v. Topeka*) and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, more African American women faculty were hired by predominantly White institutions than was a tradition in preceding years. During the past three decades, however, the number of Black women in higher education has significantly decreased. From 1975 to 1984, the percentages of African American women faculty declined from 4.6% to 3.6%

(Gregory, 1999). According to Snyder (1987) by 1987 African American women faculty represented only 2% of all faculty in institutions of higher education, with only half (1%) of those in predominantly White institutions. In 2002, Antonio noted that both Black men and women represent less than 3% of all faculty. Given this statistical picture, it is understandable that many Black faculty do not believe the academy is a level playing field. The odds of a democratic culture influencing their daily lives is yet to arrive in the relations between the majority faculty who hold positions of power and those who are a minority (Jeffries & Givens, 2003). This is very evident in White institutions that are traditionally led by White, powerful leaders. The situation that the Black, female scholar finds herself in, therefore, is not only because of whom she is and the fact of her particular scholarly disposition (Johnsrud, 1993). The voting record on matters of policy and administrative decisions will demonstrate that the Black, female scholar speaks from an experience that subverts the established way of doing business in traditional institutions (Brewer, 1997).

These are the facts that determine the Black woman's daily life on a predominantly White campus (Benjamin, 1997). African American women have some of the same concerns as European-American women including pay equity, securing tenure and promotion, balancing family and professional responsibilities, achieving respect in professional fields, and securing power in an environment that is predominantly male. Still, there are issues specific to African American women and even more particular challenges to Black, female immigrants. These hurdles might include, and are not exclusive to, ideologies and assumptions (stereotypes) about African American women and their sisters from other countries. Such stereotypes arose from the culture of slavery and continue to exert influence on the methods by which authority figures control and dominate African American women (Bryant et al., 2005; Reid-Merritt, 1996). The legacy of these limiting assumptions perpetuates an environment of racial discrimination, interpersonal conflict, exacerbated by racial tensions, and a misunderstanding about cultural attitudes and mores.

In spite of these trials, however, Black scholars prevail in order to provide "an inspirational example of vision, hard work, and ethical integrity" as they guide and nurture young scholars in their wake (Jackson, 1999, p. 1).

### **Adult Education**

Rogers and Kramer (2007) answered the research question about the instructional beliefs and practices of exemplary adult education teachers by building on Collins' (2000) framework of "visionary pragmatism." The theory of effective adult education teaching, according to the author, begins with the lived realities of the adult education classroom while it maintains a relationship with society and a concern with issues of justice. According to Rogers and Kramer, "exemplary" adult education teachers are engaged with literacy practices that are real and socially meaningful (e.g., Clark, 1996). Adult education teachers also use innovative literacy practices, which include culturally relevant and critical andragogy (e.g., Meriweather Hunn, 2004; Mitchell, 1998; St. Clair, 2004). Finally, successful adult education sites attach formal learning to important social purposes that motivate their students to complete the General Educational Diploma (GED) in the process of becoming committed citizens.

Brookfield (2005) and Cervero and Wilson (1998) believed that adult literacy education represents the struggle between two entities over power and knowledge. Those who have access to resources are the ones who have, and strive to maintain, power in society. When this analysis of social conditions is applied to adult education classrooms, we begin to understand the lower status of women who are Black, female, of low social status, and financially challenged. Black educators, committed to transforming social conditions to more equitable distributions of power and knowledge, consequently develop democratic practices within and beyond their classrooms. To achieve this end, authors such as Brookfield (2005), Demetris (2005), Deneger (2001), Heaney (1992), and St. Clair and Sandlin (2004) consistently called for critical literacy pedagogy in adult education in the face of continued resistance from federal reform efforts that promote a technical, skill-driven view of literacy and education (Rogers & Kramer, 2005).

### **Method**

In 2004 I spent several months interviewing six Black women who had attained their Ph.D. degrees about their experiences on their journey as professionals in their academic fields. In the face of tremendous scheduling conflicts the women made time to meet with me on four separate occasions over the spring semester. In the summer of that year I completed interviews with the women. Five of the women interviewed were faculty members at the same institution. One was a graduate of the school but did not teach there.

This article focuses on the women who completed the interviews. The scholars were surprised and excited to find out that there was a group of like-minded women who were being interviewed. They began to refer to the other women, during their individual interviews, as their “sister scholars” and began sharing thoughts about how it felt to be part of a “club” that was the result of the research project. It was clear to me that these women appreciated the time that I took to talk with them, the fact that they had come out of the “shadows,” and that they were being acknowledged for their contribution to the culture of success among their colleagues, students, and staff. Years of isolation on the campus, within departments that had only one or two Black faculty members, made this opportunity to talk about their experiences one of the rare occasions when they would see a Black faculty member from another department in their office.

#### *The Setting*

King University, the fictitious name used in this study, was a large multi-campus site in the Midwest United States that had an enrollment of 35,458 graduate and undergraduate students as of Fall 2004. Approximately 22,000 of the graduate and undergraduate students were female. Of the total population 30,400 were Caucasian. African-American students counted for just over 2,300 people. The university had 8 campuses in its network. The total faculty count for the main campus where this research was carried out included 263 females and 369 males. The non-White faculty included 158 (60%) women and 269 (73%) men. Black faculty are clearly a small percentage of the total faculty and non-White faculty. Black faculty accounted for 20 female and 14 male tenured and tenure track professors. Black full-time, tenured faculty consisted of 11 (4%) females and 11 (3%) males.

### *The Participants*

Six women scholars comprised the participants of this study. Five of the group were full-time, tenured faculty, and one full-time non-tenured faculty. Five of the scholars were also married, two to White Americans, and all but two had children. Four traveled and studied abroad; three listed Higher Education as their major field, and all six had described community service as their guiding philosophy. Two of the professors were immigrants from Black republics. One of these immigrants was married to a White American. Participants were given pseudonyms and were invited to write the biographies that described them as presented below.

I included myself in this study since I am Black, female, tenured, an immigrant, and a Ph.D. in my field. I asked myself the same questions and responded to all the prompts, on the video and tape recorder that the other scholars were asked in the process of the study.

Bess was a professor of French language, Caribbean literature in French, and translation. Her current research examined the use of folklore in Caribbean literature. Her translation of Haitian writer Jacques-Stéphen Alexis' collection of short stories, *Romancéro aux étoiles*, won the American Literary Translators Association prize for fiction translation in 1989.

Dee was an Associate Vice President, a dean, and a tenured Associate Professor. She had 34 years of experience in higher education that included administration, research, and teaching at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Her research interests included retention, cultural diversity, and leadership issues in higher education.

Pat was Chair and Professor of her department. She had just begun an assignment at a new campus. As a professor with 20 years of experience she had been granted tenure at three institutions of higher education. In a previous life, she was a full-time artist with a professional career that spanned over 10 years.

Kaye was an Associate Professor who had been a professor for seven years and had received tenure in the last year. Her special interest was Adult Literacy, and she had written four books that dealt with the experiences of Black students and, particularly, Black women. She lived alone and traveled a lot within and outside the United States.

Wendy was learning about the challenges of beginning a new consulting practice in leadership and organizational effectiveness. It was the best of times and worst of times for her. Having had one career as a social worker, and a second career as a government administrator, Wendy was passionate about becoming a global change agent helping people move beyond their resistance to change and encouraging them to embrace a new way of knowing.

Ann was a Professor who was best known for her work on Muslims in the United States. She was married and had one child. Her most passionate work on campus was the support that she provided students and faculty who were discriminated against by administration. Ann was also connected to international scholars through her work on African women and the issues of eco-justice (ecological justice) as they impacted the living conditions of this continent.

### *My Background*

While I am one of the participants in this study, because of this being a qualitative study, I believe that I am obligated to give this description to validate any possible bias my personal background as a Black, female, immigrant may have contributed to this study.

I come from a majority experience as an Afro-Caribbean who spent the first 22 years of my life in the Black republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Both of my parents finished high school. My mother worked her way up the civil service ladder to become a secretary in the Prime Minister's office. After she resigned, she started a new post as the secretary to the Managing Director of the then only telephone company in the country. My father was a supervisor for the Port Authority when he competed in the 1952 Olympics in Helsinki and won a bronze medal as a weightlifter. He then returned to his country and raised his three children, trained young athletes for international events, and remarried after my mother died.

Whether I was studying at the Juilliard School in New York, teaching at a middle school in Harlem, working in Wilmington, North Carolina, or doing research as the assistant director of the Center for the Study of Adult Literacy in Atlanta, Georgia, I found that I had to be educated in the way of being a Black, literate female in the U.S.A. Documenting the experiences of Black people, especially those who are educated in the formal sense, and particularly Black women, has opened my eyes to some of the challenges and triumphs that are strewn on the path to success in predominantly White institutions. Being Black, female, and a teacher gives me a high level of credibility among other women of the same educational standing. It is this affinity with other educated women that has opened doors for me to collect first-person accounts of achieving academic credentials for my research projects. I appear in this project as a participant/observer using an alias for my real name.

### *Data Collection*

Case study research is an investigation of a bounded system (Merriam, 1988). It is a description and analysis of a single unit. Stake (2000) would describe the stories of these women in the project as a collective case study representing multiple cases of a phenomenon, which makes "a more compelling argument" for the importance of the situation being investigated (Barone, 2004, p. 9). I have followed Patton's (1990) advice and sought "information rich" (p. 169) participants to help me understand the experiences of successful Black, female scholars in academia.

The study developed inductively with categories and questions emerging from the data provided by six female scholars in their four interviews. After every interview, each participant was given a copy of an audio cassette with the interview and a transcript from their individual sessions. Videotapes of all the interviews were kept by the researcher and could be copied for the scholars if they desired to have their own. The scholars were asked to review the audiotapes and written documents to ensure that no words were left out and that the spelling of proper names was included on the transcript. They could remove any information they did not want to be reported. Participants only corrected transcripts and then returned them to me for my records. Videotapes were copied and turned over to the individual after each of the four interviews.

*The Interview Protocol*

When I began the interviews with the six scholars in the study, I had three broad questions in mind (Seidman, 1991). They were (a) how did she come to her position with a Ph.D. in her field? I wanted to find out as much as possible about her life leading up to her present position or to her status as a Black woman with a Ph.D; (b) What were the details of a day in her life as a Ph.D. in her position? I added prompts such as: What is your work? What is it like for you to do what you do now that you are in this position? and (c) What does her experience as a Black woman with a Ph.D. mean to her? Prompts included: “Now that you have talked about how you came to your position with a Ph.D., and what it is like for you to be a Ph.D. in this position, what does it mean to you?”

A fourth question was added after an analysis of the answers to the first three major questions was completed. The idea behind this question was to find out the kinds of support systems that were in place to facilitate the development of the scholars as academic writers.

The initial prompt about how she came to be a Ph.D. at this point in her career was followed up by questions like: “Tell me about all the other pieces of your life that [are part of] this journey?” “What other thoughts and feelings do you have about this journey called becoming the Ph.D. that I am today?” “Tell me the story about being a mother along the road called academia?” Or “What other highlights jump out along this timeline?”

The question that I asked when we did the second interview was: “Tell me as much as possible about the details of your experience in the position as a Ph.D.” I added prompts like: “What is your work? What is it like for you to do what you do now that you are a Ph.D. in your field?” (b) “What is it like for you in your personal life . . . now that you're a Ph.D.?” (c) “If someone walked in now, how would they know that this was a day in the life of Professor X?” and (d) “Someone writing the role called ‘Professor X’ getting an actress ready to play the part, what else would that actress have to know about the day in the life of this professor so that she could play this role?”

In the third interview with the women I asked about their interpretation of the Ph.D. experience from the beginning of the journey in their life to the day on which I did the interview. My prompt began with: “Now that you have talked about how you came to your present position as a Ph.D. in your field, and what it is like for you to be a Ph.D. in this job, what does it mean to you?” It was designed to solicit a reflective response to the experience of earning a living as a Black woman with a Ph.D. I wanted to know how each woman felt about performing her work with a Ph.D. The question was followed up with prompts like: (a) “In your book of life where does this chapter called professor in the academy fit and what’s the context? and (b) “If you had to prepare a cheat sheet for an incoming Black woman professor, what would be on that cheat sheet and how would you go about mentoring her in her first years in the profession?”

The prompt in the fourth interview that was developed to understand each scholar’s writing experiences stated: “Tell me your journey with writing along this career path that you have described so far.” This request was followed with prompts like: (a) “What’s the difference in your writing compared to the past? (b) “What advice would you give young people coming

into a Ph.D. program [based on your experience]?” and (c) “Did you have a mentor who got you to do the academic writing necessary for this career?” The scholars talked about the kinds of mentoring, formal and informal, that they received from the time they entered their diverse doctoral programs. Many of the responses focused on the lonely journey to publishing in academic journals and the production of books.

### *Integrity Measures*

I followed Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) recommendations for data analysis: triangulation, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, member checks, and thick description. Triangulation was achieved by the collection of the interviews with the women, the review of publications, applications for promotions and jobs, research projects and service commitments that they presented in their vitas, and the cross-referencing of information provided in the separate accounts of the journey in the academy by each woman. Prolonged engagement was conducted through the constant communication with the women beginning in January 2004 through 2007, after several versions of the final report on the findings had been written, and edited videos representing the patterns across the interviews were shared with the participants. Drafts of the chapters for a book on the project have also been reviewed by the participants.

Peer debriefing began with members checking transcripts of the interviews for errors and places where more information would help to explain their answers to prompts. This process continued when participants saw the edited video productions that were created to represent the patterns that evolved in the cross-case answers as they discussed their experiences in higher education. Member checks were done as the video tapes of the interviews were reviewed by the participants and comments were shared with the researcher concerning anything that was to be removed from the tapes.

A graduate assistant also reviewed the transcripts, coded them for video editing to represent the themes that evolved across all the interviews, and created the final video presentations for the scholars to review. Finally, thick description was completed in the writing that was done to present the backgrounds, formative experiences, journeys through formal education from earliest childhood to the present position that each scholar now occupies in their career, and the collective picture that has been drawn to describe “a converging line of inquiry” (Yin, 1994, p. 92).

Videotaping allowed the participants to see the body language that accompanied their comments so that they remembered the attitude in which they discussed their ideas. This was an important form of documentation to refer to when the final written reports on the study were presented for the participants’ review. In several instances people did not remember expressing themselves in the way that they actually did at the time of the interview. Trust in the author’s perceptions of unstated insights or residual emotions about an episode that was recounted came easier to the participants after several incidents on video were reviewed for clarity of interpretation.



### *Data Analysis*

After reading the transcripts of the audiotaped interviews, a preliminary coding based on emerging themes was completed. Next, a process of constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used by me and my graduate assistant to compare and discuss the findings and coordinate initial codes. A videotaped presentation of edited clips from the recorded interviews, representing the major themes across the interviews, was then shared with the women scholars who were represented in the video. Then the interview transcripts were reanalyzed to confirm categories, make final changes, and cull the titles that would be used to represent the data themes. During the second review of the transcripts close attention was paid to the descriptions of the scholarship of teaching, discovery, integration, application (Boyer, 1990), which is the rubric that organizes the daily work lives of the scholars, and service in the community that each participant offered in her interviews.

### **Fierce Mothering, Cool Mentoring**

From their earliest recollections of formal education to the memories that represent the most important learning opportunities in their careers as academicians, these women have been honing their skills as educators. The fire of their passion for teaching and learning is palpable in their comments and the body language that accompanied their responses to questions during the interviews. The women exhibited a cool demeanor when they described a difficult learning situation and the way they apply the insights gained from overcoming challenges to other situations as mentors and teachers. This self-presentation helped to elaborate the depiction of navigating the rugged terrain of White, academic culture as presented in each scholar's life.

The following paragraphs, in the order listed here, describe the roles that family, mentoring, and wisdom learned from experience have played in the lives of the women. The role of the family, resistance to the presence of the Black woman in the academy, the importance of reaching beyond the campus in a support network, learning to publish in the midst of the many demands on limited time, the demonstration of productivity in the scholarships of discovery and application (Boyer, 1990), service, and advice to young scholars were the prominent themes that represented the similarities among the women's comments. It is clear from their responses, verbal and physical, that these scholars have been fired in the kiln of the academic institution of higher education and now represent "cool heads" of authority and wisdom.

#### *The Family Value of Education*

Each of the participants gave a detailed account of their upbringing in families that valued formal literacy. The examples below show some ways in which the female scholars were encouraged to achieve their goals during their journey in education. Professor Ann described her family background in a detail about her parents:

I was born to two educated parents, highly educated parents. Given the background I come from, my father was a peasant, was the first educated man in his village who ended up having a Ph.D. from the University of London, becoming one of the major education anthropologists in the Mid-East, in his region. My mother is the first woman in her ethnic group to ever get a Master's degree from the United States in '52. So I was born to a

family in which education was a must; girl, boy, able, not able. It didn't matter, you have to . . . get a university education and achieve through it something. I don't know what [but] they wanted us to achieve something.

Associate Professor Dee described her earliest experiences as a child when she stated that: "I loved playing school, I was always the teacher, I was always helping people to learn, write it on the blackboard, make it clear, I loved school and I had many good teachers who were role models for me." Her story about the decision to continue her interest in studying foreign languages fills out the picture about a long career as a student. She explained:

I had started foreign language in elementary school. German was my first language, but I didn't pursue that as I went into junior high school and senior high school and moved from that to taking French. And from there I loved French and I picked up Spanish along the way as well.

Finally, Pat's appreciation for the early training that her Methodist grandfather gave her is evident in her tone when she talked about her years of "confidence." As the Professor remembered:

I was the first grandchild of a Methodist bishop and lived with him for a couple of years early on and was privy to a lot of things in my life that children of that age are not. . . . and was very independent, very confident . . . started speaking way before normal.

This level of rapid development was further nurtured when Pat was sent to an all-Black women's college, which her mother had attended. To this day, Pat said, "I thank my parents [even though back then] I really wasn't sure it was what I wanted to do."

### *Challenges to the Ideal*

Resistance to the Black woman as a leader in the White academic setting also had an influence on the way that these scholars thought about themselves. Pat, Professor and Chair, remembers how the faculty reacted to her when she started to work as head of the program. She described her challenge as a leader in this recollection:

The worst problem was that everybody who was on faculty at that time had applied for the position that [I], an outsider, got. So there was some trauma and drama there and I was not aware of that at all before I came [to King State]. The breaking through was a big challenge [as the Black woman in the then only White department], and helping the faculty to understand that my purpose [in the department] was not to make their lives miserable but was to help them achieve the goals that they said they wanted.

Ann, Professor, also described another kind of resistance to her as a Black, female, immigrant leader when she talked about the kind of psychic energy that is necessary to present oneself in a setting that deems you strange and unusual. In her experience, she came to understand that she was

In a context where I am a stranger. I'm in a context that every move I make, because of the cultural background, doesn't allow for the decoding of my [behavior]. [I understand that I'm] not only behaving but . . . providing the code [about being an immigrant

woman] by which people can interpret your behavior, and that makes you very tired at the end of the day.

There is also conflict within families about the role of Black culture and the way in which it is to be negotiated in a professional and personal life. In another reflection about learning from race conflict in her nuclear family, Professor Barbara shared her belief about the role that her family played in her making up her mind to be in the academy and succeed as a published author who specialized in African literature. She reminisced:

When I remarried . . . and went to live in Nigeria, of course my family went absolutely bonkers, because they just thought they would never see [me and my daughter] ever again in life. So it's been a struggle with my family, the family I was born into, not the family that I had, simply because they did not have the background to really understand why I was doing the things that I was doing. And why this was important to me. I remember my mother saying to me one day, she thought that I studied too much and I read too much and you know it didn't seem to her like I was enjoying [life] and I remember saying that this is my enjoyment, this is my pleasure. And so it's not been easy. My family now thinks a lot differently than they did at the time, because they had no experience [with an academic life].

### *Teaching as Mentoring*

Among the values that the scholars espoused was the clear appreciation for their relationship with their students. Teaching is a calling and the scholars work at enhancing their relationships with their students and colleagues. Professor Pat explained her philosophy in the statement that “the people focus is my main focus.” She continued:

It is my main goal because there is faculty and students and decision-making [to attend to]. So whatever it is . . . [I] show [students] that what they are doing is parallel to real preparation for the professional world because it is a big difference between academia and the real professional world. We can't baby them or allow them to be undisciplined, unfocused, because that is not going to serve them when they move into the real world.

Professor Ann continued in this discussion of the professional responsibility that she bears:

Being a person of color in American academia means that you have a big responsibility to [disseminate] the information that you gathered from your perspective to a wide audience; so that they can share your ideas. They should not fester on your own; you should not just feel the discrimination and bottle it up. It has to come out; you have to share it. You have to make it a learning experience for yourself and others.

Associate Professor Dee has had long experience as a mentor of students and colleagues, so she values the relationships that she builds in her workplace:

Students say, “I am so glad that you said that to me! You made a difference.” Which is why interacting with students is so important. A lot of innovative ideas come out. Students, as I have said, they feel better about themselves, souls are saved. There might be somebody who's having a family crisis, [who] might come in and say, “You know, x is happening in my family. I am not gong to be able to do what I thought I was going to

do.” I always say, “Family first. You’ve got to take care of yourself and you’ve got to take care of your family first.”

### *Words of Wisdom*

In the descriptions of the stance towards facing and overcoming personal and professional obstacles, the women outlined different approaches to being successful on the academic journey. Professor Pat exhorted other academics to strive for excellence in these words: “Don’t be afraid because sometimes we paralyze ourselves because we are afraid of the unknown or we are afraid of failing and I say fail, keep failing. Keep failing because [with] every failure we are learning through that process.” Her statement exhibited the philosophy of keeping a cool head under the pressure to excel and be one’s personal best: fire of conviction and ice in the steady hand that leads in action.

Associate Professor Dee, aware that new academics who are coming into the department experience difficulties, “unless they have a mentor, somebody they can talk to . . . somebody they can trust,” is always on the alert to listen carefully so that she can offer pearls of wisdom from her life’s experience as a mother, mentor, and scholar.

Assistant Professor Bess gave wise counsel about the value of savvy planning and efficient use of writing time in the publication journey. She exhorted young scholars in this statement:

Exploit your dissertation. You can’t turn it into a book, pull stuff out as articles. Number two, you got to hit the field running because you have no control when things are accepted and appear in print and yet . . . you got a time limit on when, how much [publishing] you got to have by a given time. You have to make the time to write and see, coming up with completely new projects takes a lot of time, so adapt chapters of the dissertation in order to get things in the [publication] pipeline.

Associate Professor Kaye demonstrated the brilliance of her Black, female doctoral students by editing a book about the experiences of being Black, female, and formally educated in which the students represented more than half of the contributed chapters. The seasoned writer explained her method of culling success among her students after many years of learning to work for their best interest:

I go in with high expectations. I model the ways in which I expect these expectations to be met, the process by which these expectations can be achieved, and then I let people fall at their own levels. Invariably, people rise to the expectations [of success], once they recognize that you are sincere and you will give the attention necessary to supporting them as they grow [and] as they come into their own. They will rise to your expectations, so it’s a steep learning curve when I am doing a project and I have an assistant on the project. It’s a successful model because I have seen my [Black] assistants grow into their own proficiency.

## Discussion

In order to answer the questions about what is going on, why does it go on, and what insights can be gained from what the interviewees described about their journey as Black, female scholars (Purcell-Gates, 2004), I have correlated the information from the data collection with the questions I have asked to understand the phenomenon of being a successful Black female with a Ph.D. in a White academic institution. What I have learned from the study and how I support those findings with concrete examples follows.

A canon of literature on the many ways to be a successful Black woman in the United States of America exists (Chambers & Gates, 2003; Cooper, 2005; Danziger & Farber, 1990; Dickinson, 1997; Murray, Mednick, & Shuch, 1977; Nichols & Tanksley, 2004). A studious woman can find out from Huggins and McKissack (2004) how to become strong enough to use her resources and ideas to move forward in life. Or, Black students can find out how to work hard, develop a positive self-concept, and learn from women with terminal degrees how to overcome obstacles to success (Nichols & Tanksley, 2004). Women can also learn how to be successful on all fronts from those who understand that Black women from Veronica Chambers' (Chambers & Gates, 2003) generation know that they have succeeded in their careers because of the civil rights and feminist movements working together on their behalf. Dickinson (1997) also attested to the fact that women who celebrate Black history because it was passed on to them in childhood and continue to uphold its importance in their life are conscious of the fact that the elders who had sacrificed for them earlier on in history were due a great deal of gratitude for paving the way to the achievement that each woman celebrated. Finally, working, raising children, and maintaining a wife role in a family can be achieved and embraced as compatible and desirable goals as did the women who Murray et al. (1977) studied.

As far as pathways to success in the academy, there are authors like Berry and Mizelle (2006) who explore the road that takes scholars of color from oppression to grace. Editors Mabokela and Green (2001) have culled the wisdom on transcending challenges in the pursuit of academic excellence combining a perspective on spirituality and academic triumphs to make the point about the need for transformation that enhances all those on the journey called academia. Finally, Sleeter, Pollard, and Welch (2006) present a definition of success for those of us who work outside the margins of mainstream intellectual perspectives on educational research.

### *What Counts as Black, Female Success*

In order to appreciate the way in which the Black women in this study viewed their success as academicians, Boyer's (1990) description of the scholarships of discovery, application, and teaching can be used to analyze their comments about their achievements in higher education because it is the rubric that organizes their working lives. This analytical lens of work conducted inside and beyond the campus requires that scholars include the presentation of data that represent clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, effective presentation, and a reflective critique to prove their case under each category.

The six scholars provided evidence of their scholarship in the area of discovery through their comments about writing and publishing and the experiences that shape their publication

agenda. The scholarship of application is represented by the pattern of attention to the students and community that the scholars serve. Also, the commitment to service and teaching, on and beyond the campus, is proven by the kind of networks that are engaged in the work and personal lives of the female academicians.

*Discovery.* In every case in the research discussed by the scholars, it was clear that they were always mindful that they were working to unveil the experiences of the participants in their struggle to improve their lives. This scholarship of discovery can be identified in comments like Professor Wendy's: "I came up with a developmental . . . process of the transition that you go through once you begin to understand what is going on [in a transition experience] and allow yourself to move on." Also, in the discussion about Professor Pat's dissertation topic we glean the importance of the leadership theme to her and the field to which she contributed her research. Pat stated:

[I did a] case study on leadership for the arts in higher education and I . . . compared two [academic] institutions and . . . how [the arts] grew within those institutions based on the leadership . . . from the president on down to, you know, the faculty. Or should I say the faculty down to the president, whichever! Anyway I . . . became excited about it because I . . . was able to get into some old documents and have a lot of primary resources which I found. . . . and I ended up getting more information than anyone else knew [existed at these] institutions about the background of the arts.

The awareness that research has to serve a larger purpose than the researcher's need to publish permeated Professor Wendy's comment about responsible leadership:

There is an awareness that now [leaders] cannot continue in this same vein . . . But that I think is very key and that's definitely a driving force, we cannot continue to do a number of things the way that we [have been doing them]. You know, you pick it, whether it's the environment, or people in leadership that are running organizations, and abusing everything . . . [including the] movement to dissolve public education, you know, miseducating students and under-serving children.

*Application.* The necessity of sharing the knowledge gained through research is an important part of the scholars' work in the academy (Beattie, 2000). Application of research findings is actively being addressed in the work of these six women scholars. In the interviews about their lives and careers, the women scholars referred to the intersection of the different personal and professional roles they have played. The descriptions of their philosophy concerning the duty of maintaining a family, caring for others, and embracing their role as leaders/mothers on the campus point to the fact that they are constantly applying their knowledge to the work that they do as professionals. Comments about their inability, or refusal, to distinguish between leadership at home or in the office were repeated at different times over the course of the interviews.

Associate Professor Dee described her means of getting her scholarship into the hands of young academics when she talked about "a mentoring program" with "African-American, Hispanic, Native American, mostly African-American [students]":

[They talk about] what their life visions are, [there is] support for them from a group of faculty and staff, but also for them to interact with each other. We have some

refreshments and we talk about a lot of good things. They get heated up and steamed up and excited about different things, about their lives, and share about who they are and what they want to be when they grow up. So do we. We are still 'becoming' as well.

Professor Wendy also chose work that showed her interest in the community and practical applications of her training. The community activist explained that Transforming organizations, working with people who are personally undergoing transformation and its impacts . . . Those are key issues that a client has to deal with in this kind of work [that I provide the support system to create].

*Teaching.* Bess, Assistant Professor, believed that a teacher has to find her "bliss." She believed that teaching allows one to "share your wisdom, whatever you're learning from life you share that in one form or another in a classroom almost everyday." Her joy in sharing with her students was reflected in the stories that she shared about students who have broadened her world view through their experiences and philosophies.

Glassick, Huber, and Maeroff (1997) talked about the importance of "citizenship" (p. 12) activities to the scholar and the university. Professor Wendy made her stance on community service clear in this statement about service and teaching:

There is something that I'm here to do and it requires those three letters [Ph.D.] . . . it is not just about me. . . . It is part of a plan. . . . What will my words do for someone else? Hopefully it is helpful to someone, to a young person who may be questioning, to someone who may be struggling.

Professor Dee made clear her attitude to networking beyond the campus in this comment: The third thing would be networking and relationships within the institution but certainly outside. Because when you leave here we want to leave some of that here. We want to be able to pick up the phone and call a sister or a brother, a minister [or] someone who can make you feel good about yourself or validate what you believe about yourself.

In all the statements from the scholars, we can glean their clear understanding of Boyer's (1990) rubric that organizes their working life and the affiliations that it generates in networks beyond the classrooms where they teach in their academic disciplines. It is easy for the person who listens intently to understand why the women have been successful at making the academic community a living, breathing entity that they enrich with their personal, poetic, and political selves.

### *Future Directions*

Given the call of critical literacy practitioners in adult literacy classrooms to improve pedagogy, it is logical to believe that the scholars in this study are preparing professionals to go out into the world and address issues of justice and democracy as they impact communities (Rogers & Kramer, 2007). Operating under the rubric of Boyer's (1990) description of discovery, application, and teaching, they have created a working environment that uplifts the students, faculty, and staff who interact with them inside and outside the academy. While Darling (2005) pondered the apparent lack of progress among Black women in her essay on

being Black, female, and educated, it is clear that at this juncture in the educational landscape scholars still need to analyze the positive legacy that Black women academics uphold in their mission to nurture their students as thinkers and agents in building a quality life. More research is needed to facilitate our progress away from the perception of the Black woman scholar as “victim” in the White academic environment that has been established through work from Kennedy (1997) and Cleveland (2004). Academicians need to grapple with and articulate the passionate commitment that propels these Black women who train adults as they manage their lives with the dazzling clarity of light bouncing off of a glacier.

This line of inquiry can continue with an investigation of three areas. First, the women’s will to be formally educated and to shape the lives of those adults who value formal education. Second, how the academicians set and achieve high goals for themselves, their co-workers, adult students, family members, and colleagues in the tradition of women writers like Toni Morrison (Morrison & Taylor-Guthrie, 1994), Geneva Smitherman (1977), Anna Julia Cooper (1976), Joyce Ladner (1998), Maya Angelou (1993), Edwidge Danticat (1995), Alice Walker (2003), and bell hooks (1981). And, finally, create a strategy to listen to and learn from Professor Wendy’s voice exhorting us in a quiet, intimate tone: “My father knows poems [and] all seven of us [children] had to learn a poem: Once a task has begun, never leave it till it’s done, Be it great, be it small, do it right or not at all!”

Boyer’s model of scholarship can also frame further investigations of the way in which Black, female academicians function and produce in their college and university work spaces. Such an inquiry would be revealing to mature, as well as, young scholars. Possibly the findings would enhance discussions of the ways in which Black, female faculty can be nurtured and encouraged to work to experience the kind of success that the six women in this study have unveiled.

Using the lived realities of the adults in their classrooms to ensure a relationship with society, issues of justice, practices that are real and socially meaningful, and innovative methods that are culturally relevant and inspired by critical andragogy, and ensuring that formal education is connected to important social purposes to motivate their students are all part of the professional agenda of the scholars in this study. Operating in the heat of adversity that successful performance in a White academic environment generates these women have cooled into magnificent diamonds that represent success to themselves and their communities.

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