

Summer 2018

# Exploring Factors That Enhance Career Advancement for African-Americans Across Various Criminal Justice Occupations: A Qualitative Examination

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Bryer, Antonio J.. "Exploring Factors That Enhance Career Advancement for African-Americans Across Various Criminal Justice Occupations: A Qualitative Examination" (2018). Master of Arts (MA), thesis, Sociology/Criminal Justice, Old Dominion University, DOI: 10.25777/0vpz-3j92  
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EXPLORING FACTORS THAT ENHANCE CAREER ADVANCEMENT FOR AFRICAN-  
AMERICANS ACROSS VARIOUS CRIMINAL JUSTICE OCCUPATIONS: A

QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION

by

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B.S. May 2015, Old Dominion University

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

APPLIED SOCIOLOGY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
August 2018

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## ABSTRACT

### EXPLORING FACTORS THAT ENHANCE CAREER ADVANCEMENT FOR AFRICAN-AMERICANS ACROSS VARIOUS CRIMINAL JUSTICE OCCUPATIONS: A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION

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Old Dominion University, 2018  
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This study examined the factors that are important for African-Americans to reach executive-level positions within the field of corrections. Using nine semi-structured interviews with current and former executive-level corrections professionals, it was found that investments in social capital and human capital are the main career advancement enhancers. However, when it came to factors that were specific to African-American corrections professionals, a majority of the respondents mentioned proficiency as an enhancer.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Historically few African Americans have risen to the executive levels within the workforce. Instead, African-American professionals have been marginalized in ways that make it less likely that they will be promoted. While much is known about the factors that influence promotion among whites, far less is known about career progression among African-Americans, particularly in criminal justice. Thus, this thesis explores the factors that enhance career progression for African-Americans who work in federal and state corrections.

Picture a young African-American professional who has recently accepted an entry-level position within a criminal justice organization. Imagine that this individual aspires to improve the oftentimes strained relationship between the African-American community and the criminal justice system. This individual knows that the most effective method to improve the relationship is through influencing policy as an executive-level criminal justice professional. The only issue is that this person does not know how to navigate through the professional criminal justice field as a marginalized minority. This is a common experience of numerous young African-Americans who are either entering, or contemplating entering the criminal justice professional field.

Although African-Americans have experienced an increase in upward occupational mobility since the passage of the Equal Opportunity Employment Act of 1972, existing literature suggests that African-Americans suffer from low levels of inclusion in executive and managerial level positions across various employment fields (Baldi and McBrier 1997). In regard to the criminal justice field, the inclusion of African-Americans in executive-level positions appears to be marginal. For example, the census data shows that racial minority representation has been greater among line-level police positions and less integration is seen in professional and

administrative ranks or managerial positions (Ward 2006; Gustafson 2013). Race demographics from the New York Police Department (NYPD), a nationally representative police department, embody the marginalization of African-American inclusion within managerial ranks (Guajardo 2014). In 2011, African-Americans represented only eight percent of various chief positions within the NYPD. While the African-American representation in captain positions in the NYPD doubled between 2005 to 2011, African-Americans were still held only six percent of captain positions in 2011.

Existing literature examines the factors that enhance African-American career progression in the general workforce, however, the body of empirical literature examining career enhancing factors across various criminal justice organizations is limited. More precisely, literature is weak in examining the factors that executive-level African-American criminal justice professionals consider important for career progression.

## PURPOSE STATEMENT

This study examines the factors that enhance career progression for African-Americans who work in federal and state corrections. More specifically, this research is designed to uncover career enhancing factors for African-Americans in federal and state corrections that have gone unnoticed in previous empirical research. One central research question guides this study:

What are the factors that enhance the career progression of African-Americans in corrections?

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

By examining the factors that enhance promotional opportunities for African-Americans in various state and federal corrections through qualitative methods, this study may uncover factors that have been either overlooked or deemed insignificant in previous empirical research. Additionally, understanding the factors that contribute to African-American career progression in this specific criminal justice field may prove to be beneficial for other criminal justice organizations that want to increase the inclusion of African-American professionals in executive-level positions. Moreover, highlighting factors that African-American executive-level corrections professionals deem important for career advancement may subsequently highlight several barriers for career advancement for African-Americans. Thus, policy implications for criminal justice employment and career progression intervention may arise.

The next chapter explores the existing literature that has examined factors that enhance career advancement in the overall workforce generally and specifically for African Americans. It also examines research on the determinants of African-American career progression within municipal police departments.



## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Little research exists about the specific factors associated with African-Americans gaining employment and promotional opportunities in community-based and institutional corrections. Thus, this literature review goes beyond corrections to explore the factors that enhance career advancement for people generally and African-Americans specifically across various occupational fields. In the first section, research exploring the impact of investments in social and human capital on promotional opportunities is examined. In the second section, research examining the impact of social support, such as social-ties, networking, and mentoring, on African-American promotional opportunities indicates that African-Americans have less access to these important contributors to career success than do whites. The last section examines the internal and external factors that influence the promotion of African Americans in criminal justice occupations.

#### FACTORS THAT ENHANCE CAREER ADVANCEMENT GENERALLY

Literature examining factors that enhance career advancement for African-Americans in corrections is rather limited. Therefore, it is important to identify predicting factors for career advancement across various occupations and races. A review of the literature reveals that investments in both social capital and human capital enhance career advancement. “Social capital” refers to the social interactions that create value and facilitate actions amongst individuals (Coleman 1990; Seibert et al. 2001). “Human capital” refers to the skills and knowledge that individuals acquire to enhance their potential productivity and success in the labor market (Becker 1964; Ng and Feldman 2010).

An abundance of research suggests that investments in social capital (e.g. mentoring and network groups) best predicts gaining promotion, increased expectations of career advancement, higher salaries, and higher levels of career satisfaction (Singh et al. 2009; Seibert et al. 2001; Podolny and Baron 1997; Gubbins and Garavan 2016).

One of the earlier studies examining the impact of social capital factors on career advancement was conducted in 1997 by Podolny and Baron who examined how an individual's social network ties influenced their intra-organizational mobility. The authors surveyed 658 employees at a high-technology engineering and manufacturing corporation. Respondents were asked to identify coworkers who were important to their work-related social networks and to rate the closeness of their relations. Utilizing bivariate correlations and logistic regressions, they found that large information sharing networks enhanced an employee's chances of career advancement, as measured by salary increases and promotions, within their company.

Seibert et al. (2001) also sought to determine the impact of social capital on career success measured in terms of promotions, salaries, and career satisfaction. They surveyed 448 undergraduate, graduate, and alumni business and engineering students from a Midwestern university. Social capital was measured in terms of their total social network size and how other individuals were able to provide information pertaining to career advancement information pertaining to work-related duties. Utilizing hypothesized structural equation models, they found that strong social capital investments are positively related to an individual's career success.

Singh, et al. (2009) were interested in finding out which factors influenced promotions, increases in salary, and career advancement expectations. They used longitudinal data that was collected from 236 respondents over a three-year period. Employing hierarchical and logistic regression analyses, they determined that mentoring added more value than social network size,

behavioral characteristics, and specialized training in predicting promotions and advancement expectations, while human capital investments predicted increases in salary.

Gubbins and Garavan (2016) examined the impact of work-related social networks on career outcomes as measured through career satisfaction, hierarchical rank, salary, and participation in developmental activities. They surveyed 304 human resource professionals. Participants' social network benefits were measured through access to information, perceived support from other coworkers, perceived career sponsorship from coworkers, and contact with higher-level coworkers. Utilizing structural equation modeling, the authors' results suggest that higher levels of contact with human resource professionals in higher positions and in other organizations leads to increases in career satisfaction, developmental activity, salary, and hierarchical rank.

In sum, research suggests that large information sharing networks, social network size, and mentoring are important social capital factors that enhance career advancement. Other research suggests that investments in human capital are the best predictors of promotions, higher income, and increased occupational prestige (Eby et al. 2003; Sharabi 2011; Clausen et al. 2014; Birasnav et al. 2013).

Eby et al. (2003) investigated factors associated with three criteria of career success: perceived career satisfaction, perceived internal marketability, and perceived external marketability. They used data from 458 alumni from a large southeastern university. Human capital investments included job related skills and development of job expertise and social capital factors included network size and mentorship. The authors also measured personality characteristics such as proactive habits and conscious career insight. Utilizing partial correlations and dominance analysis, they determined that investments in human and social capital, as well as

other personality characteristics were important in predicting career success. However, human capital factors were the only factors that predicted career success across all three criteria tested in the study (perceived career satisfaction, perceived internal marketability, and perceived external marketability).

While Eby et al. (2003) used self-report, Sharabi (2011) specifically examined the perceptions of managers and workers regarding promotions in the Israeli high-tech industry. He administered a survey to 95 workers and 36 managers regarding perceptions of which factors mattered most in career advancement. His general findings suggest that managers and workers, on average, perceived that success on projects was the most important factor in gaining promotions.

Biransnav et al. (2013) were interested in discovering which factors predicted career success among government employees. To do so, they surveyed 161 government employees working in Bahrain. Human capital was measured through employee's age, education, rank and tenure. Career success was measured by the number of promotions and employee's career satisfaction. Utilizing correlation analysis and a series of hierarchical regression analysis, they concluded that tenure was the only human capital variable that was positively related to the number of promotions received by employees. Other human capital variables such as education and rank did not impact promotions received.

Similar to Biransnav et al. (2013), Clausen et al. (2014) were interested in identifying the key factors that predict managerial job promotion. They studied 7,003 promotions to middle management and 3,147 promotions to senior management of internet-based game project developers. Human capital variables were measured by job expertise, job experience, and prior project success. Social capital variables were measured through network size. Utilizing

proportional hazard models, they determined that higher levels of job experience and expertise increased the odds of promotion to both middle and senior management positions.

In sum, a number of human capital factors influence career advancement including perceived career satisfaction, perceived internal marketability, perceived external marketability, success on projects, tenure, job experience and expertise. Taken together, the literature reveals that investments in social and human capital are important for enhancing career advancement and overall career success.

## SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE WORKFORCE

Acquiring both social and human capital require support from influential others. Family and school staff provide the initial and arguably most important support. Once in the job, social support, such as social-ties, networking, and mentoring, from peers and higher-level staff are critical for anyone seeking promotional opportunities in the workplace. However, it appears that African-Americans have less access to such support than do whites.

In the 1990s, concerns about diversity in the workplace had grown immensely, and companies began exploring new approaches to manage diversity and enhance recruiting strategies (Friedman et al. 1998). One of the approaches that became common was the formation of employee minority network groups. Minority network groups are groups of minority or female employees that meet occasionally for social and career support (Friedman et al. 1998). At this point, little was known about the impact of network groups for minorities.

Friedman et al. (1998) sought to discover whether minority network groups had a positive impact on career optimism, which specific effects of these groups are most beneficial, and

whether minority network groups enhance isolation or discrimination. To do so, they surveyed 397 members of the National African-American MBA Association (NBMBA) in 1993.

In order to understand the determinants of career optimism as measured by career progress, the authors collected data about respondent demographics, their experiences with network groups, and their agreement/disagreements with statements about their careers, jobs, and relationships using a 5-point Likert scale. Two questions that related to career progress were combined to produce a scale that was labeled "Career Optimism." One question asked if they were satisfied with their career progress and another asked if they expected to move higher in their company in the near future. Six other questions based on attitudes were used to examine discrimination, feedback, mentorship, white manager difficulty, support, and ties. Respondents were asked about the strength of their ties with their African-American co-workers and if their strongest support came from African-American co-workers. Additional questions asked if respondents had mentors and if it was difficult for a white manager to be on of their mentors. Lastly, respondents were asked whether they experienced discrimination at work.

Using regression, the authors determined that network groups significantly increase career optimism, had a positive impact on ties with other African-American employees, and had a positive impact on mentoring. There was no indication that network groups resulted in any increase in discrimination from white co-workers. The results indicated that minority network groups enhance mentoring and reduce feelings of discomfort with white mentors.

Friedman, Kane, and Cornfield's (1998) study suffers from a particularly low response rate (14%) and subsequent low size effects. In addition, a dependent variable of promotion – a behavior – rather than career optimism – an attitude – would have yielded more reliable results.

Similar to Friedman et al. (1998), Parks-Yancy (2006) wanted to examine the effects of race, gender, and social capital resources on career earnings and promotions. She examined surveys from 1994 to 1998 of The National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY). This is a nationally representative sample of more than 10,000 males and females of various ethnicities, with African-Americans and whites comprising the majority of respondents. The NLSY surveys provide employment and educational information and family background characteristics.

The author developed two main categories as dependent variables: social capital resources and career returns. Parks-Yancy (2006) defined social capital resources as information, influence, and opportunity through social ties. The NLSY asks individuals how they found their current job and gives a range of options from which they can select: contacting the employer directly; contacting a public, private, or school employment agency; contacting family and friends; checking professional organizations; and attending training programs. Career returns are measured by promotions and earnings.

Using logistic regression and ordinary least square regression, the author determined that access to social capital resources in 1996 positively affected getting promoted, but access to social capital resources in 1994 did not. Additionally, Parks-Yancy (2006) determined that white men and women were more likely to be promoted as a result of their access to social capital resources than were African-American men and women. Whites and African-American men earned more, on average, than African-American women, and using social capital resources to obtain employment positively affected whites and African-American men's earnings. Additionally, the results indicated that whites have more access to social capital resources than African-Americans. Moreover, African-Americans are more likely to use formal mechanisms to

obtain employment because they often lack social ties that can offer assistance in finding employment.

Instead of focusing on the effects of race, gender, and social capital resources on career earnings and promotion, Nkomo and Cox (1990) sought to identify the elements influencing the upward mobility of African-American managers and to examine the relative importance of these elements in the upward mobility of African-American managers. To do so, they surveyed 340 members of the National African-American MBA Association (NMBAA).

In order to identify the targeted influencing elements, the authors collected data about respondent's line position experience, company seniority, mentor assistance, organization size, frequency of management vacancies, company affirmative action policy implementation, job involvement, job performance, interracial socializing, and upward mobility. Nkomo and Cox (1990) included two different measures of upward mobility: the total number of management promotions and the respondents' perceptions of how rapidly they had advanced in their company.

Utilizing multiple regression analysis, the authors determined that line position experience, company seniority, mentor assistance, organization size and frequency of management vacancies were the most significant predictor of upward mobility. However, the authors determined that interracial social activity had a negative impact on upward mobility. This suggests that informal networking amongst individuals from different ethnicities was not positive for African-American career advancement.

The above research from Friedman et al. (1998), Parks-Yancy (2006), and Nkomo and Cox (1990) relied heavily on quantitative data. Khosrovanian et al. (2011) utilized mixed methods in effort to combat previous limitations as they sought to examine how African Americans perceive their own access to workplace opportunities and rewards. To do so, the authors



surveyed and conducted in-depth interviews with 187 African Americans employed in various organization in the Houston, Texas metropolitan area between October 2007 and April 2008.

Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches to measure respondent's views on the various topics, Khosrovania et al. (2011) determined that a majority of the respondents were unlikely to be mentored, expressed dissatisfaction with not having a mentor, and believed that mentorship, as well as adequate training, were the key determinants in receiving promotional opportunities. Furthermore, while 31% expressed satisfaction with their access to workplace opportunities and rewards, the majority (65%) had never advanced and expressed dissatisfaction.

Although their study included a qualitative approach, which was missing from numerous studies on African-American career advancement, Khosrovania et al. (2011) had to rely on networking in order to include an adequate number of participants. The lack of random selection of participants makes it difficult to extend the results to larger populations. Additional research on African-American promotion refutes the importance of social capital and support on promotional opportunities for African Americans (Johnson and Eby 2011; James 2000; Smith 2005).

Johnson and Eby (2011) sought to identify the factors to the career success of college educated African-American men. The dependent variable of career success was measured by self-reports of the total number of promotions, annual compensation, and organizational (managerial) level. Social capital variables were measured through mentorship and sponsorship descriptions, membership to professional associations, and prestige of educational institutions attended. Human capital variables were measured through educational attainment, organizational tenure, work history, training experience, and geographical mobility. Demographic predictors were captured through self-report measures of socioeconomic status origin, marital status, age,

and skin tone. Finally, control variables examined were organization type, organization size, industry type, and geographical location.

Results indicated that only one of the five social capital variables (i.e., informal network) had a significant relationship with career success, while the remaining social capital variables (i.e., career enhancing relationships, general managerial support, professional association, civic and elite club memberships, and prestige of educational institutions attended) were not significantly related to career success (Johnson and Eby 2011). However, participants with longer organizational tenure, greater breadth of work experience, more extensive training experiences, more geographic mobility/international experience, high self-rated performance and high levels of career motivation reported high levels of career success (Johnson and Eby 2011).

Similar to Johnson and Eby (2011), James (2000) determined that access to social capital was not a significant predictor in promotion rates. James (2000) examined whether there were differences between African-American and white managers in work-related experiences and outcomes. To do so, the author surveyed 960 African-American and white full-time managers in the headquarters of various firms in the financial services industry.

James (2000) collected data on promotion rate, human capital predictors, and social capital predictors. Promotion rate was based on respondents' self-reported promotions achieved. Human capital predictors consisted of educational attainment and training. Education was measured on a 6-point scale. Social capital predictors consisted of asking who in the company were the most interactive with, if that person had any racial similarity, and how close they were with the person they mentioned. James' (2000) results indicated that although whites had more access to social capital than African-Americans, social capital did not predict promotion rate.

Similar to Johnson and Eby (2011) and James (2000), Smith (2005) concluded that disparate access to social capital did not have a significant impact on promotional rates between white men and African-American men and women. In particular, Smith (2005) sought to examine the variables that explain the processes that lead to promotion for white men and their minority counterparts. To do so, Smith (2005) used data from the Multi-City Survey of Urban Inequality (MCSUI). The survey is a multistage, stratified, area-probability sample of white and minority respondents in Atlanta, Boston, and Los Angeles conducted from 1992 to 1994.

In order to determine the variables contributable to the differing processes that lead to promotion, the author collected data on promotion, network assistance, education, work experience, marital status, and other basic demographic information. Smith (2005) hypothesized that white males' unique access to network assistance would disproportionately enhance their promotion chances.

Utilizing regressions, Smith (2005) determined that white males did not experience enhanced promotion chances due to their disproportionate access to network assistance, however, he concluded that the processes that lead to promotion differed between white men and their African-American counterparts. Smith's (2005) results indicated that African-American men disproportionately benefited from having more total workforce experience than white men – implying that African-American men's performance attributes were placed under heavier scrutiny. He proposed that these results indicated that African-American males must work in subordinate positions for longer periods of time than white males before receiving a promotion. The positive and statistically significant coefficient on the variable total work experience suggests that this determinant has more powerful influence on the odds of promotion for African-American men only. Furthermore, African-American women benefitted more than white men

from prior job specific experience and unit increases in the amount of hours they work per week (Smith 2005). Smith (2005) suggested that African-American women's formal credentials are scrutinized more than those of their white male counterparts, in that greater attention is paid to how long they worked for a prior employer and the number of work hours they log in a given week.

In sum, minority network groups significantly increase career optimism, improve social ties amongst African-American employees, and improve mentoring relationships (Friedman et al. 1998). However, additional research suggests that African-Americans experience higher levels of career success without significant support from social capital variables (Johnson and Eby 2011; James 2000). But, this success only comes after actually obtaining a job, a process African-Americans may find more difficult because they often lack social ties that can offer assistance in finding employment. As a result, they are more likely to use formal mechanisms to get jobs than are their white counterparts (Parks-Yancy 2006). Additionally, African-Americans perceive adequate mentorship as the key determinant in receiving promotional opportunities (Khosrovania and Ward 2011). And they appear to be correct in this as the literature suggests that organization size in addition to mentor assistance were the most significant predictors of African-American upward mobility (Nkomo and Cox 1990).

## FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE PROMOTION OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE OCCUPATIONS

Research examining the impact of internal and external factors on promotional opportunities in municipal police agencies for African-Americans reveals the importance of African-American representation in political positions, affirmative action policies, and African-

American representation in managerial and patrol positions. Relationships between police departments and the African-American communities they serve have been strained for decades. One of the common solutions to this issue has been advocating the hiring of more African-Americans in police departments. Increasing the African-American representation in police departments in order to subsequently improve strained relationships between the two communities has been a commonly agreed upon notion.

However, simply hiring more African-American officers is insufficient to changing police departments since administrators set the overall tone as well as establish policies and practices. African Americans must also be able to advance to leadership positions. However, as the data cited in Chapter 1 from the New York Police Department indicates, relatively few African Americans have been promoted to the upper levels of law enforcement. Examining the factors that contribute to African-Americans advancing to managerial and executive positions in various police departments may yield insights that will enable more African-Americans to achieve promotion to top ranks.

Lewis (1989) sought to identify the internal and external variables that influence African-American police officer representation. To do so, he combined data from the U.S. Census Report of General Economic and Social Characteristics of the Population for 1970 and 1980, and police department EEO-4 reports for 1975 and 1985. In total, 46 municipal police departments that served populations over 100,000 in the U.S. were included in his study.

Lewis (1989) collected data on the representation of African-Americans in police departments, in particular the percentages of African-Americans in the sworn ranks, patrol ranks, and police administrative management (command) ranks. Additionally, he collected data on the presence and power of African Americans in political and social life, in particular percentage of

African-Americans serving on the city legislature, the number of years the city was headed by a African-American mayor, the number of years that the department was headed by a African-American chief or commissioner, the number of years that the police department was under consent decree to hire and/or promote minorities and women, and the percentage of African-Americans in the protective service. Furthermore, he collected data on city locations and size.

Utilizing regressions, Lewis (1989) determined that the presence of African-American mayors was a statistically significant variable associated with the variation of African-American presence in combined sworn and police patrol ranks in American cities in 1975. In 1985, African-American mayors, African-American police chiefs, and affirmative action consent decrees emerged as significant variables associated with African-American presence in police sworn ranks. Lewis (1989) determined that the most statistically significant variable positively associated with the variation of the percentage of African-Americans in the administrative management ranks of police departments in 1975 and 1985 was the percentage of African-Americans in the patrol ranks.

Much has changed since Lewis' (1989) study. Gustafson (2013) used data from 2000 to better understand the institutional and external factors associated with African-American representation in policing at the line and managerial ranks. The data for this study were assembled from various cross-sectional data sets from 2000. Merging several national datasets, Gustafson included 180 cities with a minimum of 100 officers serving populations of 50,000 or more.

The dependent variable in Gustafson's study is management diversity. Managerial diversity is operationalized with counts of African-American police managers. There are several external and institutional variables that serve as the independent variables. The percent African-

American population, presence of African-American mayors, length of African-American mayor's tenure and percent African-American city councilors comprise the external measures; the presence of African-American police chiefs, formal/informal affirmative action policies, unions and other minority groups comprise the institutional measures.

Using regressions, Gustafson (2013) determined that African-American political representation does not have significant impacts on African-American police managerial representation, large and bureaucratically complex agencies are more likely to be staffed by minority police management, and that percent African-American line figures explain increases in managerial representation of African-Americans.

While Gustafson's 2013 study and Lewis' 1989 research provide important information, the internal and external factors examined have likely changed in the ensuing years. Also, the sample examined only accounts for American municipal police organizations.

In sum, social capital appears to be more important than human capital for African Americans seeking career advancement. In particular, African-American representation in mayoral positions has statistically significant impacts on the hiring of African-American police chiefs in municipal police departments, and that African-American police chiefs, affirmative action policies, and large pools of African-Americans in patrol ranks are significantly associated with African-American presence in police sworn ranks (Lewis 1989). Gustafson (2013) supports Lewis' (1989) claim that larger representations of African-Americans in line-positions positively impacts African-American representation in managerial positions throughout police departments. However, African-American representation in political positions does not impact African-Americans representation in police chief appointments. Rather, bureaucratically complex agencies are more likely to be staffed by minority police management (Gustafson 2013).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the research design used to explore the question: What are the factors that enhance the career progression of African-Americans in various criminal justice occupations? This chapter provides a brief description of the setting, sample, hypotheses, and variables, followed by a discussion of the procedures, and analysis. Lastly, the chapter concludes with a summary and prelude to the next chapter.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis is a qualitative research study designed to examine the factors that enhance gaining employment and promotional opportunities for African-Americans in various criminal justice occupations. The data included were collected from semi-structured interviews with male and female African-Americans who hold, or previously held, executive level positions in state and federal corrections. The sample population is derived from a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling is a type of sampling technique whereby participants are chosen to be interviewed based entirely on the convenient accessibility of the researcher (Creswell 2007). Initial participants were identified by a key informant that had unique access to targeted members of the sample population. Snowball sampling is a non-probability method that is used to contact individuals that are difficult to reach by asking each participant to recommend others who may be willing to be interviewed (Berg 2001). Each participant was asked to provide names and contact information for potential interview participants of the targeted sample population. Three participants were identified by convenience sampling and six respondents through snowball sampling.



Data were collected following approval of the thesis proposal by the thesis committee and the College of Arts and Letters Human Subjects Review Committee. Data collection was conducted from mid-January of 2017 until April of 2017. While it is not entirely correct to speak of independent and dependent variables and hypotheses in a qualitative study, it is useful to do so in order to maintain focus. Thus, the independent variables are the actual factors that enhanced participants hiring and promotional processes. The dependent variables are hiring and promotional opportunities. The primary hypothesis of the study was that the majority of participants will express that social capital was the most significant factor in both their hiring and promotional processes.

## PROCEDURES AND INSTRUMENTATION

The data were collected using semi-structured phone interviews. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative methodological technique that employs intense conversations between the interviewer and the participant in order to understand their perceptions, opinions and thoughts about a particular subject (Creswell 2007). For this study in particular, semi-structured interviews were used in a way to encourage participants to feel comfortable discussing their unique experiences within criminal justice institutions. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express factors that influenced their career trajectory that have yet to be explored in previous research.

A digital recorder was used to record the conversations between the participants and interviewer with their permission. The interviewer also took notes during the interview and compared and expanded on the notes when listening to the interview. The interviews were also transcribed. All the recorded interviews were uploaded to the interviewer's ODU account, which

was a secure site. Participants were provided pseudonyms to assure anonymity. The interviews began with basic closed-ended demographic information such as length of experience, highest occupation title, and educational attainment. Then open-ended questions were asked to explore the factors that influence the interviewee's career trajectory. After the interview ended, the participant was asked to refer an African-American executive-level colleague within the corrections field to participate in the study. The Appendix contains the full interview schedule.

## CHAPTER IV

## FINDINGS

This chapter presents the results of interviews of African-Americans in corrections to investigate the factors that enhanced their career progression. Nine interviews were conducted by telephone between February and March of 2017. Interviews lasted 26 minutes on average and ranging from 11 minutes to 76 minutes. The respondents included five black men and four black women who currently or previously held positions such as State Director of Corrections, Warden, Director of Institutions, Commissioner of Juvenile Justice, and Director of Human Services. It is important to note that retired respondents' interviews were longer than participants who were still active in the field. The majority of participants expressed concern about being identified because there are not many blacks working in high-level positions within the field. They ranged in years of experience in the field from 25-45 and all had at least a bachelor's degree. Table 1 presents information about each participant.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Respondent	Gender	Years of Experience	Education	Status
Paul	Female	33	Doctorate	Active
Griffin	Female	35	Juris Doctorate	Retired
Robinson	Male	43	Bachelor's	Active
Liston	Male	25	Master's	Active
Grey	Male	45	Doctorate	Retired
Brown	Female	42	Master's	Retired
Mitchell	Male	30	Bachelor's	Retired
Mizer	Female	33	Master's	Retired
Black	Male	42	Master's	Retired

The interviews suggest that the participants felt that there are commonalities as well as racial differences in career advancement within the field of corrections. All participants provided career-enhancing factors that were applicable to all professionals within corrections, regardless of race. The factors mentioned were mentorship, involvement in professional network organizations, cross-training, specialized training, years of adequate work experience, and proficiency with work. However, when prompted to distinguish between the general population of corrections professionals and African-Americans, some participants provided factors that were of importance for African-Americans specifically in pursuit of career advancement. The four race-specific themes that emerged upon the analysis of the interviews were (1) mentorship, (2) professional social networking, (3) proficiency, and (4) geographic mobility.

The following sections explore the themes mentioned by participants in response to the initial questions “Can you describe factors that enhance promotional opportunities for people generally in criminal justice occupations?” and “Can you describe factors that enhance promotional opportunities for African-Americans specifically in criminal justice occupations?” Each theme will be discussed in the following sections. Below are some representative quotations from respondents when asked what factors are important for career advancement within corrections.

#### FACTORS THAT ENHANCE PROMOTION “GENERALLY”

##### *Mentorship*

Mr. Black, a former Commissioner of the Department of Juvenile Justice in a Midwestern state, revealed that developing mentorship relationships was a key factor in obtaining promotions in the field. When asked what prompted his decision in seeking a mentor, Black stated,

At some point in life, I realized that any promotion I would obtain, would not be based on my good credentials and good career at that point. It's this thing called politics, that controls all that you get once you reach a certain level in your career, particularly if you work in a government, I'm sure that'd be true to some degree on the private side. But I made a decision that I would become political, and that's when my promotions really started to take place. Politics is a strange business, it's not based on your good skill set. In fact, sometimes that's not a consideration. It's based on who you know, and what kind of IOU's you've been able to set up over time. You do things for people with expectation that at some point, you will call on them and they're in a position to do something for you. That's the reality of it.

There are a few things that make Black's comments noteworthy. First, he states that he did not understand the importance of having a mentor until he realized career advancement was contingent upon creating good work-related relationships. After some time on the job, he realized that his good credentials alone would not materialize into career advancement opportunities. Second, mentorship created a gateway to landing promotions for Black. It is noteworthy that Black did not equate mentorship to learning skills and techniques, but that mentorship for him was simply a way to receive promotional opportunities. Third, Black labeled his interactions with others in the field as "politics". Suggesting that these types of interactions as politics infers a negative connotation. Moreover, when Black mentions "politics", he is referring to networks and social capital and that mentorship helps one build equity in both. Lastly, Black's comments suggest that interactions between people in the field have to be strategic in order receive promotions. Strategic meaning that a one must be conscientious about potential benefits or drawbacks in each professional interaction.

Unlike Black, Dr. Paul, a Director of Juvenile Justice in a Southern state, was aware of the importance of finding a mentor early on in her career. Moreover, she viewed mentorship as an opportunity to gain knowledge and guidance from individuals who had been in the field for a considerable amount of time. When asked to provide advice for individuals new to field seeking factors to enhance their career advancement, Dr. Paul stated,

The best advice that I can give you is, wherever, if you're going into a probation department, when I first started, I latched onto a person who I thought was extremely positive, and she was in a really high position at deputy level, and I'm just coming in as a probation officer, or even as a ... We were called case workers back then, a juvenile supervision officer, so I kind of latched onto her, she probably could have had me arrested for stalking, but I did, I latched onto her and I found positive role models and sought guidance from them. Because, you know, a mentor I absolutely wanted someone who had been in the department a long time, who can help with some of the nuances that you don't know when you're new, that you can bounce ideas off of, and things like that.

In line with the perspective of Paul, Mrs. Griffin, a former Director of Corrections in a Southern state, expressed the importance of mentorship as receiving guidance and learning work-related skills for the profession. When asked to provide factors that enhanced her career advancing opportunities, she stated,

For me it was, I had some very important mentors in the department. Dean was really a mentor for me because when there were opportunities he kind of pushed me to go, because he pushed me to become director to oversee our community corrections programs. He was there encouraging me to do things. Dean and others within the department, I mean there was Nancy who was a person who I respected and who mentored me as well. I think for me it was having those mentors, people who saw something in me and encouraged me to step outside what I might become comfortable with.

It is important to note that Griffin's experience with mentorship is slightly different than the two previous participants. Her mentors provided her with a source of encouragement to accomplish goals and tasks beyond the role of a line-officer. They were able to provide her with knowledge about the profession, however, it was their confidence in her that prompted her to seek promotions. When asked which factor she deemed more important, mentorship or training, Griffin stated, "I think for advancement you need to have that person who's willing to be vocal, to be willing to speak on your behalf and to speak up for you when those opportunities arise."

Similar to Mr. Black, Mr. Robinson, a Director of Corrections in a Mid-Atlantic state, did not seek mentorship. However, mentors sought him out, much like Griffin. When asked who exactly his mentors were and how did they help him with career advancement, he stated,

My mentors basically were three different individuals, two wardens and a director that actually sought me out because they saw something in me and they wanted to help and to protect me. They sought me out. They gave me advice. They helped and protected me, and that I think helped make a difference in my career.

In line with the three previous advocates of mentorship, Robinson believes that mentorship provides guidance and knowledge about the field, as well as a source of protection from career hampering instances.

Similar to the perspectives of the previous participants mentioned, Mr. Grey, a former Director of Corrections for a Midwest state, found mentorship to be a source of guidance and knowledge sharing. When asked if he thinks mentorship is a key contributor to career advancement in corrections, he stated:

Well yes. I think that it would be helpful to have a mentor, or mentors, as you continue your career in corrections, which means that you really kind of attach yourself to the people whose opinions and perspectives on performing corrections work you value. Some agencies have formal mentoring programs, which means they might assign you a mentor. There is mentoring philosophies out there, and mentoring leadership programs, but you don't have to be a part of that to have mentors. You don't even have to tell people that you want them to mentor you. You can just observe them. Observe their behavior. Observe how they make decisions. I would put at the top of the list the idea of paying attention to how other people perform the work, and you make the decision whether or not you think if you were in that position, if you would perform that work in a similar way.

There are several noteworthy points in Grey's comments on mentorship. For Grey, mentorship provides guidance on how to conduct one's self and how to get work done in the field. However, unlike the previous advocates, he does not reduce mentorship to attaching one's self to another individual. He believes mentorship can take place from afar. Put another way, mentorship could take the form of emulating other individuals in the field who have satisfactory track records.

Mr. Mitchell, a former warden for the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, had similar opinions about the role of mentorship in his career advancement as Mr. Grey. This was his response when asked to describe the benefits of mentorship in corrections:

I always say try to get a good mentor, or someone that can guide you or been there, that can help you navigate the road that you're trying to get to. Everybody doesn't necessarily want to be a warden or a deputy warden or whatever. Whatever you are, you know, find someone that can help you that's been there that can tell you what the pitfalls, and what the opportunities that you will encounter as you attempt to accomplish those goals and objectives.

For Mitchell, mentorship provides guidance on what to expect, in terms of negative as well as positive experiences, while working in corrections. Also, he noted that mentors can inform mentees of opportunities that may arise that may propel their careers. Similar to Mr. Robinson, Mitchell believes that mentors can inform their mentees of situations to avoid along their career path.

Ms. Brown, a former parole board member in a Midwestern state, had different experiences with mentorship than the other participants. When asked about her experience with mentorship throughout her career in corrections, she stated,

I was fortunate to have two good mentors. The first thing that they did was encouraged me to get involved in the state corrections association. From that involvement, I got active with the American Correctional Association which is an international group. I also ... Anyway, that gave me a lot of national exposure because I then got involved in a lot of other associations and I was the meeting planners like the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, the Association of Parole and Authorities, this goes throughout my career. Then when I was running the parole office I happened to get involved in a women's leadership program.

Unlike other participants, Brown did not credit her mentors with providing her key information or skills for corrections. However, she credited her mentors for directing her to get involved in national networking organizations. She cited her exposure to others in the field as the primary factor for her professional upward mobility. It is important to note that she did not



mention acquiring skills and techniques from her involvement in national network organizations. Her primary benefit from involvement was developing relationships with others in the field on a national level.

In sum, a majority of the participants mentioned mentorship as a career enhancing factor for people generally, but for differing reasons. Some believe mentors teach mentees skillsets and knowledge that are specific to the field of corrections. Others believe that mentorship provides a source of encouragement to pursue goals and tasks that are beyond line-level duties. Some believe mentors are able to provide guidance on how to navigate through positive and negative experiences throughout one's career.

### *Networking*

When asked what factors are important for advancement within corrections, Griffin mentioned the importance of involvement in network organizations. For her, the primary benefit of network organizations is the sharing of knowledge and ideas. Griffin stated:

I found people outside of the department that I could talk to. I think it's very important that you have people who you could maybe piggyback on their knowledge, what they knew, what they learned, that they were willing to help you. There was the Association of State Correctional Administrators when I was commissioner. There was the juvenile equivalent when I was the juvenile director. Those were people who had experience in the system, or were coming along like me.

Then we would have meetings and we would talk about things that were going on in our respective jurisdiction. These were people who say, "Have you tried this?" If you haven't tried that, or you could tell what you were doing. It was sharing and learning from one another. If you look at when you get to the point in corrections where you're a deputy or a commissioner there are only 50 states. Then they were included some of the larger county systems that were part of the adult and juvenile systems that we were meeting about.

There's a lot of information to be shared, but we're kind of a closed group. To listen to one another, to share ideas. I think that's important as well. That was kind of outside of my own department, but this is the knowledge of others within the system. I think that's

very important, to be willing to learn, and to accept the fact that you don't know everything, and that you can always learn more.

For Griffin, networking matters because it facilitates the sharing of information and ideas that may aid one in doing their job.

Mr. Liston believes that involvement in networking organizations is crucial for career advancement in corrections as well. However, his reasoning is different than the previous participant. Liston stated:

The social networks such as the different affiliations or the different type of groups, I think that will help you tremendously because a lot of times, when you get to a certain level, everyone is competitive and so then it becomes who knows you or who do you know that knows someone else because, I'll give you a good case in point. Once you get to the associate warden level, you only have 121 wardens out there, but we have about 600-700 associate wardens. Everybody wants to make a warden and so at some point in time, it ceased being about what you know, but it's politically based. Who you know and what you've done.

For Liston, involvement in network organizations provides an opportunity to forge relationships with key people in the field. He posits that skillset and knowledge alone is not enough to attain an executive-level position in corrections.

Liston's perspective of creating relationship with other professionals in the field aligns with the comments of Mr. Black on mentorship relationships. Both agree that building relationships with other professionals is a key factor in career advancement, but through different mediums. Liston believes that the best way to create relationships is through network organizations, while Mr. Black thinks involvement in mentorship relationships is the best method.

In line with the perspective of Mr. Liston, Mrs. Brown stated that her involvement in networking organizations aided her in attaining an executive-level position in corrections. This

was her response when asked to explain why she thought her involvement in organizations helped her attain promotions:

Well for a lot of reasons. Because I got involved in these two or three associations and I was putting on these conferences ... By that time in my career I felt I just wanted to give back in any way that I could in my work which was volunteer work with these various associations, Blacks in Criminal Justice, Paroling Authorities, was the opportunity to provide training to people because I got to know everybody in corrections nationally. I could bring in speakers and trainers and that sort of thing. That networking helped me be able to do that successfully. That's an example. It helped me learn just different experiences. When I was with the American Correctional Association I was a commissioner for the accreditation commission. I did that for 12 years. That was just very educational. Learned a lot because we accredited prisons well [inaudible 00:12:01] parole offices and that sort of thing.

It is important to note that Mrs. Brown credited her involvement in network organizations with providing her educational experiences as well as building relationships with other corrections professionals on a national level.

Mr. Mitchell echoed Mr. Liston's perspective on the role of networking organizations in his career advancement. When asked to explain why involvement in national networking organizations would propel one's career advancement in corrections, Mitchell stated the following:

I would encourage them [new corrections professionals] to be connected to an organization, and people that can open doors for you. For myself, I've been a lifelong member of the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, and I give credit to that organization for opening doors or meeting individuals that I would have never been able to meet through my regular interactions at work. You come to the conferences, you have these executives there, you get to make presentations of your workshops, and then they see the skillsets and abilities that you have, and as a result it opens doors. I believe that as intelligent or as bright as you may, it takes more than that in order to as you move up the ladder. A lot of it has to do with relationships as well.

Similar to the perspective of Mr. Liston, Mr. Mitchell believes that involvement in national network organizations helps build relationships with other professional in the field. Mr.

Mitchell states that those relationships often lead to career opportunities by displaying skill sets and knowledge to others from across the nation.

In sum, several of the participants mentioned involvement in networking opportunities as a career enhancing factor, but for different purposes. Some believe networking provides an opportunity to share and learn knowledge about the field. Others believe that networking allows individuals the opportunity to forge work relationships with others in the field. A few of the participants mentioned that skillset and knowledge about the field is not enough to secure career advancement. Rather, it is the combination of skillset and positive work relationships that enhance career advancement.

## INVESTMENTS IN HUMAN CAPITAL

### *Diversity in Job Experiences*

Another key career-enhancing factor mentioned amongst the participants was cross-training. Cross-training is the process of acquiring knowledge about different roles in an organization or company. Cross-training was mentioned as a key factor by a little under half of the participants in response to asking which factors are important to advancement within corrections. Their reasoning is featured below.

Mr. Liston was an advocate of cross-training as a career enhancing factor. When prompted to include other factors that he deemed important to advancement in corrections, he stated,

I would say most important is working at different levels. When you get to a certain level in your career, you want to be able to reflect back on and say, "I've worked every level of agency," of where you're working. I think that experience working at different levels is critical.

When asked whether lateral or horizontal promotions were more important for career advancement, Liston stated the following:

I think it could be both because levels ... it could be vertical and it could be horizontal from different jobs. Could be vertical, but horizontally, the more challenging assignments, but vertically, the different levels, like minimum, the camps. Their job is going to be different, but they're still challenging. Then moving over to your mediums. Or you can call it over up to your mediums. They're a higher-level security, a different type of offender is in there and they may have different challenges. That also, within its own, gives you more experience.

Then your penitentiaries, or your high security levels, you're going to manage them totally different because of the gang activities and things like that. It's going to take on a whole facet of its own. As you progress through those different levels of security levels, managing the different offenders, you build that experience that will serve you well as you try to go through career development.

Dr. Paul reiterated the importance of having cross-training experience as a factor that enhances advancement to an executive-level position. This is her response when asked to expand on factors that enhance career advancement in corrections:

I think if you want to be an executive director of a large probation department, then you need to know all pieces of the puzzle. You need to know courts, you need to know probation services, you need to know institutions, you need to know intake, and so don't ever be afraid to move around within the department, not because your trouble, but because you're a troubleshooter.

Mr. Mitchell agreed with Mr. Liston and Dr. Paul that cross-training is a key career-enhancing factor for corrections professionals. When asked to provide factors that enhance promotional opportunities for corrections professionals, he stated,

I think the great thing about the federal, working in corrections in the federal system, is the opportunity for you to diverse your experiences as you come up the ladder. Whereas, if you want to compare the federal with most state systems, normally individuals that stay in one particular field, like once you come in as an officer, you just rise to the top working strictly as an officer. Whereas in the federal system, we have opportunities to go from being an officer into any one of the many different aspects of the operation and management of a correctional facility. For myself, I was only a correctional officer for two years. Then I went to a variety of different job specialties until I made it to become a warden and chief executive officer of a federal prison.

Mr. Robinson echoed Mr. Liston, Dr. Paul, and Mr. Mitchell about the importance of diversifying one's experiences in the field of corrections. He drew on his own experiences as a counselor. It was important for him to gain experiences and knowledge about other positions through lateral promotions. Robinson stated the following when asked to explain his experiences with cross-training as an enhancer for advancement:

Yeah. There are exposures I think that you can get both internally and externally. Internal exposure would be, for example, it can be compared to experience to a certain degree. When I started in the system, I started as a counselor, but there were about four different types of counseling that was available that one could be doing. I started as an institutional counselor, but then I took a lateral transfer to become a vocational counselor. Then I took another lateral transfer to become a special interest group counselor.

All those are different types of exposure that created different types of experiences for me. What I was doing is building a base, building a foundation that will serve me well into the future. It gave me exposure. It gave me additional experience.

In sum, cross-training is important for a few of the participants, but for differing reasons. Some of the respondents stated that cross-training provides opportunities to diversify experiences and roles within an organization, which participants suggested leads to a better understanding of an organization as whole. One participant suggested that these experiences could be from lateral or horizontal promotions.

### *Specialized Training*

Some participants believed that gaining specialized training was a key contributor to career advancement opportunities in corrections. An advocate of specialized training as a key career enhancer was Mrs. Griffin. When asked to explain the importance of specialized training in corrections, she stated the following:

I think you might go into the system thinking that this is how it's supposed to be, but then you go to training, you'd go to workshops, you watch the videos, you watch other things, you listen to people. That kind of expands your horizons. You might think, "Hmm,

maybe I need to be going in this other direction." Maybe what you're doing isn't wrong, but maybe you can do it in a different way.

Mr. Grey had similar ideas about the importance of specialized training in the field of corrections. When asked to explain how specialized training could contribute to career advancement, Grey stated the following:

Participating in training opportunities, and sometimes not just participating, but actually conducting the training.

I think you should always have a philosophy of lifelong learning, which means continual education. Making sure that you are familiar with current philosophies, activities, taking place in corrections. So, if you don't have the philosophy of being a lifelong learner, you will not be as proficient with current activities, current philosophies, ways of conducting business as you probably should. So those are for starters. I'll leave it at that for now.

In sum, two of the participants mentioned specialized training as an important factor for career advancement. Both respondents stated that specialized training improves one's knowledge of what works and what does not in the field. One respondent stated that maintaining current philosophies and activities in the field as a product of specialized training is important.

### *Proficiency*

Mr. Black was a lone advocate of proficiency as a career enhancing factor for the general corrections professional. Black stated:

Well, speaking in general terms, Antonio, preparation and focus. With a young person coming into the workforce, you got to decide what it is you can be passionate about, that you really want to give your total focus to, and to try to get to the top of the business and not be held back by any real barriers, or even any perceived barriers.

Mr. Black cited having focus and being prepared to work proficiently in this field as an important factor. He also mentioned having passion and being able to work through any perceived or real barriers as important factors in advancement. It is important to note that he is

the only respondent to mention proficiency as an enhancing factor for the general population of corrections professionals.

### *Experience and Education*

Mr. Robinson was a lone advocate of work-related experience as a career enhancing factor for the general population of correction professionals. Robinson stated:

I think, first of all, promotion comes easier when you have the skills that are required for whatever position it is that may be advertised. In my case when I came in as a counselor, I happened to have college degrees in psychology and sociology, which assisted me in getting to fulfill what was the requirement, but once inside and you're competing for positions, for a promotion, I think you have to prepare yourself that it's ongoing learning added to experience or ongoing academic learning as well. I think experience mostly and preparation via education.

For Robinson, experience and education are important for career advancement in the field. He stated that having the necessary skillset to be successful in one's current position is important for advancement. Robinson suggested that skillsets can derive from formal education or prior experiences in the field.

## FACTORS THAT ENHANCE PROMOTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS SPECIFICALLY

Participants identified several factors when asked, "Can you describe factors that enhance promotional opportunities for African-Americans specifically in criminal justice occupations?"

The majority of the participants believed there were specific social capital factors that African-American corrections professionals must pay attention to if they wanted to experience advancement within the field.



### *Mentorship*

Mr. Black believes that it is important for African-American men and women in corrections to have black mentors. When asked if African-Americans in corrections should do anything different than their co-workers of different races, he stated:

It is wise to seek out mentors, Antonio. Some of my best training didn't come out of grad school or undergrad, it came from talking to people, African-American men and women, who have been through it, who are willing to sit down with you and tell you about the roadblocks and the brick walls you're gonna run into, and suggest some strategies for you to deal with some tough things that are gonna come your way. They've been there, they've seen it, they've done it. So they are a good resource.

Mr. Robinson agreed that black professionals, black males in particular, would benefit from mentorship from other successful black men in corrections. When prompted to draw on his previous experiences with mentors in the field of corrections, he stated:

I have had mentors at different stages throughout my career, and interestingly enough, these are mentors that sought me out. I didn't seek them out. There's nothing wrong with seeking mentors out. I think if there are people out there who you admire because of their professionalism and their intellect and so forth, it's okay to seek them out, but I did not because there were no black men in the system that outranked me. There were hardly any black men at all in the system.

My mentors basically were three different individuals, two wardens and a director that actually sought me out because they saw something in me and they wanted to help and to protect me. They sought me out. They gave me advice. They helped and protected me, and that I think helped make a difference in my career. I think given the opportunity for black males to select their own mentors, especially if they're other successful black males, I think that would be excellent.

There are a few parts of Robinson's comments that are noteworthy. First, he implies that he was reluctant to seek mentorship in the early stages of his career because there were no black men in executive-level positions. Second, he thinks that black males currently in the field would benefit from mentorship from successful black males in executive-level positions.

Mr. Grey agreed that professionals pursuing career advancement should seek out mentors. However, he did not agree with the notion that African-Americans should only pursue

mentors from individual of the same race. When prompted to share his experiences with mentorship as a career enhancing factor, he stated:

Sure. I've had African American mentors, and I've had non-African American mentors. You personally should not discriminate in terms of where you can get knowledge from. However, once you become an administrator, a person that can influence hiring, promotional opportunities for other African Americans, you should pay close attention. You have an opportunity to balance the workforce. I would say that not just for African Americans, but for females, for non-American born staff persons, and anybody who really wants to learn. They want to be mentored, but as an administrator. As a person who has assumed a load of leadership, I believe you have an obligation to make sure you have a balanced workforce, and I certainly believed that all the time that I was an administrator. Especially in government corrections.

There are parts of Grey's statement that are important to note. He suggests that one should not discriminate against mentors based on race. However, Grey follows that statement with suggesting that administrators with hiring and promotion influence should pay close attention to balancing the racial and gender make-up of the workforce.

In short, several of the respondents suggested that blacks in corrections benefit more from having other successful blacks as mentors rather than mentors from other races. They stated that black mentors are able to guide black mentees through obstacles and barriers that are specific to the black corrections professional. However, one participant disagreed with the notion that black mentors are simply better for black mentees. This participant posited that good mentorship should not be discriminated against based solely on race.

### *Professional Social Networking/A Different Type of Networking*

Mrs. Griffin is a supporter of involvement in networking organizations as a career enhancing factor in the field of corrections. However, she believes African-American corrections professionals have to navigate networking organizations differently in comparison to

professionals from other races. When asked to expound on her position on African-Americans involvement in organizations, she stated:

I do think that as an African American you have to be out there, you have to be seen, you have to be recognized, you have to do the work, you have to go after that training that's there, you have to pay your dues like everyone else. You also have to support one another.

Mr. Liston echoed Griffin's perspective on African-American involvement in national network organizations. When asked which career enhancing factor was most important for African-Americans, he stated the following:

I think what I will say is the most important thing is being ready for advancement, being mobile and also once you achieve that, then you need to reach back and pull somebody else up, not just because they're African American, but because they are ready.

Similar to Griffin, Liston implies that African-Americans who reach executive-level positions must help or support other blacks in their quest to upper management. His comments are unique to the sample in that he implies blacks must make investments in human capital factors (e.g. proficiency and geographic mobility) and convert advancement outcomes into promotional opportunities for other blacks in the field.

Mrs. Brown also reports similar experiences with her involvement in network organizations. When asked to share her experiences as an African-American in network organizations, she stated the following:

It gave me the opportunity to be a role model and support other people, especially minorities. It was very frustrating to me just as an example in the state of Missouri, back when I was the first black female to be given a parole office, there were very few, I'm not gonna remember numbers, but there certainly were very few black wardens at the time. I just wanted to be in a position where I could encourage other people to move up in the system and be competitive. Again, all that networking helped me, it also helped me help other people.

Mr. Grey had a differing opinion about involvement in minority network groups as a career advancement enhancer for African-Americans. Grey (Counter Arguer) stated:

I would say all of the same things that I just said. I don't know that there is a magic bullet for African Americans to do anything different than the kind of things that I just said. However, if you want to participate in activities such as with the National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice, or organizations that would take on specific tasks such as disproportionate minority confinement, and anything that would specifically relate to African American inmates. Then I would say fine, but I would say that if you did the things that I first mentioned, an African American will have just as much as an opportunity as others would.

In sum, these respondents believe that African Americans in the field have unique experiences with professional networking. They suggested that African Americans have to be conscientious about attending networking events, supporting other blacks in their career advancement, and encouraging other African Americans to make transitions into executive-level roles. However, one participant posited that African Americans did not have to navigate networking events and organizations differently than professionals from other races.

#### *A Different Type of Proficiency*

Mr. Robinson believes that African-Americans in the field of corrections must make investments in human capital factors that are different than professionals of other races. He posits that blacks have to be more competent, have better credentials, and conduct themselves at a higher standard than professionals from other races. When asked to explain which areas should African-Americans seeking career advancement in corrections focus on, he stated the following:

Again, I think African-Americans in many places are challenged in ways that others are not. African-Americans have to prove themselves oftentimes to be extremely competent and extremely prepared more so than their counterparts of other races. I think that African-Americans need to be people who, first of all, prepared more so than others. They have to have discipline. They have to have the qualifications both academic and experience. I think they just need to make sure that they conduct themselves, unfortunately a different standard, but that they conduct themselves in a manner that's beyond reproach.

When asked if he would like to share anything further about his career advancement experiences working in corrections as an African-American, Mr. Robinson stated:

I would like to say that I have been in this business now for, I've mentioned, 43 years. I complete 43 years in July, being my 44th. My career has been challenging more so, I think, than others because of my race, being a black man. Throughout my career at all levels I've experienced a lot of challenges, but I think that the thing that has most helped me is that I always seek to prepare myself for whatever challenge it is that I'm about to face.

I always make sure that regardless of the circumstances and the situation I'm facing that I am composed and that I put my best professional foot forward and that I keep my emotions in check. When you don't do that, then you may say something in a heated moment that could haunt you for the rest of your life and that could brand you, unfortunately so.

Mr. Mitchell shared similar sentiments as Mr. Robinson. Mr. Mitchell believes that African-Americans must simply work harder to dispute some of the negative stereotypes associated with being black in America. When prompted to explain his beliefs about the unique experiences for blacks and their pursuit of career advancement in the field of corrections, he states:

I think obviously to some degree being a person of African descent makes it difficult because we still deal with some underlying racism and stuff that perpetuate that. Not just in corrections, but in society as a whole, but I think sometimes we use that as a crutch. I used that as a motivation, because I knew that I had to put in more in order for me to succeed. I didn't have this pity that, "Well, this person is doing this," I always came 100% or gave 110% in everything that I attempted to do. I came to work, I never called off sick, I volunteered like I said if they needed someone to volunteer. I think sometimes we look at some of the barriers, and with these barriers that inhibit our advancement and then we get caught up in it instead of finding ways to go along the barriers that can help you to move up the ladder. While I recognize that there was some barriers, I chose not to make them barriers, but to make them ladders. An example of that, I took an assignment as the first African American in a community that had never seen a black person.

Mr. Black had similar beliefs about the black experience and seeking career advancement opportunities in corrections. When asked to share his opinion on career advancement as an African-American, he states:

Well again, speaking corrections, generally speaking Antonio, nothing changed. To take advantage of the executive level, top-level jobs, you're gonna have to be much better, in some cases twice as good as your competition that are not African-American. The good jobs don't come easy. You gotta really make sure that you are super prepared and that you don't get discouraged when you get passed over a few times, because that'll happen, even now with you entering the workforce.

When asked if she believed that there are factors that are specific to African-Americans in the field should pay attention to for career advancement, Mrs. Griffin stated:

You know, I think there are, but I think that again, we as African-Americans have to be, I mean it's to right maybe or fair, but you have to be better. You have to show up, you have to be willing maybe to go that extra mile.

Mrs. Griffin extended her experiences of having to work harder than her counterparts by sharing her experience as a woman in the field. She further shared:

For a woman, it's the same thing for a woman. I think it may be doubly hard for a female, because the corrections system in general it's been a male dominated field. That's been changing, of course, over the years. When I entered corrections, it was like '74. We still had a consent decree. Well, we entered into a consent decree at our large, major male facilities because women still weren't allowed to work behind the walls. As an African-American female, I kind of think it may have been almost twice as difficult to break into the culture and to get promotional opportunities.

When asked which career enhancing factor is most important for African-Americans, Mr. Liston stated:

Of the factors, sometimes I think, and probably one that I didn't mention is you've got to overcome those stereotypes. For African Americans, a lot of times people stereotype, such as they can't read or write. I don't care how many degrees you have, you're probably going to have to work twice as hard to get where you want.

In sum, a majority of the participants mentioned that black corrections professionals had to be more proficient in their roles than professionals from other races. This group of respondents suggested that blacks are challenged differently, have to overcome negative race-specific stereotypes, and must conduct themselves at a higher standard. As a result, they suggested that blacks have to simply be better and more proficient than their counterparts from other races. One

respondent suggested that black women have it doubly hard because the field is dominated by white males.

### *Geographic Mobility*

Two of the participants mentioned the importance of geographic mobility as an important factor for black professionals seeking career advancement. When asked to expound on other factors that may be specific to the black corrections professional, Liston stated the following,

I would say, specifically for African Americans in corrections, being willing to be mobile. A lot of times you'll find that African Americans would like to stay in the south. It's a warmer climate, but you have to find what I call separators and sometimes you got to take that more difficult, challenging assignment to progress. I would say just be mobile, is a big, big one when you're talking about the promotions of African Americans, including myself. I think being mobile helped me out a lot.

Mr. Mitchell built on Mr. Liston's statement by expressing the following:

I think what we tend to do as a people is we want to go to certain areas where we have a high representation of people that look like us, but then you have to ask yourself, "Does that really assist in your upward mobility?" Because then you're competing with a group of folks just like yourself, whereas you decided that you wanted to go to one of these remote areas because of the agency's willingness to have diversity around all of the facility. You have a better chance. I used to tell folks, "If you sacrifice the return will be much bigger than if you stay in one place." I would assume that had I stayed in New York, I probably wouldn't have accomplished the things I accomplished in the system.

The two advocates for African Americans being geographically mobile have similar explanations. One suggested that African Americans have to more willing to assume difficult roles in unpopular areas than their counterparts from other races. The other respondent posited that black professionals must take advantage of the agency's willingness to promote diversity in unpopular and remote areas. Both participants agree that it is detrimental for black professionals to assume roles that allow them to be comfortable. Rather, they must make concentrated efforts

to prove their willingness and dedication to the agency via assuming unwanted roles within the organization.

## SUMMARY

Altogether, the participants had differing opinions about what mattered for career advancement in corrections. Some respondents suggested that there are race-specific factors that influence black corrections professionals' career advancement, while a few disagreed with the notion. Table 2 provides a descriptive layout to the responses presented above. It shows that a majority of the participants cited mentorship and networking as important factors for career advancement for the general population of corrections professionals. Proficiency emerged as the only human capital factor that a majority of the respondents stated was important. Furthermore, slightly under half of the participants suggested that there are race-specific social capital factors that African Americans must pay attention to in order to experience career advancement. Lastly, slightly over half of the respondents mentioned that black corrections professionals simply have to be more proficient than their counterparts of other races to experience upward career mobility.

Table 2. Respondent's Mentioning General vs. Race-Specific Factors

	General	Race-Specific
Mentorship	7	3
Networking	6	3
Cross-Training	3	0
Specialized Training	2	0
Education	1	0
Proficiency	1	5
Experience	1	0
Geographic Mobility	0	2



## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This project explored the factors that contribute to the career advancement for African Americans in the field of corrections. Using nine semi-structured interviews with current and former executive-level corrections professionals, it was found that investments in social capital and human capital are the main career advancement enhancers. More specifically, investments in mentorship and networking were mentioned the most frequently as enhancers for the general population of corrections professionals. However, when it came to factors that were specific to African American corrections professionals, a majority of the respondents mentioned proficiency as an enhancer. The findings support previous research on career advancement enhancers.

#### PREVIOUS LITERATURE

Previous literature suggests that investments in human and social capital are the primary factors that help enhance career advancement. Investments in mentoring and network groups best predicts gaining promotion, increased expectations of career advancement, and higher levels of career satisfaction (Singh et al. 2009; Seibert et al. 2001; Podolny and Baron 1997; Gubbins and Garavan 2016). Other research suggests that investments in human capital are the best predictors of promotions, higher income, and increased occupational prestige (Eby et al. 2003; Sharabi, 2011; Clausen et al. 2014; Birasnav et al. 2013). These investments include experience, specialized training, formal education, perceived internal and external marketability, and success on the job.

Previous literature suggests that African Americans have unique experiences when it comes to career advancement. Minority network groups increase career optimism, improve

social ties, and improve mentoring relationships (Friedman et al. 1998). Additional research suggests that blacks experience high levels of career success from greater breadth of work experience, extensive training experiences, and geographic mobility (Johnson and Eby 2011). However, the process of obtaining employment is vastly different for African Americans in comparison to their white counterparts. Previous research suggests that blacks oftentimes rely more heavily on formal mechanisms to obtain employment than white counterparts (Parks-Yancy 2006). Additionally, research has found that African American men and women must work more years in subordinate positions than white men before they experience upward mobility in the workforce. In comparison, whites in the workforce often benefit from having social ties that offer assistance in finding employment (Smith 2005).

Regarding African Americans and their advancement in criminal justice occupations, prior research suggests that black representation in political and managerial positions are the most significant factors in predicting advancement for blacks in police departments (Lewis 1989). However, other research proposes that African American political representation does not significantly influence African American police managerial representation (Gustafson 2013). Large and bureaucratically complex agencies are more likely to be staffed by minority police management and percentage of African Americans in line-level positions are mostly important for black advancement in municipal police departments (Gustafson 2013). Prior research posits that investments in social capital is more important than human capital factors for African Americans seeking career advancement in criminal justice occupations.

## CURRENT PROJECT

With regard to the general and African American population of corrections professionals, participants expressed that investments in social capital outweighed investments in human capital. More specifically, a majority of respondents deemed mentorship and networking as the primary career advancement enhancers. However, when participants were asked if they thought African Americans had to do anything different than professionals from other races, a majority mentioned proficiency as an enhancer.

In regard to career advancement enhancers for the general population of corrections professionals, mentorship and networking were mentioned most often, but for differing reasons. Some stated that mentors are able to teach mentees skillsets and provide knowledge that is specific to the field of corrections. Others mentioned that mentorship provides a source of encouragement to pursue goals and tasks that are beyond line-level duties. Participants also reported that mentors are able to provide guidance on how to navigate through positive and negative experiences throughout one's career.

Several of the participants mentioned involvement in networking opportunities as a career enhancing factor for the general population of corrections professionals, but for different purposes. Some reported that networking provides an opportunity to share and learn knowledge about the field. Others mentioned that networking allows individuals the opportunity to forge work relationships with others in the field. A few of the participants cited that skillset and knowledge about the field is not enough to secure career advancement. Rather, it is the combination of skillset and positive work relationships that enhance career advancement.

Respondents also highlighted their belief that African Americans in the field of corrections must be selective in terms of some of the career enhancers. For some respondents,

blacks in corrections benefit more from having other successful blacks as mentors rather than mentors from other races. Several participants stated that black mentors are able to guide black mentees through obstacles and barriers that are specific to the black corrections professional. The specific barriers mentioned were refuting negative stereotypes such as lack of work ethic and not being as knowledgeable as white counterparts. One participant implied that simply seeing another African American in executive-level positions provides a source of encouragement.

Participants also highlighted that blacks in corrections must navigate networking experiences differently than professionals from other races. Several respondents stated that African Americans must make concerted efforts to support other blacks experience upward mobility. Their statements support previous research that posits that African Americans must rely more heavily on formal modes of employment opportunities than their white counterparts (Parks-Yancy 2006). Several participants suggested that high-ranking blacks must make up for the discrepancy by helping others experience advancement by selective hiring.

Proficiency was not mentioned as an enhancer for the general population, however, a majority of the participants cited it as a key enhancer for black professionals in the field. They suggested that African Americans in the field must hold themselves to a higher standard because they feel they are scrutinized more than are professionals from other races. This group of respondents suggested that blacks are challenged differently, have to negate negative race-specific stereotypes, and must conduct themselves at a higher standard. As a result, they suggested that blacks have to simply be better and more proficient than their counterparts from other races. Some respondents felt that they had been overlooked when promotional opportunities arose simply because they were black.

A few of the respondents mentioned that African Americans in the field must be geographically mobile and willing to accept undesirable positions to experience advancement. They noted that a significant number of positions in corrections are located in predominantly white locations. As a result, black corrections professionals must be willing to work in these areas, even though it may be extremely uncomfortable for their families. One respondent reported that African Americans must go the extra mile to prove their commitment to their respective agencies, and that accepting unwanted positions is a way to prove their dedication.

An important development through interviews was the significance of gender. All of the women in the sample mentioned gender as an additional barrier, however, none of the men mentioned gender at all. Some women felt that being a woman added an additional layer of disadvantage. One participant mentioned that women were not expected to perform similar tasks as men in male institutions. Another participant complained about being excluded from male social circles, which she believed excluded her from information about promotional opportunities. The interviewer failed to recognize the importance of gender and did not pose interview questions about the variable.

The semi-structured interviews allowed participants to introduce variables that they deemed important for black career advancement within the field. These variables can now be operationalized in future quantitative studies. A quantitative approach may allow results to be more generalizable in the future.

## LIMITATIONS

Although this project extends existing research about career advancement enhancers in corrections, it is not without limitations. First, the sample is comprised of African Americans

who are currently in or have held executive-level positions in the field of corrections, however, the sample is small. Participants that were identified through snowball sampling required strong referrals from respondents identified via convenience. It is important to note that active corrections professionals were less likely to respond via snowball sampling. Second, this study lacks a control group of executive-level corrections professionals who are white and/or another ethnicity. Many of the respondents suggested there are enhancing factors unique to African Americans in the field. Perspectives from respondents of other racial backgrounds could validate some of the opinions from African American participants. Lastly, the interviewer could have done a better job of probing statements from respondents. Probing allows an interviewer to obtain unique information that cannot be achieved through survey data. Moreover, probing allows the interviewee the opportunity to fully disclose their thoughts and opinions on a particular topic. The researcher's lack of experience with and appreciation for the challenges of interviewing along with an inadequate understanding of how qualitative data analysis proceeds represents a significant limitation to the research. It is also a significant and important learning experience for the researcher.

## FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research in this area should replicate this qualitative study with more participants and a more experienced researcher. More participants could be included if the researcher spoke to people who were attending a corrections conference. Since large numbers attend conferences, there are more potential participants to secure. In addition, being out of the office would also likely make it easier to actually complete interviews with those who agreed to them. In addition, a more experienced researcher would anticipate the need for probes and prepare a number of them

in addition to completing several practice interviews in advance of the real ones. Indeed, the researcher has already learned much from this study and would correct mistakes made in this first attempt.

Future research should include executive-level corrections professionals from several different racial groups. Expanding the subject pool beyond African Americans would allow scholars to better determine if which factors, if any, vary in importance between races.

Further, a quantitative approach using an online survey may be considered to increase the overall numbers and for easier administration and data analysis. However, these benefits must be balanced against the likely shortcomings as participation rates might be lower. In addition, objective surveys with forced choice responses do not reveal the richness obtainable from good interviews yet open-ended surveys may be perceived by the participants as taxing and so they do not complete them. Finally, scholars may wish to distinguish between federal, state, local and for-profit corrections agencies. Each level of corrections may have differing criteria that influences career advancement.

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APPENDIX  
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Introduction:** Hi, my name is Antonio Bryer and I am a Master's student at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, VA. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today to help with my research. Today we will be having a conversation regarding your promotional processes in your professional career. I assure you that your participation is strictly confidential. Instead of using your real name, I will use a pseudonym whenever referencing your statements in my research. You will not be identified in any manner, nor will I indicate that you met with me.

Our conversation will be recorded so that I may focus on our conversation instead of taking notes. Upon the completion our conversation, I will listen to the recording to take notes. The recording will be disposed as soon as my thesis has been completed and approved by my committee. Once again, your name will not appear in any of my notes or other files. This interview is one component of my research for my thesis. Upon completion of my thesis, you may request to receive an electronic copy of my research.

You may decline to answer any question and you may stop the conversation at any time.

Do you have any questions? May we begin?

What is your age?/How many years of experience do you have working in corrections? \_\_\_\_\_

What level of the criminal justice system do you work (e.g. police, corrections, community corrections)? \_\_\_\_\_

What is/was your highest rank job title?

What is the highest level of education have you completed? \_\_\_\_\_

Can you describe factors that enhance promotional opportunities for people generally in criminal justice occupations?

Of the factors you mentioned, which is most important?

Please explain.

Can you describe factors that enhance promotional opportunities for African-Americans specifically in criminal justice occupations?

Of the factors you mentioned, which is most important?

Please explain.

Can you estimate how often did you have a mentor?

How many mentors did you have?

How important was mentorship in your promotional process?

What was the race of each of your mentors?

Did you feel that the race of your mentors influenced your career progression in any way?

Were you ever a member of formal networking groups?

What was the racial makeup of those formal networking groups?

To what extent do you think that Network groups helped advance your career.

What professional benefits, if any, did you receive by being involved in network groups?

Compared to your white counterparts, was the length of time spent in subordinate positions similar?

If different, how were they different?

Compared to your white counterparts, do you feel that you needed to work differently to be promoted?

Will you please explain your answer?

Were any of your promotions appointments made by an elected professional?

If so, what was the race of the elected official who promoted you?

What else should I know about your experiences of promotion in your field?

What else should I know about your experiences of promotion specifically as an African American?

**Conclusion of the interview:** Do you have any questions?

Thank you for your time. I have enjoyed our conversation and hope that you have found this time useful. As I mentioned previously, this is for my thesis project and you may request an electronic copy at my completion. Once again, please remember that you will not be identified as a participant. Thank you.

## VITA

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