

Leadership experiences of African American women

who are mid-level student affairs administrators

by

Hannah Louise Clayborne

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Program of Study Committee:  
Florence Hamrick, Major Professor  
Susan Carlson  
Larry Ebbers  
Barb Licklider  
John Schuh

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Dedicated to Mom and Dad,  
E. Josephine and  
Samuel Henry Clayborne (1933-1994)

Thanks for providing the foundation I stand on today.

Black women in the academy differ in their experiences, backgrounds, appearances, educational levels, demographics, occupations, and beliefs. What connects them all is their struggle to be accepted and respected members of the society, and their desire to have a voice that can be heard in a world with many views. (A. C. Collins, 2001, p. 29)

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

When seeking directional information to a particular place prospective travelers and inquisitive individuals usually elect to use a road map to determine the exact distance and least detour ridden path to their final destination. Identifying specific landmarks of interests and areas to avoid, while simultaneously offering a sense of geographical clarity to those seeking directional assistance are some noted benefits of using a road map. For too long the universal leadership map for those interested in learning about leadership has drawn from the leadership values and beliefs of individuals whose life experiences do not fully represent the demographical changes that have occurred within the larger community (Parker, 2005). Consequently, African American women with intentions of using extant literature on leadership as a means or directional tool to gaining higher levels of personal and professional understanding of their own leadership approaches, inevitably confront a discourse shaped by the perceptions and experiences of White men and White women (Parker, 2005). Komives, Lucas, and McMahon (1998) acknowledged, “to successfully navigate in this world, new maps are needed—maps describing the leadership that is needed in an era of rapid change” (p. 48). Acknowledgment of potentially similar and alternative viewpoints is one of the reasons why it is necessary to focus on individuals who are heretofore not well represented in the literature on leadership. To this end, exploration of leadership issues related to one of these groups—African American women mid-level student affairs administrators—was the primary focus of this study.

Within predominantly White institutions (PWIs), a number of environmental factors have directly or indirectly hindered, repressed and/or ultimately altered the leadership experiences or leadership effectiveness of African American women. Marginalization (Guillory, 2001; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Wolfman, 1997), social isolation (Patitu & Hinton, 2003), limited mentoring opportunities (A.C. Collins, 2001) and unwelcoming campus communities (Moses, 1997; Patitu & Hinton, 2003) often manifest as some of the myriad environmental and institutional barriers that impact the professional experiences of African American women who are in leadership positions at PWIs. The combined impact of these factors often translates into formidable challenges for both institutional leaders and African American women. Guillory (2001) concluded that “although the types of barriers are much less egregious and overt than a few decades ago, they are no less damaging to the dreams and aspirations of many African-American administrators striving to create their own professional niche” ( p. 113). Therefore, these challenges demand institutional and individual responses in order to minimize their potential adverse impact on the professional experiences of African American women in higher education.

Direct connections between these aforementioned environmental challenges and the leadership experiences of African American women are difficult to establish, partly because of the dearth of research on this specific topic; however, it is important to note that the goal of this study is not testing any hypothesized relationship among institutional and personal leadership-related characteristics, but providing a space where leadership-related experiences and narratives can be shared in order to illuminate a set of heretofore unacknowledged leadership realities. As a partial response to Parker’s (2005) and Guillory’s (2001) conclusions, the primary objective of this study was to identify and explore the phenomenon

of leadership from the starting point of the personal and professional experiences of mid-level African American women student affairs administrators employed at two-year and four-year PWIs. This starting point of African American women administrators' experiences can provide a particularly fruitful setting for exploring and potentially recasting the phenomenon of leadership. As Baraka (1997) noted, "the African American woman administrator, in changing White academic settings, finds herself in multiple conflicting roles. She is both academic and activist, subject and object, central and marginal, advocate and accuser, conservator and change agent" (p. 315). In exploring these and other roles ascribed to African American women administrators, the multiple dimensions of their leadership experiences were illuminated and shared.

#### Purpose of the Study

African American women who hold mid-level student affairs' positions at PWIs reside in academic communities where their leadership experiences (i.e., definitions, assumptions, impacts on their professional endeavors) are often unknown and perhaps even concealed, resulting in a decreased general awareness of their leadership characteristics and strategies and, therefore, an incomplete understanding of leadership itself. The purpose of this study was to explore their leadership experiences as mid-level student affairs administrators. Life history interviews were utilized to gather information about their leadership development and its influence on their experiences within academic communities.

#### Rationale for Conducting the Study

Few studies exist that examine the leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators in the academy. This study contributed to the current literature on leadership by providing descriptions and analyses of the leadership journeys,

stories and development of a specific segment of the campus community. Furthermore, specifically examining mid-level administrators' professional realities should increase the likelihood that institutional barriers and pitfalls, which act as roadblocks to the attainment of senior-level positions are identified. Additionally, these findings should provide useful information to senior institutional leaders, who are in positions to reshape and restructure institutional and departmental policies, practices, and cultures. Indeed, as Carter, Pearson, and Shavlik (1996) noted,

institutional leaders must identify and support the development of minority women leaders for the sake of the women themselves, the role they can play in the lives of students, faculty and staff, and the contributions they can make to the quality of work and learning on the campus. (p. 461)

#### Research Questions

The following two questions guided this study:

1. How do African American women, who are midlevel student affairs administrators, describe their leadership development and their leadership experiences?
2. How might the use of Black Feminist Thought illuminate understandings of the leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators?

#### Key Terms

*Mid-level administrator* - an administrator with more than six years, but fewer than fifteen years, of full-time experience within the field of student affairs.

*Two-year (PWI)*- educational institutions that grant certificates and associate degrees, where white students comprise at least 51% of the student population.

*Four-year (PWI)*- educational institutions that grant baccalaureate and graduate degrees, where white students comprise at least 51% of the student population.

*Student Affairs Administrator*- a person responsible for providing services to students (e.g., academic advising, career services, admissions, student activities, financial aid, residence life, etc.).

### Significance of the Study

One overall contribution of this study was that it constructed a space where African American women could share their experiences within organizations comprised of individuals who are often unaware—intentionally or unintentionally—of the nature, development, or character of their leadership experiences. The first potential outcome of African American women sharing their stories is that members of the campus community are more aware of the realities of African American women student affairs administrators at two and four-year institutions. Second, the opportunity for the majority members of the community to shift from a place of heightened awareness of these experiences to a place where they are willing to utilize the findings, when shaping and structuring institutional and departmental policies, becomes attainable. Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) stated, “responsibility for providing supportive environments for African American women should not be left to women of color only; the entire community should be engaged in making sure that black women’s road to access and success is negotiable” (p. 102). Due to their direct role in constructing and supporting institutional and departmental policies and practices, it is imperative that members of the campus community, specifically institutional leaders, are cognizant of the professional realities and contributions of African American women. As Hughes and Howard-Hamilton (2003) noted, “changes necessary to create these environments and opportunities must be initiated and embraced by individuals who have the power and authority to move the campus toward cultural enlightenment” (p.103).

Third, women of color, who are currently in higher education administrative positions, can extrapolate suggestions and recommendations from the study that may prove beneficial in their own lives. Women of color, who aspire to administrative careers in the higher education community, can utilize the findings to learn about the leadership experiences of current African American women administrators, in addition to constructing viable strategies to address potential barriers. In the end, these personal accounts will extend the current literature on professional experiences of African American women in the academy by providing a set of themes derived from their leadership experiences that can be used to critique aspects of selected leadership research and provide suggestions for future studies.

#### Epistemological and Theoretical Orientation

Qualitative research, according to Gay and Airasian (2000), is “useful for describing or answering questions about particular, localized occurrences or contexts, and the perspectives of a participant group toward events, beliefs or practices” (p. 202). As a qualitative researcher, I structured the study using theoretical frameworks that provided the opportunity for respondents’ voices to construct and shape this study. In light of the aims of this study, a constructivist approach, which “portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing” (Glesne, 1999, p. 5), and Black Feminist Thought combine to form an appropriate backdrop to explore the leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators. Howard-Hamilton (2003) noted that “finding and applying theoretical constructs that are appropriate for explaining and understanding the experiences of African American women can be challenging” (p. 19). Utilizing Black Feminist Thought, as a guiding, theoretical orientation, which places “black

women's experiences and ideas at the center of analysis" (Collins, 1990, p. xii), reflected the researcher's goals that the respondents' leadership experiences are heard and positioned centrally in this study. More detailed information on Black Feminist Thought is provided in Chapter Three.

### Organization of Dissertation

This chapter provided an introduction to the study, purpose of the study, rationale for conducting the study, research questions, key terms, significance of the study, and theoretical perspective. Chapter 2 reviews key literature regarding leadership and women of color in higher education. Chapter 3 focuses on the epistemological framework, theoretical orientation, methodology, design, methods, and selection of respondents in the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings and Chapter 5 provides implications as well as recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter an examination of the theoretical evolution of leadership was provided, outlining the various transitions that have occurred within the field of leadership studies. The emergence of gender within leadership was the second issue addressed, which established the groundwork for the subsequent discussion on the intersection of race and gender.

Collectively, these three sections illustrate the need for further exploration of race, gender, and leadership. Research on mid-level administrators within the field of student affairs was the final area addressed in this chapter.

### Theoretical Overview of Leadership

Leadership is a complex and multifaceted concept (Komives et al., 1998) and the multidimensional nature of leadership studies inevitably produces a variety of perspectives and interpretations, which, in turn, offers insight into an area that has roots in a number of disciplines (Bass, 1991; Klenke, 1996). Synthesizing research on a topic that has connections to a variety of disciplines is a daunting task confronting researchers attempting to describe the breadth and depth of leadership studies. Utilizing subcategories and classifiers such as theories, models, campus-based programs, leader attributes, and in recent years, gender and race has been the approach of many when attempting to describe the range of work on leadership in education (Sagaria, 1988; Strifflino & Saunders, 1989), business (Bossidy & Charan, 2002; Cobbs & Turnock, 2003; J. Collins, 2001), leadership models (Astin, 1996; Greenleaf, 1996; Komives et al., 1998; Kouzes & Posner, 2002), metaphors (Rost, 1993), student leadership programs (Roberts & Ullom, 1989), gender (Astin & Leland, 1991; Hegelsen, 1990; Klenke, 1996; Rosener, 1990), and race (Parker, 2005; Valverde, 2003). The aforementioned categories illustrate the expansive nature of leadership

studies, while presenting varied perspectives on leadership literature within various disciplines. In the following section of the literature review is a general overview of the progression of leadership based on a research timeline.

A number of theories have created the foundation from which the current body of leadership literature has evolved. Great Man theories, trait theories, situational theories, personal-situational theories, psychoanalytic theories, political theories, humanistic theories, interaction and social learning theories, theories and models of interactive processes, perceptual and cognitive theories, and hybrid explanations were identified by Bass (1991) as the “better-known theories and models of leadership” (p. 37). Offering a somewhat similar description of the evolutionary nature of leadership theory, Komives et al., (1998) identified the Great Man Theory, trait theory, behavioral theory, situational/contingency, influence and reciprocal as the major movements in the field of leadership studies. Following is a general overview of the theoretical progression of leadership studies rather than an in-depth description of each area partly because of the expansive nature of leadership literature and the specific focus of this study on the leadership experiences of African American women.

Although researchers (Bass, 1991; Bensimon, Neumann & Birnbaum, 1989, Komives et al., 1998) identified similar and alternative categories of leadership theories, Rost (1991), constructed a temporal overview of the theories based on summaries “many writers make ... when studying leadership” (p. 17), which, for this study, provided an introduction to the examination of the phases of leadership. Rost (1991) noted that most writers believe

the Great Man Theories were prevalent in 1930s and 1940s, trait theory in the 1940s and 1950s, behavior theory in the 1950s and 1960s, contingency/situational theory in

the 1960s and 1970s, and excellence theory in the 1980s. (The last-mentioned movement is not as universally recognized as the others.) (p. 17)

The defining element of the Great Man Theories is the notion that one man embodies the characteristics of leadership, often manifested during various types of militaristic or organizational challenges (Bass, 1981; 1991), the fact that “women, such as Joan of Arc, Elizabeth I, and Catherine the Great, were ignored” (Bass, 1981, p. 27) in the construction of this theory serve to reinforce a concept present in the 1930s and 1940s that leadership was primarily a masculine reality. During the 1940s and 1950s, the predominant view of leadership was based on trait theories (Rost, 1991). Qualities linked to personality, social background, and abilities were used as barometers when measuring the effectiveness of leaders (Bensimon et al., 1989; Rost, 1991). When describing the next two phases of leadership identified by Rost (1991) as encompassing a time span of twenty years, Bensimon et al., (1989) stated “behavioral theories and contingency theories overlap considerably. Both concur that effective behavior depends on the nature of the situation, with contingency theories tending to emphasize the importance of factors outside the organization, while behavioral theories more frequently focus on internal variables” (p. 15). Finally, excellence theories, which emerged in the 1980s, involved “researchers [finding] out what the right thing [was], so they set about researching excellent companies and CEOs, and developed a list of traits, behavior patterns, group facilitation strategies, and culture-shaping practices for would be leaders” (Rost, 1991, p. 23).

Although the theories included in the review provide a chronological description of the evolution of leadership studies, Rost (1991) challenges a simplistic view of this evolution. Attempting to define the various movements using a specific timeframe

“suggest[s] that each of the movements had a beginning and end” (Rost, 1991, p. 23) thus constructing an inaccurate perception that leadership theories were “separate and distinct” (p. 23). Rost (1991) asserted “the models feed on one another and are so intertwined that they are indistinguishable except to intellectuals” (p. 23). Although the specific categorizations used by researchers are challenged by Rost (1991), partly because of their tendency to construct false illusions about the evolution of leadership, the categories do provide an overview of the leadership theories (Bass, 1981; 1990; Bensimon et al., 1989, Komives et al., 1998).

### Gender and Leadership

Numerous researchers have focused on the impact of gender on leadership experiences in a variety of areas such as educational organizations (Astin & Leland, 1991; Guido-DiBrito, Noteboom, Nathan & Fenty, 1996), business (profit and not-for profit) (Hegelsen, 1990; Kantor, 1993; Rosener, 1990), law (Rhode, 2003), and from a contextual perspective (Klenke, 1996). Although findings vary regarding the meaningful relationships between gender and leadership, the underlining theme that emerged from these studies is the need for further examination of the intersecting nature of gender and leadership.

Studying seventy-seven women from educational institutions, governmental agencies, and other organizations focusing on women’s issues, Astin and Leland (1991) utilized a four-step model (i.e., leader, context, leadership processes, and outcomes), when studying the experiences of three groups of women leaders (i.e., Predecessors, Instigators, and Inheritors), who were in leadership positions in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s and found that the participants in their study viewed leadership “as integral to social change” (p. 156). Additionally, Astin and Leland (1991) identified three key elements (i.e., collective action,

passionate commitment, and consistent performance), which characterized their respondents' leadership experiences. Another study conducted by Helgesen (1990) noted the presence of feminine principles (e.g., cooperation and relationships) interwoven throughout the leadership narratives of four women. Employing similar research methods used by Mintzberg (1973) in his study on male managers, where he found that men viewed their work lives and personal lives as separate realities, Helgesen (1990) discovered these four women were unable to compartmentalize their lives in a manner similar to the male respondents. Moreover, Helgesen (1990) found that women routinely acknowledged the importance of issues such as relationships, childcare, mentoring, and participatory leadership, which inevitably shaped their leadership approaches and practices within their respective organizations.

Examining women's experiences within business organizations, Kantor (1993) provided insight into the professional realities of women and men within corporate America, while Rosener (1990) examined men and women leadership styles. Kantor (1993) studied the organizational challenges present in a multinational corporation in 1977, a rare and invaluable opportunity, which provided a view of the internal and often hidden world of those employed in business arenas. The identification and examination of structural impediments (i.e., power, opportunity, access), which often hindered the organizational mobility of women, was offered as an explanation for the low percentage of women occupying leadership positions (Kantor, 1993). Rosener (1990) examined the leadership behavior of women and men leaders for the International Women's Forum and offered insight into how women and men view leadership within fields such as business, government, and other professions. "Encouraging participation, sharing power and

information, and enhancing the self-worth of others were three characteristics of women leaders,” which Rosener (1990) defined as interactive leadership (p. 120). Her findings illustrated leadership styles that directly challenge the traditional hierarchical model of leadership. Rosener (1990) noted “that for interactive leadership to take root more broadly, organizations must be willing to question the notion that traditional command-and-control leadership style that has brought success in earlier decades is the only way to get results” (p. 125).

Moreover, other issues within the leadership literature on gender-related topics are grounded in contextual concerns. Guido-DiBrito et al., (1996) shared findings on the leadership styles and preferences of two respondents drawn from a larger sample of mid-level student affairs administrators and concluded that “issues of gender and leadership intertwine and change, according to different situations, contexts, and personalities” (p. 36). Echoing similar claims, Klenke (1996) simultaneously examined the issue of gender and leadership and contends that the “leaders are very much the product of their particular era and the organizational or community setting in which they exercise leadership” (p. 188). Therefore, organizational and contextual issues are factors that should receive additional consideration within leadership studies. Whether the explanations cite contextual issues, gender, or a combination of both elements, the extant literature offers varied interpretations of connections between gender and leadership.

Each of the aforementioned perspectives assists in providing a backdrop in which an examination of the intersections of gender on leadership can occur. However, the absence of an extensive discussion on the additional intersection of race or ethnicity on one’s leadership experiences is one of the limitations of each of the studies. Although few of the respondents

in the studies (Astin & Leland, 1991; Hegelsen, 1990) were women of color, the lack of a full exploration of the impact of race and gender issues constitute grave omissions. For example, the Astin and Leland (1991), Hegelsen (1990), and Rosener (1990) studies cannot provide empirically-based meaningful and practical professional advice regarding racial concerns for women of color, who currently reside in leadership positions and seek leadership success within organizational structures in the fields of business, education, and politics. Therefore, the absence of an in-depth examination and analysis on the intersection of race and gender prevents women of color from being fully represented in, and fully benefiting from leadership literature, which focuses primarily on gender. As a result, their leadership experiences related to gender are acknowledged, but leadership experiences related to gender, as well as race or ethnicity, were much less fully explored.

Moreover, the absence of acknowledging race and gender implies that White women's experiences adequately capture the essence of all women's leadership and, therefore, regards issues such as race as irrelevant. Parker (2005) noted, "to advance a model of feminine leadership based on White women's gender identity essentially excludes Black women's experiences in constructing gender identity and, therefore, excludes Black women's voices in theorizing about leadership" (p. 10). As a result, the perspectives of women of color are systematically excluded from the formation of leadership models and frameworks. Additionally, their leadership realities, whether similar and/or dissimilar, remain unexplored. The absence of a review of their leadership experiences using the lens of race may also communicate an apparent misunderstanding of the type and magnitude of the concerns confronting women leaders of color. Finally, although the empirical focus on gender and leadership has increased in recent years, the need for additional studies remains; thus,

broadening the extant research on leadership experiences of women of color is the next logical step in the process.

#### Leadership experiences of African American women

Extant research, albeit limited that focused directly on African American women's leadership experiences offered insight into areas typically omitted in the leadership literature. As a result of this limited, but relevant research, the perceptions, approaches, preferences, and ultimately the leadership experiences of African American women are acknowledged and brought to the attention of those who are interested in these issues, thereby establishing a starting point in which further examination of these leadership realities can occur.

Two categories frame the discussion on African American women's leadership experiences, the first solely focuses on African American women (Garner, 2004; Jones, 1997; Moses, 1997; Parker, 2005, Ramey, 1995); whereas, the second category examines the professional and leadership experiences of all women, regardless of their ethnicity, often highlighting African American women as a subgroup (Carter et al., 1996; Hughes, 1988; Valverde, 2003; Vaughn & Everett, 1992). From these two categories, the professional experiences (A.C. Collins, 2001; Guillory, 2001; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; see also Mosley, 1980; Valverde, 2003; Wolfman, 1997), leadership experiences of African American women (Garner, 2004; Jones, 1997; Parker, 2005), and organizational impact of minority women (Carter et al., 1996; Hughes, 1988) emerge as factors that impact or characterize African American women's leadership experiences. The acknowledgement of these factors provides a backdrop in which an initial examination and perhaps identification of other hidden issues, related to race and gender can occur.

Professional realities at PWIs for African Americans often involves experiences of marginalization (Guillory, 2001; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; see also Mosley, 1980; Wolfman, 1997), isolation (Carter et al., 1996; Patitu & Hinton, 2003), and lack of mentoring (A.C. Collins, 2001), which often combine to form debilitating and oppressive experiences for African American women administrators in higher education. “Marginalization is defined as any issue, situation, or circumstance that has place[d] [individuals] outside of the flow of power and influence within their institutions” (Patitu & Hinton, 2003, p. 82). Isolation, a by-product of marginalization, is a formidable foe for African Americans that “may lead to greater feelings of loneliness, to the persistent awareness of ‘not fitting in,’ to always being on guard, and to the fatigue that comes from always having to be one’s own support system” (Daniel, 1997, p. 175). Additionally, mentoring or lack thereof emerged as another professional challenge confronting African American women administrators in higher education (Patton & Harper, 2003; Miller & Vaughn, 1997; Woods, 2001). According to Wolfman (1997), “in many primarily white institutions, black women administrators are left on their own, without mentors, having to learn the institutional culture through observations, guile, and intelligence” (p. 163). These findings consistently confirm how ancillary issues such as mentoring, institutional climate, and awareness level of supervisors indirectly impacted the leadership endeavors of African American women. Moses (1997) acknowledged “the leadership, advocacy and career satisfaction black women administrators strive for are affected in subtle ways by a sometimes chilly and unwelcoming environment (p. 23) ” Therefore, identifying viable solutions to this professional obstacle must be a priority because “mentoring has been considered one of the salient factors in academic and career success” (Patton & Harper, 2003, p. 67). Summarizing the professional

realities for African American women at predominantly white institutions, Myers (2002)

concluded they are

- 1) Subjected to maximized expectations and extreme evaluations in performing our responsibilities.
- 2) Expected to outperform other White colleagues, just to maintain equal status with them, only to have such outstanding performance discounted as a result of racism and sexism.
- 3) Assumed to be doing “trivial” research, if it focuses on issues pertaining to African-Americans.
- 4) Overwhelmed by responsibilities automatically given to us, based on our race and gender.
- 5) Challenged to overcome both racial and gender bias to become key players in the formal networks where real decisions are made (p. 24).

Furthermore, the leadership experiences of African American were examined in the following four empirical studies on secondary school administrators (Vaughn & Everett, 1992), college presidents (Jones, 1997), business executives (Parker, 2005), and college deans (Ramey, 1995). Vaughn and Everett (1992) conducted life history interviews with five African American women and thirteen White women school administrators, and found that the majority of them utilized a collective leadership approach and emphasized the importance of honesty and assertiveness when working with staff, parents, and students. Jones (1997) studied seventeen college presidents who were African American women and found they “perceive themselves and [were] identified (by working colleagues, peers, and associates) as possessing an approach to leadership that is more transformational than transactional” (p. 207). Finally, Parker (2005) conducted life history interviews with African American women business executives to explore the impact of race and gender on their leadership experiences within majority organizations. Echoing Rost’s (1991) call for the utilization of postindustrial leadership approaches, which is predicated on non-hierarchical leadership attributes often

exhibited by individuals excluded extant from leadership literature, Parker (2005) also noted the urgency and need to incorporate voices and experiences of marginalized groups, namely African American women. Ramey (1995) shared findings of her study of 80 African American women, who were at the dean level or higher at four-year institutions where respondents indicated that factors such as mentoring, leadership programs, racism, sexism, and family issues either positively or adversely affected their work experiences.

Additionally, examination of African American women's leadership experiences has occurred within business organizations (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Cobbs & Turnock, 2003). Cobbs and Turnock (2003) highlighted the salience of race and gender in corporate America by providing narratives of African American men and women executives, who occupied leadership positions at some major U.S. corporations. Emphasizing the impact of mentors on professional journeys, highlighting the necessity of conducting self-assessments, and recognizing the importance of creating external support systems were some of the suggestions proffered by the respondents, when explaining their success within these organizations. Respondents also acknowledged the relative absence of, but more importantly, the impact of a critical mass of corporate leaders who possess more than anecdotal understanding of the challenges facing African American executives. These issues coupled with the reality that "for blacks in leadership positions, there is still more resistance and more scrutiny, and evaluations can be less than fair" (Cobbs & Turnock, 2003, p. 180), are some of the realities of African Americans in business organizations. Bell and Nkomo (2001) presented findings collected primarily from life history interviews with fourteen women executives (seven White and seven Black) on their professional journeys in the context of

race, class, and gender. Similar issues, in addition to the influence of families and societal changes, surfaced when explaining their experiences within these corporations.

In terms of organizational impact, Carter et al. (1996) noted “if leadership development in higher education is to transform the dominant male culture, the voices of women in general and minority women in particular must be heard, understood and recognized” (p. 481), while Hughes (1988) reported that “institutional leaders need to identify and support the development of minority women leaders ... for the contributions they can make to the quality of work and learning on the college campus” (p. 71). However, when describing the leadership experiences of women of color, Valverde (2003) suggested issues such as lower expectations and fewer resources inevitably impact their ability to succeed. From the perspective of organizational impact and professional experiences, race appears to be an additional salient factor for African American women, who are currently in leadership positions. Finally, information regarding African American women’s leadership styles (Jones, 1997; Parker; 2005), their potential organizational impact (Carter et al., 1996; Hughes, 1988), and the nature of their professional experiences (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Valverde, 2003) were three themes that emerged within the literature. However, the limited amount of research, although highly informative, does not fully capture the primary focus of this study, which is on the leadership experiences of African American women who are mid-level student affairs administrators. Therefore, issues such as familial influences, serving as mid-level student affairs administrators, and African American women’s interpretations and understanding of their leadership endeavors are areas that warrant further exploration.

### Coping Strategies

The impact of these professional obstacles and environmental challenges inevitably takes an emotional and physical toll on African American women (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Researchers (Matthews, 1992; Myers, 2002) have also identified strategies constructed and adopted by African American women administrators' to counteract the oppressive hurdles that are part of their professional realities. Often the difference between experiencing success and/or failure is predicated on the approaches used to minimize or mitigate the effects of a lack of institutional support, lack of formal mentor and issues of isolation. Choosing to construct and maintain formal and informal support system with family, community organizations, and churches are a few of the approaches used by some African American women administrators (Alfred, 2001; Patitu & Hinton, 2003; Watts, 2003; Wolfman, 1997).

Acknowledging the professional realities of African American women, Patitu and Hinton (2003) added "that to cope and survive in these environments, some of them retreated, some worked harder and smarter, some relied on support networks and faith in God and used prayer and spiritual development" (p. 84). Watts (2003) also reported "that African-American women use spirituality in multifaceted ways to cope with difficulty, to resist negative images of themselves and to develop identity" (p. 38). Without taking proactive measures to combat the unwelcoming climate of PWIs, African American women administrators will continue to battle challenges, which can adversely impact their leadership experiences. Finally, this review of African American women's professional and leadership experiences illuminated some of the environmental challenges present within

educational and business organizations, and served to provide direction for guiding the interviews with the respondents in this study.

#### Studies on Mid-level Administrators

Another component of this study focused on the respondents' experiences as mid-level student affairs administrators at two and four-year institutions. Selecting a definition for mid-level administrators is "as elusive as developing an exact definition of middle ages" (Mills, 1993, p. 121). However, empirical and non-empirical studies have explored the mid-level administrator experiences in areas such as professional experiences (Belch & Strange, 1995; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2000; Mills, 1993; Rosser, 2000), professional preparation (Mills, 1993; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Saunders & Cooper, 1999), and morale (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2000). Although this review does not present an exhaustive picture of the literature on mid-level administrators, the following overview served as a general framework to guide this study.

Providing a non-empirical examination of mid-level administrators experiences, Rosser (2000) explored issues related to identity and career progression, their importance to the educational institutions, work load, and suggestions for future research. Although midlevel administrators are vitally important to the mission of the university, their position within the organization is best captured as "rarely hav[ing] the authority to change, adjust, or develop the regulations they enforce" (Rosser, 2000, p. 8). Another issue highlighted by Rosser (2000) was the importance of institutions providing meaningful and career advancement projects for midlevel administrators in order to decrease their attrition rates.

Providing a pragmatic perspective, Mills (1993) identified several issues confronting middle managers such as accountability, managing funds, and decision-making processes.

Due to their positions within the organization, middle managers confront a plethora of issues that must be successfully resolved in order to proceed to the senior-level management. Mills (1993) concluded by sharing “even with the ambiguities and seeming contradictions inherent in their positions, middle managers provide the leadership of functional areas that form the basis of student affairs programs” (p. 133).

In terms of empirical studies, Belch and Strange (1995) conducted semi-structured interviews with six middle managers (one African American, five Caucasians, three males, three females), at four-year institutions to study their professional experiences. Findings from their study varied, based on four issues: (1) length of employment, (2) career orientation (i.e., transitory and/or professional), (3) personal characteristics, and (4) institutional context. Midlevel managers with less experience appeared uncomfortable with the expectations placed on them to implement rules generally created by senior level administrators. Belch and Strange (1995) noted gender differences in how the respondents addressed issues related to advancement by sharing “men respondents articulated clear, distinct aspirations regarding specific positions or career paths whereas women acknowledged that personal commitments helped determine the emphasis placed on career aspirations at any given time” (p. 213). Another issue raised in the study recommended structural changes (i.e., hierarchical vs. heterarchical) for midlevel administrators, which could potentially provide the exposure and ultimately the training needed for senior level positions. By highlighting issues confronting midlevel managers, Belch and Strange (1995) identified some of their professional realities and challenges. Furthermore, Saunders and Cooper (1999) interviewed 151 chief student affairs administrators and found that the majority of them ranked personnel management (e.g., recognize and analyze interpersonal problems, use effective staff evaluation, and

feedback methods), leadership, and student contact higher than communication, fiscal management, professional development, and research and evaluation as specific skills expected from mid-level administrators. Recommendations for professional associations to examine, analyze, and promote these findings were also given. In another study, Rosser (2004) examined 4000 midlevel leaders employed at public and private institutions, and found that ethnic minorities scored lower on morale than Caucasians, but appeared to be content with their current position. In the end, these research findings shed light on a number of personal, pragmatic, and organizational challenges facing midlevel administrators.

Mid-level administrators professional experiences (Belch & Strange, 1995; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2000; Mills, 1993; Rosser, 2000), professional preparation (Mills, 1993; Fey & Carpenter, 1996; Saunders & Cooper, 1999), and morale (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2000) were the central focus of these aforementioned studies. Conducting an examination of the myriad issues confronting mid-level administrators in educational settings was one of the strengths of the studies, which, in turn, provided information and increased awareness levels of these individuals within the campus community. However, it is important to note this study extends the discussion about midlevel administrators by specifically focusing on the experiences of midlevel African American women student affairs administrators at Midwestern two-year and four-year institutions, which produced recommendations and suggestions for senior level administrators committed to enhancing their leadership potential. In the next chapter, I will explain the theoretical orientation, methodology, and methods used in the study. Data collection and data analysis processes are also examined.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, a detailed description of the theoretical framework, research designs, and methods that guided this study was provided. Black Feminist Thought, phenomenology, life history interviews, and the rationale for their use in this study was discussed. Other topics addressed in this chapter include the selection of respondents, research sites, data collection methods, data analysis strategies, and trustworthiness issues.

Throughout the past three years I have had opportunities to learn more about the philosophical underpinnings of research which have resulted in an identification of, and eventually a commitment to, an approach grounded in the voices and interpretations of respondents. As a qualitative researcher, I am committed to utilizing research methods that seek to engage respondents in conversations, where a more complete exploration of their experiences can occur. Attempting to understand how respondents make sense of their worlds is how I now enter research endeavors; therefore, a constructionist framework, which focuses on meaning and interpretations (Crotty, 1998) served as the epistemological framework for this study. The theoretical framework for the study drew on Black Feminist Thought, phenomenological research served as the methodology, and interviews was the principal method used to collect data.

#### Black Feminist Thought

Black Feminist Thought, which highlights the interplay among societal elements such as race, class, gender, politics, and economics on Black women (Collins, 1990; 2000), provided the guiding theoretical perspective for this study. Black Feminist Thought, according to Howard-Hamilton (2003, p. 19) is “unlike traditional theories used in student affairs practice ... which are very general and so might miss important issues encountered or

attributes embodied by African American women.” Using this perspective as a guide to study the experiences of African American women addressed one of the struggles faced by those who are marginalized members of a community that is “being listened to only [if] we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant groups .... [which] often changes the meanings of our ideas and works to elevate the ideas of [the] dominant group” (Collins, 1990, p. xiii). As Collins (1990) stated, “by placing African-American women’s ideas in the center of analysis, I not only privilege those ideas but encourage white feminists, African-American men, and all others to investigate the similarities and differences among their own standpoints and those of African-American women” (p. xiii). Black Feminist Thought theoretically guided this study of leadership experiences of mid-level African American women student affairs administrators in the following ways.

Specifically, Black Feminist Thought enabled a concentrated focus on the multiple realities of African American women in a society that has historically relegated their stories to a secondary or even tertiary status (Collins, 2000; Myers, 2002). Due partly to de jure or de facto mechanisms, African American women have not had access to similar advantages and opportunities as their White male and White female counterparts (A.C. Collins, 2001; McKay, 1997; Smith & Smith, 1992). Because of their limited access, African American women’s stories are often unknown and untold, which, in turn, has adversely impacted their ability to completely understand their place, value, and contributions within a domestic and global context (Collins, 2000). Black Feminist Thought acknowledges the intersections and impacts of race, gender, class, and politics on the lives of African American women (Collins, 1990; 2000) and served as a means to those interested in acknowledging, learning, and

appreciating the multiple facets of their identity and their leadership approaches and contributions.

Moreover, Black Feminist Thought provided guidance to the study because of its sole focus on the experiences of African American women. Taking an unapologetic stance, while exploring the lives of Black women in multiple contexts (Collins, 1990; 2000) provided readers with pragmatic and instructive information about Black women's experiences and their impacts on individual and societal levels. For all of the above reasons, Black Feminist Thought was a rich and appropriate theoretical framework for this study.

### Phenomenology

Phenomenological research served as the methodological framework for this examination of the leadership experiences of African American women, who are mid-level student affairs administrators. Describing a specific experience and the meanings associated with it is the primary goal of phenomenological research (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 1990). Furthermore, phenomenological research assumes "there is an essence or essences to shared experience" (Patton, 1990, p. 70). For this study, the phenomenon of interest was the leadership experiences among African American women student affairs administrators. Additionally, the objective of the study was to better understand their leadership experiences as mid-level student affairs administrators.

### Data Collection

The data collection process consisted of collecting documents (i.e., campus literature, the respondents' resumes, and departmental reports), conducting face-to-face and telephone interviews and engaging in limited observations of their work sites. Acquiring campus-related literature from places such as the admissions offices, libraries, bookstores, and the

respondents' respective offices prior to the first scheduled interview for each of the respondent was the first step taken in collecting documents. Information I gathered while on campus, in addition to what I acquired via the Internet, served to broaden my understanding of student services at the institutions and provided demographic information on each campus. Requesting a copy of the respondents' resumes (I received five) was the next step in the document collection phase. The resumes provided a chronological review of their educational and professional journeys, and often supplemented and clarified their responses to the interview questions. Additionally, two of the respondents provided departmental reports that highlighted their workloads on a monthly basis. Analysis of these documents provided information that, in some cases, was not shared during the interview process, thus shedding light on other professional experiences.

#### Semi-structured Interviews

Creating questions that elicit stories of respondents' life experiences (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), selecting open-ended questions (Atkinson, 1998), and pre-testing interview questions were steps in the process I followed prior to beginning and during the interview process. I began by examining Parker's (2005) interview protocol (Appendix A) used in her study on organizational leadership experiences of African American women executives. Her protocol served as a starting point to the identification and eventual selection of some questions for the interview protocol for this study. Using Parker's interview protocol as a guide assisted in developing a variety of open-ended questions that enabled the six respondents to share their varied personal and professional leadership experiences. The final interview protocol also incorporated clarifications requests, based on respondents' initial comments, as well as a number of original questions.

Pre-testing interview questions was a way of deciding whether or not the questions are appropriate or inappropriate for the study (Gay & Airasian, 2000; Glesne, 1999) because “what may seem like a good questions in the abstract may turn out not to be in practice” (Esterberg, 2002, p. 100). I conducted a practice session where I interviewed via telephone one African-American female colleague employed at the University of Maryland in the Student Affairs Division, which served to enhance and refine the interview protocol. Consequently, I was able to utilize the information from this practice interview to modify and refine the final interview protocol.

For this study, a series of audio-taped semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews (Appendix B) were conducted during the months of May, June, July, and August 2005. The goal of semi-structured interviews “is to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words” (Esterberg , 2002, p. 87). With three of the respondents, I conducted three face-to-face and one telephone interview, and with the other three, I conducted two face-to-face interviews and two telephone interviews. The first face-to-face interview lasted approximately two hours and the subsequent face-to-face interviews were approximately one and one-half hours each. Prior to beginning the first interview, I spent approximately thirty minutes discussing the study, answering their questions, and sharing my scrapbook with each of the respondents. Each of the face-to-face interviews was followed by an informal conversation which lasted about fifteen to thirty minutes. Although I had intended to conduct three face-to-face interviews with the respondents, scheduling changes and a family emergency precluded meeting this goal.

## Observations

Participant observation is the third most common form of data collection in qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). For this study, due to geographical and scheduling restrictions, self-directed campus tours that occurred prior to the first interview served as the primary observational activity, yielding only supplemental and contextualizing data.

Although limited observations of respondents' work spaces occurred during face-to-face interviews, the ideal approach in qualitative research (Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002) is observing the respondents in various roles and settings (Glesne, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002). However, the campus tour proved to be the most suitable alternative for this study because of the primary emphasis on collecting interview data and stories from respondents.

## Respondent Selection

The overall intent of qualitative sampling approaches is the selection of individuals, who "have the information, perspectives, and experiences related to the topic of research" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p.139). Snowball sampling, which is "selecting a few people who can identify other people who can identify still other people who might be good participants for a study" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 139), and criterion sampling, which is "selecting all cases that meet some criterion" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 139), were the most appropriate sampling approaches to utilize in part because of the racial, gender, and professional criteria established for the study. Therefore, in February 2005, an email message (Appendix C) was sent to approximately 25 colleagues at two- and four-year educational institutions, describing the study and seeking names of potential respondents. From these colleagues' recommendations, 16 prospective respondents were identified. Approximately one month

later the 16 nominated individuals received an email message (Appendix D) inquiring about their level of interest in the study. As a result of combining these sampling strategies, six respondents out of 16 prospective respondents subsequently agreed to participate in this study. (It is important to note the final decision of the exact number of respondents was based on the researcher's desire to ensure the representation of a variety of leadership experiences) After receiving correspondence from respondents indicating their desire to participate in the study, a respondent profile form requesting information regarding their length of employment was sent as a means of assessing their eligibility for the study. Even though all of the respondents received a copy of the profile only two of them completed the form; however, subsequent telephone conversations and the informed consent form (Appendix E) confirmed their eligibility for the study. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board from Iowa State University, the first round of interviews was scheduled for May 2005.

#### Establishing Rapport

Numerous researchers (Esterberg, 2000; Gay & Airasian, 2000; Merriam, 2002) have examined the importance of the researcher-respondent relationship within qualitative research. Noting the importance of establishing rapport, Krathwohl (1998) stated "no interview succeeds unless the interviewer builds a relationship with the respondent in which both are comfortable talking with one another" (p. 290). The researcher-respondent relationship serves as one of the foundational elements of a qualitative study because the relationship enables sharing and gathering information regarding the observed phenomenon (Glesne, 1999). Therefore, a task confronting qualitative researchers is maintaining a caring and respectful disposition toward respondents. For this study, I entered and exited the

research process with a heightened awareness about the importance of establishing rapport and connection with the six respondents.

First, I believed it was necessary and important to utilize different communication aids to minimize any potential adverse affects that the relative geographical distance between the respondents and me might have on creating and sustaining rapport during the study. In the early stages of the research process, I relied on the telephone and email as the means of maintaining contact with the six respondents. With the commencement of the interviews, communication with the respondents expanded to include face-to-face conversations. Throughout the research process, the respondents' inquiries were answered via face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, and email correspondence. The combination of these communication approaches directly assisted in the process of cultivating rapport with the respondents.

Furthermore, during the first face-to-face meeting with each of the respondents, I provided a pictorial description of my life by sharing a scrapbook that included family snapshots, favorite poems, and memorabilia from events such as films and cultural activities. While reviewing the scrapbook, all of the respondents offered some commentary on the various pictures, which presented an opportunity for me to share stories about my own personal and professional experiences. The objective in sharing this information with the respondents was not only to introduce myself in a personal and informal manner, but to create and build rapport. Using this approach enabled the respondents to learn more about my non-research related activities such as my personal and professional interests before I began inquiring into their experiences and lives.

### Transcription

For this study, I completed full transcription of the twenty-four audio-taped interviews. Immediate transcription of tapes is deemed the most effective and optimal approach (Esterberg, 2002) and postponement of this task often leads to fewer opportunities for using the data to formulate additional questions throughout the study (Glesne, 1999). Therefore, transcription of each interview tape was completed often the same day as the interview, and by the second face-to-face or telephone interviews at the latest. The final interviews, which occurred in July and August, took approximately two weeks total to transcribe. After each transcript was completed, I sent the respondents a copy via email requesting they review them for accuracy and provide corrections if necessary. Completing the transcription in a timely manner minimized the presence of data management problems often confronted by qualitative researchers and increased the researcher's ability to utilize the data throughout the duration of the research process (Esterberg, 2002). Requesting feedback from the respondents provided an opportunity for them to ensure the accuracy of each of the interview transcripts, thus addressing a partial requirement of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data demands commitment to an extensive review and an eventual interpretation of information collected for a given study (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Plummer (2001) contended "this is the truly creative part of the work—it entails brooding and reflecting upon mounds of data for long periods of time until it 'makes sense' and 'feels right', and key ideas flow from it" (p. 152). Analyzing data collected for this study included reviewing and coding transcripts, reading documents (i.e., resumes, campus-based literature)

and the contents of the researcher's reflexive journal. Completing each of the aforementioned steps played a pivotal role in my understanding and interpretation of the data collected throughout the research process.

Coding is an integral component of qualitative data analysis and serves as one of the steps in the identification and selection of themes embedded in qualitative data (Esterberg, 2002; Glesne, 1999). However, the process and rigor of coding are inevitably impacted by and connected to the type of transcription completed by the researcher. Memory based, noted-based, tape-based, and transcript-based analysis are four types of analyses available for researchers conducting focus groups (Krueger, 1994) Although this specific study did not involve a focus group, the transcript-based analysis, which requires a complete transcription of the tapes (Krueger, 1994), proved beneficial in this phase of the process because of the presence of completed interview transcripts rather than excerpts.

For this study, open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and focused coding (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) using specific analytic questions (Esterberg, 2002) guided the coding process. Reviewing the transcript line-by-line without using preconceived themes is the essence of open coding (Esterberg, 2002), completing this process produced myriad themes that described the personal and professional experiences of the respondents. Writing the themes in the margins of the transcript assisted in the process of recording and later organizing the specific topics that emerged from this step of the coding process. The themes identified by the open coding process served as the foundation for the focused coding, where specific quotes that fit the themes were typed on a separate page of paper and then posted on a large 18 x 24 sheet of paper. Utilizing this approach assisted in the selection of specific responses for the findings. Occurring throughout the process was the use of the analytic

questions (Appendix F) that were posed at different times during the analysis process. Combining and recombining information from interviews, documents and observations, reflexive journal entries, and the detailed of all, constituted the data analysis for this study.

### Trustworthiness

Lincoln & Guba (1985) identified credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as four areas that can maximize trustworthiness of a qualitative research project. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy, and member checking are techniques that address credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Visiting respondents' workplaces, conducting a total of four interviews with each participant and using alternative data collection methods such as telephone interviews, multiple sources of information, seeking the guidance and assistance of peer debriefers, and member checking were the selected strategies I used for establishing credibility.

Geographical distances, feasibility issues, and scheduling changes limited my ability to fully engage/participate in person-to-person prolonged engagement and persistent observations with the respondents. In spite of these challenges, I was able to conduct three face-to-face interviews and one telephone interview with three of the respondents and two face-to interviews and two telephone interviews with the remaining three respondents. All of the face-to-face interviews occurred in respondents' workplaces and a number of scheduled interviews were rescheduled for three of the respondents in light of work-related conflicts and a family emergency. In the end the interviews, telephone interviews, and email updates constituted ongoing engagements with respondents for a period of six months.

Triangulation is the collection of information from various sources (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 2002) and “is used to determine the validity of data” (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 275). For this study triangulation was facilitated by acquiring documents such as resumes, reports and campus literature, conducting face-to face and telephone interviews, and collecting information from a self-guided campus tour. In the end, the multiple sources of data were consulted to describe and analyze the respondents’ leadership experiences. For peer debriefing purposes, I selected two fellow colleagues who were capable of fulfilling the requirements of this role for this study which is “someone who knows a great deal about the substantive area of the inquiry and methodological issues” (Lincoln & Guba, 1995, p. 308-309). Dr. Nanci Shaw, Postdoctoral Research Assistant at Iowa State University, who served as the primary debriefer, and Dr. Mimi Benjamin, Assistant Vice-President of Student Affairs at Iowa State University, both addressed my personal concerns with procedural, content, and respondents-related issues that surfaced during the research process.

Conducting member checks is the process of sharing interview transcripts and the findings with the respondents to ensure accuracy of their stories and to solicit feedback on the preliminary findings of the study (Glesne, 1999). Additionally, it is viewed as the “most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). To ensure data accuracy and completeness for this study, member checking was conducted in the following two phases: (1) after each interview and (2) after writing the findings. At the completion of each interview (i.e., except two that were back-to-back), I emailed a copy of the transcript to the respondents requesting they review the document in order to ensure that I had accurately recorded their responses, only one respondent made minor changes to the transcript. Second, two emails were sent to the respondents, followed by a telephone call to their offices

requesting feedback on the findings section of the study. Four respondents expressed (i.e., via email or verbally) approval of the findings, while the other two did not respond.

Another element of trustworthiness is addressing transferability that involves producing “thick description [which] enable [s] someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). For this study, I focused on presenting rich, detailed, and descriptive narratives, which should assist readers in determining the potential for transferability of the results.

For this study, I utilized multiple sources of information, fellow colleagues, and reflections on my role in the study, to establish an audit trail containing all research related documents and processes in an attempt to maximize dependability which involves developing an “audit trail, overlapping methods, in addition to meeting the credibility requirement”(Lincoln & Guba, p. 317-318). Confirmability is the final step in establishing trustworthiness, which is the “linking [of] assertions, findings, interpretations, to the data in discernable ways,” according to Schwandt (2001, p. 259). Completing a thorough examination of the research process in addition to establishing an audit trail serves as an indicator that confirmability exists within the study (Lincoln & Guba, (1985).

Finally, the reflexive journal, which serves as a methodological, procedural, and analytic tool, undergirds the process of establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Numerous researchers have emphasized the purpose, importance, and value of maintaining a reflexive journal throughout the research process (Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 2002; Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 1997). From the beginning of the research process, I maintained a reflexive journal, detailing various issues and concerns regarding the researcher-respondent

relationship, modifications to the interview protocol, and information from books and journal articles read throughout the study. Writing and analyzing this information helped address the emotional and research challenges and dilemmas I encountered in the course of this qualitative study, as well as chronicled my journey as a researcher from the early stages to the final stages of the research process.

### Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers should engage in reflexive activities, where an examination of issues such as of the selection of topic, their personal beliefs regarding the topic, and methodology occurs throughout the research process (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002). As an African American woman with seven years of professional experience in the Student Affairs field and a personal interest in leadership related endeavors, I am aware that race, gender, familial, and societal influences have shaped who I am as a person and as a leader. Prior to beginning this research process, in an attempt to describe and examine their impact on my leadership journey, I wrote a personal leadership narrative (Appendix G), where I explored myriad topics, regarding my own development in this area. Completing an examination of influences and explicating the role they played in shaping my current leadership beliefs and practices resulted in my increased awareness of leadership concepts and better prepared me to undertake this study.

Leadership is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that is intriguing to me partly because of the varied extant definitions, theories, and models. Although multiple interpretations exist about leadership, the majorities' cultural views and values are often used as the building blocks of leadership models. When I reviewed the extant literature specifically examining the intersection of these race, gender and leadership, I realized that few formal academic studies

had been conducted on leadership experiences of African American women. Partly to address the absence of a robust body of literature in this area and to answer questions such as, “How do others who are non-white define leadership?,” I entered this process committed to a type of research that would construct a space where respondents were able to dialogue about their leadership experiences within educational institutions, where often such conversations have not taken place. Employing research methods such as semi-structured life history interviews enabled me to learn about the leadership experiences of African American woman student affairs administrators. In the end, their narratives should serve to broaden, expand, and challenge the extant literature on leadership.

As an African American woman who is studying the leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators, I also had to acknowledge and attempt to resolve insider and outsider status issues. Examining the insider and outsider status, Foster (1996) noted that her goal was

to demonstrate the positive effect that a shared identity can have on establishing rapport and recovering authentic accounts, as well as to illustrate that even members of the same speech and cultural community are differentiated by other equally important characteristics that make the researcher simultaneously an insider and an outsider. (p. 217)

Entering this research process as an African American woman studying other African American women, I suspected we potentially shared a number of similar personal and professional experiences. However, the possibility of overlooking and/or misinterpreting some of the embedded themes in their stories can spring from failure to recognize the individual meanings ascribed to certain events by the respondents. Therefore, I carefully

reviewed the transcripts and sought additional clarification from respondents prior to representing their stories in order to ensure that I had represented their meanings as faithfully as possible.

In the next chapter, I provide a general overview of the participants and present findings.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore leadership experiences of African American women, who are mid-level student affairs administrators. In this chapter, a general introduction of the six respondents, highlighting some of their similarities and dissimilarities in professional experiences, educational attainment, and familial structures was included. Following the general overview are the respondents' narratives, which contain their personal accounts about the myriad influences that have shaped their leadership experiences and journey. Finally, personal leadership approach, mid-level experiences, professional challenges, coping mechanism—the four themes that emerged from the data—were discussed.

### Respondents

Six African American women with at least six years, but no more than 15 years, in student affairs participated in this study. All of the respondents were currently employed in the student affairs division at their respective institutions, which include four Associate Colleges (two year institutions) and two Doctoral Research Intensive Institutions. Respondents' ages ranged from their mid-thirties to late forties. Ten years was the average length of professional experience among the respondents. Three of the six respondents were married, one of the three single respondents was a divorcee, and two of the six respondents were mothers.

In terms of their educational attainment, five of the six respondents had earned graduate degrees and two of the six had earned their doctoral degree. Five of the six respondents received their undergraduate degrees from Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), one received an associate degree from a PWI and an undergraduate from a

Historically Black University (HBU) and five received their graduate degrees at PWIs. Four of the six respondents began their own college experiences as traditional aged college students; whereas, two of the respondents were non-traditional students.

One of the six respondents was born in the South and moved to the Midwest as an adolescent, while the others were born and raised in the Midwest. One of the respondents was raised by a single parent. Two of the respondents' parents divorced when they were teenagers, and one parent of one respondent had remarried. Two of the respondents' parents are currently married and one of the respondents' parents is deceased. Finally, in terms of birth order, three of the respondents are the youngest children in their family, one is an only child, and two are the oldest child.

The above general overview summarizes the respondents groups' professional experiences, educational attainment, and family structure during their formative years. Although each of the women identifies as African American or Black, the varied life experiences illustrate ranges of similarities and differences among them; thus, highlighting one of the tenets of Black Feminist Thought that focuses on the diversity within the Black community (Collins, 1990). The individual narratives that follow include a brief description account of how life experiences such as familial influences, educational experiences (e.g., high school, college, graduate school) and professional experiences served to shape and mold their perceptions of leadership and their own development as leaders.

#### Joi Kellum

Joi currently works at a Midwestern Doctoral Research Intensive Institution, where approximately twenty thousand students are enrolled. Since receiving her undergraduate and graduate degrees from this institution, she has worked in areas charged with providing

programmatic and leadership-related opportunities for undergraduate students. Although her office is not visible from the hallway, it is located in a wing of a campus building that is in a relatively high traffic area and readily identifiable by anyone seeking her offices' services. An array of typical office products such as pens, folders, paper trays, lamps, smalls piles of paper, a few packages, and a photograph of Joi and friends were either on the large square-shaped desk, small round table located in the corner in room, or on the floor. The office's appearance suggested that Joi works on numerous projects, simultaneously.

As she sat behind her desk throughout the entire first interview, Joi's voice matched some of the wariness that was etched on her face, possibly due to the uncertainty of this process or the questions that I might ask, or a combination of the two. At times I even wondered if she felt my own concerns and doubts about our pending conversations. After completing the first interview, however, she and I joked about the interview process, the personal and professional impact of organizational change, and the importance of friends. During the second interview, Joi sat directly in front of me, unobstructed by the desk, and appeared more eager and less reticent than in our previous encounter. As a result, we were able to continue to explore issues related to her leadership experiences in a more conversational manner.

As I asked a series of questions about various phases of Joi's life, she appeared to be in the process of comprehending and accepting some significant personal and professional changes that had occurred within the past few years. Although at times, the conversation evoked painful memories, she willingly continued to respond to questions which enabled me to learn more about her life. In the end, Joi's caring and compassionate disposition surfaced

particularly as she explained the high value she placed on treating individuals respectfully, regardless of their titles or positions.

### Childhood/Family Life

Joi's father worked in a factory to provide support for a family of seven, while her mother remained in the home with the children. Until her parents divorced, which Joi shared was a result of "her mother's growing independence," Joi, the oldest of the five children, described her family life as "the typical All-American little family for a long time... you know, my dad worked and my mom stayed at home for the most part." Throughout Joi's life, a point of contention with her father has been her personal struggle with weight issues. She shared that, "I guess in terms of my childhood, I can't say it wasn't good—it was complex, because I was not only dealing with my weight, but the issues that my dad was having with it." Another childhood challenge for Joi was her mother's personal struggles with various illnesses, which severely limited her mother's ability to actively provide the emotional support that Joi needed to understand and address the numerous developmental transitions typically experienced by adolescents. Fortunately, with her father's assistance, Joi was able to address the majority of these physiological changes; however, the weight issue remained a problem for both of them until her adult years.

Due partly to her educational and professional achievements in recent years, the negative attention and emphasis that once was placed on her weight issue has been replaced with accolades and praise from her father. However, as Joi shared this part of her life, the impact of her father's words and the depth of her personal struggle with this particular issue were quite apparent, because while recounting memories about these personal experiences,

she cried. Joi's response to these questions possibly meant that recalling some of her childhood injuries remained; challenging the adage that time heals all wounds.

### Educational Experiences

Describing her high school experiences, Joi stated,

I think in high school the only thing I was involved in [was] the pep squad, and I think I may have ran for a student government position, but I didn't get that. I did go to the football games and supported the school and had fun that way.

Because of her mother's health condition, which prevented her from playing an active role in the family's daily routine, Joi provided most of the maternal support to her siblings, while in high school. Her personal accounts of this time period in her life indicated that much of her time was spent involved in studying and with her family, as opposed to participating in extracurricular activities with other students and friends. However, when she was seventeen, her own family and parental responsibility became a priority as she became a wife and a mother. Therefore, she began the process of raising a family, an experience that lasted until she and her husband decided to divorce.

After divorcing at the age of thirty-two, Joi described a pivotal moment that occurred within a work setting in which she, "blacked out at [the] computer and when [she] came to [recalled stating] 'I'm getting ready to quit my job and go back to school.'" Joi's interpretation of this event as a revelatory sign that she needed to explore other vocational and educational options motivated her to enroll as a full-time student at a local four-year university. Throughout Joi's collegiate experience she worked on campus in several offices. Describing a particular challenging time while a student, where she held two jobs

simultaneously, she reported that one office was more supportive of her educational goals than the other, a reality that eventually presented additional obstacles:

it was weird to me, they knew that I was a full-time student, but as soon as I became a full-time staff member, [my supervisor said], “Now you can’t take classes, this is conflicting [with your job].” “It’s not like [they didn’t] know that I was trying to finish a degree so I was not feeling that role at all.” [However] when I went over to (the other office) I didn’t have those kinds of issues.

After earning her undergraduate degree, Joi entered a graduate program and upon graduating accepted a full-time administrative position in the Student Affairs Division at the same institution. While discussing her professional experiences, Joi stressed the importance of recognizing and treating everyone in a respectful manner. In fact, she shared a story about reading an email where medical students were asked on a final exam to provide the cleaning woman’s name and she said that “no one knew it [and it] just basically talked about it is important to know [that] there are no big I’s and little you’s, and [the importance of] just respecting people.” This story highlights two components to her leadership approach—care and respect—which she deeply values and uses as a guide in her personal and professional life.

### Leadership Experiences

The absence of the typical formal leadership building activities, such as high school and college extracurricular activities often associated with students’ leadership development, highlighted the different nature of Joi’s leadership journey. Although the more traditional markers are not present, other potential factors—such as parental responsibilities which began at the age of seventeen, lack of involvement in high school activities, due to her

responsibilities for siblings, and entering college as a non-traditional student—likely fostered Joi’s leadership development.

When describing her leadership experiences, Joi stated, “I don’t think [of] myself as being a leader, I think about me having a job and going to work everyday, but for someone to ask me about being leader, I don’t think about myself in that role.” Although she personally did not see herself as a leader, I believed that becoming a wife and a mother at a relatively young age, probably introduced issues directly related to leadership endeavors. Parental and spousal roles demand similar skills as positional-based roles in organizations; yet, they are often overlooked because these sets of experiences fall outside the scope of a traditional leadership path. Even though Joi clearly described leadership qualities present in her home life and work setting, such as supporting and encouraging family members and coordinating educational opportunities for students to develop their own leadership skills, she remained uncomfortable with the term “leader” as applied to her.

#### Shelley Brown

For the past four years, Shelley has worked in the Student Affairs division at a public four-year institution, providing assistance to students and faculty in areas that deal with academic, co-curricular, and community-based initiatives. Shelley and I met in a medium-sized conference room on her campus for our interviews. Our pre-interview conversation covered topics such as the various phases of the study, campus politics, and other work-related issues. From the beginning of this process, Shelley’s engagement conveyed her strong interest and eagerness in participating in this endeavor; consequently, I did not detect any signs of nervousness or apprehension on her part, which, in turn, assisted in my adjustment to beginning the interview process with another respondent. Engaging, energetic, and self-

assured characterized Shelley's personality. Throughout our time together, her high level of energy was simply contagious; I felt a sense of rejuvenation after our discussions on topics ranging from personal to professional experiences and upcoming community events.

When describing herself, Shelley mentioned that, "I didn't do well in terms of the whole Black- White girl, I've always been very Black," a comment that indicated her lack of interest in acting White in order to be accepted by her peers. In the end, her sense of comfort with who she is, and her unwillingness to alter her personality characterized who she was as a person and as a leader.

### Childhood/ Family Life

Shelley, the youngest of eight children was raised primarily by her mother and older siblings in a mid-size city in the Midwest. She shared that her father "wasn't around a lot when [she] was a kid...I don't think my Dad came back into my life until I was sixteen or seventeen." When describing her childhood she noted that,

My mom [was] an alcoholic. I mean, we, I could have been a statistic—probably should have been by societal standards. I probably should have been an alcoholic, [with] ninety kids, living in the projects, but being involved in Upward Bound gave me other options, other opportunities, [and] other avenues.

Fortunately, her mother's struggle with alcoholism and the family's economic status did not create an insurmountable barrier for Shelley and her siblings to overcome. Clearly aware of the potential impact of her mother's illness, Shelley added that her mother

might have not been the role model, so to speak, but she was around a lot and she was making sure that we were getting to school ... and so I took away from her that even

though you have this situation in your life, that you can still raise good strong reliable kids because all eight of us graduated from high school.

Although the family experienced a number of societal challenges associated with low income families, Shelley was able to identify viable solutions to overcoming these adversities with the assistance of family members, friends, counselors, and TRIO services (educational programs for low-income students).

### Educational Experiences

During high school and her undergraduate and graduate work, Shelley was actively involved in a variety of student organizations, academic projects and employment endeavors that provided numerous leadership opportunities. While attending a competitive high school, she served as a radio announcer and participated in Upward Bound, an academic and college preparatory program targeting low income students. She shared a number of stories and events that occurred during this timeframe, but one that was particularly meaningful involved a class trip where she, along with other students, were caught with alcohol in their bags. A few of the students were expelled, but Shelley was given a reprieve, a decision she believes was partly based on her academic achievement and school leaders believing in her potential,

I think that experience really humbled me, because I am thinking to myself. “Here I am doing all of this crazy stuff, and yet there are people out there, who believe in me, and believe in my potential.” Because they could have expelled me and some of those kids did get expelled, but they chose to suspend me, [they sent] me to an “intervention alcohol kind” of thing and then I was able to go back [to school].

Reflecting on this one incident, Shelley pointed out that

it really just humbled me to think that these people really believed in me so much that they would rather bend the rule in my favor, let me stay, and support me, rather than to say “you are not going to amount to anything, get out.” So from then on I really did buckle down [and] I started going to college fairs.

Graduating tenth in her high school class of 267 students, Shelley entered college where she continued to participate in extracurricular activities, while obtaining an undergraduate degree. Based on her academic achievements, Shelley received a scholarship that covered housing, books, and tuition at a university approximately two hours from her home. As a first year student, Shelley shared that she associated with White people for the most part,

I was hanging out with all of White people and all of my roommates were Black except for one. And I hung out with her and her friends because I am thinking “Surely you know if I hang out with them, I’m going to get better grades, I’m going to have study buddies, [because] they know more.” I’m going to hook myself up with the people who I think are going to be able to help me along.

Ironically, Shelley noticed that the level of her engagement with her White roommate and friends shifted when she began to seek academic assistance from them. She discovered they were more willing and interested in socializing with her, but somewhat hesitant if not completely resistant to engaging in academically-based activities. She continued,

it was fine when it came to partying and they [White students] let you party with them all day long but they were very protective about their work, they didn’t want to help you. They didn’t want to help you, they didn’t want to put you in a study group, .

. . . I mean they were just very protective about their grades. I mean if you ask them to let you read their papers [she paused] well I mean [they] really [did] not want to help. I found that, they were more willing to say, “Yeah come do this bong, then come read my paper.”

Shelley mentioned that she learned the following two lessons,

(a) you are going to do this yourself or (b) you are going to have find another group of people who can be more supportive. [And] that is the time I started hanging out at the Black Cultural Center and that is where [I] find other Black people who [were] going to help me. [They said] “come on to our study group, we have other people reading our papers, here let me read yours, you read mine.” There was a community there.

In the end, Shelley fortunately found a welcoming and receptive community that offered her not only a social refuge, but a high level of academic support.

Another educational opportunity that proved highly beneficial for Shelley during her undergraduate experience was campus employment. While working as an administrative assistant, Shelley met an individual who, according to her,

exhibited all of the leadership qualities that I thought made good leaders. He was open, he was honest, he was smart, he could give you a word of wisdom, he was funny, he could be serious, he had all of these things going for him, I admired that about him. And to this day, if I am at [a] crossroad and I need some guidance here, I can always call him, and he is always there to give me one or two things to make me think [or help] move me forward.

The academic and life lessons that Shelley learned as an undergraduate proved beneficial as she pursued her master's degree at a highly competitive graduate program. One of the experiences she described about graduate school was the recruitment process,

I was sold a program where everyone helped one another. It was this wonderful community of people, who supported each other, who wanted to see each person succeed. Your classmates were going to be there for you. Your faculty was going to be supportive, I mean [current students and faculty] really painted a very beautiful wonderland, [a]fairy tale kind of picture, and I was excited about that.

After entering her master's program, Shelley encountered a different type of reality that prompted her to quickly reassess the situation and immediately identify support mechanisms to counter these new environmental challenges, tasks she had successfully completed as an undergraduate. Participating in informal gatherings with graduate students from other programs provided some support in the face of the "very, very individualistic and very, very competitive" program in which she was enrolled at the time. Based on her ability to evaluate the situation and develop alternative strategies, which in this instance involved an informal support group, she was able to fulfill her goal of receiving a master's degree. Throughout Shelley's educational journey, supervisors, campus administrators, and teachers served as role models who provided her assistance in areas such as personal responsibility, professional maturity, and career and leadership development.

#### Leadership Development

Reviewing Shelley's leadership journey, a number of experiences such as family influences, involvement in extracurricular activities, interactions with peer groups, and supervisors emerged as potential influences on her leadership development. Throughout our

discussions, Shelley repeatedly connected aforementioned issues to the development of her own leadership style. For example, while describing her mother, she noted, “I think what my mother gave me is probably the attitude of persistence. And even though she doesn’t know she gave me this, [I learn] you can make the best out of bad situations.” Additionally, other campus-based experiences, such as being a resident assistant, encouraged her to push herself in the face of uncertainty:

When you start talking about being young and begin taking on responsibilities and leadership roles, that is probably the best tool for any young person, especially if you are in college to gain leadership qualities. It forces you to be organized. It forces you to lead because these students are here looking at you and they are looking for guidance. They are looking for what is the next step, and you have to provide that next step, and you might not know how, but you have to find out.

Furthermore, in graduate school, Shelley managed to identify other forms of emotional and academic support on campus, while attempting to adjust to an academically competitive environment, while receiving little to no support from others. In the end, Shelley was able to successfully minimize the problems she was experiencing with other students in her program, as well as identify the additional support she needed to successfully meet her educational goals.

#### Yvonne Adams

Yvonne has worked in the field of Student Affairs for approximately nine years and is currently employed at a private Doctoral Research Intensive university. Her office is located within an area that has an open space that serves multiple purposes for students gathering for formal and informal group activities, in addition to several other administrative offices and a

kitchenette. Comparable to a small intimate place in a home, the office conveyed a sense of safety and protection, feelings that I later learned are an integral part of the office's mission. Throughout our conversations, her personal mission of assisting students was apparent in her willingness to work with students experiencing difficulty on campus with professors or in adjusting to the numerous demands of college. Yvonne shared that maintaining an open door policy gives students access to administrators who are fully committed to providing an array of personal and academic-based services.

Yvonne's religious foundation provided the strength, grace, and fortitude needed as she confronts myriad professional challenges on campus. She shared that she often prays about work-related concerns, which has enabled her to successfully resolve some of the professional obstacles that occasionally arise on campus. Yvonne continually stressed her personal mission of assisting students in earning college degrees and based on her selection of profession appears to have identified the ideal setting in which to fulfill this goal. Based on Yvonne's personal accounts of her experiences as a student affairs administrator it is clear that she is committed to ensuring that the students who leave her office know there is someone on campus that cares about their personal and academic well-being and is willing to offer various types of assistance with their particular needs.

#### Childhood Experiences

Both of Yvonne's parents were raised in the Midwest and remained in the area to raise their own family:

[I ] have the kind of family that is very supportive, extremely supportive, very encouraging. During times when I thought that I would not be successful, they would

say, “yes you can, you can do it.” They were positive, “never say ‘I can’t, you can,’ so that is what I grew up with [and] that’s what sustains me even now.”

Regardless of the presence of external influences such as teachers questioning her ability to succeed, she was aware that she could always rely on the verbal, emotional, and physical support of her family. Consequently, the encouraging and affirming words from her parents created a safe space for her to develop the strong sense of self she exhibits today. As the younger of two children, Yvonne remembers two specific activities—educational and church-related endeavors—that played an integral role in her formative years. Sprinkled throughout our conversations were remarks that reinforced the importance and value she places on educational attainment and the role of religion in her adult life, partly because of her parent’s behavior and role modeling.

#### Educational Experiences

From an early age, Yvonne remembers her parents telling her that attending college was an expectation and not a choice. She emphatically stated, “it was never, ‘Will I go to college’ [or] ‘if I go to college,’ it was ‘You will be going to college,’ so that was the message that was instilled in me from elementary school on.” Throughout her formative years, both parents continually emphasized the importance of obtaining a quality education, but utilized different approaches to relay the message. Yvonne’s father modeled for her his own pursuit of a formal education, which eventually led to him earning a Doctorate of Divinity. On the other hand, Yvonne’s mother provided verbal and moral support which conveyed her own commitment to education.

While attending a private high school, Yvonne confronted numerous issues in part because of the racial dynamics of the school. She was one of a handful of black students

enrolled in this school, which she shared, “had a junior KKK organization and was racist.” Consequently, relationships with other African American students served as a form of protection from the uninviting and racially tense environment. Yvonne’s description of high school in the following passage does not suggest a place of broad acceptance, peace, or personal satisfaction.

What is interesting to me and even when you look back at slavery a lot of people liked to do things in the name of Christianity, evil things in the name of Christianity, and I think it is disturbing. And so the high school that I attended was similar [in] that it put me in the same mindset. I had to deal with a lot of racism, when I was in high school, I ended up graduating as the only African American in my class. It was a small class maybe about thirty people or so a relatively small class. [I was] not the only African American in the school, but [I] happened to be the only one in my class. I did have others who were African American and one of the things that I can recall [is that] we bonded with [each other], we were very close at the time in fact we kept in touch for quite sometime after high school [although]we don’t so much any more, so there was a bond.

Not only did Yvonne have to confront racist attitudes from students, but she remembered a teacher using the “n word,” while telling a joke to other students. Although she remembered it was extremely difficult for her to process this incident and understand some of the students’ and teachers’ inappropriate and racist behaviors, the verbal and emotional support she received from parents and other African American students assisted in minimizing the distress and pain she experienced during this time. On a number of occasions, her mother reminded her how she needed to handle these situations, “You have to deal with

this, you are there for an education, you don't let them treat you any kind of way." "Don't let them interfere with your education, you say something back" was how Yvonne's mother suggested she address these issues. Similar messages and reinforcement from other African American students provided additional layers of support, which she used as she completed this phase of her educational journey.

Yvonne believed that her personality and professional aspirations were directly impacted by the environmental and individual challenges she experienced in high school, "I kind of think there are aspects of me that are very militant, I will be very honest." "And I think it was because of that experience at a school like that." Moreover, in terms of the impact on her career selection she noted, "I think that in some ways, it has influenced me today in terms of the kind of work that I do, because to be honest I am not sure [that] if I am not working with minority students, I don't know what else I would do in higher education."

Fortunately, Yvonne did not encounter the same degree of racism from her peers and professors during her undergraduate and graduate experiences. As an undergraduate she recalled participating in a couple of campus demonstrations; however, the majority of her time was spent enjoying a typical collegiate experience which involved attending and planning educational and cultural programs, such as residence hall student government and Minority Affairs Council. In terms of her graduate school experiences, Yvonne shared that the time spent in her master's and doctoral program reinforced the value of faith,

When you are working on your doctorate you are really not that confident in your scholarship, and other people are saying "you know I think you are going too fast," and that is why I try not to tell a lot of people [where she was in the process] because I didn't want that negative communication. So when other people are saying

something different [than] what you are trying to do, sometimes all you have is whatever your faith is, your faith in God or whatever the case may be. I felt that God would see me [through] and I really had to depend on Him, seeing me through. I think without that faith in Him or some of those experiences that strengthen my faith in Him, I don't know if I would be where I am today.... When you decide to get your doctorate or you decide to apply for a position, there is always some part of that that is somewhat intimidating, there is a little fear there. I experience that also but I rely on my faith and say "God you are going to have to see me through." Because I have conversations with God like I am talking to you, so it is not like a formal prayer, I guess it is like a prayer. I am like, "God you have to help me, you have to help me" and so I think that is [the] biggest thing that I received from working on the doctorate and the master's. Although I experienced challenges, I am very thankful for those challenges, because without those or had it been too easy for me I don't know if I could have appreciated as much as I do, nor would I have the faith nor would I have the courage.

In the end, Yvonne's high school, master's, and doctoral experiences presented academic, personal, and environmental challenges that she was able to successfully overcome by relying on a support system comprised of family, friends, and God.

### Leadership Experiences

Parental support, educational experiences, church involvement, and professional experiences combined to shape Yvonne's current stance and understanding of leadership issues. Creating and maintaining lofty academic goals and providing emotional and verbal

support, while emphasizing the importance of religious endeavors, are examples of how her parents provided the foundation on which she relies heavily today. Yvonne noted:

Everybody goes through moments and times when you feel [a] little intimidated about certain challenges and opportunities. I just grew up ...being encourage[d] to try things.

Yvonne discussed numerous instances of her parents' unrelenting faith in her ability to successfully confront any overt or hidden obstacles. As a result of their emotional and verbal support, Yvonne eagerly and continually sought out opportunities to expand her skills partly because of this history of encouragement from her family to pursue new endeavors.

Additionally attending a private high school replete with environmental challenges provided ample opportunities to cultivate and sharpen requisite skills for future educational and professional battles. Contending with racist behaviors from students and teachers forced her to develop a thick professional skin that continues to act as a shield as she confronts current professional hurdles. Furthermore, from working as a student affairs administrator for nine years, Yvonne has encountered numerous organizational challenges that reminded her of the importance of effective leadership. For example, the foundational elements of her leadership approach include principles and concepts such as respect, care, leading by example, encouragement and teamwork.

I think that for me leadership is to try to be an example. I am the kind of person that [does not want] the office to look bad. I care about the reputation not only of myself but of our office, so if something needs to be done, then I will do it. It is not unusual that if they [staff members] are in need of help maybe if they are stuffing envelopes, then I might get on the floor and help them stuff envelopes. I don't look at it like it is

beneath me to do that, if a job needs to get done, and we are a team, I will get down there and help also. I also try to be considerate.

Yvonne went on to note the importance of team work:

Everybody has a role, one person can't win the game, Michael Jordan couldn't win by himself, okay, it was a team effort. I can't win this by myself. It is team effort and everyone on that team has a role and a contribution to make.

Examining Yvonne's current leadership beliefs one can see the influence of family, personal challenges and lessons gleaned from educational training have served to cultivate and ultimately broaden her leadership approach.

#### Cana Jones

Meeting Cana for the first time reminded me there are individuals whose personalities complement their vocational choices. Attributes such as personable, engaging, energetic, caring, and candid provide a brief, but accurate, description of her persona, attributes which were quite apparent and consistent throughout our discussions. Cana's level of engagement in this process indicated her interest in fully exploring leadership issues. While sitting at a small round table in a dimly lit but organized office, more often than not, she responded to questions with such clarity that I walked away with a clear understanding of her stance on certain issues. During our interviews, I felt as if Cana extended an invitation to me to listen to some of the issues she confronts as an African American woman in both a personal and professional context. Consequently, we jointly explored an array of topics related to leadership, at times pausing to discuss tangential, yet relevant, issues such as the social and political climate in the country.

### Childhood Experiences/Family Life

As the youngest of four children, Cana was raised by parents whose personal odyssey began in the South and ended in the Midwest. Although her parents' educational attainment limited their vocational opportunities, they were able to find employment at a local plant that provided enough income for them to eventually purchase a home in the suburbs. Cana recalled, "being the first Black family that moved out of the city limits" and in to the suburbs as a positive experience for the entire family, a sentiment echoed by her mother whose assessment of their new neighbors was "the White people in this town treated us very well." Throughout her childhood, the mixed messages Cana received from her parents had a lasting effect on her self-concept, on one hand she was made to feel "that [she] wasn't anything," partly because of her father's lack of care and interest, while the treatment she received from her mother was more positive because she neither shared nor reinforced these damaging beliefs. Consequently, Cana struggled with issues associated with self-confidence and worth during her childhood in part she believes because of a lack of positive affirmation and emotional support from her father.

Describing another challenging time of her adolescence which occurred after her parents divorced, Cana shared that her "mom moved to different parts of town, in order to do what she needed to do." Recalling a time during her sophomore year in high school when her mother position was terminated because of a plant closing, she recalled they were forced to relocate to another Midwestern state to live with extended family. Unlike her older sisters who were legally able to remain on their own, Cana had no choice but to move with her mother. As a result, she spent her junior and senior years of high school adjusting to a new home and school, both of which she left soon after high school graduation.

### Educational Experiences

Following her sisters, Cana attended a Catholic middle school and upon completing the eighth grade, entered one of the two most competitive high schools in the area. She recounted, “I thought that was monumental...I did not understand the dynamics of it, but man I love saying, ‘I went to [name of school]’ because of the experience I got there.” Participating in extracurricular activities such as the Pom Pom team as a member and choreographer was how spent the majority of her time outside of the classroom setting. The educational experience at this high school provided opportunities for her to excel not only in the classroom, but in extracurricular activities as well and, in fact, she shared, ‘this is where my leadership began.’ As mentioned earlier, however, she had to finish her high school experience at another school in a new area, a place that she “hated” and in fact “the day after graduation” immediately returned to where she was raised until she began college in the fall.

Beginning with a typical college student-related dilemma, Cana described her process of selecting a major, she vividly recalled,

The academic counselors were not encouraging, they were not helpful, they would not help me in regards to figuring out what I needed to do to transition into this program, and what I needed in order to make sure I stayed in this program and I so got very frustrated and very discouraged about that major.

The lack of guidance and support spurred her to begin the process of identifying other potential majors and more supportive departments, a search which eventually led her to African American Studies. Here, she encountered an inviting and receptive community, characterizing the people in the office in the following manner,

[They were] receptive to me, they answered my questions, they told me what I needed to do if I chose African American Studies to be my major. A part of me really latched, initially, onto how they took care of me, in [the] African American Studies department, as far as helping me to figure out what in the world I needed to do.

After selecting a major, and becoming involved in extracurricular activities, she noted, “I wasn’t in student government, but I was affiliated with ethnic programs and services and different student organizations that were attached to that.” Therefore, she spent her time involved with organizations, which focused on the needs and welfare of African American students. During this time, she met a male administrator who continues to serve as a role model today. She remembered that

He was kind of a major force in my leadership...if I need [ed]any advice or need [ed] a letter of recommendation, he tells me, “Send me your updated resume, whatever you need, I gotcha.” I think it has been ten years basically as far as my undergrad is concerned and he is still there for me.

Throughout her undergraduate experience Cana was able to resolve academic issues with the assistance of supportive counselors, friends, and family. Cana’s graduate school experience was less challenging, as she noted, partly because of her ability to use the navigational skills she acquired as an undergraduate.

### Leadership Experiences

Learning how to adjust to personal and educational changes as a young child, identifying and securing employment opportunities as a teenager, becoming a leader of the Pom Pom team in high school, identifying academic assistance in college, involvement in social organizations as an adult, seeking the advice of mentors and working in the field of

student affairs are all markers along Cana's leadership journey. Following are specific examples in which she has exhibited leadership qualities in the various projects she has either developed on her own or with the assistance of others. As an undergraduate Cana recalled working with a student to

“develop this organization and basically we had sisters sessions, [and] talked about different issues that we as Black women face. And, it was a safe haven for us to come together and to network and to talk and dialogue about what we were going through.”

By establishing this organization with a fellow student, Cana illustrated her ability to recognize a need and work with others to create a safe space on campus for other students. These collaborative skills became part of the leadership repertoire which she continues to use as a professional.

As a student affairs professional, Cana advised a student organization that provided another opportunity for her to cultivate leadership and programmatic skills. She stated,

Basically, it was a student recruitment organization and it grew under my leadership to where it was the largest student organization on the college campus. And they [students] assisted with a variety of different thing, they helped out in the office, where we had different things going on there. We had things called cultural caravans, where we took students on the road with us, to talk about [name of college], but also the importance of higher education, and the importance of going to college. We would pretty much go to high schools, recreational facilities in the inner-city, and just go around and dialogue with students. We also had something called a speak out session, where we had students from different organizations in the community and invited them on campus, and then in our African American Cultural Resource Center

we [discussed] various topics, relationship issues, anger management, conflict resolution.

While in her current position, she worked with grant money received from the President's office which enabled her to focus on projects that "develop[ed] relationships with the community.... I created a scholarship and it focused on breaking down, tearing down walls...to eliminate the barriers to a quality education, and it was geared toward the ministerial community." Cana's role in other projects consistently illustrated the importance of being proactive and finding a way to make things happen. Finally, a number of Cana's leadership activities were positional in nature, such as serving as a hostess at a restaurant or establishing a campus organization with another student, while other leadership activities involved engaging in conversations with mentors or attending workshops that highlighted the importance of particular life skills. Regardless of the type of activity, each one offered Cana invaluable lessons about perseverance, self-confidence, and resiliency; attributes clearly present in her life today.

#### Lauren Thomas

Absolutely everything appeared in place, in Lauren's office, every item including paper trays, books, and folders in her office were arranged in a neat and orderly manner. The absence of disorder and disorganization paralleled Lauren's preferences with issues dealing with orderly space and other issues such as clarity in writing and presentation,

I am very what I called idiosyncratic, I want all the i's dotted and the t's crossed and you know I don't like ampersands, I don't like word breaks on syllables, I like printed paragraphs to be fully justified, I want signs to look a certain way, I want the area to be neat.

Even throughout our meetings the orderliness that was apparent in her work space also began to surface in the various stories she shared about her childhood, college, and work experiences, portraying a life that unfolded in a structured and predictable manner with an occasional surprise along the way. Steady, calm, and composed described Lauren's demeanor during our conversations regarding her leadership journey. However, depending on the topic being discussed, her eyes widened and her voice periodically fluctuated in order to express favorable or unfavorable feelings. When I recall our discussions, I remember her deep level of concentration and the thoroughness with which she responded to the questions regarding the various dimensions of her life. As she shared stories describing the close relationship she had with her mother and continues to share with her husband, I learned about her various personal, professional and leadership experiences.

#### Childhood Experiences

When asked about her childhood, Lauren responded in a quiet voice, "I have nothing but fond memories of my childhood." As an only child, she remembers spending an inordinate amount time with her cousins. "We all grew up together and we were very, very close, [we were] always over at different ones' houses." Describing the long talks with her mother and social outings with friends that occurred on a regular basis elicited such positive reactions from Lauren it was difficult to completely capture in words. When asked if she desired siblings, she stated, "I never wanted brothers and sisters, people used to always say 'don't you want brothers' and I would say, 'No, no, then I would have to share,'" a response that evoked a laugh from both of us.

Raised primarily by her mother in a predominantly black neighborhood in a medium-sized Midwestern city, she shared,

My parents divorced before I could walk. I never knew them together, so I was not traumatized by the fact that they were divorced. You know, I never thought of my parents as a couple, and I could, I never tried to make them a couple because I never even imagined [as a couple]. I thought that they were so different that I couldn't imagine that they were ever married, they seemed so different.

Perhaps Lauren was not impacted by her parent's separation because the event occurred so early in her life or because she also spent summers with her father and his girlfriend, both of whom fueled her interest in pursuing a doctoral degree and becoming involved in Greek-based organizations. Whatever the reason, she enjoyed the visitation arrangements of spending time with her mother during the school year and her father during the summers. When asked to describe her mother, Lauren softly replied,

My mom was just very, very supportive, very, very supportive as I looked back. I always thought of myself as very much different than my mother, she was very, very quiet, very much a loner, [she] didn't go anywhere. She just really didn't do anything, didn't have much interaction, she had a couple of friends and that was it. I happened to be in every organization, and she was definitely not an organizational person. I'd always be under her, and she was always so encouraging, and always there because she didn't go anywhere. She was always there for me, she worked nights, because she wanted to be there for me during the day. She always used [to] tell me, and I just never would believe that she was telling me the truth. She used to always tell me how smart I was, how beautiful, and she always believed that, she believed that. I just loved her to death, didn't always understand her, because I always

thought she needed to go somewhere, and she was always used to tell me, “I don’t need to go anywhere.”

Apparent in Lauren’s account of her relationship with her mother is a sense of emotional intensity and depth that is sorely missed since her passing a year ago. In terms of her father’s influence, she mentioned that “my father influenced me because of his educational attainment.” He had obtained a medical degree, to which she added, “I was very, very impressed with that.” Receiving positive messages from parents primarily from her mother, spending time with family and friends led to Lauren feeling affirmed, loved, and valuable throughout her childhood and adolescence years.

#### Educational Experiences

Lauren’s interest in school and graduate school was fueled in part by her father’s girlfriend, who had her Ph.D. She stated, “I knew I also wanted to get my Ph.D and [I] didn’t know really know in what, but I wanted to do everything that she [my father’s girlfriend] did.” The pursuit and attainment of a quality education were always at the forefront of her mind and she realized that in order to enter graduate school, she needed to focus on her studies in her formative years. Apparently Lauren did focus on her educational development because she graduated first in her high school class and was offered a partial scholarship to a private women’s college; she eventually declined after learning that she would only be allowed to visit her home a couple of times a year. She recounted upon hearing the news of these travel realities and restrictions, she simply decided, “I have to find another school.” After being admitted to a college that was located within three hours from her home, she began the process of focusing on her academic development. Both positive and negative reasons motivated her to set high academic standards at college, the positive reasons was her

to desire to emulate her father's girlfriend achievements, whereas the belief that she was not as academically prepared as her counterparts, because she attended an all-black high school underlined her negative motivations, she shared that

that whole thing about inferior schools, came up, in that people kept telling me, "Well you know you [are] not really ready, you might be a valedictorian, but you are valedictorian of East High School, so therefore you are not as prepared as the other people." I kept thinking, I [will] just study hard, and it seems like around every corner people kept telling me stories about valedictorians that went to school and flunked out.

After completing a few quarters of college she came to the realization that she could handle the academic requirements and eventually achieved a childhood goal of becoming a member of a Greek-based organization, and continued to engage in educational endeavors that eventually led to her obtaining a doctoral degree.

#### Leadership Experiences

Similar to the other respondents' experiences, a leadership journey emerges from Lauren's recollections of her life. From participation in school-based activities such as the majorette squad to holding a class officer position her senior year in high school, from joining a sorority as an undergraduate to serving on the Graduate Student Senate, to her current endeavors, which include serving as the Regional Coordinator for an educational advancement foundation, Lauren has accumulated numerous leadership experiences. Part of her journey was based on her early desire to emulate the educational and professional achievements of her father's girlfriend, while the rest occurred because of a personal interest in an issue and lessons learned from attending leadership programs. An example of a lesson

gleaned from a leadership workshop was, “Don’t say no to opportunities, don’t say no,” a message that Lauren cited as a guiding principle in her life.

As a result of these leadership experiences, Lauren has developed what she calls a participatory style of leadership. She said, “ I’ll listen to what individuals have to say about some things [because] I want my staff members to participate and so therefore I don’t just don’t come out and say ‘okay well you need to do this, this, this, this and that’s it and don’t ask me any questions.’”

An interesting side note to her leadership experiences, which I did not observe with the other five respondents, was her strong desire to play an active leadership role in her community, even though this commitment has limited her professional options by restricting her geographic mobility. She shared that

I have friends who are in much higher positions than I am because they have been willing to move to wherever the job is. People can get jobs if they are willing to move, now jobs are not as plentiful as they were ten years ago. [Because] they were able to move around the country, so they are in a much higher position. I chose to stay in [name of city] and that is just looking at myself and knowing what I wanted. I did not want to move around the country, I wanted to stay somewhere and have some roots, I want to be involved in the community

This commitment to the community may have limited her professional advancement, in the field of student affairs, however choosing to continue to identify and pursue higher level of administrative opportunities on campus was how she has managed to make peace with her decision.

### Gloria Smith

Gloria is an individual who describes herself as “a caring individual,” and admittedly attributed this trait “to [a] Southern upbringing, I naturally want to help, I want to naturally get people to understand.” Although I wholeheartedly agree with her personal assessment, after spending time with her, I would add that she exudes a degree of care, usually associated with motherhood, in addition to the Southern region of the United States.

During our first meeting, I sensed that Gloria initially viewed the presence of the tape recorder as an unwelcome guest in the room, as we continued to spend time talking about her experiences, her uneasiness slowly dissipated. While meeting with her in a conference room on campus and discussing various topics, I concluded that she was someone who cared deeply about the well-being and welfare of family, friends, and students. On numerous occasions, Gloria described how becoming a mother at an early age affected her as a person and leader. Listening to Gloria’s stories confirmed my own assumptions about how important it is for her to focus on caring for other people.

#### Childhood Experiences/Family Life

Until the age of thirteen, Gloria and her three younger siblings lived with their mother and stepfather in a small southern town with a population of less than four hundred fifty people. Gloria described her mother as “domineering” and shared that she would not let her interact with other children, a decision that was quite baffling to her. Gloria wondered, “Maybe it was because I was the first, you know, I am not sure if she didn’t want me to get hurt, didn’t want me to socialize with the underclass” but for whatever reason, her mother was overly protective of her during this time period. As a result of this decision, Gloria stated, “I had to learn...I think social skills later on....I feel that I am still developing those

social skills.” In terms of her father’s role in her life, she mentioned, “I never knew my father, I know of him, I just never knew him so he really didn’t have an influence on my life.”

When she was thirteen, the family relocated to the Midwest—a transition that she describes in the following manner,

I went from a predominantly all black school to a predominantly all white school and that, in itself, was a transition. I didn’t realize how much, until I started school, and I started interacting [with the students]. I don’t think I skipped a beat, but at the same time, that was a cultural shift for me. Even in looking at the community, living in the area that was predominantly black and then switching. As far as growing up though I had some friends, I didn’t play sports, I wasn’t an honor student. I think the only thing that kept me motivated was my mom and she didn’t want me to bring home any C’s, that is all she knew. She was a force to be reckoned with, so I made sure that I didn’t bring home any C’s, and if I did there were only a couple.

Shortly after finishing high school, Gloria entered a new phase of her life, when she became a mother at the age of nineteen, a challenging but exciting role she approached in the following manner,

“I am very involved in what they do. My daughters will tell you probably too much, I was involved in boosters, and coached some of the local volleyball teams, basketball teams, attended all the track meets. One daughter was in dance, one daughter played college ball, so [I was] very involved in their lives and I wanted to make sure that they were on the right track and whether it be a college track, whatever their track was, I wanted to make sure that I had some influence in what they did, and how they

kind of matured through their lives. Again my mother, it is not because she didn't want to [do these things], it was because she did not know how to and I know how to."

### Educational Experiences

"I don't think I skipped a beat, but at the same time, that was a cultural shift for me," is how Gloria describes the transition from a predominantly black middle school to a predominantly white middle school, when she relocated to the Midwest as a teenager, however she was able to successfully deal with these changes. The high school experience was void of traditional events such as proms and dances, in part, because she had other responsibilities, she shared,

No, I wasn't [involved in extracurricular activities] and I am not sure why [I] wasn't, I didn't seek [them] out. I know that I joined drama, and I participated in that, but that was for a class, it was for Liberal Arts. I worked at a Records Center for my stepfather, I think it was [the] 10<sup>th</sup> grade and it was almost every day and it was right after school. I didn't really have any time to do any after school extracurricular activities.

After completing high school, Gloria became a mother, an experience that, although rewarding and fulfilling, could have potentially been delayed, if she had received guidance from the school administrators or parents regarding other options.

As I looked back on [high school], had I known and been encouraged to go to college after high school, I would have pursued that. Because no one actually approached me, the counselors did not approach me, no one said, "Now what would you like to do when you get out of high school?" No high school official approached me in that

direction, if they did it was probably in a group setting and I thought they were talking about other folks [and] it wasn't for me. I didn't pursue it because I didn't know that there was something offered to me and then I found that out later in my life as an adult with children that I could pursue a higher education. I started out in small increments. It wasn't like I decided to go to college and go through it in four or five years, it was in small steps. I started out as getting a certificate in retail, I went to school for a year, Monday–Friday, 8-5, got my retail certificate, got a job. Later I decided to go back to school, got my associates, [and then] go get a job. [Then] with my bachelor's, I have a job, now I have been accepted into the Master's program, which is fantastic, I never thought that I would pursue that, so I am very excited.

Although her formal educational development did not unfold in a sequential manner, she has been able to obtain her educational goals by taking things one step at a time.

#### Leadership Experiences

“You know it is very interesting because I don't see myself as a leader,” Gloria shared as we began to explore topics related to her leadership experiences. A similar comment had been expressed by another respondent in the study who had a similar educational and professional journey as Gloria. Therefore, when I heard her response, I immediately thought she felt this way because she had defined leadership as positional as opposed to non-positional. Gloria's life story is replete with leadership qualities that are clearly evident in the various roles she has played, specifically as a teenager, mother, and professional. For example, when describing her responsibilities as a store clerk when she worked with her stepfather, she mentioned that, “I was the salesperson, I ordered the records, and I would sell them to customers, and I would stock the shelf and that is what I did. I was a

sales person/receptionist/customer service.” She described several work roles with elements of leadership-related responsibilities, which included interacting with other employees and meeting the needs of customers, skills that are critically important if one wants to be an effective leader. Additionally, when asked about the role she played in raising her children, she shared,

I coached volleyball, basketball team, first graders, second graders, third graders and it was either the assistant coach or I was the coach depending on who stepped up to the plate at what season. I would schedule meetings, I would schedule times that we would practice, go over plays, do whatever a coach would do to get his team together or her team together rather. [As Gloria continued to discuss her role in her children’s lives, as they entered middle school and high school, she added] I know that I graduated in 2000, and I am trying to think about the age of my children, I know that I was involved in so much, and I [am] going to say ‘yes’, if I wasn’t coaching. I know that I was heavily involved with the booster club. I actually think [for] a couple of years, I organized outings to some of these amusements parks that we have around town, and so I got the athletes together, arranged for the bus to pick them up, got some spare money for their event when they went to [the] amusement park. I arranged for carpooling for four years, I was heavily involved in boosters, and I arranged for little certificates from the local community. Whatever they had to give, I would quickly go pick it up, whether it be a certificate to a restaurant, whether they were giving out little goodies, whatever they were giving to the athletes, I arranged to go to pick up those items, and then I would use those as little prizes during the receptions.

Again, the programmatic skills that she developed by coordinating events for her children and other team members, or Gloria's willingness to serve as a coach for the various teams offer a different interpretation to her claims that she is not a leader. Furthermore, as a Student Affairs Administrator, she is challenged on a daily basis to render services to the campus community, a task that she immensely enjoys and wants to continue in the future. Again, either serving on a committee, coordinating a campus-based initiative, or listening to students discuss their anxieties about school and life, her leadership experiences are manifested in her personal and professional life.

#### Themes

Personal leadership approach, professional experiences as mid-level experiences, professional challenges, and support structures were the four themes that emerged in this study on leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators. The first theme, respondents' leadership approaches, encompassed issues such as their individual leadership approaches, definitions of effective and ineffective leaders, and the levels and perceptions of race and gender on their leadership experiences. The second theme addressed the respondents' professional experiences as mid-level administrators, focusing on issues such as the need for training on institutional policies, the hiring and terminating processes, interaction or lack thereof with senior level administrators, and the respondents' desire for additional professional development opportunities. Professional challenges was the third theme that focused on supervisory issues and fiscal resources. Support structures the respondents used to minimize some of the challenges confronted in the workplace was the fourth theme.

### Personal Leadership Approach

Five different leadership approaches characterized and informed the six respondents' leadership beliefs and practices. Specifically, leading by example captured Shelley and Yvonne's leadership approaches, while leading from the heart, servant-based, participatory and motherly best described Joi, Cana, Lauren, and Gloria, respectively. Abiding by the same standards and expectations they set forth for employees is how Shelley and Yvonne expressed their understanding and commitment to the leadership approach of leading by example. Offering a more detailed account of this approach, Shelley stated that,

I think leading by example is really good, it [is] what I tried to do. I'm not going to say 'x,y, z, thing' and then everyone [says] "let's do this x, y, z thing" and then me not do anything. You know you have to be willing to get in there and get up to your elbows in a whole bunch of muckety-muck if you [are] going to make something happen. Because that encourages other people that they should be in the muckety muck: "If my leader is there in the muckety-muck, then surely me on the outside looking in, can be equally as involved."

Echoing similar sentiments, Yvonne noted,

I try to lead by example. I am not the kind of person in terms of my staff, I don't want to tell them one thing and I am doing the opposite. So if I am asking them to produce quality programs, whatever, I want to make sure that I am producing quality programs."

Shelley and Yvonne's responses regarding their leadership conceptions provided a description of their personal leadership approach in terms of attitudes and aligned behaviors. For example Yvonne wanted to "produce quality programs," partly because it was an

expectation for her staff and as she explained, “I don’t want to tell them one thing and I am doing the opposite.” While echoing similar sentiments, Shelley also recognized the potential behavioral effect of this leadership approach on members in the organization by noting how “encouraging it was for employees to see their leader equally engaged in various tasks.”

Noticeably absent from Shelley’s and Yvonne’s comments was a desire to send messages conveying the differential performance standards for supervisors and employees, or to use their leadership position as a means of differentiating themselves from their staff members. For them, their leadership beliefs and practices were used as a means of communicating their commitment to an example-based leadership approach, and one of its underlying messages was the importance of everyone, regardless of title or position, meeting similar work standards.

For Joi, Cana, Lauren and Gloria, leadership approaches were based on leading from the heart, servant based, participatory, and motherly, respectively. Leading from the heart is the notion that careful consideration is given to the impact that decisions can have on others within the organization. Joi noted that, “You think about the people, what you are doing and how those people are affected [by decisions] when you lead from the heart.” Sharing the following incident as an example of the usefulness of this approach, Joi effectively explained its centrality to her on decision-making processes. About a year ago, giving no warning or notification of any type to Joi and her fellow co-workers, a small group of senior student affairs administrators at her institution not only made a decision to remove an administrator from her division, but then demanded full acceptance of the apparently handpicked, although legally hired replacement. Reflecting on the negative impact of this specific event on herself and others, while simultaneously acknowledging the missed opportunity of achieving a more

positive and well-received outcome, Joi pondered what might have happened if the campus leaders had utilized an approach more aligned with leading from the heart in their decision-making process. Although it is naïve to assume their decision would have automatically produced a favorable response if Joi and her fellow colleagues were made aware of the pending decisions, a possible reaction from Joi and her co-workers could have been less frustration with and resentment of senior student affairs administrators, coupled with a more receptive and welcoming attitude to the new appointee. Therefore, considering the potential impact of decisions on others prior to rendering the decision is the guiding principle of leading from the heart, which, in Joi's estimation, often increases the likelihood of acceptable results for those involved.

Cana introduced another leadership conception—a servant based approach—where leaders are actively focused on the needs of their constituencies, including their staff members and ensuring they are met. Describing her leadership beliefs, Cana emphatically stated,

I have learned the difference of wearing the title, and I have also learned the difference of wearing the towel. [This approach] speaks Biblically to where there was a time where Jesus washes the feet his disciples and how his disciples looked to him as the leader. You are Jesus, you are teaching us all of these astronomical things and we are leaning toward your leadership. And yet he came out of the realm and he bowed down and washed the feet of those that he was, quote and unquote, leading. And I think too often we get too caught up in the clouds and prestige to where we don't have a clue of who we really are and where we are really at and when you don't lose

the message from the title to the towel example, that is where your true effectiveness comes into play.

Elaborating on this notion of a servant-based approach, Cana offered a personal account of the relevance of framing leadership in this manner,

Because to me when you are in a leadership position in all actualities, it ain't about you... it is about those that you are influencing and those that you are impacting, those that you are inspiring, those that you are empowering, that's what it is all about. So it is not a me thing, it is really about the serving spirit.

Apparent in Cana's remarks was a keen awareness of the leader's specific role when working with fellow employees. For her it was more important for leaders to have a positive impact on others than to pursue individual gains and achievement and that leaders regularly engaged and solicited feedback from employees in order to determine the most appropriate and beneficial way to serve them. Furthermore, while emphasizing the danger and significance of not losing the message of the difference between the "title" and the "towel," Cana also connected this awareness to the effectiveness of leaders by noting that remembering this simple, but powerful message, one's effectiveness increases as a leader, while implying that the converse yields opposite results. Additionally a spiritual connection emerges when she compares her leadership approach to how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples; individuals who, in this context, were in non-positional leadership roles. Therefore, embracing a "serving spirit" is a foundational element of Cana's leadership approach.

Participatory leadership was another leadership approach proffered by Lauren, who discussed exhibiting this behavior in her interactions with colleagues and subordinates. In a quiet voice, she shared, "I am a person that listens to what people say, I want to hear

individuals' input. I am not very autocratic, I don't just say 'this is it' or 'that is how it is.'" Soliciting and acknowledging the voices and concerns of the employees during staff and one-on-one meetings is how Lauren exhibits a participatory approach to leading and rendering decisions on departmental issues. Within this approach is an implicit desire to engage and interact with others in order to ensure their voices are heard and honored. Another element to this approach is she also publicly acknowledges employees who offer suggestions in meetings that lead to the development of a better product and service, a practice that reinforces her commitment to receiving feedback from staff members. Lauren's commitment to continually seeking the opinions and at times implementing and crediting the ideas of her staff members sends a message that her staff members' active participation is meaningful and important.

Finally, Gloria noted that raising children informed the leadership approach that she employs, while engaging with students and fellow colleagues,

I think my leadership style [developed] by forming relationships with my children and guiding them you know as they matured, ... I can use those skills working with college students: "How can I best guide my child?"

Noting specific examples of this approach, she added,

I often will direct people, and I listen to individuals, I encourage feedback, I encourage questions, once I give directions, you know I insist that they come back to me, if they don't understand the directions I have given them. I like hearing what others have to say, I like getting their input.

A welcome by-product of using this approach was identified by Gloria, who shared,

students often think of me as someone who is very caring, nurturing, someone who definitely wants to make sure they have the best possible experience while they are here. They really depend on me, and that is important to me.

Using behaviors often associated with parenting such as support, nurturing, and care is how Gloria's leadership conceptions manifest themselves in her daily interactions with students. Presenting challenges to students with the understanding they are able to request additional assistance and guidance from her is one of the ways that her motherly approach surfaces in the work setting. Engaging with students in this particular manner is important to Gloria, partly because she wants to ensure that students have optimal experiences while on campus. Additionally the ease with which she appears to discuss these motherly qualities can be linked to her own experiences of being a mother who desires similar outcomes for her own children.

When I examined the six respondents' leadership conceptions, two terms—*collective* and *heterarchical*—emerged, which I believe encapsulates their respective leadership approaches. Although the similarities and dissimilarities that exist in the respondents' interpretations of these two approaches are reflected in their daily practices, the prevailing message gleaned from the respondents' leadership characterization is their commitment to ensuring involvement from others. Participatory, servant-based and motherly, and leading from the heart leadership styles convey a message that both leaders' and employees' concerns and ideas should be sought and taken into consideration, instead of solely relying on one individual who occupies a positional leadership role. Therefore, leadership behavior that is an integral part of this collective approach to leading are soliciting feedback from employees and students, listening to employee needs and concerns, actively participating in

projects with employees and students, while providing guidance and direction in the department.

Second, a heterarchical form of leadership was apparent in how Shelley and Yvonne described their individual approaches. Both of them spoke of behaving in manners that reflected their beliefs that full participation was an expectation of all members of the organization, regardless of title or position. Although Yvonne and Shelley were in positions of authority and power, they both expressed a desire to illustrate to others their willingness to assist in various projects and tasks. Additionally, they were both cognizant of their roles and duties in their current positions, the message to employees and students was their work-related behavior mattered not their position or status. For them, maintaining different standards of engagement by students, employees, and supervisors was incompatible with their leadership approaches.

Heterarchical and collective leading encompass primary aspects of the six respondents' leadership approaches, thus providing a general framework to continue exploration of leadership issues. Rejecting or setting aside a number of the traditional notions of leadership is a message implicitly expressed by the respondents in their descriptions of their individual leadership conceptions. The six respondents subscribe to leadership approaches that lend themselves to more engagement and interactive opportunities with employees, rather than embracing a hierarchical form of leadership, where leaders by virtue of their position are much more limited in their ability to maintain connections with other members in the organization, thus significantly reducing their chances of remaining abreast of their employees' professional needs. An integral element of heterarchical and collective leadership is the commitment to using specific types of interactions (e.g., one-on-one, staff

meetings, seeking input) with other employees as a means of remaining aware of and acting on their needs, ideas, and concerns.

A potential by-product of heterarchical and collective leadership approach is the construction of an organizational culture where participation from all members, not just a chosen few, is the norm. Solicitation of ideas or feedback that occurs within the eleventh hour of a decision-making process does not tend to reinforce inclusiveness and teamwork. The respondents' leadership approaches have the potential of influencing the larger organizational culture if the alternative leadership interpretations and approaches that are grounded in their personal beliefs and values are considered and fostered.

#### Effective and ineffective leaders

Shelley, Yvonne, and Gloria noted a difference between effective and ineffective leaders in their discussions and observations of their leadership experiences. Examples given of effective leaders included personal characteristics, interactions with employees, and their willingness to consider innovative and creative ideas from their employees. Unwillingness to allow employees to explore new ideas, lack of direction, and devaluation of employees were described as characteristics of ineffective leaders. Shelley stated,

I think a trait of a good leader is to be able to make people comfortable [so] that they feel like if I am having a problem with something [or]someone, that here is a person that I can trust, come to, and get sound advice, and get a word that I can use. [An effective leader could] give me something to propel myself forward rather than to have me there, not knowing what to do. [However, ineffective leaders are] people who won't let you spread your wings, people who want to make "mini-thems" and they want you to do everything they say do. They don't want you have any kind of

creative thought, they don't want you to have a new thought, they just want [you] to be a cog in the system.

Highlighting characteristics, such as trust, competence, and a motivating personality, Shelley provides useful insight into her conceptions of an effective leader. Additionally, disinterest in the creation of new ideas and programs, and desiring replication of a particular work style rather than encouraging individuality is how she describes the behavior of an ineffective leader. Shelley's vocal inflections during the conversation clearly indicated her preference for the behaviors associated with an effective leader partly because of the potential benefits, which include personal and professional learning opportunities that come by engaging with an individual who desires to create a win-win situation for everyone.

Highlighting a different dimension to the discussion on effective and ineffective leaders, Yvonne stressed the importance of being able "to motivate and encourage staff to accomplish whatever your department goals [are]" and then defined ineffective leadership as "you smother the people who work for you" and are not aware of what other employees have to offer. For example, she noted

Everybody, even our administrative assistant and student employees, I believe they have something to offer...I think if you don't recognize that your staff has something to offer, I think that's not good leadership. Because you are trying to get them to accomplish goals, and if they don't have a sense that they are making a contribution, they are not going to try. If every time they come up with something, they hear, "What you say doesn't count, it is not important, you are just a secretary," I would describe that as ineffective leadership.

Yvonne noted how effective leaders recognized the role that all members play within an organization, regardless of their title and position. She noted that often the limelight remains on a select few employees, thereby implying that others' insights and contributions are not as important or valued. However, she emphasized a leader's need to engage with everyone, and recognize the contributions of students and administrative staff members who are in roles that often render them invisible. Yvonne's personal belief is leaders should strive to behave in an inclusive manner where everyone's voice and opinion matters.

Gloria added,

I think of someone who knows how to interact with individuals, someone who can defuse any situation, someone who is really good at directing individuals. ... I don't think you can be a good leader unless you know where you are headed.

In Gloria's case, the efficacy of leaders is inextricably linked to understanding one's direction in life and possessing the ability to provide guidance on personal and organizational matters. Individuals, who are not armed with this level of awareness and particular skill set, are characterized as ineffective leaders. For Gloria, one's efficacy as a leader is predicated on a personal understanding of his or her future aspirations, coupled with skills that enable him/her to address and resolve issues present at work.

Overall, these respondents' comments focused on the specific characteristics of effective and ineffective leaders, thereby acknowledging and examining issues often associated with the applied dimension of leadership and the "how to" questions that confront leaders. For example, each of the respondents highlighted specific practices (e.g., encouraging creativity and providing organizational guidance) of effective leaders, while simultaneously identifying behavior (e.g., disinterest in hearing from individuals, who

occupy non-positional or marginalized roles) associated with ineffective leaders.

Additionally, respondents emphasized the importance of constructing an environment where employees feel motivated and supported to actively create and implement innovative programs rather than feeling pressure to maintain the status quo. Therefore, the respondents' discussions of effective and ineffective leaders' practices provided insight into the pragmatic dimension of leadership.

#### Influences of race and gender

The respondents' acknowledgments of race and gender on the construction of their leadership conceptions fell along a continuum that range from high impact to little impact to no impact to uncertainty. Although the respondents noted the presence of racial and gender issues in their leadership journeys, the majority of them experienced difficulties in understanding the impact of both of these influences. Shelley's and Yvonne's responses highlighted the struggles entailed in the respondents' attempts to understand and explicate the role and impact of these two issues on their leadership experiences. Ruminating on racial and gender issues, Shelley shared,

If you don't think [about] being Black and being a woman, when you come to work, then what kind of Black leader does that make you? If you don't have that as your foundation, if you are not coming in saying, "I am a Black woman, and everything that I do is going to be based on being a Black woman," what kind of leader does that make you? "Have I now been so influenced by the dominant culture that I don't think about that [being Black and a woman]?" "I am not saying that is not important because you can't get past that, you can't get past I am Black and I am a woman," but because I don't use that as my foundation when I come in and go to work, does that

make me less of a Black leader than Black leaders whose agenda is to forward the cause of Black people wherever, however, and whoever they may be? I don't necessarily think that it does, because, to me, what it does is that it gives me the opportunity to hear, see, feel, and be influenced on a lot of different levels and not only just being a woman, and being a Black, because there are so many other things, being an educator, being an administrator, being a friend, being all these other things that people need me to be, other than a Black woman. So I want to be clear when I say I understand who I am and I am proud of being a Black woman and I am proud of being a Black woman in a leadership position, but I don't let that determine and dictate how I operate.

Shelley's comments reflect the complexity of understanding the presence and influence of race and gender within and on one's life. Attempting to fully explore and explain the impact of race and gender issues on her life as an African American woman often trigger more questions. Although Shelley recognized the importance of these two issues as a person and as a professional, she struggles with her need to acknowledge additional issues such as being an "educator" and "friend," that, in her opinion, are just as relevant and meaningful. However, while wrestling with the task of examining the personal impact of race and gender, an apparent breakthrough occurred when she proclaimed there are indeed multiple issues that have shaped who she is as a leader, not just race and gender. In coming to this conclusion, Shelley insisted that acknowledging her other identities does not lessen who she is as an African American woman, but instead honors all of the identities that play an integral role in her life.

Yvonne's own uncertainty surfaced about the presence and role of race and gender when she stated,

I am sure it has but I don't know for a fact, okay. And that is because I really try to think of specific examples. I can't come up with a specific example of where I had to deal with something because of race and gender. As an African American we deal with those things so much that there are things that I think that I have become accustomed to. I don't always notice it and so that is why I am thinking it is a difficult question for me. I think that as a African American woman [you have] to prove yourself, in order to be I guess validated or valued, you have to put forth more effort. So I don't know, sometimes I wonder if that is because I am an African American or if that is because I am a woman, or because I am young. You know, I don't know.

The uncertainty presence in Yvonne's voice in this passage reflects her struggles in examining and comprehending the impact of racial and gender-based issues in her life. As she decides how or if race and gender have impacted her leadership experiences, she begins with the declaration of "I think I have become accustomed to" implying that certain things happen so often because of her racial and gender identities, that it is extremely difficult to reflect and describe their specific impact. Encountering a similar challenge experienced by Shelley, Yvonne expanded this discussion to include age as another factor that has also possibly influenced her leadership experiences.

Addressing similar issues as Yvonne and Shelley, but from an organizational context, Lauren added,

African American women have to work harder, and they have to be so much more above their White counterparts to be accepted, to be even seen at the same level, and I

just wonder is that just a figment of our imaginations, is race or gender really an issue, it is an issue, it is the truth, it is the truth, I watch it on a daily basis.

Lauren's comments stemmed from her observations of the manifestation of these two issues in the workplace. Initially, a hint of uncertainty surfaced in her description of the roles of race and gender in her life, but was soon followed with a realization that it is an issue partly because she has personally witnessed the double standards present at work. Producing at a higher level than her White counterparts is one of the ways she has noticed these issues at work.

Attempting to identify and describe the meaning of issues such as race and gender in their lives is a challenging task to undertake. Although the respondents provided insight into their experiences as African American women, each of them brought to the forefront the struggle one encounters in determining the specific influence of these issues—a process that was made even more complicated for Shelley and Yvonne, because of the presence of additional issues such as professional roles and age. Nevertheless, focusing on the impact of issues, such as race and gender, led to the realization that it has influenced who they are as leaders, but the extent and nature of the influence remains somewhat unclear.

#### Mid-level experiences

Emerging as another theme for Shelley, Yvonne, Lauren, Cana, and Gloria was their experience as mid-level administrators. The respondents noted the advantages of their current positions on campus as well as the challenges they confront as mid-level administrators.

Shelley stated,

“Sense of safety” is how I would describe what it is like to be a mid-level administrator. One on hand, you can make decisions about certain things while

knowing that your supervisor ultimately has your back, so to speak. Additionally supervisors often serve as a buffer and can eliminate the red tape that exists on campus. Mid-level administrators have a sense of accountability, but they are not always the individuals who have to address specific issues if they happen to arise.

Additionally, respondents reported that maintaining contact with students was another advantage of their current role. Due to their positions with organizations, the respondents believed they could balance the demands of their job with their desires to continue to engage with students in a meaningful ways. Yvonne noted,

In student affairs, when you are [at the] mid-level you have more interaction with students and that is why I personally got into this business—to help students. I feel that in my position versus being more in the executive position, I have the opportunity to have an impact and possibly and hopefully even an impact on their success, retention and I don't know if I would personally have that type of impact if I was at a higher level.

Shelley and Yvonne's comments describing some of the work-related advantages of their current position reflect the general sentiments of the other respondents. A sense of safety and regular contact with students were acknowledged as two of the positional advantages. First, the respondents experienced feelings of safety and protection from some of the inevitable political battles within a campus community, partly because of their positions within the organization. However, another issue that played an integral role in creating this sense of safety was the presence of a supervisor who provided a buffer. Instead of the respondents having to identify viable solutions to campus wide problems, more often than not their supervisors were the ones charged with the responsibility. Serving as a mid-level

administrator meant they were not on the front lines or burdened with the responsibilities and expectations associated with senior level positions, which led to another advantage noted by the respondents of maintaining contact with students. In the end, the position not only served as a form of protection, but also as Yvonne acknowledged, helped her fulfill her personal and professional desires of assisting students on campus.

Training in institutional policies and procedures specifically as it relates to the hiring and termination process for employees was also described as one of the challenges. Several of the respondents noted the need for additional guidance from supervisors and institutional training from human resources in resolving employment issues. In a number of cases the respondents had to rely on their own limited knowledge in making these crucial decisions. In fact, one of the respondents suggested the creation of a manual and training provided by the human resource office as potential solutions to this specific challenge.

A few of the respondents identified interaction or lack thereof with senior level administrators as another challenge. Due to their positions, mid-level administrators engage more often with entry-level administrators than their senior-level counterparts. However, Lauren expressed annoyance of the lack of acknowledgment of mid-level administrators expertise by senior level administrators in constructing campus-based initiatives and policies. She characterized the dismissal of her and another mid-level administrators' expertise by senior-level administrators as a debacle:

I can give you a prime example, we [have] dates in which we drop [students from classes] for not paying their fees, and let's say that it was December 22<sup>nd</sup>. We had [to] publicize all over the place. It is five days before the quarter begins, so let's say it was December 22<sup>nd</sup>, and so the people in upper management had the idea, "Well shucks

why don't we make it earlier? Now if you don't pay, you get dropped from your classes, so why don't we make it earlier, and then we can open up seats. So you make it a week earlier, well people have long standing thought it was the 22<sup>nd</sup>, and then you are going to send out a postcard or something that it was the 15<sup>th</sup>, but they are prepared to pay on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. So you know us, middle managers, myself, (another Director of a Student Affairs Office), [said] "No, no, no, that is not a good idea, that is not a good idea." It ended up being a big debacle, but they would not listen to us. They won't listen to us and so because it seems like a good idea, but it is crazy and they won't listen. They did admit it, oh yeah they did admit it, after it became a debacle. My concern is that the expertise of those who are in these positions, they are not being listened to.... it happens continuously.

Present in Lauren's comments is an element of frustration with the behavior of some senior level administrators, who, in this case, apparently chose to ignore the advice of colleagues on the front lines of implementing and enforcing policies. More often than not the respondents find themselves attempting to abide by policies created by senior-level administrators, who failed to heed their warnings about the futility of certain policies or did not solicit their professional advice while constructing the policies.

Moreover, other respondents raised concerns pertaining to their lack of engagement with senior level administrators. Several of the respondents noted the importance of keeping the senior level administrators aware of their departmental progress. Summarizing the concerns of a few of the respondents, Yvonne noted,

I feel that in terms of really trying to get across some of the things that we think need to be expressed to people at the top, it does not happen unless we see to it that it

happens. It is very important they know because it also means justification for budget requests and it can also mean justification for having a position, and for having a department. If it looks like we are not doing anything or they are not hearing anything, you know it can have a very negative [impact] on what we do or even our existence.

Another need expressed by several of the respondents was the identification of training opportunities to develop requisite leadership skills for senior level positions. A few of the respondents highlighted the need for campus-based training programs, such as the one described by Cana, as having “tracks for different levels or categories, [for] staff that we have here.” Providing additional suggestions, Shelley stated,

Senior level administrators need to provide opportunities to mid-level administrators in order to ensure they are exposed to conferences and workshops that deal with issues they confront as professionals. Providing money for these programs is another way that senior level administrators are able to demonstrate their support. Also, encouraging mid-level administrators to participate in professional associations by writing articles, assuming leadership roles, and gaining other skills such as grant writing are a few more ways they can encourage and support the professional development of mid-level administrators.

The respondents highlighted a litany of issues they faced as mid-level administrators. The respondents’ descriptions and interpretations of their professional experiences as a mid-level administrator clearly point to the significance and potential influence of their supervisors. Issues raised by the respondents regarding political battles on campus, requests

for additional training in employment issues, and desiring additional professional training are directly and or indirectly connected to their supervisors.

### Professional Challenges

Professional challenges confronted by the respondents fell within two main categories: supervisors and limited fiscal resources. Specific professional challenges encompassed issues such as the lack of public acknowledgment and affirmation from supervisors on an individual and a departmental level, limited professional guidance, and limited administrative and fiscal resources.

Several of the respondents expressed feelings of frustration and disappointment with the lack of public and private acknowledgment received from their supervisors. Cana, who has worked in her current position for three years, mentioned, “You know not one time is anyone saying to me, ‘You know you are a bad sister [implying good], or you are doing a really good job,’ we never ever hear that.” On the other hand, Yvonne’s comments focused on the perceived lack of public support of senior-level administrators for her office,

Every now and then, I would like to hear from the President or the Provost, “That [name of office] is really doing a good job.” Since I’ve been here I have not heard that once, from the top and publicly. My boss might say, “You are doing a good job,” which is good, and he should do that and let us know where we need to be corrected. But it would just be nice [especially] when I am hearing, “Oh, the [name of another office] did this,” it bothers me and once again I don’t know if those things are based on race and gender, but sometimes I think the kind of office we have isn’t really respected like maybe a Student Activities or an Academic Office.

Yvonne continued by sharing that another part of her challenge is ensuring that her immediate boss passes information along to senior level institutional leaders.

I believe this office is doing a lot of great things, and one of the things we really need to do is to make sure that people at the top also know that we are doing great things and so that is where my supervisor would come in, but I have to tell him to do that. I feel sometimes that he should know to do that because if we are successful then it is also a reflection on him. ... I feel that in terms of really trying to get across some of the things that we think need to be expressed to people at the top, it does not happen unless we see to it that it happens.

Whether intentional or unintentional, the lack of acknowledgment often leads to feelings of frustration with their supervisors and, in Gloria's case, triggers thoughts of pursuing other professional jobs. For the past 18 months Gloria has repeatedly dealt with issues related to a delay in receiving a pay raise. After an organizational restructuring, her supervisor promised to increase her salary, a promise that remains unfulfilled almost two years later. As a result of this delay, she shared, "I will have to look at other opportunities if I don't get the raise as promised."

Another supervisory issue raised by Yvonne and Cana was the desire to change the nature of their interaction with their immediate supervisors from whom they desired a greater amount of professional guidance. Recognizing the importance of the development of the supervisor-supervisee relationship and its impact on one's professional journey, Yvonne asked,

"Do I get professional development from my supervisor?" "No, in my opinion. I don't know if that is part of his personality or whatever, but I like him a lot as a

person. But in terms of taking someone under your wings it is not his style, I think, at least not for an African American woman. There is one particular person I think he has taken under his wings, who happens to be a white male, so I don't know if that has something to do with it or not.

When talking about interaction with her supervisor, Cana shared an example that illustrates the tenuous nature of their relationship,

I need to get out of this office because it is not a healthy office environment, with my boss being here and her having the authority, she oversteps it many times, and it undercuts my authority [and makes] me look less than. She will place me up in a meeting with the V.P. [vice-president] and not share things with me or coach me on stuff, but yet and still she will say, "Well, talk about such and such." And I am like, "What are you talking about?" She just did that yesterday, and I was like, "What are you talking about?", and so the V.P. is looking at me, and I don't even know what [to say] but then the conversation just shifted to something else. [I wondered] Why [would] you do that? I am your direct report, you are supposed to be coaching me, and making sure I am on my p's and q's and being a resource for me, when in all honesty, I really feel that a lot of times you set me up to fail."

Sprinkled throughout the respondents' comments was an undercurrent of frustration with their current supervisor coupled with an awareness of how important it is to maintain communication with supervisors and other senior administrators. Cana expressed frustration with a lack of personal acknowledgment of her professional contributions and commitment to the office, where Yvonne noted her concern with the senior administrators' awareness levels

of the status of her office, and Gloria raised the possibility of seeking another position partly because of administrators' not honoring a promise to grant her a promotion.

Initially surfacing within the discussion on mid-level administrators' experiences was the supervisor-supervisee relationship. However, in this discussion of challenges the same issue evokes a different type of reaction partly because of the emotional element present in the personal stories. Hearing how Cana repeatedly felt set up to fail by a person who occupied a positional leadership role, while Gloria's case involved waiting to receive a promotion promised two years ago, the respondents' accounts presented a different perspective on the personal impact of this issue. Based on their descriptions, it was apparent there is a need to explore the supervisor-supervisee relationship, partly because of its professional implications.

Another element that needs to be explored is the emotional impact of these professional challenges on respondents that often manifest themselves in respondents' willingness or lack thereof to remain in their current administrative position. Although only Gloria and Cana specifically mentioned considering other employment options in response to these professional challenges, the possibility exists that others might do the same. Examining professional challenges raised concerns on individual and professional levels, and indirectly touched upon issues associated with staff retention.

The lack of resources was identified as another professional challenge for two of the respondents. Repeated and unexplained denial of requests for additional funding and administrative and secretarial support were identified as concerns by Yvonne and Cana. Yvonne stated, "I know there have been times where I have asked for money and did not receive any additional funding, but yet I have seen other departments receive additional

funding.” Cana shared how her repeated requests for administrative support have fallen on deaf ears,

I manage one of the most key, most crucial areas in the division of student services, yet and still I don’t even have a secretary, but my boss has a secretary whose secretary has a secretary. Then I look at the resources and I see how part-timers in other areas within the same division are switched to full-time and they get full facilities built for them, and they have secretaries and it is just them so you sit back and wonder, “Is it just me?”

In summary, professional challenges for the respondents included the lack of public acknowledgment and affirmation from supervisors on individual or departmental levels, limited professional guidance, and limited administrative and fiscal resources. Implicit in these cases is the supervisor, supervisor-supervisee relationship and its potential impact on one’s administrative effectiveness and professional journey. However, the absence of this supportive and enabling relationship was identified as a central concern for the respondents.

#### Support structures

Spiritual connections, familial relationships, and non-familial relationships were identified as three coping strategies used by Yvonne, Cana, Joi, and Shelley in their attempts to fulfill their professional obligations. Providing an additional layer of support and protection is how their spiritual beliefs have guided each of them at their respective institutions. One of the first respondents to acknowledge the role of God in her life, Yvonne shared “I do rely heavily on prayer, I rely on prayer for decisions that I make.” This practice has been a part of her life for years. Explaining how her relationship with God has replaced her tendency to worry about personal and professional issues, Joi quietly stated, “I know that

God is good, and He will supply my needs and I [just] have to be faithful.” Furthermore, Cana’s spiritual beliefs have served as a way to redirect her attention from her professional challenges to other salient issues such as her physical health:

Half of the time I don’t have time to eat, so by the time I get home, I [am] drained and I [am] eating. Then you go to sleep, well then you are not working that stuff off, because that is probably where I gained so much weight. I am in meetings throughout the day. ... I sit back and look back, oh my God, how I used to be, and I see that I am at a place of peace right now. I had to literally create the peace through my faith and my belief in God.

Reflecting on the meaning of these professional challenges, Cana continued by sharing, “I know it is about the process of pressure because a lot of times when pressure takes place in our life, God is taking us through a process to take us somewhere.”

For the respondents, the various manifestations of their spirituality included praying, reading the Bible and attending church services. Along with the multiple manifestations of their spirituality was a description of the specific times it proved useful in their work setting. Prior to rendering a major decision, addressing a challenge with a colleague or student, and/or attempting to understand a politically charged event on campus were some of the instances when the respondents identified their spiritual foundations as their primary source of support as they attempted to successfully and effectively resolve these professional obstacles. Apparent in these four respondents’ stories is a spiritual connection that has served as an emotional buffer throughout their professional journeys. One of the primary benefits of this spiritual connection for the respondents is their renewed and sustained commitment to meeting and addressing the needs of the campus community—primarily students.

Summarizing the description of the respondents' spiritual foundations, Shelley described how her relationship with God has affected her overall disposition toward others:

I am not walking around toting a Bible or anything but people's spirits make them who they are, and I would hope that the relationship that I have with God and me trying to show Him through my actions and how I treat people, through the things that I do, comes through.

Familial and non-familial relationships were identified as another coping mechanism by the respondents. Parents, friends and/or spouses served a pivotal role in making meaning of and from their professional lives. Encapsulating the description of familial relationships of other respondents, Shelley noted,

I know my family is my support network when it comes to anything that I am doing. I am probably more likely to go to my family, to my sisters, for help and advice and some counsel to help me deal with that, I mean yes, my pastor is there, and yes I can talk to him, yes there are people in my church that I can talk to but again, it is the same thing, you have to feel people out and not everybody, just because they are in your church can be trusted and so you know, I looked more toward my family to be my support network.

On the other hand, Joi and Gloria noted the importance and role of non-familial relationships in their description of their support system. Joi shared, that "although they are not university staff, they still have some insight, and can kind of help you out and see the bigger picture and how you can handle some things, so that is good." Gloria described her support system as consisting of friends who "believe in me and my success" and serves as a sounding board because she "typically bounce[s] ideas off of them and gets guidance."

In each of these instances, familial and non-familial relationships served as a source of support for the respondents who were seeking a safe and affirming environment to process work-related concerns. Critically, no respondents spoke of coworkers as serving this function for them. When in the company of family and friends, the respondents had the opportunity to engage with supportive individuals who were willing to listen, help analyze their current dilemmas, and offer suggestions on how to minimize, if not eliminate, a particular work-related challenge.

Another benefit of familial and non-familial interactions for the respondents was the redirection of their attention from professional matters to other relevant issues and events occurring in their families and friends' lives. Engaging in regular dialogues with family and friends often served as a reminder to the respondents that life is more than their current professional realities. Spending time with their spouses, family members, and friends proved to be an effective and healthy outlet they needed to process and refuel for future professional challenges. Therefore, utilizing these familial and non-familial relationships during difficult times provided another layer of support that assisted the respondents in addressing the myriad challenges present on their campuses.

### Summary of Thematic findings

#### Personal Leadership Approaches

The six respondents in this study subscribed to a leadership approach that essentially served as a reflection of their personal ethos. Present in their leadership approaches was a commitment to ensuring involvement and interaction with other individuals in the organization. Although the categorization of their specific approaches produced five different types of leadership approaches, a shared objective remained the same—engagement with

others regardless of their position. Another by-product of their leadership approach was the sense of congruency that was reflected in their leadership conceptions and their leadership practices as described. For example, the respondents' leadership practices, such as requesting feedback and input and participating in formal and informal conversations echoed their specific espoused leadership approaches, thereby emphasizing their importance of "walking the talk."

Furthermore the respondents acknowledged the pragmatic dimensions of leadership by highlighting specific behaviors that increased or lessened the efficacy of a leader. The ability to motivate others, provide clarity on personal and professional concerns, and embracing innovative practices were identified as traits of effective leaders, while the ineffective leader was described as exhibiting antithetical behaviors. Based on their personal and work-related experiences and beliefs, the respondents specifically highlighted behaviors that differentiated effective leaders from ineffective leaders.

Moreover, each of the responses regarding the perceived impact of race and gender on their leadership experiences indicated an awareness of these issues, coupled with a degree of uncertainty, which often led to more questions regarding other salient issues such as age and occupation on their leadership experiences. The respondents highlighted some of the inherent challenges in determining the specific role and impact of issues that have an intersecting nature. Conducting this type of examination of racial and gender issues inevitably raises queries regarding their individual and collective impact on one's life. However, in spite of the noticeable difficulty respondents had in pinpointing specific manifestations of racial and gender issues, in the end they were able to share their current

understanding and awareness, as well as their continued uncertainties related to their professional lives.

#### Midlevel experiences

Describing their position within an organization that at times evoked a sense of protectiveness and safety, while simultaneously rendering them invisible or at least less influential, the respondents' personal accounts illuminated some of the professional realities of mid-level administrators. As mid-level administrators, the respondents described a sense of freedom from the primary responsibility of resolving administrative decisions within their campus community, a task often reserved for senior-level administrators. As a result, the respondents were able to channel their energy and attention to more immediate employee-related or student-related matters. However, the same positional freedom that released them from participating in decision-making processes was often replaced by the feeling that their expertise and professional opinions were irrelevant or insignificant to others in senior level positions. For the respondents, their positions appeared to be a mixed bag of positive and negative realities.

Furthermore, the respondents shared numerous concerns related to their supervisors' involvement or lack thereof in their professional journeys as well as benefits of feeling partly protected and shielded from the political issues prevalent on their campuses. These observations provided valuable insight into some of the experiences of mid-level administrators. Seeking training opportunities with human resources issues and access to those who occupied senior level positions were a few of the specific issues of concern for the respondents.

### Professional Challenges

The respondents identified limited resources and supervisory issues as professional challenges. Specific professional challenges encompassed issues such as the lack of public acknowledgment and affirmation from supervisors on individual and departmental levels, limited professional guidance, and limited administrative and fiscal resources. The respondents' descriptions of these challenges provided a starting point for a discussion that addresses the supervisor-supervisee relationship, partly because of the direct and indirect relationships that existed between them and the professional challenges identified by the respondents.

### Support structures

Relying on spiritual connections and familial and non-familial relationships proved to be primary sources of support as respondents confronted various professional challenges in their workplaces. Activities such as engaging in religious practices such as praying and attending church service to spending time with family and friends produced an emotionally supportive environment or a place of peace where an examination, comprehension, and ultimately resolutions of their professional challenges could occur. The identification and use of these aforementioned support structures as sites of exploration of professional issues illustrates the respondents' willingness to examine rather than ignore challenges present in their workplaces. Repeatedly, the respondents acknowledged the role, impact, and value of these various sources of support in their professional lives.

### The Lens of Black Feminist Thought.

While conducting an examination of the respondents' leadership experiences using Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) as a theoretical guide, a few connections began to emerge

with some of the tenets of this framework. Six distinctive features of this model, an interpretive framework that highlights intersectionality and the matrix of domination, epistemological claims made by African Americans, and empowerment, (Collins, 2000) constitute the four distinctive foci of this framework. However, several overarching themes such as racial uplift and outsider-within also play an integral role in describing Black Feminist Thought, and it is here where the connections are made with some of the respondents' experiences.

Appearing in African American communities in the late nineteenth century, racial uplift was a collective belief shared by African Americans that the acquisition of education was one way to achieve progress (Collins, 2000; Giddings, 1984). One of the expectations for African Americans in the community who received educational training was to offer assistance, guidance and support to others with similar desires (Collins, 2000; Giddings, 1984); therefore this concept rested on the notion that the acquisition of an education extends far beyond individual purposes and gains. After examining the respondents' accounts of their leadership experiences, one respondent's explanation of her role in the field of student affairs indicated a backdrop of racial uplift. Yvonne noted, "to be honest I am not sure if I am not working with minority students, I don't know what else I would do in higher education." Implicit in Yvonne's response is the sense that her involvement in student affairs is motivated by the much larger goal of the advancement of members of the minority communities, thus it appeared as if her work and professional aspirations were spurred by the goals of racial uplift.

Second, the outsider-within is an experience that African American women encounter within majority organizations. This experience highlights the presence and impact of unequal

distribution of power within organizations and differential impacts members who are not part of the majority group (Collins, 2000). Working at predominantly white institutions, the six respondents were indeed in organizations where they were not members of the majority group. In their personal accounts of their leadership experiences, some of the respondents mentioned incidents where they encountered professional obstacles that could be directly or indirectly linked to their status as outsiders-within.

For example, Yvonne shared,

I don't always feel as if we [her office] always receive the support that I think we should receive...but I know there have been times where I have asked for money and did not receive any additional funding, but yet I have seen other departments receive additional funding.

Describing another work-related experience, Cana had requested a secretarial assistant partly because of the demands of her job, and noted that, "I do not have a secretary but yet and still everybody in this division does...even the secretary [has a] secretary which makes no sense to me." When their supervisors do not provide the same level of support granted to others in similar departments an implication could be that they do not accept Yvonne and Cana as full members of their respective communities. Not receiving monetary support or services available to those in similar positions within the organization not only limits respondents' abilities to fulfill their professional obligations, but might suggest that their supervisors do not view them in a similar manner as other employees.

Furthermore, examining the respondents' leadership experiences as midlevel administrators produces yet another possible connection because of the existence of positional differences with other members of the campus community, namely senior level

administrators. Lauren's example of the approval of the policy change by senior level administrators despite repeated objections from mid-level administrators shows the positional restrictions present for those who do not occupy senior level positions. As mid-level administrators the respondents are members of the larger community, however at times senior level administrators' behavior suggests that they do not have the same privileges as other members.

Another element of outsider-within is the perspective of the outsider within their respective community coupled with their inability to affect their realities. From both an individual and positional view point, Yvonne, Cana, and Lauren recognize the different types of treatments from supervisors and senior-level administrators but were powerless to change the outcomes. Essentially the outsider-within status offers a description of the marginalization process for individuals who are not members of the majority group, which ultimately results in their relegation to secondary status.

Applying Black Feminist Thought to the leadership experiences of the respondents produced some connections to overarching themes of the theoretical framework, although potential connections with the other four tenets were much less apparent this highlights the need to consider additional frameworks when examining leadership experiences, an issue addressed in the sections on recommendations for future research.

Conclusions, limitations, recommendations for research and practice are included in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5: LIMITATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

An examination of the leadership experiences of African American women, who are mid-level student affairs administrators, was the central focus on this qualitative study. The following two questions guided this study:

1. How do African American women, who are mid-level student affairs administrators, describe their leadership experiences?
2. How might the use of Black Feminist Thought illuminate understandings of the leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators?

The theoretical framework for this study drew on Black Feminist Thought and phenomenological research served as the methodology. Information pertaining to respondents' leadership experiences was gathered through face-to face and telephone interviews, reviewing institutional literature and personal documents, and conducting a limited number of observations. Included in this chapter are limitations, conclusions, implications for practice and recommendations for future research. Specific limitations included concerns regarding protocol changes, limited observations, and regional homogeneity.

### **Limitations**

For this study, limitations were presented in the following two categories: (1) limitations pertaining to methods and (2) limitations pertaining to findings. Limited observations of the respondents and changes to the proposed data collection plan addressed limitations of specific methods. Regional homogeneity examined limitations pertaining to the findings.

First, during my scheduled campus visits I spent the majority of my time conducting face-to-face interviews with the six respondents and very little time conducting observations of the respondents in their work settings. Although prior to each face-to-face interview, I visited different parts of campus such as the administrative areas, recreational facilities, bookstores, and student unions as a way of learning more about the campus community, these self-guided tours did not yield the same quality of information or insight as observing the respondents in formal and informal settings. Although interviews, documents and observations are the most common form of qualitative data collection methods (Esterberg, 2002; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 2002), the geographical limitations (respondents lived in another state than the researcher) meant the data for this study primarily came from interviews and documents. Therefore, it is difficult to surmise the amount of information regarding the respondents' leadership experiences that remains unknown, partly because I did not observe them in various settings such as staff meetings, community functions, and personal events.

The second limitation of the study was linked to changes in the proposed interview structure. Initially, I had planned to conduct all the interviews in the respondents' work settings, but due to some of the respondents' experiences of family emergencies and work-related issues, telephone interviews were deemed the best alternative to face-to-face interviews. Consequently, interviews with three of the respondents involved two face-to-face and two telephone interviews. Interviews with the other three respondents involved three face-to-face interviews and one telephone interview. As the researcher, I sensed a noticeable difference between the conversations that occurred face-to-face and on the telephone. When posing questions during the telephone interview that specifically focused on sensitive areas,

such as supervisory issues or promotional challenges, the limitations and impact of the telephone became apparent. In general the responses were comparatively shorter than the ones during the face-to-face interviews. Even though asking follow-up questions yielded more information, I realized the telephone was negatively affecting the depth of the overall discussion.

Another part of my struggle was determining the meaning of the respondents' silent pauses on the telephone, thus I often wondered if they were finished responding to the questions or needed additional time to share their thoughts. Feeling connected to the respondents was also a challenge partly because of the literal geographical distance between our locations, but more importantly, because of my inability to observe their non-verbal behaviors, such as facial expressions and gestures, as we discussed various topics related to their leadership experiences. Despite the limitations, however, the use of the telephone was deemed the most appropriate substitute for the face-to-face interviews, when the other alternatives were either email contact or no further contact with respondents.

Another limitation of this study was the geographical location of the respondents; all resided in the same Midwestern state in the United States. Partly because of the difficulty I encountered locating respondents in my current area and the impracticality of financing visits to several different states, I decided to identify a group of respondents in or near the same area. Contacting numerous colleagues at other educational institutions assisted in the process of identifying prospective respondents for this study. As a way of addressing potential concerns, such as the lack of regional diversity among the respondents, I specifically selected six respondents who were employed at six different colleges, which included four Associate Colleges and two Doctoral Research Intensive Institutions. Nevertheless, interviewing

African American women respondents from different regions might have yielded similar and different personal accounts and interpretations of their leadership experiences.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings reported in Chapter 4, the following five conclusions were drawn.

- Heterarchical and collective forms of leadership practices and beliefs rather than hierarchical were described and exhibited by the respondents.
- Supervisor-supervisee relationship appeared to impact the respondents' abilities to fulfill their leadership responsibilities.
- The positional realities of being mid-level administrators appeared to be a mixed bag of positive and negative realities.
- The formal and informal network served a critical role in respondents' abilities to minimize some of the professional challenges they encounter in their workplaces.
- The confounding nature of racial and gender issues emerged in the respondents' accounts of their leadership experiences.

#### Heterarchical and Collective Forms of Leading

The respondents' leadership approaches and practices denoted a commitment to utilizing a non-hierarchical form of leadership. Exhibiting leadership practices such as listening, soliciting ideas, and acknowledging the potential contribution of positional and non-positional leaders were some of the specific manifestations of their leadership conceptions. Notably absent were non-interactive leadership beliefs and behaviors such as being inaccessible, focusing only on individuals who held positional power within the organization, or expressing disinterest in hearing the opinions of others (Hegelsen, 1995).

Consequently, reflected in their personal accounts of their leadership experiences were some of the ideals and behavior associated with tenets of contemporary forms of leadership such as Relational, Interactive, Servant, and Primal (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Greenleaf, 1997; Hegelsen, 1990; Komives et al., 1998; Rosener, 1990).

Each of these contemporary forms of leadership approaches emphasizes the importance of leaders possessing an awareness of the presence and potential of others within an organization and identifying ways in which to ensure their participation occurs in meaningful ways (Goleman et al., 2002, Greenleaf, 1997; Hegelsen, 1990; Rosener, 1990). Predicated on the following five principles—inclusive, empowering, purposeful, ethical and process-oriented—the Relational model of leadership emphasizes the relational nature of leadership (Komives et al., 1998) Examining the respondents' leadership practices, the connection between their practices and this specific principle surfaces. For example, the respondents' commitment to the inclusion of employees in decision-making processes, listening to the viewpoints of others, and the deemphasization of positional differences are leadership practices that reflect the ideals of the empowering principle of this model. Similar connections emerged when comparing the respondents' leadership approaches to the Interactive Leadership Model, which Rosener (1990) noted, emphasized “encouraging participation, share power and information, enhance the self-worth of others and energizes others” (pp.120-123). Additionally, one of the respondents mentioned that leaders should possess an understanding of the difference between the “title and the towel,” concluding that “a serving spirit” should guide one’s leadership practices; a belief that is a foundational element of Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1997), a model predicated on the notion that the leader’s primary role is to serve his or her constituencies. Finally, Primal Leadership, a

relatively new form of leadership is predicated on the emotional awareness or lack thereof of the leader and its potential impact on an individual and organizational level (Goleman et al., 2002) One of the key elements of this framework is the production of resonance and/or dissonance by a leader (Goleman et al., 2002), which essentially drives the individual and/or organizational emotional compass either positively or negatively, respectively. Examining the respondents leadership approaches, using selected tenets of the four-step model (i.e., self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management), a number of similarities emerged with the elements of social awareness and relationship management. For example, both of these components focused on the importance of consistent involvement with individuals within the organization in areas such as service and establishing connection, which was consistently reflected in the respondents' leadership practices. Some of the aspects of the respondents' accounts echoed selected tenets of the contemporary leadership models Relational, Interactive, Servant based and Primal leadership approaches (Goleman et al., 2002, Greenleaf, 1997; Komives et.al, 1997; Rosener, 1990).

#### Significance of the supervisor-supervisee relationship

The respondents' personal accounts of their professional experiences addressed the various facets and often tenuous nature of the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Concerns regarding the absence and irregularities of professional support and guidance encapsulated the concerns of several respondents. In some cases, respondents portrayed their supervisors as barriers rather than as supportive mentors, who willingly provided professional insight on how to effectively navigate organizations. Not surprisingly, the respondents' accounts highlighted the potentially significant impact of the supervisor-supervisee relationship on one's professional career. Professional experiences are often shaped and transformed by the

involvement or lack thereof of supervisors. According to Bassett (1992), “when supervisors have negative feelings toward subordinates, they may deliberately withhold information or support in order to assert authority” (p. 20). Although in this study, the supervisors’ feelings regarding the respondents was unknown, the lack of supervisory support was noted by several of the respondents. Furthermore, supervisors can provide their employees with career-related information that can significantly increase the likelihood that their awareness and preparation is equivalent to the demands and expectations of a higher level position (Turnock & Cobbs, 2003), so the management of this relationship is critical to one’s professional success. For several of the respondents, the absence of this type of relationship produced additional challenges. For these reasons, the complexities and the continued importance of the supervisor-supervisee relationship merits further examination in future studies.

#### Midlevel administrators

Reviewing the respondents’ accounts of their professional experiences, the benefits and inherent challenges of holding mid-level administrative positions within an academic community become apparent but their professional realities did not appear to severely impact their leadership endeavors. Respondents noted levels of safety from political battles that existed within the larger campus community, opportunities to focus their attention and efforts on students, lack of training in institutional policies, and feelings of professional disrespect regarding their level of expertise were some of their positional advantages and challenges. Finding alternative solutions is how they addressed some of these professional hurdles. For example, in some cases frustration with their lack of administrative power was replaced with

their involvement in endeavors that were student-based, and respondents used their formal and informal networks of support served as emotional outlets.

The extant research on mid-level administrators in student affairs supported a number of the aforementioned issues raised by respondents. First, Mills (1993) stated, “middle managers may have both responsibility and authority in some areas, but they are also charged with implementing decisions from a higher level” (p. 127), a point echoed by one of the respondents who recounted how a decision made by senior level administrators to change a policy had a direct impact on her department. Second, Fey and Carpenter (1996) found the three most preferred methods of professional development opportunities for mid-level student affair administrators were conferences, workshops, and readings. The same opportunities were expressed and sought by several of the respondents in this study. Finally, the respondents in this study brought to the forefront issues that should be examined by senior-level administrators who are in positions that can potentially eliminate or at least minimize mid-level administrators’ concerns.

#### Formal and informal networks

Constructing support structures was how the respondents addressed the professional challenges they encountered as student affairs administrators at their respective institutions. The respondents’ religious or spiritual foundations and familial and non-familial relationships were essential parts in each of their professional journeys. Attending religious services on a regular basis and spending time with family members and friends in formal and informal settings provided emotional outlets for the respondents. Drawing strength and support from each of the aforementioned sources proved beneficial in their quests to continue to fulfill their personal and professional obligations within their campus communities. In

many ways, these supportive and strengthening relationships served to offset or mitigate the lack of institutional support, lack of internal mentors, and issues of isolation. Alfred (2004) characterized the use of formal and informal networks by African American women to process their professional realities within a majority of the places as “retreating to safe spaces” (p. 62). Choosing to construct and maintain formal and informal support system with family (Alfred, 2001; Jones & Gooden, 2004; Miller & Vaughn, 1997), community organizations (Alfred, 2001; Jones & Gooden, 2004), and churches (Alfred, 2001; Jones & Gooden, 2004; Watts, 2004) are a few of the other approaches used by some African American women professionals to enable them to remain focused and committed to their professional and leadership responsibilities.

#### Influence of race and gender

Some respondents noted their awareness of the presence of their racial and gender identities and, in some instances, traced these influences in greater detail than other respondents who were less clear on these issues. Nonetheless, their personal examples of the different expectations for white and black employees, witnessing the perceived difference in the professional guidance of White employees, or attempting to abide by parental admonitions to work twice as hard as others conveyed their current understanding of these issues. In the end, the respondents’ awareness or lack thereof of these issues coupled with their descriptions of its influence on their lives speaks to the intersecting nature of these identities and the inherent challenges that exists when one attempt to conduct an examination.

Studies focusing on racial and gender issues (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Warner, 2005) offered additional insight on how some African American women address and make sense of

these issues. Bell and Nkomo (2001) found that African American women business executives described themselves as being bicultural, a sense of understanding how to successfully operate within two worlds. Although none of the respondents in this study offered similar characterization of their leadership experiences, an examination of this issue within an educational context should occur to determine whether or not or to what extent this is true for student affairs administrators. Few studies have addressed the intersection of race and gender in an attempt to fully explore and eventually gain an understanding of its potential impact on individuals. Therefore, it is imperative these issues are the focal part of future studies.

#### Recommendations for Practice

The following recommendations were based on the findings and conclusions, and from the study of leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators. Recommendations were listed in the following categories (1) individuals, (2) supervisors, and (3) organizations. It is important to note that a number of the organizational recommendations are connected to the Office of the Vice-President of Student Affairs, an office that represents student affairs administrators within the campus community and, therefore, should take the lead role in addressing some of the leadership concerns of African American women student affairs administrators.

#### Recommendations for individuals

*Internal and external career opportunities.* African American women should continually seek additional internal and external professional development opportunities to cultivate and/or enhance career-related skills. Although several of the respondents discussed the need for additional supervisory guidance, it is just as important that respondents take proactive

measures in identifying ways to shape their own career paths. Focusing on additional tasks such as teaching or serving in professional associations may serve as a way of acquiring additional skills that can lead to other employment opportunities and serve to offset the lack of career guidance offered by their supervisors.

*Formal and informal networks.* African American women must continue to construct and utilize their formal and informal networks in order to minimize some of their professional challenges that exist within the campus community. Using these networks on a regular basis should provide a safe place for them to share their personal and professional ordeals, and receive the requisite support and assistance needed to effectively fulfill their professional obligations.

*Examining the influence of race and gender.* Attempting to examine and understand the influence of race and gender on the respondents' leadership experiences provided a glimpse into the confounding nature of these issues. The varied responses to the influence of these issues suggest that these issues need to continue to receive attention. African American women student affairs administrators should participate in individual or group-based discussions to explore how these issues have influenced their leadership endeavors.

#### Supervisors and Senior-level Administrators.

*Using the literature to learn about leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators.* Understanding the leadership experiences of African American student affairs administrators should increase supervisors' and senior level administrators' awareness of the specific roles they can play in meeting their professional needs. Reading publications such as *Diverse*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, higher education journals, books, and non-higher education journals should assist in providing

current information about the characteristic leadership approaches, beliefs, and practices of this segment of the campus community.

*Professional development opportunities for mid-level administrators.* The respondents shared the need for additional training and professional development opportunities tailored to mid-level leadership positions, thus ensuring that mid-level administrators attend professional seminars and workshops must be a priority for supervisors. Providing financial support for programs, such as the Summer Institute for Women in Higher Education at Bryn Mawr, the Regional Leadership Forums sponsored by the American Council on Education, the Donna M. Bourassa Mid-Level Management Institute offered by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), or those specifically targeting women of color, such as the Leadership Development Institute for African American Mid-Level Administrators developed by the League for Innovation in the Community College, should expose mid-level administrators to career-related information to assist them in their leadership endeavors.

*Dialogues with supervisees.* Conversations between supervisors and supervisees focusing on questions such as, “do we know each other” could serve to address the challenges noted by some of the respondents. Supervisors should consider initiating informal discussions with supervisees as a way of conveying their interest in understanding supervisee’s personal and professional experiences; thus indirectly creating an opportunity for supervisees to do the same. A potential outcome of these exchanges for both supervisors and supervisees is the emergence of a community where members are connected on more than a formal or positional level.

### Organizational Recommendations

*Supervisors and senior-level administrators.* The respondents' descriptions of the supervisor-supervisee relationship illustrated a need to offer training to individuals who are currently in supervisory roles. Working with the Office of Human Resources, the Office of the Vice-President of Student Affairs should require supervisors and senior-level administrators to attend a specific number of professional development workshops that examine the supervisor-supervisee relationship, leadership experiences of mid-level administrators, and recognize and address career needs of women and minorities in the workplace. Providing campus-based workshops should help address some of the concerns that exist between supervisors and supervisees. However, supervisors should also attend off-campus training programs developed for Senior Student Affairs Officers and offered by National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) and the American Council on Education (ACE) that directly or indirectly examine similar issues.

*Develop a mentoring program.* The respondents described the role and impact of external mentors in their professional lives but noticeably absence were internal/campus-based mentors which could be provided through a campus-based mentoring program. According to Wolfman (1997), "in many primarily white institutions, black women administrators are left on their own, without mentors, having to learn the institutional culture through observations, guile, and intelligence" (p. 163). By offering an internal mentoring program, African American women administrators are provided opportunities to receive requisite knowledge about the formal and informal rules of the campus community, in addition to receiving professional guidance from seasoned professionals. As Jackson (2001) noted, "this experience will provide knowledge of the political environment that is very important in

terms of acclimating to the campus and its culture” (p. 104). As a way of illustrating a commitment to providing support to members of the student affairs community, The Office of the Vice-President of Student Affairs should direct these efforts.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following were some recommendations for future research studies on leadership experiences of African American student affairs administrators.

The absence of a well-developed understanding of supervisor-supervisee relationships emerged as one of the challenges confronting some of the respondents. Conducting qualitative studies that focus clearly on the tenuous nature and significance of this relationship should assist both current and prospective supervisors and African American student affairs administrators in understanding their respective roles in the development and maintenance of the relationship. Also, due to the potential impact on the supervisor-supervisee relationship on one’s professional career, it is imperative that it is the central focus of future studies. Additional issues that can be examined are potential issues, such as the racial and gender differences between supervisors and supervisees.

Conducting additional studies that include both men and women mid-level student affairs administrators could provide fruitful information on the potential similarities and differences that exist and the relative impact on their leadership experiences. Also, focusing on the role of senior-level administrators in offering professional guidance should produce beneficial information to those who are in currently in these positions and are seeking advice in this area.

Another issue that continues to merit further examination is the intersection of race and gender, and its influence on the leadership experiences of African American women. However, determining the manner in which this examination should occur is as challenging as understanding its influence and impact on one's life. For this study, the focal part of the study was on the leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators rather than the racial and gender identities of respondents. Therefore, conducting additional qualitative studies on the respondents' racial and identity development coupled with theoretical frameworks such as Black Feminist Thought and Critical Race Theory should assist in examining these complicated and multifaceted issues as they relate to leadership issues.

Finally, when constructing future studies, I recommend that the researcher spend additional time with each of the respondents. For this study, due to geographical limitations, the majority of time was spent interviewing the respondents. Spending at least four to six weeks with each respondent should enable the researcher to conduct observations in a variety of settings, rather than solely relying on face-to-face interviews, campus-based literature, and personal documents. Completing several observations of the respondents' in various sites increases the opportunity to learn additional information about their experiences.

From these African American women's leadership conceptions and experiences, a new *map* begins to emerge that offers instructional and beneficial information for current and prospective leaders seeking directional assistance and clarity regarding leadership beliefs and practices of African American women. Although these stories do not represent the leadership experiences of all African American women student affair administrators, the personal accounts of these six respondents offer valuable insight into their professional realities as

members of the campus community. In the end, individuals from similar and dissimilar racial and gender background now have information that may prepare and assist them in their own leadership journeys.

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## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### *Questions adapted from Parker(2005) on Race, Gender and Leadership*

Describe your professional journey to this point in your life?

Leadership experiences within an organization

Tell me about your current position. (Length of employment, responsibilities, opportunities for advancement, organizational structure)

Describe your leadership style and how it has it evolve throughout your life.

Describe the impact of race and gender on your leadership style?

As you reflect on your life experiences, what do you consider the most significant influences on your development as a leader?

What is it like to be a mid-level administrator?

Are there any advantages and/or disadvantages to being a mid-level administrator?

What recommendations/suggestions would you provide senior-level administrators regarding the professional development for mid-level administrators?

What advice would you give to other African American women and/or other women in general who are pursuing similar professional goals?

First, tell me about your family.

What was the size and composition of your family?

Where were you in the birth order?

Tell me about your mother and father (or other person(s) that reared you). What were/are their occupations? What was/is their educational background?

What were their roles within your family? What were some of the important messages that you received from your parents that you feel helped to shape who you are today?

Focusing on high school and describe any critical incidents, significant experiences, persons, or events that influenced your leadership behavior/ development

College years (undergraduate and Graduate), describe any critical incidents, significant experiences, persons, or events that influenced your leadership behavior/ development

What did you learn about leadership from these influences?

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Table 1: First round of interviews: Face-to Face Interviews May 9<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup>

Respondent's name	Respondent #1-Joi	Respondents #2-Shelley	Respondent #3-Monica
Face-to-Face interviews	May 9 <sup>th</sup> May 11 <sup>th</sup>	May 10 <sup>th</sup> May 12 <sup>th</sup>	May 16 <sup>th</sup> May 16 <sup>th</sup>

Second Round of interviews: Face-to-Face Interviews June 6<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup>

Respondent's name	Respondent #4-Cana	Respondent #5-Lauren	Respondent #6 -Gloria
Face-to-Face interviews	June 6 <sup>th</sup> June 9 <sup>th</sup>	June 7 <sup>th</sup> June 8 <sup>th</sup>	June 13 <sup>th</sup> Cancelled the second face-to-face interview Rescheduled second interview for phone interview, July 5 <sup>th</sup>

Third Round of Interviews: Phone interviews- June 29<sup>th</sup>-July 7<sup>th</sup>

Respondent's name	Respondent #1-Joi	Respondent #2-Shelley	Respondent #3-Yvonne
Phone Interviews	July 6 <sup>th</sup>	June 30 <sup>th</sup>	June 29 <sup>th</sup>
Respondent's name	Respondent #4-Cana	Respondent #5-Lauren	Respondent #6-Gloria
Phone Interviews	June 30 <sup>th</sup>	June 29 <sup>th</sup>	July 7 <sup>th</sup>

Fourth Round of Interviews: Face to Face and/or Phone Interviews July 18<sup>th</sup>-August 23<sup>rd</sup>

Respondents name	Respondent #1-Joi	Respondent #2-Shelley	Respondent #3-Yvonne
Face-to-Face Interview		July 19 <sup>th</sup>	July 21 <sup>st</sup>
Phone Interviews	July 29 <sup>th</sup>		

Respondents name	Respondent #4-Cana	Respondent #5-Lauren	Respondent #6-Gloria
Face-to-Face Interview	July 20 <sup>th</sup>		July 18 <sup>th</sup>
Phone Interviews		Cancelled face-to face interview rescheduled for August 23	

## APPENDIX C: EMAIL MESSAGE TO COLLEAGUES

Greetings everyone,

I am in the initial stage of identifying potential participants for a study which is entitled, Leadership experiences of mid-level African American women administrators at two and four-year institutions and I am trying to locate individuals who meet the following criteria:

African American women(student affairs administrators) with at least six but no more than fifteen years of experience at either a two or four-year institution in xxxx or xxxx. (Student affairs is defined as academic advising, admissions, residence services, student activities, minority affairs,women centers, career services, financial aid, etc.)

If you know of anyone who fits this description, please forward their names to me. If you have any questions regarding this study, call me at (515)xxx-xxx or via email at xxxxxxxx. Thanks for your assistance with this study.

H.C.

#### APPENDIX D: EMAIL TO PROSPECTIVE RESPONDENTS

My name is Hannah Clayborne and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department at Iowa State University. Currently I am in the process of identifying potential respondents for my study which is entitled, Leadership experiences of mid-level African American women student affairs administrators at two and four-year institutions. xxxxxx mentioned that you might possibly meet the criteria for my study which is listed below:

African American women (student affairs administrators) with at least six but no more than fifteen years of experience at either a two or four-year institution in xxxxx. (Student affairs is defined as academic advising, admissions, residence services, student activities, multicultural affairs, women centers, career services, financial aid, etc.)

I am writing to ask if you would be interested in participating in this study. If you have any questions, let me know.

H.C.

## APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

### INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Title of Study:** Leadership experiences of mid-level African American women student affairs administrators.  
**Investigator:** Hannah Clayborne, B.A., 1993 Miami University, M.A., Wright State University, 1999

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership experiences of African American women student affairs administrators at two-year and four-year institutions. This study will contribute to the extant literature on leadership by providing description and analyses of their leadership journeys. You are being invited to participate in this study because you meet the following criteria (i.e., African American women, mid-level (no fewer than six years and no more than fifteen years)) as a student affairs administrator at a two-year and/or four-year institution)

#### **DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES**

The duration of the data collection and data analysis phases should last between two to five months and you will need to be available for at least two face-to-face interviews and one phone interview. A fourth phone interview may be scheduled if the researcher needs additional information. Each interview will last approximately 1.5 to 2 hours.

Each face-to-face interview will be audio-taped in order to ensure that your thoughts and ideas are accurately recorded. After the completion of the project (August 31, 2006), the tapes will be erased.

#### **RISKS**

No known risk exists at this time from participating in the study.

#### **BENEFITS**

If you decide to participate in this study there are no monetary benefits for respondents. Constructing a space where African American women can share their experiences within organizations comprised of individuals who are often unaware-intentionally and unintentionally-of their leadership stories and providing information that may be useful in constructing departmental and institutional policies for women of color are two of the benefits of the study.

#### **COSTS AND COMPENSATION**

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

#### **PARTICIPANT RIGHTS**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken (1) fictitious names will be given to respondents and (2) only the principal investigator will have access to the records (i.e., tapes, interview summaries) which will be kept in the researcher's home until the completion of the project in December 16, 2005. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

**QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS**

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact, Hannah Clayborne, 515-292-0298, [hannah@iastae.edu](mailto:hannah@iastae.edu), or my major professor, Dr. Florence Hamrick, 515-294-9628 in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Iowa State University. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact Ginny Austin Eason, IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, [austingr@iastate.edu](mailto:austingr@iastate.edu), or Diane Ament, Research Compliance Officer (515) 294-3115, [dament@iastate.edu](mailto:dament@iastate.edu).

\*\*\*\*\*

**SUBJECT SIGNATURE**

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Subject's Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

**INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT**

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Person Obtaining  
Informed Consent)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## APPENDIX F: ANALYTIC QUESTIONS (Esterberg, 2002)

## Questions about events:

What happened?

Who was involved?

How did the event begin?

How did it end?

## Questions about chronology:

What happened first? Next? Then?

## Questions about the setting:

What is this place like?

What does it look like?

## Questions about people:

Who are the people involved?

What are they like?

## Questions about processes?

What are people trying to accomplish?

How do they do this?

## Questions about issues:

What are the key issues for these people?

What is important to them?

How do they describe what is important?

What language do they use?

## APPENDIX G: LEADERSHIP NARRATIVE

*You don't make progress by standing on the sidelines, whimpering and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas.*  
*Shirley Chisholm, Former Congresswoman*

*No matter what happens, keep on beginning and failing. Each time you fail, start all over again, and you will grow stronger until you find that you have accomplished a purpose-not the one you begin with perhaps, but one you will be glad to remember.*  
*Anne Sullivan*

### Hannah Clayborne-Leadership Narrative

Attending conference workshops on leadership development issues, reading books and articles that highlight the pragmatic and theoretical aspect of leadership, observing my parents raise five children, engaging with colleagues, participating in self-reflective activities, working at two educational institutions and being an African American woman are some of the factors that have combined to shape my own leadership beliefs and practices. In an attempt to share my own journey in this area, the following narrative will highlight and expound on some of these aforementioned events and their impact on my leadership journey.

Throughout the majority of my formative years, I held a positional view of leadership partly because of the impact of familial, educational and religious influences in my life. Observing my parents raise a family of five children was one of the initial experiences that supported my perceptions of leadership as positional. In my home, my parent's decisions regarding individual and family concerns were final. Witnessing two individuals operate from an authoritative position within a family context served to reinforce the notion of leadership as directly related to one's position. With my mom as the nurturer of the family and my father as the provider, a gendered image of leadership also emerged during this period. However, gender was an issue that remained unexamined for the most part until I

entered graduate school, where I had numerous opportunities to more fully explore these issues with professors, colleagues, and friends.

Another place where positional leadership was present in my life was in primary and secondary schools. During this time period, my perceptions of teachers were that they were the leaders. Therefore, I viewed them as authority figures and to some extent I believe a number of teachers held similar beliefs. Within these classroom settings, an ideal place for students and teachers to develop learning partnerships in fact was a space where the “sage on the stage” was the predominant student view of teachers. Regrettably, I, along with some teachers did not acknowledge the importance nor participate in learning practices that emphasized our role as partners or collaborators in the educational process. For the most part students were viewed as empty vessels and teachers were essentially responsible for filling them with theoretical and pragmatic information; consequently, critical thinking skills and questioning teachers’ interpretations of issues were learning behaviors that were not cultivated, nurtured and/or expected until I entered college. Experiences of this nature supported my assumptions, albeit incorrect that leadership was connected to a position rather than based on meaningful issues such as self awareness and commitment to change

Third, one of my first recollections of individuals in an authoritative and leadership position within an organizational context was watching various church leaders, mainly white men lead the congregation in song, prayer and/or a sermon. Since attending church was a weekly ritual for my family, I thought organizational leadership was directly connected to individuals who looked like the majority of the church leaders, who were white and male. In fact I was in high school before I asked my parents about this white masculine image of church leadership; however, I do not remember many subsequent conversations where these

issues were fully explored. Due to few opportunities to examine this racialized image of leadership, questions regarding this image remain unanswered until I began working in student affairs and attending graduate school.

Following are examples of incidents that involve some type of questioning, processing, etc in terms of family influences:

#### *Decisions*

- *My parents made a decision to attend a church that followed a doctrine that I thought was restrictive and gender biased. For the most part women wore dresses and worked at home while men were the primary breadwinners of the family. No televisions (family), no dances (females), no jewelry (males and females), no pants (for the females) is the best description that I can share regarding what was/was not permitted in our home. Questions regarding this doctrine were asked on a regular basis, (especially as we got older) however, the decision to attend the church on a regular basis was made by my parents and that meant it was final.*

#### *Leadership Lesson:*

- *Although I learned valuable life lessons during Sunday school and church services, I truly believe if my parents were willing to explain their decisions, I might have a different perspective regarding their choice to live their life in this manner. Explaining the reasons for a decision does not mean that everyone will embrace and accept your rationale but it does increase the likelihood that that will at least understand why you made a particular choice. In terms of how this influenced my leadership style, I strongly believe effective leaders offer some explanation to why certain decisions are made. Although I am fully aware that the extent of the disclosure is situational, I believe that sharing the rationale for the decision is expected behavior of leaders. In the end, the less secrecy the higher the level of trust.*

#### *Teamwork*

- *Due to the time we spent together as a family, I learned about the importance of teamwork from my parents. My parents stressed how we were expected to work together, offer encouragement (when needed) and provide a safe space for each other. As a result of emphasizing this type of behavior, I believe that we are supportive of each other.*

*Leadership Lesson:*

- *In terms of leadership, I believe the ability to effectively operate in a team is extremely critical to the success of a leader and an organization. Identifying ways to ensure that consensus exists, acknowledging and resolving differences within the group, and creating an environment where the organization can be successful is one of the multiple roles of a leader.*

Graduate School and Professional Experiences

Learning how to adjust to an environment that I would describe as racially, socially, and academically challenging was how I spent the majority of my time as an undergraduate; therefore, the genesis of my leadership awakening, I believe can be traced to graduate school and professional experiences. As a graduate student and full-time professional, I felt comfortable in my surroundings or at least enough to interact with people (both at the master's and doctoral level) who were reflective and opinionated, which in turn sparked my interest in participating in similar activities. Interacting with people in classes and at work who held diverse viewpoints, possessing the requisite skills needed to effectively adjust to different institutional cultures, and a budding interest in leadership issues were some of the changes that occurred during graduate school and as a professional that have shaped my leadership beliefs and practices. Additionally during this period, a number of questions arose regarding leadership issues. Why is this person viewed as effective leader? Why is this organization experiencing problems with retention issues? Are there specific books, articles, reports, or magazines that I can read in order to increase my personal understanding of this concept? Do I have to look, sound and behave in certain manner to be considered a leader? What is leadership? Am I leader? Questions such as these started to develop from all of the personal and professional interactions with people during a span of about ten years. Fortunately journaling, reading books, engaging in numerous formal and informal

conversations with friends and colleagues provided the answers to the majority of questions created by this awakening. Now, I have a clearer understanding of where I stand on issues related to leadership issues.

Following are examples of incidents that assisted in my leadership awakening process at the graduate level:

*Master's Work:*

*Second chances/opportunity/Hope:*

- *My graduate program provided an opportunity for me to pursue one of my educational goals which was to obtain a master's degree in student affairs. As a result of a lackluster academic performance as an undergraduate I truly believed that I would never have a chance to continue the formal portion of my educational journey. Although I knew I could handle the work, my ability was not transparent to a number of admission committees. When I did receive notification that I was admitted in a program, I knew that I had received a second chance, which enabled me to begin a new chapter in my life that involve beginning to rediscover my love of learning.*

*Leadership Lesson:*

- *Taking advantage of second chances and opportunities are behaviors exhibited by effective leaders. Often leaders are faced with personal and professional challenges which lead to a place where they are hoping that another chance comes along their way. I believe that the second it appears it is important to embrace the opportunity while simultaneously making a commitment to avoid repeating the same mistakes. Although I did encounter some new challenges while completing the program, I know that I approached this experience with a greater sense of awareness than I did as an undergraduate.*

*Comfort zone:*

- *During my master's program I remember applying for a summer position in the Office of Pre-College Programs which provided educational programs for middle and high school students. After I was hired, I received notification of a training session for staff members where issues such as student health issues, work hours, staff expectations among other things were to be discussed. During the training session, one of the icebreakers that I participated in was called a trust fall. The objective of this activity is for individuals to either fall forward or backward believing that the other group members will catch you before you hit the ground. Out of all the participants I was the one who struggle the most with this activity. One of the many lessons that I learned from this experience is the importance of moving beyond your comfort zone.*

*In order to experience the fullness of life, I know it is extremely important to continue to move away from what is familiar. For me, I participated in an activity that made me extremely uncomfortable but on the other hand provided an opportunity for me to grow as a person, as a leader and address issues such as trust.*

*Leadership Lesson:*

- *Effective leaders whether on a personal or organizational level are willing to make decisions that move them beyond their comfort zone. Embracing this concept indicates an awareness of the importance and benefits of experiencing the unknown. Leaders who are unwilling to accept the responsibility of seeking new opportunities intentionally and/or unintentionally put the future of the organizational at risk.*

*Doctoral Work:*

*Support:*

- *Beginning my doctoral work, I clearly understood the importance of creating a support system in order to deal with the academic and non-academic challenges of living in small homogenous community. Sending cards, calling several times a week, scheduling informal gatherings are a few of the ways that my support system has provided assistance throughout this process. To me their support is invaluable. Based on my previous professional and educational experiences, I knew that I would not be able to achieve my goal without their support and encouragement.*

*Leadership Lesson:*

- *Due to the emotional and professional demands placed on leaders identifying individuals in their personal and professional lives who can provide formal and informal support is a priority. Without a strong support system, leaders potentially face difficulty time in obtaining their personal and organizational goals. Furthermore, no one makes it alone in life.*

*Learning:*

- *A number of people view the doctoral degree as a ticket to senior level administrative positions. Although this belief has some validity, I believe the most important element of the doctoral process is the learning that takes place during the formal and informal interactions. Reading books for class assignments, making presentations on various educational issues, engaging with other students on team projects and accepting leadership positions within professional associations are a few of the educational activities that have served to reinforce the issue of learning. Life-long learning is a principle that is present in all facets of this program.*

*Leadership Lesson:*

- *Acquiring, developing and enhancing leadership skills is a goal that can be accomplished if leaders subscribes to the notion of life-long learning. Making a commitment to attending conferences, reading books and journal articles, interacting with others with similar interests are some approaches that leaders can used to address this issue of life-long learning.*

Professional Experience

During my seven years in the field of Student Activities at two different institutions, I learned about the significance and impact of effective and ineffective leadership within an organizational context. Observing the decision making processes of leaders enabled me to formulate my own definitions and practices related to organizational leadership. Although it is difficult to address all of lessons learned during this phase of my life, I will share some examples that left indelible marks on my life.

*Self-Worth*

- *One of the most draining but enlightening professional experiences in my life was the process of requesting a raise. After meeting with several campus administrators, I along with two other female colleagues were informed that the decision to increase our salaries would be made at the end of the academic year. Soon after the meeting, the same administrators who postponed our request until a later date, decided to raise the salary of a male colleague in order to match a job offer extended by another university. After learning about their decision, I met with several campus administrators to determine my options. Although I am unable to fully describe this situation, I do believe that this was of one of the first times where I confronted the issue of value as a professional. I knew that I did not want to continue to work in an organization which failed to acknowledge and reward the commitment made by a number of its employees but instead identify ways to retain those who were participating in a job search. Of course, I realized that employees actively seek employment options on are a regular basis, however, the manner in which the situation was handled served as a catalyst to me understanding the process of requesting a raise, knowing my value and ultimately beginning a job search of my own.*

*Leadership Lesson:*

- *The lesson that I learned from this incident is the importance of being willing to ask for what you deserve and more importantly, if the requests are not sufficiently met then having the strength and courage to consider other professional endeavors. Knowing your self-worth is the first step in determining what an organization should be willing to provide to either hire and/or retain your services. Again this is an issue that is not often discussed especially by women but I know this experience taught me the importance of asking for something that I truly believed that I deserved and not allowing my fear of the unknown to stifle my voice.*

*Multiple ways of leading*

- *Another lesson learned from working at two different institutions is that there are multiple ways of leading an organization. Observing individuals lead departmental units through various organizational changes enabled me to understand that there is a space for all types of leaders. Furthermore, allowing leaders with varying styles and beliefs to participate in the decision making process often led to the development of policies and procedures that benefited the majority of people as opposed to a select group.*

*Leadership Lesson*

- *Understanding that there are multiple ways of leading an organization releases any need to participate in behaviors such as emulating those who are currently in leadership roles. Acknowledging that leaders may have varying philosophical stances, skills, and abilities increases the likelihood that individuals who do not fit the stereotypical image of a leader are welcomed as opposed to excluded from leading organizations.*

### Leadership Beliefs

Based on personal and professional experiences, I believe effective leaders understand the importance of the following four issues (1) knowing oneself (e.g., strengths, weaknesses, values, life goals, participating in restorative activities) and establishing and following a personal moral and ethic code, and (2) making a commitment to cultivating, maintaining and enhancing pragmatic skills and continual learning about the educational changes within the field, (3) understanding contextual factors that may or may not affect leadership styles and (4) being able to articulate why they are leading.

On the other hand, examples of ineffective leadership are a lack of self-awareness, completely disengage and/or intermittent interaction with members of the organization, focusing solely on individual rewards rather than considering the organizational needs, failing to cultivate a sense of community, the inability to provide the direction needed to ensure organizational success, and refusing to solicit feedback from colleagues. Although these self-created definitions describe the characteristics of these leaders, they simply cannot capture their impact on an organization. Effective leadership, in my experience often leads to higher level of morale, productive and efficiency; whereas ineffective leadership leads to issues of stagnation, dissatisfaction, and inefficiency within the organization.

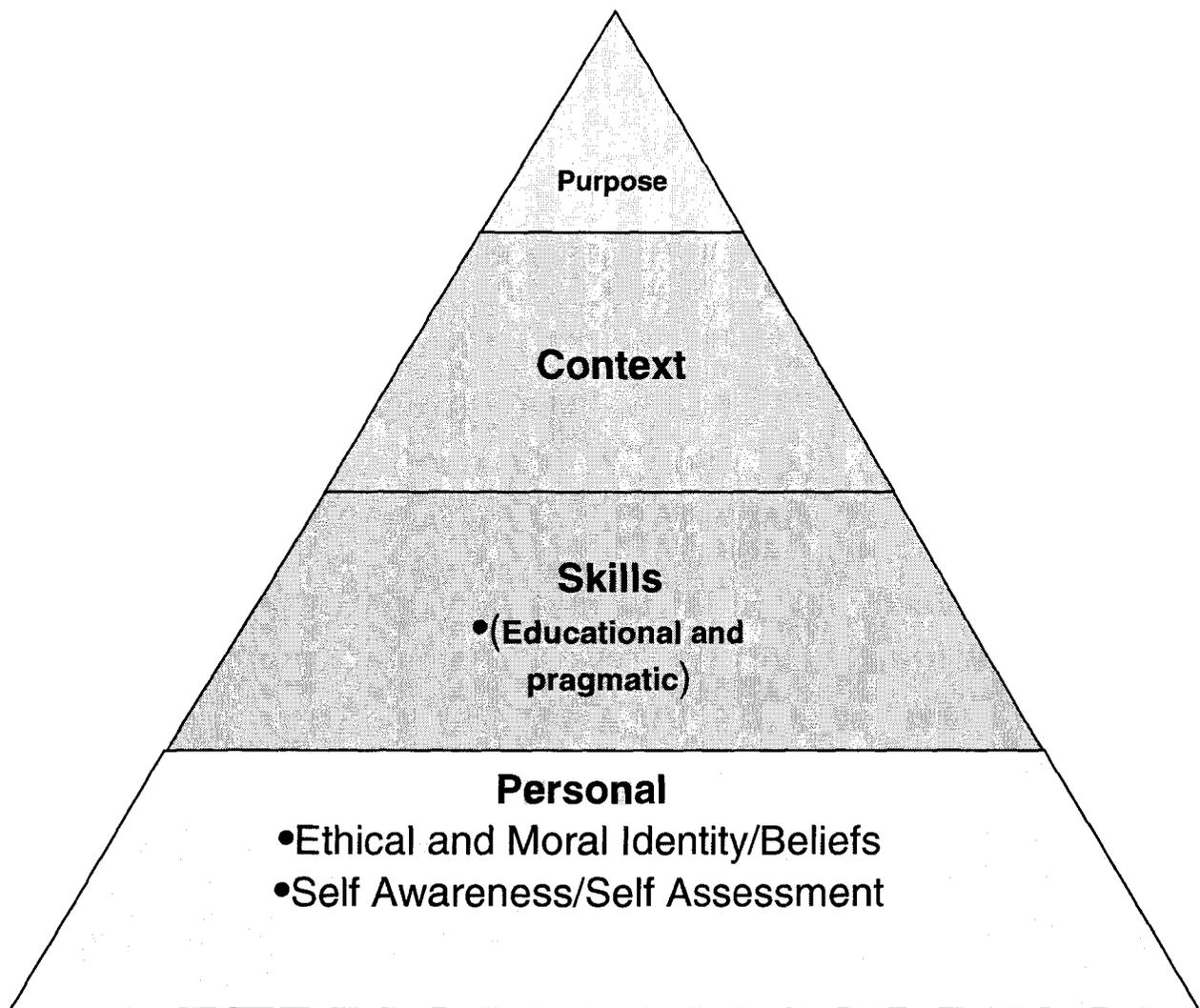
Today I believe that leadership is the ability to provide direction and guidance in any given situation. Using specific characteristics such as listening, motivating, challenging and supporting, requesting and accepting assistance, knowing the difference between using a collective and/or individual decision making approach, acknowledging cultural differences, delegating, negotiating, in addition to operating from an ethical and moral position is the most effective way to provide direction and guidance on an individual, group and community level.

### Race and Gender Experiences

As an African American woman from a working class background, I am aware that my racial, gender and class identity has played an integral role in shaping my leadership beliefs and practices. Attempting to analyze these identities as separate realities prohibits a thorough examination to occur, which results in a limited understanding of all of them; therefore I must admit that collectively they have had a profound impact on who I am as a leader. Due to my membership in these marginalized groups, I am more aware of the feelings

associated with being viewed as irrelevant, insignificant and invisible; consequently when I am in a particular situation such as preparing a co-curricular program, hiring, and other decision-making processes, I posed questions such as, who is missing from this scenario? Identifying ways to ensure that the issues and concerns of everyone are taken into consideration rather than a select few is another approach to addressing these concerns. Utilizing a collectivist approach to leadership by refusing to believe that there is a singular approach to addressing organizational issues is the third way I acknowledge the presence of my race and gender within a leadership context.

As an African woman who is committed to being an effective leader, I rely heavily on conversations, articles and books that provide detailed accounts of other leaders such as my mother, E. Josephine Clayborne, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, community activist Marian Wright Edelman, and educator Kimberle Crenshaw, who are committed to making a difference on a local, state and national level. Whenever I find myself confronting personal and professional impediments their narratives provide the courage, stamina and motivation I need to continue on my journey. Finally, capturing the essence of my leadership development is difficult to do because it is constantly evolving due to internal and external factors. As I continue to learn more about leadership, attend classes, workshops, work in diverse settings, participate in self-reflective activities, my own definition of leadership will expand and reflect the growth and development in this area. As I experience these personal and professional changes I look forward to developing a higher level of awareness of my own leadership abilities so that I can continue to make progress toward one of my goals, which is to be an effective leader on an individual, group and community level.



### PERSONAL LEADERSHIP MODEL

- D. **Purpose**-Why am I leading? Am I meeting personal, group or community needs? What are my goals and intentions?
- C. **Context**- In what setting am I currently in as a leader and how does that impact, shape, and/or influence my leadership style?
- B. **Skills**-educational (classes, degrees, professional development opportunities)  
pragmatic-facilitating discussion on vision, how to effectively motivate people, how to delegate, how to make decisions, budgetary issues, etc.
- A. **Personal** –Who am I? How does my ethnicity, SES, and gender impact my leadership practices? What are my beliefs? Do I understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate behavior? Do I understand the difference between right and wrong? How do I define my ethical and moral stance?

## APPENDIX H: HUMAN SUBJECTS FORM

**IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board  
Office of Research Compliance  
Vice Provost for Research  
1138 Pearson Hall  
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207  
515 294-4566  
FAX 515 294-4267

**DATE:** April 26, 2005

**TO:** Hannah Clayborne  
**FROM:** Human Subject Research Compliance Office

**RE:** IRB ID # 05-233

**STUDY REVIEW DATE:** April 21, 2005

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the project, "Leadership experiences of mid-level African American women student affairs administrators at two-year and four-year institutions" requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b)2. The applicable exemption category is provided below for your information. Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

The IRB determination of exemption means that this project does not need to meet the requirements from the Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects, unless required by the IRB. We do, however, urge you to protect the rights of your participants in the same ways that you would if your project was required to follow the regulations. This includes providing relevant information about the research to the participants.

Because your project is exempt, you do not need to submit an application for continuing review. However, you must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or required by the IRB.

Any modification of this research must be submitted to the IRB on a Continuation and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes, to determine if the project still meets the Federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

cc: ELPS  
Florence Hamrick

## APPENDIX I: REFLECTIVE ESSAY

Learning how to accept the presence of ambiguity, which is an integral element of qualitative research proved to be quite daunting and challenging in the initial stages of the study, now at the end, it is less difficult and more manageable. Part of the reason for this developmental change or shift is that I am now more aware of the meaning of conducting a qualitative study. Arriving at this point in the learning process involved experiencing growing pains, similar to an individual embarking on a new adventure or odyssey, possessing more educational training than actual first hand experience. At times throughout this research process I felt that I was crawling, stumbling, and walking or some combination of all three, however, regardless of my footing during this educational journey, I have learned numerous lessons, which have assisted in the development of a greater appreciation for and a deeper understanding of qualitative research.

The researcher is the instrument is one of the universal tenets of qualitative research (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002) and is usually one of the first lessons shared in an introductory qualitative research course. After conducting this study, I now have a personal rather than an anecdotal understanding of this concept. As the primary instrument, my strengths and weaknesses- individually and collectively-impacted this study. For example listening to the respondents, asking probing questions, and making adjustments when necessary are quite easy to acknowledge and publicly share with others as some of my strengths, on the other hand grappling with understanding Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) in addition to processing personal reactions to the stories and accounts of respondents experiences are self-identified challenges, and are more difficult to share. Nevertheless it must be done.

Numerous times throughout the process I questioned my own understanding of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) and often wondered if my struggles in processing the multiple facets of this theory would negatively impact the study. Attempting to read and review sections of the text often led to the development of additional questions, which on one hand describes the basic principles of the learning process, but at times the complexity and depth of this theoretical framework led to feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Regrettably, I must admit it was not until the latter stages of the study, that I requested assistance in examining the various layers of this theory. Disappointed is my characterization of how I handled this issue. Although today I am more familiar with Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) I am aware that I need to continue to engage in conversations about this framework with other colleagues to ensure that my learning and development continues to expand and deepen.

Another challenge I encountered in this process was acknowledging and processing the emotions triggered while completing the study. During past qualitative class discussions or while engaging with other students conducting qualitative studies, conversation often centered on the emotional element of engaging in qualitative research. In spite of my educational training and frequent conversation with peers, I still was unprepared for the intensity of emotions which periodically surfaced while completing this study. Topics that addressed childhood experiences, current professional challenges encountered as women of color at educational institutions or frustration with the learning process often triggered a response that uncovered my own unresolved emotions with these issues. Using my reflexive journal to write about these experiences coupled with conversations with colleagues and friends proved to be an effective outlet for examining my reactions; nevertheless, I remained

quite startled at the presence and intensity of these emotions throughout the duration of the study. Therefore, when conducting future qualitative research studies, I intend to schedule short breaks or mini-mental vacations to address the inevitable emotional reactions that are integral element of qualitative research. In doing so, I believe that this should increase the likelihood that I remain fully aware and engaged in the process.

Rich thick description is a common term used by qualitative researchers (Esterberg, 2002; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 2002) to describe qualitative writing. In this study, I struggled with this concept as it related to the description of the respondents' physical features. Noticeably absent in the narratives of the respondents is the inclusion of a description of their physical characteristics, an issue that continues to be a challenge for me as a qualitative researcher. Of course, I am keenly aware of the importance of providing the reader with ample and descriptive information of respondents, but I continued to struggle with the relevance of including specific physical details. Is it that important the reader knows the complexion or size of respondents? I think not. However, in examining my hesitancy in providing this information, I realize the primary reason why I elected to omit this information was my own discomfort in discussing issues related to complexion, body size, and other issues related to physical features. Conducting this self-analysis forced me to examine and eventually admit my own conflicts with these issues rather than to continue to act as if the omission of this information was primarily based solely on principles. Continuing to explore my own issues of discomfort with this issue is where I am today in my journey.

Overall I am more appreciative and possess a deeper understanding of qualitative research as a result of conducting this study. Learning how to enter a process with minimal structure, encounter and resolve theoretical issues, engage with respondents in meaningful

ways, while learning about the confounding and rewarding nature of qualitative research is my personal definition of “standing in the crossroads of ambiguity” a phrase spoken by Anna Deveare Smith, a playwright and author when describing her own perceptions and approach to life. What I now know as a result of conducting this study is that ambiguity is a central element of qualitative research and when it surfaces in future studies I must remember the myriad lessons learned in this research process on how to effectively embrace and manage its meaning and potential impact.