

THE ROLES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE  
PROFESSORS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS  
A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE  
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## **Introduction**

Since the Civil War Era, African Americans have been active in public relations, working primarily on race related projects that involved African American publics and issues of importance to the African American community (Tillery-Larkin, 1999). When public relations became known as a profession in the 1930's, African Americans were still active in the field and began serving as public relations consultants (Tillery-Larkin, 1999). While African Americans have been active in public relations since its early beginnings, most public relations texts and histories exclude the contributions they've made to the practice and retell the history of PR as if minority practitioners in America have never been active and practiced public relations (Tillery-Larkin, 1999).

One such example of a prominent African American practitioner is Ofield Dukes. In 1969, Dukes started his own public relations firm, which is now recognized as one of the most successful public relations firms in the country (PRSA News Archive, 2008). In 1964 he was asked to be a part of the Johnson-Humphrey administration as Deputy Director of Information for the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. In 1975 he won PRSA's Silver Anvil Award and founded the Black Public Relations Society of Washington in 1993. Dukes served as an adjunct professor at Howard University and American University. He gained major recognition in public relations by being among the first to be inducted into the Washington, DC/National Capital PRSA Hall of Fame in 1999, the Virginia Communications Hall of Fame in 2003 and the National Public Relations Achievement Award presented by Ball State University

in 2003 through the receiving of their (PRSA News Archive, 2008; Ofield Dukes Web site).

Currently, women have been studied more than any other group in public relations. With the release of the Velvet Ghetto Study in 1986, the surge of research to understand women and their roles in public relations has been massive. As public relations began to shift from male-dominated to female dominated, it was important to understand the roles of women and how their influx into the field would have an impact on public relations (Cline et. al, 1986). While women are not a minority in the field, they are often marginalized and perceive themselves as filling the technician role rather than the managerial role (Pompper, 2005; Anderson, 2006). When it came to women serving in managerial positions (and even in technician positions), they are paid substantially less than their male counterparts who are in the same position (Toth 2001; Anderson 2006). Cline et. al (1986) found that when other professions, such as teaching and nursing, went from male dominated to female dominated, the professions have diminished in status and salary. These findings are important because they help to give an understanding of the functions of women as marginalized in public relations. However, there is still a need to understand the functions and roles of other groups in public relations, such as African Americans, that have not been studied as thoroughly as women have.

Diversifying an agency or department is likely to be more of a benefit than a burden (Hon and Brunner, 2000). Practitioners from different backgrounds are more likely to bring distinctive and broader perspectives to public relations planning and implementation and also help to eliminate the process of groupthink (Hon and Brunner, 2000). As audiences become more diverse and more international, it is important for PR

agencies and departments to be composed of individuals that are members of diverse groups or who can communicate effectively with diverse publics (Hon and Brunner, 2000).

In addition to public relations, African Americans have also played a very active role in higher education. Cheney University, one of the first historically black colleges, was founded in 1837 to allow African Americans the opportunity to receive a college education (Roebuck and Murty 1993; Freeman 1998; Cheney website). Soon thereafter, many other historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were established to fill the void of African Americans not having a presence in higher education—at the student and educator level. Due to the climate of the United States at that time, African American professors were prominent at HBCUs, since the majority of predominately white universities would not permit them to teach. Adding to the accomplishments of African Americans in higher education, Sadie T.M. Alexander received her doctorate degree in 1921, allowing her to become the first Black woman in the United States to achieve that level of education (Giddings, 1984; Tindall 2002).

Studying the roles of African Americans in public relations education is relevant and necessary because they are an active minority in the field that has been understudied and virtually ignored. When ethnic minority groups have been studied in the past, they have all been grouped together in the minority category, and not looked at as individual ethnic groups. The only ethnic group that has been studied alone, in-depth is African American women (Pompper 2005). While this is an important step in furthering the knowledge about African Americans' roles, it is still not enough because it fails to incorporate African American males, whom also are an active part of public relations.

This research will explore and examine the roles of African American females who are a part of the public relations academy and will be a fundamental piece in understanding the roles of African American educators teaching public relations at institutions of higher education. Recruitment and retention hinge on understanding educators of diverse backgrounds; without that understanding, it is very difficult to recruit and retain minorities in public relations academia. If public relations is to progress as a discipline, understanding and awareness of African Americans in the field—especially in the area of academia—is vital to its growth and development.

### **Definitions**

Throughout this paper, the term African American will be defined as the race of individuals of African descent living in the United States (Tillery-Larkin, 1999, 8). The term Black will be used to refer to the biological characteristic of the shade or pigment of people's skin (Tillery-Larkin, 1999, 8). For the purposes of this study, the terms African American and Black will be used interchangeably to avoid repetition.

## **Literature Review**

The review of the literature on this topic is significant in providing a look at what has already been done and what needs to be done in relation to African Americans in public relations. For the purpose of this study, the Velvet Ghetto Study will be discussed first. This topic is relevant because it provides a look into the status of women—once regarded as a minority in the field—in public relations. The next topic that is reviewed is women in public relations, which will be discussed through the lens of the Velvet Ghetto studies. This is important because it provides a better understanding of women in public relations and how they have been marginalized, even though women dominate the field. The next topic, diversity in public relations, provides a foundation about why diversity is important in public relations and why ethnic minorities should be included. The section about African Americans in the workforce and management gives an overview of the status of African Americans in the workforce and management positions overall, which is important to studying African Americans in any industry. The last section, African Americans in public relations provides a look at what information exists about African Americans and what their status is within the field.

### ***Women in Public Relations***

The *International Association of Business Communicators* Research Foundation released the Velvet Ghetto Study in 1986. Researched by Cline et. al (1986), the study analyzed the future of public relations and business communication profession as the field was undergoing a gender majority switch from male to female (Cline et. al, 1986). Velvet ghetto is defined as a field in which women experience drops in status and salary. The researchers looked into the possibility of professional communication becoming a

velvet ghetto (Cline et. al, 1986). The study was conducted in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom and consisted of surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups and analyses of data, salaries and trends. The study examined three trends: 1.) women are more likely to perceive themselves as filling the technician role rather than the managerial role; 2.) women were paid substantially less than men even when other variables were controlled and 3.) when other professions had gone from male-dominated to female-dominated, the professions had diminished in salary and status. The basic findings of the study suggests that while the field of public relations was moving from a male dominated field to female dominated, women were more likely to be in the technician role and men were more likely to hold managerial positions. The study also found that there was a discrepancy between men's and women's salaries. In other words, women were not being taken seriously enough to hold higher positions of power within public relations.

In 2000, the U.S. Department of Labor statistics projected that in 2008, women would make up about 48 percent of the U.S. workforce. They also stated that women's labor force growth should be faster than men's and as more women were added to the workforce, their numbers would approach that of men (U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, 2000). Even as the numbers of women are increasing in the workforce, there are still issues that are preventative of women receiving equal wages similar to those of their male counterparts.

While women continue to make up the majority of the public relations field (*PRSA/IABC Salary Survey 2000*, 2000; Aldoory, 2001b; Grunig and Toth 2001; Anderson 2006), they are still being subjected to the gender gap when it comes to roles.

This gap often leaves men at the top and women at the bottom. The basic findings of the Velvet Ghetto Study suggest that while the field of public relations was moving from a male dominated field to female dominated, women were more likely to be in the technician role and men were more likely to hold managerial positions (Cline et. al, 1986; Anderson, 2006). Broom found in 1982 that there was a significant difference between men and women in terms of what roles they saw themselves performing. He found that about half of the women he studied perceived themselves as communication technicians and more than half of the men saw themselves as expert prescribers. In 1986, Broom and Dozier stated “changing from the technician role to the predominately managerial role is a transition biased in favor of male practitioners” (Broom and Dozier, 1986, 55).

On Average, women in the workforce also continue to make less money than men. The same holds true for public relations. Cline and her colleagues (1986) also found that there was a discrepancy between men and women’s salaries (Toth 2001; Anderson 2006). In other words, women were not being taken seriously enough to hold higher positions of power within public relations (Cline et. al, 1986). In 1995, *A Salary Survey of Public Relations Professionals* found that on average, men’s salaries were 45% higher than women’s. Leyland found that despite women outnumbering men by almost two to one, women earned 38% less than men (2000). The *Public Relations Journal*, a former trade journal of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) surveyed its subscribers regularly between 1986 and 1989. In 1986 when Beyer reported his description of the results, he did not provide a median salary for women or the industry. He did show that men typically earned about 39% (\$11,000) more than women (Beyer, 1986). Median salaries were reported for men and women in 1986, 1988 and 1989. In

1987, the gap between men and women was \$17,000, with men earning a median salary of \$48,000 and women earning a median salary of \$31,000. In 1988, the gap increased to \$17,400; men earned \$50,300 while women earned a salary of \$32,900. In 1989, the median salary for men rose to \$51,716 while women's salaries only increased to \$31,993. The gap between men and women's salaries was even greater, rising to \$19,723 (Pollack and Winkleman, 1987; Russell, 1988; Tortorello and Barnes, 1989). The glass ceiling studies conducted in 1990 and 1995 also provide a look into the disparities of men and women's salaries in public relations. In both the 1990 and the 1995 studies, men reported earning a median salary of \$55,000. In 1990, the median salary for women was \$37,000. In 1995, that median salary increased by \$3,000 to \$40,000. While these two studies demonstrate that the pay gap between men's and women's salaries narrowed within the five years, it still shows, however, that a gap does exist. In 2006, Anderson found that the average male salary in public relations was \$123,310 while the average female earned \$80,940.

Another explanation for why the pay gap exists in public relations might have to do with the type of organization a practitioner is employed at. In 2000, Seideman and Leyland found that men outnumbered women by 26% to 30% in corporate jobs, which have traditionally been the best paying jobs in public relations. They also found that men tend to work in the highest paying sectors, which include financial services, investor relations, industrial/manufacturing, public affairs and crisis communication. The 1992 *Public Relations Journal* salary survey also illustrated a correlation between the highest paying organizations and gender. The survey found that men were slightly more likely to be working in high paying areas such as industrial/manufacturing, utilities, and

scientific/technical. The women in the sample were more likely to be working in lower paying areas such as nonprofit/museum, religious/charitable, and miscellaneous services. Very similar results were found in the *PRSA/IABC Salary Survey 2000*. In the *Handbook of Public Relations*, Elizabeth Toth states that other studies suggest that female-domination of public relations adds to the devaluing of the field (Toth, 2001). This could seemingly have an affect on the salaries women are earning within the field, as well as their chances for advancement. Adding to this notion, Grunig, Hon and Toth (2004), listed five explanations for the gender gap in compensation. These explanations included age, years of experience, type of organization in which the practitioner works, roles carried out and discrimination against women (Grunig, Hon and Toth, 2004). They noted that public relations was shifting toward younger, lower paid professionals and more women. They also stated that women were clustered in lower paying organizations and that they worked in less lucrative roles than men (2004).

### ***Diversity and Public Relations***

Diversity is not a new idea to the workforce. It is an idea that has been debated, accepted and rejected throughout corporate America (Hon and Brunner, 2000). As quoted in Hon and Brunner, Feagin pointed out that if current trends continue, “the United States will become a country where European Americans are a statistical minority by the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. By 2055 or 2060, the majority of all people will be...Latino, Black and Asian (Arndorfer, 1996, p. 6A). Some theorists have incorporated the dimensions of diversity into the concept of requisite variety (Weick, 1979). The concept of requisite variety simply states that organizations are most effective when they are diverse enough to deal with and capitalize on the diversity in their external

environments. Weick states, "It's because of requisite variety that organizations have to be preoccupied with keeping sufficient diversity inside the organizations to sense accurately the variety present in ecological changes outside it" (Weick, 1979, p.188).

Hon and Brunner (2000) state that practitioners from different backgrounds are more likely to bring distinctive and broader perspectives to public relations planning and implementation and also help to eliminate the process of groupthink. As audiences become more diverse and more international, it is important for PR agencies and departments to be composed of individuals that are members of diverse groups or who can communicate effectively with diverse publics (Hon and Brunner, 2000). In a PRSA Issues Paper, Debra Miller explains that communicators who are uncomfortable with conducting business across cultural lines will be at an extreme disadvantage (Miller, 1991). Miller also stated that well trained, culturally sensitive communicators will be extremely valuable to organizations.

### ***African Americans in the Work force and Management***

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 63.9% of the African American population was a part of the American labor force. The percentage of African Americans holding management or professional positions was 33% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Jones wrote in 1986 that the Bureau of Labor Statistics had reported an increase in minority managers from 3.6% to 5.2% between 1977 and 1982. In the book *Ensuring Minority Success In Corporate Management*, DiTomaso and Thompson stated that in 1980, Blacks made up only 4.7% of the executive, administrative, and managerial workforce although they made up 12% of the population (1988). In the same book, DiTomaso, Thomas and Blake report that 93% of the companies they studied reported that less than 12% of their

managers were Black (1988). They also found that minority managers felt that one of the reasons that they had been excluded from top management was because they had been discriminated against. A second explanation that they gave for the exclusion of the African Americans they studied is that African Americans were excluded from social and political networks that could have given them information and resources for moving upward. While reviewing the literature about African Americans in management, it was interesting that there was not as much as expected. Most of the literature dealt with racism and included self-help books for African Americans in the business world.

### ***African Americans in Public Relations***

African Americans are no strangers to public relations. In 1994, a *Businessweek* article named public relations one of the fastest growing industries for African Americans. While this might be a promising field for African Americans, there is evidence that suggests that African Americans face the same adversities as women did (and in some cases still do) in public relations (Zerbinos and Clanton, 1993; Hon and Brunner, 2000; Pompper, 2004; Pompper, 2005). Some studies conducted on African Americans point out that African Americans in public relations feel overlooked, trapped and neglected in their positions (Malette, 1995; Tillery-Larkin, 1999). Trapping of African Americans generally takes five forms in public relations: (a) being hired to work on primarily race-related projects, (b) being hired into a stereotypical position for an African American, (c) being hired to fill a quota, (d) being restricted from advancing to higher positions in an organization, and/or (e) being restricted from functionary positions with real decision-making power (Kern-Foxworth, 1989a; Malette, 1995).

In 1995, Mallette found that African Americans in public relations are usually pigeonholed, which refers to the trapping of or limiting of an individual into a specific category (Tillery-Larkin, 1999), and find themselves serving in the role of practitioner. However, within these roles, since they are African American, they usually only get to work with African American or other minority clients. They also serve the role as “cultural interpreter” and are sought after for advice and counseling with minority clients and publics. African Americans who find themselves in these positions also find that they usually are not permitted to work with other clients that are non-minority or on campaigns that do not deal with minority issues. Layton suggests that public relations agencies are uneasy about matching people of color with white clients and that the public relations profession has a long way to go to lose its nickname as “the last of the lily-white professions” (Layton, 1980). In a survey of 140 public relations practitioners, Zerbinos and Clanton reported that forty-four percent of the ethnic minority respondents stated that they were denied access to a client because of their (the respondents’) race (1993). The study did not indicate whether non-minorities were denied access to work with minority clients or publics. It has also been suggested that once African Americans demonstrate their ability to work on race-based projects they have trouble crossing over to mainstream projects and are continually hired to communicate exclusively with African American publics (Kern-Foxworth, 1989a).

African Americans are sometimes looked at as being better suited for particular public relations jobs rather than other jobs. For example, Kern-Foxworth states that African Americans are usually in more “stereotypical jobs” such as urban affairs or community relations (1989a). Kern-Foxworth also asserts in her 1989 study that African

Americans are frequently chosen for these positions because the publics with which the organization wishes to communicate are primarily African American or economically poor Americans. She notes that there is an assumption that African American practitioners will be better able to communicate with these specific publics because of commonalities of race, culture, and possibly economic status (1989a).

It is sometimes common for African Americans to feel that they have been hired by an organization to satisfy numbers. To illustrate this, Hill and Farrell found that African American public relations practitioners felt that their talents and abilities were not being used (1988). Many of them, as stated before, were working on race-based projects, or not working on the mainstream campaigns within the organization. This ultimately led to a feeling of marginalization, which can have an effect on how African Americans perceived their jobs (Hill and Farrell, 1988). Many of the African Americans in the study expressed that they thought that their organization was trying to limit their visibility unless they wanted to showcase the one or few African American employees (Hill and Farrell, 1988).

Many of the studies conducted on African Americans state that African Americans experience limited mobility on the job as well as exclusion from managerial positions (Hill and Farrell, 1988; Kern-Foxworth, 1989a; Kern-Foxworth, 1989b, Mallette, 1995, Zerbinos and Clanton, 1993). Many of the African American practitioners researched in the aforementioned studies express their fear of being trapped in the same position forever or for longer than their Caucasian-American counterparts. When African Americans become locked into entry-level or low-level positions, it becomes particularly difficult for them to for them to gain positions of power within

organizations, public relations in particular (Tillery-Larkin, 1999). In 1993, Zerbinos and Clanton reported that more than half of their respondents felt they were denied promotion during their careers because of their race (1993). These studies paint a picture that show African Americans being left behind and excluded from the management scene.

Pompper (2004) suggests that the public relations literature has fallen short in terms of accounting for ethnic diversity. She states “Moreover, public relations researchers tend to operationalize minorities as one homogenous group (multicultural) and findings may be limited by almost exclusive reliance on the survey method” (Pompper, 2004, 275-276). This is an indication that further research on the status of African Americans in public relations needs to include them as one singular ethnic group and also incorporate other methods of collecting data.

Salary is another important issue that African Americans struggle with in the workplace. Broom and Dozier wrote, “The most obvious indicator of professional standing is salary. Even though this measure is confronted by many other factors, we use it as the primary indicator of management or client perceptions of practitioners professional contributions and importance” (Broom and Dozier, 1986). While little research has been done on the salaries of African Americans in public relations in comparison to their Caucasian-American colleagues, Marilyn Kern-Foxworth (1989a) found that minority middle-level public relations managers were making about \$15,983 less annually than their white counterparts. Zerbinos and Clanton found that of the minority practitioners who responded to their questionnaire, the annual salary range for the male respondents was \$50,000-59,000 and for the females, \$30,000-39,000 (Zerbinos and Clanton 1993). While these studies give us a brief look into the salaries of African

Americans in public relations, they are still not enough to provide in-depth insight into the salaries that African Americans are earning and how these salaries compare to others in the field. The public relations industry has fallen short in providing this information, and not enough research has been conducted to determine these factors. In order for the issue of salary gap by race to be examined and discussed, there must be evidence of this existence. In support of this Kern-Foxworth et. al write “Data collection that documents salaries of Black men and women in public relations should offer another method of comparing the status of Blacks in public relations to others” (Kern-Foxworth et. al, 1994).

While African Americans have been overlooked and marginalized within the profession, there have been very successful African American public relations pioneers that have opened up doors for other African Americans while making significant contributions to the field. Joseph Varney Baker became the first African American practitioner to gain nationwide exposure through obtaining accounts with major corporations when he left his job as the editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune* (Kern-Foxworth, 2001). He became the public relations consultant for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. Over a decade later, Barbara Harris became the first woman of color to handle major corporate public relations accounts after beginning her career at Joseph V. Baker and Associates, and was eventually appointed president of the firm (Kern-Foxworth, 2001). Another prolific figure in public relations, D. Parke Gibson organized the first meeting of the American Association of Minority Consultants—which consisted of 25 independently Black-owned public relations, advertising and marketing agencies (Kern-Foxworth, 2001). PRSA has also named an award after Mr. Gibson, which is

given to practitioners who demonstrate outstanding practice in the area of multicultural communication. Kern-Foxworth (2001) also details information about Frank M. Seymour, whose agency became the first multi-ethnic agency to win a Silver Anvil award from PRSA in 1954. In 1980, Inez Kaiser became the first African American female to open a public relations firm with national accounts and seven years later, Ruby Miller was the first woman of color elected to the PRSA National Board of Directors (Kern-Foxworth, 2001).

### ***African American Women in Institutions of Higher Education***

Empirical research concentrating on the experiences of African Americans teaching public relations education is very scarce. While there are few studies that focus on the African American experience in higher education, as of yet, none of these studies include the experiences of African American men. While African American men have practically been ignored, Dates and Stroman (1997) acknowledge, “it is clear that communication researchers have devoted little attention to African American women and communications” (p. 247; Tindall, 2002, p. 3). This statement reinforces the notion that there exists a lack of research detailing the African American experience within the field. This is especially true for African American academicians. Most of the public relations research concerning Black women has been focused on practitioners rather than educators, as demonstrated earlier in this literature review in the sections entitled *Diversity and Public Relations* and *African Americans and Public Relations*.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2002), minority women make up four percent of full-time faculty in the nation (Tindall 2002). Gregory (1995) and Alfred

(2001) noted that the majority of Black female faculty members are located at HBCUs, leaving only 1.2 percent of Black female educators at predominantly White institutions.

When examining the roles of African Americans in public relations, most of the roles of these practitioners can be viewed as “tactical” rather than “managerial.” The same roles can be transferred to the sector of academia. Men and women of color are burdened disproportionately from high expectations of service within their departments (Turner and Meyers, 2000). In 1995, Gregory noted that in comparison to White male professors, Black female professors teach more classes, advise more students and participate in more committee work. These intense commitments to service leave less time to devote to research and places different demands on them than those of White faculty members (Turner and Meyers, 2000). These service demands result in the value of their work being “trivialized and overlooked by members of their departments and colleges” (Tindall, 2002, p. 8). In the same study, Tindall found that African American public relations professors “were invested in their students and colleagues on several levels of interaction and made meaning of their roles as a faculty member through several different lenses” (p. 15). These roles taken on by African Americans in higher education are the same roles used in the practitioner side: technical and managerial.

In their study of women in higher education public relations, Weaver-Lariscy, Cameron and Sweep (1994) said that “female public relations officers are most likely to occupy what we call the *conscience of the organization* role, whereas their male counterparts characterize a *dominant insider* position. They characterized the *conscience of the organization* role as having “concern with social issues and the organization” (p. 137). The *dominant insider* role was characterized as “an insider with access to all

information and the authority to argue... which favors competition and advancement” (p. 137). The *conscience of the organization* role can be most closely associated with the “technical” role in public relations practice and the *dominant insider* role is best related to the “managerial” role. While this study did not focus on African Americans in public relations higher education, these defined roles can still be used to analyze the roles that Blacks teaching public relations curriculum do have at their respective institutions.

After a review of the literature concerning African Americans in public relations, the following research questions and hypotheses have been developed:

RQ1: What do African American women see as their role in higher education?

RQ2: How do African American women in higher education view their interactions with students?

RQ3: What led these women to make the decision to teach instead of practice public relations?

## **Method**

The participants who were chosen for participation in the study were African American female educators teaching at accredited colleges or universities with public relations programs. Participants were recruited using the snowball sampling technique. A professor of public relations assisted in compiling a list of initial contacts, who in turn provided names of other potential participants. Profiles of professors within the public relations departments at the colleges and universities were examined and those who met the requirements for participation (African American woman teaching public relations curriculum at an institution of higher education) were contacted. Participants were initially contacted by phone or email and made aware of the objective of the study. Eleven women agreed to participate. Two of the 11 women taught at a Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCU) and the other nine taught at majority-served universities. The universities were located within various states throughout the country, from Washington State to Maryland.

In-depth interviews were conducted with the participants via telephone. This was due to the various locations of the participants. In their methodology, Hon and Brunner (2000) reported, "Although telephone interviewing can reduce rapport, it does provide the advantage of being able to reach a more geographically diverse group of respondents" (p. 317). The ability to not read nonverbal cues and missing out on the opportunity to meet the participants are weaknesses of telephone interviewing as well (Rubin and Rubin, 1995).

The interviews were semi-structured in nature. This type of interview helped to provide the researcher with a more in-depth look into the attitudes and beliefs of the

subjects. The interviews were tape recorded in addition to the researcher taking typed notes during the interview to compare them with the recordings. Before the interview, participants were made aware of the purpose of the research and read a consent form.

After data collection, the interviews were transcribed and coded, using the open and axial coding (Curtin 1999).

The interview schedule is attached as Appendix A.

## Results

This study was designed to gain insight about the roles of African American female academics of public relations through exploring their experiences in higher education. The findings indicated how African American women in the public relations academy view their roles as educators. Below is a chart that outlines the demographics of the participants:

<b>PARTICIPANT</b>	<b>YEARS TEACHING</b>	<b>RANK</b>	<b>INSTITUTION SIZE</b>
A	14	Associate professor	24,352
B	7	Assistant professor	6,000
C	5	Assistant professor	21,000
D	9	Instructional staff	1,000
E	5	Assistant professor	16,841
F	13	Assistant professor	44,406
G	34	Professor	27,488
H	6	Assistant professor	25,923
I	19	Associate professor (tenure)	47,361
J	15	Associate professor	8,696
K	6	Assistant professor	11,500

*Figure 4.1- Participant Demographics*

*Research question 1: What do African American women see as their role in higher education?*

The main focus of these academics is to be educators of public relations for students interested in becoming a part of this competitive field. These professors were committed to providing their students with the best educational experience possible by remaining relevant and updated in the field. One of the professors elaborated on this thought by noting that she did consulting work in her previous teaching job and also does consulting work in her current position as a professor: “When I was in City X I did consulting work and here I’ve done a little bit. I’m really big on being relevant in the

classroom. I can't not talk about something that is current" (June 11, 2009). The professors were also able to give their students thorough, hands-on experience that will translate to their effectiveness outside of the classroom. One professor attested to this by stating: "Because we live in City X and we have so many PR professionals here, I like to make sure we have a lot of guest speakers and students visiting professionals" (May 28, 2009). These women were passionate about the success of their students and preparing them for the workplace. To demonstrate this passion, one of the professors stated that she makes her students work hard in her classroom:

I teach them like I am preparing them to go to work. I treat the classroom like a business. I'm very strict about things being on time and perfection in the assignments, which is what they will see in the industry. I teach them as adults and like it's the business world (April 4, 2009).

According to one of the participants, public relations is an interactive field and the students need to be prepared for their future careers:

I see my students as scholars, as future PR professionals. The minute I walk in the door I treat them as such. I expect certain things from them. In the PR world, deadlines are important. I don't accept late work at all. On the flip side, I play up organizational communication and communication theory themes. I really like my students to work in teams. I think that's very important because in the PR world we work on teams (April 13, 2009).

In addition to being student-focused, the academics were dedicated to remaining as much a part of the field as possible through practice in addition to teaching and by staying on top of trends and current topics. By engaging in practice, not only do they view themselves as being professionals, but also as providing their students with the best information and knowledge possible because they made the decision to remain a part of the practical side of the field. These women feel that they have a responsibility to be as

much of a resource as they possibly can for the students they are preparing. To illustrate this point, one of the professors had this to say:

Being a publicist, it's always important to keep your ear to the streets. It's best to keep up with trends. I need to know what's going on, which helps to better serve my clients. My students relate better to me because I know what's going on in the world. I'm going through the same experiences that they are going through. I quote hip-hop lyrics in class and it helps to get through to them. My classes are very interactive (April 13, 2009).

These 11 African American professors are serving in the dual role of being public relations educators and professionals.

*Research question 2: How do African American women in higher education view their interactions with students?*

From the transcripts of all 11 participants, the one thing that was most important in their roles as public relations professors was their interaction with their students. The women all shared a passion for providing their students with the best possible classroom experience to prepare them for their future careers in the public relations industry. All of the participants provided their students with hands on, "real world" experience, such as giving them the task of creating a public relations campaign for an organization and then executing the plan. The professors were determined to keep up with trends in the field of public relations and within society to be able to best relate to their students. One professor expressed this by noting that she was more interactive than other professors in her department and took the time to relate to her students:

I am a bit more interactive than some of my colleagues based on what my students say. I use a lot of humor, I tell a lot of jokes. I use a lot of pop culture references. I 'keep it real.' And when they start to complain I let them know that they need to suck it up and deal with it. I try to be more of real life, real situations towards them to let them know that they need to be about their business (June 23, 2009).

This demonstrates that the professors wanted to be able to relate to their students and communicate to them relevant public relations knowledge in a manner that was easy to grasp and understand.

The women also wanted to provide their students with an enriching and enlightening experience by bringing diversity issues to the classroom and allowing their students to discuss them and become aware of their existence. According to one of the participants, practitioners and faculty of color can help not only their students relate to diversity but also clients and companies where they are employed:

I think we can definitely be the bridge in helping our companies and agencies and clients to understand how to not only communicate effectively to the African American audience but to also communicate to audiences of color in general. I think we can be that in the classroom and in textbooks as well (June 11, 2009).

*Research question 3: What led these women to make the decision to teach instead of practice public relations?*

All of the interviewees had been active as practitioners in the field of public relations at one time or another but made the decision to teach instead of practice. Teaching was the best career choice for them because it provided them with a number of options that practicing did not. To these professors, teaching afforded them a better lifestyle that would allow them to be available to their children and families and experience benefits such as free summers, which could not be acquired had they made the decision to continue practicing. This thought is echoed by one of the professors as she explains that she wanted the flexibility of being able to raise her family: “I didn’t want to work long hours and be trying to raise a child” (June 11, 2009). In addition to this, the pay cut that came along with the decision to teach was not a determining factor in these decisions and was evened out by the benefits that they received. One of the participants

elaborates on this statement by noting that she took an extreme pay cut but to her, it was worth it:

This is a labor of love; it's a paltry salary. When I did work and decided to walk away from the professional side, I took a \$50,000 pay cut. Working in PR is not conducive to having a family. Academia, even though it's a lot of work, it's more on my time. Yes I'm taking the crazy pay cut but there are other trade-offs (April 4, 2009).

Teaching also gave the professors more freedom career wise. Being a professor gave these women the opportunity to pursue their various research interests, which were mostly linked to former careers in public relations. A point of interest was that the majority of them did not specify a devotion to minority-focused research, but did have research interests, such as health communication and public affairs. One of the participants made mention that she has an interest in doing research that relates to her background as a practitioner:

My research interest is government PR. I worked as a public affairs officer my whole career. As far as my research, I'm just getting started again. I have this whole research agenda to partner with political science to bring together the two. Public affairs isn't as talked about as it could be. I'm interested in government communicators and people who work in that sector (April 4, 2009).

Another point of interest was that the overwhelming majority of professors stated that research concerning African Americans in the field is lacking and more needs to be conducted. One professor gave a very candid response to illustrate her thoughts of diversity research in public relations: "I'm really sick of people doing research on us who are other than us" (May 26, 2009). Another participant elaborated on this thought and mentioned that this type of research is important for minorities and that if minority scholars and practitioners aren't going to do research in the areas of diversity, no one else

will: “I see the importance of what you’re doing... We are the ones that are going to have to tell these stories. If we don’t do it, it won’t get done” (April 13, 2009).

In terms of their careers, the women were also able to share their vast experiences and public relations knowledge with their students. In addition to doing this, the women were able to be innovative and creative as much as possible. There were no limits placed on them and they didn’t have the confinements of workplace rules and regulations to prohibit them from experiencing the freedom they enjoyed in this particular line of work. According to one of the professors, she was able to enjoy her job more as an educator because she had the freedom to work when she wanted (in terms of consulting) and also teach: “With my teaching and consulting work I’m happy. I love what I do. PR professors have the best of both worlds because they can teach and still work in the field” (April 13, 2009).

### *Summary of Findings*

This study explored the roles of African American female educators teaching public relations at institutions of higher education. The participants had unique and different teaching styles in comparison to their colleagues. The professors had been a part of the professional side of public relations before switching to academia and all enjoyed the benefits and flexibility of being professors. There were only a few issues with service commitments, and the rest enjoyed being able to serve or didn’t serve as much as others did. To some of the participants, research wasn’t as much of a factor for them as it was to others. Some were seeking tenure while the rest either already had tenure or weren’t seeking tenure at all. There was a large majority of participants whose research focus did not include diversity related issues. All of the participants viewed

mentoring as a significant part of their careers and important to people of color within the field of public relations.

## Discussion

Five major themes emerged from the 11 interviews. These themes describe how African American women in the public relations academy view their roles as an educator and give more insights into the way they interact with their students and why they chose to become educators.

*Teaching style.* The majority of the women had been teaching for five or more years, with one of the participants having almost 34 years of higher education experience under her belt. All of the participants expressed that they taught public relations courses, ranging from introductory courses such as introduction to public relations, and the advanced level courses, such as public relations campaigns. A couple of participants noted that they also taught other communication courses, such as health communication or advertising, in addition to the public relations curriculum.

Many of the statements made by the participants suggested that these women viewed their approach to teaching as unique and different from their colleagues, which affected how they interacted with their students on a daily basis. One professor described her interaction with her students and what she feels is important for her to bring to the classroom:

I try to keep up with the trends, so I give a lot of examples from their (the students') world. Because I'm younger and African American I like hip-hop a lot, so I do use pop culture and hip-hop references to try to relate to them. And because I have experience in the field, I bring that to the classroom as well (April 4, 2009).

The professors also commented that in addition to keeping up with the trends, it was important for them to also make sure their students were getting relevant, hands on experience in the classroom because of the practical nature of the public relations field.

One of the professors made it clear that she expects her students to understand basic principles of public relations and how to effectively use these principles in real public relations situations:

I make them find real clients for the PR writing class. And for the campaigns course, they have to work in a student run agency and get a real client and execute the campaign. They're knee deep in it in the campaigns class and I treat them like they're in a real agency. I make them have time sheets and everything in addition to their assignments (June 11, 2009).

When talking about various courses and their teaching styles, the majority of the professors mentioned that they were tough on their students and expected a lot from them but that they were always fair. They implicated that one of the reasons for their challenging nature in the classroom is because the public relations field is very demanding and employers expect nothing but the best from their employees. This was one way in which many of the participants tried to prepare their students for careers in public relations. One professor described this type of classroom experience and explained that her students learn a lot from her: "I'm very demanding and challenging in the classroom; they learn a lot... Students have always commented that they learned a lot from me and they feel really prepared for their career after taking my class" (May 28, 2009).

Within this theme, participants also mentioned that they felt that African American female professors were more nurturing to students, especially students of color. Some of the professors also felt that African American female professors were more encouraging to their students of color and more willing to work with them because they could understand and better relate to those students. One of the participants stated that

this is an experience of African American female professors across all institutions of higher education:

I would say that many more African American female professors tend to be a lot more nurturing with regard to African American students and that's regardless of the institution. That style is brought out by necessity and more African American teachers are willing to play more of an encouraging role. Most of the problems that most professors have with the students come from them not being able to relate well to students (May 20, 2009).

The majority of the participants also noted the importance of bringing an awareness of diversity and differences into the classroom as well. This was expressed as being essential and important due to the fact that nine of the eleven women taught at majority served institutions where they had few minority students participating in their classes. When commenting about her teaching style and making sure students are aware of diversity, one professor stated that because of the type of environment that she teaches in she understands the importance of making her students aware of diversity:

I think it's different in that I'm very aware that I'm in this very white environment and I'm very aware that some of these students have never had any interactions with African Americans in their life. I think sometimes I'm more accommodating than other people. I try to understand where they are coming from and I'll listen more (May 26, 2009).

In having a unique teaching style and making a conscious effort to bring diversity to the table when instructing students, one of the professors noted that it's important to make the students aware of differences and diversity because it helps to prepare them for the real world of public relations and the interactions that they will have with people from all walks of life:

Students a lot of times haven't had an African American professor in class, so I try to curb any of the pre-conceived notions they might have coming in. I'm very mindful of how I speak and what I say and occasionally I will be casual and use slang or some Black dialect in class. I try harder to relate to the kids in trying to

break down what I may perceive that they are thinking about me. Some of the students have never had a conversation or interaction with a Black person or a person of color for that matter. I make sure to talk about the diversity of Black people and white people for that matter to try to get them to have a conversation about it. This is something real that they can't escape. They will be interacting with all different kinds of people when they get out into the field, so this helps to prepare them for that (June 11, 2009).

Within this theme, it was also discovered that many of the professors believed that their teaching style was unique in comparison to their colleagues because they come from very different backgrounds, which allows them to have a different world-view than that of the majority. One of the participants described this difference and how it plays out in her teaching: "I think it's different because I wasn't born and raised here. I have a different focus, from an international perspective, in all of my classes. Diversity is a big thing for me so I make my students look at things from a different perspective that they never would have thought to look at" (June 15, 2009).

*Work Experience.* All of the participants mentioned that they worked in the private sector of public relations as practitioners before deciding to transition to the academics. The majority of the participants mentioned that they consulted or did freelance public relations work in addition to teaching.

Many of the women stated that they decided to teach public relations and leave the practitioner side because the academy offered a better lifestyle for them. Several of them mentioned that being a professor allows them to have freedom and creativity that they could not get as a practitioner. As a professor, they are able to be in control of their own ideas and are able to research according to their interests and expertise. According to one of the participants, working as a practitioner in public relations is not very conducive to having a family and the type of lifestyle she wanted to live:

I chose to stay in here (the academy) because this is the best job on the planet. If I didn't have a child and a husband, I would work all day in academia. This really doesn't feel like a job; everything I'm doing, I love to do. This is all I think about. I know that if I went back to work, I'd be confined. As frustrating as it is being broke, I wouldn't be happy. There is no room for creativity, etc. But here, you don't have a boss when you teach. You have chairs and things but I don't have people saying 'you didn't come in at 9:45, where were you?' If I want to work at six in the morning to nine at night, or if I don't want to do it at all I don't have to. The possibility of design, creativity and innovation is endless. You can do pretty much whatever you want to do. You just have to find it and manifest it (April 4, 2009).

While a lot of the women mentioned that they enjoyed their jobs as professors and the benefits and lifestyle teaching in higher education offered them, the majority of them stressed that they took a major pay cut when deciding to teach instead of practice. All of the professors noted, in one way or another, that to them it wasn't about the money. One of the professors describes her pay cut to be somewhat of a trade-off when compared to the other benefits of being a professor: "When I switched over, I took a \$10,000 pay cut. It wasn't about the money. It was about the flexibility and quality of life being better versus me being a practitioner. The benefits are a lot better" (June 11, 2009). While most of the women had mentioned taking a pay cut to be a professor, some of them also mentioned that they supplemented their income by consulting or doing freelance public relations work in addition to teaching.

One of the other findings within this theme is that the majority of the female professors were either the only African American or minority in their department, or the only African American female. Only one of the 11 participants mentioned that being the only African American female in her department was challenging at times for her. The other 10 participants noted that they didn't feel like them being "the only one" posed any type of significant challenge or issue. Many of the participants stated that they had fairly

cordial, friendly, respectful relationships with their colleagues. According to one of the interviewees, although she was the only Black female in her department, she still liked being there and enjoyed her work very much:

I really love my department. I work with some really great women. Our department has grown a lot. I'm the only Black female and in our department there are only two Black people. We get along fairly well and if you were to sit in on some of our meetings you might not think we do, but we just like to be honest about our work (April 13, 2009).

None of the participants mentioned that they felt pigeon-holed within their positions or that they were the token Black person within the department. In fact, the majority of them expressed that they felt welcomed and able to be themselves within their department. One professor stated that she had no issues and didn't feel like there was any opposition to her wanting to teach diversity courses:

I'm the only African American and African American female in my department and in my college. There are never any challenges. I don't feel like I'm pigeonholed into anything. I teach the diversity in communication class and I think I'm the only one who tries to make an effort to include that in my schedule (June 11, 2009).

She went on to discuss the relationship she has with other faculty members around the campus, which she notes were very positive relationships, and how she has a very close, professional relationship with the dean of the college.

*Service Commitments.* All 11 participants made mention that service commitments were a part of their job as professors in addition to teaching. Only one of the professors mentioned that she felt bogged down and overloaded by her service commitments and obligations:

It's way way too heavy. I'm in a unique position because I'm not working towards tenure and I'm a senior faculty member, so I have more service responsibilities. It's not only a gender thing, but it's a race thing too. I've always

had a 40-40-20 thing; 40% teaching, 40% research and 20% service, but it always ends up being 100% for each of them (May 26, 2009).

On the other end of the spectrum, one professor stated that she was equally committed to teaching, research and service and that she didn't feel bogged down: "Service is a vital part of my role as a professor. I'm equally committed to all three. I'm not bogged down by too many service requests because I'm a full professor" (June 2009). The rest of the participants stated that they participated in service areas such as serving on academic committees within their college, advising professional student groups such as the PRSSA chapter and serving on other committees across the university they were a part of.

In addition, one of the participants also mentioned that because she was pursuing tenure, service was very important. However, according to her, she had to be strategic about the types of service she decided to take on:

The mission here is tenure. You have to be very strategic about what you do and don't do. With that said, I haven't signed up for anything because I want what I do to be very strategic. It is my intent to sign up for the advisor for the PR groups. I also plan to assist the department in fleshing out their internship program (April 4, 2009).

There were very few mentions of any of the professors feeling like they had to be a part of a committee or take on a service obligation because of their race or because of diversity issues. In other words, there was barely any mention of the participants playing a token role for a committee or other commitment.

*Research.* Only one out of the 11 participants stated that she wasn't involved in any research due to the fact that she was not pursuing tenure. Out of the 10 participants that did do research, only three of them stated that they did any type of diversity or race-

related research. Some of the research areas for the participants included crisis communication, health communication and public affairs. The participants who didn't focus on doing diversity related research alluded to their not feeling like it was mandatory for them to be doing diversity or race focused research, but that that type of research was vital for the advancement of the public relations industry. One of the professors mentioned that it was important for more research focused on people of color to be conducted within the field:

For us, people of color, there is still a ton of research that needs to be done. There is work to be done. As professors it's crucial for us to be training a lot of our students to be doing the same stuff. We have to pass the torch on because it's hot and we can't let it fall (April 13, 2009).

All of the participants felt that the research they produced was significant to the field of public relations for various reasons. According to one participant, the research that she produces is important to the field because it brings a different perspective and approach because she is a woman of color:

I'm more of a health communication scholar. My thing is that any research and any scholarship that we (people of color) do is automatically going to be different because we have a different understanding of things. I think our scholarship is important and I think we're also more understanding (May 26, 2009).

Similar to this idea, another one of the participants, whose research focus is on women and leadership, views her research as important to the field of public relations because the field is dominated by women but not at the management level. She states: "My research is basically on women and leadership and I've also researched multicultural audiences. Both of these areas impact PR practice because there is a lack of women at the management level" (June 11, 2009).

The difference between the interviewees and their research focuses and interests were interesting to note. As aforementioned, one of the women was not seeking tenure so she didn't participate in any research activities. Those that had tenure status didn't have to focus on researching as much and those who were seeking tenure were trying to focus on producing more research and getting published.

*Mentoring.* There was an overwhelming consensus among the participants that mentoring and being mentored was important and vital to being in a competitive field such as public relations. However, many of the women expressed that they either had not been mentored or that they didn't get a mentor until later in their career. A few of the interviewees also mentioned that they had to find mentors outside of their departments because no one reached out to them. When discussing the issue of mentorship within the field, a lot of the women expressed that while having a mentor was extremely important, the truth was that students and people of color within public relations very rarely have them. One professor mentioned this and also described how having a mentor could be complicated: "I think they're necessary. We need them but we rarely have them. And then when we have them, it gets tricky" (May 26, 2009).

All of the women stated that they served as the role of mentor to some of their students, especially their African American and other students of color. One of the participants expressed this when she stated: "I think mentors are very important for any professor and especially for women and people of color who might face other barriers." Another participant mentioned that sometimes being a mentor to students, especially students of color, can be difficult and somewhat challenging:

I think that I am viewed as a mentor. But sometimes I end up getting into trouble with my African American students because I expect a lot out of them but sometimes they are not prepared and sometimes I go the extra mile for them to try to help them and it can end up being some resentment there (May 26, 2009).

Some of the participants also mentioned that there is a need to choose between who you will mentor and whom you won't mentor because as a mentor, they felt that they should be able to benefit the student and be as much of a resource to them as possible. According to one of the participants, she is selective in choosing to mentor students because she wants to be beneficial to those students:

To some of them, I am a mentor. I'm great at reading people and you have to be careful not to impose where you might think someone needs help. To a select few of my students I play the role of mentor. I'm selective in my process and you've got to do it to where it will benefit the mentee (May 20, 2009).

One of the relevant findings within this theme is that while some of the women had not been mentored before or had gotten a mentor late, they all made the decision to help their students to the best of their abilities so that the students wouldn't be placed in similar situations.

### *Additional Findings*

*Diversity and Public Relations.* One topic that consistently emerged with all of the participants was that public relations is not a field open to diversity. Many of the participants made mention that in terms of public relations and African Americans, there is still a lot of work to be done. Some of the participants stated that there seems to be some sort of disconnect between the public relations industry and the people of color who are a part of it. According to one of the participants, the status and roles of African Americans in the field aren't where they should be:

I think it's not really where it should be. The paper I presented is what can the PR industry learn from the Obama campaign in terms of diversity. It's human nature that people want the status quo. There is a long way to go and not a good mechanism to get us there (May 26, 2009).

This concern was mentioned several times by other participants as well. One of the professors also mentioned that she doesn't feel that public relations fares well in trying to include people of color within all facets of the industry: "I wish corporate PR would play a more active role in involving African Americans in PR. Moving to academia I feel the same way. PR cannot be theorized as a whole. You almost have to have people with a variety of backgrounds," (May 20, 2009).

Another participant mentioned that she feels that there are not a lot of African Americans in the field and that for students of color, it helps to see someone who "looks like you" in the classroom or anywhere in the field: "There aren't a lot of African Americans in the industry. That translates into academia... One of the reasons I went to University X is because I wanted students to see that there are people that look like them and not be intimidated," (April 4, 2009).

In addition to these responses, a few of the participants did express a sense of optimism in terms of public relations and diversity. These participants stated that this was an exciting time for African Americans to study public relations and enter the field. They were hopeful that the future for African Americans in public relations would offer more opportunities and fewer barriers than they had experienced. One of these professors mentioned that she was ready to see how circumstances will play out for African Americans in public relations and what to look forward to in the future:

I'm an optimist and I can't wait to see where we're going. Not only as African Americans and people of color that are in the field professionally but for

educators too. I know that there is a lot going on and there is a lot being done that people don't know about. I look forward education wise for us to able to grow. There is such beauty being an African American woman in the field because we bring such spice to the pot (April 13, 2009).

Another participant had a similar outlook: "We're seeing more African American students in PR. I'm excited about more going into the field. Hopefully this will be a change for the good," (April 13, 2009).

### *Weaknesses of Study*

This study presented some weaknesses that should be addressed to help guide additional study in this area. One of the key challenges was the sample. Because the research is focused on African American females teaching public relations, the population size to sample from was inherently small. Another challenge to note is that the data cannot be generalized to a large population because of the research method and the small population size.

### *Future Research*

The goal of this study was to gain initial and rich insights into the experiences of African American female educators and what their roles are within the public relations academy. While this research was not the first to examine the experiences of African American women teaching public relations curriculum, it is certainly another perspective that can be added to the public relations body of knowledge. More research focusing on the experiences of African American males within public relations would be relevant, because it is virtually non-existent. African American women are not the only ones participating in the field from the African American population. Research aimed at understanding the roles of other minority females would certainly be beneficial. The

Latina, Asian and Native American voice also needs a stronger presence within the public relations literature. Another area of focus is to study the experiences of African American public relations students to understand how that experience shapes their futures within the public relations discipline.

## **Conclusion**

Prior to this study, very few articles were published that addressed the experiences of Black women in public relations and the academy. This study adds a missing piece to the public relations body of knowledge and gives much needed insight into the blended and anomalous role that African American women have taken on within the public relations academy. Recognizing these roles is an important step in retaining and recruiting more African American practitioners and academics.

Pompper (2004) stated that one way Black women derive job satisfaction in public relations is through the creative aspect of writing: “Their creative talents translate to effective public relations practice—particularly during crises when organizations must communicate carefully and quickly, and when issues are particularly complex and tedious’ (p. 292). This statement further validates the need for these professors to have creative freedom within their positions. Along with the creative freedom they receive as professors comes the satisfaction of being able to practice through consulting on their own time, at their own pace and with whom they choose. By establishing their own set of rules in terms of practicing, they are still able to be in control of their creativity and experience the freedom they enjoy in their jobs within the academy. By taking a deeper look into and understanding this aspect of Black female professors, it might be easier for other faculty members who are not minorities to be able to relate to their colleagues and appreciate the differences that they bring to the table. The comprehension of these roles is not only important for potential colleagues, but also for department heads who do the hiring. Having this knowledge and gaining better insight into what the roles of African

American women are will help to curb stereotypes and perceptions that might exist and also allow for more acceptance when it comes to differences of thoughts and opinions.

Other professors within the public relations academia also need to recognize that African American females are not like them and will more than likely not have the same experiences as they do. Aldoory (2000) identified the “standard white woman” as the typical career professional in public relations. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicates that the majority of professors are White males. Neither of these descriptions fits the 11 women interviewed, which indicates that their experiences are different from those of their non-minority colleagues. These women are not the standard within the field of public relations on the practitioner side or the academic side. In this dual role of educator and professional, they not only operate as teachers and practitioners of the discipline, but they also bring different cultural perspectives and experiences to the table, which add to and enrich their experiences as African American female educators in the public relations academy. Adding these women to the academy and attributing their experiences within the current body of knowledge expands the diversification process within public relations.

Research efforts focusing on minority issues should be more accepted within academia, especially public relations. Reyes and Halcon (1988) stated that there is a perception that minority-on-minority research is not valuable or objective, which pervades many academic circles. This perception could be the reason why many of the scholars decided not to pursue minority-focused issues in terms of research. If this research is not continued, how can the field of public relations truly continue to advance?

Research encompassing minority groups should not be frowned upon but rather embraced and encouraged.

More effort needs to be put forth in understanding the experiences of African American female professors within the classroom setting. Living in a society as a minority, it is less of a challenge to recognize that the people around you are different and that they might not have the same experiences you have. Recent data indicates that the composition of the United States will reflect more racial and ethnic minorities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), which means that neither faculty members or students can avoid interacting with people from other cultures and backgrounds within the classroom and on the job. Many of the women were adamant about preparing their students not only with current public relations curriculum, but also with lessons in diversity.

Gower and Reber (2006) found that public relations students agree that having a certain set of skills is important to being prepared for a career in public relations, but indicated that some students felt they lacked those skills or weren't prepared enough. By these professors giving their students practical experience and allowing them to become aware of diversity matters, they are contributing to the training and preparation of future public relations professionals, which will ultimately help the students to be successful within their careers.

While more research about diversity issues is necessary, this study is a step in bridging the gap that exists within the current public relations body of knowledge in terms of African American females. Understanding the diverse experiences of African American faculty and practitioners is imperative for public relations to truly be able to effectively reach a state of excellence.

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## APPENDIX A

### *The roles of African American female academicians in public relations*

#### **Interview Schedule**

1. How long have you been an educator in public relations?
2. How would you describe the institution you teach at?
3. What type of classes do you mainly teach?
4. How would you describe your interaction with your students?
5. How would you describe your interaction with your colleagues in your department?
6. Are you the only African American in your department? The only minority?
7. How is your teaching style different or unique in comparison to your colleagues or other minorities?
8. What is your view of your research? How is it important or significant to the field?
9. How do you view your service commitments to your students/university?
10. As an African American female in public relations, especially in academia, do you feel that having a mentor is necessary in this field?
11. Before you started teaching, did you work in the field of public relations as a practitioner? If so, how long?
12. How would you classify the roles of other African Americans that are in the field of public relations?
13. In reference to your experience and the data that currently exists about public relations salaries, how would you compare your salary with those of your colleagues?
14. What other thoughts do you have about public relations as it relates to African American educators and practitioners?