

Persistence, Connection, Passion

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**Persistence, Connection, and Passion: A Qualitative Study of the
Career Development of Highly Achieving
African American/Black and White Women**

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Abstract

This article describes a qualitative study of the career development of 18 prominent, highly achieving African American/Black and White women¹ in the United States across eight occupational fields. Grounded theory methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to generate a theory of the career development of participants that was "grounded in" their experiences, as related in semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The theoretical model generated from the data included five major components: (a) a core story consisting of participants' work behaviors and attitudes, which is enacted within (b) sociocultural, (c) personal background, and (d) current contextual conditions, and leads to particular career (e) actions and consequences. The emergent model and illustrative quotations from participants are presented, and the implications of the study and the theoretical model for both research and practice are discussed.

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Despite the burgeoning literature in the career development of women over the past three decades, several consistent limitations have been noted. One problem has been inadequate attention to the experiences of women of color (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Byars & Hackett, 1996; Fitzgerald, Fassinger & Betz, 1995). Because little is known about the combined effects of sexism and racism on vocational development, the extent to which existing theories and models accurately describe the experiences of African American/Black women and other women of color remains unclear, as is the degree to which existing instruments accurately measure constructs and processes in these populations. In addition, because much of the extant research has been conducted with college students, very little is known about the experiences of professional women, particularly those who have reached the very highest levels of attainment within their fields (Fassinger & Richie, 1994).

The present article describes a qualitative study of the career development of 18 prominent, highly achieving African American/Black and White women in the U.S. across eight occupational fields. The overall aim of the study was to explore critical influences on the career development of these women, particularly related to their attainment of professional success. We chose to study this rarely-studied population of high achieving women for several reasons. First, if the women in the sample all were at the tops of their professions, any variability in their career development narratives were more likely to be based on occupational, racial/ethnic, or personal factors than due to differing levels of achievement. Moreover, there is much to be learned from stories of women who have survived and succeeded in racist and sexist environments, particularly in identifying career strategies that lead to accomplishment; such information is potentially useful in theory, research, and intervention.

Also, while the present study is one in an extensive, on-going program of research on the career development of demographically diverse women, we began this program of research with African American/Black and White women because these are the women on whom most previous research has been done, the limitations of the literature on African American/Black women notwithstanding. Moreover,

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an earlier quantitative study on this population (Fassinger & Richie, 1994) left many unanswered questions, thus motivating us to attempt a qualitative approach to studying this same population, as well as prompting the qualitative study of other diverse groups of women as well (we currently have similar studies underway that involve Latinas, Asian American women, lesbians, and women with disabilities). While our ultimate goal is the construction of a theory of women's career development that truly is inclusive of the experiences of diverse women, we decided to begin with the two groups of women about which we knew the most and to whom we already had access (see below).

Qualitative methods of inquiry, which often rely on interviews or other means of direct observation to textualize phenomena, allow for the exploration of the full experiences of participants from their own points of view and in their own words. Such approaches thus have the potential to produce conceptual models and theories that maximize proximity to the actual lived experiences of participants, a form of internal validity that is a strength of the qualitative approach to research (Hoshmand, 1989; Patton, 1990). Although qualitative methods are only just beginning to gain visibility among counseling psychologists (Polkinghorne, 1994), such methods are particularly useful with understudied populations or phenomena, where existing information is too unreliable or unavailable to build a foundation for sound quantitative research.

Qualitative approaches are thus promising in illuminating the previously understudied career development experiences of women who have managed to reach success at the top levels of their professions. Their career development experiences, it was assumed, would provide an opportunity to examine the commonalities and differences among their varying paths to success in the work world. Empirical study of this nature is much needed, not only in order to ensure inclusiveness in theoretical models of career development, but also because career interventions are (or should be) driven by such theories. If research can determine and articulate the external influences and internal processes that have allowed some women to achieve at the very highest levels of success, then career interventions can be designed that target those influences and processes. Clinicians working with young women can encourage them to develop coping strategies, cultivate appropriate connections, and engage in useful

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experiences that will enhance their capacity for vocational accomplishment and goal attainment.

The present study utilized in-depth, semi-structured interviews and grounded theory analytic strategies (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to describe the career development experiences of this sample of highly achieving women. Grounded theory, recently highlighted in a series of articles in the Journal of Counseling Psychology (reviewed by Polkinghorne, 1994), is a comprehensive method of data collection, analysis, and summarization in which an emergent theory is constructed from (and therefore grounded in) direct experience with the phenomena under study (in this case, interview data gathered from participants). Data collection, analysis, and theory construction occur somewhat concomitantly, and thus stand in "reciprocal relation" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23) to one another as theoretical constructions repeatedly are verified by the data. Constructed theories are evaluated based on their methodological soundness and their usefulness in accurately and comprehensively capturing the depth and complexity of the phenomena under study (Polkinghorne, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Consistent with the assumptions and principles of the grounded theory approach to research, no formal hypotheses were proposed for testing. Rather, general exploratory questions were formulated based on the existing literature in women's career development (see Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987, and Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995, for comprehensive reviews and commentary). This approach was an attempt to ensure that in addition to its base in the research literature, the data would reflect the experiences of the women in the sample described in their own words and from their own phenomenological perspectives. The emergent theory would, therefore, be as close as possible to the voiced experiences of the participants in the study.

Clearly, researchers interested in theory development must remain open to all possibilities that pertain to their research questions, and not become too steeped in research literatures that might bound their vision or keep relevant constructs from emerging. It is important, however, to focus the data collection and to examine closely the constructs that are most important to the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Moreover, having a rudimentary conceptual framework developed from existing literature and a set of research questions (in our case, translated into an interview protocol) enables

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researchers to do "multiple site" research, allowing for comparability across cases (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Multiple site research is implemented when an inquiry is conducted in more than one locale, either with multiple organizations or with different individuals who are not associated with one another.

The research reviewed for the present study was used to develop the initial interview questions, to compare the constructs in the literature with those emerging from the data, and to compare the final theory with existing constructs. More specifically, we were interested in exploring the following well-documented, salient variables in women's career development as they pertained particularly to the experiences of high achieving women: (1) background influences (e.g., family, socioeconomic status, education, gender role socialization); (2) stress, coping, and resiliency; (3) self-efficacy and attributional factors; (4) community and social support; (5) external challenges and obstacles (e.g., sexism, racism); (6) and factors related to individual personality and temperament.

As a result of our background in these literatures, and our previous work with this population (Fassinger & Richie, 1994) we had the following expectations for the results of this interview data: (1) that these women would have non-traditional gender role beliefs and expectations and that they would have received strong messages of support for pursuing a career and achievement in this career from significant people in their backgrounds (Betz & Hackett, 1986); (2) that this would be a resilient population, and that while previous literature on African American/Black women's career development would lead us to believe there should be significant differences between African American/Black and White women (Byars & Hackett, 1996; Carter & Cook, 1992; Richie, 1992), previous work with this population of high achievers found few significant differences between these two groups in gender roles and ways of coping (Fassinger & Richie, 1994); (3) that the high levels of achievement in this population in these largely non-traditionally female roles would be represented by high levels of career self-efficacy (Long, 1989). In addition, that the "pioneer" status of many of these women might require a stronger sense of self-efficacy to survive and succeed (Fitzgerald, Fassinger & Betz, 1995); (4) that the African American/Black women in the sample would be more likely to choose relational and collective approaches to achievement, using the full range of social support available in their various communities

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for handling obstacles to their career development (Carter & Cook, 1992; Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 1990; Richie, 1992); (5) that racism and sexism would adversely affect African American/Black women's career development (Sokoloff, 1990) and that sexism would adversely affect White women (Gilbert, 1992), creating obstacles to their career achievement, and possibly even causing African American/Black women to avoid career fields which they appraise as being particularly racially or sexually biased (Evans & Herr, 1991); (6) and that these women leaders might be expected to be able to handle obstacles to their achievement, to persevere in the face of those obstacles (Kobasa, 1982), to have a good sense of self-knowledge, to take initiative, to pursue their own goals, to be interested in using power to improve society (Cantor & Bernay, 1992), to demonstrate that internal standards and intrinsic rewards were very highly valued, and that they would prefer to achieve without the use of networks (Fassinger & Richie, 1994).

The specific protocol we developed for our in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants (described below) addressed these general exploratory questions regarding the professional development experiences of our sample. The protocol developed for this study was open-ended and exploratory in nature to allow the full experience of the participants to emerge. The intention of the researchers was to develop a theory of career development for these achievers which would then be modified and tested by further study with similar and different populations.

Method

Participants

The present study is embedded in an extensive on-going national study of women's achievement. In the first phase of the present study, 125 nationally prominent, highly-successful African American/Black and White women were quantitatively studied by survey; these women were identified in the media and by their professional organizations as being leaders across 10 occupational fields (see Fassinger & Richie, 1994, for a full description of the study). This national sample represented a wide geographic, age and occupational distribution. While no statistical analyses were performed on the current sample, those conducted on the original sample indicated no statistically significant differences were found by

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race for income level, age, years of education or occupational status (Fassinger & Richie, 1994). At the time data were collected during the first phase, participants were queried about their willingness to be interviewed for a later phase of the research. Thus, the participants for the present study were all women who participated in the first phase of the study (or, in one case, who met the original criteria for high-achieving women in the first phase; see below). Participants were nine African American/Black and nine White women, matched as closely as possible in age, occupation, and geographical location within each of eight occupational fields. The occupational fields represented by the participants who were willing to be interviewed were: business (two private business owners); education (a college president and the leader of a national educational organization); athletics (a professional athlete and a sportscaster who had been a competitive athlete); science (an astronomer and a physician who was also in public service); law/politics (a politician/elected representative and a judge); visual arts (two painters); literary arts (two writers, one of whom wrote fiction and one of whom was a playwright/performer); and journalism/media (two editors, both of whom also wrote nonfiction, and two newscasters). Twelve women in the sample were currently married, and 14 of the women had children. The range of ages in the sample (based on the 17 women for whom that information was available) was 34 to 72, with a mean age of 51 and most between the ages of 40 and 60.

Generally, in qualitative research, it is appropriate to intentionally draw a sample to address a particular research question (Miles & Huberman, 1984). For the present study, the sample of matched African American/Black and White women is appropriate, as the aim of the research was to include diverse experiences and to examine the effects of both racism and sexism on career development. However, one drawback to the present study was having a primarily self-selected sample. This again raises the issue of the generalizability of these results, or how applicable the emergent theory will be to other women. Qualitative researchers generally maintain that when appropriate sampling is done initially, and the emerging theory is based on the data, the theory that is generated should generalize well to other situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Interview Protocol

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The primary instrument used in the present study was an interview protocol developed by our original research team after extensive literature review (highlighted above) and team discussion. The original research team consisted of six women: two African American/Black (ages 22 and 40), one Eurasian (age 24), and three White (two of whom were Jewish, ages 24, 29, and 42); one faculty member, three advanced graduate students in counseling fields, and two volunteer assistants, (one of whom had completed a bachelor's degree in psychology and one of whom had a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in urban affairs).

A draft of the protocol was created and piloted. Wording specifically was chosen in order to minimize response bias in favor of constructs already in the psychological literature (e.g., the use of "handle" instead of "cope" and "believe internally" in lieu of references to "self-efficacy" or "attributions"), and to avoid threatening participants by being too analytical or invasive. The questions also were open-ended in order to further minimize any guiding of the participants' responses, with prompts devised for some of the questions in order to ensure that the specific content of the research questions would be addressed. For example, the question, "How did your parents influence your professional development?" sometimes elicited vague responses from pilot participants. Therefore, a prompt focused the response on the participant's personal experience: "What did they expect or encourage you to become?"

The interview protocol was piloted on eight locally available highly achieving women who were not tapped as participants in the current study. Two women in each of four occupational fields were interviewed. These fields were business, law/politics, education, and science/medicine; three of the women were African American/Black and five were White. All pilot participants were interviewed using the team approach and procedures to be used in the actual study (described below). This provided the team with practice in interviewing, taped transcripts for later practice in data analysis (described below), and useful feedback regarding the interview protocol. The two African American/Black and three White original research team members participated in at least one and as many as five pilot interviews (depending on skill level and practice needed), and the feedback from pilot participants was incorporated into the final interview protocol. As the interview protocol was both carefully designed, and tested for

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ambiguity (through the pilot study) it was considered an appropriate tool for collecting data (Kerlinger, 1986). The final questions in the interview protocol covered the following areas:

- (1) Current position (likes and dislikes about job, career path leading to current position, background influences on beliefs about potential success in this job).
- (2) Professional stress (common work-related problems, ways of handling problems and related stress, pattern of responses over time, relation to handling stress in personal life).
- (3) External challenges and limitations to achievement (obstacles encountered, positive and negative effects on career, effects of absence/presence of women and African Americans/Blacks in career field).
- (4) Success and failure (definition, perceptions of responsibility, internal beliefs about capabilities and achievements).
- (5) Background and current influences (family of origin, spouses/partners, children, relatives, friends, colleagues, community, educational and training experiences, temperament/personality).
- (6) Retrospective and summary (what would change if doing life over, anything else important we failed to ask).

Procedures

All participants from the first phase of the research who had returned a postcard expressing further interest in the study were sent a summary of the first phase of the study with a cover letter explaining the next phase. Eleven African American/Black women were chosen from the group of willing participants, and these women were paired with 13 White women (also from the group of willing participants) in similar occupations to create a potential interviewee list of 24 women. When a participant from our potential interviewee list was unable to be interviewed, we returned to our original sample to find another woman who fit her career and demographic description as closely as possible. When we were unable to match all of our participants through this approach, we invited an African American/Black businesswoman to participate who was not in the original sample but who fit the original criteria for participation, that is, a woman who had been nationally recognized for her work in her field (see Fassinger & Richie, 1994).

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Participants who agreed to be interviewed for the current study were sent a second letter with telephone follow-up in order to establish a time for the interview and to provide a description of the general topic areas to be covered. The women were interviewed by a team of two interviewers, one African American/Black and one White (both part of the original research team). The interviews lasted 60-90 minutes, were conducted in a location chosen by the participant, and were audiotaped. All of the participants in this study lived, worked, or were visiting the Northeast (Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, New York, or Connecticut) during the time of the data collection. Interviewers took field notes during the interviews, which provided background information and context for interpreting the interview transcripts during analysis, thus providing an additional source of information (triangulation for context) to ensure trustworthiness of the data and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

At the time of interview transcription and data analysis, six new undergraduate research assistants were added to the original research team (creating a 12-person research team): five were female and one was male; all were White; aged 19-30; all were pursuing bachelor's degrees in psychology or related fields; and, although all were interested in women's career issues, none had prior knowledge of the literature (thus, we refer to them throughout this manuscript as "naive" researchers). Data analysis training was conducted with the entire research team and included two half-day meetings in which general information on grounded theory was reviewed and data analysis was practiced using transcripts from the pilot portion of the study. After initial training, additional training took place during regular research team meetings, as each phase of the analysis was introduced and explained to the team members.

The audiotapes of the interviews for the main study were transcribed with notations made of interruptions, laughter and other apparent emotions, tone of voice, and emphasis on particular words, using a coding system developed by the research team (c.f. Reinharz, 1992), and were reviewed for accuracy by one of the interviewers. A final copy of the transcript was sent to the participant for her feedback on the accuracy of the transcript, referred to as "member checking" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); however, most participants did not return amended transcripts. The transcripts ranged in length from 12-

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29 single-spaced pages, with a modal length of 18 pages. In total, including field notes and transcripts, the research team had 344 pages of original data to analyze.

Data Analysis

In Gelso's (1979) concept of the bubble hypothesis -- a recognition that all research is inherently flawed -- it is made clear that there are trade-offs in all decisions about the type of research chosen to address a particular research question. The research question itself should determine the appropriate methodology. Qualitative methodology adds substantive potential for investigating new theoretical constructs and exploring new areas such as the understudied population here. As is the focus of our program of research, qualitative methodology may best be used in combination with quantitative approaches to the same phenomena in order to achieve a more comprehensive approach to theories and constructs, one that is both internally and externally valid (Hoshmand, 1989; Neimeyer & Resnikoff, 1982).

As previously mentioned, the method of grounded theory was used for data analysis, which culminates in the construction of a theory that is closely based on, or grounded in, the actual lived experiences of the participants in the study. In the grounded theory approach, the theory is generated by a series of steps which proceed, both sequentially and concurrently, from data collection, to generating concepts from the data and the categorization of all the available data, to synthesizing these many categories into a few salient constructs, and finally the articulation of the theory in which the emergent constructs and their interrelationships are described (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Throughout the process of data analysis and interpretation, as well as theory generation and verification, the current study utilized the full 12-member research team. Because the research team consisted of six "experienced" team members who were familiar with the research literature and the areas being investigated, as well as six naive team members who were new to the team at the data analysis stage and approached the data without being biased by a priori terms and constructs, we believed that these multiple perspectives would aid in the on-going articulation and management of subjectivity in data analysis. With a research team of 12 active and highly involved members, the voicing of diverse opinions

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and points of view was permitted to enrich the interpretation of the data, thereby contributing to the credibility of the articulated theory. That is, the use of multiple analyzers and arbiters of the data ensured some degree of dependability of the results and functioned to bring fresh perspectives and new ideas to the interpretations of the original six researchers, a process referred to as "peer debriefing" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is presumed in qualitative research that constructs emerging from the data analysis by more than one judge are likely to be relatively free from individual researcher bias (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

We were concerned about the impact of the power differentials between the original 6-person research team and our newer naive team members (and the subsequent impact on the peer debriefing process), due to age, familiarity with the research, and academic status differences. Numerous team discussions focused on this issue, as all efforts were made to include each team member with an equal voice. Naive team members understood explicitly that their perspective was not only valued, but crucial to our attempt to manage the researcher bias of the original team.

Each interview transcript was initially examined for specific "incidents" (by pairs of experienced and naive researchers), which were then translated or "coded" by the researchers into "concepts," a process referred to as "open coding." A master list of concepts was generated, which, when all participants' data had been coded, consisted of approximately 3000 separate, distinguishable concepts. (Some examples included: early lack of self-confidence, social support, others believed in her potential and abilities, social conscience--sense of responsibility to help others, feels it is important to share your resources even if you don't have much). These concepts were compared against one another for similarities, and then were abstracted and grouped into "categories." This task was done by full team consensus, and resulted in 123 separate categories from the data. (Some examples included: work attitudes, peer career support, maternal educational encouragement, early feelings about self, perseverance/ persistence, and education/training). From the master category list, the team used "axial coding" to determine relationships among categories generated in open coding and to group them into higher order "key categories," resulting in 15 distinguishable key categories (with some categories

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subsumed under more than one key category; some examples included: Racism and being African American/African American Influences, Approaches to Work/Career, Interconnected (Balance) Personal and Professional life, Leadership/Pioneer, Wanting to Change the World).

During the next step, "selective coding," the team determined whether key categories were considered "saturated," that is, that continued reading of the data failed to provide new information and that the category was well represented among participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). When saturation was achieved, the key category was accepted as critical to the emerging theory; this process also revealed where reorganization of key categories was necessary to make sense of existing data, resulting in reducing the number of categories to five higher order "constructs," which became the salient organizing elements of the emergent theory. Then "properties" (various aspects of the construct) and "dimensions" (aspects of each property placed on a continuum) were generated for each construct, and a narrative was written for each construct, using the information from the properties and dimensions to describe the construct thoroughly. One construct was chosen by the team as the "core narrative or story," that is, the story thought to be the most generally representative of, or core to, the experiences of the participants as a whole (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Returning to the original transcripts, the team noted and discussed confirming and disconfirming incidents in order to determine how accurately and comprehensively the core story fit the experiences of every participant. This discussion of disconfirming incidents is referred to as "negative case analysis" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

With the core story serving as the central construct of the theory, the relationships among the remaining constructs and the core construct were discussed and determined by the team, returning to the original transcripts to determine the "fit" of each of the constructs with the experiences of every participant. A pictorial representation or model of the emergent theory was constructed, contained in Figure 1. The final phase of data analysis also included comparison of the emergent theory with the existing research literature, as well as a final solicitation of feedback from participants in the study regarding the manuscript being prepared for publication. Participants were sent a draft of this manuscript, with a request to check it carefully for accuracy, fit with their experiences, and protection of their identities

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(member checking; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants were asked to return amended manuscripts or to contact us directly by phone if they had comments or corrections. A total of three participants responded, with complimentary comments and minor corrections; the latter were incorporated into the final manuscript where appropriate.

As can be seen from our description of our data analysis process, we used a number of strategies to increase reliability and validity. Kerlinger (1986) suggested training interviewers and both pretesting and revising the interview protocol to increase reliability of data in a qualitative study, as we did here. Internal consistency was managed in this research by using more than one judge or analyzer of the data set. It is presumed that data analyzed by more than one judge produces constructs that are more likely to be free from individual researcher bias and to be internally consistent. In addition, an analyzer or researcher who plays "devil's advocate," continually challenging assumptions and providing alternate explanations of the data, seems crucial (Marshall & Rossman, 1989) and this function was performed by all members of the research team. Researchers are considered "reliable" observers of a phenomenon when they have been trained to be impartial observers and rigorous analyzers of qualitative data (Patton, 1990) as they were in this study. Internal validity is proposed to be high for most qualitative research including the present study, because the conclusions of the research are grounded in and emanate directly from the data. Certainly, the results of this study have face validity, as the data generated the results directly, and therefore created results credible both to the participants and the consumers of the research (Patton, 1990). External validity poses more of a problem than internal validity, as one can never be sure whether this sample is representative of the population it is intended to exemplify, but this is, of course, a problem in quantitative research as well (Neimeyer & Resnikoff, 1982). For example, self-selection of research participants in some quantitative research calls into question the differences between respondents and non-respondents (which is often not known).

One suggested strategy we used to enhance the ability to generalize the results of this study was using multiple cases, to strengthen how useful the study is in more than one setting or context (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In terms of transferability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that depends largely not

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on the original researchers but on those who wish to use it elsewhere. The requirement of the original researchers is to provide "thick description", that is, enough descriptive data for others to determine whether the results of the original study transfer to other settings. We have attempted to do this throughout this manuscript.

The trustworthiness of this study can be considered relatively high because the model generated by the research is grounded in and emanated directly from the data. Having carefully and repeatedly scrutinized the transcripts of every participant in the study, and having requested feedback from participants at several points in the analysis process, provides some assurance that the emergent theory does, indeed, accurately represent the experiences reported by this particular sample. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested a series of techniques to achieve trustworthiness of the data, and in this study we applied three of those techniques: peer debriefing, negative case analysis and member checking. Other ways we strengthened potential weaknesses of our approach included: challenging theory once it was generated; searching for negative instances in the data which did not conform to theory; making the procedures and analysis explicit so the reader can judge their appropriateness to the questions; outlining the researchers' biases in the area so the reader can judge if the biases affected the development of the theory; and making the parameters of the participants or context explicit so the reader can judge if the study is applicable to any other context (Hoshmand, 1989; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Neimeyer & Resnikoff, 1982; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Clearly this study needs to be cross-validated and continually tested and then modified in future research.

Results

The present study resulted in an emergent theoretical model for understanding the career development of high achieving African American/Black and White women, represented in Figure 1. As can be seen in Figure 1, the theory is conceptualized as a conical representation involving several interpenetrating contextual "wraps" of influence on a core self, leading to particular consequences. The emergent model postulates a core story consisting of participants' career behaviors, attitudes toward work, and relationships in both professional and personal life, enacted within sociocultural, personal

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background, and current contextual conditions; in addition, actions and consequences result and, in turn, cycle back to exert influence on the contextual conditions, creating a dynamic, constantly evolving person-environment interaction.

The following sections describe in detail the five major components of the theoretical model, using direct quotations from the participants for illustrative purposes, and noting variability of responses within the emergent theory. Similar to a system used by Rhodes, Hill, Thompson, and Elliott (1994), we discuss the responses according to the following notation: (1) Wording using "generally," "most," "often," "these women," "the women in the sample," "the majority," "usually," "typically," and "tended" indicates the characteristic response of a majority (a dozen or more) of the participants; (2) wording using "some," "several," and "a number of" indicates responses from 5-11 participants; (3) wording using "a few" indicates responses from four participants or less; more specific wording (e.g., "all," "one") occasionally is used.

Core Story

In this theory, the central story or "core" category consists of the beliefs about themselves expressed by the women in the study -- the essence of how they see themselves in the world and who they are in relation to others and to their work. The most salient properties and dimensions of the core story told by these women are their strength and perseverance in facing challenges, their reliance on internal standards and judgment, their strong passion for their work, and a relational orientation that focuses on interconnectedness with others and the balancing of tasks and relationships.

The women in this sample generally showed a great deal of persistence in the face of barriers. These barriers might be sexism, racism for the African American/Black participants, low socioeconomic status, or personal life situations, but these women persevered in the face of those obstacles. Stated the African American/Black editor: "...you say, why didn't you ever give up? It never occurred to me. It never occurred to me to stop. I tried different things to keep going. But it never occurred to me to stop." Many of these women welcomed the challenges that those obstacles created for them, being able to push through those obstructions and use them to advantage. The African American/Black scientist said:

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I think, many people would feel that it's been a challenge probably being a female. It's been a challenge being Black...It's been a challenge, many people probably think, being from the South. But, you know, I really think that I've turned those challenges into assets for me. And made them work for me, instead of against me.

Despite the extrinsic rewards that these women have accrued -- fame, wealth, and recognition in their career fields -- most of these women described their own valuing of their work and its intrinsic rewards as much more personally important, as noted by the White newscaster:

I have reached something in this town which is a very tough town, that I would call success. That I've lived by my standards, that I've represented a certain brand of journalism, that I have integrity...And, that I really feel extremely fulfilled and enriched by the fact that I didn't compromise or ever sell myself out, that I did what was in my gut always...But I never judged myself on how much I made, I judged myself on what I did.

Many described themselves as loving their work and being privileged in being able to be paid to do something they love to do: "I am absolutely doing what I love and getting paid for it," stated one participant; "...there is nothing about my job I don't like," commented another.

Just as these women generally love what they do, they expressed deep commitment to their careers. They have a sense of investment in their work and feel passion for the kind of work they do. Stated the White businesswoman:

I think you can only be successful if you're tying what you do in your work life with your passions...So to me a successful person is a person who is able in their occupation to follow their passions and do those things that they want most in the world to do. What I want to do in life is I want to change the world and make it a fairer place.

Generally, the women in this sample expressed a vision of "the big picture," that is, they had some perspective regarding how they and their work fit into the world at large. Their responses to our open-ended questions pointed to an understanding that they are connected to others in the world, and that their own problems or difficulties need to be seen in the larger context. Said a newscaster, "I know what I do is important to people, deem it as being important, but I know that, in the big picture, it's not, it's just an occupation. So I don't take it too seriously."

In general, the women in this sample demonstrated a relational orientation, either in their personal or professional lives, or both: "I am so enormously grateful for the ability to reach other people's lives," stated one participant. They expressed feeling connected to other women, to other African Americans/Blacks, in and out of their career field. Many noted participation in their community currently

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and/or had been connected to their communities as children. They exhibited a sense of how their families of origin and how others in their past had contributed to their current level of achievement. These contributions could be both positive and negative, but these women were very aware of how different people had affected their lives.

The women in this sample tended to see merit in those around them, striving to help others realize their potential. They tended to think from a collective rather than individual perspective about work and personal life. Stated the African American/Black educator:

I've always believed you should enjoy yourself, you should work hard, you shouldn't forget others. You should always look out for others and be cognizant of others in...your surroundings. I've always been raised to have a deep sense of social consciousness, you know, to be very involved and very concerned about the society in which I live....I was always taught that it doesn't matter how little you have. You can share with others.

These women demonstrated awareness of themselves in the larger context of the world, in their community, in their career field, in their families, and with their friends. They were aware that most people do not achieve at high levels without the contributions of other people: "I always try to remember that I owe a lot of what I am to others, a lot of the opportunities." They tended to give credit to the people around them for their successes and to take the responsibility for any failures of which they were a part.

The African American/Black scientist asserted:

I've often told people..."I don't mind being the lightning rod, as long as I know that the thunder is behind me." And many organizations and many people have really been out there being my thunder. And that...keeps me going.

The essence, then, of the core story is persistence, connection, and passion. This was summarized best by the African American/Black scientist:

And you must do everything you can to try and put those programs and policies in place to make that happen regardless [of] what other people think, regardless [of] what they do. You've got a mission and you must move forward with your mission. Take the abuse, take whatever it is. You knew when you came here, it was not going to be easy. If it was easy, it would have been done. So just go forward...I've done everything I need to do and want to do for me. So everything I do now is really for the bright young people that are coming along.

Sociocultural Conditions

Grounded theory also assumes that there are "conditions" which affect the core story (Strauss &

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Corbin, 1990). In the emergent theory described here, the conditions are three concentric layers or wraps that surround and filter through to the core. The first, outermost wrap is sociocultural conditions, specifically sexism and the reality of being a woman in a patriarchal and often sexist environment, and for the African American/Black participants, racism and the reality of being African American/Black in a racist environment. The only consistent difference between the experiences of the two races in this sample was the need for the African American/Black women to cope with racism, as well as sexism, in the workplace. However, the effects of the combination of racism and sexism evidenced similarity to the effects of sexism alone as experienced by the White women, and all women were strikingly similar in the coping strategies they used to face these obstacles. It also should be noted that the bitterest, most painful responses came from the African American/Black artist and writer.

The sociocultural conditions layer is outermost because it is the most pervasive in the lives of these women -- that is, who they are as women and African Americans/Blacks determines how they are as professionals. The most salient properties and dimensions of this condition are the workplace barriers faced by these women (e.g., discrimination, lack of opportunity); support by and for other women and African Americans/Blacks; their notable persistence in the face of sexism and racism; and the passionate desire evidenced in the participants to end sexism and racism and make the world a fairer place for women and African Americans/Blacks.

Being a woman in a sexist context is a condition that was reported to affect every participant in some way. For most participants, sexism created barriers, such as lack of opportunity, outright discrimination, and/or negative attitudes from others. For example, the journalists/newscasters in the sample discussed prejudicial attitudes in hiring, being assigned to job levels beneath their abilities and talents, the absence of women in professional positions as well as on the air, and the emphasis on appearance rather than journalistic talent. The artists and writers commented on the discrimination among peers, galleries and publishers. The women in the sample who were in science, business, education, law/politics, and athletics spoke of the absence of women in those fields and the discrimination in educational experiences, salaries, promotions, and physical conditions in the workplace. One

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participant, the White educator, noted: "...I've recognized that times when I've encountered roadblocks, the roadblock is very simply that I'm a woman, and I can't do much about my gender."

In contrast, a few of the participants reported acceptance in the workplace. One participant, a newscaster, commented that she is "very fortunate that I work with a group that is receptive and embraces the fact that I'm a Black woman." Generally however, the women in this sample had experienced disempowerment at some point in their careers because of being women and had to develop ways of reclaiming power and control in the workplace -- for example, through writing, political action, or deliberately empowering other women. Many of the women in the sample described not allowing themselves to be blocked by either sexism or racism. As the African American/Black athlete described:

...it's something that, again, I turn into a positive. I know that people are going to have me under a microscope so I refuse to give the "enemy," so to speak, ammunition by not being prepared. I have to know more than the person sitting next to me, a challenge that I welcome some. There is pressure being a woman in a male dominated field.

Support of and by other women seemed to be critically important for almost all of these participants in counteracting the isolation of being pioneers in their fields. Many spoke of the critical importance of female mentors and role models in their own professional development. The White editor commented, "I had a very warm and close professional community in...the feminist community, and that's the nature of sisterhood." Generally the women in this sample expressed a strong commitment to supporting other women around them and an eschewal of actions by other women that were not perceived as supportive -- indeed, many commented on the desire to end sexism as a driving force behind their choices and decisions about where to put their professional time and energy. The White politician commented: "...we [women] looked to expand our ranks [in government] and I'm pleased to say I think I had a hand in bringing other women in and helping show them the way."

A few participants spoke of the importance of economic security for women or for themselves as women. Said one participant:

You have to have economic independence to be free. And women need economic [independence] -- that's the biggest area. If we can get women economically stronger, they would become stronger people because the more money you can make equals more freedom.

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Many of the women also discussed ways in which sexism entered their personal lives as well as their professional lives (e.g., unsupportive families), and every woman expressed awareness of her gender in relation to her professional development, mentioning ways in which feelings and attitudes about oneself were powerfully influenced by this awareness. The African American/Black educator felt her gender worked for and against her: "Being a woman has been negative but it's also been positive. I know that there have been doors that have opened because I'm a woman." Although many of the participants mentioned self-doubt (currently or in the past), the general effect of being a woman in the workplace seemed to be to increase determination to succeed and to change the world so that other women might succeed as well. For example, the African American/Black businesswoman said, "The challenges are becoming an equal player in an environment where there is inequality. And so, I must try to become one of the players."

Among the White half of the sample, they exhibited a general lack of awareness of racism or racial issues. Given the privilege associated with being a part of a majority in a culture, this might not be surprising. In many cases, the White women had to be prompted to identify any issues related to race in their occupational field. Within the African American/Black half of the sample, the combined effects of sexism and racism were very prevalent. Most African American/Black participants, for example, outlined difficulties due to the interactive oppressions of racism and sexism, described the salience of both oppressions in their professional development, and noted that sexism and racism were inextricably linked.

Said one participant:

I deal with many of the African American groups, but I also deal with many of the feminist groups. The reason I do it is because...you cannot stand one half free and one half slave. What would they do -- allow me as a woman to make it and enslave my heritage? Or the other way around.

Like sexism, racism presented barriers for these women in the workplace, through lack of opportunities, outright discrimination, prejudicial attitudes from others, and professional and personal isolation. The African American/Black artist and writer were particularly bitter about their experiences of racism in the workplace. The artist told the following story of professional colleagues:

They were outrageous! I had a partner who did not want me in her private home when

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she was having professional parties, where I was the assistant on the show!...Any policy-making parties I would be totally alienated from...African American artists did not have a chance in hell.

Most of the African American/Black women mentioned a strong sense of the history of their people, and some discussed their struggles with anger and bitterness over the racist treatment of themselves and/or other African Americans/Blacks; a few participants mentioned negative treatment by other African Americans/Blacks as well. Again, those in artistic professions appeared to express the most difficulty and pain. One noted,

I feel extremely hysterically distressed because I see the state of my success, which is astronomical relative to the conditions I have to go against, and I'm seeing my coworkers jump on me for this success...it's such an astronomical task to deal with all the scapegoating and all the internalized rage.

Most of these women described themselves as actively involved in their African American/Black communities, and actively sought support from other African Americans/Blacks. Said one participant, "The presence of African American women in my field has been very helpful...[they] provide emotional sustenance and academic legitimacy...it puts me in a context where I know I'm not by myself." The desire to eradicate racism and give back to their communities was reported as a driving force behind the professional goals and activities for many of the participants in the study. In addition, the African American/Black women seemed to have a strong sense of internal strength and persistence, and a driving desire to make the world a more welcoming place for other African Americans/Blacks. The educator noted:

Now to be a minority means you gotta be super good because you gotta keep the door open for someone else. And the other lesson you learn is you reach back and you help other people come through...women have to help women and minorities have to help minorities, because otherwise we don't get through that door very often.

Personal Background Conditions

Moving inward toward the core, the next layer of conditions comprises personal background affected by sociocultural conditions, and, in turn, exerting effects on the current contexts in which these women live and work. Salient properties and dimensions of personal background conditions are the messages and expectations of families, teachers, and others; early interests and experiences in the career field; influences of mentors and role models; and formal and informal preparation and training for a

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particular career.

For many of these women, the people in their lives and the messages they received were the salient background influences that led them to believe they could be whatever they wanted to be. These influences included both implicit and explicit messages, which influenced their general views of themselves and their career aspirations. The women in this study described a wide variety of individuals who were important in their career development, including husbands/partners, family members, good friends, teachers, colleagues, and other professional women.

Many of these women's comments about the supportive individuals around them included their families. Summarized one participant,

Growing up, that's what you need. To me, that's what makes a great person -- is to have someone say: you're the best you could do anything...You need somebody who is in your corner saying "whatever you do you're great, don't listen to that, don't look at the grades, you're great."

In terms of parental influences, many of these women described their mothers' influence as very positive and important. For example, the African American/Black scientist said of her mother:

...whereas they [her parents] may not have been pushing college and knowing about college, they always wanted us to have the best education that we could have, but you know, my mother, I remember her really, really, pushing me very hard.

In addition, many of the women reported that their mothers had served as inspirational role models, and several also considered their fathers' influence to be positive and important. The African American/Black businesswoman described her father's influence as very strong:

His philosophy was you had to get up earlier than, you had to work harder than, you had to stay around longer than...as a Black male I believe he felt as though whatever the barriers or hindrances, they could be overcome by determination, perseverance, and hard work.

However, several of the women reported having fathers who held traditional values and as a result expected their daughters to follow a traditional path. For example, the White businesswoman spoke of how her father still questions why she does not stay at home with her children.

In general, however, most of the women indicated that they received a great deal of family support for pursuing their career, and in some cases they felt that although their families were not overtly

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supportive, they were not unsupportive either. The women who did speak of family support clearly felt strongly about it. For example, the African American/Black athlete said, "I had a very solid family background, very supportive ...they are my worst critics...and I appreciate that, it's tainted with love."

Many of the women also felt strongly influenced by their families' values. For most of the women, their families instilled a value for hard work. For example, the White businesswoman said, "I had a really good background in values and working hard, and understood that things in life are not always easy and that you have to be responsible for yourself." While some of the women's families held traditional values that may have predicted a more stereotypical and less career-oriented role for them, there was usually enough support to act as a balance.

For some women, their values grew out of their religious beliefs as well. A number of these women grew up with a religious background or believing in some form of a higher power. The White editor spoke of the influence of religion:

Well, I think being Jewish has a tremendous influence because I grew up in a culture where the most revered thing is learning and achievement. You could look ugly, and have no money, and if you were smart, you were the greatest, you were the best...You had to be educated ...You had to give back...You had to be aware of those who had less than you, had to give money to them in our culture...Those values have stayed with me and have been informative for me.

Influences of partners/spouses were reported to be positive and important for many of the women in this sample, although a few had apparently disengaged from previous partners who were unsupportive. The African American/Black judge said of her husband, "My husband of course was very supportive. You can't do these things if your husband isn't going to be supportive." Most of the women who had current partners reported that they shared home and family responsibilities, which allowed the women to focus on their careers. In addition to career support, many of the women also found professional guidance in their partners as well.

For most of these women, the influences of teachers were reported to be positive and abundant. The African American/Black educator in the sample described one particular teacher's response to her inability to do a task: "She said, 'that's not the point, there are things that you can't do, I don't want you to dwell on what you can't do! Tell me what you can do.'"

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However, a few of the women indicated that there were teachers who were unsupportive. The White writer reported: "I was so unsuccessful as a schoolchild, my teachers, for some reason...thought I was stupid." Ironically, this led to her eventual career in writing, as she would write stories instead of doing homework because her efforts were often criticized; eventually, as she progressed in school, her talents were recognized by other teachers who encouraged her to pursue her writing.

The six women in the sample who claimed a role model or mentor (White educator, African American/Black physician, White scientist, African American/Black artist, African American/Black editor, White newscaster), found that influence to be inspirational and supportive. The White educator said:

I strongly believe I emerged from [her undergraduate women's college] a much stronger person than I entered, with a great deal more self-confidence. I found an area which I really thoroughly enjoyed, I had good mentors, I had good advisors, I had the classic support.

However, the prevalence of mentor or role model influences varied a great deal in this sample. A few of the women did not feel they had any specific role models; in fact, the White athlete said she wished she had more role models in her life. Since many of these women were pioneers in their fields, they did not have the opportunity to establish mentor relationships with other women. Yet in recognizing how important a role model or mentor can be, many of these women now expressed dedication to being role models for others.

For many of the women in this sample, childhood exposure to their career field was positive and important, and they generally indicated that they had a great deal of early interest both in their particular field as well as in having a career more generally. Through early exposure to their fields many of the women in this sample were afforded opportunities to gain experience and start their professional development at young ages. A White journalist indicated early interest in a career that was typical of many of the women in this sample:

When we were in high school we would sit there and dream about our careers - not too much more than that, but that sense, we were just not going to be home moms. I was an oddity in that I was the only person who didn't quit my job for the summer to sit on the beach, and that's what everybody did...I was looking for a career.

Other childhood experiences that were salient for many of these women included early exposure

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to particular social/cultural forces and messages (e.g., the civil rights and feminist movements) that influenced their views of themselves and their place in the world. With regard to race, the White women in the sample (with one exception), did not identify the impact of being White on their career development. In the one example where the issue was raised by a participant, the White newscaster noted only that she moved up in the field when the station she worked for was ready for a White woman on the air. In addition, the White women talked generally about African Americans/Blacks in their fields, but identified little impact on them of the absence of African Americans/Blacks professionally.

In contrast, the African American/Black women in the sample identified clearly the impact of racism and being African American/Black on their career development and personal lives. Overall, they described both positive and negative effects. They described the positive effects of the civil rights movement on their opportunities, the advantages of segregated communities leading them to see African Americans/Blacks as leaders and role models, the nurturance of the African American/Black community in furthering their careers, and the strong positive messages they received about themselves as African American/Black from their families. On the negative side, they described the strong impact of racism in their lives (discussed in sociocultural conditions section), and concerns about "tokenism" professionally. Finally, they described the impact of their own racial identification in influencing their professional focus.

The messages perceived by the women in the sample were quite variable, this may be due to the differences in ages of the women in the sample. Perhaps the impact of the social forces of the 1960's era had a greater impact on younger members of our sample than on the older participants. Some of our participants were taught that they could rise above any obstacle, while others were led to believe that there was a predetermined path they were expected, as women, or as African Americans/Blacks, to follow. One African American/Black participant, for example, reported learning that African Americans/Blacks could be leaders despite societal oppression:

...in my home, an African American woman was the leader. In my church, African Americans were the leaders. In my school, when I went away to college, they were leaders. When I came to Washington, see, I came to a community that was predominantly minority, and so even though we weren't all of the leaders, there were still leaders.

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The White athlete spoke of how the lesson she learned from her awareness of social injustice had directed her goals: "I lived in a world where I've been discounted my whole life. And I don't like it. I don't want any human being to be discounted because of their gender, race, religion, or whatever."

In terms of career preparation, many of these women had traditional training and had spent many arduous years working their way up to their current positions of leadership. For example, the White newscaster said,

I went from secretary, and a pretty good glorified secretary's job and did my Masters at night...I did films for them and I delivered trivia information for them...all of a sudden they were looking for a white woman. So I started on the air in 1973.

In addition to formal training, most of the women had learned informally with and from others, as well as on their own. The White athlete commented: "We learned how to be businesswomen -- marketing, promotion, just every part...and we learned it by the seat of the pants."

Current Contextual Conditions

The innermost layer or wrap surrounding the core and exerting influence on it is current contextual conditions, which consists of contemporary (versus past) forces acting on these women's lives. The most important properties and dimensions of these current contextual conditions are stress, pain, and difficulty (from internal as well as external sources); the coping strategies used in handling difficulties and stress; and levels of support from contemporaries (families, partners/spouses, colleagues, friends, and community).

The women in this study generally reported receiving solid support from the people currently involved in their personal lives -- families, spouses, and friends -- despite variable past experiences in being supported by others. These relationships often were reported to be critically important in mediating how the participants viewed and dealt with stressful situations. This was true even for the few women who reported currently experiencing difficult relationships and little support, for whom the pain from disappointing relationships seemed to strongly affect their current perceptions and feelings.

The majority of the women described a great deal of positive support from their current spouse/partner, children, and relatives. The African American/Black educator spoke of her family's

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support: "My husband [has] always believed in me and my children supported me." A White journalist described how her husband gave up his career and moved to accommodate her career:

The rumors at his company were, they're getting divorced, she's getting a career. I think it was very hard for him. And I think that was an incredibly generous thing. He ended up making a completely different career.

Most of the women indicated that they also received a great deal of support from coworkers and colleagues in their current professional positions, as depicted by the White writer who said, "I had a very very warm and close professional community in book publishing, friends I have still to this day." Many women reported colleagues who had inspired them, challenged them, directed them, and helped them to develop professionally.

In terms of stress, the women in this sample often reported specific work-related stress in addition to the strain of on-going sexism and racism (discussed above). For the African American/Black women, they often experienced both sexism and racism resulting in a highly stressful and uncomfortable work environment, especially for the African American/Black artist and writer. Moreover, across fields, the African American/Black women described having to confront a range of behaviors, throughout different stages of their careers, due to their race that ranged from blatant discrimination to subtle prejudicial attitudes and comments.

In addition, for all of the women, other sources of work stress included external demands (such as deadlines, limited budgets, coworkers, or workloads), as well as living up to their own goals or personal standards. The White writer, for example, spoke of the challenges in managing her time: "It takes time to write, it takes time to be a wife, it takes time to take care of the kids."

Observing the ways in which these women reportedly responded to their stress gives some suggestion of the reasons for their exceptional achievements. Despite individual variation in the types of stressors experienced, these women tended to rely on similar coping strategies. In particular, for the African American/Black women, the added stress of racism in addition to sexism, did not elicit different coping responses than those demonstrated by the White women responding to sexism alone. Rather, the majority of these women persevered, attacking problems head-on in a proactive manner whenever

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possible. For example, the White writer said:

I think you just have to keep fighting, you just have to keep saying you're going to do it because you could easily fall back. I'm stubborn and it works both ways. That's what kept me hanging in there when I couldn't get published in my thirties. I couldn't quit.

In addition to perseverance and direct action, other coping strategies described by these women included travel, setting boundaries, spirituality, reading, hobbies, exercise, psychotherapy, spending time with family or friends, and isolating oneself.

Many of these women turned to others for support, although a few participants mentioned isolating themselves in response to difficulties. The White educator said, "There is a network of friends that I would turn to, if need be. And I think that's sort of what friends are all about, to be there in good times and in difficult times." Several of the African American/Black participants particularly noted the encouragement and support they received from the African American/Black community. Although a minority in this sample, several women reported that their belief in God also played an important role in their coping. The African American/Black scientist, for example, asserted that "I believe with every fiber that's in me that even when things are terrible, I really believe that God knows best."

For a few of the women, the opposition they faced in the workplace was too powerful to have yet been successfully overcome, and the pain and difficulty caused by oppression resulted in highly pessimistic views. This appeared to be of particular concern to the two African Americans/Blacks in the Arts. Said the African American/Black artist:

I had one class where I had two skinheads, some very rough kids, I was scared to death. There was a razorblade in my name plate, a few years before that someone had thrown black paint against my door. And ironically, my chairman dismisses it.

Although only a few women in this sample currently were experiencing a great deal of pain and difficulty in their work lives, their accounts provide a chilling picture of the profound effects of racism and sexism in the individual lives of even the most prominent and successful women. Moreover, the persistence and success of all of these women in the face of a variety of stressors and adverse circumstances in their current contexts suggests an extraordinary capacity to manage stress and overcome adversity.

Actions and Consequences

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Grounded theory postulates that actions and consequences result from the core story being enacted within its surrounding conditions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the emergent model presented here, actions and consequences manifest themselves in the specific ways these women lead their work lives. The most salient properties and dimensions of the work lives of this sample included their pioneer and leadership status in their fields; their passion for their work; their notably hard work and high standards for themselves; their awareness of their place in the world and a strong sense of collective empowerment; fierce dedication to helping others and making the world a fairer place (and using their positions to do that); and a strong sense that their personal and professional lives are interconnected -- that "career" decisions are "life" decisions for these women.

Of course, because these are women of great power and influence, they do change the world each day of their lives, so the model contains arrows (see Figure 1) indicating the ongoing influence that the actions and consequences of these women's work lives continuously have on the conditions surrounding them. Thus, as sociocultural conditions change, the understanding and perception of one's background and influences also change, as do the current contextual realities; the core self is influenced in turn and continues to change, which in turn influences one's actions and consequences. As an example, a woman of influence in the judicial sphere may work to bring about legislation that increases the numbers of women in particular occupations (actions and consequences). This change is reflected in increasing numbers and visibility of women in these fields (sociocultural conditions). This new awareness of the presence of women may well bring into sharp relief the negative messages the woman received in her youth about "acceptable" occupations for women and result in a clearer understanding of the internalized impact of those messages (personal background). This new understanding of the limitations of her background may induce her to actively seek out collegial support from women co-workers in the present (current context). Such support is likely to help her better recognize institutional barriers and not internalize them as individual inadequacy (core story), as well as fight harder to eliminate them (actions and consequences). The cycle thus exists in a continuous dynamic of interaction between the women and their environments, as Figure 1 indicates.

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The women in the current sample reported working hard at balancing the work and family components of their lives. They tended to view career decisions as life decisions, because they saw their professional and personal lives as interconnected. If married or partnered, these women tended to receive a great deal of support and help from their husbands/partners (as previously mentioned). However, many of these women also reported that the emotional responsibility for their children (if any) and executive function of organizing and running the household fell mostly to them, creating an ongoing struggle in trying to achieve balance between their personal and professional lives. Many of the women felt that they were able to maintain a balance with which they felt comfortable. Said the White businesswoman:

I feel really lucky in my life. I have, you know, a good family life, a wonderful group of friends and supporters. I love what I do at work. I'm able to impact in my community nationally and locally in what I do. So this balance - of all the pieces of your life.

Typically, these women were able to achieve some balance, but some expressed the difficulty and sacrifices involved in doing that. The African American/Black athlete described how her career interfered with her personal goals:

And I was like, I don't want to go to [a predominantly White community]. But I knew it was a great career move. And it has been, it's been invaluable. But I knew that personally I was going to suffer because this is not an environment that is my environment.

Other participants described how they would compromise their career goals in order to meet personal demands. The White editor stated: "...when my kids were home they came first. And if I responded to anything, I would respond to them...I'm a typical Jewish mother. Deadlines, my own plans, wherever I'm going, everything goes for the kids." The African American/Black writer made it clear that she felt women had to look at both personal and professional demands when making any career decision.

Several of the participants described how becoming a parent actually had contributed to their success in their careers. The African American/Black scientist (a physician) stated:

I think [being a mother] affected my career positively...I've learned to add sense to some of the things that I would say as a doctor to mothers...I feel that learning how to be a good mom really made me a better doctor.

Several women also described how their children and families allowed them to keep their careers in

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perspective and minimize whatever stressors were encountered at work: "I have children and they add stress and relieve stress...they're great fun, and they are very good at helping you put life into perspective."

Despite the ability of some of these women to put their careers into a larger perspective, their responses also indicated that they worked very hard at their jobs, expressing a belief in doing whatever is necessary to accomplish the task at hand. They demonstrated a sense of investment in all the things they do; they clearly set personal goals and reached them; and they held very high standards for themselves. When discussing their approaches to their work or career, these women generally described themselves as hard workers who are "driven" and "passionate" about their work. Said the White newscaster, "I'm a pretty serious, driven woman...I went to every story, you know, I did everything. I drummed up a lot of stories, I put together the pieces pretty well...I earned the respect of my colleagues." They appeared more concerned that they do a job well for the love of the work and to satisfy their own internal standards, than for the recognition that their careers afford them.

As mentioned previously, these women generally reported feeling connected to and valuing people. However, for many of the women, this relational identity has had to function within an isolationist context because they were often the first or one of only a few women and/or African Americans/Blacks in their career field. So, despite the fact that these women reported valuing the people around them and that connections with others were extremely important to their achievement, they may have had difficulties in making some of those connections at work with similar others. One participant, a businesswoman, commented:

The absence of African Americans in this industry creates a support problem, because...everybody else out there is a competitor, so therefore you lack sometimes the opportunity to gather with...people with a common career.

All but one of the current sample indicated that they as women or as African Americans/Blacks were the first or one of the few in their career field. This put many of them in a position of leadership, regardless of their own perceptions regarding their personal leadership qualities. Generally the women expressed positive feelings and attitudes about taking a leadership role, but a number questioned their abilities in this area.

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Largely as a result of feeling connected to other people (particularly other women and African Americans/Blacks), these women generally expressed strong feelings about making a difference in the world and leaving it a slightly better place. The White editor said:

Well, what I strongly believe is, to try to get some other doors open for everyone and then let them climb upon your shoulders...gets more doors open or gets the ceilings cracked.

In their desire to change the world, many of these women were activists and advocates for the causes they believe in, and demonstrated clearly their willingness to fight for their beliefs. For many of these women, this took the form of making changes within their career fields for other women and African Americans/Blacks, as expressed by the White scientist: "I've also worked hard to try and improve the situation for women, for minorities, for anybody that needed help." In particular, for the African American/Black women, the goal of making the world a fairer place was specifically directed toward helping all African Americans/Blacks and women. As summarized by the African American/Black businesswoman:

...the playing field is not yet level, so therefore, if I'm gonna help anybody, I better help somebody who's on the down side, instead of people who I think are born with a little bit more of an advantage than other people.

Discussion and Implications

Summary and Discussion of Results

This study sought to explore the career development of highly achieving African American/Black and White women, constructing a theoretical model in order to represent the ways in which the women in this sample described their personal and professional lives. This study described a group of relationally oriented women who are persistent in the face of obstacles, and are passionate and hard workers. These participants primarily rely on internally-set, high standards to measure their success and have a focus on balancing tasks and relationships. These women have had to deal with sexism and, for half the sample, racism at work and in their personal lives, and see their personal and career lives as inextricably linked. These women report that they are strongly connected to other people, and they have a sense of perspective and awareness of their place in the world. These women are dedicated to making the world

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a fairer place through their work, and particularly to improving conditions for other women and African Americans/Blacks.

Comparing this model to existing vocational literature suggests one way in which qualitative research can be used to enhance a knowledge base of theory and empirical findings. In particular, the results of this study illustrate ways in which women's career development differs from men's, confirming the inappropriateness of applying career theories written by and based on White men to White women and people of color. While the women in this sample appear somewhat similar to men in the literature on achievement in that they attack professional problems head on (Menaghan & Merves, 1984), persevere in the face of difficulties, and perceive a sense of control over their work environments (Kobasa, 1987), many of the participants' career-related behaviors differ from those typically exhibited by men, and have demonstrated that one need not be a man to succeed in either traditional or non-traditional fields. In particular, these women did not appear to mute their femininity in order to succeed in their careers and displayed expressive characteristics (e.g., nurturance, relational orientation, and sensitivity) that contrast with the rugged individualism often associated with a traditionally masculine style of achievement (Cook, 1993, Lemkau, 1986, Lipman-Blumen, 1992). In fact, the participants achieved career success on their own terms, maintaining interconnectedness, valuing social support, and balancing their personal and professional lives. Moreover, the "queen bee" stereotype that depicts women in high positions as unsupportive and competitive was not apparent in the data from this sample. Rather, these women described consistently a sense of collective identity or shared experience with regard to other women.

Overall, an inherent theme throughout the model that differentiates the career development of this sample from that of men's, is the importance of interconnectedness in their career achievements (cf. Lipman-Blumen, 1992). For example, the characteristics describing the core personalities of these women reflect a relational orientation and a perspective that centers around seeing the big picture. They do not view their current lives as separate from their past experiences, nor do they claim their successes as independent from the contributions of significant individuals and messages received. For many of the women, their perspective is influenced by the collective experience of women and/or African

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Americans/Blacks in addition to their own individual circumstances.

The importance of connections permeates the other conditions of the model, and the past and current contexts of this sample provide additional examples of individual and community support as significant components in career development and achievement. Contrary to the typical independence and competition demonstrated by many highly achieving men (Cook, 1993, Lemkau, 1986, Lipman-Blumen, 1992), these women discussed their reliance on the support they receive professionally and personally, attributing their successes to the teams of which they are a part. Given the results of our previous work (Fassinger & Richie, 1994) which would lead us to believe that this sample would prefer to achieve in the work world without the use of networks, it was surprising to see the level of connection that this group of women exhibited, and the extent to which they cited the use of teams and the importance of others in their everyday career successes. In particular, many of the women discussed the role that their families of origin, husbands/partners, friends, mentors, role models, teachers, colleagues and other women have played in their career pursuits, and recognize how they have been influenced by significant people in their lives. Many of the participants also reported the use of social support when faced with stressors.

In addition, interconnection relates to the multiple roles these women strive to balance, for their career decisions are often intertwined with personal/family decisions. Many of the women described the significance their families played in their successes, and discussed the ways in which they worked to combine a career and a family. Given this strong focus and value of the women in this sample, traditional career development theories have missed a significant factor in their inattention to the importance of incorporating a family and career. This is consistent with a growing body of literature suggesting that, for women, vocational issues must be considered in the context of other life roles and choices (see Fitzgerald, et al., 1995).

In terms of the actions and consequences that result from the core story and surrounding conditions, these women demonstrated their relational orientation in their strong commitment to trying to make a difference in the world through their work, particularly in improving conditions for other women

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and African Americans/Blacks. Specifically, many are dedicated to furthering the careers of other women and reported both receiving and giving support as individuals and as a part of various communities. Again, this contrasts with the individualistic focus often assumed in the vocational behavior of men.

Previous literature (e.g., Carter & Cook, 1992; Richie, 1992) anticipated the powerful effects of the sociocultural context on African American/Black women's career development found here, and, surprisingly, these effects also were found for the White women in the present study. The vocational literature appears to better address the effects of sexism and gender stereotypes on women than the effects of racism on people of color. The combined effects of two sets of stereotypes on African American/Black women is not well addressed in the literature (Richie, 1992). As previously noted, the women in this study emphasized the combined effects and stressed that those effects were inextricably linked. Despite increased roadblocks due to those connected effects, these women demonstrated persistence and a drive to excel. In some cases the lowered expectations of others may ironically have spurred them to higher levels of achievement. Many of the African American/Black women referred to the history and ill-treatment of their people, and did not view themselves as separate from that history, but rather, connected to it in their daily lives. As a result, the women in this sample reported working passionately to end sexism and racism, with the hopes of lessening barriers to other women and African Americans/Blacks in the work world.

This group of women felt this imperative to improve the career possibilities for others which could add stress and difficulty to their work lives. Many of the women discussed the importance of their own career achievements for expanding opportunities available to other women and African Americans/Blacks, and described pressure to succeed because they were aware that any failure might close the door to others. Further, they faced the added stress of feeling the need to make career and work-related decisions with the understanding that, as pioneers in their fields, they personally would be perceived as representing all African American/Black or White women. Moreover, as pioneers, these women were often the only woman and/or African American/Black in their fields, so despite feeling more comfortable when in connection with others, their relational orientation was stymied in a career context in

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which they often felt isolated.

The combined effects of racism and sexism on the African American/Black women served to highlight their sense of a global or collective identity. Many mentioned feeling a sense of support and empowerment from other women and African Americans/Blacks in or outside their career fields, even when they did not have direct interactions. For some participants a sense of history and connection to previous generations gave them that sense of empowerment.

Turning briefly to other related research, the set of personality characteristics described by the present participants was found to be similar to many of the characteristics of healthy functioning described in the literature. For example, their tendencies to tackle difficult problems directly, to seek social support, and to reframe obstacles into challenges are typical of the kinds of coping strategies that are hallmarks of healthy functioning. As suggested in our previous research (Fassinger & Richie, 1994) the African American/Black and White women in the sample appeared to use similar coping strategies in the work world. High levels of self-efficacy appeared to be characteristic of the women in this study, and contributed to their perseverance and persistence in the face of obstacles, just as the literature predicts (Bandura, 1989; Betz & Hackett, 1986). Finally, as the literature suggests (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987), gender role socialization appeared to be a salient variable for participants, either in terms of having to overcome restrictive gender roles or in noting the positive impact of nonstereotypic roles and expectations.

Limitations

Any study easily can be compromised by the biases of the researchers. Despite including open-ended questions, the interview protocol clearly led the participants to attend and respond to particular aspects of their career development. There are, of course, myriad aspects of their careers that the interview protocol did not address, may not have been discussed, and, thus, were not included in the emergent theory. In addition, bias in data interpretation is an oft-cited potential problem in qualitative research. This problem was somewhat addressed by working in a team, by pairing naive and experienced researchers, by continual discussion and arbitration of (dis)agreements and conclusions

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throughout the data analysis process, and by the final review of the theory by participants. However, despite these attempts to minimize bias, it is likely that all team members became influenced by the opinions of others as the months-long analysis progressed.

An additional issue regarding the use of a grounded theory approach is the potential for individual differences among participants to dissipate once analytic procedures are set into motion. In this approach, discrete concepts reflecting each participant's unique experiences are collapsed into increasingly general, abstract categories, which are constrained by their necessary applicability to the "stories" of all participants. Thus, what is characteristic of most of the participants is what is articulated in the theory, and variant responses may be given somewhat scant attention in the reporting of results. This is an ironic problem to encounter, because we deliberately chose this methodological approach for its promise in giving voice to previously unheard, diverse experiences.

Another limitation in our study reflects various sampling restrictions. The research participants were self-selected, which also decided the choice of occupational fields. Due to logistical difficulties, the sample was somewhat geographically skewed as well, since all of the interviews were conducted in the Northeast. In addition, these were very busy, successful women who were willing to give extended time to be interviewed for the purposes of our research; this may have skewed the sample toward women who enjoy discussing their lives, believe in psychological and educational research, or believe in helping other women, as just three possible explanations. Also, the standard used for selecting these women may have contained an initial bias, in that women who have been successful outside the paid work force, such as full-time homemakers or volunteers, were not considered. It is possible that their perspectives and roads to success lie outside the theory described here. In addition, the use of national professional organization award winners and media-recognized achievers reflects the bias of success in traditional work force terms (see Fassinger & Richie, 1994, for a full discussion). Finally, the high levels of success in the sample dictated that the participants would be somewhat similar in age and developmental phase of life. Cohort effects might have affected the data and theory, for example, this sample's sensitivity to gender and race issues that might not be present in a sample with more older or younger women (due to

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the impact on this cohort of the civil rights and feminist movements). Such restrictions raise questions about the applicability of the emergent theory to other women. While non-random sampling is a weakness of the approach we used in this study, Kerlinger (1986) argues that "using knowledge, expertise, and care in selecting samples" (Kerlinger, 1986, p. 119), as was attempted here, can mitigate these negative effects. Also the replication of this study with other samples in the future could broaden its transferability and generalizability.

As outlined earlier, "triangulating" multiple sources of data can enhance the applicability of the results of a qualitative study. Although the present study included multiple and diverse cases across a number of different occupations, additional sources of data might have further strengthened the study. For example, despite having quantitative data on most of the participants from the first phase of the research, no statistical analyses were completed using these data. Due to the logistical difficulties in arranging just one in-depth interview with each of these prominent women, as well as our desire to maintain consistency in interview content and information for each participant, further interviews were not considered. Therefore, the grounded theory technique of open sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), that is, continually adding new participants or reconceptualizing the interview protocol as the study proceeded was not utilized. In addition, even though supplemental information (e.g., biographies, media interviews, interviews with significant others) could have been obtained for some of the women in the sample, we chose, for the sake of consistency, to limit our analysis to data that could be obtained from all participants. The retrospective nature of many of the interview questions also raises concerns about the possible effects of selective attention and memory lapses. The emergent theory thus represents the experiences of these particular participants that were most salient to them during a private interview with us at a specific point in time.

Implications for Research and Practice

Given the current dearth of research in this area of women's career development, further studies are needed with these populations and with other women of color who are high achievers. Comparisons between the strategies used by these populations and women who are demographically similar but have

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not reached high levels of achievement would be interesting to explore. Similarly, future qualitative and quantitative studies might illuminate whether our emergent theory applies to other women diverse in race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, and other demographic or cultural variables.

The collective identity and sense of connection to others reported by the women in our study raise questions about taking an individualistic focus in career development research, and not explicitly exploring the impact of individuals' work decisions on their families or communities. It might be important in future work, for example, to query participants directly regarding the importance of incorporating family, community, or the world at large in making career decisions.

The methodology of our study also may have implications for future research. The use of a team approach as a strategy to reduce researcher bias in qualitative studies should be formally examined. Anecdotal evidence suggests this approach has been used by others engaged in qualitative investigations, but empirical studies that examine the utility of team versus individual approaches to qualitative research, particularly with regard to managing bias in analysis and interpretation, have not been reported. In addition, systematizing and empirically testing various strategies to address bias within a research team would be useful to explore.

Future research that examines in detail the external obstacles of racism and sexism in the workplace would help to validate the current study and would add richness to the career development literature, which traditionally has had more of a focus on internal than external factors in the career development of women. Fitzgerald and Betz (1992) have called for empirical research to address the environmental variables (which they refer to as structural and cultural factors) that may mediate vocational behavior. Such external factors might include not only racism and sexism, but also social class, occupational stereotypes, and other forms of oppression related to identity, such as homophobia (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1992). There are likely to be myriad social and cultural contexts that have profound impact on the career development of women, and qualitative approaches offer promise in exploring some of those possibilities.

Fitzgerald, et al.'s (1995) review of career development theory indicated a need for research and

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theory development to examine the context of women's lives. Our study is a first step in this direction and further studies with populations of women both similar to and different from this sample could bring the research consensus closer to a much-needed inclusive theory or model of women's career development (Byars & Hackett, 1996). Most of the current research examines one part of the model generated here; for example, the research on gender role socialization or self-efficacy fits into the personal background conditions in the present model; similarly, the research on coping strategies can be incorporated into current context conditions in the present model. Future research that examines these and other individual differences variables within a sociocultural context will contribute to modifying, expanding, and confirming the model generated by the present research.

In terms of career intervention, our study suggests that it is critical to understand that many women see their personal and work lives as inextricably linked. Such awareness might help career counselors and their female clients to more effectively address the stressors faced as they attempt to maintain and integrate their multiple roles in a work world in which multiple roles and responsibilities often are discouraged or ignored. Career interventions might encourage perseverance in the face of obstacles and teach negotiation of personal and professional impediments to goal attainment. This might be accomplished through direct support of clients who are facing difficulties at work, as well as through consultative and psychoeducational interventions that proactively inform women (and men) of the issues involved in multiple role management. A therapeutic focus on internal standards of achievement also may help women persist in working toward their goals, even when external rewards are lacking.

In addition, helping the individual to identify and articulate aspects (particularly oppressive elements) of the larger sociocultural context in which she finds herself can normalize her experience and help her to gain perspective in dealing with the barriers she will inevitably face as a White or African American/Black woman in present day society. Given that women often are not integrated into established (largely male) support networks in the work world (Lemkau, 1986), women can be encouraged to develop networks of friends and colleagues, particularly other women, in order to acquire support for career aspirations and goals. In addition, the counselor can act as a source of social support

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for the client who is faced with these obstacles in her work environment.

Finally, while career counselors are trained to be -- and encourage their clients to be -- realistic about their clients' career plans, our study suggests that passion, persistence, and connection may carry one far in the achievement of career goals. A quotation from one of the African American/Black participants in our study beautifully captures the spirit of the inspirational women we came to know:

...Everybody ought to have that dream of what they want to be. And even if you can't be it now, understand that it's still possible. You should understand that no does not mean never. No means not now. No, not right now, but it doesn't mean no, not tomorrow. Every dream you have -- it's very possible.

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Footnotes

¹ While we are aware of the complex issues involved in racial/ethnic designations, we have used the terms African American/Black and White here to represent the self-chosen labels of our sample in describing themselves racially (African American and Black were used interchangeably by participants).

² While we are aware that the phrasing "women and African Americans/Blacks" is awkward due to African American/Black women belonging to both groups, we felt it necessary to use this phrasing to remain true to the phrasing of our participants. If we describe White women and African Americans/Blacks then we are ignoring the other women of color with whom our sample felt connections. If we use the phrasing women and African American/Black men then we are highlighting the role of men or an interest in helping men which was not evident in our data from this sample.