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# Invisible Woman? Narratives of Black Women Leaders in Southeastern Two-Year Colleges

Shelia Counts

Clemson University, sheliaantleycounts@gmail.com

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INVISIBLE WOMAN? NARRATIVES OF BLACK WOMEN LEADERS  
IN SOUTHEASTERN TWO-YEAR COLLEGES

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Educational Leadership

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by  
Shelia Antley Counts  
August 2012

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Accepted by:  
Dr. Russell A. Marion II, Committee Chair  
Dr. Curtis Brewer  
Dr. James W. Satterfield, Jr.  
Dr. Matteel D. Jones

## ABSTRACT

This narrative research study explored the experiences of two Black women executive-level leaders who started their careers within higher education, including two-year technical colleges located in the Southeast during the pivotal sociopolitical moments that occurred during the 1960s to the 1980s. The stories of these women revealed their perceptions of the barriers they faced as well as the opportunities they received for career advancement as their careers evolved parallel to the development of the technical college system itself. Qualitative procedures, including semi-structured interviews and a combined narrative analysis and analysis of narratives interpretative framework (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Creswell, 2009; Kramp, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1995, as cited in Kramp, 2004, and in Creswell, 2007; and Roberts, 2002), illuminated a richly descriptive and complex perspective of these women's lived experiences. The theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and Black feminist theory – viewed through the historical lens of Southern racial politics – served as the foundation for the research questions. The guiding research question that framed this study was: What are the experiences of Black women executive-level leaders in Southeastern two-year colleges? The secondary questions were: How do Black women leaders' constructed realities regarding social, theoretical, political, spiritual, familial, and other factors influence the participants' leadership development and their leadership style or approach? How did the civil rights and women's rights movements influence Black women leaders' career choices and desire for advancement? How do these Black women leaders perceive challenges to their career advancement? How do they describe the pivotal successes of

their careers? How do they perceive the future for Black women who aspire to leadership within two-year colleges in the Southeast?

In the moving and deeply personal stories of their lives, two Black women leaders shared concerns about the continued need for mentors to help Black women in developing fully their leadership potential; their commitment to enhancing and increasing diversity and awareness on their campuses; and their recognition of the dynamics of race and how race plays out in their lives, their professional roles, and in their perceptions of others and of themselves. The women also shared a commitment to “pulling all of the strengths together” for successful team building; their belief in the importance of faith and spirituality in maintaining a balanced perspective on work and life; and the joy they both found in their leadership lives when they embraced the mantra that “what’s for you is for you,” so it’s important to always “put [yourself] in the way of a blessing.” This study underscores the importance of exploring Black women’s perceptions of their individual and collective leadership experiences within scholarly discourse, and recommendations will be made for future studies based on the implications of the study’s findings.

*Keywords:* Black or African-American women administrators or leaders, two-year technical and community colleges, barriers, opportunities, career development and advancement, transformational leadership, postheroic leadership, servant leadership, critical race theory, Black feminist theory, narrative inquiry or narrative research

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work and the following poem to all the women that I am grateful to have had in my life who instilled in me the belief that poor, nappy-headed Black girls matter in this world, too. That I know that I am somebody has been primarily because of you.

### *A Reflection of You*

*If you say that I am beautiful, it's because you make me smile.*

*If you say that I walk erect, it's because you make me proud.*

*If you say I have a strong character, it's because you connect me to my past.*

*If you say I have a beautiful voice, it's because yours would not be silenced.*

*If you say my backbone is unyielding, it's because you refused to give in.*

*If you say I am outspoken, it's because you weren't afraid to speak up.*

*If you say I have a strong presence, it's because you too often were invisible.*

*If you say I'll probably go places, it's because you so often could not.*

*If you say I sure am proud of my history, it's because you never forgot.*

*If you say I am a good leader, it's because you refused to be led.*

*If you say I am a good teacher, it's because yours was the book that I read.*

*So if you say that I am a shining example, it's because I am simply a reflection of you.*

Shelia Antley Counts (July 13, 2004)

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shared aspects of their lives and experiences as participants in this study, realizing that theirs are stories from which we all can and *must* learn.

Without the tender love and nurturance of my family, I would not have believed that I could go from working in the fields to working on the doctorate. To my parents, the late John Fairey Antley and Ruth Alnese Antley, thank you for loving your 12<sup>th</sup> child just as much as you loved your very first. To my beloved sister, the late Betty Davis Brockington, my life will be worthwhile if I become half the woman you were. To my other siblings, aunts, uncle, nieces, nephews, and cousins, I love you and thank you for believing in me. To my wonderful cadre of sistafriends (too numerous to list here, but you know who you are!), thank you for willing me to become “Dr. Counts.” You always knew I could do it and weren’t afraid to speak it as though it were already so.

Last but certainly not least, I thank God for life, health and strength. And I praise Him most for the gifts of His love right here on Earth – my husband of nearly 18 years, Robert Lee Counts, and our two cherished daughters, Cameron Kendall and Morghan Camille. Mommy loves you all the days of your lives.

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## PROLOGUE

*“The world you want to create needs you.  
It needs you to create it.  
It needs to hear what  
You have to say.  
The last word has not been spoken!”*

*~ Beah E. Richards, 2000, actor, poet, dancer, playwright, activist*

In her introduction to *Keep Climbing, Girls*, actor and documentary filmmaker LisaGay Hamilton includes these last words spoken fervently by Beah E. Richards in *Beah: A Black Woman Speaks*, an HBO documentary of Richards’ fascinating life as a Vicksburg, Mississippi-born actress who starred on Broadway, in film and on television over the course of her prolific career. Sometime during the year 2010, I happened to catch a rebroadcast of the documentary, and I recall sitting riveted to the screen as Beah stared feverishly into the camera as if staring into my soul. I still get chills, remembering how I rushed to grab a piece of paper, anything I could get my hands on, so that I could jot down these very words that I felt Beah had spoken directly to me.

Some days later, I went to Amazon.com to search for the collection of poetry that LisaGay mentioned in the documentary. I ordered *Keep Climbing, Girls*, and waited anxiously to learn in her own meticulously put together words even more about the life and activism of this actress, well known for her Oscar-nominated role as Sidney Poitier’s mother in the 1950s black and white classic, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner?* What I had learned from *A Black Woman Speaks* about Beah’s life sadly only reinforced a lesson I have had to learn over and over again as I move forward in the fourth decade of my life. And that is that in the 20<sup>th</sup>, and yes now, even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Black women and their

potentially extraordinary lives, gifts, and talents remain marginalized, minimized, and unrecognized in this great country which yet today refuses to embrace us with the same reckless abandon that we choose to love this nation. And we do choose to love this country – even as one-dimensional and typed as society aims to make our very existence. For though Beah was an actor of immense theatrical range, this dark-skinned beauty with the gapped teeth, this graceful and classically trained dancer who taught the likes of Diahann Carroll how to move fluidly on stage, found herself repeatedly relegated to the margins. From there she was made to play roles the industry thought the public would willingly accept Black women in – mostly as maids and aged women, even though she was a regal woman in the prime of her life.

When *Keep Climbing, Girls* arrived, I was surprised but not overly so to learn that the book of thought-provoking poetry that I was expecting turned out to be an excerpted portion of that volume of poetry, presented as a beautifully illustrated children's book. In retrospect, I should have known that I would receive such a book, the cover of which featured a chocolate brown, pigtailed girl draped in a dazzlingly golden dress poised mid-leap between the limbs of a tree, her left arm stretching ever forward and higher, seeking the next limb, as just the tips of the fingers of her right hand graze the limb she leaves securely behind. Her upturned face is a study in concentration; her deep-set brown eyes glint with a determination uncommon to a child that age. I smiled, as I lovingly turned the leaves of this treasure, each page gliding smoothly through my fingers – images of my own girls, Cameron and Morghan, moving fixedly across my mind. It was then that I knew.

I knew with the same dogged determination of Maria Miller Stewart, the pragmatic political acumen of Mary Jane McLeod Bethune, the unflinching spirit of Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, the steely resolve of Fanny Jackson Coppin, the unwavering faith of Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, and the outspoken advocacy of Lucy Diggs Slowe. In that very moment, I knew what Beah's words meant – that the Black woman's struggle for affirmation continues undaunted and undeterred. That, as the adage goes: "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Rather than downtrodden, I was buoyed by a renewed sense of purpose and meaning. For the first time in a long time, I felt again a sense of rightness about the work that I knew I was meant to do. I felt a deep, spiritual connection to these famous women as well as those unknown women who have come before me. Women whose courage, tenacity, grace, dignity, sense of purpose, and sense of divine calling, make what I am called to do no more or less than what my daughters will one day be called to do. And that is to stand, present and accounted for, in defense of ourselves (White, 1999).

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Beah E. Richards was not an academician or a scholar, at least not in the formal sense. But she *was* an educator, and like many other Black women before and since, her story is representative of a broad spectrum of Black women's lived experiences and therefore rightfully deserves a place within the context of scholarly discourse (Collins, 2009). For, like many before her, Beah used the story of her life, her words, and her deeds to educate subsequent generations whose leadership would move our country and its people forward, since "the path of life goes up and up, not down!" (1974/2006) US-born Black women have inherited both the historical legacies (as educators, school founders and community leaders) and burdens that Collins' (2009) research documents [e.g., controlling images of Black women as "jezebels" (pp. 89-93) and "mules uh de world" (pp. 51-54)]. Paradoxically, these labels may have infused Black women today with the requisite skills, resoluteness and resilience needed to take the helm at 21<sup>st</sup> century higher education institutions – particularly the nation's technical and community colleges. However, in order for these underrepresented and often overlooked women to be given due consideration for senior-level administrative roles, more needs to be learned about the experiences of those who are currently leaders and their thoughts on what constitutes effective educational administration.



## Background of the Study

Just over 20 years ago, national leaders of the community college movement began sounding the alarm, decrying the lack of representation of women and minorities at the upper levels of college administration in light of population statistics and projections (Gillett-Karam, Roueche, & Roueche, 1990/1991). Since then, that bell has gone largely unheard in terms of increased racial diversity. A 2007 American Council on Education (ACE) survey found that while there is a likelihood of greater relative gender diversity in terms of college presidents, the prospects of increased racial diversity among college leaders in the coming decades are not as likely (King & Gomez, 2008). Of particular concern is the use of “filters” during the search for executives, which tend to limit the number of African American and other minorities in the hiring pool (Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Given the racially and ethnically diverse communities served by two-year technical and community colleges, there is growing concern about the lack of racial diversity among the leaders of these institutions (Dembicki, 2006).

A review of each college president’s webpage reveals that in the Southern Technical College System (STCS) – a pseudonym used throughout most of this manuscript to protect the identity of the study participants (with the exception of the historical sections of Chapter Two’s literature review)– 98% of technical and community college CEOs are White. Today just four, or 25%, of the state’s 16 technical colleges are led by women, one of whom is Black. That number is down from 31% (five women) only four years ago. One of the 16 colleges, Orchid-Corsage Technical College, is now led by a Black man as of April 2011. And later in 2011, the sole Black woman president

of a state technical college (the former president of the only historically black college in the system who retired from Daffodil Technical College in 2007) returned to lead that college on an interim basis. Those of us familiar with the system have heard for the last seven years at least that there will soon be a significant pool of senior-level positions from which to choose as current leaders head into retirement. And yet, in this state, the current trend is to replace retiring leaders with nearly identical and interchangeable parts – for the most part, White men and White women presidents are being replaced by other White men and women presidents.

#### Statement of the Problem

The problem as revealed in the literature review is that the number of Black women who hold leadership positions within the 16 colleges of the Southern Technical College System is disproportionate to the number of Black women students and faculty within these institutions. As shown in Table E (See Appendix), Black women made up 23% of students in Spring 2011; 10% were Black men. White women and White men made up 36% and 24% of the student body, respectively. While the number of faculty was not delineated by gender, Table F (See Appendix) showed that only 15% of faculty was Black, whereas 82% of faculty was White during 2010, according to the state's Commission on Higher Education (CHE). And even fewer numbers of Black women and men serve as executive level, managerial and administrative staff, according to the data retrieved from the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Table G (See Appendix) showed that in 2009, while both White women and White men equally

held 39% of executive positions within these institutions, only 9% and 10% of such posts were held by Black men and Black women respectively (IPEDS, 2009).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of two Black women who are or have been leaders in the Southern Technical College System but who started their careers either within higher education or the technical college system during the 1960s to the 1980s. Other than Banner's (2003) study of the perceptions of Black women administrators within the state's public technical and five private and public two-year colleges, very little research exists that focuses on this group's perspective of higher educational leadership.

Even though staunch advocates and long-time leaders within the national two-year college system such as Roueche (1990/1991) and Vaughan (1996) unequivocally stated years ago that the leadership of these institutions must reflect the concomitant diversity found within the student population, very little has changed in the last couple of decades. It would seem that a starting point for developing a pipeline of Black women leaders for the system would be to identify talented women with the requisite educational background, interest, and potential, and prepare them for leadership advancement. Yet the professional development of African American women in leadership roles is seldom discussed in human resource development literature (Byrd, 2008). Parker (2001) asserted that the reason African American women are overlooked for top leadership roles as business executives is due in part to stereotyped assumptions that make these women's leadership traits and behaviors appear antithetical to traditional leadership behaviors

(based on a traditional White male leadership model), even though there is documented historical evidence of successful African American female leadership of organizations. My research is focused on discovering the cause of the lack of African American women administrators in executive-level positions within the Southern Technical College System from the perspective of Black women who best know what is required of individuals who serve in these positions. I want to find out *why it is that the state technical college system has had a Black woman president only at its sole formally recognized historically Black technical college, even though the system of sixteen colleges serves a disproportionate number of Black women*. Further, I believe that it is critically important to learn how Black women who are leaders in the system go about the practice of leadership so as to remove some of the stigma and mystery surrounding Black women's abilities to actually lead institutions. The overarching purpose of this research then is to help the reader understand that this is a complex, relevant, authentic and urgent issue of marginalization and disempowerment that must be addressed and remedied.

#### Significance of the Study

There are two interrelated reasons why this topic and paper are relevant and necessary. This research topic is important because of the continued underrepresentation of Black women as senior-level administrators in the community college system (Flowers & Moore, 2008; Gillet-Karam et al., 1990/1991; Jackson & Phelps, 2004; Logan, 2006; Vaughan, 1996). The second reason why this topic is important is because of the gap that currently exists in the leadership literature regarding the specific ways that Black women lead (Parker, 2005). Even though they represent a disproportionate percentage of the

student population compared to their percentage of the total population, Black women remain underrepresented both as faculty – which usually serves as the pipeline to senior-level administration – and administrators in the community college (Flowers & Moore, 2008; Jackson & Phelps, 2004; Vaughan, 1989, 1996).

According to numbers from the member database of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2011), Black women remain disproportionately underrepresented as leaders in the national system of community and technical colleges. Of the 1,167 member colleges nationwide as of January 2011, 72% of the chief executive officers (CEOs) were male and 28% were female. White male CEOs made up 81% of the total pool of executive officers, while 8% of CEOs are either a Black man or Black woman. Six percent of the CEOs are Hispanic, 3% are American Indian and/or Alaskan native, and 1% percent is Asian and/or Pacific Islander. The AACC figures are not reported by both race *and* gender. From these figures, there is no way to know what proportion of the 28% female CEOs are Black women.

In the Southern Technical College System, there are sixteen colleges. A review of each college website and president's message page and photograph revealed that 10 are led by White men, three by White women, one by a Black man, and one by a Black woman (serving on an interim basis; photo of this president is not currently available online, but systems office human resources personnel confirmed this leader's identity). Orchid-Corsage Technical College replaced its retiring White woman president with a Black man in April, 2011. Daffodil Technical College, the only designated historically Black college within the system, is led on an interim basis by one of its former presidents,

a Black woman. Clearly, Black women remain underrepresented as leaders in the system referred to euphemistically as “the people’s college,” given its touted mission of serving as the gateway to higher education for those populations historically underserved by colleges and universities (Boone, 1997; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Griffith & Connor, 1994).

At the same time, not much exists in the literature about how those Black women who are leaders actually lead. Nor is much known about how the Black women who are leaders became leaders or how these women *do* leadership (Parker & ogilvie, 1996; Parker, 2005, emphasis mine). Organizational and educational leadership theories and literature lack the perspective of Black women leaders, whose leadership context is informed by the intersectionalities of race, class, and gender (Collins, 2009; Parker, 2005). Educational and organizational leadership theories and literature tend to generalize the leadership behaviors of White, middle-class men and essentialize the behaviors of White, middle-class women in ways that suggests their behaviors are representative of all other leaders (Parker, 2005).

In sum, this research study is important because Black women remain underrepresented as leaders in the community college system. At the same time, leadership and organizational literature tends to posit a race-neutral, essentialist leadership perspective as being representative of the leadership behaviors of Black women.

### Research Questions

The principal research question that this study seeks to answer is: What are the experiences of Black women executive-level leaders in the Southern Technical College System? Several clarifying secondary questions that will guide this narrative inquiry include:

- How do Black women leaders' constructed realities regarding social, theoretical, political, spiritual, familial, and other factors influence the participants' leadership development?
- How do Black women leaders' constructed realities regarding social, theoretical, political, spiritual, familial, and other factors influence their leadership style or approach?
- How did the civil rights and women's rights movements influence Black women leaders' career choices and desire for advancement?
- How do these Black women leaders perceive challenges or obstacles to career advancement?
- How do Black women leaders describe the pivotal achievements and successes of their careers?
- How do they perceive the future for Black women who aspire to leadership within the technical college system?

### Organization of the Study

The organization of the study is important for meeting the goal of the development of a cogent argument. It is critical to first provide the contextual framework and rationale for the research study in Chapter One, Introduction. To date, I have uncovered a single dissertation written in the last decade that deals specifically with the experiences of Black women administrators in the Southern Technical College System (Banner, 2003). This suggests that this population of leaders has been largely

understudied, and therefore, underrepresented within the higher education leadership literature. Chapter Two, the Literature Review, is organized to enumerate the steps taken in the conduction of the literature search. This is followed by a presentation of the historical, empirical, and theoretical conceptual frameworks for the study. Next will be the presentation of a thorough review and thematically-structured synthesis of the extant research literature that explores the experiences of Black women administrators in community colleges and higher education. The majority of research studies provide mostly a qualitative perspective of Black women leaders primarily in student affairs administration in community colleges and four-year institutions nationally (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Bridges, 1996). However, there is some literature that focuses on the challenges, motivations, successes, and representation of Black women administrators in higher education.

Chapter Three, Methodology, will provide a framework, rationale and outline of the use of the chosen research design for this study – narrative inquiry or narrative research. The experiences of Black women administrators in the community college system have been under-explored, with their experiences being articulated through the perspectives of Black men and/or of White women (Collins, 2009; Parker, 2005). I have purposely chosen to use narrative inquiry to place these women’s experiences at the center of the discourse, privileging their re-telling of their own stories in their own words. This chapter also details the use of purposive sampling processes for the selection and identification of participants; the administration of a single, semi-structured interview of about two hours’ duration with two executive-level administrators, followed by informal,



follow up question and answer exchanges; the ethical considerations inherent to qualitative research (narrative, in particular) and the researcher's role; and finally, the procedures for how data will be collected, analyzed, and interpreted.

Chapters Four and Five, the Results chapters, will each provide a narrative analysis of each woman's leadership story that takes the form of an interview profile (Seidman, 2006) – a thorough re-articulation of the experiences of each executive-level Black woman administrator in a combined expression of the researcher's interpretations interwoven seamlessly with each woman's own words. The study will conclude with Chapter Six, the Conclusions chapter. In this chapter, I will present an analysis of narratives that highlights the commonalities of these women's leadership experiences as expressed through a series of six emerging themes of Black women's leadership approach. The discussion of these themes will be followed by my interpretation of each woman's leadership experience, from my perspective as a critical race theorist and based on my experiences as a first-generation college Black woman born and raised in the South. In addition, these stories will be interpreted through the theoretical lens of critical race theory (CRT) and Black feminist theory (BFT), and from the perspective of leadership theories which have been applied to Black women leaders in the literature, including transformational leadership, servant leadership, and postheroic leadership. Implications of the findings and recommendations for future research studies conclude this chapter.

## Theoretical Framework

This narrative inquiry into the experiences of Black women leaders within the Southern Technical College System over a span of several decades will be framed primarily through the lens of critical race theory and Black feminist theory. Black women's struggles earned them a place in history as a pivotal linkage between the movement for Black liberation in the 1950s and 1960s, and the movement for women's liberation in the late 1960s and 1970s (Dill, 1979; Taylor & Smitherman-Donaldson, 1989). The timing of both movements coincided with the development of the state's technical college system, as well as with Black women's early roles in the system in meaningful ways that the research study will hopefully illuminate. Further, the combining of various aspects and perspectives of critical race theory and Black feminist theory may provide a vivid picture of the ways that Black women lead during peak moments of social upheaval.

### Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) has at its foundations the work of Karl Marx and other critics of social and economic theory. The worldview of these theorists revolves around the belief that class and socioeconomic status and condition disproportionately and negatively impact the day-to-day existence of those who reside at the lower rungs of society. Society is stratified by economics, and the underrepresented, disempowered, and disenfranchised are those from the lowest economic levels. Noted legal scholar Derrick Bell is one of several thinkers who have been credited with the development of the theory in the 1970s and 1980s while Ladson-Billings and Tate are noted for bringing the

precepts of CRT to bear on educational systems and institution in the United States (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Critical race theorists argue that race and ethnicity add another layer and dimension of discrimination to the everyday existence of marginalized groups of people of color. This highly provocative and debatable theory developed out of the legal field to “uncover deep patterns of exclusion and what is taken for granted with respect to race and privilege” (Ladson-Billings, 1997, as quoted in Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Four central themes have emerged in this field, including the centrality of race and effects of racism in American society, including higher education institutions, where racism is covert and entrenched in its daily practices. Another central theme is that CRT challenges the dominant ideology that American universities function from a race-neutral or color-blind perspective in terms of its policies and practices. Delgado (1989) and Lopez (1990) used the CRT framework to assert that this dominant ideology of race neutrality serves to distort the self-interest, power, and prestige of dominant groups that are the driving force of policies that negatively impact the less powerful. Third, CRT recognizes the legitimacy of experiential knowledge and lived experiences as sources of social science and other research (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Finally, CRT asserts the validity of analyzing race and racism in both a historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, as cited in Parker & Villalpando, 2007).

### Black Feminist Theory

Black feminist theory evolved out of a desire by Black women intellectuals and activists to have a legitimate voice and role in the movement for the rights of women. As

early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century club movement, Black women were giving voice to what would eventually evolve into Black feminist thought – the belief that Black women were differently positioned in society based on their race, their gender, and their social class. As a result of this differential status, the White women’s movement for suffrage and later for equal rights did not speak authentically to the experiences of Black women (Collins, 1996, 2009; Dill, 1979, 1983; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; hooks, 1994; Taylor, 1998; White, 1999). Given that both waves of the women’s movements (first that started alongside the abolitionist movement and the second that started within the civil rights movement) tended to marginalize if not totally disregard Black women’s rights and roles, Black women resourcefully countered by articulating their own experiences of reality, a reality that was a different representation than the one that White women sought to express for them or that White men denied even existed (Collins, 1986, 1989; Perkins, 1993; Taylor, 1998). Table 1.1 outlines some of the distinguishing features of Black feminist epistemology that guide this research study.

Table 1.1

*Core Themes of Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2009)*

- 
- Articulation of a Black woman’s standpoint or ways of knowing and experiencing reality
  - Acceptance of individual responses of Black women to common challenges the group faces
  - Recognition of link between consciousness and experience (or one’s thoughts and actions)
  - Working to maintain a self-defined standpoint at the risk of suppression by dominant groups
-

## Assumptions

Crotty (1998) defines epistemology as the nature of knowledge or how it is that a person arrives at knowing what he or she knows. Creswell (2008) defines epistemology as a worldview or paradigm that structures the way a person exists in the world. The assumptions that underpin any epistemology are those inherent beliefs and values that the person has that inform the way he or she goes about processing, making sense of, and interacting with knowledge. There are a number of epistemological assumptions that underpin narrative inquiry, and these assumptions influence the individual's story in a variety of ways.

The epistemological assumptions underlying narrative inquiry are that knowledge is contextually situated in time and place, and within a social context – which consists of both personal conditions of the narrator (interviewee) and the broader social conditions in which the narrator lives. And narrative inquiry is interpretive hermeneutics. Hermeneutics involves the interpretation of texts, a complicated seeking out of meanings that may or may not exist (Crotty, 1998) – meanings which, if present, the researcher arguably (according to Ricoeur, 1970, as cited in Josselson, 2006) ferrets out – introducing the tensions inherent between what Ricoeur refers to as a hermeneutics of faith and a hermeneutics of suspicion:

Does the interpreter/researcher privilege the voice of the participant, trying to render the meanings as presented in the interview – or does the researcher try to read beneath, or in Ricoeur's metaphor – in front of the

text – for meanings that are hidden, either unconscious or so embedded in cultural context as to make them seem invisible. (Josselson, 2006, p. 4)

Narrative inquiry is also rooted in phenomenology and privileges the lived experiences of the unique individual, without regard or necessity of generalizing – except as it (narrative research) seeks “some understanding of the patterns that cohere among individuals and the aspects of lived experience that differentiate” (Josselson, 2006, p. 5). And narrative is postmodern in that there is no body of set facts, and knowledge is unique to the individual (Josselson, 2006). Further, narratives and their inherent meanings are socially constructed. Narrative research is fluid and evolving; it is never static (Riessman, 2008).

The aforementioned assumptions all have an impact on the individual’s story, which is ensconced firmly at the center of this method. Part of the foundation for the interpretation of these women’s stories is the epistemological assumption that the meanings associated with these women’s lived experiences are not created but “constructed...as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 2003, p. 43). “Constructionism drives home unambiguously...that there is *no* true or valid interpretation. There are useful interpretations...[t]here are liberating forms of interpretation too” (p. 47). The narrator has the discretion of telling his or her life story as he or she perceives it as unfolding (unabridged) or as he or she would have liked to have it unfold (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Another layer of interpretation comes from a close examination of the language used by the women in telling their stories. Etter-Lewis (1993), a sociolinguist, determined that nearly all utterances made in the recounting of life stories hold some

particular meaning for the narrator. “Articulation of African American women’s life stories in their own words involves a complex interaction of race, gender, and social status with language, history and culture” (p. 201). “...its [language’s] power to reveal more than what appears on the printed page is often underestimated. Words, phrases, and even silences contain multiple layers of meaning beneath the literature surface, and particular combinations expose social realities otherwise concealed from view. What narrators say *as well as* the way they say it, is extremely important” (Etter-Lewis, 1993, p. 202).

In *My Soul is My Own: Oral Narratives of African American Women in the Professions*, Etter-Lewis (1993) focuses on the sociolinguistic aspects of oral narratives, which she stated made for such authentic renderings of the experiences of these African American women, who ranged in age from 61 to 100, and who were moving into their professions in the early to mid-part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many of these women were trailblazers – usually the first Black or the first woman or both in their fields, including medicine, law, and even in foreign service.

#### Limitations

There are several limitations of the study, including the size of the sample and resulting relative lack of generalizability of the study results. This study examines a single technical college system that consists of 16 institutions within a single state. The smallest college serves several hundred students, while the largest boasts the status of third largest college in the entire state. The pool of Black women who serve in leadership posts is even smaller and more difficult to access as a result. Some studies in the

literature cite the challenges researchers face in securing participants, who express reluctance at being the subject of yet another examination (Southern, 1996). And yet it is only through such inconveniences that the tapestry of a rich leadership history can be woven. And although the individual and personal nature of the stories of these Black women leaders is an attempt to privilege a perspective that is too often taken for granted or disregarded as unimportant, it is important to acknowledge the inherent gaps that will continue to exist within the literature. These gaps can only be filled with persistent efforts to gather and record the experiences of Black women, undiluted and unrestrained.

#### Delimitations

I have chosen to sacrifice generalizability of results, because I believe it is important that these women's individual leadership experiences become a part of educational leadership literature. In her efforts to memorialize the history of segregation within the public school systems of North Carolina, educational researcher and historian Vanessa Siddle Walker (2003) emphasized the importance of disseminating the living history represented by the Black principals and teachers who both attended and ultimately taught in, and worked in segregated schools. And I have chosen to focus solely on the technical college system in this southeastern state because of the relatively few studies that have been conducted on this system within the past few decades, especially work that focused on Black women leaders. Further, I have chosen to use narrative inquiry rather than other recommended research designs, such as phenomenology. Narrative inquiry allows participants and researchers to share ownership of collected stories, if all parties are in agreement (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). As a Black woman who has formerly



served as an administrator within the state technical college system, I believe that my participants will draw a measure of security from my race, gender, and similar work background that may allow them to be more forthcoming in sharing their stories.

### Definitions of Terms

Throughout this literature review, several terms are used interchangeably. However, it is important to clarify the distinctive meanings associated with some of these words. For example, *technical colleges* and *community colleges* will be used to refer to the same group of educational institutions, but there are differences in the historical development, missions, and principal purposes of these two systems – these differences will be highlighted as part of Chapter Two, the literature review. A *community college* or *comprehensive two-year college* is “any institution regionally accredited to award the associate in arts or the associate in science as its highest degree” (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 5). A *technical college* provides “education and training opportunities that promote the economic and workforce development” of the state (sctechsystem.com). Also throughout this document, the terms *Black* and *African American* are used interchangeably to refer appropriately to North American people of African descent (APA, 2010, p. 75). The exception is where specific racial designations are directly quoted or referenced in the research studies or other literature, especially the historical literature. However, participants in my research study will be asked to indicate their personal preferences, which will then be adhered to as appropriate in the results (narratives) chapters. Similarly, the terms *administrator*, *leader*, *senior-level administrator*, *senior-level leader*, *executive-level leader* or *executive-level administrator*

are being used interchangeably in this study. The IPEDS glossary defines executive level staff, administrative and managerial, as those staffers whose duties relate to management of policies and general or business operations of the institution, department, or subdivision. This category classification includes titles such as president, vice president (including assistants and associates), deans (including assistants and associates), directors and department heads (including assistants and associates). According to the Human Resources office of the Southern Technical College System's Office, executive-level leaders within the 16 technical colleges are those leaders who report directly to the college president and who assist in day-to-day operations of the college. This leadership team consists of the president, executive vice president, vice president, associate vice president, and assistant vice president (Peacock, 2011, personal communication). Participants in this research study hold or have held at least one of these positions, and therefore, are being classified as executive-level leaders according to the distinction made by the Southern Technical College System's Office.

Other terms that will be defined here and/or whose use will be clarified include *narrative inquiry*, *narrative research*, *story*, *narrative*, *analysis of narratives* and *narrative analysis*. *Narrative inquiry* or *narrative research* is conducted by the researcher who "is interested in determining the meaning of a particular experience or event for the one who had it, and tells about it in a story," (Kramp, 2004, p. 108). Narrative research is the "study of stories" (Polkinghorne, 2007, p.1). These two terms will be used interchangeably in this manuscript. Like Kramp (2004) and Riessman (2008), I also intend to use the terms *story* and *narrative* interchangeably in this

manuscript, although the former generally has a more impersonal connotation while the latter embodies more conventional and formal usage. Used more informally and conversationally, a story is an example of a narrative, contains all the elements of narrative (character, plot, setting, point of view, conflict, dialogue), and functions in quite similar ways. A story is “a construction by the teller or narrator” (Kramp, 2004, p. 106). “Stories preserve our memories, prompt our reflections, connect us with our past and present, and assist us to envision our future,” (Kramp, 2004, p. 107). In his essay that focuses on the use of stories as a method of attaining racial reform through the justice system, legal scholar Richard Delgado (1989) defines stories as “interpretive structures by which we impose order on experience and it on us” (p. 2415). Narrative has been more formally defined by Polkinghorne as:

...the fundamental scheme for linking individual human actions and events into interrelated aspects of an understandable composite...a meaning structure that organizes events and human actions into a whole, thereby attributing significance to individual actions and events according to their effect on the whole. (1988, as cited in Kramp, 2004, p. 107).

Narrative “enables the storyteller to organize the story told by linking events, perceptions, and experiences” (Kramp, 2004, p. 107). While I might refer to participants’ “stories” also as their “narratives,” a distinction will be made in the analysis of these individual stories. The stories themselves provide the data for analysis (Kramp, 2004). Elements of the stories shared by the participants (e.g., direct quotations, excerpted conversational dialogue from the interview) will be used in the data analysis sections of each of the two

“Results” chapters. These elements will be used to illustrate how I arrived at the themes that came up from the data during the *analysis of narratives*, which will be presented in the final, conclusions chapter. Polkinghorne (1995) distinguishes *analysis of narratives* as a process based on paradigmatic reasoning and which leads to the identification of the themes in each story as well as those found in all the stories (as cited in Kramp, 2004). The distinction I alluded to earlier comes in the second phase of the analysis process. Lunenburg & Irby (2008) cite noted narrative authorities Connelly and Clandinin’s definition of *narrative analysis* as “how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves,” (1990, as cited in Lunenburg & Irby, 2008, p. 100). Polkinghorne (1995) defines narrative analysis as a process of using narrative reasoning to attend to the meaning of experience. According to Polkinghorne’s conception of narrative analysis – which I intend to use in this study – the researcher uses the data gathered from each story to construct a new narrative that pulls all the data together rather than apart. As a result of this “restorying,” the “stories are returned to [the] participants,” (Kramp, 2004, p. 120).

### Chapter Summary

For decades, community college leaders nationally have written and lectured about the impending crisis of senior-level leadership for a system of more than 1,100 colleges that is just over a hundred years old. The leadership of this system – in many instances, and particularly in the Southeast – has changed little since its early days. And this fact did not go un-mentioned by these national figures. Leadership today little resembles the startlingly diverse student demographic served by the “people’s college,”

(Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Black women are disproportionately represented within two-year colleges as students but exist marginally as faculty – the traditional pipeline to senior-level administrative positions. And while there are Black women who serve in senior-level leadership posts nationally, there are very few studies that examine the experiences of Black women leaders in two-year, technical college systems of the Southeast. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the higher education and leadership literature by relating the experiences of Black women who *are* leaders in these colleges, so as to re-work the traditional leadership model so that it is more inclusive and representative of actual college leaders and communities that these colleges serve. The theoretical perspectives of critical race theory and Black feminist theory will be used as frameworks for understanding and making sense of Black women’s leadership experiences as told through their stories and in their own words.

## CHAPTER TWO

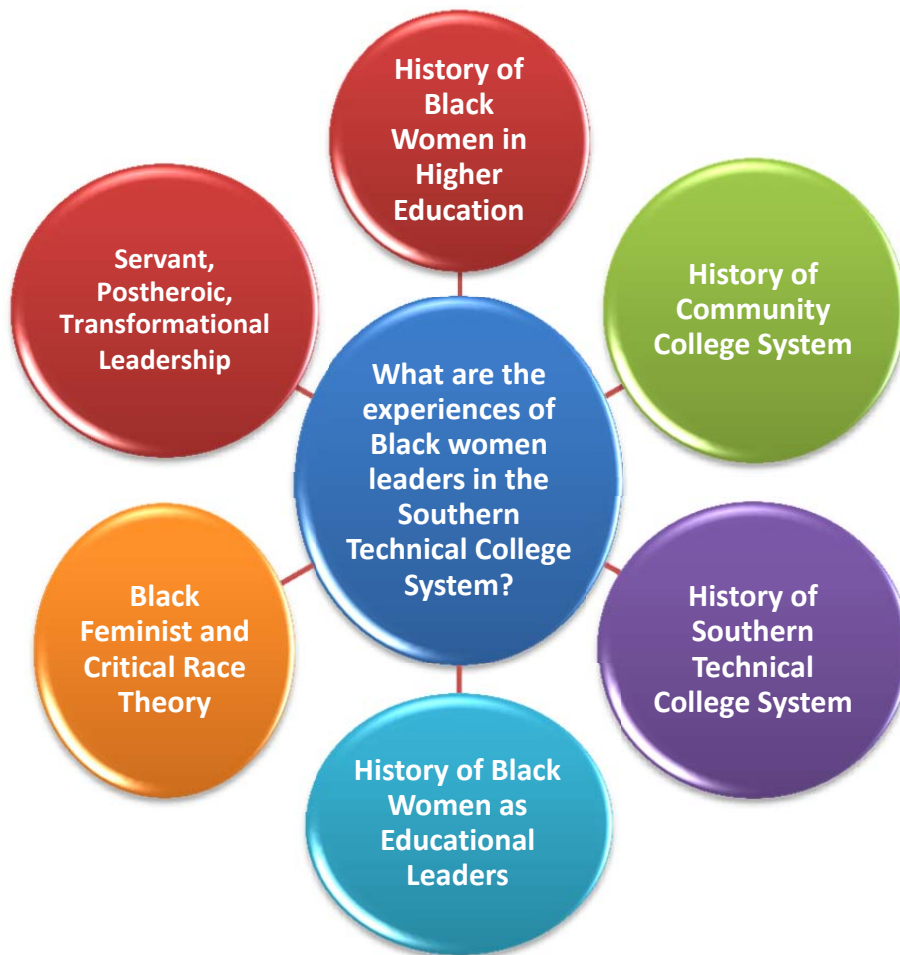
### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I will first outline the organization of my review of the higher education and leadership literature that addresses Black women administrators in the two-year and four-year college systems. At the end of this section is a conceptual map that illustrates the interconnected streams of literature that this review led me to delve into to learn more completely what has been written about the experiences of Black women leaders in the community college system nationally. This conceptual map of the topics explored during the literature review is followed by a presentation of the historical, empirical, and theoretical conceptual frameworks for the study. Next I present a thematically-structured synthesis of the extant research literature that explores the experiences of Black women administrators in community colleges and higher education. The majority of research studies provide mostly a qualitative perspective of Black women leaders primarily in student affairs administration in community colleges and four-year institutions nationally (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995; Bridges, 1996). However, there is some literature that focuses on the challenges, motivations, successes, and representation of Black women administrators in higher education (Banner, 2003; Flowers & Moore, 2008; Opp & Gosetti, 2002).

#### Organization of the Literature Review

The organization of the sections of the literature review provides the appropriate historical, empirical, and theoretical frameworks within which to justify the research study and the argument. First, I include a conceptual map in this section, which provides

a visual representation of the various literatures examined as they related to the central question that guides this study. The next section of the paper will explore the history of Black women and higher education and the historical significance of individual Black women educational leaders. These sections will be followed by a historical overview of the development of the nation's community college system and how this differed from the creation of the Southern Technical College System (a pseudonym – the actual technical college system will be identified in this chapter and its history and current status will be detailed). Next, the themes constructed from a thorough review, analysis, and synthesis of the research studies of Black women administrators will be detailed. Then, there will be a discussion of the theoretical framework and leadership theories underpinning the proposed research study. Finally, I will summarize the key points of the literature review chapter and transition to Chapter Three, Methodology.



**Figure 2.1 Conceptual Map of Literature Review**

The conceptual map in Figure 2.1 positions the research question for this study in the center and then outlines the various literatures that I reviewed. Based on a thorough review of the literature, I determined that the concepts outlined in each outlying bubble represent some aspect of the research question.



## History of Black Women and Higher Education

Since the days of slavery, Black women have braced themselves for oftentimes staunch opposition to their rights for free voice and independence of thought (Giddings, 2006; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; White, 1999). Conditions for which Blacks worked during slavery were referred to as “race uplift,” which meant “the educational obtainments of all African Americans, gender notwithstanding, would be for the advancement of the race” (Perkins, 1993, p. 265). The basis for this belief was that Black women and men had to equally work to improve the conditions of their people given that they were both treated as non-humans (Dill, 1979). So unlike White women whose educational pursuits were restricted based on claims that educated women were less likely to marry and an education would do physical and psychological harm, Black women knew their role was to play an equal part in educating and, therefore, liberating the race. Therefore, in spite of and because of racism and sexism, these women taught themselves and others, building whole communities of learners (Giddings, 2006; Perkins, 1993; White, 1999).

The end of slavery brought no end to Blacks’ treatment as second-class citizens. If anything, Black people were made to suffer in even more profound ways as retribution for their part in ending a normalized way of living. Black women saw it as their moral and spiritual calling to serve their own by uplifting their race through education (Giddings, 2006; Perkins, 1993; White, 1999). They were also encouraged to pursue an education for the sake of their children, whose social status historically had been linked to the mother. An educated Black woman was viewed as a valued commodity in the Black community, for an education – along with morality – was seen as the means for

developing the race (Coleman-Burns, 1989). Families sacrificed so that their daughters could go to college, in some cases, even moving to states where Blacks were allowed to attend college. These families believed it a worthwhile investment, to keep their daughters from having to seek domestic work. Mary Jane Patterson's earning a BA degree in 1862 from Oberlin College in Ohio, which in 1833 opened its doors to all races and both sexes, "marks the beginning of higher education for Negro women in the United States" (Slowe, 1933, p. 352).

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and after suffering the setbacks of the premature end to Reconstruction, Black women continued their college attendance. By the 1930s, educated Black women leaders made clear the differing expectations of the next generation of college-educated Black women:

The world will expect from [college women] practically the same sort of contribution that it expects from men – the contribution of an individual so disciplined that she can direct herself, so informed that she can assist in directing others in this intricate modern world. Institutions of higher learning must furnish the world this type of individual. (Slowe, 1933, p. 358)

At the same time that less fortunate Black women were fending off the sexual advantages of White male employers (Cardwell, 2010; Giddings, 2006; McCluskey, 1989; White, 1999) while working the dirtiest, most laborious jobs – those not suited to the delicateness of White women (Beal, 2008; Giddings, 2006; Welter, 1966; White, 1999), Black women were also struggling with claims that their lack of femininity,

questionable morality, and propensity for assertiveness accounted at least in part for the inability of their Black men to lead (Giddings, 2006; White, 1999). These charges of emasculation came to a head in 1965 with the Moynihan Report, which suggested that the deterioration of the Black family was caused in part by so-called role reversals within the households (Beal, 2008; Dill, 1979; White, 1999).

Similar claims had formed a trail behind Black women as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Black men's fight to get the franchise after the Civil War caused a fracture in the support Black men had always given women for their educational pursuits (Perkins, 1993). Some of these claims were begun in Black communities themselves, as Black women sought avenues that would help them to keep their families together during a time when they arguably had better access to jobs – even though they were menial at best (Beal, 2008; Giddings, 2006; Perkins, 1983; White, 1999). Black men supported Black women's strivings because these women were not placed on a pedestal; rather, they were made to labor just like men (Beal, 2008; Dill, 1979).

However, with the franchise (right to vote), the dynamics between Black men and women changed, as men garnered leadership positions in state and local governments. Their acquisition of power in the North caused Black men to begin changing their views of what Black women could and should do. Black men sought to gain some of their lost masculinity by restricting the spheres of Black women's influence (Beal, 2008; Perkins, 1993). However, Black men forgot they could not feasibly afford to act as patriarchs without Black women's contributions. With the turning tide that was the early end of Reconstruction, Black women and Black men were brought back to parity with one

another. It was then that Black women began to demand equity from Black men (Perkins, 1993). It was a very early showing of the average Black woman's nascent feminist tendencies. The festering and unresolved issues between them did not deter these women from traveling down one of the very few avenues for citizenship – higher education (Cardwell, 2010). The value they ascribed to education as a means of empowerment and independence was based at least in part on the exceptional examples set by Black women educational leaders.

#### History of Black Women as Educational Leaders

*“How long shall the fair daughters  
Of Africa be compelled to bury  
Their minds and talents  
Beneath a load  
Of iron pots and kettles?”*

*~Maria Miller Stewart, 19<sup>th</sup> century lecturer, feminist, abolitionist*

Believed to be the first African American woman to speak publicly to an integrated crowd about women's rights (Guy-Sheftall, 1995), Maria Miller Stewart's writings and speeches sought to lift Black women from their largely unearned reputations as being less than virtuous women, appealing to their religious and moral ideals as well as their desires to be held in the same lofty esteem as the “true women” of their day (Welter, 1966). Among other subjects, Miller admonished Black women to not allow the country's prejudices or men's efforts silence their voices. She fervently implored Black women to leave a lasting legacy on their world, advocating that they collectively raise the funds to “lay the corner stone for the building of a High School, that the higher branches of knowledge might be enjoyed by us” (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p.28). Miller ended her

touring circuit prematurely in 1833 after being firmly denounced by some Black ministers for speaking in public, but not before lambasting them for their biases in her farewell speech (Guy-Sheftall, 1995; White, 1999).

In their historical analysis of African American educational leaders who have served as agents of change and social justice, one of the themes that emerged in Murtadha and Watts' (2005) work is that people of African heritage have been educational leaders during all periods of U.S. history. They make a convincing case for the inclusion of the biographies of individual women leaders in their own work because they serve as "models for school leadership" (p. 592). Dating back to U.S. slavery, Black women have played a key role as education advocates, recognizing an education as the surest way to self-actualization, economic freedom, and a measure of racial parity (White, 1999). As early as 1793, Black women were establishing their own schools. In that year, for example, Catherine Ferguson opened an integrated Sabbath school for the poor and the orphaned in her home in New York City, where children received religious and secular instruction (Gyant, 1996).

The following five Black women leaders are representative of those who, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, laid the groundwork for the aspirations and strivings of today's Black women educational leaders. Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2003) acknowledge the suitability and practicability of borrowing someone else's argument if it is similar to one's own, helping the novice researcher to gain credibility for knowing what others in the field are pursuing. Like Logan (2006), whose dissertation was an oral histories study of three African American women's pathways to the

community college presidency, I believe it is important to the logic of my overall argument that I include the historical leadership legacy of individual Black women leaders in this literature review. Logan's reasoning is succinct:

This review of the history of African American female leadership is one approach to meeting the researcher's objective of further developing the leadership history of African American women with the intent of demonstrating that they have earned leadership status within the field of higher education. (p. 53)

#### Mary Jane McLeod Bethune

Known for saying, "I believe in God, and in Mary McLeod Bethune," (McCluskey, 1994), Mary Jane McLeod Bethune's uncommon political acumen enabled her to found a national women's organization and an educational institution during a time when poor, dark-skinned, and assertive Black women like her had as much to prove to her own people as to the White majority. Bethune was the first to be born free as the 15<sup>th</sup> of 17 children born to Patsy and Samuel McLeod in the small town of Mayesville, South Carolina. Bethune is famously known for founding the National Council of Negro Women, serving as an advisor to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a confidante to his wife, Eleanor, and principally as founder in 1904 of the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls, which still exists today as Bethune-Cookman College in Florida (McCluskey, 1989, 1994; White, 1999). Her early educational experience of being the only Black student at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago (Murtadha & Watts, 2005) may have facilitated her later ease with working with people

of all races. Like her contemporaries, Bethune believed that education for women would provide them with some measure of independence, given the restrictions of society during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, Bethune believed that it would be the educated Black woman who would contribute to the long-term development of the Black race as a whole (Giddings, 2006; McCluskey, 1989, 1994).

#### Anna Julia Haywood Cooper

“Annie” Julia Haywood Cooper’s enduring legacy was her belief in the rights of men, women, and the poor to live their lives in ways that allowed them to live up to their God-given potential as unique creations who were unhindered by the burdens of their times. She was born in either 1858 or 1859 (the two years most commonly referenced by her biographers) in Raleigh, North Carolina, to her mother, who was a slave, and her father, who owned her mother. Dr. Cooper, who earned her doctorate from the University of the Sorbonne in Paris at the age of either 66 or 67, has been credited by some scholars with the creation of the community college concept – a compromise she formulated to bring an end to the ongoing and often contentious debate between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois over what was the best purpose for which to educate Black people – the limited purposes of industrial, trades education, or the more intellectual purposes of a classical education (Cooper, [ca. 1892]; Keller, 1999; Giles, 2006). Cooper allowed that the most useful education for Black children helped them to take their “proper and honored” place in society (Murtadha & Watts, 2005, p. 600). During her tenure as principal of M Street School in Washington, D.C., a public Black high school, she challenged the dominant thinking espoused by Washington and was

ultimately relieved of her post. But this was not before she strengthened the school's classical curriculum, increasing the numbers of Black students accepted at Harvard, Yale, and Brown (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). A feminist and supporter of the poor, Cooper lamented the "*gain and greed and grasping selfishness,*" rampant in late 19<sup>th</sup> century America, writing that "woman's work and woman's influence are needed as never before; needed to bring a heart power into this money-getting, dollar-worshipping civilization" (ca.1892/1995, p. 44).

### Fanny Jackson Coppin

Born into slavery in 1837, Fanny Jackson Coppin worked tirelessly to educate Blacks, particularly those who were indigent (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). In 1865, Coppin became the second Black woman in the nation to earn a college degree when she graduated from Oberlin College. Mary Jane Patterson was the first, graduating from Oberlin in 1862 (Perkins, 1983). When she was named principal of the Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth (ICY) in 1869, it was "the highest educational appointment of any Black woman in the nation at that time" (Murtadha & Watts, 2005, p. 599). She would lead the school for 30 years, introducing teacher-training courses and establishing a school for industrial arts during her tenure (Collier-Thomas, 1982; Gyant, 1996). At Oberlin, Coppin started evening schools for freed people migrating from the South (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Today ICY is Cheyney State University, and a college in Baltimore, MD, Coppin State University bears her name (Perkins, 1982).



### Elizabeth Evelyn “Lizzie” Wright

Elizabeth Evelyn “Lizzie” Wright’s irrevocable place in history stems from her unequivocal faith in God’s will for her life – to start a school for the sons and daughters of former slaves, so that Black people would have a chance to live productive and affirming lives. Born April 3, 1872, in a small, mostly Black and overwhelmingly poor Georgia town, Wright was the “seventh child born to a Black carpenter and a full-blooded Cherokee Indian mother,” (Morris, 1983, p. 3). Due to lack of funds, Wright attended Tuskegee Institute in Alabama as a boarding and working student in the night school program. Although illness forced her to take a year off from her schooling, Wright ultimately earned her teaching credential and set off to South Carolina with the purpose of founding a school to educate Black children, whose needs continued to be overlooked by the state. Two themes that dominated Wright’s life and work were the education of Black people, and training of Black people in industrial skills so that they might secure good jobs, support their families, own their farms and maintain a comfortable standard of living.

After repeated episodes of being burned out of structures by Whites opposed to the education of Black people in “three of the neediest counties in the Southern part of the state,” (p. 90), Wright ended up in Denmark. She became encouraged that Bamberg County (specifically Denmark) might be her best chance for starting a school, since – as in other places – there was no public school for Black people. More importantly, though, Blacks and Whites got along well together. Wright devoted over a decade of her short life tirelessly working to secure the financial help of all people – mostly White in the

North but those in the South, as well – to support the work of the Denmark Industrial School for Colored Youth. Wright’s school, which continues today as Voorhees College, was re-named by Wright and the school’s board of trustees to honor the benevolence of Ralph Voorhees, a Clinton, NJ philanthropist – and his wife, Elizabeth – who wholeheartedly supported Lizzie’s efforts almost from the moment they were made aware of her cause. Wright died on December 14, 1906, at the age of 34, of a chronic gastric condition. Though her life was short, she died as she had lived – with a firm and all-believing faith that she had lived her life out according to God’s plan (Morris, 1983).

#### Lucy Diggs Slowe

Lucy Diggs Slowe became the first African American woman to serve as a higher education administrator when she was named dean of women at Howard University in 1922. Born July 4, 1885, in Berryville, VA, Slowe was orphaned as a young girl. Reared by a paternal aunt and transported to Baltimore, she graduated second in her all-Black high school class. She attended Howard University on an academic scholarship, and in 1908, she graduated first in her class at Howard and returned to her Baltimore high school to teach English. One of the first Black women formally trained in student personnel at the Teachers College of Columbia University, Slowe was appointed Howard’s dean of women in 1922. Slowe spearheaded the creation of the National Association of College Women (NACW) and the National Association of the Women’s Deans and Advisors of Colored Schools (NAWDACS). Slowe served as president of NACW, which focused on standards and leadership for Black college women. Ultimately, Slowe and the NACW were responsible for the appointments of additional

women deans. An outspoken supporter of women's equality, Slowe advocated the self-determination, respect, and advancement of college-trained African American women. She believed that educated Black women should lead. Unlike some of her contemporaries, however, Slowe used a practical rather than a spiritual rationale for enhancing the status of Black women. And rather than for [race] uplift, Slowe wanted Black women prepared for modernity, just as White women were being prepared at their colleges. Slowe advocated Black college women's involvement in international affairs. And she believed that Black women, with proper career guidance, should pursue a wide range of employment opportunities. Further, Slowe believed that strict religious upbringing negatively impacted Black women who were subjected to more sexist, traditional beliefs about women's roles. Slowe's refusal to reign in her actions which stemmed from her beliefs concerning women's rights and roles put her in direct opposition with the first Black man to lead Howard, the one who had replaced the president who hired her. Before her untimely death due to kidney failure at the age of 52, Slowe had been nearly stripped of all the leadership authority she had worked so hard to earn serving as the first woman dean at Howard. Yet her place in higher education leadership is firmly rooted in her unyielding belief in the abilities of Black women, her groundbreaking work at Howard, and the guiding philosophies of the two national organizations that she helped to establish (Perkins, 1996).

### Summary

The role these individual women leaders played during some of the most turbulent periods in U.S. history cannot be overstated. And while leadership and other literatures

have largely neglected the inclusion of these women's distinctive contributions to the field of higher education, this oversight should be righted. For it is not simply enough to know who these women are or even what contributions they made. Rather, it is far more important that educational leadership scholars study these women's lives and leadership behaviors in an effort to glean valuable nuggets of wisdom that, added to the existing leadership literature, will make for a broader, more inclusive approach for leading in a complex and culturally diverse context (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

#### Overview of Development of Community College System

The national system of community colleges was begun in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, first as an extension of high school and then as a junior college to the senior colleges (Boone, 1997; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Zook, 1922). By the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the mission of the system would evolve to include vocational and continuing education, in addition to a strengthened transfer component. The open access policy, relatively low cost of attendance, and convenient locations of these colleges all contributed to the community college serving an unprecedented number of first-generation students, many of them minority and from disadvantaged backgrounds (Griffith & Connor, 1994; Townsend & Bragg, 2006).

#### Extension of High School to Junior College

The junior college concept was originally presented as an answer to the changing demands being placed on the U.S. educational system. Whereas a slightly dysfunctional secondary educational system once enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with higher education in terms of providing colleges and universities with students prepared for

college-level work, the changing needs of high school students themselves – forced high schools to add a vocational curriculum to its array of offerings. With fewer college-preparatory offerings for fewer college-preparatory students, higher education institutions were left with no choice but to offer the courses that were traditionally taught in high school and “spend a wholly unwarranted amount of time assimilating Freshmen and Sophomores who are doing a grade of each work which each year is becoming more clearly recognized as secondary rather than higher in character” (Zook, 1922, p. 576).

In 1901, Joliet Junior College in Illinois was established as the country’s first official junior college, in part at the behest of University of Chicago President William Rainey Harper. The junior college would test students’ ability and eliminate low-performing students at the same time that it would provide the first two years of a general education/liberal arts curriculum, so that senior institutions could focus on advanced and graduate level work. In 1917, California passed a law allowing high schools to offer the first two years of college; in essence, then, some high schools and junior colleges were serving the same functions. President Harper also recommended that junior colleges be authorized to award associate’s degrees to graduates, so that they would have a credential that allowed them to seek viable employment should they opt not to continue their education. (Boone, 1997; Townsend & Bragg, 2006; Zook, 1922)

### An Evolving Comprehensive Mission

The end of World War II and the Truman Commission Report of 1947 both contributed to an explosion of growth in the community college, with the Truman Report underscoring the importance of these institutions, referred to as community colleges for

the first time. The belief was that these colleges could bring education to a population of Americans who heretofore were either unable to gain admittance, unable to afford, or who could not travel to get to other colleges or universities. The mission of the colleges started to expand as social, economic, and political forces influenced the system (Townsend & Bragg, 2006).

Koos and Eells, strong early supporters, advocated a vocational component alongside the existing transfer mission, so that students could gain immediate employment in semi-professional occupations with just two years of college (Townsend & Bragg, 2006, p. xx). Then in the 1950s, Bogue added continuing education to the mission so that students could pursue education or upgrade their skills on a part-time basis. The 1960s and 1970s brought additional missions to the colleges, including community services and remedial/developmental education. The Carnegie Commission Report of 1974 identified the community college as the institution of choice to increase access for minority and low-income groups (Townsend & Bragg, 2006).

### Summary

The community college has enjoyed tremendous highs and lows over its relatively short existence. With the advent of the high school concept and its concomitant issues, educational leaders and politicians were challenged to come up with a way to address the changing needs of a changing population so as to meet the continually changing demands of the nation's economy. Today community colleges are an intrinsic part of their local communities, providing comprehensive program offerings and boasting numerous accomplishments. Community colleges enroll 50% of the nation's students who are

enrolled in higher education, including nearly half of all undergraduate students of color (Boone, 1997; Zamani, 2003). The challenges to the system are as varied as its curricula offerings. Most pressing are issues of keeping the open access mission that the system was based on initially (Griffith & Connor, 1994), responding to the needs and challenges of the most diverse student population served by any higher education institution (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 2008), showing accountability to myriad stakeholders who may have little understanding of the comprehensiveness of the community college, and increasing diversity of faculty, staff, and administration (Boone, 1997; Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Flowers & Moore, 2008).

#### Early History of the South Carolina Technical College System

Whereas the national system of community colleges was started with the specific purpose of serving as junior colleges to senior institutions, the South Carolina Technical College System was created for a purpose not unlike the one into which the national system has evolved (Morris, 1997). The system was formally legislated in the early 1960s as a system of loosely configured trade education centers (TECs) under the leadership of Governor Ernest F. Hollings, who appointed legislators to his select committee for state development. This committee explored the over-riding issue of how to entice business and industry to South Carolina, a state hampered by its inability to transition from its agrarian roots to the innovations of industrialization.

A significant portion of the state's difficulties lay in its educational system. Still operating dual, racially-segregated and unequal systems of education, years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, South Carolina ranked squarely on the bottom of all other states in

educational attainment of its citizens (Frock, 2002; Morris, 1997). In his campaign for governor, Hollings vowed he would tackle the issue head-on if elected, and he did (Frock, 2002). He immediately set to work on forming an exploratory committee of legislators, who were tasked with visiting systems in other states and reporting back their findings and recommendations. Those findings and recommendations evolved into the South Carolina Technical Education System (Frock, 2002; Morris, 1997). Though none of the literature explicitly traces the technical college system back to the earliest systems of education in the state, specifically those that provided an education to Negroes, White women and poor Whites, a brief look here at South Carolina's history of educating Negroes specifically is revelatory and may answer the question of why the technical college system was the first integrated educational system in the state (Morris, 1997).

#### Early History of Education of Negroes

In *History of Education in South Carolina* the authors devote four of 247 pages to "The Education of the Negro," which is included in the section on public schools since "the education of the negro [sic] is so largely elementary" (Meriwether & McCrady, 1889, p. 122). In 1744, a school "perhaps for free Negroes, of whom there were many throughout the state during the time of slavery..." (p. 122) was established in Charleston by the Rev. Alexander Garden of The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. However, after a series of insurrections, a law was passed in 1834, forbidding the teaching of slaves to read and write (this apparently applied to the free Negroes as well), though religious teaching continued. With Reconstruction, however,



those Negroes who had received only elementary and trades instruction before the war, “suddenly became orators, parliamentarians, and statesmen” (p. 123).

It was during this time that a number of Negro schools were established by different religious denominations, with “Northern benevolence” (Meriwether & McCrady, 1889, p. 124) resulting in over \$26 million being sent South to set up schools for Blacks. With the reorganization of state government in 1868, a public school system for Blacks was created. Negroes received elementary education for three months of a year. Several normal schools and institutes were established, providing good high school training. However, Claflin University in Orangeburg, South Carolina, was singled out for reportedly “furnishing a grade of instruction almost equal to that of any white college in the State” (p. 124). While the grammar school which served as preparation for the normal school, mechanical department, Girls’ Industrial Home, and courses in science and practical agriculture all flourished, “as was to be expected from the condition of the race,” the classical department was minimally attended though “the work is of a high grade and thorough” (p. 125).

#### Early Development of TEC

By most accounts, the South Carolina Technical College System evolved out of the state’s desperate need for economic development and the requisite workforce training necessary to entice business and industry to the state (Morris, 1997; Frock, 2002; McLafferty, 2006). During the late 1940s, and into the 1950s and 1960s, the state of South Carolina faced three general needs: a.) improve the economic status of its citizens by addressing cyclical challenges of functional illiteracy and poverty, b.) diversify its

economic base, which had subsisted in its agrarian roots for centuries, and c.) accommodate the growing demands of its citizens for access to affordable higher education for a better quality of life (Frock, 2002). Additional factors including the out-migration of the state's youth, a declining rural but increasing urban population, inferior educational system, lack of accessible post-secondary training options, and the returning World War II veterans compounded Governor Hollings' challenges. The fact that the state's powerful legislature remained staunchly committed to its segregated ways made the plausible seemingly impossible. Even with the plethora of needs and factors weighing in and weighing down the state, the West Committee's (Hollings' legislative group) recommendation that the state pursue a plan to training its workforce by educating its workforce met resistance from all sides. The General Assembly resisted acting on the recommendation due to concerns ranging from fears that the new system would encroach on vocational teachers in the public schools to fears that Black and White students would be learning together to fears that textile workers would be lost to a competing industry (Morris, 1997). Once Hollings and the committee allayed most of the fears, the legislature was ready to move forward.

### Today's Technical College System

In 2011, the system celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the legislation which brought it to fruition. This system of trade education centers and now 15 technical colleges and one community college (Spartanburg as of 2006) which started in Greenville now spans the entire state. Greenville Technical College, Midlands Technical College in Columbia, and Trident Technical College in Charleston, are the largest colleges in the

system. In fact, Greenville Technical College boasted the third largest student enrollment of the state's 33 not-for-profit public and private colleges and universities just a few years ago. Trident Technical College in Charleston, now the largest technical college in the state, has recently usurped this coveted claim from Greenville Tech, according to South Carolina CHE data. Like the national system, the state system of colleges is affordable, conveniently-located, and responsive to students' changing curricula needs. And while the myriad missions, functions, diverse student body and challenges of being all things to all people while being clear to none still plague this system just like the national community college system. In a 2006 mixed-methods study of the perceptions of several groups of stakeholders (technical college presidents, state legislators, and four-year college and university presidents) of the technical college system's image and its perceived weaknesses and strengths, legislators and technical college presidents held significantly more favorable views of the quality of students and faculty than other presidents. Further, quality of students and faculty consistently rated as the most important issue on the minds of the respondents (McLafferty, 2006). Other perceived weaknesses of the system included:

- Poor quality of part-time faculty
- Poor articulation with four-year universities
- Less focus on transfer, more focus on technical training (legislators)
- Less focus on technical training, more focus on transfer (four-year presidents)
- Students not prepared to be successful nor is faculty competent (four-year presidents)

The most commonly cited weakness was the perception that the technical colleges wanted to be community colleges, and therefore, they were ignoring the technical training component of their mission. There were perceived strengths of the system as well:

- Meets needs of business and industry, good training programs
- Bridge programs (Midlands and USC; Tri-County Tech and Clemson)
- Accessible, convenient, and affordable

Another interesting finding of the McLafferty (2006) study was the perception that South Carolina has too many colleges and universities.

#### Thematic Synthesis of Studies of Black Women Administrators

The research studies that I have examined about the experiences of Black women leaders in higher education focus on Black women in higher education within a variety of contexts: as college presidents (Green, 2008; Logan, 2006; Vaughan, 1989; Waring, 2003); in student affairs administration (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007; Henry, 2010); within the scope of an assessment of the experiences of Black women leaders, students, and faculty all together (Jackson & Phelps, 2004; Patitu & Hinton, 2003); with their experiences undistinguished from that of Black male administrators (Bridges, 1996; Rolle, Davies, & Banning, 2000; Smith, 1980; Tucker, 1980; Vaughan, 1989, 1996); and through comparison of the male and female four-year administrator to their two-year administrator counterpart (Flowers & Moore, 2008; Jean-Marie, 2006; Greer, 1981). While most of the studies are qualitative in nature, I have also reviewed a few quantitative and mixed-methods studies (Amondi, 2011; Schwartz, Bower, Rice, &

Washington, 2003). Only two of the studies I reviewed compared Black women and White women in the professions (Richie et al., 1997; Sokoloff, 1992).

Based on a careful review and synthesis of the key arguments made in these studies, the foci have remained constant (strategies, challenges, characteristics, skills and behaviors of successful leaders); what has changed is the tone and tenor of the messages. As an example, 1980s-era studies tend to combine the experiences of Black women and Black men administrators. Further, the literature of the 1980s started the shift in consideration of other factors than personal ones as being responsible for low numbers of women in administration (Opp & Gosetti, 2002). Surprisingly, literature from this era made liberal use of pejorative language in referring to ethnic groups, the use of which would be highly questionable in today's scholarship. In the 1990s, literature focused on the "chilly campus climate" created by organizational and cultural factors (Opp & Gosetti, 2002). This was quite similar to Amondi's (2011) findings regarding the Ministry of Education program in Kenya. In the early 2000s, attention shifted to understanding gender in the context of race/ethnicity and specific institutional characteristics, but this has yet to become a consistent part of the data set (Opp & Gosetti, 2002).

#### Strategies for Leadership Development

Harvard's (1986) literature review cites three studies that explored strategies Black women could use for personal and positional power as leaders, such as learning and understanding organizational culture. Based on their research findings, Alexander and Scott (1983) crafted a career management model for Black women that focused on

their ability to conform to organizational culture; to project a professional image in dress and demeanor; to possess technical knowledge and interpersonal competence; to map out a career pathway; and to make use of all available contacts within and outside of their institutions. Shivers' (1985) study of 79 administrators in over 100 community colleges in California revealed that Black women needed to focus on acquiring knowledge and skills in a variety of areas including fiscal affairs, institutional planning, group dynamics, and educational issues. Lewis (1985) interviewed 10 women qualitatively and learned that these women become more informed about the career development process, cultivate multiple support relationships, and network with other women and seek advanced degrees.

Self-motivation, strong work ethic, personal support systems, and knowledge, skills and network opportunities were strongly evident (Banner, 2003). Minority leaders need role models, mentors, and sponsors to help them advance (Richie et al., 1997). In a study of high-achieving Black and White women, Black women were proactive, attacking problems as they presented themselves. A belief in God and spirituality were also important to both Black and White women's abilities to cope with the stresses of their work lives (Richie et al., 1997). Chatman (1991) found that for Black women administrators in community colleges within North Carolina, constant pursuit of educational excellence was the most effective strategy. Other leadership strategies included influential role models and mentors. Other studies focused on communicating verbally and orally and developing and strengthening self-esteem (Bridges, 1996). Flowers and Moore (2008) observed that to increase administrative diversity, it is

important to hire minority faculty in mass and provide support networks. Finally, Robinson (1996) interviewed and tested 14 community college presidents to find out how they get the strength to do the work that they do, with the following themes as a result:

- Showing early signs of leadership
- Spirituality
- Self-Reliance
- Relationships
- Aloneness

#### Leadership Qualities and Behaviors

Black women should possess or be able to acquire a variety of leadership qualities in order to be successful in their careers, such as communication skills, self-confidence, decision-making skills, and organizational skills (Bridges, 1996; Chatman, 1991; Collier-Thomas, 1982; Greer, 1981; Harvard, 1986; Henry, 2010; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). Being able to listen to non-verbal cues conveyed, “Lead from the heart,” (Clayborne & Hamrick, 2007). Schlesinger’s (1979) study offered additional requirements such as the abilities to communicate, listen, and try to understand from where other people are coming. Working with others on teams, evaluations should be used to improve self and others” (Logan, 2006). In their joint venture of interviewing, Bower and Wolverton (2009) added to the extant leadership literature on ways African American women leaders do leadership through their case study project which detailed the stories of seven African American women in educational leadership roles, outlining the commonalities of

these women's experiences as illustrated through the "six C's of leadership" – the themes of communication, creativity, sense of divine calling, caring, competence, and credibility.

Additional leadership attributes include determination to prove ability, attainment of the doctoral degree, humility, work ethic, self-assurance, good communication and political skills (Rolle, Davies, & Banning, 2000).

#### Obstacles or Challenges to Advancement as Leaders

In the 1980s, administrators were faced with two challenges – 1.) Administration without the power or authority to carry out those responsibilities, and 2.) Work position not clearly defined (Greer, 1981; Harvard, 1986; Mosley, 1980; Smith, 1980; Tucker, 1980). These challenges were exacerbated by the fact that Black administrators were mostly hired as staff officers, meaning their positions fell outside true administration (Smith, 1980). On top of these complications, Black administrators were expected to be the authority on issues of race. Mosley (1980) labeled Black women an "endangered species" of higher education because they were tenured and promoted less, plagued by societal and institutional racism, as well as oppressed by the double jeopardy of racism and classism. Greer's dissertation (1981) sought to determine the status of top-level Black women administrators in the two-year and four-year colleges. Race and gender were found to be negative in terms of career, while more women found gender an issue in predominantly White institutions than in predominantly Black institutions (Greer, 1981).

An important national study of nearly 2,000 community college faculty was conducted in 1979 to explore faculty attitudes towards affirmative action. The survey revealed that those who favored affirmative action policy generally were those who could



benefit from the policy. This study and its 84% response rate made it especially powerful (Schlesinger, 1979). This study is quite revealing of faculty in the community college, which has as its foundation being responsive to community and social demands (p. 113). Further, this finding suggests that a liberal education policy may not have been acceptable to educators in 1979 (Schlesinger, 1979).

In *My Soul Is My Own*, Etter-Lewis (1993) recounts the oral narratives of nine Black women from around the country, between the ages of 61 and 101. Some of these women indicated that earlier in their professional careers, a “challenge” for them was being made to do significantly more as a student teacher than was required. Ironically, as a result of this differential treatment of them, these women were very well prepared for teaching (Etter-Lewis, 1993). While racism and sexism were consistently found across studies as a significant barrier for Black women, Etter-Lewis exposed the disturbing phenomenon of forced retirement. Black women felt that the discriminate use of forced retirement as a practice perpetuated racism, and they also believed their contributions were seen as not important (Etter-Lewis, 1993).

In Clayborne & Hamrick’s study (2007), the “mammy” image manifested itself, in terms of work-related care giving requirements of Black women. Banner’s (2003) found that family commitments both helped *and* hindered career advantage for Black women. And diverse faculty creates more diverse administration (Jackson & Phelps, 2004). Meanwhile, data was gathered to show that rather than being doubly advantaged by the affirmative action policies of the late 1960s and early 1970s, Black women were

still relegated to low-status, poorly-paid, female-dominated professions – and consequently, doubly *disadvantaged* (Sokoloff, 1992, p. 94).

Numerous studies found racism and sexism to be persistent barriers to advancement for Black women. Allen et al. (1995) found that finding mentors and sponsors was especially difficult for the group of African American women school administrators in their study. Bower (1996) explored social power by African American women as a possible reason for their lack of upward mobility. Findings from this quantitative study showed that power is determined by the individual's position in the organization, which gives the individual the opportunity to exercise power. In this study, race had zero sum effect on the scores, and it was determined that both Black and White women used their social power in very similar ways. As a result, this study was unable to say what prevents Black women from moving up in their organizations.

In addition to racism and sexism (Jean-Marie, 2006; Patitu & Hinton, 2003), other barriers to upper-level Black women leaders included family issues, perception of incompetence that subordinates tend to have of Black women, and subordinates' tendency to question Black women's abilities to perform their duties. In addition, the Ramey study (1995) found lack of authority, isolation, and limited networking to be additional barriers to Black women. Chatman's dissertation (1991) revealed two interesting perspectives on Black women's reactions to barriers. First, Black women indicated using negative experiences as motivators to excel, and they also had a tendency to overload themselves.

In their comparative study of highly-achieving Black and White women, Richie et al. (1997) found workplace barriers such as discrimination and negative attitudes from others as barriers. A lack of understanding of Black women's worldview, pressure to prove herself, being the lone voice, and Black women who request favors of another Black woman in an authority position are all compounding issues for Black women leaders in student affairs administration (Henry, 2010). Amondi (2011) concluded in her study of the Ministry of Education in Kenya, that organizational factors followed by sociological factors, and finally individual factors were responsible for the glaring gender discrepancies in employment. Some individual-level factors that may be at work include Kenyan women's avoidance of criticism and negative feedback, fear of failure, less confidence in leadership ability, and the perceptions of others of themselves. Though certainly impacted by African cultural mores, Amondi's study illuminates the parallels in experiences of U.S.-born Black women and Kenya women. According to Becks-Moody's (2004) dissertation, lack of respect by colleagues; questions of competition; and isolation are all barriers to Black women's leadership advancement.

#### Theoretical Frameworks of Research Study

This narrative inquiry into the experiences of two Black women leaders within the Southern Technical College System will be framed primarily through the lens of critical race theory (CRT) and Black feminist theory or thought (BFT). While it may not be appropriate to apply every tenet associated with each of these theories to these women's experiences or to expect that each woman's leadership story can be fully explicated through these frameworks, it is conceivable that these Black women's experiences of

leadership have been shaped at least in part by their own self-affirmations as Black women with their own distinct standpoints, and whose differential social locations within their organizations are based on the intersecting oppressions of race, class, and gender (Collins, 1986, 1989, 1996, 1999, 2009). It is also possible that some of the tenets of critical race theory may be applicable to these women's lives and leadership experiences, given the likelihood that these women may have constructed counter stories of aspects of their experiences in an effort to insulate themselves from some of the negative and controlling images and pervasive racial attitudes that may have impacted their abilities to lead within their organizations with conviction (Collins, 2009; Delgado, 1989). In order to have a clearer understanding of the explication of these women's stories within these frameworks, a historical and philosophical overview of each theory is presented.

#### Critical Race Theory (CRT)

Critical race theory (CRT) was developed in the field of critical legal studies (CLS) during the 1970s and 1980s by such legal scholars as Derrick Bell, Patricia J. Williams, Alan Freeman, and Richard Delgado in an attempt to address the inadequacies of civil rights legislation – the discourse of which is rooted within a color-blind principle – in bringing about justice for people of color (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Dixson and Rousseau, 2005; Tate, 1997). The CRT movement is “rooted in social missions and struggles of the 1960s that sought justice, liberation, and economic power” (Tate, 1997, p. 197). CRT is distinguished from CLS in that CRT scholars claim civil rights discourse of CLS “does not adequately address the experiences of people of color,” (p. 198).

Theories and beliefs about people of color in educational research and American jurisprudence have both been based on the belief that people of color are inferior – supported by “political, scientific and religious theories” (Tate, 1997, p. 199) that rely themselves on racial characterizations and stereotypes. “The inferiority paradigm is characterized by its fluidity and dynamic nature, an ever-changing hegemonic discourse,” p. 199). The paradigm has been identified by traits, such as IQ studies, that are present in educational research: a.) White, middle-class male is standard other groups are measured by; b.) instruments that measure difference are universally applied across groups; and c.) social class, gender, culture orientation, and English proficiency are considered extraneous factors. As a result of this paradigm, “a theory that explicates the role of race in education and law” is needed (p. 202).

Racial injustice has often been litigated in the courts; hence, there was a need for African-Americans to be trained in the law. Howard University’s law school program was rebuilt by Charles Hamilton Houston, whose use of social engineering to attain civil rights to achieve racial equality in the courts resulted in numerous cases won when he became chief counsel to the NAACP. When Thurgood Marshall, Houston’s protégé, took over the position from Houston, Marshall asked Derrick Bell, a trained lawyer and the head of a local branch of the NAACP, to join his staff. Later, upon his move to teach law at Harvard, Bell applied his perspective as a Black man and his foundations in civil rights work to this teaching role. In 1981, Bell was denied tenure by Harvard, which resulted in student boycotts and the creation of a new class centered on race and the law, and based on a book that Bell had written entitled *Race, Racism, and American Law*.

Student-led movements against racism in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s also pushed the development of CRT forward.

Though there is no clear date of inception, CRT generally is traced to the post-civil rights era (1970s to the present). Crenshaw (1988) asserted that “CRT should be understood as an effort to build upon and extend the legal scholarship and activism that led to the civil rights movement rather than an attack on the thinking and efforts associated with the legal scholarship and strategy of that era” (p. 206). In his scholarship, Bell puts forth three arguments: constitutional contradiction or the idea that the framers of the U.S. constitution legally sanctioned slavery so as to maintain the privilege of property rights over human rights; interest convergence or the notion that progress for Blacks must come at an incremental pace and only as the goals for Blacks also meet some need for Whites; and the position that “Whites will not support civil rights policies that appear to threaten their superior social status” (p. 215). In *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice*, Bell (1987) uses his protagonist (ostensibly Bell) and his fictional alter ego Geneva Crenshaw – a former civil rights colleague who has been hospitalized for the past 20 years, to take part in a series of discussions of “10 ‘chronicles,’ metaphorical tales devised to illuminate society’s treatment of race” (p. 212).

Richard Delgado, another founder of CRT, puts forth four reasons for the use of stories, counter stories, and the voice of people of color within legal analysis and scholarship (Tate, 1997, p. 219) –

- Reality is socially constructed.

- Stories are a powerful means for destroying and changing mindsets.
- Stories have a community-building function.
- Stories provide members of out-groups mental self-preservation.

Recognition of experiential knowledge is equivalent to “voice” in legal studies-based CRT. Voice is “the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of personal community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge” (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 10). There is not one “single, common voice” (p. 10) for all people of color, since individuals will and do tell different stories. Yet, “there is a common experience of racism that structures the stories of people of colour [sic] and allows for the use of the term voice” (p. 10). This scholarship based on the aspect of voice serves as a counter story – “a means to counteract or challenge the dominant story” (p. 11). Therefore, critical race theorists posit that political, moral, and legal analysis are all situational – attendant on historical, contextual, specific dimensions rather than “transcendent, acontextual, universal truths” (Tate, 1997, p. 220).

Delgado noted that stories or counter-stories, if they do not appear coercive, can change mindsets in that they can make an oppressor reframe his or her position in light of additional information or evidence. Storytelling builds community through “consensus, a common culture of shared understandings, and a more vital ethics” (p. 220). Finally, voice serves to ensure the mental stability of marginalized groups. Storytelling and the sharing of stories help “heal wounds caused by racial discrimination” (p. 221), allowing people of color to share their stories, gain better understanding of their condition, and consequently, “stop inflicting mental violence on themselves” (p. 221).

CRT as a method of analysis of society and its systems was brought to the educational arena in the 1990s by scholars including Ladson-Billings (1995) and Tate (1997). Table 2.1 outlines the central themes of CRT applicable to higher education:

Table 2.1

*Central Themes of Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Parker & Villalpando, 2007)*

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- CRT asserts the centrality of race and racism within American higher education.
  - CRT challenges university claims of meritocracy, color-blindness and race neutrality.
  - CRT is committed to social justice and praxis so as to eliminate all forms of subordination.
  - CRT argues that experiential knowledge and lived experiences of people of color are authentic sources of social science and other research.
  - CRT asserts the validity of analyzing race and racism in both a historical and contemporary context using interdisciplinary methods.
- 

“Education...is at the heart of critical race theory both in its origins and some of its central concerns (Powers, 2007, p. 152). CLS challenged “meritocracy,” whereas “CRT focuses directly on effects of race and racism,” as well as “the hegemonic system of White supremacy on the ‘meritocratic’ system” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, pp. 26-27). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that a critical race theoretical perspective in education is needed based on three propositions: that race continues to matter in the U.S.; that U.S. society is based on property rights, not human rights; and that the intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity. “...we contend that the voice of people of color is required for a complete analysis of the educational system” (p. 58). In their story that explored the experiences of Black male students on



historically White research university campuses, Smith, Yosso, and Solórzano (2007) used CRT as the framework for their construction of a race counter story that compiled the experiences of 22 Black male students into one composite account that explored negative campus racial and gender climates. They concluded that “universities foster a negative campus racial climate by implicitly or explicitly endorsing such race-conscious actions” (p. 560) that would create a climate where Black male students reported being the victims of stereotyping which resulted from Black misandry. “Black misandry refers to an exaggerated pathological aversion toward Black men created and reinforced in societal, institutional, and individual ideologies, practices, and behaviors” (Smith et al., 2007). Four Black misandric stereotypes directed toward Black male students included being perceived as criminals or predators, street-smart experts on “ghetto life,” non-academic athletes, or anti-intellectuals.

Dixson & Rousseau (2005) assessed the state of CRT in education by examining education scholarship that specifically “build[s] on and expand[s]...the scholarship found in the critical race legal literature,” (p. 9) – since it evolved out of critical legal studies. Education scholarship has addressed race and racism; the dominant discourse centered on merit, color-blindness, neutrality, objectivity; historical and contextual analyzes, and the voices of people of color. However, the tenets of CRT that relate to its interdisciplinary nature and the connection of a social justice agenda with active struggle have not been as developed in the CRT literature in education. Much of the literature on critical race theory in education has focused on the theory’s application to “qualitative” research; however, being that CRT is a “problem-centred [sic]” (p. 22) approach, the problem

should determine the method – therefore, qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods – all methods should be used to address educational inequity. Dixson and Rousseau (2005) suggest that ensuring that recommendations for changes in policy and practice are actually put into place should be the cause for a community of CRT scholars in education (p. 24).

### Black Feminist Theory (BFT)

Black feminist theory or thought (BFT) consists of ideas that are produced by Black women that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women (Collins, 1986). In her historiographical article that overviews the evolutionary development of BFT within the larger feminist movement, Taylor (1998) described how BFT was formed out of both the “antagonistic” (p. 235) and distrustful relationship that existed between Black and White women during and immediately after slavery, as well as Black women’s desire to improve conditions for their own empowerment themselves. Taylor zeroed in on the struggle that perpetually existed between Black women and White women about one group’s ability to live without the complications (a life uncomplicated by race) and the other’s inability to envision a world that is not complicated by race. As a result, feminism needed to be *darkened* to reflect the racial issues.

The first wave of feminism was linked to the abolitionist movement (1830-1865) during which “free” (p. 235) and enslaved Black women sought to dismantle slavery and end sexual abuse. Abolitionist Sojourner Truth called attention to the fact that Black women were differently situated from White women, and called for an end to slavery and for equality between the sexes that was based on biblical doctrine (Taylor, 1998). White

women feminists such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton demonstrated a lack of integrity by appearing to be concerned with Black women's lack of suffrage but this was only as a way to secure Black men's support for White women's suffrage. During the suffrage movement, which took place from 1890-1920, Black women rallied for the vote, even though White women refused to support their campaign, as doing so ran counter to White women's belief in White supremacy which underpinned affirmation of the vote.

Meanwhile, Black women continued to participate in civil rights organization including the National Association of Colored Women, the NAACP, and the National Association of Wage Earners (Taylor, 1998). The second wave of feminism corresponded with the civil rights movement of the 1960s, specifically with the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the freedom summer of 1964 (and passage of Civil Rights Act, Title VII and Title IX), and most especially, the women's liberation movement. During this period, Black women activists were forced to choose race membership over gender identity – even as they suffered through acts of chauvinism by Black leaders of such groups as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Black feminist theory rearticulates a consciousness that already exists in Black women and gives these women another tool of resistance to all forms of their subordination (Collins, 1989). “Using the term ‘black feminism’ disrupts the racism inherent in presenting feminism as a for-whites-only ideology and political movement. Inserting the adjective ‘black’ challenges the assumed whiteness of feminism and disrupts the false universality of this term for both white and black women” (Collins,

1996, p. 13). There are four major themes that characterize BFT (Collins, 1990, as cited in Taylor, 1998). Black women's ability to define and value themselves enables them to counter the negative and controlling images of Black womanhood. Second, Black women "confront and dismantle the 'overarching' and 'interlocking' structure of domination in terms of race, class, and gender oppression" (p. 235). Another theme of BFT is Black women's ability to blend intellectual thought with political action. And Black women's embrace of their cultural heritage equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to resist daily discrimination.

As one of the scholars credited with more recent iterative developments of Black feminist theory or thought, Collins' influence on the conceptualizations of the theory have been prominently noted. In an attempt to process her personal experiences of isolation in school and work environments during the 1980s, Collins' (1986) exploration of her own position between groups of unequal power prompted her to explore whether other African American women were similarly located based on the intersections of race, gender, and class. This resulted in her conceptualization of the sociological concept known as "outsider within," which originally referred to "how a social group's placement in specific, historical context of race, gender, and class inequality might influence its point of view on the world" (1999, p. 85). In addressing the problems associated with the overwhelming response she received to her work on the "outsider within," Collins (1999) later reflected on a series of challenges that she faced. First, the meaning of "outsider within" had been changed to reflect a focus on individual identity that takes away the power that Collins sought to provide to Black women who are located

in places that they have historically not been allowed access to in their professional lives (p. 86). This is a problem because not every "outsider within" attained their status in the same way (p. 86). Collins now defines "outsider within" as those social locations or border spaces occupied by groups of unequal social power. And Collins has redefined "outsider within identities" as those "situational identities that are tied to specific histories of social injustice" (p. 86). Collins also referred to the second challenge of marketplace ideologies that result in the commodification of Black women simply for their "outsider-within status," thereby causing social institutions to "hand-pick" Black women to serve as examples of their commitment to diversity and inclusion, while allowing the same unequal power relations/conditions which created the "outsider within" status to exist in the first place, to remain unchallenged (p. 88). Rather,

Organizations should aim to *eliminate* (emphasis in original) outsider within locations, not by excluding the individual Black women who raise hard questions, but by including them in new ways. More importantly, for those African American women who have gained access to places denied their mothers, new ways of inclusion, outsider-within and otherwise, provide new opportunities for fostering social justice. (p. 88)

Rosser-Mims' (2010) qualitative exploration of Black women's lived experiences and leadership both during slavery as well as their emerging roles in the first wave of the feminist movement, used a Black feminist lens to describe how the confluence of power, race, and gender influence the process through which Black women activists acquire

skills. From her examination of the lives of Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Anna Julia Cooper, three themes of Black female leadership emerged. Their experiences:

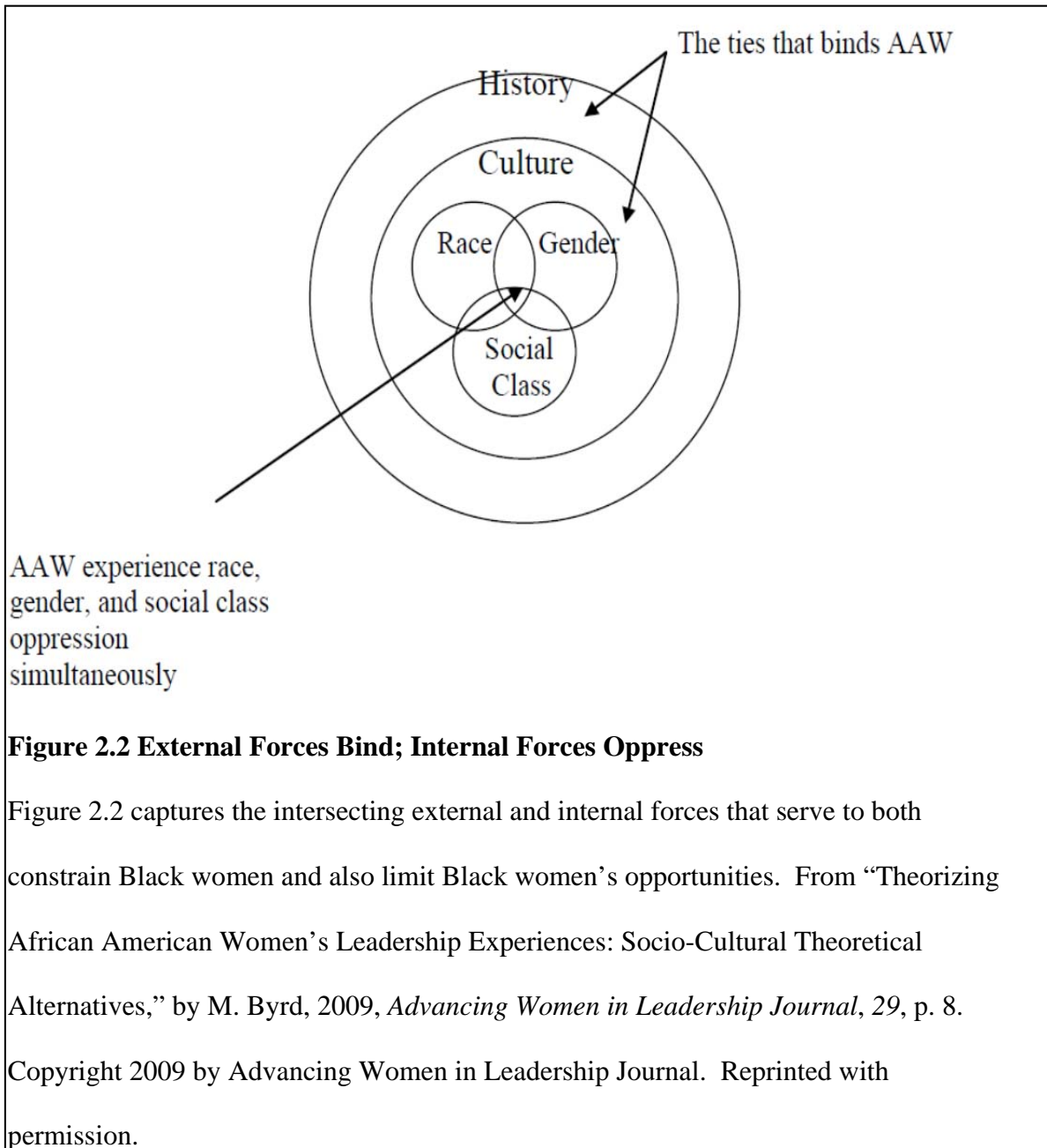
- Exemplify survival techniques in family, church, and community organizations that encompass creativity and commitment for group well-being
- Consist of Black female networks, formal and informal, which are dynamic, interrelated entities that form reinforcements matrix that hold the Black community while developing leadership for the future
- Represent the collective experiences and action toward community empowerment

Black feminist ideology is transformative and “rooted in [Black women’s] reality” (King, 1988, p. 71). The following tenets as espoused by King (1988) will partially guide my research study:

- Black women are visible.
- Self-determination is essential to Black women.
- Inter-structure of oppressions of racism, sexism, and classism must be challenged in institutions of the dominant society.
- Black women are imaged as powerful, independent subjects.

There have been some critiques of the limitations of the theoretical framework in practice, however. In her exploration of Black feminist theory in practice both in Britain and the U.S., Reynolds (2002) articulated some contradictions inherent within the framework. “Only certain stories of Black womanhood get taken up,” (p. 592). These experiences of often “poor, urban, deprived” Black women are viewed as authentic and valued experiences (p. 592). Therefore, Black feminist theory appears to be reductionist in nature, essentializing the experiences of all Black women to one that is most valued.

Further, social class differences of Black women are not analyzed, even as privileged Black women are called on to speak up for other less-privileged women. Neither does Black feminist theory include prominently Black lesbian writers, nor have homophobic tendencies of Black communities been critically engaged. And the majority of the narratives tend to focus on African-American female experiences, which do not reflect or incorporate other Black women's experiences. At the same time, these experiences are assumed to represent those of Black women throughout the world. Lastly, Reynolds expressed concern that the commercialization and commodification of a dysfunctional perspective of Black women's experience in the popularity of Black women's writings suggest that dominant-group publishers will market the perceptions of Black women that publishers believe will sell – these perceptions, however, are usually steeped in harmful stereotypes of Black women.



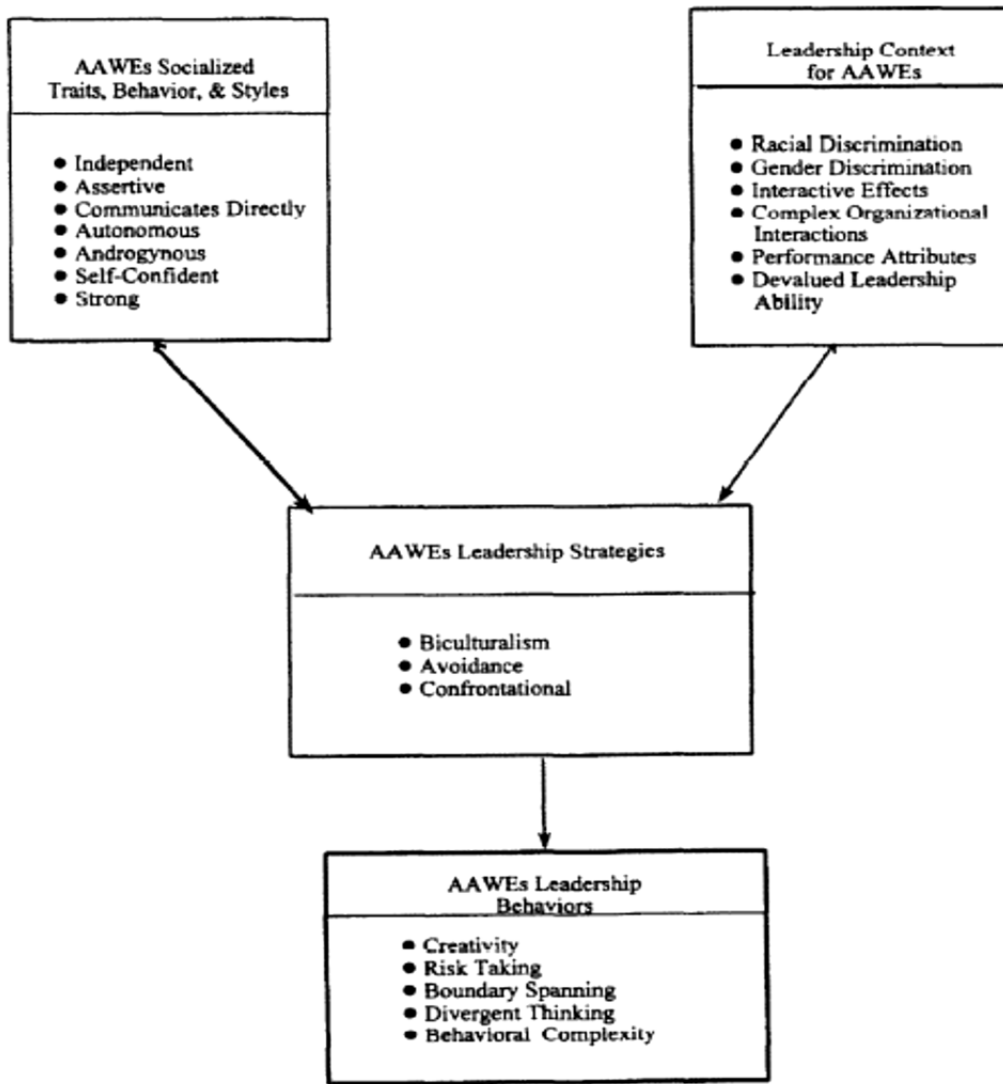
Overview of Leadership Theories Applicable to Black Women Leaders

At the same time that there continues to be a lack of representation of Black women leaders’ perspectives within the leadership and organizational theories literature, the research literature on the Black woman leader lacks a clear articulation of Black



women's ways of leading. For example, the leadership literature does not include Black women's networks formed within their communities as a way to lift up their communities – which would demonstrate that in non-traditional ways, Black women seek to collectively, not hierarchically, guide their followers (Parker & ogilvie, 1996; Parker, 2005; Rosser-Mims, 2010).

Parker and ogilvie argued that a distinction needs to be made in the organizational and management leadership literature about the effect of both race *and* gender on the ways that African American women lead – this difference is embedded within Black women's cultural make-up. Figure 2.3 represents the strategies and behaviors Black women exhibit within organizations – and how the strategies and behaviors “may be conceptualized as a function of their socialized traits, behaviors, and styles – and...their distinct social location within dominant culture organizations” (p. 192).



**Figure 2.3 Model of African American Female Executives' Leadership**

Figure 2.3 represents a model of leadership strategies and behaviors of African American women executives that reflect the ways that they are differentially socialized based on their cultural heritage. This combined with the leadership context of their organizations impacts their approach to leadership. From “Gender, Culture, and Leadership: Toward a Culturally Distinct Model of African American Women Executives’ Leadership Strategies,” by P. Parker and d.t. ogilvie, 1996, *Leadership Quarterly*, 7(2), p. 192. Reprinted with permission.

In the empirical studies I reviewed, the basic tenets of several theories have been offered up as closely representative of the ways that Black women lead. However, there are limitations to these traditional theories as they do not consider socio-cultural aspects of the leader, nor do they offer solutions to problems that plague Black women leaders (Byrd, 2009). While some theories have been recommended, more studies of Black women's leadership experiences are needed to arrive at a theory that clearly articulates a Black woman's standpoint, which impacts her leadership approach. An established theory whose tenets have been applied to Black women's leadership behaviors is servant leadership.

### Servant Leadership

Although at least one scholar eschews the label of "servant leadership" as a theory applicable to Black women leaders, who for far too many years have served as others' servants (Parker, 2005), Greenleaf's version (1970) of this form of ethical leadership clearly has applicability to the ways that Black women lead in community colleges. A servant leader is an individual who emerges as a leader by first being a servant in that he or she works to serve and advance the well-being of workers and of the organization. Further, a servant leader has a social obligation to be concerned with the "have-nots" (as cited in Northouse, 2004, p. 309). Some of the tenets and observable behaviors characteristic of servant leadership that have been cited in the empirical studies of Black women leaders include:

- Shifts authority to followers
- Is empathetic, listens and accepts others unconditionally

- Recognizes leader-follower relationship as central to ethical leadership
- Pays attention to follower's unique needs
- Practices an ethic of caring, which builds trust and cooperation
- Serves others, including nurturing, defending and empowering followers

Some Black women educational leaders who are also scholars have balked at the description of their leadership function as being the equivalent of servitude (Collins, 2009; Southern, 1996). Black women in higher education are often called upon to serve other roles, particularly for minority students (mentors, mothers, counselors) – roles that, though honorable, take away from these women's key duties and responsibilities and pushes Black women administrators into modern day “domestic workers” (Southern, 1996, p. 29). Further, these roles tend to push Black women outside of their formal administrative positions; hence they are “under-utilized in the intellectual arena and over-utilized as a caretaker” (Southern, 1996, p. 29). The realities of these aspects of their experiences for some Black women administrators is what causes some Black women scholars to resist applying the term *servant leadership* to Black women's ways of leading.

Conversely, servant leadership inherently values a diverse culture and the leader who models this theory embodies basic values such as respect, service, and equity; demonstrates respect for cultural differences; develops strategies to attain leadership diversity, including providing recruited leaders with mentoring and encouraging the development of their leadership skills (Page, 2003).

### Spirituality and servant leadership.

Spiritual leadership was not formally defined in the leadership theories literature or empirical studies I reviewed. Rather, I have read a lot of studies and theoretical pieces that talk about the role of spirituality to the balanced lives of Black women leaders (Bower & Wolverton, 2009; Ramey, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Southern, 1996) especially as they rise to meet the challenges of their roles as leaders. An important aspect of most African cultures (Southern, 1996), spirituality has played a significant role historically in the lives of Black women who often spoke of being “spiritually called” to educate others (Giddings, 2006; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; White, 1999). Spirituality also served as a stabilizing force in Black women leaders’ lives as they adjusted to their often uncomfortable places in schools of higher learning which were not intended or designed for African Americans. Black women in academe who are spiritually connected people realize their highest selves in becoming one with all humanity (Southern, 1996, p. 26). By extension, their belief in a higher purpose to their lives manifests itself in their service to those whom they are called to lead.

### Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership theories that have evolved in the leadership and organizational theories literature were strongly guided by Burns (1978). Transformational leadership is defined by the “confident and optimistic” leader’s ability to gain trust and a commitment to the organization from followers through the articulation and explanation of “a clear and appealing vision” for the organization (Yukl, 2005, p. 292). Burns’ initial conceptualization of transformational leadership was framed

in contrast to the behaviors of transactional leaders, whose interactions with followers were driven by mutual self-interest and exchange. Subsequent variations of transformational leadership shift focus to the leader's ability to charismatically lead others through the carefully crafted articulation of a vision for the organization. This vision can only be fulfilled if the followers are convinced that their futures are intimately enmeshed in the organization's future; in other words, the transformational leader's power comes from being able to project a vision for the future of an organization, empower followers through investment in the vision, and motivate followers into making this long-range vision a reality (House, 1976). While some posit a "smoke and mirrors" aspect to the transformational leader's role, others laud the innovativeness inherent to a visionary. For rather than a short-sighted, managerial focus on the now and the near future, the transformational leader craftily creates the organization's long-range future and then clearly projects this future for followers to see (Northouse, 2004; Yukl, 2005).

### Postheroic Leadership

"Based on bottom-up transformation fueled by shared power and community building" (Sandmann & Vandenberg, 1995, p. 2), postheroic leadership theory is defined as leadership models that focus "less on the heroic actions of a few individuals at the top of organizations" and more in "collaborative...relational" aspects of leadership interspersed through entire knowledge-based environments through "dynamic interactive processes of learning and influence" (Fletcher, 2004, p. 648). Huey (1994) has been credited by some (Sandmann & Vandenberg, 1995) with developing the theory that he also dubbed "virtual leadership" (Huey, 1994, p. 2) during the 1990s, with the advent of

the global economic changes that were brought on by the information technology boom. Huey argued that the systemic changes to the way corporations and other organizations operate now demands an equivalent change in the ways that these organizations are now run. Rather than the single heroically visionary leader at its helm, an organization may now consist of multiple layers of leadership:

Post-heroic leaders don't expect to solve all the problems themselves.

They realize no one person can deal with the emerging and colliding tyrannies of speed, quality, customer satisfaction, innovation, diversity, and technology. Virtual leaders just say no to their egos. They are confident enough in their vision to delegate true responsibility, both for the tedium of process and for the sweep of strategic planning. (p. 3)

According to Huey, post-heroic companies all operate by a “clearly stated, oft-repeated set of core values that guide everyone's decisions” (p. 6). These values include a dedication to maintaining *fairness*; making and keeping *commitments*; *freedom* and dedication to using it; and the use of a “*water line*” to determine which decisions require input from others before they are made and which do not. Huey cited leadership expert Warren Bennis’s claim that “leaders must learn to change the nature of power and how it’s employed” (p. 2). Rather than the expectation that a single charismatic leader will ride in and save the organization from certain peril, 21<sup>st</sup> organizations recognize the importance of hiring individuals who *each* has the requisite “intellectual capital” as “knowledge workers” to be able to function as leaders at whatever level of the organization they function (p. 2). Companies now must wrestle with the need to harness

the energy and dynamism of a diverse workforce, so that its “intellectual capital” remains with the company, rather than peeling off to form its own “self-contained small businesses” (p. 2).

In their quest to come up with a framework that would more adequately address the complex issues facing communities and organizations, Sandmann & Vandenberg (1995) and other Michigan State University Extension faculty, staff, and administrators developed a community action leadership development framework to drive their extension services programs. This framework rested in part on their conceptualization of Huey’s post-heroic leadership theory. Some of the central tenets of postheroic leadership theory include: shared leadership, leadership as relationship, and leadership in community (Sandmann & Vandenberg, 1995). Also called collective, distributive, or group-centered leadership, shared leadership is based on the premise that “all of us have leadership qualities that can be pooled and drawn upon as needed, when working with others on vital common issues,” (p. 2). “...leadership as relationship revolves around the idea of a network of fluid relationships and is built on the concepts of empowerment, participation, partnership, and service,” (p. 2). And leadership in community is built on the assumption that leadership relationships take place conceptually within “communities of commitment,” where the focus shifts from competitiveness to cooperation, and to the exercise of values such as “trust, commitment, sharing and ownership,” (p. 2).

Huey (1994) observed that there are those who argue that the decentralized structure of post-heroic organizations poses significant communication problems. “Increasingly, the crucial challenge facing the would-be post-heroic leader is less about



how to structure a company than about how to get people who are truly not like you, or even each other, to pull in the same direction,” (p. 6). Therefore, “managing diversity” becomes a major issue in organizations where the workforce is made up of so many ethnic, cultural, and racial groups that some individuals may feel “hindered by barriers tied to their differences” (p. 7). One recommended antidote to meeting the needs of a multiplicity of different interest or “affinity” groups is “listening” (p. 7). Listening then leads to the ability to honestly give up control and allow others to lead the way, even if “employees may lead you someplace you don’t want to go,” (p. 7).

A decade later, focus has shifted from an acknowledgement both of the theory and of the need for a different leadership theory to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century workplace, to the ways that the theory and the practice of leadership based on it has fallen short of its early promise. Fletcher (2004) stated that the issue with postheroic leadership is that neither the theory nor the practice of the new models of leadership is gender, power, or sex neutral. And because the underlying gender and power dynamics are not addressed, the potential of postheroic leadership theory to bring a “radical challenge to current work practices, structures, norms and operating systems” (p. 658) may be stunted or worse coopted and melded into existing heroic leadership models instead.

Fletcher argued that because the gender and power dynamics of Western society are implicit, emotional and subconsciously feed into self-identity that is socially constructed as “feminine” or “masculine,” the traditional heroic model makes the postheroic leadership model invisible. In other words, identity for women and men in Western society is constructed according to the stereotypical images of women and men

belonging to separate spheres – work (men) and family (women). These spheres are characterized as being “separate and adversarial...sex linked...and unequally valued” (p. 651). Because the traditionally masculine trait-based heroic leadership model appears to be giving way to the traditionally feminine trait-based postheroic leadership model, Fletcher questioned three perplexing problems.

First, Fletcher pointed out that the individualism associated with heroic models of leadership remains a popular image of leadership even in the face of an apparent move to collective and collaborative leadership because of positional leaders’ ego and their self-identity being linked to their individual achievements (without recognition on their parts or anyone else’s of the teamwork that was required for the individual accomplishment to be attained). Paradoxically, Fletcher noted that it is the *team* who silently encourages the leader to step out into the limelight because of followers’ own need for heroes. As a result, postheroic leadership appears “invisible” (p. 652) as men and women leaders camouflage the postheroic attributes and aspects related to their accomplishments.

Next Fletcher addressed the notion that postheroic leadership models advantage women over men. Ironically, the opposite appears to be true. Viewed through the gender/power dynamic lens, women who exhibit postheroic leadership traits (stereotypically feminine traits) are actually seen as simply functioning the way women or *mothers* would function, so that their behaviors are not viewed as leadership behaviors nor is there an expectation that others should behave in a mutual way towards women leaders, even though mutuality is a key aspect of postheroic leadership models. Men who embrace these feminine traits in their roles as postheroic leaders, on the other hand, are

viewed more positively for being able to think outside the box and do something new. So instead of a leadership model based on feminine traits actually advantaging women, men appear to have the advantage. Finally, Fletcher questioned and doubted whether postheroic leadership would live up to its transformative potential. “Achieving the transformational outcomes of postheroic leadership requires putting into practice a set of beliefs and principles, indeed a different mental model of how to exercise power and how to achieve workplace success and effectiveness” (p. 656). Until whole systems address the gender and power dynamics that for now seem to be holding postheroic leadership captive, a model that the leadership literature touts as being what is needed for 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations risks remaining invisible or worse being coopted and folded into the old traditional heroic models – effectively silencing any challenge to the old system.

#### Tenets of Effective Leadership

In conducting the literature search for their case study, Bower and Wolverton (2009) gathered together the various strains of literature they reviewed and developed “a basic structure about what we believe contributes to effective leadership” (p. 150). This structure is presented in Table 2.2. Because effective leadership crosses over racial, gender, class, and even theoretical lines, it is appropriate to conclude this segment of the literature review with this overview.

Table 2.2

*Nine Tenets of Effective Leadership (Bower & Wolverton, 2009)*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Effective Leaders are...</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* <i>passionate</i> about their organization and committed to its people</li><li>* <i>reflective</i> in that they are self-aware, self-disciplined, self-confident, and self-assured</li><li>* <i>competent</i> with the intelligence and mental capacity to get the job done</li><li>* <i>great communicators</i>, with their finger on the pulse of the organization</li><li>* <i>cognizant</i> of the role that culture plays in shaping the way they lead</li><li>* physically and emotionally <b>strong</b>, with energy and stamina for the long run</li><li style="padding-left: 40px;">* <i>focused</i> yet forward thinking</li><li style="padding-left: 20px;">* <i>respectful</i> of and <b>value</b> individuality</li><li style="padding-left: 40px;">* <b>credible</b> leaders</li></ul> <p>Table 2.2 adapted and taken from <i>Answering the call: African American women in higher education leadership</i>, by B.L. Bower and M. Wolverton, 2009, p. 150. Copyright 2009 by Stylus Publishing, Sterling, VA. Reprinted with permission.</p>
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### Chapter Summary

Black women in the U.S. have valued education since they were punished for learning to read and write as slaves. Their higher aspirations of higher education enabled them to continue to lift the race as they climbed out of repression (White, 1999). Black women historically have served as educational leaders as they created libraries, day care centers, and schools (Giddings, 2006; White, 1999).

The three strongest themes that emerged from the search of applicable research literature of Black women leaders include: strategies for leadership development;

leadership characteristics, qualities and behaviors; and challenges and obstacles to advancement. Critical race theory (CRT) was developed within the field of critical legal studies (CLS) in the 1970s by legal scholars who sought to more effectively pursue justice for people of color outside of what they viewed as limiting civil rights discourse. Black feminist theory can be traced back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionist movement and has at its crux Black women's rights to shape their own identities, images and futures based on a reality that distinctly differs from that of Black men and White women. Of the existing leadership theories, Black women's ways of leading have been described as some combination of spirituality-based servant leadership, transformational and postheroic leadership. This research study and others intend to advance a leadership theory that is situated within what King referred to as the multiple jeopardies, the multiple consciousnesses that is the Black woman's experience in the U.S. (1988).

Most of the empirical research studies that explore the experiences of Black women leaders tend to do so through the use of a narrative or similar qualitative lens. Regardless of the mode of research, different methods and criteria of evaluation must be applied to the subject (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Given the propensity of educational research literature to either meld the experiences of Black women with those of White women or with those of Black men, it is logical and fitting that researchers allow Black women to tell their own stories, and articulate their own leadership experiences in light of the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class that tint their leadership behaviors. More than two decades ago, Foster (1991) presented a strong claim for the importance of these types of studies in education research: "The paucity of contemporary accounts by

African-Americans about their lives, experiences, and educational practice will limit current and future historians' and sociologists' complete understanding of schools and schooling" (p. 239). However, even from within its own field, there are those who question the rigor, merits, and worth of a method (narrative inquiry) that at the end of the day does not seem to contribute much more to the extant knowledge than what already existed (Josselson, 2006, and as cited in Rudestam & Newton, 2007). I have chosen narrative inquiry because of its emphasis on understanding and to elicit in-depth responses to the following guiding research questions:

- What are the experiences of Black women executive-level leaders in Southeastern two-year colleges?
- How do Black women leaders' constructed realities regarding social, theoretical, political, spiritual, familial, and other factors influence the participants' leadership development?
- How do Black women leaders' constructed realities regarding social, theoretical, political, spiritual, familial, and other factors influence their leadership style or approach?
- How did the civil rights and women's rights movements influence Black women leaders' career choices and desire for advancement?
- How do these Black women leaders perceive challenges or obstacles to career advancement?
- How do Black women leaders describe the pivotal achievements and successes of their careers?
- How do they perceive the future for Black women who aspire to leadership within the technical college system?

In Chapter Three, I will provide a chapter overview, restate the importance of my study, and then situate my chosen design -- narrative inquiry -- within the qualitative

research tradition. I will also address ethical considerations related to the use of this research design, and how my biases as a researcher shaped all aspects of my approach to conducting this research study. I will then outline narrative inquiry as it was used in my study, enumerating and addressing specifically the methods that were used to select participants, collect, analyze and interpret the data, and validate the study's findings.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

*“Narrative imitates life.  
Life imitates narrative.”*

*~ Jerome Bruner,  
Life as Narrative, 1987*

#### Chapter Overview

While the primary purpose of this chapter is to outline the qualitative methodology used to undertake this study, there are additional topics that will be addressed as well. The chapter begins with a discussion of the importance of the study’s research question and the selection of the research design, the appropriateness of which is based on the purpose of the study and the qualitative research literature. The purpose of the study is to explore this guiding research question: What are the experiences of Black women executive-level leaders in Southeastern two-year colleges?

I then situate my descriptive and interpretive study’s design – narrative inquiry – within the qualitative tradition. This is followed by a discussion of the ethical considerations inherent in a narrative inquiry study and the researcher’s biases regarding the topic and the study participants. This section of the chapter is especially pertinent, given special considerations that came into play as the study progressed. Ultimately, these considerations changed some of the methods that I used to analyze and interpret the women’s stories. These considerations will be developed fully in this chapter. Next, I outline the procedures I used for selecting the participants and the instrumentation. Then,



I give a detailed description of the methods used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the topics discussed.

### Importance of the Study

Scholars have written about the lack of substantive research that focuses on how Black women describe their leadership experiences within the field of professions including higher education administration (Alston & McClellan, 2011; Bower & Wolverson, 2009; Etter-Lewis, 1993). Arguably, it is quite possible I could find no research that exists about the experiences of Black women who may have started their careers in this southern state's technical colleges during the formative decades of the technical college system from the 1960s to the 1980s. Given the significant civil rights and political movements that occurred during these years, I am curious to learn what if any impact these movements may have had on these participants, their career choices, and their leadership development. It is also important to know more about the leadership paths of Black women, their challenges and successes, and the myriad influences on their leadership approaches and leadership aspirations. Illuminating the experiences of these Black women within the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and Black feminist theory may demystify the ways that such socially constructed forces as race, gender, and socioeconomic class impact not only Black women's leadership style but ultimately their decisions to pursue and be chosen for leadership roles. I have selected narrative inquiry as my qualitative methodology in order to more richly explore the experiences of Black women whose path to leadership may have started during these pivotal decades. I want to learn more about these women's lives through their own stories of leadership, because

I too believe that “defining one’s own reality lies with the people who live that reality, who actually have those experiences” (Collins, 2009, p. 39).

### Selection of Research Design

In order to do justice to the primary and secondary research questions that guide this study (Kramp, 2004), narrative inquiry is the most appropriate research design to use. As it is “grounded in the particular,” (Riessman, 2008, p.12), narrative inquiry will allow me to explore the stories of these women in their own words, and within the situated context of their own lives. Story is “a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful,” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). I am challenged by the opportunity to experience these women’s lives because I am aware of the temptation to ascribe meaning to their lives based on my views of their lives rather than their own. Narrative inquiry will allow me to understand the words of these women alongside and even over my own, at the same time as I work to situate their experiences within the context of the existing higher education leadership literature as well as the contexts of time and place. Narrative inquiry works because it allows me to structure the interview so that I am able to ask open-ended questions that will allow the participants to travel down any path they choose, framing their perspectives of their past experiences of leadership within the now that is the telling of these stories of leadership.

At the same time, Riessman’s (2008) interpretation of the myriad referents of the term *narrative* as it is used in the social (she prefers *human*) sciences signal the complexities of working within this design:

The term narrative in the human sciences can refer to texts at several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives. (p. 6)

During each interview, I intend to give participants as much discretion as possible as they respond to each question. They will be reminded that they have the right to opt not to respond to a question or to re-phrase and then respond to a question. However, I still intend to refer to a series of secondary questions or sub-questions (Creswell, 2007) that will allow me to uncover the experiences that the study is designed to illuminate. By the very nature of this study, a revealing and personal look into the lives of two professional women, the participants could potentially choose not to provide such an intimate portrait of their lives. It will be left to the discretion of the readers of this study to judge if this appears to be the case and to speculate as to the participants' reasons for doing so.

#### The Narrative Tradition

Narrative research is the “study of stories” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 1). Narrative inquiry or narrative research is a term that refers to a plethora of very similar narrative methodologies that Connelly and Clandinin (2006) include under the umbrella term they call “*narratology*” (p. 477, emphasis in original). These include oral history, life history, oral narrative, storytelling, autoethnography, autobiography, biography, and others. “Narrative research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of

individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then often retold or re-storied by the researcher into a narrative chronology,” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). Narrative inquiry or “the study of experience as story...is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477). This research design refers to an interdisciplinary qualitative methodology that only recently has gained traction in the field of education research, according to Connelly and Clandinin, who noted in *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Education Research* that the first, 1980s edition of this textbook did not reference narratives or narrative inquiry (2006, p. 477). Narrative traditions are far more common to the humanities, psychology, sociology, and even to such applied fields as nursing (Sandelowski, 1991); only within the last couple of decades have they come to be seen as a viable and credible method of qualitative research in the field of education.

Qualitative researchers struggle with the term *narrative* (Kramp, 2004). Because of the seemingly limitless forms that narrative inquiry or research can assume, it is challenging to define this methodology and even more difficult to trace its epistemological roots. The complexity of the human experience is best expressed and articulated through storytelling (Casey, 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Josselson, 2006). The human instinct is to tell and share one’s lived experiences, and in the literary tradition, to even embellish one’s experiences – the livelier and less-related to the truth, the better here in the South! Narrative inquiry takes the form of telling or living. Telling inquiries usually consist of interviews, in which the narrator tells about the life that has

been lived as opposed to living inquiry in which the narrator and interviewer unfold life as it is lived (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Lincoln & Guba (1985) specify methods for conducting qualitative studies such as narrative research, and their perspectives are reinforced by Creswell (2008) and others (Corbin & Strauss, 1985; Denzin, 1971; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). These methodologists recommend that participants be selected through the use of purposive or criterion sampling, so that the participants selected are those who can inform the study. Semi-structured interviewing methods are recommended to allow for the necessary ebbs and flows, the directing and re-directing of thoughts, expressions, and meanings that is expected in qualitative research. However, others including Connelly and Clandinin (2006) recommend that researchers go a step further and engage in conversation with their participants, allowing these conversations to direct the interviews for more fruitful, participant-driven narratives. In this study, I opted to use a combination of open-ended and semi-structured interviews. Open-ended interviews are “interviews in which the intent is to understand informants on their own terms and how they make meaning of their own lives, experiences, and cognitive processes” (Brenner, 2006, p. 357).

Some of the common critiques of this tradition include the fact that narratives’ increasing popularity makes it difficult to discern whether those who are using this methodology are doing so with disciplined thinking (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Another critique of this tradition is Josselson’s (2006, referencing Paul Ricoeur, 1970) discussion of the tensions inherent in narrative research between the hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion. The first type of hermeneutics gives precedence to

the narrator's account and seeks to express the narrator's account as closely as possible based on the interview, whereas the hermeneutics of suspicion has as its basis the researcher's position that she should attempt to look "in front of the text" and seek out the hidden meanings that the narrator either consciously or unconsciously keeps from view. Josselson (2006) also cites Ricoeur's (1970) assertion regarding complaints that narrative research eschews finality or certainty as it "stands outside the hierarchical realm of facts" (Josselson, 2006, p. 5). Alternate, even conflicting, accounts of the same experience are accepted and expected by the narrative researcher (Kramp, 2004). In fact,

The researcher understands that each story has a point of view that will differ, depending on who is telling the story, who is being told [the story], as well as when and where the story is told. Consequently, verisimilitude – the appearance or likelihood that something is or could be true or real – is a more appropriate criterion for narrative knowing than verification or proof of truth (Kramp, 2004, p. 108).

The only conclusions that could or should be reached about narrative must come from a community of scholars engaged in a conversation with one another who arrive at some consensus regarding meaning. This "connectedness to others" is a principal goal for narrative researchers (Josselson, 2006).

Josselson (2006) expressed a concern that narrative studies and their requisite interpretations are becoming quite abundant and questioned what is to become of all this accumulated knowledge. She posited a provocative solution to the problem of the mountain of narrative studies -- and that is through collective consensus of narrative

researchers – to have a *conversation* about what researchers are learning through the reading of these narratives, sharing candidly what they know about themselves as well as what they found they did not know. She stated that the goal is not to take narrative research in a direction that simply scientizes the rich and myriad interpretations of individual’s lived experiences; rather, it is to come up with a way of aggregating this collective knowledge that honors each (she mentions case studies, specifically) case at the same time that it brings some deeper sense to the work as a whole.

### Ethical Considerations

There are a number of ethical issues to consider at various stages throughout the research process, given the nature of this qualitative research design, the research questions, and the participants. One of the most important considerations is ensuring that participants’ rights are respected and their perspectives taken into account, almost from the moment that the researcher formulates plans to complete the study (Creswell, 2009). In this section, I will highlight this and other key ethical considerations to be made throughout this research study. First, though, I will provide some context for how and why I chose this particular topic as well as some of my concerns about moving forward with the study.

From the first semester that I started doctoral studies, I knew that my research interests revolved around the role of Black women who served as administrators within the technical college system. I was drawn to this topic as an area of interest because I am a Black woman who once served as a middle-level administrator in one of the 16 technical colleges within the state system. A middle-level administrator is typically

identified as one who reports to a division's vice president, who in turn reports to the college president (IPEDS). Based on my own anecdotal observations, I discovered that there were very few Black women who served in administrative positions at the level of dean or higher within the system. I also learned through my research that in 2011, thirty-three percent of the students attending a state technical college were Black (See Table, Appendix E). Putting these two together in my mind made sense. Instinctively, I believed there to be some sort of connection between the two ideas. Also, I knew what *my* experience had been as an administrator within the system. What was this experience like for other Black women? Were our experiences disparate or alarmingly similar? Since the research literature gives little mention of Black women leaders in the Southern Technical College System, I viewed this as an obvious gap that needed to be addressed. And yet I hesitated initially to go forward with this research. There were a few reasons for this hesitancy.

One of the reasons that I was hesitant to move forward with this study is because I am a Black woman who is interested in learning more about other Black women who have quite similar professional and educational backgrounds. Other Black women and men scholars have noted that this is an undertaking that is devalued in academia, with significant risks that the researcher will either be stigmatized or branded an isolationist of sorts (Collins, 2009; hooks, 1994; Tate IV, 1997). Another reason that I have doubted doing this study is my concern that a qualitative study will not be received with the same amount of respect and consideration as a quantitative study, especially in light of the research question and the study participants. The most important reason that I have



hesitated about moving forward with this study is because of concerns regarding the participants. At first, I was worried that I would not be able to secure enough participants who fit the demographic that I am interested in learning about, specifically those women who have worked in the system and/or within higher education for more than 20 years. That concern was swiftly followed by one that I have yet to resolve to my satisfaction: how will I be able to maintain these women's anonymity *if* they ask that their identities not be revealed. I know that it is characteristic to provide study participants and institutions with pseudonyms or aliases (Creswell, 2009), and while I have used pseudonyms to refer to the system, individual colleges, and participants in this study, I do not know how well this method will work. There are simply too few executive-level Black women within the system to mask their identities effectively. And it is this concern which feeds into my last concern, and that is that the participants in the study may not reveal their complete and honest perceptions of their experiences in the system possibly out of fear of retribution. When I consider that the participants may not feel comfortable moving forward with the study without a guarantee of confidentiality, I then question the value of conducting the study at all. The study is not worth risking the security these women have worked so hard to gain in their respective institutions. Fortunately, my dissertation advisor and committee helped me work through these challenges, and I was able to move forward with the study. What I did to ensure the participants' anonymity to the best of my ability was to use pseudonyms for the system, individual colleges and participants. I also removed or changed information about the participants that may have made their identities easier to discern. Whether any of these

efforts or all of them in concert will prove to be effective is unknown at this point.

However, it turns out that my concerns were well founded. One of the participants commented after fact checking the interview transcript that she could not believe some of the things that she said during the course of the interview, that she hoped I would be able to keep her identity from being revealed, and that she “hopes this [participation in the study] doesn’t come back to haunt me.”

No matter how important I may view this study, I first and foremost must make a priority the participants and their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006) – participants who may find themselves unexpectedly stressed by the research problem or the ways that their words and stories are interpreted (Creswell, 2009). In considering the research problem, it is important to bear in mind that my mission is to empower, not “further marginalize or disempower the study participants,” (Creswell, 2009). And I must make certain that the participants know what *all* the purposes of my research study are, even those purposes that may be somewhat contentious. To do otherwise would be to engage in practices of deception. Another important ethical consideration is making sure that – like the researcher – the participants also benefit from the research in some way (Creswell, 2009). For their time, I intend to offer each participant a gift card of a nominal amount to thank them for taking part in the study (Seidman, 2006). Finally, in analyzing and interpreting the data, it is critically important that my interpretation is an accurate representation of each participant’s account of her experience (Creswell, 2009). “The credibility of an investigator’s representation is strengthened if it is recognizable to participants. For ethical reasons alone, it is important to find out what participants think

of our work,” (Riessman, 2008, p. 197). Both of the participants were sent the interview transcripts to fact check, and although I also sent each participant her chapter and the interpretations chapter in the week following the dissertation defense, it is unclear what effect their reactions and responses to the document may have with such a short window of opportunity to provide feedback to me. Nevertheless, I still sent the chapters to them electronically and respectfully requested an expedited response to anything that they wanted to give a reaction, comment or response. I indicated to the participants that their written responses to their chapters and my interpretations of their stories would be included in a “Coda” that would follow the final chapter of the dissertation and precede the “Epilogue.”

Since that time, I heard from one of the participants, who indicated that while she would read the chapters, she did not think she would have time to submit a written response to my interpretations due to her work obligations and my severely restricted timeline for submission of the final manuscript. Ultimately, however, this participant *did* decide to write a response, which focused primarily on the conversational style of narration she used within the interview itself, a style and language that she felt did not appropriately represent her professional and educational background. The other participant also responded to her chapter and my interpretations, but in a far more succinct (and unexpected) manner. Her brief comments are also included in the “Coda.” My biased opinion is that I have remained close enough to the actual data (transcript, body language, archival documents, verbal exchanges with colleagues, etc.) to make an objective interpretation of these women’s stories. However, I am also aware that my

judgment may be clouded somewhat by the quite similar upbringing that I share with these participants as well as by the literature itself, which tends to guide researchers down paths of least resistance (i.e., in the direction of themes already identified during the literature review).

At the same time, several scholars support the researcher's right to apply judgment and discernment to the data and come up with plausible interpretations (Bruner, 1987; Creswell, 2009; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Seidman, 2006; Wolcott, 1990). Further, there is also support for the notion that two researchers may come up with entirely different interpretations from the same data or even that a single researcher may come up with a different assessment of the data under a different set of circumstances. "...the writing of a research text is a narrative act. In a different time, in a different social situation, and for different purposes, a different research text might be written. There is no ultimate finality or limiting truth, in the particular research texts written" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 485).

#### The Researcher's Bias

At the same time that my participants may be more comfortable discussing their experiences with me than with other researchers who are not Black women and who have not had the experience of working as administrators within the same technical college system, there are other considerations and risks involved as well. As a Black woman who formerly served as the director of three academic support service areas within one of the 16 technical and community colleges in the state system within which these participants currently are employed, I have a strong personal and professional connection

to this research topic. In part, some of my personal experiences as an administrator contributed to my interest in learning more about the experiences of other Black women leaders. Further, I have taken part in a number of anecdotal conversations with other minority women staffers, faculty, and administrators. An advantage of being a Black woman with first-hand knowledge of what goes on behind the scenes is that I will be able to develop rapport with and gain the trust of my participants based on our shared worldview as Black women born in the South, and our shared experiences as leaders within the technical college system. However, a disadvantage of “being a Black woman with first-hand knowledge of what goes on behind the scenes” is that I may be inclined to assume that I know the participant’s experience, what she may or may not be saying, or even what she may be thinking. If I knew all those things, then I would *be* the participant (Seidman, 2006).

Another clear, potential disadvantage is that I run the risk of losing my sense of objectivity because I am so emotionally vested in this project. In a sense, it is somewhat fortunate that I have been out of the technical college system in a full-time capacity for more than four years now. I believe time has had a distancing effect on a topic about which I once felt such urgency. Besides, having learned more about Peshkin’s concept of subjectivity (1988) reassures me that it is acceptable for me to bring to this study any assumptions I may have about the inherent discrimination that Black women face as they seek to move into executive-level administrative roles. I believe that I will be able to deal with the assumptions and the disadvantage of once having been far too close to the subject by maintaining an awareness of my biases and subjectivity throughout the project.

It is important that I make others aware of my subjectivity as well. To this end, in the initial e-mail I sent to the participants inviting them to take part in the study, I provided the participants with background information about myself and my upbringing, and I also disclosed my former affiliation with the technical college system. I felt this last point was particularly important in the event that participants decided they needed to be more cautious with the information they shared about themselves for some reason. I do not think that this was ultimately an issue. Creswell (2009) suggested that a fresh and honest approach to clarifying where one stands as the researcher brings validity to the overall research process itself:

...clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study. This self-reflection creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers. Good qualitative research contains comments by researchers about how their interpretation of the findings is shaped by their background, such as their gender, culture, history, and socioeconomic origin. (p. 192)

#### Becoming a Part of the Study

Initially I disclosed my biases to the participants in an effort to be as transparent and forthcoming as possible. Then I attempted to limit my biases by highlighting all the reasons why it was both *acceptable* to be biased around the topic and participants in this study *and* why I would be able to manage better these biases and prevent them from interfering with my ability to conduct this study in an objective fashion. As the women's stories unfolded and I became more and more involved in the depictions of their lives, however, I realized that I

*needed* to become a part of the story. While it was definitely my intention to keep these women's stories of their leadership experiences separate and apart from my own, I ultimately came to realize that for the purposes of triangulation and trustworthiness of this study and its results, I had to become a part of this study. This is because as I listened to these women's stories, I kept hearing similar stories that I had heard passed down from generation to generation in my own family. And as I heard these women try to grapple with the reality of their lived experiences as Southern-born Black women leaders in a system located within a state with an undisputedly checkered racial history, I heard my own story as a former middle-level administrator in this very same system resonating in the background. The commingling of our backgrounds and experiences became more pronounced as I went about the painstaking task of replaying the audio recordings, and I attempted to hear their accounts impartially.

I found myself drifting in and out of the second participant's story and fading into portions of my own family's remarkably similar shared stories, which is when I knew that I had to address this dilemma. An important way that I decided to do this was by collaborating with the participants in the telling of their stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Connelly and Clandinin support this method of going about narrative research, suggesting that doing so makes for a richer, fuller articulation of the narratives than is possible when the researcher elects instead to tell the story an acceptably safe distance away from both the participants and their lives. Consequently, as the conduit for each woman's

narrative, I begin these chapters by situating myself within the context of the time and place of the narratives. Rather than simply relaying these women's stories as they relayed them to me, I decided to introduce each woman's narrative first. Relying on my skills as a writer, I made use of literary elements such as setting and plot in the case of the first narrative, and the use of characterization and description in the second narrative, to inject myself into these women's stories and attend to the nuances of meaning inherent to place and a Black woman's standpoint that are such pivotal aspects of their experiences.

#### Selection of Participants

In keeping with the fundamental precepts of qualitative research, the participants for this study were purposively selected (Creswell, 2009), chosen because they are representative of the group of interest to the researcher and "will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question," (p. 178). The snowball sampling method (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008) was also relied on, in the event that the researcher was unable to identify enough suitable participants for the study. The Black women chosen for the study must hold or have held leadership positions within at least one of the technical colleges within the Southern Technical College System. The women should hold or have held leadership positions defined by human resources personnel within the Southern Technical College Systems Office as those executive-level positions with direct responsibility and impact on the day-to-day management of the college and administration of its services. For the purposes of this research study, the participants should hold positions of president, executive vice president, vice president, associate vice



president, or assistant vice president. These women must have begun their careers within higher education and/or within the technical college system within the 1960s to the 1980s, even if they did not hold a leadership post during that time period.

While the pool of women from which to choose participants was exceedingly small, I was still able to identify three women who fit the characteristics of the group of interest. These were all going to be women who “had stories or life experiences to tell,” (Creswell, 2007, p. 55). One woman who considered taking part in the study suggested off-hand a couple of other women for the study. This information was quite helpful to the researcher given that I was not aware that one of these women still worked within the system or that the other woman had worked for so many years within higher education.

Because I had met one of the participants before, my initial contact with this first woman was by telephone in November, 2011. I confirmed the length of time she had worked in the system and her current job title and description. I then verbally provided her with the background for the study, general questions that I would ask, and a tentative timeline for conducting interviews. We then talked about some of the other Black women who would possibly meet the selection criteria for and be interested in taking part in the study as well. After agreeing to take part in the study, this participant asked that I e-mail some tentative guiding questions that I would likely ask during the interview, so that she could be prepared in advance. In January 2012, I provided this participant with the tentative guiding questions of the study and gave her a tentative schedule for the interview.

Because I was not as familiar with the other two women, I made contact with them through e-mail. First, though, I did try to reach one woman by telephone in early January, 2012, and reached one of her assistants. Her assistant was quite helpful in suggesting the best way to try to reach her and the best way for “pitching” the research study. Taking her advice, I followed up the same afternoon with a detailed e-mail to the potential participant herself, providing very similar information to the verbal recitation that I had made over the telephone to the first participant. Given that I was not as familiar with this woman, I provided additional background information about myself to hopefully remind her of our prior association – this prospective participant had shared her experiences as a college president, serving as a guest speaker for one of my higher education administration courses in 2006. Given that she is the only Black woman to have served as a two-year college president, her perspectives and experiences of leadership would have been particularly insightful.

Unfortunately, even after several attempts on my part, I never heard from this potential participant, so she was not a part of the study. The third woman received an almost identical e-mail as the second one. She responded almost instantly by e-mail, expressing interest in the study and asking additional questions about both the study and other likely participants. We corresponded through e-mail a couple more times on that same day, with the third woman agreeing to take part in the study. Of the three prospective participants initially sought, ultimately, two confirmed their willingness to take part in the study once it received IRB approval.

### Instrumentation

The principal instrumentation used in this study was a semi-structured, face-to-face interview that was audiotaped. Although his focus is primarily that of the phenomenological interviewing method, Seidman (2006) offers an abundance of practical guidance to the novice and seasoned researcher alike on how to make interviews as effective as possible – including making use of a digital recorder. While Seidman’s method emphasizes a series of three interviews as part of the requirement for meeting the epistemological demands of phenomenology, he does leave room for those who may not be able to fit all the interviews in due to the constraints of time or whose methodology may not demand as much face-to-face time with participants. He spends an inordinate amount of time throughout the book making this type of interviewing appeal to a broad range of qualitative researchers. Opining that researchers must learn to “keep our egos in check” and “realize we are not the center of the world” (p. 9), Seidman goes on to make it very clear that it is the researcher’s responsibility to ensure the participant knows that it is his or her story which matters the most – *not* the researcher’s.

Creswell (2009) also highlights advantages and limitations of various instruments, including interviews. An advantage of interviews is that they are useful when participants cannot be directly observed. Interviews also allow participants to provide historical information. And interviews allow researchers control (somewhat) over the line of questioning. On the other hand, interviews provide indirect information that has already been filtered through the views of interviewees. And instead of a natural setting, interviews are usually conducted in a designated place. Another limitation is that

the researcher's presence may actually serve to bias responses from the interviewees. Finally, not all people are equally articulate and perceptive when they are being interviewed. Even given this list of pros and cons, interviews were still the best method for the conditions of my study because they allowed me to gather a significant amount of information in a condensed time format.

In this study, an interview protocol (Creswell, 2007, 2009) was created, so that each of the two interviews was conducted in a very similar manner. The interview protocol provided participants with guidance in terms of how questions would be asked and their options for responding to the questions. Participants were asked to choose a date for the interview from a list of prospective dates, and they were also asked to select the location and time for the interview, based on their convenience. Both participants requested that we meet at their offices on their college campuses. Interestingly, the interviews were held back-to-back and at the exact same time of the mid-afternoon. I requested that the participants have on hand copies of any documents (personal or public, including newspaper articles, meeting minutes, personal journals, etc.) that highlighted their leadership experiences if they chose to do so. Each session began with a grand tour question (Spradley, 1979, as cited in Brenner, 2006), and this over-arching, "opening question that asks the informant to give a broad description about a particular topic" (p. 358) was followed up by more detailed and specific mini-tour questions or prompts that were linked closely to the principal research question. The participants each opted to have a copy of the interview protocol before them, and they were prompted to refer to the

list of questions and respond to them in any order that they saw fit, *if* they saw fit to do so.

At the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to share any story about their leadership experiences that they had not had the chance to relate. The series of questions that the participants were asked had been created prior to the interview session; however, each participant was encouraged to use these initial questions as guides for their responses. They may have opted to not respond, interpreted questions in light of their uniquely differing perspectives, and/or chosen to ask their own clarifying questions and then respond as they saw fit. The single interview session was audiotaped with a miniature digital recorder for accuracy, and each session lasted just over two hours, giving each participant ample opportunity to respond in depth to questions if desired. The researcher used a small sheaf of loose-leaf paper to jot down additional questions as well as take brief, anecdotal and observational notes during and after the interviews; however, the researcher relied heavily on the digital recorder for its accuracy in capturing the verbal exchanges. In addition to the audiotaped interview session, participants were contacted by the researcher within a couple days of the interview by e-mail and asked to respond to additional questions brought about as the researcher reflected on the participants' responses. For the participants' convenience, these additional questions were sent via e-mail and participants were encouraged to send their responses back in kind.

### Data Collection

The data collection process for this research study consisted of three different stages: steps that occurred before, during, and after the collection of the data. One of the earliest steps taken by the researcher was to secure successful recertification in human subjects research training for the social and behavioral sciences through the university's Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI). I met this requirement a year prior to the start of the research study. Before the actual interviews, I made contact at least twice with each participant. The first contact made was to introduce or re-introduce myself, present the idea of the study to each woman, and solicit her tentative agreement to participate pending study approval. The next contact was to confirm the successful defense of the dissertation proposal and receipt of the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to move forward with the study. At this time, each participant was sent an e-mail with two attachments: an informed consent letter and a demographic data profile sheet. In the body of the e-mail, the researcher thanked each participant again for her willingness to take part in the study and also provided the participants with a brief explanation for the delay in the project's going forward.

Importantly, each participant was presented with at least three possible dates for the interview, all set within a two-to-three-week window. Every effort was made to accommodate each participant's request of date, time, and location for the interview. However, the first dates that were scheduled had to be re-scheduled, given unexpected events including the necessity of finding a last-minute replacement member for my committee. The process of seeking IRB approval of the study was delayed as the

prospective new committee member underwent peer review, since she is not a Clemson University faculty or staff member. The participants were kept abreast of the study's status throughout the project, which might have explained their willingness to remain a part of the study, given the newly- constricted timeline for project completion.

I created the demographic data profile sheet to collect such information as institution, current position title, length of service, description of career progression (including educational background, all work experiences, and ultimate career goal), parents' educational background and marital/parental status and significant community service involvement. The purpose for sending the demographic data profile sheet ahead of the interview was to collect this important data (which may also serve as the impetus for additional interview questions) but not take time away from the actual interview. When I arrived for each interview, however, neither participant had completed the demographic data profile sheet ahead of time. Both women took only a few minutes to fill out the sheet; one provided me with a current curriculum vita as a substitute for detailing her career progression and community involvement on the profile sheet. The other participant indicated she would forward her curriculum vita to me by e-mail; I received her vita about a week and a half later.

During the interview, I followed an established interview protocol so as to maintain consistency in the way I conducted each interview. I collected each participant's signed letter of informed consent, and I re-confirmed each participant's approval of the use of a digital recording device. Also before we began, I made anecdotal note of any archival documents that the participant may have on hand. Participants were

told that the interview would begin with a “grand tour question” (Spradley, 1979) and end with a question that permitted them to wrap up their stories in a way that felt natural for them. The interview protocol listed each question that would be asked in a specific order – from grand tour question to main sub-questions to final wrap-up question; however, each participant was encouraged to clarify questions first, and then respond naturally and fully. Ultimately, the researcher instructed the participants to refer to their copies of the interview protocol and respond. This permitted the participants’ voices to be heard far more frequently than the researcher’s. Participants were also reminded that they had the right to abstain from making a response, and they might also modify the question so that their response was truly representative of their stories and not manufactured simply to suit their perceptions of the researcher’s intent.

“First, and most important, we speak to our participants and ourselves to fulfill the relational responsibilities of representing our co-constructed experiences,” (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 600). While my intention was to conduct each interview in the exact same way, for some reason, this did not happen. With the first participant, the interview went pretty much according to plan. She told her story from her childhood to the present; then she referred to the interview protocol to make sure she addressed all of the questions. Because the first participant’s responses were primarily episodic and circuitous, there were no convenient places to tactfully insert a question that may have been prompted by something she said. So I decided the best option was to jot down shorthand notes on my notepad that would help to jog my memory later at a more appropriate time to follow up. I decided to ask follow-up, probing type questions of the



participant at the end of the session, rather than interrupting her throughout the session. This allowed the participant an opportunity to go into more depth with her responses and gave her the requisite time and space to make certain that she was clear about what she was being asked (by referring to the interview protocol and clarifying what was being asked in a couple of instances) and what she wanted to say.

Since the first participant did not have additional stories and did not object to additional questions, the researcher took this opportunity to ask questions that naturally arose from some of this participant's earlier responses. Some of these unscripted questions offered the most illuminating glimpses into these women's lives. Interestingly, I do not think my former affiliation with the system impacted either of the participants' telling of their stories. Rather, I believe these women had already somewhat made up in their minds how much they were willing to tell me during the interview. As a consequence, with the first participant in particular, I had to use several techniques to move her away from the comfortable place that was her pre-formed leadership story and get her to a place where she was willing to reveal herself more. For example, following up on a hunch from the way she told an earlier story, I decided to ask her about her family, specifically her parents and siblings. It was during this exchange that I learned more about some of the choices she made as a teenager and was able to get an understanding of the relationship she shared with her parents – both relationships impacting her over the long-term in completely different ways.

During the second interview session, I took a different tack from that used with the first participant. At appropriate but limited points during the interview, I asked a few

questions right as she was completing a response. The first time I did this, I felt as if I were showing my eagerness to learn more too readily. However, the second participant's stories were engaging – even though she did not necessarily tell as many stories within stories as the first participant. So my inclination was to simply jump in and ask a question that came to mind from something she said, and so I did. Once again, some of the most insightful responses developed from this method. At the end of the second interview, I asked additional questions that *bubbled up* (Wolcott, 1990) naturally from this woman's leadership story. I asked enough questions and took notes of each participant's appearance and manner, as well as her office and immediate environs, and interactions with staff. This was important so that I established a situational context for each participant's stories within the frame of their personal experiences, their culture (racial or ethnic), and time and place (Creswell, 2007). Throughout the sessions, participants were encouraged and appeared comfortable taking as much time as necessary to respond; meanwhile, I used encouraging phrases like "Would you tell me more about" and "Hmm" appropriately throughout the interview. Importantly, I made sure to listen rather than talk, and was not afraid of silences (Seidman, 2006).

After each interview was concluded, I thanked each participant for her time and her sharing of her stories. Within a day of the back-to-back interviews, I played back the digital recording so that I could connect what I *heard* on the tape with what I *saw* and may have recorded anecdotally during the actual interview. Next, I transcribed each interview verbatim, playing back each audiotape in its entirety to ensure the accuracy of each transcript. After each transcript was reviewed and constructed to represent a clear

question and answer format for ease of reading and to the extent possible, the transcribed interviews were e-mailed to the participants for member checking or reciprocity (Lunenburg & Irby, 2008). Each participant was asked to review the transcript for accuracy, noting any glaring errors or omissions. For their convenience, participants were given an adequate amount of time to review the interview transcript and then e-mail their transcript mark-ups to the researcher; the researcher then incorporated any needed corrections, deletions, or additions into the master copy of each participant's interview transcript. The first participant returned her transcript the next day, which was surprising because the interview transcript was very long. The second participant did not return her transcript for about six days. She made a series of corrections, especially to words that she spoke in contracted form (e.g. gotta, kinda, etc.) While it may have been tedious to find every "mistake" in the document and correct it in the new version of the transcript, ironically, the receipt of so much feedback also helped the researcher to see a new side of the participant that she may have wanted not to expose – and that is her apparent perfectionist tendencies or maybe simply her desire to be perceived in a particular manner – perhaps one better suited to her image of a senior-level administrator.

### Data Analysis

Like the stages of data collection, the analysis and interpretation of data culled from a narrative inquiry required quite a few steps. It also necessitated the command of a basic language used by qualitative researchers to describe their methods of winnowing down large amounts of data to a somewhat more malleable form. It was my intention to

conduct the analysis of data collected from each of the interviews fairly soon after each respective interview. That way, the stories were prominent and distinctive in my mind.

Creswell (2009) outlined six basic steps in qualitative data analysis, beginning with organizing and preparing the data through the process of data reduction (See Miles & Huberman, 1994, below.) In step two, the researcher reads through all the data to get a general sense of its overall meaning. Next, the researcher should begin a detailed analysis of the data using a color-coding process, such that segments of text data are sectioned off into categories that are labeled with a term. In step four, this coding process should be used to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis – the researcher should come up with no more than five to seven categories or themes for the study. A narrative paragraph that outlines how the description and themes will be represented needs to be written in step five. And finally, in step six, the researcher needs to come up with an interpretation or meaning of the data. While the above process can be completed without benefit of computer software or technology, to do so requires a significant amount of time. A qualitative computer software program such as NVivo9 provides several very useful tools for making sense of copious amounts of data (Creswell, 2009). Initially, I had intentions of using N-Vivo software, but several considerations caused me to change my mind. First is my preference for having actual hands-on control of the data in terms of being able to highlight and color-code portions of text within the context of the entire document and being able to manually move and manipulate the data at will. Because of the small number of study participants and the single semi-structured interview, the data were not

so unwieldy as to be unmanageable without software. Further, the experience of reading and re-reading and then re-reading each participant's story again solidified the stories in my mind and helped me to gain a more thorough understanding of these experiences. And my prior experience in the coding of data and pulling out of themes gave me confidence in my ability to use my judgment and discretion to discern the most prevalent issues addressed by each of the participants in this study (Polkinghorne, 2005; Seidman, 2006). Admittedly, my election of the more conventional method may have required more time than if I had used computer software instead; however, this process worked better for me.

Noted qualitative analysts Miles & Huberman (1994) define *analysis* as consisting of three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (p. 10). In the first stage of the process, the researcher works to reduce the amount of data on hand by undergoing “the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions” (p. 10). While this stage seems to be setting the researcher up for the actual process of analysis, data reduction is actually a *part* of data analysis. “The researcher’s decisions – which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which patterns best summarize a number of chunks, which evolving story to tell – *are all analytic choices*. *Data reduction* is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that ‘final’ conclusions can be drawn and verified” (p. 11, emphasis in original).

After data reduction is *data display*, which is essentially an effort to take data from its textual form and turn it into “an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action” (p. 11). Finally, there is *conclusion drawing* and *verification*, in which the researcher begins the process of tentatively thinking about what things may mean, but not holding too firmly to any interpretations at this early stage. Once each stage has been successfully navigated, it is now time to consider the next steps in the process – namely, the methods of analysis that will be employed for this study.

Kramp (2004) outlined Polkinghorne’s two types of data analysis used within narrative inquiry – *analysis of narratives*, and *narrative analysis*. Analysis of narratives is based on Bruner’s (1984, as cited in Kramp, 2004) paradigmatic reasoning – one of two identified ways of knowing or reasoning – and an identification of themes within each story as well as those common to all stories. Narrative analysis is based on Bruner’s (1984) second way of knowing – narrative reasoning – which seeks to arrive at the meaning of experience and which “moves from the particular data gathered to the construction of stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, as cited in Kramp, 2004, p. 120). Using the data collected from each story, the researcher constructs a narrative that “must fit [and integrate rather than separate] the data while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves,” (Polkinghorne, 1995, as cited in Kramp, 2004, p. 120).

So...an *analysis of narratives* involves culling inductively from the data the themes central to a single story, as well as one appertaining to all the stories and then

using the narrator's own words to illustrate the theme. Whereas *narrative analysis* involves carefully reviewing the individual stories (unit of analysis) and then writing a narrative that is based on the data gathered in that particular story:

Used together, they provide a rich analysis of the stories your research participants shared with you in their interviews. An analysis of the narratives that leads you to identify the individual and the shared outcomes would certainly inform and shape the plots you construct when you create your storied analyses. (Kramp, 2004, p. 120)

Because the participants naturally created actual stories of their leadership experiences with clear beginnings, middles and ends, I realized I would be able to create interview profiles – based on Seidman's guidelines (2006) and allow each participant's story to stand on its own. My intention is to share these individual women's stories. I am making no explicit claims that their experiences are representative of other women's leadership experiences, although it will be left to the reader's discretion to decide whether such a claim could realistically be made. Also, as Seidman (2006) and Connelly and Clandinin (2006) both point out, another researcher – using the very same data – could arrive at an entirely different interpretation or way of putting together these women's stories of their lives. What follows is simply one researcher's interpretation of these women's stories based on the data (stories) themselves, as well as on the researcher's own background and experiences.

Finally, Creswell (2009) recommends the use of various methods of triangulation to address the question of validity with this particular research design. I will incorporate

some if not all of these strategies into my research study. First, I will triangulate different sources of information by interviewing more than one participant rather than a single individual. As mentioned earlier, I will clarify any biases that I might bring to the study. Further, I have elected to embrace my biases rather than distance myself from them by collaboratively relaying the participants' life and leadership stories in conjunction with my own. In writing up the stories of each Black woman leader, I will use "rich, thick description" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191) to convey the findings and also I will convey as many perspectives about a theme as possible – so as to create a richer, more realistic accounting of the themes. I will also be sure to include any negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes. To do so also increases the study's validity (Creswell, 2009). Last, I will make certain to engage in member checking, so as to determine the accuracy of the transcriptions of the interviews. And participants will be encouraged to clarify, omit, add or otherwise modify their original responses.

The participants will also be given an opportunity to read and react to their narrative chapter as well as to the final chapter of the manuscript, which outlines the researcher's analyzes and interpretations of their leadership experiences from the researcher's personal perspective, as well as within the theoretical and leadership frameworks used as the basis of this research study. Given the significant time limitations, however, I did not think that the participants' written responses would be able to be included in a separate "Coda" that follows Chapter Six – Conclusions. However, this ended up not being the case. The second participant sent me a brief e-mail to let me know that she had read the chapters, felt I had done a good job with the analysis, and that



she did not have any changes that she would make to what I had written. I decided to include an excerpt from the second participant's e-mail in the "Coda" once I learned that the first participant had some concerns about her language usage during the interview. When the first participant contacted me by e-mail on the day that I had asked for their responses to be sent to me, after having a week to review their narrative chapters and my interpretations, she asked if I would be able to give her a call the next day so that we could discuss her chapter. While she did not indicate one way or the other, either the participant did not closely read the interview transcript or she assumed that I would edit the transcript for any issues, such as grammatical errors. Because in the course of interview she spoke "with the researcher as if she were a girlfriend back in my rural hometown," the participant communicated far more informally than she may have under other circumstances. As a result, there were a number of subject-verb agreement and other more minor grammatical errors throughout her transcript.

Concerned that her language did not reflect her professional and educational background, she asked that I edit her narrative for the grammatical errors (primarily subject-verb agreement) that she had not realized were present until she read her story more closely. Given my background as an English teacher, the reason why I had elected not to make those changes on my own was because this was *her* story – I wanted the story to sound like her because it *was* hers. I wanted to neither usurp her authority nor her identity. At the end of our conversation, I agreed wholeheartedly to making the necessary changes, and then she indicated or I asked (or both!) that she would write up a response to her narrative that addressed her concerns about the ways she communicated

verbally during the interview. This response, as well as the more succinct response from the second participant, is included in the “Coda.”

### Chapter Summary

At the beginning of this chapter, I restated the importance of this type of study, which fills an existing gap in the higher education leadership literature about the leadership stories of Black women administrators in the state two-year technical colleges. Next, I connected the study’s purpose – an attempt to describe and interpret these women’s stories of their leadership experiences -- to the suitability of narrative inquiry as a research design. “Each individual is unique, yet what we seek in narrative research is some understanding of the patterns that cohere among individuals and the aspects of lived experience that differentiate,” (Josselson, 2006, p. 5). I then situated narrative research within the traditions of qualitative methodology.

Given the nature, purpose and methods of qualitative research, it was important to discuss ethical considerations at various stages of the research study. While qualitative methodology allows the researcher to address problems or issues, to seek out and hear the participant’s voice (Creswell, 2007), there is still the inherent risk of the participant’s voice being subsumed by the researcher’s. Therefore it is critically important to the validity of the research study that the researcher clearly state his or her biases up front; the researcher should go one step further and speculate on how these biases may impact her interpretations of the participants’ experiences. And should the researcher decide to become a part of the study, this needs to be clearly stated and a rationale provided as well for the change in direction. I discussed the use of purposive, snowball sampling to

identify participants for the study. And I detailed the use of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews as the principal instrumentation of the study, even with their inherent disadvantages. Next was a discussion of the specific steps taken in the data collection process (before, during, and after) the actual collection of data. The chapter concluded with an in-depth examination of the data analysis and interpretation methods that will be used in this study.

#### Note of Explanation Regarding “Results” and “Conclusions” Chapters

Chapter Four and Chapter Five – the results or narratives chapters – each begin with an introductory section, in which I narratively describe the setting and situational context leading up to each interview session. This introduction is followed by an in-depth presentation of each woman’s story, presented eloquently in her own words, as part of the narrative analysis interpretative framework (Polkinghorne, 1995, as cited in Kramp, 2004). Given that I had as much to learn from these women’s stories as the readers of this manuscript, I opted to remain present during the interviews. The material that is bracketed and italicized within each woman’s story represents my reflections on the observations, thoughts, and questions that came up spontaneously as I listened to each woman’s story (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The inclusion of my perspective during each session hopefully adds another layer to the interpretation of these stories; at the same time, my perspective is not meant to take away from these women’s experiences. Accordingly, I present each woman’s story in her own words and language (grammar, dialect, etc., are presented as stories were shared). The transcripts of these stories were member-checked to ensure their accuracy; any changes to the language contained in these

stories were made at the participant's behest (e.g., subject-verb agreement errors were corrected, and contracted words such as "gonna" and "gotta" and "kinda" were replaced with "going to," "got to" or "have to," and "kind of"). These chapters are followed by Chapter Six – the conclusions chapter, which features an analysis of narratives interpretation of the common themes culled from each woman's leadership story based on the guiding research questions and also an in-depth discussion of my interpretations of each woman's individual experience. My interpretation is framed within the personal context of this Southern-born Black woman researcher's experience of these women's stories (Creswell, 2009); the interpretation is also framed within the theoretical perspectives of Black feminist theory and critical race theory, and applicable leadership theories from the literature. This section is followed by a discussion of the implications of the study's findings and finally, recommendations for future research studies.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE FIRST NARRATIVE

*“If we would deepen and humanize ourselves,  
We must seek out storytellers  
Different from ourselves  
And afford them the audience they deserve.  
The benefit will be reciprocal.”*

*~Richard Delgado, 1989, “Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others A Plea for Narrative”*

#### A Black Woman Speaks...of Leadership – “Alice”

As I walked into the outer reception area of Alice’s (a pseudonym) office, I was greeted by the administrative assistant whom I had spoken to only moments before on the ‘phone. I had called from the road, letting her know that I would likely be a few minutes late, having hit a truly frightening patch of stormy weather – the thunderous booms providing a melodic rhythm for the brilliant streaks of lightning which all made for a glorious sounds and lights show – I only wished I were viewing this majestic display from the relative safety of my home, an hour and a half in the opposite direction. The administrative assistant told me that Alice was on the ‘phone and would be with me shortly. She got up from her desk and headed towards the back of the reception area where Alice’s office was located, and – motioning to her through the door’s glass pane – nodded in my direction, indicating that I had arrived. She suggested that I have a seat. I politely declined, saying I needed to work the kinks out of my legs from the long drive.

Seconds later, two young men – who from their uniforms must have been campus

safety officers – walked in and sat in chairs positioned against each wall, directly across from each other. They waited expectantly. I found it rather odd that the administrative assistant did not acknowledge their presence, but I shrugged the niggling thoughts away. Maybe it was customary for campus safety to drop by various offices during the mid-afternoon lull, just to check in on things. By now, the administrative assistant was on the ‘phone, speaking with someone about the merits of replacing an older model copier machine. I smiled politely at the two officers and continued my vigil near the door. As I waited for Alice to finish her telephone call, I turned to look out the paned glass window which was just to the right of the entrance.

Directly across the way from us sat the campus bookstore. I mused briefly about the bars braced horizontally against the bookstore windows, only to have my attention snagged by the muted sounds of voices coming from an area close by. I glanced in the direction of an adjoining office area, cocking my head slightly and picking up several muffled, deep timbres. I hazarded a surreptitious peek at the security officers; then quickly flicked my gaze back to the room next door. Through the rectangular slat of glass, I was able to make out what appeared to be a conference room. Sitting around the oval-shaped table were what looked to be a couple of college staffers or administrators; a police officer; and what I guessed was a student, based on his ball cap, scuffed up jacket, t-shirt and dark pants – maybe denims – I couldn’t tell for sure, since he was seated.

As I cast another furtive glimpse in the direction of the security guards, the two scenes started to coalesce in my mind – especially when one officer’s brows perked up at the sounds of discernible activity next door. Hearing a shuttling of chair legs, as though

the members were rising and preparing to depart, my eyes darted back to the conference room. It occurred to me then that whoever was in *that* room would need to exit through the reception area of *our* room. I hastily took a step away from the window so that I was within steps of my own assigned chair. As the door opened, I braced myself for what was to come – unsure of exactly what that would be. Campus security straightened in their chairs. Searching for a suitable facial expression, I settled on the most nondescript one I could find – the “I’m just visiting – please don’t mind me” look.

As the gentlemen filed out of the space, all but the student cast a friendly though openly curious glance in my direction, nodded and proceeded out the door. Sandwiched between the authorities, the student lifted then as swiftly lowered his head – and shuffled his way out the door. As though it were the signal they had been waiting on, campus security rose in concert and followed the departing figures in a direction I was unable to make out, given that I was dutifully and firmly ensconced in my chair. Just as I was reaching down to retrieve my cell phone (for what purpose I have no idea), the door to Alice’s office opened and out she stepped. I blew out the breath I didn’t realize I had been holding; then quickly came to my feet.

Though she uncharacteristically wore glasses and it had been quite a while since we’d last seen each other, I still knew it was Alice. In her mid-50s, Alice is an attractive, chestnut-brown skinned woman with a genuine down-home quality that put others at ease. Having served in the technical college system for many years, she is well-known throughout the state – not only for her leadership role within the system, but also for her active community engagement. Smiling her hello, Alice motioned me back as she

walked over for a brief exchange with her administrative assistant. Guessing that I knew what that exchange was all about, I gathered up my belongings and strode towards Alice's office door and waited. Within minutes, Alice was saying hello and asking me how I was doing. Saying she had just one more thing to quickly attend to, Alice waved me in the direction of her corner office and then turned to walk away. Swiveling back to me, she changed her mind and told me to choose where we met – her office or the conference room next to her office. She suggested I might like the conference room better since it had a round table and plenty of space for me to spread out my things.

I thanked her; then proceeded into the conference room and began setting out my materials. Silencing my cell and depositing my keys in my capacious shoulder bag, I placed the mini- digital recorder in the center of the table. I neatly and evenly spaced out the interview protocol, consent form, demographic data profile sheet, and a small stack of strips of 8.5"x11" paper that I had halved lengthwise to record anecdotal observations during the session. As if she instinctively knew that I was ready to begin, Alice chose that moment to walk into the room. Outfitted in a simple white blouse and beige slacks, she seemed poised and ready for our conversation. Silently, I wondered if she was still preoccupied by the odd happenings from earlier. As if reading my mind, she apologized again for the delays – made brief mention of the meeting I inadvertently had been privy to – and then we got right down to business.

After confirming that she had no questions about the consent form, Alice signed and dated the copy that I had with me. She then asked if it was OK to go ahead and complete the demographic data profile sheet before we got started. At my assent, she



went to work – she noted that she would have to e-mail her resume to me in the days ahead, given her considerable community involvement. When I asked Alice my grand tour question, “Tell me your leadership story,” she gave a characteristically hearty laugh. “And what a story it is,” she began. Right then, I knew that I was in for quite a journey. I nudged the recorder closer to her side of the table and settled back in my seat. It was time for this Black woman to speak.<sup>1</sup>

### The Early Years: A Born Leader

#### Small Town, Big Dreams

When I think about me and leadership, I’m trying to think of a time when I wasn’t [a leader]. Some people would talk about whether you’re born to be a leader or whether you learn to be a leader, and I think we can see examples in life of both. Being the oldest of seven [children], I think, even from my childhood, I tended to want to look after, take care of, or give direction to ...so it seemed like it was a natural, a natural kind of fit for me. [Pause] [In school], I always tended to volunteer for things or want to be a part or desired to be a part of whatever and wherever the action was. So I think that is probably what propelled me into leadership.

I was the oldest child and first-generation college; neither parent had gone to college and neither of my parents had high school diplomas. I understand what it’s like to be a first-generation college student, what it’s like to have to navigate the way because

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<sup>1</sup> What follows is my representation of our conversation. While the participant’s story remains the focus and is honored through the uniqueness of her voice, I have chosen to remain present in part due to the circuitous, episodic, and recursive nature of the story. My observations and queries are literally bracketed (and italicized) within the conversation to serve as a conduit for her storytelling, re-ordering events so that her experience informs both the reader and me (Altheide, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Erickson, 2010; Madison, 2008).

your parents can't do that for you, because they haven't walked that walk before. I think that's helped me to be more sensitive to the students, and maybe why I enjoy the community college more because we tend to get students, a higher percentage of students, as first-generation here. And recognizing and knowing what it's like to not have a lot. And then, also recognizing the power in the opportunities that an education can afford someone. You know, to go from one socioeconomic level to the next, just by being able to complete a degree and to go out and go to work and earn. So I can see where that may have impacted my leadership.

I was born in a very small, rural town, and it had a poor, [segregated] education system and I think it's even poor now. Now a lot of the teachers were... [they] drove in; they didn't live in that area. So when you start asking me about a role model or someone I had coming up...I remember especially my science teacher in junior high who actually lived in the community and she was just – always so clean, and so neat. And she enunciated so well, and she was just such a smart lady. And, I just was in awe of Mrs. Wilson, and the first time I saw her in the supermarket, I couldn't believe it. Miss Wilson's in the supermarket! I mean, I don't know...my mother was in the supermarket. But Miss Wilson...you just didn't think the teacher, you know the teacher was just held in such high esteem. She was very firm, very smart, and she just [pause] just held herself in a very professional manner, compared to other teachers. She was just so, she was very [pause] *clean* [laughs]. She wore these very clean white shirts and they were always *pressed* and she was just so *neat* and *professional*, and I just thought, "Wow," you know,

so, I remember back to seeing Miss Wilson as I grew up and she was just...she just always impressed me as being someone so different from everybody.

*[I asked Alice whether Miss Wilson was a Black woman, and she said yes. That question led Alice to clarify the context of time and place and her high school years.]*

That was before we had integration, so that's when we were in segregated schools. In fact, my first year of high school was the year we integrated high schools. So that was interesting, because I was the first person to cross over and talk to somebody on the other side. We stood in the classroom, all the Black students on one side, all the Whites on the other. *[Bursts out laughing. I am sorely tempted to ask her why she laughed, but I worry about interrupting her and also about putting her on the defensive. Her reaction may have been brought on from reflecting on that time in light of today's times, or she may be reflecting the convivial attitude that she had even then].* So I guess I've always kinda been about trying to bring it together. *[I stopped Alice again to ask her whether her need to "bring it together" was innate to her as a person.]* Yeah, I just kinda remember back then, and I don't know where those kids had been, 'cause we live in a small town, and I'd never even seen these other White kids that were my age. 'Cause they went to one school and we went to another, and we never came together, and when we came together there *[in that high school classroom]* – they were all on one side and we were on the other.

And that's how the homeroom class was, and then, one day, I crossed over and started talking to somebody, and you know, eventually...by the end, by the time we graduated, we actually had everybody to a point where that wasn't as big a deal. You know, 'cause when you're cheering – you cheer on a team with Blacks and Whites and

cheering together – and those kind of things. But the first year, it was kinda rough, because in homeroom – our homeroom was outnumbered, because there were more Whites in it than Blacks. So, of course, we didn't win anything. Then we tried to split the vote by nominating somebody on that side, and we still didn't win anything. [laughing] You know, it was kinda like they would stick with their candidate no matter what. And then we'd have two of everything at first – two Homecomings, so we'd have one Black and one White [Homecoming queen] – and then you'd stop having as many social things, because everything got to be about the race when you were trying to bring the class – the school together. Towards the end, we got to the point where we were, we were kinda merging pretty good...So that was, was an interesting time as well.

In high school, I was a leader...and I cheered, and you know, was in clubs and organizations, and an honor student. As I left high school, that trend followed into college. I was in student government in college; I was student leader. I was involved in the Phi Beta Kappa, which was the honor fraternity for two-year colleges. And [I] then moved on to four-year college and also was in student government. And I got involved in community service, those type things.

### A Mother's Sacrifice

*[At this point in the conversation, I wanted to see if I could arrive at Alice's "private" voice rather than the mostly "public" voice I had been hearing up until now (Seidman, 2006). I do not think that Alice was necessarily conscious of the fact that her responses sounded as if they were practiced in a sense, nor do I think there was any intention on her part in this regards. Still, it actually wasn't until I started asking non-*

*scripted questions about her family – specifically her relationship with her parents – that I was able to get a better understanding of how Alice became the leader she is today.]*

My mother is my shero. She was the one that told me I was not gonna get married just because I was pregnant. We were so sure that my parents were gonna insist that we got married. We got engaged, and my mother said, “You’re not marrying anybody until you graduate from high school.” She said I didn’t have to, and when I graduated from high school, I didn’t want to. She said there’s no need in making two mistakes; one didn’t necessarily mean the other. So, she was always supportive. Looking back on it, I never missed a day out of school. When my son had to have his check-ups and things like that, my mother would take him – she worked, but she would take him with her to work, ‘cause she had ladies that worked with her. And after she would take him, drop him off at work, then she would take him to the doctor, and she’d bring him back to the sitter, and then go back to work. But I never missed a day out of school. She had not gone to college, so she did everything she could to help me so I wouldn’t have to [drop out of high school]. I mean, she, when I decided to move to Redwood, and go to Larkspur [College] full time, she supported me doing that. She kept my son until I could do that, and I’d come back when I could. But she was just very supportive. Then I found out that she had gotten pregnant with me in the eleventh grade, just like I had, and she’d never finished high school. And she was determined that I was going to finish high school, and then after that, each time when I got a degree, she was so proud. And then when I got my doctorate, she was just...so very proud.

### A Father's Pride

My dad went to sixth grade. That's as far as he went in school. He was a worker. [Pause] I don't know whether, I think he was always *proud* of what I did, and I think he always saw my name in the paper and things, but [pause] he just used to always tease me about, "Oh, yeah, she's an educated fool. She just goes to school all the time. She's a good girl, but she's just always in school." But I don't [pause] know whether he had...I guess...I think he had a true appreciation for the fact that I went to school. I was in a better situation than he was in, and I took care of him there at the end until he passed away. But he never had that education. And [he] didn't really support me in it? But [he] didn't knock me at it either. So I had to make my way myself. He didn't provide for it, you know; I got financial aid. And surely with financial aid, I had to work. I had to work when I went to school. I didn't have – the luxury that I gave my children, where I worked and assumed the loan, so they could go to school. And when I took out the loan [for my children's education], that was a loan that I had to pay back. But that was my parents.

### Something More in Me

*[I found a few things rather curious about the way that Alice discussed her parents. First of all, I don't know that she expected the topic of being a teenaged mom to come up in this interview. I also think that she wanted to present a succinct vignette of her father – maybe in the hopes of presenting him in a light made bright by the passage of time. For some reason, I believed that there was more to Alice's private side that would give a more complete picture of her as a leader. So I asked if, in addition to her parents and*

*being the oldest child were there any other influences on her leadership development.*

*Before she started to speak, Alice took a deep breath and got a faraway look in her eyes.]*

I worked there at the mill at my hometown, after I was in high school and I started working there. I was still living at home. I was making *pretty* good money, and my friends had already gone off to college. I ...was... then [pauses] a single mom. I'd gotten pregnant in high school, so I thought, well, I'm just gonna work a while and do this. And so, I went to...the two-year college, one evening – just to hang out – 'cause I was not working. I mean I was off, and with my friends who were attending college, and one [man] that was the dean of students came up to me and talked to me while I was sitting in the cafeteria, and asked me what I was doing, and I told him I was waiting on my friends, who were taking classes. And he wanted to know why I wasn't taking classes, and I said, "Well, I'm just working, and I'm off," and he said, "Well, why don't you take the placement test?" And I thought, "Well, no," and he said, "Well, doesn't take that long, and you'll have it done by the time your friends get out of class." So, he talked me into taking it, and so he gave me the results back, and he said, "You know, you scored high enough to take anything we have here. Why don't 'cha sign up for something?" I said, "No...I'm not interested. I'm just gonna, you know, go 'head and work," you know, that kinda thing.

And so, I went back [pause] to work. And, I was there one night, and I was working that third shift. And it looked like 8:00 was never gonna come. And I looked down that row of the mill, and I saw those older women there, and I thought, "God, I don't think I want to do this 'til I'm this age," and I thought, "I think I ought to go back

and find that man who I talked to,” and I started late. They had already started the next term, and I called him, and I came back, and I signed up for some classes, and I graduated top in my class. But it was...you know, if he had never kinda talked to me. I mean, you know, he just kinda came in the cafeteria, just talking, and I remember when I got my degree, and he was dean of students then. And I, he was still at the college when I got my doctorate, and I wrote him a letter announcing that I had it, and I went back to our annual, and I took a picture of myself and him dancing, and I said to him, “And just think...it all began with the first dance.” And he said, “Alice, I am so proud of you.”

You know...I remember... I always remembered him...just talking to me. And I mean, he didn't look like me. He was not a man of color. He just came in the cafeteria, saw a person sitting there at a table, and just started talking to me. And he said, “You know. Why don't you just do this? Why don't you do...?” And so, I went in and took the test, and he told me I scored well, I could do whatever...any program they had there. I was in the top 10% of my class in high school. But I made a wrong decision, got pregnant, and I just kinda did some things differently. So, I ended up going, and I loved it! I finished that, then I transferred to the college, then I finished that, and then I went and got my master's, and then I finished that, and then I started working for a long, long, time, and then I got, you know, the doctorate. But, I think, it was people who saw something in me, and encouraged me. And so, you know, so that's why I like giving back and talking to people, say, you can do this. You can do this, but like I say, I was just there hanging out [that evening at the college]. And he did that, and when I was leaving, the faculty member said, “You should consider coming back,” and the counselor



who said, “When you finish, you *come* back, and I’m gonna create this, and you do what I tell you to do.” And so it was these people who were there, who helped push me to be better, or to try, or to do that.

And then when I graduated from college, and then took my first job, back at my alma mater, which was the first two-year college that I had attended, because I still had that that inclination to just jump in, develop and create, it was ...it was just neat, just if you saw something that needed to be done to just ...I just took the lead and did it, and rallied other people in to do it with me. So that’s kinda just been my mantra.

### Accepting the Challenge: On the Path to Leadership

#### Falling onto the Leadership Path

In terms of my career choice, I kinda fell into it. First I thought I wanted to be a nurse. In fact, that’s what I was gonna do when I left to register. And then I saw some colleagues in another line – that I had gone to school with – and they told me they were going to human services, and I said, “What is that?” And they said, “Oh, it has psychology and sociology,” and I know I took a psychology course in high school, and I liked it. I did. So I got out of the nursing line and got in that one. And it just worked out for me. I did the psychology, and after I left psychology, I did counseling, and then from counseling, on to higher ed administration. So it just clicked for me. So there was no planning, no master plan, whatever. It was just a fluke that ended up working. So I don’t know if it was destiny or what. But I *did not have* a systematic career plan. I still have a, um, fondness for nursing. You know, I still appreciate what they do and what they bring to the table. But at this point, I think where I am is where I needed to be. So I don’t, I

don't miss it [laughs] at all, but, that was one of those things that I thought I'd like to be a nurse, but I didn't do that.

### Affirmative Action

I graduated from high school in 1974, which would have been after the civil rights stuff came in, and then of course, we had the movement and I think I might've got the benefit from affirmative action. That would have been alive and well at that time. And I think probably some of the opportunities I got may have been because we had affirmative action initiatives in most organizations at that time. So if you had a person who was capable, and they were a person of color, if – you know, you needed to diversify, then that was an opportunity that probably lent itself in the seventies to propel my leadership experience. *[I found Alice's delivery of this information to be rather specious, but given her age at the time, her reflections on this period of her life may have been quite appropriate. I appreciated that she did not attempt to embellish those times or her role during those years, other than to note that she – like most people of color – benefited from affirmative action policies implemented during the early years of the program.]*

### Someone Saw Something in Me

When I went on to a two-year college, I started meeting teachers who said, "You can do this. You can do this. You're really good at this." And then when I got ready to graduate, my department chair said to me, "You should consider coming back here when you graduate and [get] your four-year degree, to work here. And I'd never thought about it. And that's someone who saw something in me. And she didn't look like me. So most

of my mentors have not been African American women, you know, they have not been people that looked like me. She was another person who was very professional. She didn't laugh and joke a lot. She was just kind of very serene. And I made good grades in her class. And I just didn't think that she thought about us, beyond that. And she said that to me, when she was advising me for the last time.

And then I had a counselor there who also was very personable. And she said to me, "When you graduate [from the four-year college], you come back. I'm gonna get you a job here. You call me when you graduate." And she told me that, and when I graduated, I thought, "I'm a call her." And I called, and I said, "Hey! I just graduated. Where's my job?" She said, "I tell you what. I want you to go to Cottonwood University, go to that office and apply for the master's program. After you apply for the master's program, you call me back because the job I got in mind is gonna require a master's degree. When you come to apply, I'm gonna tell 'em you're working on it, so you go ahead and make sure [you apply]..." So I got accepted to Cottonwood, and I called her, and I said, "OK, I've done what you said." And she said, "Now, I'm gonna set up this interview, and you come in and interview." So I came in and interviewed, and it was for a part-time job, which is really kinda crazy.

And I guess that's taking a leap of faith, because I was working at a state job, in Laurel County, which I was driving from Redwood, which is about a 30-minute drive, one way, and I was working there as a mental retardation supervisor at the center. And, and – with benefits. A state job with benefits! Back there in the '70s, that was a good job to have, and so, I remember that she said it was gonna be part-time. "You'll work

from 8:00 to 1:00.” So I remember leaving the state job, which I was making \$6,500, something like that, and I had all those benefits, to work part-time, at Tech, making – I think I ended up making...It was going to come to about \$8,000. It was making more money, and it was gonna be no benefits. And then on top of that, I wasn’t going have to drive anymore, so I was gonna be saving on gas. So, in a way, it was a risk to go from a full-time job with benefits, to take a part-time job with no benefits. But, I did. So, I did that, and I worked, and I kept adding on things [duties]. And I added on things, and then I ended up getting hired on full-time, and that was the first, full-time counseling position they’ve had there, other than the director, although the counseling position was part-time. So I worked myself into a full-time job, so that was kinda neat. But that came with somebody else who was helping me, telling me what to do, and encouraging me, and in paving the way for me. *[Alice’s reflects with a depth of emotion on this period in her life. I felt as if she wanted to communicate the enormity of these events relative to her professional career. She stressed more than once the fact that people who saw something in her worth nurturing and building up “did not look like me.” This message had powerful resonance for me.]*

### The Right Place at the Not-So-Right Time

So I’ve had people along the way to help navigate things, until I came to Mimosa. Then it got crazy, because I didn’t know anybody, and because I had moved to Concord. And it was like you didn’t know anybody, so I never had to apply for a job before, because when I applied, pretty much, [the person in the hiring position] said, “Go apply, and then I’ll call for your packet.” And so when I came here in 1981, there were

no jobs because the state had had this big layoff. So everybody's on reduction in force, so I did some substitute teaching and I did a couple of things like that, and then, finally I got a job at Mimosa a year later. I started here as a counselor.

The *first* leadership position I took on was really not because I wanted to be in charge. It was because I didn't want to work for the other person who was gonna be getting the job. So, it was self-preservation. So I thought, "Hmm, if I don't apply, I know he is. Can I live with him, or should I do..." So I applied, and I got the job, and I've just been – going ever since. And I did that job, and it was, "Until we can work out something... until we can get the money." But the money didn't come through. You know, it was turned down...the re-org that they submitted was turned down, and so I continued to do it [the job], so I would have experience on my resume. And then later we had another re-organization where another person became the director – and then we had another re-org, re-organization, and the person who was the director when I was coordinating – he became the dean and I became the associate dean.

So these are all positions that re-orged and I'm not applying for these. I'm just being moved around. And then we did that until we re-organized again. And then we flattened our organizational structure. And then I got a new position, and that was when I came and I got student judicial and grievances, and all this, and I thought, "Oh, my goodness. I just want to do counseling." In the meantime, I've taken advantage of my professional role. I still keep up my licensure, and my certifications in counseling. I'm licensed, certified, and nationally certified as a counselor. So, I can always go back to

doing that, if I decide to do that. Then, after I got going in my new role, I started to work on my doctorate.

I completed the doctoral degree, and the neat thing about that was that we worked it out where if I finished that, I would get a promotion and salary. So I got additional responsibilities, and then also, I got a promotion in that. So it was kinda interesting, because I got the highest salary I could get without [the salary] being as much as the person on the next level up, because there's some rule about that. So, I kinda think it's unfair to me that this person only got the master's degree, and they're not interested in, you know, going forward with the doctorate. And I have the doctorate, so they gave me as much percentage as they could do [given my job title].

### There's a Silver Lining

I think one of the challenges for me in leadership, and probably one of the most learning experiences and what I've shared with other folks has been [pauses], when [pauses] I applied for the position in counseling and my counterpart applied. He was nine years older than me. He'd been at the college about six years before I'd come. And I felt like I did a lot more than he did, in terms of leadership kinds of things. And he was named for the position. I had just had a child, and I was on maternity leave. And I remember my dean telling me that he was gonna do the interview, and he said, "You don't have to come in. We can just do it over the phone." And I said, "No, I'll come in," because I didn't want to use the fact that I was having a child to be a reason why I couldn't do whatever I need to get [the position], and he said, "Well, I don't know why I'm having to interview you all, 'cause I know you both. But the Vice President said I

had to interview.” I was a little concerned by that comment because to me, then it meant the interview wasn’t going to matter. If he didn’t think the interview was going to matter, because he already knew the both of us, then he could pick whom he wanted without the interview. But I still went forward with the interview. And, in fact, once he decided which one of us he was going to hire or made his decision, he never called me back to tell me that I was not the person.

I was on maternity leave, and I was coming in at Christmas – my child was born in October – so I was coming in to go to the Christmas party that we usually have at his house, and they encouraged me to bring the baby so the staff could see her. And so, I called, no, I was gonna say, I called. But one of the staff members was calling me, and she said, “Well, yeah, you know, such and such got the position, I hear,” and I said, “Oh? Oh, really?” And she said, “Yeah, da, da, da,” and she then said, “Oh, my goodness! Please don’t say anything! I thought you already knew! I thought you already…” And I said, “No, no, that’s fine.” And it *really, really* hurt me that I had taken the...whole...process more seriously than the person who was doing the interviewing.

But then yet, he was still my supervisor, and I knew he had a fondness for the person that he picked, and then I thought, um, and I didn’t say anything about it. I went on to the meeting, and I held my head up, and I smiled, and I went on. And it was a while later, when he and I were talking one-on-one about something. I said, “You know, John, I...it always bothered me a little bit, and I just wanted to share with you...I felt really bad that you never came back to me, to tell me that you hired this person, and I had to find out from somebody…” And he said, “You know what, Alice, I am so sorry. I

should have done that.” And he said, “But you know what, Alice? You’re young. You’ll have your time. He’s this age, and this is his time.” Now I could have got hot-headed and said, “That’s not *fair*. That’s *ageism*. It shouldn’t matter how old someone is, and this and the other.” But I knew I wanted to work here. I knew I didn’t want to cause a problem with him, and so, I just took that into account. And that was just like, OK.

So, pretty much, my career became waiting for this person to leave, so I worked with this person. I did a lot of work. The neat thing about it was I couldn’t be upset with him, and I’ve coached other people who’ve gotten upset with the person who was chosen over them. I couldn’t get upset with him, because he didn’t choose himself. He wanted the job, the same job I wanted. He got it; I didn’t. And I could be sour...I could be negative. I could sit around and talk about how awful it is, and how bad people treat me, or I could let him see how you, how you act when you don’t get what you want. So I think for me, that was a pivotal point. Just take my eyes off of him, and keep my eyes on, you know, the True Provider. ‘Cause I’m a woman of faith, and I believe what’s for me is for me. And maybe it *wasn’t* my time. And maybe he *had* served his time.

So I was the best assistant to him that we [the college] had. I did work to make him look good, and he let me do it. And the neat thing about that was somebody said, “Oh, he was this, and he was this. He didn’t let you do this.” When he left his job, I could do it because he’d given me the opportunity to do every part of it. And in some ways, some people may say, “Uhn, that wasn’t so good,” but I worked with other people who did it all themselves and never allowed you an opportunity to do it, and I can say that he did *not* do your work. And he...delegated, and I learned a lot because he let me



do the work. So when I got ready to write my resume, I could tell a person I did this, this, this, and this. While I didn't have the title, by the time he left, I had done all of those kinds of things that he did. So I was really prepared to step in and take the shoes.

So sometimes there's a silver lining in what you may look at as not being a good thing. And so, yeah, I didn't get it when I thought I wanted it. But then I see some people, when they don't get things and they don't want it...They get angry, and they become bitter, and then they lose out. And sometimes it's just not the timing, or it's just somebody else's time. But if you keep at it, your time will come. And I know over the years that experience I've shared with people. Sometimes, it's just not your time. But you can't get upset with the person. He didn't put himself in the position. And can you afford to get upset with your boss? And I opted not to, and to stay. And, even to this day, when I see my old boss, you know, we have great respect for one another, and he prides himself on hiring me, and says it was one of the best decisions he made. And when he retired, he felt like he left the college in good hands – because I was here. And so I feel good about it, and I've learned that, sometimes, you just have to put the time in. It's not all about the other. So, and I guess it gave me an opportunity to dig my roots a little deeper, and to be more mature. And, um, I think that's some pivotal points. *[It is clear why Alice uses this experience as one of her talking points when she is mentoring other would-be leaders. The pride that she felt about herself for handling such a delicate situation so adeptly was palpable.]*

### Choosing the Well Worn Path

I've had a couple of opportunities to pursue high level, a higher position, and I stayed. I don't know whether that's been good or bad, but I'm happy. One of the challenges was I would look at how those positions would tie into my family. Because I opted, I mean, *I* decided I wanted to have children, and I wanted to not disrupt their lifestyles in certain ways. So I *stayed* in the area. My husband worked with a company, where he traveled and certain cities were better for him to get in and out of. So Concord was a good place for him to be, and his work. And it was a good place for the girls to stay. And so I think, at times, balancing a family – it was easier to stay in one place than to be in another. And, where my office is here, the girls were in school – elementary school, a mile and a half up this side of the road. They were in junior high half a mile up this side of the road. And then in high school, a half a mile up this side of the road. So, they were right within my reach, and so I could do what I needed to do for them, and then [get] back, and their daycare was like two miles down this road. And so, and then the after school later became a half a mile up this way. So, that was our way. That was my way to balance my career.

And looking back on things, I would meet with colleagues different times [who'd say], “You're still at Mimosa?” You know, and in some ways, it's like, “Yeah, I'm still here.” But I know the history, I know the cycles and all this, and it was just amazing to me. I would meet other colleagues, and like, every two to five years, they were moving to another college. I mean, they were moving up in positions, but they were moving to another college and I just...Mimosa afforded me an opportunity to grow, and

to do things, and now where our institution is flat, if I'm into upward mobility, there's no other position I could go up. It would be to move up to the next level. And at this time, my boss is pretty content. I don't think she's going anywhere in the next few years, so if I wanted to be move up to the next level, I'd have to move out.

I've gotten a couple of calls from people asking me to apply for their administrative positions, and I have declined. And I've seen people...with less experience than I go on to get those positions. But that was a choice I made. And I was, I was mentoring them as they did that, and I felt fine with it, because it just wasn't a good time for me, to go to that particular location, because of my family and those kinds of things. And they're in a position where they can move and go and do that. So, but whether it was a challenge or an obstacle, I really wouldn't want to put that label on my children in any way, because, you know, I, I like being a parent. I like having my children, and now they're adults. They've all gone through college. I had one that went the military route. He's married, and I have three grandchildren. You know, they're in Maryland, so they're a little farther away. And the girls are both here in the state. Katherine just moved to Nashville. She's getting married soon, so she may be in Washington State or God knows where eventually they will go. Anna's in Georgia right now, but she's talking about maybe moving to Kentucky.

So, I'm at a point in my life now, where I have enough time – I could retire – right now, if I wanted to. And I could move on to another position, if I wanted to. But when you talked about what my ultimate career would mean, when I was younger, I thought I wanted to be a college administrator. I'd be fine with that. Right now, now

that I'm [am] at that level, because this would be how my position is classified that I have here...I'm, I'm not sure whether I want to move any further. And if I did, it would have to be the right fit for me, in terms of values. It would not be, you know, aspiring to a position for the position. It would have to be a fit, and the fact that I would be contributing something to that organization. Because, my ultimate was, I always wanted to get my doctorate. And I thought about that when I finished my master's, and then I started having children. And I'd think about it again, and I've have a child. And then, finally, when I got the children old enough that I could juggle that I did it.

And that was a very good, comfortable accomplishment for me. And I thought after that, "You can do anything." And then I started thinking, "Well, what else is there that you want to do?" So, as I start nearing retirement, my thought is, "Well, if I'm gonna work, would I do anything else?" I'm just as excited about this job as I was the day they first offered me the job back in 1982. So, if I'm gonna work, I'd just soon work at Mimosa. You know, or if I'm gonna work somewhere else, then it's gonna have to really be something that I really, really see other than just a title. Because I don't think leadership necessarily is in what the label is on it, but what you think you're gonna contribute and where, you know, where you think you can make a difference. And I, I feel like I make a difference here. And that's where I want to be. And when I got the doctorate, part of that was I wanted to be prepared, so *if* there were another position, opportunity that came along, I would be qualified for it, credential-wise as well as experience.

And it's a good feeling to be in, you know, where...if things get bad, I don't think I contribute anymore...or it's not what I want to do...I don't like it anymore. I can go home and retire. Or I can leave on, try something else if I don't like it, because I can retire [laugh], yeah, so it's a good place to be. And my children aren't depending on me to make the living, to get into college and all of that. My husband's not depending on me to, to...you know. So it's a good place and a good time, where I'm open. It's a good place, and a good time. Probably one of the most scariest times in my life, 'cause I'm not sure that I'm ready to hang up my slippers.

But then, I'm not sure how much longer I want to go at this same pace that I'm going now. So, it's kinda like I'm...internally, kinda seeking where is it, is it to go? Because I mean like you met the milestone you had out there, and I haven't put another one out there yet. And maybe it's because I'm...I reached where I want to be. And the only way I'll go out further would be...and I don't have a vision for anything further than where I am. And I don't know if that's a bad thing, or just that, you know, we don't talk about what happens when you arrive [laughs]. You know, and that's maybe where I am. You know, and, and, it's a good feeling, to not be worried about trying to *be* somewhere, and to *get* somewhere, and to do something. But just to be there. Now, every day is a challenge and I have new opportunities to grow and do new things. Every student case, everything comes up is different.

And the job I have now, if I had applied, I wouldn't even have applied for it! 'Cause I didn't think I'd even want to do this, and that's another thing I found, and that's probably I'd encourage anybody in leadership is, sometimes, when things are thrust upon

you, you never *know* until you try it. I mean, because, student *discipline*. I don't even like disciplining my *children*, I mean [laugh], you know...to be over rules where you're determining whether students are gonna stay or go. This is *never* what I thought I bargained for from counseling, and then I realized my understanding of where people are, are those moments to give people the opportunity to develop and change is very much a student development part in discipline. And at the same time, sometimes, you have to say no in order for students to learn that this behavior is not acceptable here, and you need to make some changes if you're going to stay, or you need to go away and come back when you've made some changes. Be re-considered, so that's, that's been a blessing, and I've enjoyed this job more than I ever knew.

But that was still a time when somebody saw something, because I remember saying to my current boss, when she called me, they'd done the re-org. when I was on vacation. [She] said, "Alice, we, we, made some changes, and we're gonna put you over this." And I said, "But what about counseling? I really, *really* like counseling." "Who's going to be doing that now?" She said, "Oh, Alice. Where you're going, we want the best counselor we have. 'Cause you're gonna need to use all of those counseling skills as you navigate and work with students and faculty," and, and she's correct, because I have faculty who get very upset about student behavior, and I have students who get very upset about faculty behavior. And then, trying to work with that, and work with people and having to...with faculty enough that they trust you to do the right thing, and the students to trust you, you know, and then faculty to know that sometimes, what they're asking for is not quite what I can do. And how do you explain that, and work through it. So, I

mean, conflict management and all the...and she's right, it just ...it's taking A-L-L of that and more.

And I'm happy to report, even though it's not bragging, but I've been doing this since 1993, and I *may* have had, *may* have had, five cases that's gone beyond my office level, to a committee, a grievance...Not a grievance committee but to a hearing committee. That's when the students aren't satisfied with hearing outcomes and decide they wanna go to the next level, which is to appeal it. And that's fine, they can do this. And out of those five that have gone above my level, they all five have been supported. So I work with the students on the lowest level I can. I try to keep the students in school as much as I can. But sometimes, there comes a point where and when you have to say, "No. You've broken the rules. You've had an opportunity, and still did this." So, it's amazing sometimes how things that look soooo impossible, on jumping in there, that we're able to pull it together and get a resolution that people may not be happy with, but they can live with and they can understand why it's not gonna go their way.

### Evolution of Leadership Development

#### Leadership Style

And if you think about what my style might be...I think it's more, has evolved as I've gotten older. You know, more in the beginning, it was get in there and get it done. It's now more of how you rally, get the people to work with you to get things done. So I tend to be more of [a] leader that help individuals see the potential they have, and promote and develop that. I ... delegate and coach, as opposed to directing, you know. I feel that I tend to be more nurturing in nature as a leader, but yet firm in

expectations, but then nurturing in allowing for error, and growth, and coaching. And I always try to create an environment where a staffer who reports directly to me feels like she can come in and say, “Hey, Alice, I missed it. Let me tell you the bad news first,” [laugh], you know, and then out of that bad news ... we say, “Well, OK, what can we sort out of this and what can we do differently...And now, the damage control. What are we gonna do, how are we gonna make it better, how are we gonna fix what we have now.

One example was I had a staff member call me this morning, and I told her I’d call her back in two minutes. I was with someone else, and I asked my administrative assistant... I said, “Please tell her I’ll call her back in two minutes unless it’s an emergency.” My administrative assistant said, “OK.” So I called her back and I said, “OK, What’s up?” This is a direct report. And she said, “Alice, I’ve got good news, and I’ve got bad news. I’m gonna start with the bad news.” I said, “OK.” She said, “We left off a student in the honor ceremony,” she said, “and I think it may have been all my fault.” But she said, “I got so many e-mails and everything, and I looked back on things, and I found it. And it’s here.” She said, “I’ve talked with the department chair, who told me it was an outstanding student,” and she said, “And I looked back here...and I got it, but I was getting something from this person, something from the other ...the student was there and she got an award, but she didn’t get this other award that she was supposed to get.” And I said, “OK,” and she said, “So I called PR, and I’m gonna get them to put something out on the intranet, and then get something [pause] on the newspaper...in the college newsletter, and then I’ll try to get something to the student.”



And I said, “Well, these things happen. This has happened before, someone who’s done this before you had this happen.” And then I said to her, “Uh, hmm. But you don’t want to *over-emphasize* the error.” I said, “I don’t see a need to list it here and here. Why don’t we just send a letter to the student directly, and explain to her what’s happened, and then, let’s create her a chart...a certificate and then mail it to her.” And she said, “Oh, yeah, yeah,” and I said, “What do you think about that,” and she said, “Yeah, I think that would be better.” But then she said, “Alice, I sent this whole list out to the department chair, and they said it was fine. Nobody told me that this one was left off.” I said, “It’s harder for people to see what’s not missing when they see everything.” I said, “What I told the person who did this before is just send back what you don’t have.” She said, “You know, I hadn’t thought about that.” And I said, “You say, ‘I don’t have one on these.’ That’s easier to see than if you send a whole list, because people see the list, and they see completion, even when they’re not.” She said, “You know, that makes sense.”

So I said, “And copy the department chair and the program chairperson next time. And even if the department chair can’t see it, the program person will say, ‘Wait a minute! I had one of those ‘cause I sent it up to my department chair.’” So she said, “Yeah...that’s, yeah, that is easy.” Then she said, “I did talk to the department chair, and I told her it was my fault.” And I said, “By the way, *never* say it’s your fault,” I said, “Because it, it doesn’t matter, really. Just fix it,” I said, “Because sometimes we work with faculty, and when you accept all the blame, then what they go away with is, ‘It was her fault. She said she dropped the ball.’”

And I said, “You may have, and you may not, but it sounds like the system was confusing,” because she was just sending it to the department chair, and the department chair was the person that—overlooked the list. But there were so many subdivisions under [the] department chair that the department chair did not figure that one was missing. And I said, “Let’s communicate both ways,” I said, “But just tell ‘em it was an oversight, you’ll get on it, you’ll fix it, and you whatever,” I said. There’s no need...so she had beat herself up so much about it, and I said, “There’s no need to just...” And she said, “OK...yeah,” and I said, “I’m not saying that we won’t admit when we make a mistake, but just the fact, it was an oversight but you don’t want to over – you know, do this and this.”

And then she had mentioned to me something, and I said, “Oh! Well, let’s hear about the good news!” And I didn’t want her feeling...and so we started talking, and she said, “Well, I think I finally came up with a date, um, for my wedding.” And then so, she, ‘cause I had been teasing her about making that commitment, and she said, “I’m engaged. I guess I’m engaged.” And I said, “Well, when is it?” And she told me the date, and I said, “Oh! You would pick my anniversary week, wouldn’t you?” And she said, “You gonna be out of town?” And I said, “No. Whenever it is, I’m gonna be there, even if I have to move my anniversary celebration around [to] another time.” And I said, “Can I put this on my calendar?” And she said, “Yeah...yeah, go ahead and put it on your calendar. But I’ll call you back if I’m not gonna do it!” I said, “You’re gonna do this. You’re gonna do this.”

But, you know, it's part of that...not, "Oh, it's OK, don't worry about it." But at the same time, let's fix it, but let's not worry about it, because worrying about it and beating yourself up. But what can we take away from this, and what can we learn, is kind of more the approach I use, as opposed to [thumping her index finger in the air], "Uhhh, uhhh, uhhh, uhhh, uhhh," pointing the finger, or taking the blame, or pinning the blame. It's, what went wrong and what can we do to fix it? And I think she's got a game plan for how to make it easier next time. And she said, "Yeah, you can see what's missing," when you just say, "I don't have any for these," as opposed to seeing a long list, and she said, "I never thought about doing it that way. Thanks, Alice."

So, the good news is she felt good enough to call me and tell me, "I think I messed up," you know, and step up and take that responsibility. And that's what I expect out of employees. It's just to tell me when it's not going like we thought, so we can come up with a better way to fix it. But not hide it or whatever, or someone feels like she or he can't come to me and tell me that something's...Tell me the way it really is. You know, you have so many people who feel like they have to paint this – picture that things are great? Because you don't accept hearing anything else, and then when you find out it's not so great, it's too late to do anything with it. So that's kind of my approach to how I work with my colleagues in terms of leadership style. It's more *modeling*. This is what I do. And more coaching.

And when I've had staffers not used to or feel comfortable presenting, I will present with them. "I'll do this, I'll do this, and you come along with me." And then, "I'll do this piece, and then, you do this piece." Then, "You do this piece, and I'll do this

piece.” And then eventually, “You do the pieces, and I sit back, and I’m there for you. And eventually I phase out, and you can go when I’m there, and when I’m not there. Because I’m not there to critique you. I’m there to cheer you on.” So, that’s kinda how I, I work with my staffers that do presentations or take on new, new activities, that we’re here, there together. “How’s it going? What can we do?” Kinda monitoring along the way.

Like I said, [though] I think that evolved over time. As you get more experience, and you learn that no things are [interrupted by staffer bringing in coffee], you learn over time that – everything’s not that serious. And I think when I was younger, I thought that everything was that serious. [laughs] Everything had to be [laughs] perfect. Everything had to be...you as a leader...you had to be better than anybody else. The staff...you had to be this. Then as you get older, you realize that, *team* is more about pulling all of the strengths together...rather than one individual having all the strengths. So I think, over time, I’ve learned that it’s less about me and more about...the union, as a whole. And, and so, I strive to, to work on how we as a unit can be better, [how] we as a team can be better. [More] than who Alice is [as an] individual. You know, where I strive for excellence individually, but I want that excellence to be for the department, and not just Alice. And I find that the staff works hard, my staff of folk.

You saw he [staffer] just brought me coffee, ‘cause he knows that I’ve not had a chance to go to lunch. “If I can get a cup of coffee, then I can make it through the rest of this.” And while, the same way he’ll make me a cup of coffee, I’ll make him a cup of coffee. He knows how I like my coffee; I know how he likes his coffee. So it’s no, big

“I”s and you know, little “I”s in the department. It’s whoever needs what at the time; that’s what we try to work to do. And, you know, since we’ve been together awhile, this team here, we have an understanding of what people’s [pauses] little ways are. You know, when someone’s kitty cat is sick [laughs], they know I don’t particularly care for animals. When their kitty cat is sick, I’m compassionate about that, because, well, I have children, and they don’t. So, when their dog or cat is sick [laughs], it’s just as important as when one of my children are having some events. So someone comes to tell me something crazy their cat did. We’ll laugh about that, and I’ll tell them something crazy one of my children did. And you know, it’s so – it’s a family, and then it’s a business. And we care enough about one another. And it’s not TMI, to that point; people do have a sense of boundaries on what’s appropriate and inappropriate to share. But then, we’ve been together so long that ...With the upcoming marriage, you know, that I was telling you about. All of them are excited about my daughter getting married, because they’ve known her since she was [gestures] so big, so they’re all excited about coming to the wedding and seeing this happen, too.

#### Adapting Style to Meet Differing Needs

*[I was surprised by the direction that the conversation moved in when Alice started responding to the difficulty of leading and managing people. I wasn’t expecting such a deeply emotional recounting like the one that I witnessed. And it wasn’t so much that she showed a lot of emotion; rather, it was the hesitations and the steady pacing of her words that suggested that she wanted to share this and felt it important to share as a life’s lesson. I don’t know whether the specific instance regarding one of her staffers*

*occurred recently – and that is why she felt compelled to mention it more than once during this interview – or if she was deeply troubled by this entire situation. I believe this situation, regardless of when it happened, was truly hurtful for Alice and that is why she mentioned it more than once.]* I think the most difficult aspect of leading and managing people, for me, is that sometimes [pause] I don't think they realize or appreciate how much you do...for them. And I talk with a group of ladies about personnel issues and how you don't take it personally, but it *is* personal. You feel like you've gone out of your way and done all you can do for an employee, and then when they come back and they attack, or blame you. I mean, you have a heart, and it gets... [Pause]. You can be disappointed, and what I've just said is, if one person disappoints me, then I just count it as that. It's not gonna change...you're gonna treat the next person the same way [as if you hadn't just been disappointed by the last]. Because when you've done all you can do and you can look at yourself in the mirror and say, I gave her every opportunity. I gave them every opportunity. And they, they blew it. Then you continue to do that.

*[With these next words, Alice re-focused on what I think she felt that I was asking about all along; again, though I think she wanted to mention the incident above as a warning about the ways that people can disappoint you.]* So, I think for me, it's...I've learned that I can't manage people all the time the way, I want to be managed. I tend to like to just tell people to do, then to just throw it out there and let them do it and just, check on them, and let me know when they need to. But I've learned you have to figure out whether other people work like that. So you need to start off, maybe giving more guidance when they first come in, to make sure they understand, and then walk away,

instead of just throwing them in and assume they'll figure it out and come to you.

Because what I found is when they get off track, and you try to step in, they don't...they don't seem to be as open. They feel and think like, you're critical or you're... "It's mine. Why are you talking about, or why are you doing..." And maybe the understanding from the very beginning [should be], even though I delegated to you, I'm still ultimately responsible. So I delegate it to you, but I'm gonna be checking on it from time to time. Or I need you to check, check back in with me.

And so I kinda learned that I just can't assume that everybody's an independent worker and when they're not coming to you, there's no problems. And then when you report in, and you find out, you haven't done any of this. You know, wherein, if I – with me, if I run into a roadblock, you'll know 'cause I told you. Otherwise...But I just can't assume everybody works like that. So I, I've learned that I've had to see what, what works best in each individual. And there's no way you can treat everybody the same way. Some people may not need that, and others do. So, what I try to do is, when I bring a new person on is, ask them, how do you work and how do you like to get feedback, and when I give you a project, what do you need. And then we try that, and then if that's not working, I, I step in early enough, instead of being -- unpleasantly surprised later on. So, kinda – not treating every, putting everybody in the same box, but to try to figure out how that might work for each individual person, according to their strengths, and what they need.

### Diff'rent Strokes for Diff'rent Folks

I had a faculty member who...was very upset because a student had written a paper last semester, and two students later had come in with a similar paper. And we talked to one of the students, and the student admitted she got the paper from someone else, but not from the person who the original paper was with. Faculty member was soooo upset, and she was determined that the person, the original author had cheated. And I tried to explain to her every way I could, that, that would be like, if I wrote a dissertation and somebody came behind me and took my paper, and turned it in as their own to get credit, that doesn't necessarily mean I cheated, because somebody got my paper.

We have to figure this out a little bit more, and finally when I finished it [the investigation], I called her back and said that two students were being charged with cheating, 'cause one had admitted it and the other one had not come in for a hearing, but her paper looked too similar to the two students who turned in the paper this semester. And because she had not come forward, it was that. But I had not found the other student responsible. I met with her [the student author of the original paper], and she was shocked. She did not know the student whose paper looked identical to hers, but she told me that that paper definitely was her paper. She talked with me about certain things enough that I knew, so I said, even worse case scenario, if we thought she sold the paper...it was still that student that took that responsibility, that she turned in someone else's paper. And because I didn't have any proof that she sold the paper...[that] she



even gave her the paper. But we look at papers all the time. Part of our research is to look at other people's papers.

So [for the other student] to look at her paper, doesn't [equate to the original author] cheating, and so, she [faculty member] was so upset. And she told me that they had already decided that they were gonna vote the student down for something. And I said, "Well, I don't know on what basis you're doing this." And she said, "She was gonna be on the program, and I'm gonna take her off the program." And I said, "Well, [pause] I wouldn't advise you to do that," I said, "and if you take her off the program, what are you going to tell...what's the reason. You can't tell her she's cheating." [Faculty member, indignant:] "Well...I will [tell student she's cheating]," and I said, "Well, I don't think you have the authority to do this, because this office determines whether a student's cheated or not. You had your suspicions, you turned it in to my office, and I'm telling you the office has not found this to be the case. So...if you go out there, you're on your own."

[Faculty member, haughtily:] "Well, I'm going to do it. I have the authority," and I said, "And just what authority do you think you have?" I had to get pretty direct, because authority on whether the student is found responsible for breaking the code rests in *my* office. "So what authority are you going off on to talk to the student?" [Faculty Member, haughtily:] "Well, I'm going to do it either way." "Well," I said, "I've given you the college's rule on this. You can do whatever you want to. But I want you to know, if you move forward, it will be without the advice of this office. And I just want to make that clear as you move forward." [Faculty Member, indignant:] "Fine, but this is

what I'm gonna do." [Alice shrugged]. Hung up. So I talked to the faculty member who reported it, and I said, "She probably won't pull the student. She rants and raves like this, but she probably won't."

One of my staff members went to the program this morning, and the student *did* participate in the program. But you know, sometimes your back is against the wall, and you have to just do what's right. And I think part of leadership is integrity and consistency, and it wouldn't be fair for me to buckle in because this faculty member was upset and was bullying me. I had to treat this student like I would any other student that fell in this situation. I did not find her responsible, and so I was not going to take any further action. And that was where the college was gonna stand. So, sometimes, that counseling comes in...you have to know, and then, the same point, the leadership piece to say, right is right, and I'm not gonna treat this student differently because you're breathing down my neck. Even though the department chair over here wasn't breathing down my neck. Either way, you have to be consistent, so I think integrity is a big piece.

#### The Trust Factor

*[Throughout most of our conversation to this point, I noticed a recurrent theme in many of the vignettes that Alice shared. I commented that she seemed to have developed a level of trust that those who report to her feel towards her, and vice versa, that she has in those she manages and leads. Could she speak more to the importance of trust ...in leadership?]*

I think it's *very* important, because I think if people don't trust that they can be...genuine with you, or trust that they can count on you being the same or being

consistent or being there for them, then they're not gonna venture out but so far. You know, and it's like, I need to know when I mess up, I can come in here, and I'm not gonna get beat up some more. I'm gonna be, "Oh, yeah, we did. But what can we do about this?" Or I need to trust that...what I share with her...is gonna be...protected. You know, 'cause I have different staff members that have come to me with things in confidence that they shared with one another that each of the others don't know, and it's not my place to tell 'em. You know, because sometimes they tell me things because they want me to know, because they either want me to pray with them about it, or they are telling me so I know so I can assist them with it, or they want me to know because when things are different in their behavior responses, I'll know what's going on. Or they just want me to know, because they just want me to know. But if *I* don't trust an individual, then I'm not gonna share certain things. I'll only tell them what I think they need to know. And trust is a very important piece that you have. And then it's OK if someone only trusts you to a certain level. Because that's the level of what they'll share with you.

I learned a long time ago, [in] one of my first professional positions [when] I was sooo open; I found sometimes that you can share *too* much. I talked with a supervisor about a personal goal I had or something I wanted to improve. It didn't have anything necessarily to do with work, but it was just a personal thing I wanted to do. And she said, "Oh, I don't think that's a big thing." I said, "Yeah, but's it's just me, and something personal *I'd* like to do." And then we had a situation come up where she had given me an exceptional evaluation, and she'd given other people in the department one as well. And then they had this rule where, they were coming back, and I think the

evaluations were associated with salaries or whatever. And then we could only have so many [exceptional evaluations], and she was giving [taking] some back.

And she had to re-work them, and then, I found out the very thing I had shared with her was the thing she put on my evaluation. [It became the thing] I needed to improve. And I couldn't say anything, couldn't say I didn't need to, 'cause I shared it with her, it was something *I* had given her. And I thought, "Um, she is still my supervisor, and I trusted her enough that...'cause we were on a personal, you know. She and I traveled together and did other things, and it was just personally talking about something personal for me. "Oh, I'd like to work on this, because it..." "Oh, no, no, no. You don't have to..." Because sometimes I'll do this and I'll do that, and I thought, hmm, I need to improve on that." And she said, "Well, I never noticed it, but that's a good thing, just, you know, to aspire to." And then later, so, but I, I thought about it, and I'm thinking, if I had not given her that, would I have been the one that would have been written down or [would] that have been something she would have come up with on her own? And would that have been something that would have cost me that evaluation?

I was kinda hurt by it, but there was nothing I could say. I couldn't even say, "I don't agree with that. I don't need to work on that." But would it have been something she would've even picked up? 'Cause when I mentioned it, she said, "I never noticed." [Pause] I learned from that. The person that's evaluating me may have not been the person that I told or shared that with. But I've learned, I learned that, and I'm thinking, hmm. She would've, she could've come up with something else, but it wouldn't have been what *I* gave her. So I wondered then, had she noticed anything and not *said*

anything, or was it, now that I *told* her that, she didn't have to dig for it or anything. So, that's a trust story, too. [laughs] Yeah.

### In Search of a True Model of Leadership

*[I wanted to find out whether Alice had seen any leadership traits or characteristics that she emulated in those with whom she worked. I was looking for a listing of certain qualities that individuals may possess that Alice admired or found appealing. Interestingly, Alice went straight to the idea of a person who was the representation of a model leader as opposed to a person whose leadership behaviors reflected positively on that person in his or her capacity as a leader. I am not sure what conclusions to draw from this distinction.]* I don't know whether [pause] I really had a true model [of leadership], because I just [pause]. Uhn, and I hate to say this on record, but there were things that I *liked* about some people that...but things...I'd never do. It was kinda like, "Well, I wanna treat people the way I would like to be treated. I would never do that." 'Cause I had one supervisor that was really smart, and go get it, and I learned how to just tackle things, to just do things, but then some of her moral [pauses] issues...I just thought, I would never do that. I would never put myself in the position like that. So, she was never the person I would model, you know what I mean? So it was kinda like...I didn't have a person that I just said, "Oh, I wanna be like that person. Oh, that's the person that has these...things."

Now I've seen qualities that I've admired in people, you know, there's one lady that's a president of a college and I've seen her, and, and how she, and her composure, whatever, and I said, "Wow. Pretty impressive, that," and yet, she was so *cold* sometimes

to people, and I thought, “Well I’d don’t want to be like that. But, boy, I like the way she presents,” but I don’t wanna be...So, I don’t have a person that I can look at and say, “She is just...it’s been qualities I’ve admired in people but not one person that I thought, “Oh, wow.” “Cause, you know, I met some people that I thought were really impressive, but I didn’t know them well enough to know whether what you saw, was really what they were, and how genuine it was. ‘Cause I’ve talked with people, and I’ve said, “Oh, wow. I saw your president at this, and she said, did this,” and they said, “Really? She doesn’t even speak to us on campus,” you know, so then it’s like, Huhn. But, I don’t know that person personally, but I may have seen some characteristics.

But I know the kind of characteristics I’d *like* to have, and what I’d *like* to be like. But I don’t know if I’ve seen it all in any one person. So, I, I don’t know what other people have...And I don’t know...maybe I’m just kinda like...Well, I hope this doesn’t sound negative, but you just hate to put your trust in a person, you put ‘em on a pedestal, and then you find out...that what you *thought* you saw really isn’t what they were? ‘Cause you don’t, you really don’t *know*. You know, I think about the candidate from North Carolina who was running for president, and he seemed really genuine, and I thought, “Oh,” you know, “what a nice guy.” And I met him, and I saw him, and he seemed *genuinely* like people. And then I found out later – this person was cheating on his wife, and he’s had a baby for somebody else – And I’m not saying people are perfect, but I’m thinking, your word and honesty and integrity...well, could you not just *leave* her and then do this?

Or, you know, and this is my own personal thing, but I just think, *personal* integrity means a lot to me. And I can't speak to that, and say, oh...So, it's kinda hard for me. I'm just not a person who even put a whole lot of campaign signs on my car or on my yard, because I don't know...It'd have to be somebody I *really, truly* know. And I guess that may be weird, because if I don't know – really *know* you – I don't know whether I can say for sure that you're everything you're saying. Or whether you're just selling this campaign or whatever. I may go ahead and vote for somebody, and take a chance, but before I go out and start telling other people, you ought to vote for him, too [laughs], I, I just feel like I gotta have a little bit more assurance that I know more about him. And maybe a lot of people would say the same kinda...He wasn't the candidate I voted for, but I thought he had, he had promise. And...when I found out all this other stuff, it's like, "Really? You really just can't trust that people are what they say they are." And I admire a lot of things in Bill Clinton, but then, something's not quite tweaking right if that kinda stuff is going on in the White House.

So, I mean, there's different kinds of things, but I just [pause], I haven't found a person that I want to be like, and I guess it may sound a little corny or whatever, but I guess I just concentrate on what would Jesus do? [laughs] You know? And just kinda try to model that, and take the good that I see and, not judge people, but not maybe embrace everything I see at, at face value either. And just know that...people will disappoint you. So, that's, I guess another objective way of looking at it. It's not personal, but people aren't perfect. And when you put somebody up on a standard, 'cause I've seen us in our society...we put athletes on a standard 'cause they can do well

and excel in one thing. That doesn't mean that they are developed in character and in other things, and when they do things that, are *not* so favorable, then it's shocking, but then no one said they were...there when we put them up. So I'm just not one to put people on pedestals. I don't know, we're just, all here. We all got our strengths, and challenges, and things we're working on. So I'm just kinda more like that...when it comes to leadership.

### Evolution of Leadership Development

#### Maintaining a Measure of Objectivity

*[I mentioned to Alice that something she said early on that stuck in my mind was the fact that she said she had always been able to be objective. I asked her to what or whom she attributes this ability.]* I try to step outside of [of a particular situation], and ask myself certain questions: If it wasn't this, and if it wasn't that, would you still feel [that way]? Like, say for example, if it wasn't your friend or it wasn't this person you knew, and you just looked at these facts, what would you conclude? If the person wasn't Black or the person wasn't White or wasn't this, what would you think? If *you're* in that person's position and you didn't know this, how would you feel? How would you think? So those are some of the kinds of things that I... [Cell phone hums.] So, that's sort of how I try to do it, and not take it personally. 'Cause it's always easy to take offense, and take it personally. And then, you know, in venting, you might do that. [Cell phone hums.]

And my husband will say, "You're so objective. You're always so objective. You always try to see things so objective." I told him, "When you pull yourself out if it,



it's not personal anymore, and that probably takes the sting out of a lot of stuff. Even if people mean it for hurt, if you just take it [objectively], then it puts it back there and gets the emotion out of it, and you keep going. Because I think, sometimes if people can find out... I pledged a sorority, and we had this saying, "If they can find the crack in the shield, then they'll know where to apply the pressure." If you stay neutral on certain things, then people can't find a hot spot. Then they don't know where to apply the pressure. So if you take the emotions out of it, it's ... what it is.

So when someone says to you, "Well, you know, you're just this kind of this," and I go, "Really? Huh. No one's ever said that to me before. Tell me more." Most people would go, "Yeah, well you're a..." instead of going back in and saying, "OK. I hadn't heard that before." Wonder what make this person think this? "Tell me more about it." Then I can draw some conclusions for it, instead of getting the emotional part. "You hurt me. How can you say this to me?" I'll process that later, but it's like, "OK. So, what is it that I did that makes you think this, or why or how did you come to this conclusion?" And then when people say, "Well, you did boom, boom, boom, boom, boom," and then you look at it and say, "Yeah, well, I, I did do that." And would I have done anything differently, or would I have done the same thing? So you are kinda getting the idea of what they put together to come up with that assessment that they have or that feedback they've given you. And then it's given you more insight to say, well, is that accurate? Then, wait, huhn, if I did that and that's the way they see it, then maybe I need to alter some things or either, well yeah, they're right, and if that's what I did, that's what I did.

And if in the situation, I would do this again, they need to know and I don't even have to defend that necessarily, but they need to know...well, did they say this because I did this, this, and this, and would I have done this, and this, and this again. If the answer's yes, then – fine, but if it's, oh, so I did this. She got that. Well, I can change this. I can move this around. So, I just don't take it as an insult up front, even though it may be insulting [laughing out loud]. And then sometimes it just gets to the point where they have a right to their opinion, good, bad, or indifferent, or whether it's on target or not. But if it's an opinion that is built on something that I can change, an opinion that I, you know, then I'll do what I can on that. But then, the bottom line, too, everybody's not gonna like everything you do.

And if you disagree, and this is the decision, like with the faculty member I was telling you about earlier, this is the way it's gonna be. If she doesn't like that, and then she wants to do something else, I'm sorry...I'm not going to be bullied into changing this, but I'm gonna treat this student like I do everybody else, and if you got a difference of opinion or you want to do something differently, fine, but know you're moving without the recommendation from this office. Now she may think, "Oh, that was kinda stern." "Well, I just needed to make it clear. [laughs] I'm not gonna be bullied in this, and I told you what the college says, and if you don't want to go with that, and you're gonna do something on your own – then you need to know that you're on your own with this." And I would've probably told the Vice President and the President that's the advice I gave her, if she'd done something differently than that. But that's, you know, that's her call.

But I've had people say things to me that were probably meant to be mean-spirited and I do this thing in my head, being in psychology and transactional analysis talk about the three different, uh, levels of communication, where there's the parent, the child, or uh or the adult – and the goal is to operate on the adult level. And so what I do is when somebody says something insulting to me, depending on whether, how it's *said*, it's probably, you know, trying to hook one of those other levels I don't wanna be on. And I can respond *back* on that level with them, or I can decide, "Oh, she's trying to hook the child in me. I'm not gonna go tit-for-tat back with that." I'm gonna go on the adult level and say, "Well, why do you feel this way? Tell me what I did, or what did you observe," instead of, "Well, you're another one!" "Well, you're one, too!" Or, or to go and try to talk down to that person, too. So, I don't go on that parent, you should've known or you should've done – or correct them, you know.

So the level to get on is that adult to adult, and that's what I try in my head to say, oh, that comment was a this, and I'm not going to go back with that comment. Not saying that it's always, you're gonna bat that 100% of the time, but when I understand the communications and how it's going where I wanna go, I try to develop an objective way of saying, "Well, OK, you feel this way. Tell me about it. Or, how'd you come to that conclusion? Oh, OK. Well, what was it I said or didn't do that made you feel like this?" Instead of, "Well, who you calling that? You're another one!" See? So, that's kinda the objective model, what I try to, strive to, whether I always get there or not, but that's what I try to [do]. Now *later*, when I'm venting to someone, I may go home and say, "Honey, do you know what such-and-such had the nerve to say to me? Well, blah, blah, blah,

blah, blah!” And so you empty all that out, ‘cause I’ve got somewhere to *dump* it, where it’s not judged, and I come back and I’m going on with what I’m doing. So, that’s [laughs] how it goes, good, bad, or indifferent. But that works for me. [laugh]

### Being Comfortable in Your Own Skin

So I think somewhat, I’ve always been comfortable with people that didn’t look like me. I guess it started in high school, and then I went to predominantly White institutions from that. So, you know, you have friends that are White, you have friends that are Black, and so I guess it wasn’t anything mysterious or uncomfortable about being around White people. I’m [pause] just as comfortable around them as Blacks, sometimes more comfortable around some of them, because I’ve been the only one [laughing], so many instances, you kinda learn. Like I was talking about the time, you know, affirmative action, because I was the only Black counselor, you know, with the other school. And I was the only Black on the committee, and I was the only Black... I’ve gone to predominantly White churches in the past – right now, I attend a predominantly White church. But you know it’s not that I got any problem with being Black, it’s just that I’m just comfortable with me.

And I don’t go there. I was telling somebody, when you see me, you know I’m Black. So that makes that statement. But I guess I’ve been OK with, I’ve been comfortable; I’m not intimidated by people who don’t look like me. And I don’t know whether sometimes some people, some of us [Black people] *are* and that’s why people shy away from certain things. I’m not sure, but I guess maybe having friends in high school, friends in college, I see that there are not as many differences as we may make

[out]. Everybody wants to do well in college, everybody wants to get married, and everybody wants to have children – I guess most people – want to have children, and do well, and live well, and be accepted, and be a part. And there's nothing different in that. No matter what color your skin is.

### Role of Faith and Spirituality

The grace of God [has helped me as a leader]. I mean, I pray...usually, when I have a situation, and I have to talk to someone about it. I mean, even the students...when it's a *bad* situation. And I have gotten some divine intervention on some creative ways to go in and do some things, and to solve some things, that *only* through prayer. I mean, when it's *really* disturbing me, I, I, pray about it. Because this position has a lot of power...we have the power to, especially with students' lives. And you know, you don't want to take it lightly. And I think I relied heavily on that to pray about it, and in some situations, with some people, I've jokingly said to other prayer people that when you get in a situation like this, you just pray 'em up and pray 'em out. And, you know, a lot of people have moved in timely times [laugh], and I've just been thankful, you know, that they haven't had to be terminated or whatever but they've found something else that they like better. And we still have fellowship and we still talk, and we left on a good note, but it was time. It was time.

So I think, spiritually, even when I was frustrated over not getting positions, *that* position that I thought I was more qualified, and then I was reminded of the parable of the man who was hired. Early on, he promised a certain labor, and then somebody came in later on and got the same pay. And he said, "Hey! That's not fair!" And then it was like,

“Did I not pay you what you agreed on? Then what is it to you concerning him?” And that’s when I thought, “Did I not get the job that they hired me for, and did they not give me what...? You know I need to take my eyes off of what’s going on with that person and keep my eyes on the promise, and that’s what I have to do. ‘Cause I mean, it’s easy to get around people and get negative, too, when people are negative and they come around and they try to start talking negative. But I didn’t want to be the kid that looked so naïve, “Oh!” But at the same time, you know, you want to surround yourself with positive people.

You want to be *practical* but you want to be positive and not get into this, “Ain’t it awful” kind of thing. And sometimes, I find it’s easy to get into that. Sometimes when you get into, the support – support mode of African American people, we all want to talk about how bad everybody’s doing, but you don’t...you want it to be more, this is the situation. This is the reality. What can we do to change things? Not a, ain’t it bad, how it is so awful how they are [pause] treating us, and this kind of thing. I never, I’m just not a person that gravitates toward that. It’s depressing. It pulls you down. It doesn’t mobilize you; it immobilizes you, I think. So, I just [pause] don’t like to waste a lot of time on [pause] bellyaching. ‘Specially not at work. I mean I’ll go home and tell him [husband], “Oh! You won’t be-lieve!” And then after we’ve had that little thing – I’m back to work.

#### Willingness to Give Second Chances

*[I decided that I would ask Alice another question that she probably was not expecting. I decided to ask her what she believes are some of her weaknesses as a*

*leader. Alice paused for a while, and then finally let out the breath she had been holding.]* Some would say I give people too many chances, but I see it, maybe [long pause] it's a part of that – not always assuming the only thing is out. When I've done all that I can do, and then when I walk away from it, then I know, it's settled with me...But I, but it's accountable and it's responsible, but I just don't believe in just – the first step needs to be [motions with her hands], because, you know, so...And I think, I don't know whether it's a weakness or I struggle with that more, because I *want* to make sure I've given a person every opportunity...and chance. And I think sometimes I seem...because others jump quickly to say, "That's it. They've gotta go." And, you know, the point may be when they got to go, but when it gets to that point, it's like, they've all but done it themselves. I've given 'em an opportunity to turn things around.

But I don't have as much slackness in my operation as a lot of people, and I mean most people may say that when they look at me. Because I think other people may pull their weight for the team, and they'll do more than their part. It is because they know the team is there for them, too. Because I had a part-time person that wasn't doing his part, and everybody was so awkward about it, but they didn't come to me and whine about it. 'Cause when I started thinking, "Well, what is he doing?" And then I started questioning other people, "Well, what do you see?" And one of them said to me, "Oh. You mean 'Mr. President,'" and I said, "What do you mean?" and she said, "Oh, that's what we call him. Because he walks around and does nothing. So we call him 'Mr. President.'" And then I thought, "Oh, well, that's not gonna go."

And so, I asked the person to come in, and I said, “We’re gonna meet, and I want you to bring a list of the things you’re working on,” and this kind of thing, and so when he came in, he had nothing on his list. So, I didn’t come in and say, “You’ve done absolutely nothing.” I said, “Tell me what you’ve been working on,” da, da, da, da, da, “and some of…” I want you to highlight some of your accomplishments,” blah, blah, blah, blah.” He was a person coming from another department and had been working with me, and then it was like, over a *year*, over the last year. And there were two things that he had on the list, and both of those were something that somebody else was working on along with him and not very much. “So, what things have you got in the works,” [and he said] “at this time, not very much.” And that was like, “Well, you gotta do some more things here.” So, then it was like, he was put under somebody else, and they were asked to give him some things to do and follow up every two weeks. And then, he got to the point where he just wasn’t working. He still wasn’t doing…simple stuff.

And so I put him under somebody who had more time to supervise, ‘cause I didn’t…I just did too many things. And when I came back around, I saw he had a couple of assignments and had not done those. And then we just called a meeting, and I just told him that it wasn’t working out. And he said, “Well, now that I know what you want,” and I said, “No…what we need at this point is, we need someone with the skill set already to do these things, and you were assigned to do, something as simple as to set up voter’s registration table, and two weeks later, you still hadn’t done it, two weeks later, and…one – two weeks.” And he said, “Well, I didn’t know where the stuff was.” But the person who told him to do it is on the campus; all he had to do was go and ask them.



“So, then, and when they asked you two weeks later, and you still hadn’t done it. Then the next two weeks, you still hadn’t done it.”

And I’m thinking, “That’s a simple task.” “We, we need somebody who can follow up and do,” and so I just told him that I wasn’t going to re-new his contract. I mean but, most people would say, “You should’ve told him that six months ago,” but I gave him an opportunity, and I thought, well, since I’m not here to follow up and give him what he needs, I’ll put him with somebody else who can give him that. So he shoulda known his time was short, but he still...so...if anything, I think I probably kept him around longer than he shoulda been, but I kept him around long enough to give him a chance if he wanted to make it work. And when he didn’t...and, I didn’t realize how bad this had started to affect morale...’cause people don’t whine and complain. And when I started looking at and asking questions, it was like, Hmm...yeah...And then, after we had done what we were gonna do, and I was talking to a manager, she said, “Wow. I’m impressed. You just told him he was gonna lose his job...and then, now you and I are just going on with business.” And I said, “Well, yeah.” She said, “Wow. So...you just told him that?” I said, “Well, yeah. It was just...But at this point, he said, “I know what you want. I can do it,” and I said, “N-n-no. We’ve had a year of this. A year and a half, really.”

And so basically, he was a year and a half of doing nothing. And we weren’t paying him a lot; but it was \$11 bucks an hour, and I’d gotten to the point, every hour I’m dropping a ten and a one in the trashcan. But, when it was time, it was time. And I’d given him every opportunity, ‘cause at first I thought, “Well, well maybe we’re not

giving him the right environment. Well, yeah, I'm kinda busy, and really, it was important to me, because I didn't know where to put him, since they moved him from another department. I'm too busy in what I do. I'm gonna put him over here, with a person who can see him day-in, day-out. He'll be a part of that staff, give him an assignment, and then follow up with it, and that's what we did. And given that, there was no excuse. I mean, a high school kid could've set that up.

And so, so, and like I said, for some, it may be giving people too many chances. And for others it may be considered weakness, but when it's done. It's done. And I haven't done it to you. I've given you opportunities, and you haven't turned it around. So it becomes very easy to document, you know, so...So some could say it's maybe something I do well! [laughs] Some would say it's a weakness, [but I don't say so]. Because when I've had to terminate, it's been easy, because the paperwork was easy to follow. I started it [documentation], and I was giving you opportunities after opportunities after opportunities to turn things around.

### Bringing Others along on the Journey

#### Making the Case for Diversity

I think [pause], I think being a woman of color has been some advantages as well as disadvantages. I think that the advantages have been *I* feel like I've always been objective, and I've always been open to other people and their differences. So when I've been a part of a committee or part of a department or part of anything, even program planning, I've always made an effort to make sure it was a diverse [pause] group of people. If I'm planning a committee...a search committee, whatever, I've always been

cognizant of making sure there were enough diverse interests involved, whether it be a committee for an initiative with the college, whether it be a committee for advisory, whatever. And while student activities are one of those things that I work with, you know, ours is the typical college. You know, you have your African American history month and those kinds of things. Personally, my philosophy is immersion...if we do it all year long, there's no need for a day or a year or whatever. But for political reasons, to say that [this college] doesn't have any events would not be a good thing. But every event we do, [I try] to make sure it's diverse, and it represents. So in the departments that report to me, I've already, I always work with my directors. Let's make sure that our staff is diverse. Let's make sure the program is diverse. We're trying to be as inclusive as we can. So those are some of the kinds of things I've done.

So, I think sometimes I've gotten to a table because I, there needed to be a person of color at the table. And sometimes there've been situations that's come up, I've tried to speak to them [issues of diversity], and, and some situations that were, maybe, not quite as comfortable. Or if I had spoken too directly, it would have come off as self-serving. So for that reason, maybe I would not have addressed something directly but may have addressed it more broadly. For example, I sat on one interview, one where it was obvious that the woman of color had a LOT more experience and credentials than another person, another candidate, and this candidate was being discussed as being superior to the other one [woman of color]. And, being the only person of color [laughs] on the committee, I was very uncomfortable about the conversation because it seemed obvious to me that they were not equal, even with years of experience and everything,

and it seems that this person was – with less – he was not a person of color, was getting this, and the other was getting this, and I thought about it, and then I realized there was another position in that department that was coming open.

And I said, “You know, since they’re both [pauses] equally qualified,” so I just embraced it [the committee’s belief that the two candidates were equally qualified]. “Since they’re both equally qualified, I said, “why don’t we look at diversity in your office, and let’s talk about what that looks like. And then that may be an opportunity where you can diversify your office.” I felt like if I had come out and said, [pause, exasperatedly] “Look, it’s obvious this lady has so much more...I don’t know whether it would have helped her or hurt her. So in those [situations]...I’ve tried to be politically correct, but still focused. So instead of saying, “I don’t know what the discussion is. This woman is obviously so much more qualified than this other one.”

So I just embraced where the committee was, and said, “So if they’re equally qualified, let’s look at diversity in your department. I know you have another position open, and I know you mentioned that you had a person in mind for that. Is that a person that’s going to add to the diversity of your group? And she said, “Oh, no, this person da da da...” and I said, “Well, hmm, then maybe you might want to look at this person then, because...” And then it was kinda, “Yeah...that’s a great idea, because she does have this, this and this.” And then that person was hired, but I think probably if I had not been in the room to even make that conversation ...And I don’t know whether the other people around the table were even aware of it? I don’t know how to explain it really, but it wasn’t until I brought it up...I don’t think that they were aware of it...It wasn’t until I

brought it up that they...got it, you know. But it wasn't some, "Yeah, that's right. Yeah. And, she does have this and this, and he just has – this." And so, so I think I've been in situations where I've been able to speak and direct and broaden some things, because of who I was and what I represented. *[I found this part of Alice's talk to be profound on so many different levels. This scenario makes a really important point – the fact that Alice points out, albeit indirectly, that her colleagues were not ever going to give the woman of color her due. Rather, they were only willing to see her contribution in terms of increased diversity – and that was only because Alice framed the discussion that way. My personal view is that this is so sad, but this is also typical of so many conversations to which I have been privy.]*

#### Serving as a Model of Leadership

Do I consider myself a role model for other women leaders? I think so. I think just the fact that I'm here in this position, other women, and especially women of color, see that. So then they see it's possible. So...staff know I'm approachable...I've had lots of young women come to my office to talk to me about things. I'm available. I encourage, I give advice, as they come to me and ask for it, and I've been sounding boards, and I do encourage them in terms of their education, in terms of completing their degrees, and those kinds of things. So I think, yes I do.

I have served on a board promoting women for – I'm going on my 15<sup>th</sup> year. In fact, I'm getting ready to retire [laughs]. I told them, after 15 years, I think I should give some other women the opportunity for leadership. So that's one way I'm developing leadership with encouraging women, and in that program, the whole notion is to promote

leadership development for women. So I've served on panels there, I've served on the board, I've served in designing programs and things of that sort to encourage women. And I encourage the women in my organization to also participate in the organization and in the activities of the organization...

#### Accepting Limitations of Individuals

*[Based on some comments that Alice made earlier, I took a chance on asking her the next question. Not entirely certain how to ask her – in part, because I didn't know how she would respond – I decided to go for it. I asked Alice whether she felt that other people – specifically, other women of color – have had issues with her success. Alice took a long breath before responding. I sensed hesitation brought on by regret.]* I...used to be naïve enough to think that they [other women – other people of color] were happy because I was moving up, 'cause it represented us. The last move I got, my final supervisor said to me, after I mentioned to her that I got a strange comment from one of my direct reports at the time, who was a person of color. And then she said, "You know that's interesting, because I got an e-mail from her." And she said, "Out of the announcement that I got from everybody, I only got two people that had a comment that was not positive." And they were both two women of color. Does that answer that question? And one of them came to me later, and said that she reported to that other person, and that that was *not* her comment. That person wrote her name in, as a one e-mail with both names, and she said, "She was my supervisor, and she put this here, but I want you to know, you've always been supportive of me, and I've never had any concern. But, it was awkward for me, because my supervisor wrote this."

So, I said, “Well, fine,” but I said, “It would’ve been helpful had you come to me and told me it was coming, because I was so surprised. Hurt and surprised.” But still, this went back to that, OK, they’ve got a right to their opinion...if this is how they felt, after all I’ve done for both of these people, then, what else can I do? Because I mean it was one of these people that told me they wanted a new job, doing something that they couldn’t even do in my department anymore. I found money to give her, beyond the college scholarship money that I was over, to send her back to school, to be trained in that area that I *knew* was not going to be to help me. And I wrote recommendations for her, to help her get this other job. And then to come back that I don’t promote anybody in my own area. But what was interesting about it...my supervisor would’ve never brought it up to me, had I not said, “I just had the strangest conversation with this person.

And they said this, and I was so floored, because they were telling me they wanted to be a ‘X.’” So when you come to your supervisor, and you tell them that you want to do something, and this is what God has laid on you, I don’t argue with people when they tell me what God has told them to do. Whether it makes sense to me or not, that’s *their* thing. So when you tell me you’ve been led to do this, and I said, “Oh, OK, well, great, these kinds of things can help you do this, but then you come back to me later, and say, “Why didn’t you promote me in this?” “Because you told me you were going here. So why would I promote you here, when this is going in another whole different direction, and then you come back later, and write this note that I never did anything to promote you, when, I’ve been giving you these opportunities, encouraging you to do these other experiences to help you get experiences in this.”

And when the person finally left, [I] pretty much gave a glowing recommendation to a person who knew me, who took, you know, my recommendation very strongly to get the job that they got. But I didn't use it... basically, I just looked at this as a person that's not developed where they should be, and if this person was comfortable with themselves, they would... Because, this person had not even been at the College that long, and then to say, the time you been here – how can you say I didn't promote you when I didn't even open the job up. I appointed you to a promotion; I didn't even open it up for the person to *compete* with anybody else. And I'm thinking, "What does *that* say?"

So, that's when I realized, I can't alter what people perceive as different. I can only look at the facts, and the fact is, you're here in this position. I promoted you to the higher position, without you even having to *compete* for it, and then I open your position up to somebody to come in. So, I did. I did see that [people of color not supporting my success]. Now the other person came back, very mortified to say, "I...don't feel like this, and you've done X, Y, Z for me, and I've been very grateful for everything you did for me. Because when this other person wouldn't even hire me, didn't want to hire me, you came into the hiring process and saw that I got this job. And I'll always be grateful to you for that. You have encouraged me, and you helped me all along." But this person wrote that I had not helped either one of them.

But what's interesting is my supervisor knows that that's one of the things she rates me the highest on...it's usually motivating other people to be the best, and to do the best, and to coach to the next level. So she was surprised by it, but she wasn't going to



say anything to me about it. But she, I guess, didn't want to hurt my feelings with it, or either...but she said, "I only got two people that had anything negative to say. And it was these two, in my immediate area, and people who look like me. *[It is only with these last five words that I discovered that the "women of color" Alice referred to were Black women. I am curious about why she refers to, usually, Black or African-American people as "people of color." However, I do not ask this question at this point. I do ask her later how she prefers that I refer to her in the manuscript – as a woman of color, a Black woman or an African-American woman. Ultimately, she said it didn't matter and left it up to me to choose.]*

Then I found out later too, when I was moving up, I was talking with one of my colleagues, and she said, "Alice, you have only been here this long, and I have been here all this time. And you had moved up, and everybody moved up, and you came in and moved up over me." And she said, "I went home, and I cried to my Dad. And I said, 'This is not fair.'" And I realized, well, I didn't have anything to do with the move, but *she* was very much concerned. And I...she didn't look like *me* or that, but then, I said, "Well, I'm sorry. I was told that you didn't *want* leadership." And she said, "Well, nobody ever asked me." But I didn't tell her, "Well, you are always off every Friday, and you wanna be off all the days. So I guess they assumed they didn't want that to cramp her style. Or you are always out on a smoke break, but then, you know, but then so was the man. The male on the other campus, he got promoted. But she didn't. She was a woman. And he, I guess...but, yeah, I know and when I was talking to him later, and he said to me, something about, "Alice, you've moved up faster than anybody in this whole

department.” And I thought, “Really?” And I thought, “OK.” So, I don’t know whether...A lot of people rejoice when people move up...in other positions. I heard other people make comments about other people at the college who moved up, and they were in a position that they didn’t want, didn’t want to do it, but still, had something to say about the person who was doing it. Go figure. I don’t know, but I...yeah...I had people that [pause] didn’t [pause] like it [laughs]. Yeah. *[Another curiosity is the fact that incidents that I believe may have hurt Alice deeply are ones that she usually begins and or ends the re-telling of by laughing about or by taking lengthy pauses – as if deciding how much she feels comfortable sharing. On the other hand, this may be defensive posturing on her part – if she laughs about it, it obviously did not mean or no longer means as much. I was truly humbled that Alice felt this project was important enough to not conceal or gloss over the sometimes not so positive aspects of being a leader – especially a Black woman leader. I also appreciated that she felt comfortable enough within herself to share sensitive issues such as Black women being in conflict with other Black women. I think these are critically important aspects of this Black woman’s leadership experience.]*

### Leader’s Outlook: What’s Ahead for Education

#### Challenges for Students and Parents

*[Given the many years that Alice has been in the technical college system, her assessment of the challenges now facing the system is invaluable. I asked her specifically about the biggest challenges to education and for young people trying to pursue an education.]* As a leader, I think – financially – there’s some concerns. But some of it is

readiness too for education. Because education has gotten so expensive, I think people really need to put a lot more thought and preparation in it. The parents and the students. I think students come expecting people to give more than institutions are willing to do, in terms of time, bending rules, those kinds of things. And we're getting young students coming in who are not used to hearing, "No." They think that most of the rules and regs apply to other people. And if I run into a rule, then Mom and Dad can call somebody that they know. You know, everything's negotiable and it's not always [like] that. But I think the challenge is the expense of it, and I think it is more competitive to get where you want to go – because of that. And because it's getting more competitive, I think, for some schools, [they think that students] can afford to pay a little bit more because people really want to go there. So they can charge a little bit more.

But I think the big challenge is [pause] the students being prepared for what...awaits them. Because I see lots of students coming in and failing out, because they didn't apply themselves or they didn't realize it was gonna be that hard. [I see this] especially at the four-year colleges; I think they [students] go and they're free from parents all together. And they don't have anyone to remind them, wake them up. And that's the whole beauty of moving away...so that can be a downfall, if you're not self, uh, if you don't manage yourself well. So you have to be somewhat self-disciplined to be successful away from home.

### The Role of Black Women Leaders

In terms of the future of Black women aspiring to be leaders within the technical college system...I think even at Mimosa Technical College...we have a lot of African-

American women in student development services who are chairs or department chairs or leadership ...I think leadership for Black women is broadening. Leadership for women in general at this college is very good. We have not had a woman president yet. I don't know whether we've ever had anyone in the pool to apply, so you know, I can't speak to that. But I think as Black women become more, more comfortable with who they are, and more comfortable assuming leadership responsibilities and aspire for it...I think we have to first apply, you know, we have to get in the pipeline. I think we sometimes disqualify ourselves from positions because we look at a job description and we see two or three things we don't do. I find that it's the other way sometimes; you just find some people see two or three things that they *do* do, and they apply, and then they, you know, do that.

So I think we have to learn how to get in the right pipelines, how to sell ourselves, and I think as more Black women or women of color get into positions, and they begin to mentor and help others, then I think the future looks bright. The future's encouraging in both higher education and in the technical college system. I think both equally, because you know, higher education tends to be broader in scope and more open to diversity. I think sometimes when you start looking at leadership, that's when things start getting narrow. But I think as we begin to participate more... I will tell you this; I think one of the things that I think may have helped in my leadership development is I participated in a *lot* of different leadership programs. I mean, I did ones within the technical college system. I did national leadership forums; I did local what we call regional leadership forums. So any leadership opportunities I got, I participated in those

formal forums. And sometimes in those you get inside scoops on things you can do to make yourself a stronger candidate.

I always as a part of my professional development, even for my department, I promote professional development. One of the objectives for all of my employees within a whole unit is that they have to attend at least two professional development activities per rating period. And I think it's important that you get out, and you do things and you see and hear what's going on, so you can stay abreast, and then you can contribute and give back, too. I think that's very key, because as you get out, you meet people. If you meet people at those things, and those networking events...those help you also 'cause other people will tell you about opportunities or you'll learn things from someone else. Or you'll be able to talk about something with someone else in another area that can help you grow and develop. So I think... we're getting more women *involved* in leadership, I still think there's a need to keep the pipelines open for the younger women. And to keep giving back, because I think it's important that...I think sometimes when young ladies look at where we are, they don't realize sometimes that it came with the cost, a price, and you didn't just run up the ladder. So they'll know not to get discouraged when they have a bump. They'll [bumps] happen; they'll come.

And on the other hand, I think, with my years of experience and instructional preparation and the success that I've had...I think probably had I not been a woman of color, I would have been farther up. So, that's what I mean about the [advantages and disadvantages of being a woman of color]. I've met several women who have a lot less experience and a lot less credentialing who have moved on to other positions. And, part

of that, I have to think too was, some are tapped, and I think sometimes, the mentorship for women of color is not always there. I think people move ahead in organizations based on them having someone to champion for them, or to mentor them, or to speak on their behalf.

Now this college has been good to me and I have moved up, probably [takes a breath] I'm probably the highest ranked person, African-American woman, in this college. But then there have been other women who have come after me who are higher ranked, you know, with less credentialing. But they're not women of color. So, I *see* sometimes, and I don't know whether it's the *state*, or just the [pauses, takes a breath], dynamics of this state, that I think you'll find very few women of color that have gotten to the presidency in an institution, other than a predominantly Black institution. And, uh, I think until we start seeing more of that, I don't think we really seeing the potential of where we are and where we can be [as Black women leaders].

Now, I think people are comfortable with us being as high as the vice presidential level. You probably have met, in some of your research – some African-American women or women of color who have reached the vice presidency level. But I'm not sure whether this state or the political landscape is ready yet to embrace an African American woman as president. Now, the future may look brighter [laugh]...moving forward. I don't know whether we're cultivating enough of our own. And it may happen. It may be that someone will come from out of state and move in that capacity. I'm not sure. And then the other key thing that's happening with leadership is I'm not sure whether the *desire* is there as much for people in the vice president's level to

even *want* to be president. So, if the desire is not there, and I'm hearing this on the national level, with the state organizations with women in community colleges is that they're having a hard time enticing some people to even be interested, because it doesn't look like the kind of job most people would want to do. So, with that being the case that may be some of it at that.

### Chapter Summary

The recursive, circuitous, and episodic nature of Alice's leadership journey is summarized by the visual representation of most of the stages of her narrative presented in Figure 4.1:



**Figure 4.1 – Graphic Representation of Alice’s Leadership Journey**



## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE SECOND NARRATIVE

*“Stories humanize us.  
They emphasize our differences  
In ways that can ultimately  
Bring us closer together.”*

*~Richard Delgado, 1989, “Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others”*

#### A Black Woman Speaks... of Leadership – “Azizza”

The following afternoon, I arrived for my interview with Azizza, (a pseudonym, pronounced /ah-zi-zah/, meaning “precious beloved”), a full thirty minutes ahead of schedule. A gloriously uneventful, storm-free journey surely portended a casual and relaxed second session. With so much extra time on my hands, I decided to head straight for the campus and locate the exact building, so that I would have no trouble finding it when I made my way back to campus. I would have to double-back to campus after dropping my older sister Bevelyn off at an area mall, where she intended to happily while away the hours as only avid window shoppers know best how to do. Once back on campus, I pulled my rental car into the closest available spot and double-checked that my voluminous bag contained all the necessary accoutrement.

With a bounce in my step, I headed into the building – which was abuzz with students. Some lined the hallway, waiting their turn at the registration and other student services windows. I stepped around and between them, making my way to what appeared to be a centralized gathering space. Turns out, I *was* in a gathering space – I

was in the midst of a vibrant student lounge and food court area. It had a hip, coffeehouse vibe. Groups of students perched precariously atop bar stools, totally immersed in their laptops or engaged in lively chatter. Bistro-style tables and chairs scattered across the space, beckoning the weary and the parched alike to come sit and sip for a while. Taking the pulsating atmosphere in, I glanced at my watch – reassuring myself that I did indeed have enough time to consider purchasing a latte, bottled water, a pack of gum – something, anything that would prolong my stay in this space that crackled with vitality and youthful energy.

Snapping back to the present, I realized that I wasn't sure exactly how to get to Azizza's office from where I presently stood. So, I made a beeline for the nearest beverage case and grabbed a cold bottle of water. As I made my way to the cash register, I realized that I literally had made it under the wire. A grey gate-like contraption poised mid-air – waiting to be tugged into place to begin its duty of encapsulating this section of the café come closing time – which clearly was only minutes away. My bottle of water firmly in hand, my bag snugly draped over my shoulder, I made my way back the way I had come. Finally coming upon the bank of elevators, I decided against this option and pushed through the outer doors which led to a stairwell on the right.

I climbed the stairs, replaying the lively scene from downstairs in my mind. Given all that I'd just seen, I was confident that there was more in store at the top of this flight of stairs. And I was right. I pulled open the stairwell door, glancing to my right and to my left. Looking to my right, I climbed the stairs, replaying the animated scene from downstairs in my mind. And as I glanced again to my right, I caught sight of a

large, white placard-like sign dangling from the ceiling; the sign's bold, sharp lettering announced the very division that I was seeking. One last peek at my watch confirmed I had mere minutes to spare. Moving briskly in the direction of the placard, I made another quick left and discovered a similar crisp, clear proclamation of the division and its leader. Stepping to the door, I turned the knob and walked in. Immediately I was in a reception area, where two open cubicles were situated. One was unoccupied; the resident of the other cubicle was an attractive young woman who appeared much younger than she sounded from speaking to her on the 'phone.

Turns out, the executive assistant with whom I had become acquainted through several 'phone calls was away from the office this afternoon. I regretted that I would not get the chance to meet her in person. The friendly receptionist introduced herself and then told me to have a seat, and that Azizza would be here shortly. Before I had a chance to get comfortable, I heard the muted click of heels. Turning my head to the right, I smiled as I saw a stunningly regal Black woman moving briskly in my direction. Though I had only seen her headshot online, I recognized her instantly. And in that same instant, I deduced that Azizza was a consummate perfectionist. Everything about her was professionally coiffed, from her make-up to her hair – which she wore in a no-nonsense bob – to her manicured nails – to her classic spring ensemble of a linen jacket, crisp blouse, skirt and heels. My eyes swung to the dangling woven grass earrings she wore; I had never seen a pair like them before. She was impeccable.

I stood and waited for Azizza to cross the threshold. It was not a long wait. “Welcome, welcome!” she thundered, marching forward as though she led a band

procession. It was difficult for me to believe that this spry ball of boundless dynamism is in her mid-60s! For such a petite woman, her voice packed quite a wallop. Clasp my outstretched hand, she tossed a quick glance at the young receptionist, asking as she did, whether we had met each other. Even as the receptionist was nodding, Azizza was breezing past her cubicle. She reminded me of a very refined, ultra-feminine version of the Tasmanian devil. Azizza strode gracefully ahead of me down the wide hallway, which moved all traffic towards a singular destination – her office – located at the very other end. Several ample-sized offices stood like sentinels to the right of the hallway.

Once in the office, I had what felt like only seconds to briefly look around the space, and try to take it all in. Like its owner, it was colorful, well-appointed, and immaculate. Rather than a single desk, Azizza had two; the desk facing the back wall was devoted solely to her telephone and two computers, each with a massive flat monitor. The afternoon sun shone in from the large corner window, lighting up her three college degrees which were already prominently displayed on the wall above the back-facing desk. In fact, every wall in her office was adorned with a bold piece of mostly African-themed artwork. Enchanted, my eyes danced from the African women moving harmoniously in their traditional garb to a piece from the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian to two reproductions of Zulu tribal art (beer pot and ear plugs), to the African-American women weaving traditional Gullah marsh grass baskets. Azizza's pride in her cultural heritage permeated every inch of the space.

“Have a seat. How've you been?” she commanded all in one breath, moving behind the highly-polished cherry wood forward-facing desk and depositing her shoulder

bag. Motioning me in the direction of a round, conference room-style table against the far wall, she inquired about my health, the trip, and my progress-to-degree, all in rapid-fire succession. The fleeting thought, “Wait – who’s interviewing whom?” crossed my mind then vaporized. Fast on its heels was the thought that Azizza’s articulateness of speech and precision of manner only reinforced my earlier impressions of this remarkable woman. Breathing out my responses as I moved toward the table, I was taken aback by the beautiful bouquet of fresh flowers that centered the conference table. At my assigned place setting were a napkin and an ice-cold bottle of water, if the condensation running along its sides was anything to go by. Murmuring my thanks for her thoughtfulness, I began unpacking my interview materials.

In similar fashion to the previous day’s interview, I neatly set out the various forms I needed to have close at hand, along with my trusty digital recorder. Rather than signing my copy of the consent form, Azizza handed me hers instead. “I went ahead and printed it out,” she offered. Since she didn’t have any questions about the form, I filed it away and moved on to the demographic data sheet. Like yesterday’s participant, she too asked to complete the form now and indicated she would provide her curriculum vita at the end of the interview. As she filled in her responses, hesitating and sighing deeply in response to the “description of ultimate career-related goals” section on the back page, I made sure that a copy of the interview protocol and my stack of strips were within easy reach.

Thanking her again for taking the time to sit down with me, I again placed the digital recorder near the center of the table – just slightly to the left of the beautiful

bouquet – and pressed the red record button. When I asked Azizza my grand tour question, “Tell me your leadership story,” I sent up a silent “Thank You” for my mini recorder. Unhesitatingly, Azizza jumped right in, moving confidently about the business of telling her story. Mesmerized, I found myself leaning forward in my seat. It was time once again for a Black woman to speak.<sup>2</sup>

### The Early Years: Coming of Age in Time of Civil Unrest

#### The Military Reservation

Well, I guess I’ll begin – with my childhood. I was the oldest of three children. My father was in the Army. He was a senior enlisted man, so I’ve been aware of leadership all of my life. Because we lived on a military reservation, and there’s a real hierarchy in the military. It’s kind of leadership in its essence, because on a military reservation, everybody reports to somebody. And even in our family, my mother and my brothers and myself were very much affected by that hierarchy, because for one thing, being in the military, my father had to adhere to certain rules. The grass – in our front yard and backyard – always had to be cut, because in the military, your residence had to have a very positive demeanor and look. My father always impressed upon us, the bills had to be paid and had to be paid on time, because – if they weren’t – if he didn’t have a good financial standing, it could affect his military career. So I’ve always been aware of leadership and the leadership hierarchy.

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<sup>2</sup> What follows is my representation of our conversation. While the participant’s story remains the focus and is honored through the uniqueness of her voice, I have chosen to remain present so that I could ask elucidating questions in the moment. My observations and queries are literally bracketed (and italicized) within the conversation to serve as a conduit for her storytelling, re-ordering events so that her experience informs both the reader and me (Altheide, 2008; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Erickson, 2010; Madison, 2008).

## Leadership: A Family Tradition

My father was a leader. He was a senior enlisted man in the Army, and he was the type of person that people turned to for support and input. I recently have been thinking about the fact that there would be people who would come to our house – men – who would come to our house, seeking my father’s advice and counsel, about everything from domestic issues to their military career to advice in terms of what to do with wayward children. I mean people perceived my father as a man of character and as a leader, and he also had a leadership position in the church.

. My father – I always said he was a big “character” man. My father was always a good judge of character. And that was one of the reasons that people sought him out, I think. He could be with a person five or ten minutes, and he could tell you: “That’s a good person. That’s not a person you can trust.” And I’ve gotten *some* of that from him. But he was really good at that; yet, he was a little bit too judgmental. But he really could connect with people, and people connected with him in that way.

My mother was also a take-charge person, and I’ve always emulated her a lot. And her leadership lessons to me were to be organized, to be on time, and always be in a position or be willing to help. She never said this, but one of the lessons I got from her was that a leader helps and supports other people. So, growing up, I was surrounded by people – two people – who were highly organized, very much perceived as leaders themselves, and for whom that was a natural role for them.

So as the oldest of three, I was often in charge. My mother worked full time; of course, my father worked full time. And so we were latchkey kids, so when we came

home from school, the first thing you did was call Mom to let her know you were there, changed your clothes, and get down to your homework. And I was a little bit in charge – as time went on – I became more and more in charge of that. And I took my duties pretty seriously. When I was 13 – my mother’s sister passed away, and my cousin came to live with us. And he was the same age as my younger brother. And so, that was, that was an adjustment for the family. And then I was in charge of three, rather than two.

But even as I was growing up in school, I often had leadership positions. I was president of a couple of clubs when I was in high school. I was a cheerleader. I was captain of the cheerleaders at one point. I was in the band. I was first chair among the clarinets, so leadership was something that, to some extent, kind of came easily to me. It never bothered me to kind of be in charge. When I went to college, my second year, I had a leadership role within the dormitory. It was one that I had sought; it was one that I wanted. And as I progressed through college, there were other instances in which I took on leadership roles, head of the debate team and various and sundry other things.

And so, for me, leadership started in childhood. Once I graduated from college, I went on to graduate school, and at the *beginning* of my profession, I wasn’t in a leadership position. However, I always knew that I wanted to be able to – to the extent that I could – determine my own destiny, professionally. And so my way of *doing* that was to decide where I wanted to be in terms of what profession I wanted to take on, what roles I perceived for myself. And I knew that I wanted to be in education – somehow, and that I wanted to be able to kind of call my own shots. And for *me*, that meant getting a PhD. And so, that was what I pursued. And largely it was because I wanted to be in a



position to, have some control, and also, I wanted to be in a position to make a good living. [*Almost as though she had practiced the leadership story that she planned to share with me, Azizza came to the point where her story apparently ended. Azizza indicated that she would “stop there,” so I tactfully asked her to refer to the list of questions on the interview protocol and respond to the questions in the order given, as she felt comfortable doing.*]

### Power Concedes Nothing: The Struggle for Equality

In terms of the influences [on my leadership development], of course, my parents, as I've said. In terms of social influences and political influences [on my leadership development], I was *very much* influenced by the civil rights movement. As an older teenager, I demonstrated in downtown Richmond, Virginia. My experience with that had been a *little* different than some of my peers. Because I grew up on a military reservation – there was – I won't say there was *no* segregation – but there was *less* segregation. I never sat upstairs in the movies. There were no buses, so I didn't sit at the back of the bus. And on the military reservations, there were no separate drinking fountains, although when we went to shop in Richmond there certainly were. I was *never* allowed to drink from any of those fountains, and we never went to movie theaters in the city because seating *was* segregated, and my father wasn't going to have that.

And, so, my perspective was a little different; *however*, a lot of my ideas were formed by being a distinct minority on a military reservation. Because I went to school, from kindergarten, with White children, and there were always many fewer African American children than there were White children. And so, in the classroom, not only

was there this hierarchy – in terms of your father’s rank in the military – but also, in terms of your color – and as I got older, in terms of your gender. So that was pretty much how a lot of my ideas were formed.

I’ve always been a news junkie. Even as a child, I would watch the evening news, so I was always very aware of what was going on. Well, to the extent that you know, the news could indicate. I was aware of what was going on in the world, and I was aware of what was going on where I was. So I was very aware of the civil rights movement. I remember sitting in the living room – watching the guards go into Little Rock, and watching the governor stand in the schoolhouse door, so that [James] Meredith could not, couldn’t go to school. So I was always very aware of that, always – and my parents talked about it a lot – And for me, the movement was natural. It just made a lot of sense to me that we needed to *fight* for equal treatment and equal access and I guess I believed early on that power concedes nothing without a struggle. And that it was incumbent upon us to do so. And so, I was as involved as I could be in the civil rights movement.

When I left high school, I went to college. I went to a predominantly White college, so there I was again, in a dormitory where there were very, very few African Americans, and even, my freshman year at Longwood University, the majority of the Black freshman students – there were 20 of us – were put on the back of the campus, pretty much on one end of... Well, what had happened in the past was that Black freshmen were put on the ground floor of one dormitory, on one end of the dormitory, so they all had to use the same bathroom. And my freshman year was the first year that they

had stopped that and had more fully integrated the Black students into the dormitories, and so my roommate and myself, and two other Black freshmen were in a dormitory on the front of the campus. And not on one end of the hall, but using the same bathroom as the White students.

And that was a little new and a little different, but we were still conscious of being minority, and of some of the differences that were made. So that only heightened mine and many of the other Black students' awareness of racial issues and the need to struggle. And so, we considered ourselves, and we laugh about this now at our reunions, we considered ourselves Black nationalists, and we were tutoring, you know, working-class Black students and kids, elementary kids, and marching, and protesting. So, that was, you know, that was very much a part of my upbringing. And so I was very aware that I needed to be better, that I needed to study hard, that I didn't have a choice, in terms of education. I had to *get* it, and I had to *use* it. Not only for my own personal growth and development, but that I had a responsibility to give back to the community and to others. And I do have a strong racial identity. It has helped me professionally to know and embrace my racial and ancestral roots and to use that knowledge and my strong cultural identity as a prism through which I am able to appreciate other cultures, ideas, and world views.

In terms of my career choices, I don't know that the civil rights movement had so much of an impact in terms of what I *chose* to do. It may have had some impact on my trajectory. It may have been that I might have been a little further along sooner. I don't know. That's something that I've thought about, but what I always thought was,

that in terms of race and the civil rights movement – that if there were in fact people who wanted to hold me back, or who did not want to give me opportunities because of my race or my gender, that what *I* could do about that was to put myself in the way of an opportunity – to be prepared for opportunities and to do what I needed to do in order to be worthy and capable of doing whatever it is that I wanted to do.

### Coming from a Lineage of Strong Black Women

So the women’s rights movement – I’m sure I have certainly benefited from the women’s rights movement. But, you know, as a Black woman who’s grown up in the South, and who comes from, I guess, a lineage of strong Black women. My grandmother left her husband – because he was not a good husband, he wasn’t a good father – took her five girls and raised them. *Her* mother was a very strong woman, because, when my grandmother left her husband in the coal fields of West Virginia, she came home to *her* mother – who was my great-grandmother, who provided a home for her and her five daughters. My mother, and all – and most of her sisters – were very strong women. My father’s mother, whom I never really knew, but I did know her daughters – were all strong women – and so, my perspective has always been that women *should* be strong. That you *need* to be strong.

And so, I’ve never seen the women’s movement from a standpoint of the way that I saw *some* White women seem to interpret it, as, you know – we’re helpless, we’re less than, and therefore, – you know, the women’s rights movement is about helping us be less helpless or less weak. My mother always told me – God, I remember all these things – my mother always told me, “Don’t be dependent on a man to buy your Kotex.”

And, I used to giggle about that. But, as I got older, I understood what that meant. And it's a *very* – that's some strong teaching. And I've always told my daughter that, because – you know – if you're *that* dependent, then you are *really* in trouble. And so, a lot of what I've done, and a lot of the way that I've tried to shape my life is so I would *not* be dependent on, on people, anybody. And I don't mean not dependent in a way so that I think it's jeopardized relationships. But I think that it has allowed me to bring more to the relationship, because I've always felt that I needed to pull my own weight. That I needed to contribute, that I needed to support, and that I didn't need to sit back and wait for someone to do for me.

But, getting back to the women's movement – I've always thought of the women's movement as something that could certainly help empower me, but that I didn't have to *depend* on for empowerment. At least, not in the way that I thought I saw some women really *dependent* upon the movement for empowerment. And I guess a lot of that came out of my idea – you know, how I viewed the civil rights movement – because I didn't see – I saw Black people as being very proactive, very strong, and very motivated to *do* something about the situation. And so, in terms of movements, that's the way I've always felt – the movement is *you*, you who are affected, *doing* something about the situation.

## Embracing “Middle-Class Values”

What impact do I feel my race, gender, and socioeconomic origin of birth have had on my leadership ability? Let me start with socioeconomic origin. I’ve often said that I was really fortunate that my father was in the Army. My father finished high school and had one semester of college before his father died. And he had to leave college to help support his family. My mother was a college graduate, and interestingly enough, she had grown up with a mother who raised her principally. My grandmother was a domestic, and she worked for, as she used to say, “rich, White folk” – “rich White people.” And so she had five daughters. All of them, coming up, worked in these houses with her. Consequently, I’ve always said that my parents had very middle-class values. I’m not sure where my father got *his* from; my mother got hers from working with rich, White people. I was probably grown before I knew that there was any soap other than Camay soap. We always had Camay soap, ‘cause that’s what White folk had, and my mother said, “When I get grown, that’s what I’m gonna have.” Things throughout my life, in my home and the way that we did things, were very much related to the things that my mother saw rich White folk do.

So, I grew up with really, kind of *strong*, what I refer to as “middle-class values.” All of us always knew that we would go to college. There was never any question. And there was a way that you did things and a way that you *perceived* things. I came to realize how you handle money, the importance of material things, relationships with people that were very much kind of based in middle-class values. I remember growing up and my mother saying, “If you need help, get help.” And so, consequently,

her thing was – if you need to see a psychiatrist, see a psychiatrist. That’s nothing to be ashamed of. If you need medical help, get medical help. If you need legal help, get legal help. You don’t need to hide things. You need to use resources that are available to you. So, I guess I’ve always had middle-class values and I’ve always *valued* that, because I felt that it has really helped *me*.

And so one of the things that I tell students here all the time is that you may have not have come from what you consider a middle-class family. But if you’re going to be educated, you have to take on some middle-class values, and eventually, they’ll become your own. You have to be on time. You have to let people know when you’re not able to show up. You’ve got to take your responsibilities seriously, and if you say you’re gonna do something, you’ve got to do that. But to use those values as a way to get you to what you want. Those are the ways I feel my middle-class values have been important in terms of my career and my life.

### Influences on Leadership Development and Evolution

#### Race, Gender, and Leadership Ability

In terms of race and gender, [there is] no doubt about it. In America, race has always been important. It still *is*. It’s one of the things that define people immediately, and there’ve been several times – probably more than that – that I’m aware that my race has defined me. Sometimes in a negative way; sometimes in a positive way. There were a lot of times where I’ve been the spook who sat by the door. And that has its down sides but it has certainly had its up sides, too. It’s allowed me to be in places, and to be able to take advantage of things that I might not have been able to otherwise. But I’ve always

thought that race and my socioeconomic values – my middle-class values – have kind of coincided in some ways, because some of the reasons that I’ve been able to be the spook who sat [slight laugh] by the door is because I’ve pursued that opportunity, and that’s been my ambition and my push to be in certain places – to be able to take advantage of certain things. My mother always said, “If you want a blessing, you have to put yourself in the way of a blessing.” You don’t sit back and wait for it to happen. You go out there and make it happen.

And so, you know, race has been a knife that has cut both ways for me. I remember when I was in college my senior year. I was trying to get an internship, and I asked the head of my department to write a letter of recommendation for me. And I had had a work-study position in his office. And I knew that he didn’t know me *well*, but he knew me and I knew that it was going to be impressive to have a letter from the department chair. When I got the letter, I was shocked. He said I had come from a poor, working-class family, had had to overcome great obstacles in order to be at the college and in order to do well. And, it was very clear to me that he didn’t know anything about me, even though we had done some work together. But he thought that because I was Black, and I was one of the few Black students there, that that had to be my story.

So that was one of the experiences that really stood out for me – in terms of the dynamic of race, and what that was about, especially in that situation. Of course, I didn’t use that letter, but it really brought home to me, as much as anything ever had, that people can look at you and not know you, not see you, not know anything about you – and take certain things for granted. In terms of gender, one of the things that we used to



say when we were in college was – and that was when the women’s movement was getting really hot.

And one of the things that we would say was, you know, that’s [the women’s movement] not for us, because we’re discriminated against more as African Americans than as women. And, over my lifetime, to some extent, I think that’s been true.

Although I’ve always been very aware of the dynamics of gender, and I’ve experienced it, I’m sure. I *see* it all the time. I’m very aware of the glass ceiling. But I think if there have been things that have inhibited me, it’s been race – much more than gender. And that’s – pretty much as I talk to other women about this – Black women and Hispanic women – that seems to – Black and Hispanic women, *my* age – that seems to be pretty much the case. That it’s been race more than gender.

#### The Role of Spirituality in Leadership

[This belief in my responsibility to others] was very consistent with my spirituality. I grew up in a Baptist church where the New Testament preachings were very prevalent: that you do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That we do have responsibility for [and] that we *are* our brothers’ keeper. And that we need to develop our talents and that you can’t take your good fortune for granted. So my spiritual and religious upbringings and beliefs, as well as what I learned in my family, and what I had been taught, and what I had seen. All that just kind of made a lot of sense to me, and just kind of coalesced for me. I didn’t have this term *then*, and I wasn’t able necessarily to articulate it then as I am now. But the whole notion of servant leadership has always

been very much a part of my life and my ideas about leadership, and what it is, and what its purposes are.

### A Blending of Servant and Democratic Leadership

I think the way that I would describe my leadership style – my approach – is in relation to servant leadership, and in terms of democratic leadership. [*I asked Azizza to give me her definition of servant leadership.*] Servant leadership is being able to do things in a way that benefit others, and it's also bringing others along with you. One of the things that I try to do is develop people who are on my team. I ask my folk, what is it that I can do to help you? How can I help you grow? What is it that you need? We have just finished evaluations, and one of the things that I ask everybody is that question. And one of my people said to me, "I want to teach. I've taught this particular course once. I really want to teach more." And so now, it's incumbent upon me to appeal to the appropriate Dean and the appropriate department chair, to try to see whether or not I can't try to get this person more opportunities to teach. But growing people and doing things that benefit people that work with me is what I refer to as servant leadership – as well as setting up situations and processes that benefit the masses, and in this case, students here at the college.

As a democratic leader, I really do *want* and solicit input, and that has been a growth trajectory for me. Because I've always prided myself on being independent, and sometimes that has led me to make decisions without being as inclusive as I should. So one of the things that I've tried to do, one of the lessons that I learned along the way, is that inclusiveness is better than exclusiveness. I think that there's a way that you have to

invite that input, that you have to solicit it, that you have to get it, and I think you've got to know when you've had enough of it, too. [This is] so that you're able to move on, [and do] whatever it is that you need to do. But in terms of my style, I think servant leadership and inclusiveness are two things that I've tried to practice.

### In Search of a Leadership Model

In terms of people in the workplace that I emulated, there have been a few. One of the things that have been a factor in my life is that I've not really had mentors, in the way that, you know, that we think about them today. I've certainly had people who have supported me, in various ways. But in terms of someone really taking me under their wing – I haven't had that, and I guess what I've done is selected people myself, along the way, that I wanted to emulate, that I wanted to, I guess in some ways, *be like*. And there've not been many of those who have been African American women. I actually have taken a lot of lessons from White women, and White men, too, in terms, as long as what I saw them do, and the way in which I saw them act, was in concert with my own ideas and beliefs about what I wanted to be. And as much as I've done that – I also looked at people who were doing things in ways that I *didn't* want to do them, and who were acting in ways that I didn't feel were in concert with the way that I wanted to be or felt that things *should* be. And I think I have taken as many lessons from that as I have anything else. And so obviously there've been a lot of things along the way that have kind of shaped, I guess, where I am today.

## Getting to Really Know People's Lives

What are some of the most difficult aspects of leading and managing people?

One of the things that experience that I told you about – with the department head – one of the things that experience taught me was not to take the superficial things for granted. Not to look at a person and determine who or what they are. And so, one of the things that I've tried to do as a leader is to get to know people, and to know something about people. Because it has become so clear to me that you don't really know people's lives – that you can see someone who appears to be very competent, and then you find out, that they're *not*. That what you see on the outside can be masking some very real and some pretty deep problems. And when you see someone who seems to be all at loose ends, but when you sit down and talk to them, you find out that they've got a solid philosophy. And that they have a very, very rich life. And so I've always tried to get to *know* people. And that can be difficult. I have a 120 people, but I know something about all of them. Especially – at least all of my full-time, permanent people. We have a lot of temps that come and go. But I know something about all of my folk.

And it's not only what other people have told me, it's what *they* have told me – or what I have gained...garnered from my conversations with them – my observations of them, something. So that can be difficult, getting to know something about everybody, but I think it's very important. [Laughs] Other things that can be difficult – the personality differences can really get to be...And it's not so much the personality differences as it is the unique aspects of people's personalities. Folk who have a very different approach or very different way of thinking...and although I certainly welcome

that diversity – there are instances in which it can be difficult – in an organizational setting to accommodate those differences. And even though I'm a real proponent of diversity and I do a lot of diversity training, I'm very aware too that sometimes diversity can be very difficult to encompass within an organization. So that's a constant challenge.

### Influences on Leadership Development and Evolution

#### Impediments to Career Advancement

What have been some of the challenges, obstacles to my career advancement? I think to some extent race has been. Another one of the big obstacles was [laughs] getting married and coming here, and, and really having to start all over again. And [a challenge was] being in a place where there just weren't many opportunities, in terms of my particular chosen profession. Having a family has been a challenge. It has not always been *easy* to juggle all those balls; however, I had a very good role model in my mother, who worked full-time and raised three children – four children – and was very successful at what she did. So, although it's been a challenge, it hasn't been insurmountable, and it certainly has been possible. I think another challenge has been not having a mentor; I think that has been a challenge. And at various times, I've felt that and have regretted that. But I really haven't known what to do about it other than what I *have* done. But I think that has been a challenge.

*[Azizza said earlier that not having knowledge and experience early on sort of made her leadership path a little bit more of a challenge. Curious to know if there were things that she may have regretted doing or wish she had done differently or better, I*

*asked her to reflect over her leadership career and share some of those things – if there were any that came to her.]*

My marriage had a *big* impact on my career. When I got married, I guess I just kind of took for granted that I would find something here that was comparable to what I had. Well, I didn't. And I probably should have thought through that a little bit more, a little better. I should have been more aware of what the opportunities were, and were not here. And I don't know – it might've been that I would not have gotten married or not gotten married then – or maybe I would've stayed at University of Texas and commuted for a while, until I could get something that was comparable. So, I didn't look at my options well enough there. That was one thing I *probably* would have done differently. The vision piece is another thing. It really is important...when you go into a job, you've got to have a vision about what needs to happen, what and how things need to be. And there've been times that I *felt* my way through – as opposed to having a bigger picture and letting things evolve from there. I think too I probably would have tried harder to seek out mentors. Although, given where I've *been* and what I've been *doing* – that may not have been possible. But if I could've influenced that, I think I would have wanted to.

How have I dealt with them [the challenges]? I think I talked about that, in terms of the challenge of race, I think I said – you know – be the best that I can be. Anticipate where I need to be, what I need to do, and seek out my own opportunities, um, seek out my own opportunities. I've never felt limited by race; I've just always felt – I've just always known that it was there – that it could be a factor. And my charge has been to do what I needed to do to overcome that, if in fact, it did exist. And I think I've

shared some examples. One of the things that I've learned in my career – a couple of things – is you put yourself in a way of a blessing. If you want it, you have to prepare yourself and go get it. The other thing is, I think that what's for you, you're going to have. I think that if you're prepared, if you're doing what you need to do, if you're vigilant and aware, what is *for* you – you're going to have. And I can point to various things, and I think I have. [For one] being hired at Duke University – you know, kind of late in my career – and the way that came about was so *unusual*, that I have to believe that it was kind of – that was my destiny. This position was another thing like that, and although I hadn't always had the positions that I would have wanted to have, I think they've all prepared me for where I had to go next. And that's been very important.

#### An Unexpected Success Story

In terms of pivotal achievements and successes from my career, I guess some of the pivotal achievements, actually, for me, was – you know – finishing college and getting on to graduate school and doing well in graduate school. One of the things that happened to me was – I was trained as a communications specialist. And that's what my doctorate is in, and that's how I planned to spend my life and make my professional contribution. When I finished my doctorate, I went to the University of Texas, and I was there as a faculty member for two years – and it was a good start. Then I got married, and my husband was from Charlottesville, and we had met in graduate school. And he had come back to Charlottesville to start a business, so there was no decision about where we would live. We were going to live in Charlottesville. And when I came here, there were *no* college communications programs. The nearest one was a couple of states away.

And I didn't want to have to commute that distance, and so, I kind of gave up my profession and took – jobs – in colleges here, except for a three-year stint with the Better Business Bureau. But I wasn't doing communications, and it was a difficult time – professionally – because I had some status in the job that I had, the position I had had in Texas. But when I came here, I was in jobs in which – I didn't have any. I was kind of starting all over, and that wasn't easy. It wasn't easy at all.

But I had a very *unusual* thing happen – to me. I had worked in several different places, and I was at Valley Forge Military College in a staff position. And I applied for a position in the diversity office at Duke University. And one of the people who were on the selection committee saw my resume. And he saw that I had a background in communications, and so he said to another person on the committee: “Do you know her?” And she said, “Yeah, I know her,” and he said, “Well, I want to meet her.” So, this woman arranged a meeting, and I went to meet with him. And he said, “I want to start a communications program here, and I see you have all the credentials. And I see you've applied for this job. You're not going to get that job, but I want you to come and work with me, and start this program.” As, [pauses] the *Lord* would have it, the man who was talking to me, was a man by the name of James Jackson – he was the senior academic dean at Duke. He and I had been in third grade together. He didn't remember that. I didn't either at *first*, but the more we talked, about where we were from – no, we were in the fifth grade together – it dawned on me: This is the James Jackson that I was in fifth grade with. Anyhow, he hired me, and I started the program – the graduate program in communications at Duke.



So it brought me back into *my* area of expertise. And I guess that was one of my most significant achievements, it was starting that program. And through the work that I did there, I became a Fellow of the American University School of Communication – something that I *never* thought would happen. But I'd been put back into an area where I could make that kind of contribution. So that was *very* important to me; that was a real pivotal moment in terms of my career. And I was very happy there, and really felt that I did a lot of good work there. And then *this* opportunity came about because, Sally Peoples – who's the president – and I had shared an office when I had been here earlier. And when this position became available, I had an opportunity to interview for it, and I got it. And this has probably been the best job I've ever had in my life – in terms of a lot of different things. But I think this too has been a pivotal achievement for me.

This is the best job I've ever had because of what we do. And that is, taking the students that I talked about, as well as – we have, we have much more diversity here. We have people here who have two master's degrees and are coming here for a nursing degree or coming here to become the graphic artist that they always wanted to be. We have students who are coming right out of high school who are regular run-of-the-mill students, and we have people who never thought they could go to college. *That's* one of the reasons, because it all comes together here, and I love that. It's the best job that I've ever had because I have a large staff, and I can get things done through people. It's the best job I've ever had because Sally Peoples is a very good leader. And she lets me do my job, and she supports me. It's the best job I've ever had because it comes at a time in my life where I can really *appreciate* it, because I've had some jobs that weren't – the

best – and I, I really appreciate this job, because of what it affords me, in terms of being able to – *I think* – be effective and also interface with the community and have an opportunity to influence, not only students – I probably don't influence students as directly as I do some of my staff members. And because it's a job that allows me to use pretty much everything I've ever, ever learned. I mean, I feel like every job I've ever had has really prepared me – has been part of my preparation for this position.

### Making the Tough Decisions as a Leader

*[I have always been curious about the ways that leaders go about tackling difficult issues. Because I've somewhat been able to intuit what Alice's approach is – which is to work through the issue as a team but take it on early while it is still small – I'm interested to know if Azizza's is similar.]*

[To make the tough choices, the tough decisions as a leader] it depends. You know, I always try to get – I always get input – unless it's a confidential matter. I always get input. I always try to understand how this has been handled other places. I tell my people all the time, "Look – you don't have to re-invent the wheel. Get out there and see how somebody else is doing it." I try to understand, you know, how these things are handled at other places. Sometimes I seek input from colleagues – I might ask Judy up at Foxtail-Lily – my counterpart up at Foxtail-Lily: "You ever dealt with such and such? How'd you do this?" And, you know, I always try to bring the best thought, the best ideas, or whatever, to it, and I – very often, I pray. I pray – especially if it's a decision that involves a person, a person's livelihood, a person's professional progression. Very often I'll pray over it.

But I try to bring all that together, and come up with what I think is the best decision. I try to keep from having to have those hard decisions, because I try to take care of small things while they're small rather than letting them get big. I try to have good people working for me. I tell my folk all the time, they get upset if a student comes to me and asks me to over-rule something that's been done. They did a financial aid appeal, and the appeal was not granted. And they [students] come to me and they say, "But look what my circumstance is. Could you give me some consideration?" I tell my people all the time: "If they come to me, they're likely to get it. Because I'm a student advocate. Don't let them come to me. *You* take care of it. *You* do what needs to be done." And, pretty much, [laughs] that's what they do. There're very, fewer and fewer things that get to me, because they know – if they don't take care of it – I'm going to do it in my way. And sometimes my way isn't the most popular way. But I try to avoid having to make big decisions that are going to be unpopular."

#### Importance of Mentors *Being Your Experience*

Mentors are important, because remember when I said, if I had known *then* what I know *now*? Well, my mentor knows *now* what I don't know. And my mentor could have said, "Azizza, have you thought about what you're going to do when you get married and go to Charlottesville? Have you thought about what you're going to do down there? What jobs are available there? You have this offer at such and such. Do you know what that's going to entail? You said that you really wanted to do research. Are you going to have really good research opportunities there? What kind of research infrastructure do they have there?" That's what, you know, that's the kind of thing that a

mentor can do that becomes very, very important. They can *be* your experience. They can be your ears and your eyes in a situation in which you don't – you're not able to do that. And that becomes very important in terms of making life choices. And if you're as serious about your profession as I am, as *you* are, as many of us are – you know, these *are* life decisions. And the more you know, the better decisions you can make. And [mentors are important] because you need somebody to cheer you on sometime when you have to make the tough decisions, and when you might be unsure. You need to have a confidential, supportive source that you can turn to. That becomes very important.

*[Azizza's perspective on the role of mentors is a compelling one. The literature is replete with studies of leaders that identify lack of mentors as a principal reason for stagnated career growth. However, none of the studies I have reviewed provide such a strikingly clear illustration of the pivotal role of the mentor to a leader's development and ultimate success.]*

#### A Little Bit More Insight = Better Leadership Preparation

One of the things, you know, is – one of the *problems* is – that you don't have this experience and this knowledge very early on. I think if I had had it, I might've been a little bit more patient at some points. I would've had a little bit more insight, might even been able to prepare myself a little bit better. But, you know, [it is about] being prepared and knowing that what is for you will be for you. Even if it doesn't come at the time that you might think it should or that you want it, or that even you feel like you need it to. That it *will* come, if you're doing what you need to do. I think it's also very

important to *know* what you want to do. A lot of times, we don't, and so, it is important to know.

### Encouraging Women's Leadership Development

What efforts should be made to encourage leadership development and potential in women? Well, I think we have to start early. I work with a group of middle school girls – who are in a working-class middle school, here in Charlottesville. I work with them, because I want them to aspire to leadership roles. I think we have to work with girls in high school, college, graduate school. I think it's incumbent upon leaders to be mentors and to bring other folk along. I'm spending, probably \$12...\$15,000 in my budget to send two women to leadership experiences this summer, because it's important for them to develop. And it's important for me to let them know that I think that they have potential that needs to be developed. So, I'm always pushing for that and looking for women that I think can benefit from that, because I think that's important. I didn't have that, and so it's something that I certainly want to be able to provide.

### A Role Model of Leadership

Do I consider myself a role model? Yeah, I do. I do. And that's what I'm trying to be for these women that I am trying to help develop. I consider myself a role model in terms of being able to share my story, in terms of what I do professionally, and the way that I do it. I do try to model good leadership skills, good community involvement skills. And good personal and family skills. You know, I do talk to women about having it all, and I believe you can, and that's what I say. You can have it all. You have to make up your mind that you want to have it all. You have to decide how you are

going to achieve that, and it might be different for each of us. I tell women a lot that if you want to have it all – if you’re going to be married – then you have to choose the right mate. Because the only way you can have it all is to have somebody who *wants* you to have it all, and who’s going to help you have it all, and whom *you’re* going to help have it all. So, you know, making the decisions about who you have in your life, and when you do things becomes very, very important.

### Getting Others to See Your Vision

#### Understanding the Need for Diversity

*[Initially, when Azizza came to the end of what I’ll call her pre-packaged leadership story, I prompted her to use the interview protocol to address areas that had not yet been discussed. Because she still skipped over this question, I thought I’d ask it again – just to find out whether there was intention on her part. While she had no response to the impact of her socioeconomic class, she had quite a bit to say about others’ perceptions of her based on her race and gender. This causes me to believe she merely overlooked this question, which was similar in phrasing to another question in the interview protocol.]*

What impact has my race, gender, or socioeconomic class had on how others view and respond to me as a leader? In terms of race, I have employees who, when I talk about diversity – it’s like, “Oh, here she goes again. And it’s because she’s Black. She’s so interested in diversity, because she’s a minority.” And certainly, some of my interest *does* come from that, but it also comes from my knowledge that it’s very important – it comes from my knowledge that a leader who doesn’t embrace diversity isn’t likely to be

very successful, in some – well, in any situation. So I think that’s one impact that perhaps race has had. I don’t know whether or not there were people on my staff who discounted me when I came because I was Black. I don’t know – I’ve not necessarily gotten that feeling – but I know enough about people to know that that could have happened.

In terms of gender, I probably felt that most at [laughs] Valley Forge – but I think Valley Forge was a little unusual, because there just aren’t that many all-male places left. But, one of the things that *did* happen at Valley Forge was that there were not very many women in very significant positions. Most of the women, *all* of the women were in support positions. And so, there was the mindset about women there that I thought was somewhat oppressive. And I had, I had the mixed blessing of not only being a *woman*, but being a *Black* woman, and being in charge of institutional planning – and trying to do bottom up planning – in a military hierarchy where there’s only top down planning. So, that was quite an experience. But gender definitely played a role.

#### Using Faith in Service to Humanity

*[Near the end of her discussion of the difficult aspects of leading and managing people, Azizza said: “I’m very aware too that sometimes diversity can be very difficult to encompass within an organization. So that’s a constant challenge.” I considered this a rather provocative statement and sensed that following up on what she said would prove insightful, so I asked Azizza if she could provide me with a specific example of the difficulty of dealing with diversity in the workplace.]*

A specific example [of the difficulty of dealing with diversity in the workplace] would be that I have folk who profess to be *very* – to be Christian. And Christianity is the most important thing – their relationship with God is the most important thing in their lives. And then I see how they treat people. I see how they relate to certain things *like* diversity...their ideas about the amount of time that they should spend in the workplace and with what they do. Not understanding that their inability – that their reluctance to do a little bit more – really inhibits their opportunity to support other people. Although they'll tell you very quickly, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you" – is the way they live. The Golden Rule is the way they live. But when I see what they do, it's very different. And then trying to get them to understand that what you profess is not what I'm seeing here, and that that's really causing a problem. Those kinds of dichotomies and those kinds of conversations can be very difficult. That's an example that I would give. And I guess it's because, recently I've been dealing with three employees around that very thing – trying to help them see how they can *use* their Christianity in much more positive ways – and in terms of their own success as supervisors and as an employee.

#### Appreciating the Distance Some Students Must Travel

When I was at Duke, I worked with students who knew – from the time they were born – they were going to college, that they were going to graduate school when they were in the sixth grade. They knew they wanted to be a physical therapist, a doctor, or whatever. Here, I work with students who never thought they *would* go to college. And, you know, for me, seeing a student start out in developmental English,



developmental math, and then walk across that stage with a degree is one of the most positive experiences I've ever had. And both of them were really good. And I got a lot out of both and I felt that I'd been able to contribute to both, but I *know* the difference. [I know the difference] between having the family support and the ideas, and being able to live into those ideas.

I *know* the difference between that and not having the family support, and not having anybody that you can ask: "How do I choose these courses? Mama, what should I do?" Not having a mother to tell you: "You know, you need to drop that course," because she never went to college. She doesn't know anything about what you're going through, and [your] still being able to get through all of that and get a college education. I know that there's a real difference in those two students, but I also know there are a lot of similarities, because – you've got to want it, you've got to be able to do some of the same things.

And so, being able to value those differences and use those, but also being able to use the similarities has been really important in terms of the work that I've been able to do with students. And staff, too. I've had to point out to my staff – in many instances – the students that we're working with – their experience is not the same as yours. You may be like me – you may have been born knowing you were going to college. They weren't, and so, you've got to look at things from their perspective. The things that we take for granted – the things that we grew up *taking* for granted – are things that have come in a very different way with these students. And if you want to be successful -- if you want to help these students be successful – you've got to take on that perspective.

So, you know, a big part of my leadership here has been in terms of helping people who work with these students realize that, you can't take for granted that everybody knows everything and that all this comes as easily to them as it did for you.

*[After making these statements in our initial conversation, Azizza declared: "So, that's it. I'm through." Because I had so much more that I wanted to learn from her and about her experiences, I delicately inquired as to whether I could ask a few follow-up questions, and she enthusiastically said, "Sure! Yeah." So, I did. I had been jotting down anecdotal notes throughout the interview, and when Azizza said something that sounded incongruent for whatever reason, I took note of that something so that I could shape it into a question that I would hopefully get the chance to ask later. Because she had mentioned that her family embraced "middle-class values," I wondered what gave her these insights about students whose backgrounds were apparently so much different from hers.]*

Well, part of [what] it is [that gives me that insight into what the road has been like for many of our first-generation college students is], I *want* to know. I want to know what your experience has been. Another part of it is that even though I grew up on a military reservation and there were a lot of people who were just like us, around us, I've always known people who were not like me. I've always been interested in people who are not like me. And I've always been interested – and I think it comes out of my interest in diversity, but I've always wanted to know what other people's experiences are.

That's why I wanted to go to South Africa. I had heard about it, I read about it. I wanted to *see* what is it like to be in a *system* like that? And part of that was because

when I was at Duke, I did my research on infants and children with HIV and how that impacted their ability to communicate. [I compared] children who were infected as opposed to children who weren't. And, out of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki – where you had one of the biggest epidemics of HIV in the world. How the leader of that country was saying, “Look, HIV does not lead to AIDS.” And I couldn't fathom that. And I wanted to go see.

I wanted to understand how a man as intelligent as Thabo Mbeki could have that kind of perspective, because he was really hurting his people. Because people were saying, “I have HIV, but I don't have to have protected sex. I don't have to do anything, because it doesn't lead to AIDS.” And so, I wanted to *see* what that was all about. And after going there and living there for four months, I understood – I understood where that kind of mindset came from, and how a culture had influenced that and why that had come to be. But I've *always* been interested in people's walks, people's journeys, and how people get to where they are, and why people are the way they are.

#### Ability to Connect, Empathize with Others' Struggles

I have this saying. I've always said, “If you tell me about the first six years of your life, I'll tell you about yourself as an adult.” Because those years – those formative years – are *so* important, that they really do influence who we are as adults. And – just like today – my telling you about the things my mother said to me. Those things have really impacted me. The things that we learn as kids are very important. And for the students who come here, many of them, the difference between whether they're going to make it or not is whether or not they have those tapes in their head, whether or not

they've seen somebody persevere. Whether or not there's been somebody in their life that gave them some, "You've got to keep going – you have to overcome the obstacles. You got to do these lessons," as opposed to those who don't have that.

### Realizing Value of Student Services to Learning Outcomes

*[Based on what Azizza said, it sounded like she was advocating that her staff play a much more active role in the lives and futures of their students. I was compelled to try to get at exactly what kind of role she envisioned herself and her staff playing. I presented a scenario: "Say those who come from nurturing backgrounds have this toolkit, if you will, and they know what they need to go in and get in order to overcome an obstacle. For some of the students here – they're not all the same – but for those students who don't have a toolkit, what do you see your role being as a leader as well as the role of your staff, in helping those young people?"]*

[In order for my staff and I to help those students who do not come to college with the necessary 'toolkit' to help them overcome obstacles], the first thing *I* have to do – well, there are a couple of things, several things I have to do. That's why I work with my staff so hard, so much. And that is, see, our mission – our vision, our vision for this division is that we will be seen as an important part of the educational mission of this college. People in student services don't always think they have anything to do with education. They feel like we have a role in Admissions – to get students into the college. We have a role in the Registrar's office, to keep their records safe and secure. We have a role in Orientation, to tell them where to go get what. I tell them – that's true – but you have to educate students.

So, consequently, we have student learning outcomes. What is it that a student can learn when they come into contact with Admissions? What is it a student can *learn* when they come into contact with Financial Aid? They can learn how to develop a budget – that’s a life skill. Where are you going to learn that? You’re not going to learn that in English class. You’re going to learn that by doing the budget that’s required to get a loan or if you want to get student aid. What is it that a student can learn from Admissions? Well, the first thing you learn is how to fill out a form correctly. That’s a life skill. We fill out forms all of our lives.

So I tell them, “Look, you have an impact on these students in terms of what they learn. Now, if you want to go a step further and really make *your life* worthwhile, you need to support them in what it is they say they want to do.” Now, we have students who come here, and they’ll be standing in the line in the Registrar’s Office, and I’ll say, “What can we help you with today?” They reply, “I came, I came to register.” “Have you applied for admission?” They reply, “What’s admission?” They don’t even know what I’m talking about, OK? Are they ready for college? Maybe, maybe not. Our responsibility is to get that person to somebody who can start at the very beginning with them and get them through the process. Now, there are some people who want to dismiss that student. “You don’t even know what the word ‘admission’ means? You don’t have any business in college.”

I think the other perspective is, “You don’t even know what the word ‘admission’ means? Come here. Let’s begin to help you understand. This is what you have to do first. This is what you do next. This is what you do after that. And this is my

card, and if at any point, you don't know – or you have questions – come back to me. This is where I am.” So I work with my staff on that a *lot* – and some of them *get* it, and some of them don't. But, I let them know that, if you're gonna be in student services here, you need to at least pretend like you're getting it. And as I'm walking around, I'm listening to what you're saying to students. And I'm going to know whether you get it. Students are going to come to me, and I'm going to ask them: “What kind of experience did you have?” There are a lot of different ways for me to know or to try to know. But that's what we need to do. I tell them all the time – this is not Harvard. This is the *people's college*. Open door. People who have low skill levels are going to come to us. Some of them we will be able to educate. Some of them, we may not. But everybody deserves an opportunity. So, if they can demonstrate to us that they can read on a sixth grade level, then we have got work to do with them. We need to try to help them get to the right place.

So, you know, there's a mindset that you have to have. And you've got to *want* to do this work. I tell them all the time about my students at Duke, and the students here. And I say, you know, some of my best work has been done [here]. It's not as big a deal, to help somebody who's always had, “My mama's going to send me – my daddy is going to write the check for me to go to college. I don't have to work; all I have to do is study. Yeah, I have a nice apartment downtown, and I can have a roommate if I want to. But I don't have to, because I don't need anybody to help me pay the rent. And, yes, I'm very bright, and I read well, and I understand all the stuff that they're trying to teach me.” That's a whole different thing than somebody who's barely reading on the sixth grade

level. [That's different from someone who] has an aspiration but doesn't know how to get there.

When *that* person walks across the stage, you've *done* something. You have really *done* something. Because, you know, the chances are the student at Duke – maybe they're going to be OK, whether they get a degree or not – because maybe they can get a job in their father's company. Or they know some people who are going to look out for them and do for them. Or maybe they can go home, and their parents will support them. But you know this one, here? They don't have anybody but themselves. If they don't get the skills to get a job, they're either going to be on welfare or they're going to be nowhere.

And so our life's work is to get them [laughs] into a position. I tell them – get them into a position so they can help me get my Social Security. They're going to be my Social Security cushion. I want as many of them out there doing as well as they possibly can. And we laugh about that, but, you know, that's our work. Your work is not only to process this application; your work is to help this person apply. [Your work is] to help this person know what to do next. I always tell my staff – you know, it's one thing to answer a question – but what you have to do is anticipate the *un-asked* question. Because that's what's going to get them in trouble – the question that they *don't* ask. [It is] the question that they *don't* know the answer to. We have to anticipate that, and say: “You've haven't asked me about such and such, but you're going to need to know...x, y, and z.” So that's the work that we have to do. And if we're successful, students are going to be successful. If we're not successful, they're not going to be successful.

So...that's, that's it. [*This is a poignant point that I don't think gets made enough (the idea that some students are simply not going to know which questions to ask). It is this basic lack of understanding of a system that they may just be learning about for the first time that often causes problems for the students who need guidance the most.*]

### Traits Leaders Must Have to Get Others to Follow

[*I reminded Azizza that she had shared with me some qualities that her parents possessed and that she much admired. I wondered what qualities she believed were essential for good leaders to have.*] I think that leaders are good listeners. I think good leaders have a vision, and that's something I had to learn. I think you've got to have a vision that you can *sell*. And people need to know what your vision is. I think you need to be organized. I think you need to be [pauses] I think it helps if you're a good manager. I've known leaders who are not good managers – I've known good leaders who are not good managers – but I think some of the best leaders I've known *have* been good managers. They're people who, who not only can lead, and have the vision and can get people to move in the direction that they want them to, but they also have good management skills.

I think you have to be selfish, to some extent, and by that I mean, you have to be able to close the door and get the work done. You have to be able to say “No.” You have to be able to say, “I've heard everything that you all have said. You have some good ideas, but that's not what we're going to be able to do.” And I tell my people all the time – you have to be prepared not to be so popular all the time. I tell my people – you need to have people in your life who love you, who support you, and who are going to



make you feel good. Because your co-workers are not always going to do that. You can't always depend on them for that, and if you start depending on them too much for that, you're going to start making decisions that are not in the best interests of the organization. So, have your support group and be prepared to not always have people support you.

I think it's important not to micro-manage, unless you absolutely have to. And [it's important] to know that when you get to that point, you need to make some changes. That's something I have to fight against, because I can sometimes try to do other people's work. But I'm aware of that, and I try hard not to do that. And I know that when I move toward that, it's because I perceive something's not being done and what I need to do is work with that person and make sure that what needs to be done gets done.

#### Your Vision: Getting Others to See It

*[I found myself thinking back on something Azizza shared from her experience in South Africa. She talked about how disheartened she was at the notion that some Black South Africans supported the dismantling of historically Black colleges there. While she empathized with and recognized their own struggle for civil rights, she lamented that they had missed the "Black is beautiful" stage in their own protest movement. She said she felt years ahead of where they were regarding the subject of appreciating the historic significance of Black higher education institutions. To bring it back around to the subject of leadership in the two-year college setting, I asked whether she ever got the feeling that she was too far ahead of her staff or seeing too big a vision for her staff to see, too. Unlike other times when she politely cut off my meandering questions, this time*

*she forthrightly dismissed where she knew I wanted to go with the question, and instead, took the question in the direction she wanted to go.]*

Yeah, that happens [that my vision for my division is so big that those who work with and for me can't see it as clearly as I can]. Sometimes my biggest challenge is getting my president to see my vision. An example is: [takes a breath] -- the technical colleges came out of the Special Schools thing. And it used to be that people would drive here from work, jump out of their car – go take a class – jump back into their car, go back to work or go home. Nobody was here...you know, students didn't hang around here. That has changed. You know, we now have students who are full-time students. They come here at 8:00 in the morning; they leave at 5:00. We have nothing for them to do, no place for them to go – if they're not in class. I have said repeatedly, "We need student activity space. We need a place for students to hang out. Things are different now. This is not 1982; it's not 1992.

We've got students who are treating this place like a full four-year college. We built a bookstore four years ago. I said to the president, "We need to have a coffee shop." You go in Starbucks. You go in Barnes & Nobles. What do you see? *Our* students, sitting around with their laptops, or in study groups. "We need to have a coffee shop, so students will have a place to hang out." No, she didn't want to do that. The consultant recommended against that. We built it [the bookstore]. It's been up four years. What are we doing now? We're now building a coffee shop. We could have done that at much less expense five – four or five years ago. There has been some progress with outdoor student space for students to congregate: tables with umbrellas. So, that's one of my

challenges, you know. I'm still trying to sell my vision to the president in terms of – every time we build a building – we need to incorporate meaningful student space. And not just a place for students to go *study*. We need a place where students can *do* something, you know. We need some ping pong tables and some basketball courts. That's an example of a challenge that I have.

### A Global Perspective on Leadership

#### South Africa: A Chance to Experience Others' Walks

One of the things that I've tried to do is be as broad in my professional career as possible. I've always wanted to experience new things – different things. I wanted to go to South Africa and work in South Africa. Well, how do you do that? Work in South Africa? I had a family, I had a husband. How do you do that? Well I knew for years it was something I wanted to do, and so, eventually, I was able to do it through a Rotary foundation fellowship. So, I, and it's funny how things happen, because I met a woman from South Africa, who was on the faculty at South Africa University. And I told her that I wanted to come to South Africa, and I was trying to find a way to do that. And, eventually, when the Rotary opportunity came, I got in touch with her and she wrote me a letter of invitation to come there and work in the communications program. And so it was a matter of putting some things together, but it was what I wanted – and I got it! And that was another example of, if you want a blessing, put yourself in the way of a blessing. And, you know, taking the time to work on some things – having goals. That's one of the things I tell people is *very* important – you must have goals – some of them are short term and some of them are long term. But you must have goals. That was a goal of

mine that I was able to achieve. And I was really happy about that. [*I found this experience particularly fascinating and Azizza's feelings about it somewhat analogous to the way that many African-Americans undoubtedly feel about having lived to see this country's first Black president. Curious to know more about a place and a sociopolitical moment that I'd only read about in history books or seen reported on TV, I asked Azizza to reflect on and share more about her time in South Africa.*]

### Higher Education System: Segregated and Elitist

The experience of South Africa was wonderful. It was interesting because the South African higher education system is based pretty much on the British system. So there they have a much more *elitist* idea about education and who gets educated – which was interesting to me because here in America – because we have a free public education system, we expect everybody to be educated and we want them to be educated to the highest level that they *want* to be educated. And there are ways in which we make that possible. There – it's very different – you pay for school, so poor kids can't go. You have very rigorous, very exhaustive exams that allow you to pass from one level to the next.

So, education is very much an elitist endeavor there. The students that I was teaching were students that had gone to Witwatersrand – which is one of the premiere universities in the world, in Johannesburg. I was aware of this. In South Africa, you have the Dutch, you have the English – the British, and you have the Indians, East Indians from India. And the society is so *segregated*. Each of those groups have their own colleges, and universities, and schools. So – Medunsa – the Medical University of

Southern Africa, where I was – was the allied health and medical university for Black Africans. And – the premiere university for Indians is in Durban – you have a high concentration of Indians in eastern South Africa. And the premiere university for the Dutch is in Stellenbosch, where they still speak Afrikaans.

I was working with a group of students who had gone to Witwatersrand, and they thought that they were going to become communications specialists. But they only allowed them two years of education, so they didn't have the degree or the credential. Once apartheid began to come to an end, and the country was seeking more equality, they decided that they were going to let these students go *back* to school and get the full credential. And that was how the program at Medunsa was developed. I was teaching those students. I got a real good first-hand look at the higher education system, and one of the things that were really interesting to me was this – they wanted to consolidate Medunsa with one of the White universities in Limpopo.

#### Dismantling South African HBCUs

And my thought was, “Don't do that. Let this stay an HBCU – an historically black university.” Their response was, “Oh, no, because the HBCUs are not as well-funded as the White institutions.” So I said, “Well, yeah, I know that's true and that was very much the case in America. But now we have HBCUs that are really premiere institutions, like Spelman, and Morehouse, and Howard, and Hampton. And, you really need to take *pride* in these institutions. Don't dismantle them. Don't dilute them. Figure out a way to get better funding for them.”

And it was like I was always 20 years *ahead* of where their thinking was, because they hadn't been through the "Black is beautiful" era or struggle that we had. They hadn't had the same kind of civil rights movement— although they had struggled mightily and had sacrificed a lot. Their thinking was very different, in terms of what needed to be preserved, and what was good, and what should be cherished. It was like there was this big rush to be like the English or the Afrikaners. And I would be like, "You're the *majority*. They should be trying to be like *you*, if anyone's going to be like anybody."

#### The Method to Mbeki's Madness

But it was, it was a real experience. And then I did get to meet Thabo Mbeki very briefly, but I came to realize that his ideas were borne out of the fact he didn't want – and there were some editorials written about this, and I had an opportunity to talk with some people about this – but he didn't want...Because of the world's ideas about Black Africans as promiscuous, and lazy, and not industrious. He did not want the world to associate a sexually transmitted disease that can kill you – with Black South Africans. And so, it was easy for him to say, you know, HIV doesn't lead to AIDS. And he was reading some scientists – out of the University of California – who were saying that. I didn't realize – until I got there – that there's really a pretty big movement of scientists who *do* say or have in the past said there's no relationship between HIV and AIDS – as weird as that seems to us. And these are people who are highly educated and highly published. But he kind of fell into that group, even though, you know, Mandela was saying HIV was a precursor to AIDS. But in any case, it was good to be able to try to

understand that perspective. And the fact that promiscuity among men is part of the fabric of the traditional Zulu culture. It's hard to find a Zulu man who doesn't have several women, and so, there's a culture that says that men ought to be able – to sleep around.

And so, then it's very difficult for them to acknowledge that what they're doing is in fact killing them, and killing their wives, and killing their children. It was also interesting to see all of the AIDS orphans who are growing up in orphanages and who, as soon as they're old enough to run away – they do – and they live in the streets and they're uneducated and they're un-parented. And they are going to have the potential to really wreak havoc on the society – because they're going to be criminals and they're going to be unemployable because they have no skills. So that was really something. The level of violence was interesting, but when you understand the history of the nation and apartheid, you can understand why people are so violent – why people are so *angry* and why they're so violent. High rates of unemployment, poor housing, lack of education – just a whole perfect storm of negative societal pressures that mitigate against civil order and prosperity.

Black South African Leadership – White South African Rule:

*[I wanted to know what parallels, if any, Azizza saw between South African Black culture and Black culture in the United States.]* One of the things [about having the experience of learning about and viewing the culture of Black South Africans is that] it made me really appreciate the strides that Black Americans have made and really appreciate how far we've come. And I have a great deal of empathy with what the South

Africans were going through at that point, because it was like they were just emerging from the whole apartheid era. And the fact that there's a *lot* of Black leadership, but the economy and many aspects of the society, are still very much in the hands of the White South Africans. They are the bankers. They are the *investment* people. They are the ones that *own* the large plantations. They are the ones that have the manufacturing plants. I mean they still control the economy, pure and simply. And so that was interesting, and that even though Mandela was the president – and Thabo Mbeki has been the president – Zuma is the president now, and to a large extent, White South Africans still have a lot of control. And they're going to because they're the ones who set up a lot of these institutions and they're going to continue to control them.

Are things better? Yeah, in many instances they are, but there's still a lot of work to be done. But there are Black South Africans who are brilliant, and who are rich, and who are making significant contributions to the society and to the world. They're very industrious people. They're very smart people. They have a lot of resources in that country that people are really benefiting from and taking advantage of. And so – if a lot of different things come together – it will be one of the greatest nations in the world. But if a lot of the right things *don't* come together, I think it really has the potential to be another Zimbabwe. Which would be very unfortunate, because there's a lot of *promise* there, but things are not happening very fast. People are not getting good housing; people are not getting good jobs. And a lot of that now has to do with the whole global economic downturn, but there's still a lot of suffering in South Africa.



## Coming back to America: Spirit of Perseverance

*[I wondered how and in what ways Azizza was affected by that experience.]*

Coming back to America after that experience, I really felt a lot more urgency for our people – in terms of being able to take advantage of what we have here, because we don't have a lot of the – some of the constraints that Black South Africans still have. But it also – I think about that system and those situations a lot in terms of the fact that even with these very difficult realities – that a lot of people continue to push forward and continue to try to do what needs to be done in order for them to have the kind of life that they want to. And that's what I see here – you know, I see a lot – you know, we see a lot of that here in America. I was with a young male student this morning, who has three psychiatric diagnoses. He's homeless. He has no job. The Catholic diocese is providing him with a room in a motel to live. And he told me that he hadn't eaten in two days, and he was still very optimistic about being able to finish the two courses that he needs for his degree. And I was thinking, "If I were you, I don't think I could put one foot in front of the other," but he's, he's moving on. He's trying. He's trying. And, you know, it's that kind of spirit that allows people to persevere, and I saw a lot of that in South Africa – I see a lot of that *here*. And I often, you know, I often think about the parallels between – all over the world – I love to travel, and I've been a lot of places.

But, you know, it's what separates those who make it and those who don't, and it's that willingness to continue to push when everything else seems to be going against you. And I've seen that in South Africa, I've seen it in West Africa, I've seen it in Charlottesville, I've seen it in Sedona, Arizona. I've seen it in England. I've seen it in a

lot of different places, but when you get down to it, that's what separates the wheat from the chaff. And that is whether or not, regardless of what your circumstance is, you're willing to continue to move forward.

### Leader's Outlook: What's Ahead for Education

#### Black Women Leaders: Get in Where You Fit in

*[Based on my own personal experiences within higher education, as well as those shared by some former colleagues of mine, I thought I'd ask Azizza how Black women leaders make themselves fit into an organization.]* Hmm. That's interesting. Well, I think one thing that's really important, and I've been thinking about this a lot because of Southern State and the fact that my first job after my master's was at Norfolk State University. I think one thing is you have to go where you *can* fit. And that's why it's important to know what your strengths are. It's important to know what you like. And it's important to know what you can do. And it's important to know about the culture of the place you're going. I have said I could work in a large, state-supported institution – like the University of Nebraska or the University of Texas. I could work in a single-sex university, college like Valley Forge. I went to Longwood University when there were 5,000 women and a 100 men – because it, historically, had been a women's college. I could work in a community college. I could work in a private college or university.

I could *not* work in a historically Black college. Because the culture in many HBCUs – is [pause] – “Me and my husband and my mama have been here for 40 years. This is the way we do it. I was here when you became president, vice president, and I'm

gonna be here when you leave.” That’s *part* of what’s wrong at Southern State. I saw it at Norfolk State University when I was there. And it tends to be the culture of a lot of HBCUs, because that was the only place that people of color in higher education could work – and some of those people are *still there*. And it’s hard as hell to move them, to get them to go a different way, or to do something different. I would not take a job at an HBCU because I know – I know something about those cultures, and you see Southern State has had what, five presidents in 12 years? It’s *hard* – it’s really hard to get stuff done.

Plus, the legislature keeps sending them people who – shouldn’t be – on the Board of Directors. That can happen a lot with HBCUs. You know, they won’t scrutinize the people who go on *that* board, like they do the people who go on the University of Virginia board or the College of William and Mary board. So, you’ve got to go somewhere where you can fit. And you have to know where you’re going. You must know the culture and the history of where you’re going, because you’re not going to fit everywhere. You’ve got to know what’s important to *you*. You got to know what your strengths are, your weaknesses are, and you got to know what the possibilities are where you’re going. That’s one thing that becomes very important.

#### Black Women Leaders and “Softer Side” of Education

And it’s equally, it’s really important – because even though there’ve been some advances – Black women – Black people period, but Black women are viewed, in some instances, by a different rubric, a different measure than are their White counterparts. And so, I mean that’s just the reality. Especially, initially, now it might be that once you

get there and people get to know you, that it – that that kind of difference won't be made. But, very often, there's still that, "Are you here because you're Black?" I mean even in 2012, "Did you get that job because you're Black and they *needed* one?" You know, one of the things that have happened *here* is, you know, I'm the only Black vice president. The person who preceded me was a Black male. Is the Student Services position the Black spot? Probably. Probably. There've been other vice presidents hired since I've been here – none of them have been Black. So you have that, too. You know, when I look at the vice presidents in the technical college system – there're no female – there was one Black female vice president of academic affairs. She's no longer there. So there are no Black females who sit around the Chief Academic Officers table. And I think there may be one Black male who's a Vice President of Academic Affairs. Most of the Black vice presidents are in student services in the technical college system. They don't run finance. They don't run academics. They're not in charge of development, the money raising. They're in charge of student services. And that's not unusual throughout the nation. That's not unusual throughout the nation.

I think it is sometimes easier to view Black women (and men) in a role that does not exercise too strong an influence over what is often viewed as the most essential aspects of higher education: the curriculum and teaching and money and budget. Student Services has historically been viewed as the "softer side" of higher education and there has been more of a tendency to "track" Blacks in that direction. Also, we sometimes see Black academicians who have not been able to advance to leadership roles on the academic side of the college transition to student services for career advancement.

## Black Women and the Technical College Presidency

*[Before Azizza would respond and share her thoughts on the future for Black women leaders within the technical college system, she clarified that I was asking about the state's system as opposed to the national system of technical and community colleges. In her response, however, she decides to address the status of Black women leaders within both systems. This is probably because – in her estimation at least – the prospects for Black women leaders in the state are uncertain at best, dismal at worse.]* I'm not sure what the future is for Black women in the state. And I say that because of this. There are sixteen technical colleges in the state. Over 50% of them have changed presidents within the last five to six years. None of them have been Black women. Now that's not the only level of leadership, but you have your vice presidential level, you have the director's levels, etc. But, with the exception of two positions – all of them have been White men. And *they* didn't even come from this state. So I'm not sure what the future is for Black women in the state or in the Southern Technical College System.

Since I've been here, we've gotten two new technical college presidents of the state system. Neither of them have been Black – men or women. So I'm not sure. In terms of leadership in the community and technical college system nationally, I think it's good. You see more and more Black female presidents. You see more and more Black female vice presidents. But I think it's a little different here in this state, as it always has been. I take that back. The president of Daffodil was a Black woman, but she was not replaced with a Black female. And I think she's acting now, she's been brought back,

and she's acting now. But she's the only one. And she was recycled. Another Black female was not chosen. Two Black men succeeded her, but not Black women.

So I'm not, I'm not sure. And I don't know whether it is because Black women aren't aspiring to those [executive leadership] positions – I know that I was one of the finalists for one of the presidencies – an internal candidate was selected. But I don't really know what the future is going to be for Black women in the technical college system. What I've seen so far does not – make me very optimistic. And then when you look at – within the technical college system – vice presidents of academic affairs, which are the people who are usually most likely to go on to be presidents – I don't, I don't see that. And I don't see the Black women who are the vice presidents for student services becoming presidents. So I don't know. I think we'll have to wait and see what happens.

#### State Legislature: A Big Handicap

*[Given the variety of challenges facing all facets of higher education today, I was especially interested to hear Azizza's take on some of the greatest risks to the technical college system, in terms of outside factors that may impact what she and other leaders are able to achieve with and for the students in the system. Her answer did not disappoint in its bluntness.]*

I think one of the biggest risks that anybody in this state has [as well as to the technical college system and its ability to ensure student success] is a very strong, un-enlightened legislature. We're in a strong legislative state. The legislature determines a *lot*, and we have legislators who are not at all enlightened about education – period. Higher education, K-12, anything, and decisions are made accordingly. I think that that

is a *big* handicap in the state – to education, to business, to social progress, the whole nine yards. I think some of the risks that we have in terms of the technical education system is leadership that in some instances, is not strong –in other instances, is really hampered by the rules and regulations that exist. For example, presidents in this system need to be much more entrepreneurial.

#### Need for Forward-Thinking College Leaders

There needs to be a *lot* more thinking outside the box, and there needs to be a *lot* more thinking about how they can help students be successful. An example is – Susan Marsh said to me one time years ago – she said, “My goal is for any student that graduates from a high school in Lilac County to come to Orchid-Corsage Tech – if they come to me *right* out of high school – they’ll get a free education.” She said, “I want to take the lottery funds, whatever Pell they can get, and then I want to fundraise, to get money to close the gap. And I want to say to students: ‘I’m gonna put your lottery money, with your Pell money, with your scholarship money – and if you come to me right out of high school, you’ll get a free education.’” That’s one of the most forward-thinking things I’ve heard from a leader here in this state. Nobody else is talking about that. And Susan Marsh has retired and gone on. We need a lot more of that kind of thinking and a lot *less* control by the legislature. I think those are the two things that are the most – are the biggest impediments to the progress of the technical college system. One of the things that have *helped* us has been the economic downturn.

### Using Research for Informed Decision-Making

Research is essential to any leader's decision-making. Leaders should conduct research and use data routinely to determine program and personnel strengths and weaknesses and to determine the efficiency of various operations within their areas of supervision and leadership. Community college leaders should also be abreast of the current research regarding issues that impact their students, institutions, and departments. Trends, demographic and economic changes as well as curricular and other issues are all areas that are influenced by the information that well-conducted and reliable research yields.

### Acknowledging the Elephant in the Room

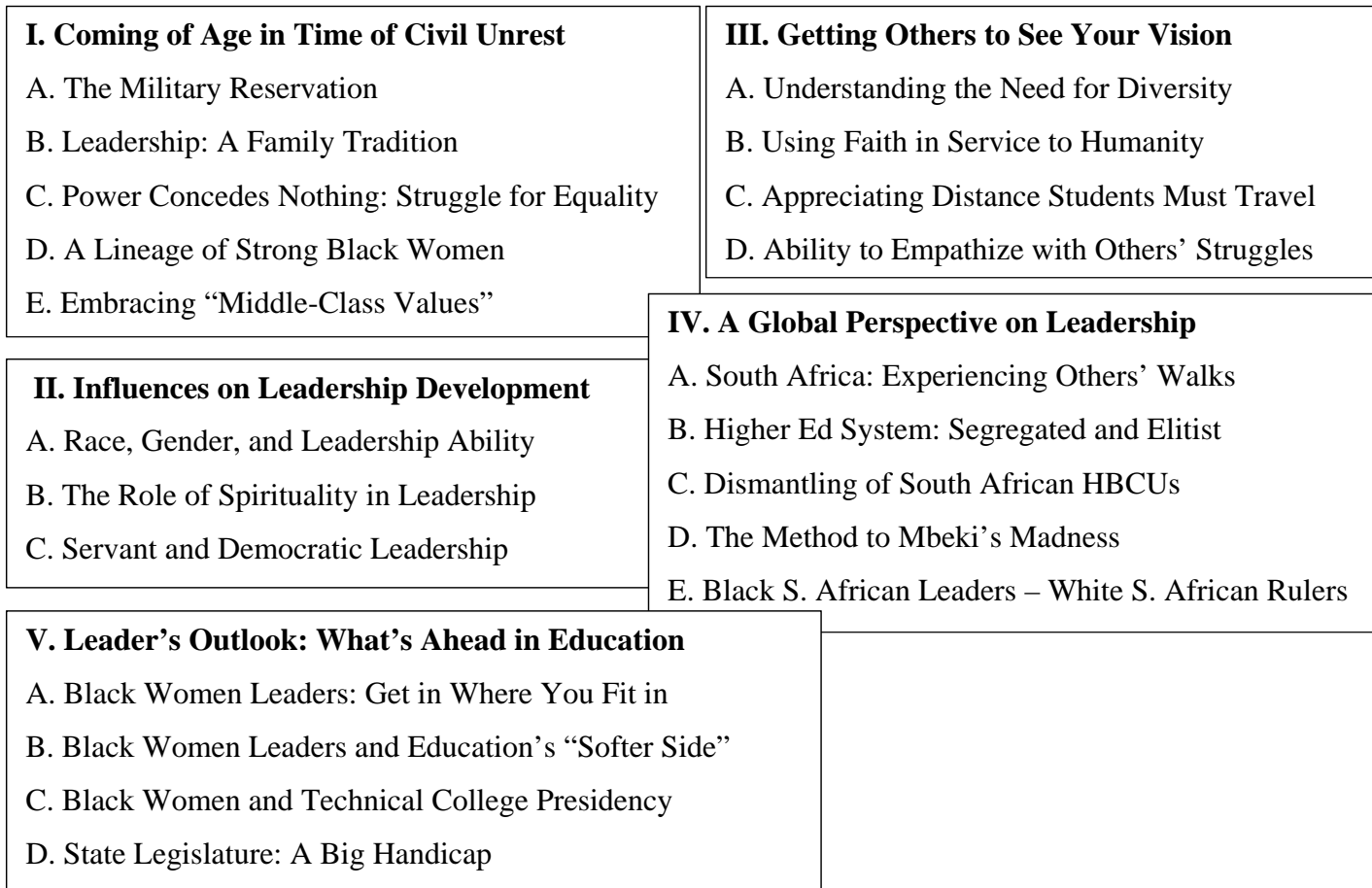
And finally, I think people see that you can come to – one of the two-year colleges – and re-tool. It has done a lot for Tulip Tech in terms of positive publicity. But what people don't want to acknowledge is the fact that the majority of students who go to four-year colleges come through the two-year system. And they have to do that because of money and lack of preparedness. Nobody wants to talk about that, because if they did, they'd have to do more to prepare students coming out of high school. And that's a problem, too. The fact that nobody wants to acknowledge that a lot of students can't *get* right into the four-year colleges out of high school – because they're not prepared. So, we got a lot of challenges. A lot –

### Chapter Summary

As with Alice, the story of Azizza's leadership experience is best summarized by the visual representation of the stages (or chapters) of her narrative presented in Figure



5.1, which presents some but not all of the sub-topics for each stage in her leadership development.



**Figure 5.1 Graphic Representation of Aspects of Azizza’s Leadership Experience**

## CHAPTER SIX

### CONCLUSION

*“Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then  
I contradict myself  
(I am large  
I contain multitudes)”*

~ Walt Whitman, “*Song of Myself*” 1855

#### An Interpretation of Two Black Women’s Leadership Experiences

The last two chapters were presentations of each woman’s narrative or story of leadership – in essence, an interview profile (Seidman, 2006) of each woman’s story in which I incorporated traditional literary narrative elements such as setting, mood, plot, character, conflict and denouement to bring a structured cohesiveness to the whole story. At the same time, I also highlighted the authenticity of each woman’s voice in her reflections and remembrances throughout each chapter – similar to “...life history research that results in written documents entirely in the informant’s words” (Brenner, 2006, p. 360). In this chapter, I am going to present two forms of analysis – first I will provide an analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 2007), which will discuss the common themes of leadership culled from these two women’s narratives. These themes are presented in no particular order, although some were mentioned more frequently in each woman’s story than others. This discussion will be followed by my interpretation of the differences that I discovered relative to my analysis of these women’s leadership experiences (Josselson, 2006). I will share what personal lessons I learned from these women’s stories within the framework “of [my] own culture, history, and experiences”

(Creswell, 2009, p. 189), and I will interpret the meanings of these stories within the theoretical perspectives of Black feminist theory and critical race theory. I will also discuss these experiences in terms of the extant leadership theories literature (Creswell, 2009).

Specifically, I will focus my analysis on the differing storytelling styles of these two women, and I will make use of metaphorical phrases that will hopefully capture the distinctiveness of each woman's voice. Interestingly, the ways in which these women structured their stories matched their leadership experiences. For example, Alice goes back and forth in the telling (and even re-telling) of some of her experiences. This episodic, recursive, and circuitous method contributes to what I will develop as a *crossing over* identity or motif. On the other hand, Azizza's linear, precise, and focused recitations of her experiences contribute to what may be classified as a *marching forward* identity or motif. These interpretive sections of this chapter will be followed by a discussion of the implications of the findings from this study as well as recommendations for future research studies.

#### Emerging Themes of Black Women's Leadership Experiences

Before I discuss the six common themes that came up in an analysis of each woman's story, I want to mention two other themes that did not present as strongly but that were mentioned. Though it is not presented as a theme below, both women did mention at least once family commitments (marriage and kids) as having an impact on their career trajectories, in that each woman chose to either leave a promising position or decline a promising position, so that she could fulfill what she felt was her primary

commitment to her family (husband and children). This consideration for women of ways to balance all aspects of their lives – work, family, and community involvement – also presented in the leadership literature that I reviewed for this study as being both an advantage and a disadvantage for Black women leaders (Banner, 2003; Jean-Marie, 2006; Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

The concept of *time* presented as a strong theme for Alice but not as much for Azizza. Alice talked about things happening in her career “all in good time,” or at “the right time.” She mentioned tough personnel decision-making “when it was time” and the quandary of dealing with student expectations about “how much time” they have to complete their programs. Alice lamented that even though she had reached “a good time” in her career, now was also “a scary time,” since she had already reached the career goal she set for herself and “we don’t talk about what happens when you arrive,” Alice laughs. The following is an interpretation of the six themes which presented for both Alice and Azizza.

#### Emerging Theme #1: Mentors Can Be Your Experience

Mentoring has been defined in the educational leadership literature in a variety of ways, depending on the researcher’s epistemological stance and purposes for conducting the study. In my review of leadership literature dating back to the 1980s, a consistent claim has been made by Black women regarding the importance of mentors to their professional lives, as well as the limitations they have experienced within their careers due to a lack of these mentors. In their mixed-methods study, Allen et al (1995) used expectancy theory to explore the experiences of African American women school

administrators in New York State, and their findings showed that women had trouble finding *mentors*, as well as those they refer to with the lesser-used term *sponsors*.

While both are denoted as being “people who provide moral support and genuine opportunities for an administrator,” (p. 409), Allen et al. go a step further and delineate the basic distinction they were making between the two. In keeping with the more classic definition, they define a *mentor* as “someone who provides counsel and moral support for an administrator,” whereas a *sponsor* “is a person who can actually open the doors of opportunity and employment” (pp. 410-411). Further, they note that one person may serve in both roles, but not necessarily. In their article which explores varying definitions of mentoring that exist in the literature they reviewed as part of their argument for addressing the needs of Black women in graduate and professional programs, Patton and Harper (2003) traced the term *mentor* to Homer’s epic *The Odyssey* and Odysseus’ old friend, Mentor, whom he enlists to care for his son while he fights in the Trojan War. “Mentor was responsible for guiding, teaching, and offering counsel to young Telemachus in his father’s absence,” (pp. 67-68).

Alice and Azizza echoed the sentiment of other Black women in the literature; both women believe that mentors can play a pivotal role in the shaping of a woman’s professional future. However, Alice was able to point to specific individuals who served in a mentor and sponsor capacity at several critical junctures in her professional life. From the chance encounter in the cafeteria of the technical college to the guidance she received on how to put in for a position that would essentially be created for her, Alice counted numerous individuals – mostly White men and women – who were there for her,

encouraging her at the same time that they were paving the way and opening doors. Azizza, on the other hand, noted that while she certainly had an informal support network, she still lamented the lack of formal mentors who may have been able to prevent her from making the mistakes that come with lack of patience and experience by “*being my experience*”; to help her make the tough on-the-job decisions, and to support her when the decisions she made were unpopular. She expressed sincere regret that she did not make more of an effort to identify potential mentors for herself but also seemed somewhat resigned – she did what she thought she had to do for herself in those moments and that was to select specific individuals whom she wanted to emulate and she patterned herself after them.

Interestingly, one point of convergence in these women’s experiences of mentoring is that these Black women counted very few Black women among their mentors. Both women spoke in practical terms about this circumstance, and neither openly expressed surprise or dismay that this was the situation. Both women noted more than once that they had received guidance from people “who didn’t look like me,” but who obviously had a desire to help guide and counsel them in ways that would allow their visions for their futures to become reality. Another commonality within this single theme is that both women’s mothers served as their first role models, a slight variation on the idea of the mentor, but clearly a mentoring-type role nonetheless. Though it is somewhat ironic that the first Black woman to serve as their mentor likely may have been their last, this notion too has presented itself in the literature – the salience of Black

women's parents, especially their mothers, to their professional career aspirations and development.

What is inspiring too though is that both these women see themselves as role models for other women, and they have been there for other women – especially women of color – as mentors in ways that others often were not there for them. Alice was also optimistic about the possibilities for future Black women leaders, based at least in part on the ways that Black women could work to be there for each other:

So I think we have to learn how to get in the right pipelines...and keep the pipelines open for the younger women. [We also have to learn] how to sell ourselves, and I think as more Black women or women of color get into positions, and they begin to mentor and help others, then I think the future looks bright. The future's encouraging in both higher education and in the technical college system.

#### Emerging Theme #2: Faith and Spirituality – “The Grace of God”

Throughout, their stories were charged with an undercurrent of faith and spirituality. From their childhoods to their adulthoods, both women expressed the importance of their religious faith and spiritual beliefs in their ability to tackle the challenges of leadership as well as the challenges of leading healthy, well-balanced lives. And like the mentoring aspect, the literature that I reviewed also supported these women's views that faith and spirituality were essential components of their lives. Southern (1996) explored the spiritual journey of Black women in academe, noting the



ancestral roots of spirituality as being important to all African cultures. “Spiritually connected people realize their highest selves in becoming one with all humanity,” (p. 26).

Alice’s faith allowed her to push through the experience of being passed over for a promotion that was given to someone her supervisor “had a fondness for.” She shared that in retrospect she appreciated the mature and professional way that she conducted herself – recognizing that rather than focusing on some other person – “as a woman of faith” – she needed to “just take my eyes off of him (her competitor) and keep my eyes on the True Provider.” She was reminded of the parable from the Holy Bible of the man who had been hired for a particular service. When another man was hired and received the same pay for a different labor, the first man cried foul. She said it helped her to place her own situation in perspective, reminding her that she too had been hired to perform a certain job. Rather than thinking about the position that went to someone else, she remembered that she was in the position for which she had been initially hired. Alice also talked about it being “the grace of God” that helped her to be able to make it through tough, sometimes *bad* situations with students and colleagues. Believing in the power of prayer, she acknowledged receiving “some divine intervention on some creative ways to go in and do some things and to solve some things, that *only* through prayer...” Later, Alice joked about being with a group of prayer partners who helped her “pray...up and pray...out” some people who either no longer wanted to be where they were or who may have simply wanted to make things difficult for her.

Like Alice, Azizza was humbled at the recognition of the power that her position afforded her over the lives of those with whom she worked. She never took this for

granted. "...very often, I pray. I pray – especially if it's a decision that involves a person, a person's livelihood, a person's professional progression. Very often I'll pray over it." Azizza aligned her belief in her responsibility to others as being very much connected to her spirituality and the New Testament teachings of her Baptist church upbringing. Having mentioned that her father was a leader in the church when she was growing up, Azizza spoke of the guiding influence of her faith in her daily life. "...you do unto others as you would have them do unto you. ...we do have responsibility for [and] we *are* our brothers' keeper. And... we need to develop our talents and... can't take [our] good fortune for granted." The lessons she learned in her family and those she learned through the experience of daily living, "All that just kind of made a lot of sense to me, and just kind of coalesced for me." Azizza embraced the notion of servant leadership, which she defined as "being able to do things in a way that benefits others. I didn't have this term *then*, and I wasn't able necessarily to articulate it then as I am now. But the whole notion of servant leadership has always been very much a part of my life and my ideas about leadership, and what it is, and what its purposes are."

### Emerging Theme #3: "The Dynamics of Race"

More than any other theme that came up from these women's stories, the question of the role that race has played in the lives of these women brought about the most distinct differences in their personas as individual Black women and as educational leaders. Azizza's candid observation that "race has been a knife that has cut both ways for me" and Alice's open musings that "probably had I not been a woman of color, I would have been further up [on the administrative rung]" are both clear illustrations of

these women's recognition of the primal role that race has played in their professional lives. On the other hand, the clear dichotomies of these women's perceptions of the impact of race, their first-hand experiences of race and racism, even their responses to the ways that they actively embrace their own racial heritage, all contributed to my angst as I struggled just to classify these portions of their stories. I found myself vacillating between such phrases as "race consciousness" and "race matters" – finally settling on a phrase that both represents more fully aspects of certain events that unfolded in these women's personal and professional lives, as well as one that speaks to the complexities intrinsic to matters of race and racial identity more broadly in American society – the dynamics of race.

Alice's early experiences in her high school's integration and at the predominantly White universities that she attended made her admittedly comfortable with herself as well as with and around people of other races, particularly White people. It is that level of comfort that she has with herself and with others who are unlike herself that made Alice proudly disclaim the necessity of pronouncements of her race. "I was telling somebody, when you see me, you know I'm Black. So that makes that statement." Since she was "usually the only one" in a meeting or on a committee, Alice sort of figured out that they [Whites and Blacks] shared more in common than their differences. Alice speculated that some Black people may be "intimidated" by people "who don't look like [us]" and "that's why people shy away from certain things." She also candidly shared her belief in the unproductive nature of getting into the "support mode" with other African Americans on the job. Finding "bellyaching" on the job to be "depressing and

immobiliz[-ing],” Alice still acknowledged that there were occasions when she would go home and complain to her husband. “I mean I’ll go home and tell him [husband], “Oh! You won’t be-lieve!” And then after we’ve had that little thing – I’m back to work.” Even as Alice expressed regret that she had experienced instances where other people, women of color, did not view her advancement positively as a representation of them all, she did note that opportunities for leadership for Black women were “broadening”, at least, at her college. Almost immediately, however, she began qualifying that statement. Opportunities were good, but only *certain* ones. And *those* ones were not always handed out fairly. She noted that other women with less credentialing – not women of color – have higher rank than she has. She pointed out that the “dynamics of the state,” particularly the political landscape, made it unlikely that a Black woman would be named as president of a college that was not designated as a historically Black college. And until that threshold is crossed, “I don’t think we really see the potential of where we are and where we can be [as Black women leaders].”

Azizza was “*very much influenced*” by the civil rights movement. “I saw Black people as being very proactive, very strong, and very motivated to *do* something about the situation.” She did something too by demonstrating in her downtown when she got older. And while being raised on a military reservation made Azizza’s experiences with segregation somewhat different from those who did not live on a military base, race still mattered. For on the reservation, a person’s place within the classroom hierarchy had as much to do with the person’s race as with the father’s rank. This made her more aware of being treated differently based on that one identifying marker. Azizza also talked about

always being aware of what was going on with the struggle, since her parents were both politically active and she was a “news junkie.” And while television news did not present all aspects of the struggle, she was still able to keep up with what was taking place in the South specifically regarding the fight for civil rights:

And for me, the movement was natural. It just made a lot of sense to me that we needed to *fight* for equal treatment and equal access and I guess I believed early on that power concedes nothing without a struggle. And that it was incumbent upon us to do so. And so, I was as involved as I could be in the civil rights movement.

As it was with Alice being a part of the first integrated high school class in her town, Azizza experienced her own first when she arrived onto her college campus. For the first time, Black students were no longer being made to live in dormitories on the back of campus. This year they were being “more fully integrated...into the dormitories,” so that Azizza and a few other students were living on the front of the campus – and sharing the same bathrooms with White students. Aware that they were still being treated differently, however, Azizza and some fellow students were motivated to become even more politically involved. “...we considered ourselves Black nationalists, and we were tutoring, you know, working-class Black students and kids, elementary kids, and marching, and protesting.” Azizza fully embraced the historic notion of “race uplift” – believing fervently that she had to prove herself equal to others by doing exceedingly well at everything she attempted. But doing well was not for her sake alone: “I had a responsibility to give back to the community and to others.”

In contrast to the civil rights movement, the women's rights movement was not as significant for Azizza. "I've always thought of the women's movement as something that could certainly help empower me, but that I didn't have to *depend* on for empowerment. At least, not in the way that I thought I saw some women really *dependent* upon the movement for empowerment." While she was aware of the glass ceiling for women, Azizza still believed that for women of color of her generation, race was a stronger identifier than gender. And so, "the women's movement wasn't for us, because we're discriminated against more as African Americans than as women. And, over my lifetime, to some extent, I think that's been true."

Azizza acknowledged her "strong racial identity," saying "it has helped me professionally to know and embrace my racial and ancestral roots and to use that knowledge and my strong cultural identity as a prism through which I am able to appreciate other cultures, ideas, and world views." Azizza said that she realized that her race has defined her, both positively and negatively, but admitted that she had benefited from being "the spook who sat by the door," taking advantage of opportunities she might not have received otherwise. "I've never felt limited by race; I've just always felt – I've just always known that it was there – that it could be a factor. And my charge has been to do what I needed to do to overcome that, if in fact, it did exist." Azizza pondered the question of the future for Black women as leaders in the state, and then made swift work of using the past as a predictor for the future. She surmised that the chances of a Black woman becoming president of one of the technical colleges (other than the one historically Black technical college) were not promising – even though there are qualified

women to serve. Rather, she believes the trend will stay its present course – the practice of placing Black women in leadership roles on the “softer side” of higher education – student affairs and student services. “I think it is sometimes easier to view Black women (and men) in a role that does not exercise too strong an influence over what is often viewed as the most essential aspects of higher education: the curriculum and teaching and money and budget.”

Emerging Theme #4: “Team – Pulling All of the Strengths Together”

Using such sports analogies as “coaching,” “developing skills” and “rallying” their respective “teams,” both Alice and Azizza attempted to describe their leadership approach in more contemporary and democratic ways, and less in the traditional and bureaucratic ways that are not as revered in current organizational leadership literature (Parker, 2005). Alice readily admitted that in the beginning of her career, she was more focused on her individual success as a leader. “...when I was younger, I thought that everything was that serious. Everything had to be [laughs] perfect. Everything had to be...you as a leader...you had to be better than anybody else.” Over time, her commitment to “excellence” did not diminish; rather, it expanded to include those around her. “Then as you get older, you realize that, *team* is more about pulling all of the strengths together...rather than one individual having all the strengths. So I think, over time, I’ve learned that it’s less about me and more about...the union, as a whole.” She continued:

It’s now more of how you rally, get the people to work with you to get things done. So I tend to be more of [a] leader that help individuals see

the potential they have, and promote and develop that. I ... delegate and coach, as opposed to directing, you know. I feel that I tend to be more nurturing in nature as a leader, but yet firm in expectations, but then nurturing in allowing for error, and growth, and coaching.”

Alice gave examples of helping her team to develop skills, such as public speaking, by co-presenting with them until they were able to present on their own. She also encouraged her staff to think creatively and divergently in order to solve problems. And team members were required to attend two professional development activities each rating period; clearly, the primary reason was for the development of the employees. She stressed the importance of these activities for both experienced and inexperienced employees: “And I think it’s important that you get out, and you do things and you see and hear what’s going on, so you can stay abreast, and then you can contribute and give back, too. I think that’s very key, because as you get out, you meet people. Or you’ll be able to talk about something with someone else in another area that can help you grow and develop.”

For Azizza, her leadership approach is about “bringing others along with you. One of the things that I try to do is develop people who are on my team. I ask my folk, what is it that I can do to help you? How can I help you grow? What is it that you need?” Azizza saw it as her responsibility to provide her team with opportunities to develop and grow their potential. Whether it was figuring out ways for an individual to have more teaching opportunities or spending considerable money to send women for leadership development training, Azizza believed this to be a component of her work as a



leader. "...growing people and doing things that benefit people that work with me is what I refer to as servant leadership – as well as setting up situations and processes that benefit the masses, and in this case, students here at the college."

Azizza stressed the important having "good people working for me," but she also worked hard with her staff to bring them along. In her no-nonsense way, Azizza made it clear that she held certain expectations of those with whom she worked, especially as it pertained to serving students:

So I work with my staff on that a *lot* – and some of them *get* it, and some of them don't. But, I let them know that, if you're gonna be in student services here, you need to at least pretend like you're getting it. And as I'm walking around, I'm listening to what you're saying to students. And I'm going to know whether you get it. Students are going to come to me, and I'm going ask them: "What kind of experience did you have?" There are a lot of different ways for me to know or to try to know. But that's what we need to do.

Admitting that she sometimes tended to "try to do other people's work," Azizza recognized this tendency to micro-manage for what it was: the need to make changes or to work with an individual to ensure they have the skills necessary to do the job themselves.

#### Emerging Theme #5: "Put Yourself in the Way of an Opportunity"

Both women shared a healthy view of how they were able to make it to their respective places within their organizations. Noting that "where I am is where I needed

to be,” Alice admitted that most of what has happened in her career has simply happened – “there was no planning, no master plan, whatever. It was just a fluke that ended up working. So I don’t know if it was destiny or what. But I *did not have* a systematic career plan.” In all of the ups and downs of her career, Alice concluded that she experienced what she did *when* she did because “I believe what’s for me is for me.” And when she was passed over for that position? “...maybe it *wasn’t* my time. And maybe he *had* served his time. But if you keep at it, your time will come.”

Interestingly, Alice saw opportunities for Black women in senior-level administration but also framed these options in terms of Black women’s willingness to branch out in search of new and different opportunities:

But I think as Black women become more, more comfortable with who they are, and more comfortable assuming leadership responsibilities and aspire for it...I think we have to first apply...we have to get in the pipeline. I think we sometimes disqualify ourselves from positions because we look at a job description and we see two or three things we don’t do. I find that it’s the other way sometimes; you just find some people see two or three things that they *do* do, and they apply, and then they, you know, do that.

Like Alice, preparedness for opportunities on the horizon was critically important for Azizza. She believed that preparedness served as a counterbalance “...if there were in fact people who wanted to hold me back, or who did not want to give me opportunities because of my race or my gender.” Stressing how important it was “to put myself in the

way of a blessing – to be prepared for opportunities and to do what I needed to do in order to be worthy and capable of doing whatever it is that I wanted to do,” Azizza made it clear that working hard and dedicating oneself to excellence always paid off in the end. And while opportunities may not come when expected, “[they] *will* come if you’re doing what you need to do.”

#### Emerging Theme #6: Embracing Diversity

Similar to the theme of the “dynamics of race,” I found myself struggling somewhat to label a myriad of connotations and interpretations of what constitutes diversity as well as the ways in which these women viewed their role in affirming the importance of diversity in the workplace. Alice openly acknowledged the value of programs such as affirmative action for her workplace but also for herself. “And I think probably some of the opportunities I got may have been because we had affirmative action initiatives in most organizations at that time. So if you had a person who was capable, and they were a person of color, if – you know, you needed to diversify, then that was an opportunity that probably lended itself in the seventies to propel my leadership experience.”

Alice cited one of the advantages of being a woman of color as having the capability to be objectively open to others and their differences. As a result, Alice always looked for opportunities to diversify her college campus, starting with the importance of being on search and other committees. Alice stated that there was a clear interest in wanting to ensure as many diverse interests as possible were represented on these committees; of particular interest was the need to ensure that the college met its

commitment to seek out ways to increase diversity. She shared a powerful story of being part of a search committee, where the minority candidate was – in her view, at least – clearly the better candidate for the position. She explained that she had to use reverse psychology of sorts to convince the committee to select this woman of color rather than the other, less qualified applicant. Making them think that she agreed that both candidates were equally qualified for the position, Alice convinced the committee that this was “maybe an opportunity where you can diversity your office”:

And then that person was hired, but I think probably if I had not been in the room to even make that conversation ...I don't know whether the other people around the table were even aware of it? I don't know how to explain it really, but it wasn't until I brought it up...I don't think that they were aware of it...It wasn't until I brought it up that they...got it, you know. And so, so I think I've been in situations where I've been able to speak and direct and broaden some things, because of who I was and what I represented.

Given her background growing up on military reservations, Azizza noted that she has always known and been interested in “people who were not like me. And I've always been interested – and I think it comes out of my interest in diversity, but I've always wanted to know what other people's experiences are.” Acknowledging that some of her colleagues see her interest in diversity as merely reflective of her status as a member of a minority group, Azizza embraced this position then moved beyond it to the recognition

that any leader who chose to ignore the importance of diversity would not likely be a leader for long.

Stating her commitment to diversity initiatives, Azizza mentioned a different kind of diversity dilemma on her campus and the challenges associated with accommodating it:

A specific example would be that I have folk who profess to be *very* – to be Christian. And Christianity is the most important thing – their relationship with God is the most important thing in their lives. And then I see how they treat people. I see how they relate to certain things *like* diversity...their ideas about the amount of time that they should spend in the workplace and with what they do. Not understanding that their inability – that their reluctance to do a little bit more – really inhibits their opportunity to support other people.

Azizza stressed that it was worth the effort to try and get people to see that there were more positive and productive uses of their beliefs for the organization. She also highlighted the increasing diversity among the student body in terms of their curricular needs as a worthy challenge. From the students with master's degrees, coming back for re-tooling or to pursue a lifelong interest to students who come to the college straight out of high school, to those students who never foresaw a college education in their futures, all have a myriad of concerns and interests that the college must seek to address.

## Researcher's Interpretations of Black Women's Stories of Leadership

### Alice's Leadership Story – *Crossing Over*

There were many interesting dynamics that I found within Alice's leadership story. The way that Alice went about the telling of her story was reminiscent of some of the many wonderful storytellers in my own family. As a matter of fact, she even *sounded* like some of the storytellers in my family! While it could be somewhat pronounced at times (and made for interesting transcription moments), the roots of Alice's Southern dialect -- what some linguists refer to as Black English – did not in any way take away from her story. In a way, it added another layer of genuineness to Alice's entire persona. I am in no way making a judgment about Alice's speech; rather, I am acknowledging that Alice's language patterns seem reflective of her upbringing and her childhood home. This is not to be construed one way or the other. It simply signals the core of the person that is Alice.

Alice's story was representative of the *conversational narrative style* that Etter-Lewis (1993) defines as one which “occurs when a narrator reconstructs past conversations verbatim. A narrator modifies voice, tone, and/or pitch in order to represent different speakers and different emotions. She used conversation as a means of illustrating an idea or event” (p. 180). Another familiar element to Alice's storytelling was that she told complete stories, providing just enough detail on the characters in the story, the setting, and the mood to keep the listener riveted. She paced the action of each recounting, so that the plot unfolded quickly enough that the listener wanted to know how it all ended up, but not without the requisite pauses that were designed to build a

climactic sense of suspense. What was helpful about this method of storytelling was that it kept me focused on the unfolding story, even as those stories were interwoven with others.

Alice's modus operandi for each mini-story or vignette was the same – she would begin by making it clear that she was responding to one of the guiding research questions. She might in fact even read the question from the protocol before responding. In the event that she would jump ahead of herself in the telling of the story – always aware of her audience – Alice would backtrack and begin again, picking up the story in a place so that the telling made sense to the listener. What I learned from this habit of hers was that Alice genuinely cares about people – she cared about whether the researcher was able to keep up with the winding roads that she often traveled while telling one of her stories. This also demonstrates Alice's overall caring nature, which came through clearly and honestly in the telling of her story.

There were many other lessons that I learned from Alice's experience – but if I had to encapsulate what I learned from Alice's leadership story into a single overarching lesson, it would be that it is important for a leader to be a person who recognizes the inherent worth in humanity first and foremost – all other identifying markers, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, etc. – all those markers, though important, are not as important as being the type of leader who is appreciative of and values all those with whom she or he works and interacts. Almost from the beginning of her story, it became clear that Alice believed in the intrinsic value, the merits of every individual regardless of color or stripe. When she talked about her junior high school

teacher, Mrs. Wilson, serving as a role model to her because of her intelligence, her professionalism, her enunciation and her neatness, it was clear that Alice valued this individual for whom she was. She also valued her for the example that Mrs. Wilson, “[who] just always impressed me as being someone so different from everybody,” set for how she wanted to live her own life.

Although Alice grew up in a “very small, rural town” that was pretty much as segregated as the school system, given that “I don’t know where those (White) kids had been, ‘cause we live in a small town, and I’d never even seen these other White kids that were my age,” I did not come away from her telling of those childhood days feeling that she was in any way resentful of the circumstances of her coming up. She did remark that the educational system was poor overall, but there was a fifth grade teacher as well as Mrs. Wilson in junior high school to help compensate for that. No, rather than resentment – though this may be too harsh a word – there was a level of acceptance in her voice of those circumstances, an implicit understanding that this was how things had to be *for now*, but that things would certainly improve in time. Because I am about 14 years younger than Alice, I don’t know first-hand what it was like to grow up during the times when schools were segregated. Because I am the youngest of twelve children – the first having been born in 1945, however – I am quite familiar with the stories of what those times were like for many Black people in the state of South Carolina. Considering some of the stories that I still remember hearing on Sunday evenings after supper, at times, it was slightly uncomfortable to hear how accepting Alice was of the



circumstances of her coming up. But I had to listen, and I had to listen openly if I wanted to learn how Alice's growing up years shaped the leader she would ultimately become.

And it was through that careful listening that I heard that Alice was so accepting of her circumstances, because she didn't allow her circumstances to define the person that she was. She knew that she was the daughter of two hard-working individuals – a mother who went as far as 11<sup>th</sup> grade in high school and a father who stopped school after the sixth grade because “he was a worker.” As the first-born, she knew that she was responsible for her siblings and for setting the bar in terms of what she achieved. And she was a leader in her high school, which became integrated her freshman year, in more ways than one. Alice talked about being a leader in clubs and organizations, and being a cheerleader and an honor student. She talked especially about what it was like during that first year that the high school was integrated, noting her role as being someone who “always kinda been about trying to bring it together.” In fact, she was the first Black person to cross over to the other side of the classroom – which now had more White kids than Black kids – and just start talking to a person who wasn't Black. Alice did not glaze over the fact this was a rough first year for everyone involved; however, by the time they graduated, things were much better than when they all started.

That ability to cross over gulfs in search of common humanity stayed with Alice as she made her transition to college. This transition was not a smooth one, however. After becoming a teenaged mother during her junior year of high school, Alice still managed to graduate high school with the unwavering support of her mother. Because her mother would not give up on her, Alice did not give up on herself. Instead, she ended

up “doing some things differently.” One of those things was choosing to go to work after graduating from high school. Alice did not go into detail about the decision to go to work rather than to college. I do not know whether she was pressured by her parents or others to get a job so that she could help support her child, or whether she had doubts about whether she could attend college *and* take care of a baby at the same time. I did not ask her about this. I just accepted that she worked at a local mill after graduation, and that it was a chance encounter one evening in the cafeteria of an area two-year college with a man “who didn’t look like me,” that literally changed Alice’s life. Because she accepted this person as he presented himself – as someone who cared about why this person was sitting in a cafeteria and waiting for her friends who were clearly the same age as she – rather than being there on campus taking classes herself, Alice’s future would become different than that vision she had seen of herself. It would no longer be that vision she saw on “that night it looked like 8:00 was never gonna come. And I looked down that row of the mill, and I saw those older women there, and I thought, “God, I don’t think I want to do this ‘til I’m this age.”

Throughout Alice’s years at the mostly White two-year college and then at a predominantly White four-year university, Alice found herself having some very similar experiences. In many instances, “[persons] who did not look like me” were being placed in Alice’s life, persons – teachers, counselors, even department chairs – who “saw something in me” would be there, encouraging and cheering Alice on. Though she does not make this clearly obvious point, it goes without saying that these persons in her life, Alice’s mentors, were able to cross over, too. They were able to see beyond Alice’s skin

color, to see beyond the humble circumstances of her birth, to see beyond the fact that she was an unwed mother. They were able to see Alice's common humanity, and just as importantly, to see a future for Alice that she may not have been able to see as clearly for herself at those critical junctures in her life. But they went one step further. Beyond simply *telling* Alice what she had the possibility of becoming, these persons worked to make sure that Alice's possibilities *became* reality. More than once, someone stepped up and became that experience for her – the experience of knowing what graduate degree program to pursue and where; the experience of knowing that what *looks* like a secure position (that state job) may not be the best option for her over the long term; the experience of knowing that “sometimes you just gotta put the time in.” All those things “came with somebody else who was helping me, telling me what to do, and encouraging me, and...paving the way for me.” It was those persons being her experiences – from her childhood to the integration of her high school, through the completion of her graduate degrees – it was the common humanity of those persons who helped shape Alice into the leader she has become.

#### Alice's Story Viewed through CRT Lens

From a critical race theoretical perspective, Alice's leadership stories exemplified the importance of the use and acceptance of experiential knowledge of people of color as an authentic way to inform social science research. As a counter-story to the traditional leadership discourse, Alice's stories illustrate the powerful ways that individual stories can add depth and breadth to the literature in ways that may otherwise not be considered. Alice's ability to see beyond color to one's humanity speaks to the counter story reflected

in her leadership development, which started in some of the earliest experiences of her youth and then continued over into her teen years. As early as in high school, Alice was able to cross boundaries and bridge distances in an effort to bring people of different racial backgrounds together. This ran counter to her own upbringing in a poor, rural town that was so segregated, she “didn’t know where those White kids” who joined her newly integrated high school had been since she couldn’t recall ever seeing them around the town. Alice did not let the social conditions of the place where she lived dictate what would become of her own life. Instead, through one chance meeting on a two-year college campus, she was set on the path her life was inevitably supposed to take. It was in that moment that Alice started her own journey, facilitated by a number of other-raced individuals who “saw something in [her]” and set out to ensure that “something” came to fruition.

#### Alice’s Story Viewed through BFT Lens

I will explicate Alice’s stories of leadership based on applicable aspects of the knowledge claims made according to Afrocentric or Black feminist thought (Collins, 1989, 2009). First, wisdom or mother wit is critical to a Black woman’s survival. This was critically important for Alice as her mother shared the wisdom of her own experiences and told Alice that though she had had a child out of wedlock, she did not need to make two mistakes instead of just the one. Her mother’s strong support of her served as the foundation for all that Alice was then able to do later in her educational and professional lives. Second, concrete experience is critically important as a criterion of meaning. In other words, those who have lived through an experience are more

believable or credible than those who have only read or thought about them. The experience of working in the mill taught Alice in the way that nothing else could that, at least for her, the path to a better and more fulfilling work and rest of her life rested in the acquisition of as much education as she could get.

Third, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is important because connectedness through dialoguing (as opposed to separation) is essential in the knowledge-validation process. Alice demonstrated this aspect throughout her series of leadership stories within stories, in which she effectively made use of all aspects of storytelling – including dialoguing – in telling stories illustrative of specific aspects of her leadership experiences. Fourth, the ethic of caring or “talking with the heart” suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions and empathy are central to process. Personal expressiveness is rooted in the belief that each individual is a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy. Emotions are appropriate in dialogues, as they indicate the speaker’s belief in the validity of the claim. And the individual needs to possess a capacity for empathy. Throughout her stories, Alice expressed a sincere ability to not only “talk with the heart” but “lead with the heart.” She exhibited this aspect in the many instances where she illustrated her method of coaching and developing her co-workers’ abilities.

Finally, there is an ethic of personal accountability, in that people should hold personal positions on issues and argue their validity. Alice demonstrated this aspect in her pointed explication of the reason she does not hold a more senior-level position with her institution. And it is not from want of educational and practical preparation or

supplemental leadership development forums; rather, Alice suggests that the racially-politicized history of the South still looms large even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. And, from her perspective, it is this ubiquitous heritage that dooms Black women in terms of their prospects for heading up two-year colleges, unless they are historically Black institutions. Alice goes further to hold herself accountable for the career decisions she has made, indicating that she turned down opportunities for advancement after considering the impact on her entire family. And regarding whether Black women or other raced women have applied for presidential posts, she indicates that she is not certain. However, she does know from her attendance at national conferences that fewer women are expressing interest in the top posts. She maintains, though, that the best prospects for a Black woman to serve at the helm of one of these institutions would likely be if the woman were brought in from another state.

#### Alice's Story from Spiritually-Based Servant and Postheroic Perspectives

Based on her stories, I would classify Alice as a strong spiritually-based servant leader and a developing postheroic leader. First of all, service to followers is the primary the primary responsibility of the servant leader. And Alice shared that she relies on her abiding faith and spiritual beliefs to help her make some of the most difficult decisions. Alice shared many stories of her efforts to attend to the needs of her followers by nurturing, defending, and empowering them. She shared, for example, how she would coach her staffers through presentations and other experiences of learning new skills if doing so put them more at ease. And rather than resenting employees' requests to attend conferences and other professional development opportunities, Alice requires attendance

at two such functions as part of their annual evaluation. In explaining this, Alice did not indicate that employees' attendance was always expected to provide some type of return to the division; instead, her hope was that the staff member would make connections, gather information, be exposed to new trends that may or may not impact his or her work responsibilities but that would possibly prove beneficial for their personal and professional growth.

Alice also exhibited some of the characteristics associated with postheroic leadership when she acknowledged that there are "no big I's and little I's" in her division. Everyone works together, pulling his or her own weight – as well as someone else's. Ironically, it was this level of cooperation and collaboration that allowed a part-time employee to get away with doing almost no work as long as he did. Noting that it is uncharacteristic of her team to gripe and moan, Alice stated that it wasn't until morale was almost affected that she learned the employee was not doing his fair share – or any share of his work. That situation was resolved speedily. Leadership is distributed and shared within the organization at all levels. In addition, individual staff members are encouraged to seek out opportunities to improve and develop their leadership skills.

#### Azizza's Leadership Story – *Marching Forward*

Though they were literally different as night and day, Azizza's story was no less captivating. What was fascinatingly different about this interview is that I had to remain far more attentive and focused on Azizza's words than I had with Alice's (even with some of the challenges of Alice's dialect). Given her communications background, I had no trouble understanding what Azizza was saying. In fact, when she returned her

interview transcript to me – heavily marked up – I was instructed to correct any contracted words (e.g., gotta, gonna, kinda) and told to remove all the ums, ahs, and uhs that she might’ve missed the first time through! I was able to assess within minutes of meeting Azizza that she was a no-nonsense, take charge kind of person. Her interview did not disavow me of this opinion. And given that I am similarly disposed, I had no problem with this. What it took only about ten minutes into the interview for me to discover was that I would have to be vigilantly aware of the fact that I was interviewing someone who was *not* one of my older siblings! Older than Alice by nearly a decade, Azizza is in the same age range as some of my oldest sisters and brothers. And because of the strong influence that has been exerted on me by my oldest sisters and brothers – especially the three oldest children – it required a lot of effort on my part to hear some of Azizza’s stories and recognize them as *her* stories rather than stories I had grown up listening to on Sunday evenings after supper.

And just like many of those Sunday evening talks around our pot-bellied, cast iron, wood-burning heater – when everyone clamored for the chance to share their “Do you remember when?” stories, or just simply to be heard over everyone else – Azizza’s re-telling of her leadership story was just as moving, just as evocatively honest and refreshing in its raw candor. But it was more than her leadership story, though that was clearly the purpose of her storytelling. It was her *life history*. And in many ways, it was *American history*. Listening to Azizza’s story, I was transported back to my family’s stories of the days of the civil rights movement. I was remembering what I had heard of “the struggle,” and the senseless brutality of still-remembered events like the Orangeburg



Massacre. Listening to her tell her story in her strongly-assured, proud Black woman's voice, I was reminded of what it was to be a poor, Black girl growing up in our modest clapboard house on tenanted land in the rural countryside of an even more rural small town – where class divisions among Black people in this college town were steep, almost insurmountable.

I remembered what it was to hear my parents, both of whom were born in the 1920s, talk about what it was like to live through Jim Crow. I remembered their stories of separate water fountains, Whites-only signs, and not being able to go and be served at the counter of what I knew to be Ferse's 5 & 10. It was the very 5 & 10 that *I* always remembered going to the very back of where the lunch counter was located, as well as a walk-up window for folks to cash their paychecks, get money orders, and pay their telephone bills. I remembered walking up to that very counter and ordering the absolutely best, hot and crispy crinkled French fries I'd ever had – the kind that begged to be drenched in ketchup. But I remembered other, less pleasant things, too. I remembered what it was like to take a ride in the back of the boss man's farm truck, to head out to the fields for a day of picking whatever crop was ready for harvest – peanuts, corn, butterbeans, Crowder peas, or the tiny little green snap peas that appealed to so many of the wealthy White housewives who lived on Moss Hike – an exclusive enclave located near the center of town, where stately old oak trees lined the edges of the boulevard, greying moss arrayed around their shoulders like mink stoles. The day of field work started early in the morning, when the misty dew still clung thickly to the bunched plants – dragging them to the fresh earth below. By the time we were ready to knock off work

for the day, the glistening dew was a long-ago memory – it had been replaced instead by a blazing hot sun that pounded mercilessly on our backs, mocking us as we labored to gather up our white five-gallon buckets or our croaker sacks and head for the cool of a shade tree.

Azizza’s story brought to mind so many other stories that I had heard throughout my growing up years, as my family sought to make sure that the “baby” of the family understood the sacrifices that had been made by others both known and unknown to me. My family believed that it was vitally important that I knew what came before so that I might have a deeper appreciation of the opportunities I had and would be given, such as being the first in my family to attend Clemson University instead of a historically Black college or a two-year technical college like my other sisters had. Shaking off those long-ago memories, I focused again on Azizza’s own stories and how best I could articulate what her earliest experiences represented for her and for the leader she would one day become.

As I traveled back to my home the day after I completed the interview with Azizza, I played back the digital recording once and then once more at home before I actually started the transcription phase. The reason I did this was so that I would be able to match what I heard on the recorder with what I was still able to see so vividly in my mind. Doing this allowed me to bring more details to the actual transcript, observational details that might have been missed had I waited any longer. Based on repeated readings of the interview transcript, coupled with a review of Azizza’s bulky curriculum vita, I formed an overall impression of Azizza as a person and a leader. Then came the

daunting task of how best to express my interpretations of her leadership experiences based only on my slightly longer than two hours interview; her words and body language throughout the interview; her brief interaction with her receptionist; and her vita. The metaphorical phrase that best captures the essence of Azizza is that of a leader who is marching ever forward, undaunted and unstoppable.

Azizza's story was representative of the *unified narrative style* that Etter-Lewis (1993) defined as one which "contains words and phrases that are all related to a central topic or idea. Contiguous parts of the narrative fit together as a whole" (p. 178).

Azizza's leadership development hinges on those early years with her parents and younger siblings growing up on the "military reservation." By the time she got to the predominantly female and White college that she attended as an undergraduate, she had already laid claim to her identity as someone more likely to do the leading than to be led. Even with the bumps she would eventually experience during the early stages of her professional career, Azizza managed to smooth them over, even if she was not able to totally obliterate them. Azizza's image of herself as a leader took shape in the most apt of places. But I believe that more than the fact that there was an established leadership hierarchy with rules and regulations governing the soldiers' lives as well as the lives of their families, there was something about growing up on the military reservation – somewhat but not completely cloistered from the outside world – that contributed early on to Azizza's strong sense of self. Though she was not completely removed from sometimes differential treatment based on her race – "I won't say there was *no* segregation – but there was *less* segregation" – it was clear that growing up on a military

reservation provided a sense of closeness, security, and structure for Azizza and her family, and I believe that this was part of the reason why Azizza was able to easily embrace what would eventually be her calling. She noted in fact, that “It never bothered me to kind of be in charge.”

Because her father was a “senior enlisted man” in the US Army, it would not be a stretch to imagine that Azizza likely inherited more than her ramrod posture and clipped, precise manners of speech and decorum from her father. He was a man whom she admired for his leadership ability and his position on the military reservation as a man of character whom other male soldiers looked up to and sought for “support and input” on a myriad of challenges they faced. She admired his selfless commitment to his own family, leaving college after only a semester so that he could go to work and support his family when his father died. She revered his ability to gauge the quality of a person in a matter of minutes, a quality she admitted she also possessed, though to a lesser degree. And she undoubtedly venerated his staunch refusal to allow his children to be treated as less than others by patronizing any area business, such as movie theaters, that would enforce segregated seating: “[He] wasn’t going to have that.”

It would be Azizza’s college-educated mother, one in a long line of strong Black women relatives, who instilled other traits of leadership and character in her. Azizza’s mother worked full time and raised her family, including her sister’s child when her sister died. She gave Azizza a lot of her early opportunities to be a leader by putting her in charge of the children when they arrived home from school ahead of their parents. Through her own words as well as her deeds, Azizza’s mother modeled the type of

woman she hoped her daughter would become. A woman who had watched the example of her own mother (Azizza's grandmother) – who left her husband “because he was not a good husband, he wasn't a good father” – Azizza's mother knew what strength, what resilience women had within them if they would only tap into it. It was her mother, for instance, who admonished Azizza that she “Don't depend on a man to buy your Kotex.” It was that sort of “strong teaching” that taught Azizza the importance of being a woman who was capable of taking care of herself, “because...if you're *that* dependent, then you are *really* in trouble!”

As importantly, though, it was also her mother who instilled those “middle-class values” in her that *she* had inherited from her own mother – who, along with all five of her daughters – worked cleaning the homes of “rich, White folk.” These “middle-class values” placed a value on material things and the accumulation of material things. In order to acquire these material things, there was a strong work ethic that came along with the desire to possess the finer things – Camay soap, for one, which they always had in their own home “because that's what rich White folk had.” Azizza's mother inculcated in her the importance of possessing a particular way of thinking about and moving about in the world:

All of us always knew that we would go to college. There was never any question. And there was a way that you did things and a way that you *perceived* things. I came to realize how you handle money, the importance of material things, relationships with people that were very much kind of based in middle-class values.

These values that Azizza's mother appropriated and then claimed for her very own would play a significant role throughout Azizza's life, and especially in the lives of others she with whom she came in contact on the grounds of her community college. In particular, she noted that she would often take the opportunity to talk to young people who were first-generation college students about the importance of acquiring these "middle-class values" even if they didn't have them naturally. Values such as learning the importance of being on time, following through on things they say they are going to do, working hard, and being responsible – no matter what their social class of origin – these values would help propel these young people upward and forward throughout their lives.

#### Azizza's Story Viewed through CRT and BFT Theoretical Lenses

From a critical race theoretical (CRT) perspective, Azizza's leadership stories exemplify the importance of the use of experiential knowledge as credible sources within social science research (Delgado, 1989). Azizza's story of how she became a leader is in itself a counter story to the dominant narrative of the ways that Black girls raised in the South during the civil rights movement were brought up. While the dominant narrative tends to focus on the limitations placed on the lives of Black folk during the time of Jim Crow segregation, Azizza's story of coming up on a "military reservation," though it most certainly shared some of those aspects – there was *less* not *no* segregation – also served as the backdrop for a decidedly different sort of upbringing. For it was on the military reservation, where there were no separate water fountains, or movie houses or buses in which she would need either to seat in the balcony and at the back of, that Azizza started to form her own narrative and in so doing also created her own voice. As

the first-born, Azizza grew up strong and proud of her racial heritage and cultural roots, the Black people who were engaged in the struggle for their civil rights, and most especially her family, and her ability to care for herself and her younger siblings and her cousin while her parents worked. She was secure in the love of her parents – her college-educated, “take-charge” mother whose own mother reared her on the appropriated middle-class values of the “rich, White folk” whose houses she cleaned. And she was guided by the firm hand of her senior enlisted Army officer father – a leader to far more than just those in his household and church – who was able to judge accurately others’ character within minutes of meeting them, and from whom other men sought counsel regarding domestic issues and matters of childrearing.

Unquestionably, Azizza’s parents established early and often that Azizza had both the will and the ability to become whatever she wanted to be – regardless of society’s attempts to limit the range of her imaginings. Hence, her parents did not hinder her from exercising her right to march in the downtown civil rights demonstrations, ostensibly acknowledging the role she too needed to play in Black people’s liberation. Nor was she sheltered from television broadcasts of demonstrations and dangerous stand-offs happening across the country. Further, she engaged in discussions about the movement with her parents and family friends. Because she was allowed to develop to her full potential as a person, rather than just as a woman, Azizza knew no limits to what she was capable of accomplishing.

Consequently, Azizza excelled at nearly everything she attempted – in high school and in the predominantly White college and graduate school she attended – she led

rather than followed, persevered rather than floundered, and righted herself even as she stumbled as she attempted to transition herself from one position with “high status” to another. She discovered that her options were somewhat limited in part by society’s gendered expectations of women leaving their careers in order that their husbands may further their own careers. The opposite scenario remains a relatively obscure one. As Azizza recovered her professional footing by acquiring a new job that similarly positioned her to the high status one that she had had to leave behind, her confidence in her abilities grew anew. She was reminded that while race would sometimes serve as a barrier, sometimes as a portal – she still possessed the requisite skill, drive, and preparation to more than meet the challenges that she would undoubtedly continue to face as a Black woman leader.

CRT and BFT both emphasize the importance of the experiential knowledge of people of color, as well as BFT’s focus on the self-defined standpoints of Black women and their experiences. From a BFT perspective, Azizza’s leadership story is a representation of what Black women are and can become when they embrace themselves and define themselves according to their own ways of knowing and experiencing reality (Collins, 2009). I will explicate Azizza’s stories of leadership based on applicable aspects of the knowledge claims made according to Afrocentric or Black feminist thought (Collins, 1989, 2009). First, wisdom or mother wit is critical to a Black woman’s survival. Azizza’s mother made sure that she equipped her daughter with life lessons that would sustain her throughout her life. One of the most important was to never be so dependent on a man that you need him to secure the essential necessities of a woman’s



life; that level of dependence could be crippling. Second, concrete experience is critically important as a criterion of meaning. In other words, those who have lived through an experience are more believable or credible than those who have only read or thought about them. This is illustrated by Azizza's participation in civil rights demonstrations as well as her opportunity to see the conditions of Black South Africans firsthand. From both those rich experiences she was able to draw and apply a depth of meaning not only to her own life but also to ways that she could make others' lives better.

Third, the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims is important because connectedness through dialoguing (as opposed to separation) is essential in the knowledge-validation process. Azizza illustrated this dynamic through the conversation that she had with her three devoutly Christian staff members. She attempted through conversations with them to show how their professions of their deep and abiding faiths were not being carried over into their actual work practices, and creating a disruptive dissonance within their work spaces. Fourth, the ethic of caring or "talking with the heart" suggests that personal expressiveness, emotions and empathy are central to process. Personal expressiveness is rooted in the belief that each individual is a unique expression of a common spirit, power, or energy. Emotions are appropriate in dialogues, as they indicate the speaker's belief in the validity of the claim. The individual also needs to possess a capacity for empathy. Azizza demonstrated these claims to knowledge through her sharing of the story of the student with the three psychiatric diagnoses who was still able to "put one foot in front of the other," and persevere toward his degree under extremely challenging circumstances.

And finally, there is the ethic of personal accountability, in that people should hold personal positions on issues and argue their validity. Azizza illustrated this aspect through her condemnation of a powerfully uninformed state legislature that she believes is a handicap to the very educational system over which it lords so much control. She provided sufficient evidence to support the validity of her position, including the apparent unawareness of the state legislature that most students in four-year colleges get there through two-year colleges since they need the additional academic preparation their high school experiences did not provide. Consequently, all educational systems within the state (secondary, two-year, and four-year) need sufficient resources to meet the challenge of the new student demographic that they each serve.

#### Azizza's Story from Transformational and Servant Leadership Perspectives

Based on her stories and observations of brief interactions with a staff member, Azizza presents as a charismatic transformational and spiritual servant leader who relies heavily on traditional bureaucratic management behaviors in her interactions with her staff. The charismatic aspect of transformational leadership that applies to Azizza focuses on her personality traits, including her dominance, self-confidence, strong sense of her own moral values, and her strong desire to influence others (Northouse, 2004). Because of this desire to influence her followers, Azizza serves as a strong role model for the beliefs and values that she wants her staffers to adopt and appears competent to her followers. Also, Azizza seeks to transform and motivate her followers by making them more aware of task outcomes. An example of Azizza's transformational aspects would be her implementation of student learning outcomes within her student services division.

This paradigmatic shift in thinking (that students who seek services can actually be *educated* in the process) required significant incentives for motivating staff members to think of their jobs in an entirely new way. And those staffers who were slow to come around to the new way of thinking knew they needed to “act like they get it,” if they wanted to remain in the student services area.

Azizza embraces some of the more traditional, bureaucratic style aspects of leadership (manager v. leader/with strong task orientation), and while I think that she does attempt to be participative/democratic, the buck clearly starts and stops with her. She admitted that she believes the best leaders are those with good visionary *and* managerial skills. And although she is willing to receive input from her staff, there is a limit to just how much input she needs in order to make a decision, and when she has received enough, she will make this clear. Though it did not present as strongly as the charismatic transformational and traditional bureaucratic aspects did, Azizza’s discussion of her spiritual upbringing and belief in being her brother’s keeper rang true in her description of herself as a student advocate and servant leader who would intercede on her students’ behalf nearly every time they asked. Again, though, bureaucratically she stated that if her staff did not want her to give in to a student’s appeal, then they needed to make sure that they took care of it themselves, and not let the student reach her.

#### Implications of Research Findings

Practically everything about living life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is fluid, fast, constantly changing. The relics of old – print versions of books, TV Guide, newspapers, telephones that were used for actual *talking* as opposed to the once unheard of *texting* – these

contrivances have all virtually gone the way of the Model T, rotary phones with their requisite party lines, \$1.00 a gallon gasoline – and the space shuttle. While there are clear benefits of living during a time when it is possible to communicate with nearly anyone around the entire world at any time and with only a few clicks on a keyboard within the relative obscurity of our own living rooms, there is a less exciting prospect looming in our collective futures. In our increasingly digital, traveling faster than the speed of light age, it almost seems un-natural to talk about the importance of documenting the *now*. We are being propelled forward into our futures at such a pace that the thought of taking the time to slow down and record our present – tomorrow’s generations past – no longer seems to matter quite as much. The folly in such thinking should be fairly obvious but is still worth a mention.

If nothing else is taken away from the stories of two Black women leaders’ experiences within two-year colleges in the Southeast, the one take-away should be that their lives serve as a reminder of times and circumstances present *and* past. Most of tomorrow’s educational leaders will only have read about the civil rights movement. Azizza lived during and was a part of the civil rights movement. And while the civil rights movement most assuredly is included in every American history textbook, the oral renderings of a person who actually experienced this period in our history are becoming scarce. Not to mention that the articulation of these Southern Black women’s standpoints came through the perspective of a Southern Black woman novice researcher. Critical race theory highlights the importance of storytelling and counter-stories as ways to present counter-narratives to dominant ideologies which tend to marginalize other groups

as ways for majority groups to maintain unearned privilege acquired through their oppression of these groups (Delgado, 1989; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Several important implications of this study and its findings are the authentication of the experiences of these two Black women who are leaders in two-year colleges as being qualitatively different, based at least in part on their race and less so on their gender; and the persistence of negative and oppressive controlling images of Black women within American society (Collins, 2009) which contribute to these Black women's resulting social locations within their institutions. Another is that the experiences of these two Black women leaders cannot be usurped or used in ways that will deny them their right to speak up for themselves – so that they stand present and accounted for.

#### Recommendations for Future Research Studies and Other Projects

One of the reasons I decided to take on this research project was because I discovered during my program that the experiences of Black women leaders in the two-year colleges remain dismally underrepresented within the educational leadership literature. The importance of other narrative research studies of Black women leaders in the community college system cannot be overstated, particularly the need to reassess the number of Black women who are classified as leaders on their college campuses or whose experiences deserve mention in the literature as representative of the myriad forms that leadership can take within these colleges. Efforts must be made to capture the experiences of Black women at all levels of their institutions – not just those at the executive-level – although studies of these women remain relatively small. The literature

is replete with anecdotes of Black women's experiences being lumped together with those of other women of color, or being subsumed under White women's leadership experiences or even the experiences of Black men. Statistical data seldom parse out the numbers of Black women administrators from Black men administrators, given the significantly small pool of these administrators combined. Flowers and Moore (2008) observed that the lack of a critical mass of African American faculty and staff is at least partially to blame for the relative lack of administrative diversity in both two-year and four-year colleges. There is the distinct possibility that Black women may actually even be *more* underrepresented in the numbers, simply based on job or position descriptions that may not accurately reflect what duties and responsibilities these women have. More studies of the lives of these women may prompt a reclassification or redefining of what it means to be a leader and who is in fact a leader.

Specifically, I am thinking about the Black women who serve in staff and supporting roles within the technical colleges – mostly as administrative assistants – who fought for and claimed the right to move from the fields to the mills to clerical positions in the colleges and schools – with a fervor equal to those Black women who fight today for opportunities to lead these colleges and schools. I have personally been in rooms when these women were often referred to anecdotally by their supervisors and other administrators as the lifeblood of the institution, the engine which makes the whole system run. If that is indeed the case, then a better understanding of these women's roles within organizations may allow researchers to develop deeper insights into more effective ways institutions may be run. Perhaps an examination of these women's work

experiences within the framework of postheroic leadership theory (Fletcher, 2004) may shed light on the “shared and distributed” nature of 21<sup>st</sup> century leadership (p. 648).

These women’s stories of struggle and triumph also need to be presented as they provided the impetus for the strivings of today’s generation of Black women leaders. Equally important are the stories of women who have been relegated to what Azizza referred to as “the softer side of education” – student services and student affairs. The numbers assuredly bear out the fact that Black women are overrepresented in this division of the community college, where they work predominantly to serve as the “face” of the college in admissions and orientation, perform clerical duties in records and registration, and often perform the roles of “modern-day domestic worker” and “caretaker” that Southern (1996) documents to the near exclusion of their formal administrative roles and requisite duties and responsibilities, regardless of their job titles and descriptions.

Because the stories of these women’s experiences were examined in part through the use of CRT, this study qualifies as a CRT project. Therefore, according to Dixson & Rousseau (2005), a social activism or social justice component should be included. I believe that a practical recommendation which could be made based on this study and after subsequent research studies is that an ad-hoc committee be created at the technical college systems office level. This committee would be charged with looking at the numbers of Black women in leadership positions within all of the individual colleges and relative to their proportions in terms of total student population, faculty, staff, etc. Colleges whose ratios are significantly off would then have administrative leadership diversity plans created with the requisite benchmarks, timelines, etc., for improvement.

This program could be expanded to include other people of color. Putting such a program at the systems office level would demonstrate the importance of the program and the commitment on behalf of the system itself to recognize a problem (lack of administrative diversity) and be a part of the solution (increasing administrative diversity). The committee should also explore the creation -- at the systems level -- of a mentoring program that is a part of its higher education leadership certificate program, whereby future leaders are paired with current ones in an effort to bridge the distance for them.

In order to justify the development of a committee to examine the state of administrative leadership diversity at all levels of the technical college system, additional studies would need to be undertaken, which would assess the numbers and qualitative experiences of Black women leaders. In addition, more research studies – quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods viewed through such theoretical frameworks as Black feminist theory and critical race theory may allow researchers to begin to tap into the underlying assumptions about Black women’s relative worth to institutions and how stereotypical and controlling images of Black women within American society (Collins, 2009) feed into the restrictive narrative of what Black women’s roles can and should be within these institutions. It is only through an understanding of these women’s experiences from their perspective that substantive social justice and societal change can be effected.



## Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the researcher's analyzes and interpretations of the participants' stories of leadership – both as a series of several themes of leadership that were common to each woman's experiences – as well as an interpretation of the innate differences in these women's stories. The researcher's interpretation of these differences was developed through the lessons she personally took from their experiences, which were framed by her own culture, upbringing, and family and collective histories. Further, the researcher offered up additional elucidation of the leadership stories, both through the theoretical perspectives which framed the research study as well as the leadership theories which have been applied to Black women leaders within the extant educational leadership literature. These series of interpretations were followed by a discussion of some of the implications of the study's findings, including the urgent need to record and document the stories of underrepresented educational leaders in these technological times of warp speed and the endless search for the next great or the next best. Finally, the chapter concluded with a series of recommendations for future meta-studies of Black women educational leaders at all levels within individual technical and community colleges across the nation.

## CODA

### *The Words of My People*

*The words of my people  
So incorrect by the white man's definition  
But so beautiful to my ears  
I's seen, gon' be, lordy please have mercy  
These words are deeply embedded in my history  
They have passed down countless stories  
From generation to generation  
The words...of my people.*

*~ Billy Williams, Jr., 1996*

### A Black Woman Has Her Say

As a way to sort of come full circle in the sharing of these Black women leaders' leadership experiences, I asked both participants to consider providing reaction, response, and/or comments to their stories that I could include separately – after the narratives chapters and Chapter Six, the conclusions chapter which outlined my analyzes, interpretations, implications, and findings – and before the Epilogue, which allows me to close my own circle in the telling and experiencing of these powerful stories. While Azizza chose not to provide a formal response to include in this chapter, she did share the following in part with me by e-mail: “I think you have done a good job with your analysis. I don't have anything to add to or change about what you have written.” Alice, on the other hand, did write a formal response to her narrative, one that speaks specifically to the conversational style of narration that she used throughout her story. The level of comfort that Alice felt in the course of our conversation combined with the natural spontaneity of her unpracticed responses caused Alice to use a much more relaxed

manner of communication than she would normally. I found this feedback enormously helpful as it clarified certain questions I did not get the chance to ask during the weeks following the interview. I enthusiastically embraced the addition of Alice's response to her story. This response, once again in her own words, is shared in its entirety in this chapter.

### Alice's Response

To avoid appearing stiff and rehearsed, I did not prepare advance responses to the interview questions. As a result, I found that I resorted to informal and unguarded language that did not reflect my professional and educational status. I spoke with the researcher as if she were a girlfriend back in my rural hometown. I found this style default surprising. Yet, I realized that I shared personal information and detailed examples that I would not have shared had I prepared formal responses. This unintentional decision brought richness to this research that neither I nor the researcher had anticipated.

During the interview session, I found it difficult to speak for such a long period of time without active feedback from a listener. I noted that I often said "you know" as a default to get permission to continue or as confirmation that the listener comprehended my detailed responses. While it seemed that I talked at length and struggled to stay on topic, the comprehensive narrative transcript and insightful analysis confirmed that the researcher was able to glean a wealth of information from our session.

The accuracy of the narrative transcript and the detailed analysis of emerging themes were exemplary of the researcher's ability to interpret the stories utilizing

established research methods and theoretical frameworks to construct such perceptive findings.

At the end of the interview, I felt exhausted and proud that my experiences were worth sharing and that they could help others succeed. It was my sincere pleasure to participate in this research project and most of all to be of assistance on another Black woman's success journey – entrance to the earned doctoral degree pipeline. To God be the glory!

## EPILOGUE

*“Only the BLACK WOMAN can say  
‘When and where I enter,  
In the quiet, undisputed dignity  
Of my womanhood  
Without violence and without suing  
Or special patronage,  
Then and there the whole...  
Race enters with me.’”*

*~Anna Julia Cooper, 1892*

Elizabeth Evelyn Wright. Lucy Diggs Slowe. Maria Miller Stewart. Yolanda Moses. Jerry Sue Thornton. Do we recognize these names? Have we ever heard of these women? *I* had never heard of four of the five names I have just listed before I started this doctoral program and discovered my passion for learning about the history of Black women as educational leaders. Through the course of my four years of doctoral studies, and most especially during the last two as I have explored deeper and deeper into the primary and secondary source readings of these remarkable women’s lives, I could not help hearing the same question over and over again in my mind – why and how was I able to live nearly four decades without ever having heard of these women before? A reader and writer since I was 4½, the time when I was taught these skills in my hometown’s Head Start program, I have always been bright and inquisitive. And while I have tended more toward the fiction genre for my chances to “escape” the mundaneness of certain times in my life, I *have* been attending school off and on since I was 4½ years old. Why were these women not included in the history books or the educational leadership books at any level of my schooling – elementary, middle, high, undergraduate,

graduate, and postgraduate? The college that Elizabeth Evelyn Wright founded in her late 20s, Voorhees College, literally sits no more than 30 minutes away from my childhood home. How is it possible that a sickly young woman who was able to accomplish so much in her short life was never included in any Women's History Month celebrations, or at the least, in a South Carolina history book? I don't know that there are suitable answers to these questions, but the questions still deserve to be asked.

The first half of the title of this dissertation is deliberately provocative – designed to stimulate thoughtful discussion about how Black women leaders within two-year colleges in the Southeast view their roles in these colleges and how they tell and make sense of their leadership stories – from their own perspective. To be invisible is to be without form or substance... Was this the way the Black women leaders in my study described themselves? Did they see themselves as invisible women – vapid and vacuous, constantly morphing themselves into more pleasing and acceptable forms? The women in my study were not asked this specific question; rather, these women's stories were presented so that readers could make this assessment for themselves. *Had* the participants been asked, however, I daresay each would challenge a swift and easy answer to a far too complicated notion. Rather, as Derrick Bell's fictitious alter ego, Geneva Crenshaw, proclaimed in *And We Are Not Saved* when Bell remarked about her uncanny resemblance to Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth: "...those women had an inner vision that enabled them to defy the limits on their lives imposed by the world around them" (1987, p. 19). Unequivocally, I believe that the same can be said for both Alice and Azizza.

*In Herstories: Leading with the Lessons of the Lives of Black Women Activists*, Alston and McClellan (2011) highlight, among others, the remarkable life of the United States Congresswoman from the state of Texas – Barbara Charline Jordan – the first Black woman to be elected to the House of Representatives from that state in 1966. Alston and McClellan feature Jordan as an example of a transformational leader. And she most certainly was one. Jordan famously said, “I never intended to become a run-of-the-mill person.” Jordan, who “lived a life committed to an ethic of care and an ethic of justice,” (p. 155) at the same time was unafraid of speaking up and voicing her honest, truthful opinion on even the most contentious of issues, such as her belief that the U.S. “must set limits on who can enter and then credibly enforce our immigration law” because “it is both a right and a responsibility of a democratic society to manage immigration so that it serves the national interest” (p. 186). She also took the position that poor people and members of minority groups need to work hard and use their determination to succeed in order to overcome obstacles thrown up by society (p. 187). She specifically admonished Black people to:

Throw away your crutches and quit complaining because you are Black.  
Don’t belch, choke, smoke, and wish for something to go away. Because  
when you are finished belching, choking, smoking, and wishing, society  
will still be here. (p. 186)

I have included this segment on the life of Barbara Jordan because she was an archetypal transformational leader, but I also included this segment to illustrate one of the central

precepts of Black feminist theory – the right of each individual Black woman to self-definition and self-determination (Collins, 1986, 2009; King, 1988).

One of the most moving aspects of sharing the experiences of Alice and Azizza's leadership stories came near the conclusion of the second interview. Azizza remarked that she had never been the focus of anyone's dissertation study before. What I found particularly humbling about this statement is the fact that *she* appeared humbled by the request. It was as though she never expected that any researcher (novice or otherwise) would find her leadership experiences of interest enough to serve as one of the cornerstones of that researcher's work. I was amazed by this, given the educational leadership background of a woman of Azizza's stature as well as her numerous personal and professional accomplishments. Which I suppose takes me back to the way that this segment – this epilogue – began. It started with a recitation of the names of Black women educational leaders whom I had never heard of before I began this program. It takes me back to the provocative question that I intentionally made part of my dissertation's title: *Invisible Woman?* I believe that the reason Azizza could appear so humbled by my request that her life's story become some part of the educational leadership literature has at least something to do with the question I presented earlier. I believe she was so humbled, because her story – like that of so many other exemplary educational leaders – has been left out, overlooked, ignored. While this may seem somewhat paradoxical (given that we actually *have* some of these women's stories), this really is not. That a woman's story of leadership is written matters – it matters a lot. But if that woman's written story of leadership is not made a part of the fabric from which



educational leadership programs are woven – if that woman’s story is marginalized or always made to serve as an appendage to someone else’s more remarkable story – then what does it matter that her story was ever written?

In one of the final scenes from *Beah: A Black Woman Speaks*, Beah Richards stares directly in the camera with a fierce urgency. There is a sense that she knows she is nearing the end of her life – and there is one last message that she wants to leave with the viewers of her life’s story. LisaGay Hamilton reminds us in the introduction to *Keep Climbing, Girls* that Beah’s work and her message were meant for “all human beings, young and old, male and female, encouraging us to reach far beyond the expectations society might have for us” (Hamilton, 2006, Introduction). I think if there is any message that can be taken from this Black woman’s life – then it is the one that LisaGay shares: “Beah is challenging each of us to fight for a world that embraces freedom and equality for all. We must do this with love of self and love for all. We must do this with determination – ‘Climbing right up to the topmost bough of the very tallest tree...letting no one prevent us’” (Richards, 1974/2006). It seems to me as if this is Barbara Jordan’s message. This is Alice’s message. This is Azizza’s message.

The stories of Alice and Azizza share Beah’s message to us all – our lives individually are only worth the value we place on the lives of our collective humanity. Hopefully these women’s stories will spark in the reader – as they have in me – a renewed hope and faith in the goodness of humankind to work towards this end.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### IRB Approval Letter

IRB Protocol #2012-125 Approval – “Invisible Woman? Narratives of Black Women Leaders in Southeastern Two-Year Colleges

Sent: May 2, 2012 2:10 p.m.

From: Nalinee Patin, npatin@clemson.edu  
To: Russell Marion, marion2@clemson.edu  
CC: Shelia Counts, scoutsc@clemson.edu

Dear Dr. Marion,

The Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed the protocol identified above using expedited review procedures and has recommended approval. We will follow-up with a formal approval letter via interoffice mail. For your convenience, a copy of the stamped consent form is attached for distribution. The original will be sent with the approval letter.

Please remember that the IRB will have to review all changes to this research protocol before initiation. You are obligated to report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, complications, and/or any adverse events to the ORC immediately. All team members are required to review the “Responsibilities of Principal Investigators” and the “Responsibilities of Research Team Members” available at <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html>.

We ask that you notify the ORC when your study is completed or terminated. Please let us know if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Good luck with your study.  
All the best,  
Nalinee

**Nalinee D. Patin**  
IRB Coordinator  
Clemson University  
Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Voice: (864) 656-0636  
Fax: (864) 656-4475  
E-mail: [npatin@clemson.edu](mailto:npatin@clemson.edu)  
Web site: <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/>  
IRB E-mail: [irb@clemson.edu](mailto:irb@clemson.edu)

## Appendix B

### Letter of Informed Consent

Information about Being in a Research Study  
Clemson University

#### **Invisible Woman? Narratives of Black Women Leaders in Southeastern Two-Year Colleges**

##### **Description of the Study and Your Part in It**

Dr. Russ Marion and Shelia Antley Counts are inviting you to take part in a research study. Dr. Russ Marion is a Professor of Educational Leadership, Higher Education at Clemson University. Shelia Antley Counts is a student at Clemson University, running this study with the help of Dr. Marion. The purpose of this research is to learn the stories of the experiences of three Black women leaders in the South Carolina Technical College System, who may have started in the system during the 1960s to the 1980s.

Your part in the study will be to participate in a single, audio-taped interview session, which will last approximately two hours and take place at a date, time and location of your choice, and to possibly complete a demographic data profile sheet. You will be asked a series of open-ended questions about your leadership development, influences, approaches, and experiences within the technical college system. After the interview, you may be contacted for a brief follow-up interview by telephone or e-mail to clarify or add to responses given during the initial interview. You will later receive by e-mail a verbatim transcription of the session and asked to use the track changes tool in MSWord to check the transcript for inaccuracies, omissions, clarifications, deletions, additions, etc.

It will take you about three to four hours to be in this study, including time to review and complete the two forms prior to the interview, the interview itself, potential follow-up sessions, and time to review the interview transcript.

##### **Risks and Discomforts**

There are certain minimal risks or discomforts that you might expect if you take part in this research. They include the possibility that your identity may be deduced, and you may feel mild discomfort or stress associated with the sharing of stories of personal and work-related experiences. To minimize the risk that your identity may be revealed, a pseudonym will be used instead of your real name. To minimize any discomfort you may feel about sharing your personal story, you will be allowed extensive leeway when responding to interview questions (e.g. election to modify a question or to not respond to a question).

##### **Possible Benefits**

We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, this research may help us to understand the leadership experience from the perspective of a group of women within a system who have been underrepresented within the higher education leadership literature.

This form is valid only if the  
Clemson University IRB  
stamp of approval is shown here:

CLEMSON UNIVERSITY IRB CONSENT FORM
APPROVED 5/2/2012
EXPIRES 5/1/2013

Page 1 of 2

**Incentives**

To encourage participation and to thank you for your time and stories, you will be offered a \$10-20 gift card at the conclusion of the study.

**Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality**

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. To protect the confidentiality of the information obtained in this study, the co-investigator will secure the USB drive (with saved interview transcripts) and digital recorder in a locked drawer in her desk in her home office. Only the principal investigator (PI) and co-investigator will have access to the data. After the study, identifiers will be masked but all data (transcripts and digital recordings) will be kept for a period of up to five years after the study is completed. The results will be published in a doctoral dissertation and may be used for subsequent conference presentations or publication; however, findings will be reported in a manner that protects the identities of participants.

We might be required to share the information we collect from you with the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance and the federal Office for Human Research Protections. If this happens, the information would only be used to find out if we ran this study properly and protected your rights in the study.

**Choosing to Be in the Study**

You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

If you choose to stop taking part in this study, the information you have already provided will be deleted from the dataset. We will not be able to delete the data once it is analyzed however.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Russ Marion at Clemson University at 864-656-5105.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or [irb@clemson.edu](mailto:irb@clemson.edu). If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

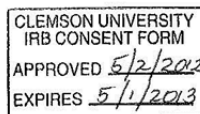
**Consent**

**I have read this form and have been allowed to ask any questions I might have. I agree to take part in this study.**

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

A copy of this form will be given to you.

This form is valid only if the Clemson University IRB stamp of approval is shown here:



## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

Research Study Co-Investigator and Doctoral Candidate: Shelia Antley Counts

Title of Research Study: Invisible Woman? Narratives of Black Women Leaders in Southeastern Two-Year Colleges

Document Type: Prospective Interview Questions and Procedures for Research Study

Here are the projected interview questions for the study. The “grand tour” (Spradley, 1979) question will be asked to provide each participant with as much freedom, flexibility, and leeway in recounting her story as possible. The additional prompts listed will hopefully be addressed by the participants in their recounting of their leadership experiences, but if not, will be posed by the researcher. Questions may also be offered up by the participants, and/or consist of very slight variations of these questions.

1. Grand Tour Question: Tell me your leadership story.

As appropriate, researcher will use the following prompts to expand this story:

- a. What are/were some of the influences on your leadership development early in your career and now? (Prompt additionally, if necessary, for social, theoretical, political, spiritual and familial, etc. effects)
- b. Were there individuals in your home, community, workplace whom you aspired to emulate as a leader? What leadership traits or characteristics did these individuals possess that appealed to you and why were these appealing qualities or behaviors?
- c. How would you describe your leadership style or approach?
- d. How has your style or approach to leadership evolved over time?
- e. What impact, if any, do you believe your race, gender, and/or socioeconomic origin of birth have had on your leadership ability?
- f. What impact, if any, do you believe your race, gender, and/or socioeconomic origin of birth have had on how others view and respond to you as a leader?
- g. What would you describe as some of the most difficult aspects of leading and/or managing people?

- h. What, if any, impact did the civil rights movement have on your career choices and desire for advancement?
  - i. What, if any, impact did the women's rights movement have on your career choices and desire for advancement?
  - j. What would you describe as the pivotal achievements and successes of your career?
  - k. What would you describe as challenges or obstacles to your career advancement?
  - l. If there were any, how did you deal with the challenges? Would you share one or two examples?
  - m. What do you think is the future for Black women who aspire to leadership within the technical college system, specifically, and higher education in general?
  - n. What, if any, efforts should be made to encourage leadership development and potential in women?
  - o. Do you consider yourself a role model for other prospective women leaders? If so, in what ways?
2. Wrap-Up: What other stories of your leadership experiences would you like to share?

## Appendix D

### Demographic Data Profile Sheet

Research Study Co-Investigator and Doctoral Candidate: Shelia Antley Counts

Title of Research Study: Invisible Woman? Narratives of Black Women Leaders in Southeastern Two-Year Colleges

Document Type: Research Study Participant Demographic Data Profile Sheet

Participant's Current Title:

Participant's Current Institution:

Participant's Length of Service with Current Institution:

Participant's Place of Birth:

Participant's Marital Status:

Participant's Parental Status:

Participant's Age Range:

Participant's Parents' Educational Background:

Participant's Community Involvement:

Description of Ultimate Career-Related Goals:



## Appendix E

### Southern Technical College System (STCS) Spring 2011 Student Enrollment by Race and Gender

Technical College	Hispanic/Latino		American Indian/Alaskan Native		Asian		Black/African American		Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander		White		Two or More Races	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Amaryllis	28	46	6	11	7	16	273	655	4	7	746	1148	0	0
Carnation	33	58	0	3	11	28	545	1450	0	0	613	1241	1	9
Daffodil	0	1	1	0	1	0	373	461	0	0	19	25	0	0
Foxtail-Lily	15	33	11	23	14	19	735	2061	0	0	1016	1563	0	0
Ginger	278	397	33	38	77	105	1167	2264	3	7	3825	5509	58	87
Holly-Berry	77	137	11	21	29	43	486	1420	2	8	1880	3323	34	76
Mimosa	97	207	24	35	101	136	1345	2847	4	3	2762	3648	23	26
Narcissus	0	1	7	23	1	1	158	404	0	0	185	415	0	0
Orchid-Corsage	5	10	1	9	13	5	520	1121	0	0	406	713	0	2
Poppy	27	42	1	7	15	27	553	1522	1	1	1254	1953	10	18
Scarlet-Plume	81	119	10	11	68	95	400	992	0	2	1458	2156	10	13
Tuberose	39	91	3	6	10	16	256	838	0	0	415	901	1	0
Turtlehead	73	83	9	10	35	46	257	642	0	0	2277	2817	39	44
Tulip	175	318	85	81	96	133	1421	3278	19	32	3794	5252	124	175
Wormwood	1	2	1	1	0	0	168	321	0	0	66	115	0	2
Yarrow	61	85	16	39	39	51	477	1041	0	1	1530	2212	2	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>990</b>	<b>1630</b>	<b>219</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>517</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>9134</b> <b>/10<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>21317</b> <b>23<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>33</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>22246</b> <b>24<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>32991</b> <b>36<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>302</b>	<b>455</b>

*Note.* Technical college system and names are fictionalized to protect study participants' identities. Data were taken from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. New definitions and reporting requirements to the federal government for race and ethnicity have been adopted in accordance with the final guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education on October 19, 2007. These changes are necessary to implement the US Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) 1997 Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. For more details on the changes, please see the following website: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/reic/resource.asp>.

<sup>a</sup>These numbers represent the group's percentage of the total number of students in the system (90, 934).

## Appendix F

### STCS 2010 All Headcount Faculty Teaching Credit Courses by Race or Ethnicity

Technical College	Hispanic	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Black or African American	White	Two or More Races
Amaryllis	0	1	5	0	40	115	0
Carnation	0	0	1	0	34	178	0
Daffodil	0	0	9	0	40	10	0
Foxtail-Lily	0	3	7	0	38	223	0
Ginger	5	1	12	0	81	666	0
Holly-Berry	5	0	5	0	32	313	4
Mimosa	24	4	11	0	113	515	0
Narcissus	1	1	1	0	11	67	0
Orchid-Corsage	0	0	1	0	52	112	0
Poppy	5	0	2	0	40	303	0
Scarlet-Plume	2	4	9	0	40	300	0
Tuberose	0	1	3	0	22	117	0
Turtlehead	3	1	10	1	29	338	2
Tulip	12	3	6	0	87	613	10
Wormwood	0	0	0	0	20	39	0
Yarrow	3	2	11	2	65	280	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>744/15<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>4189/82<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>18</b>

*Note.* Technical college system and names are fictionalized to protect study participants' identities. Data were taken from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. New definitions and reporting requirements to the federal government for race and ethnicity have been adopted in accordance with the final guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education on October 19, 2007. These changes are necessary to implement the US Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) 1997 Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. For more details on the changes, please see the following website: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/reic/resource.asp>.

<sup>a</sup> These numbers represent the group's percentage of the total number of faculty teaching credit courses in the system, including non-resident aliens (5,129).

## Appendix G

### STCS Fall 2009 Executive Level Staff (administrative/managerial) by Race and Gender

Technical College	Asian/Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Black or African- American/non- Hispanic	Black or African- American/non- Hispanic	Hispanic or Latino	White/non- Hispanic	White/non- Hispanic
	Men	Men	Women	Women	Men	Women
Amaryllis	0	0	0	1	3	3
Carnation	0	0	0	0	1	4
Daffodil	1	2	4	0	1	0
Foxtail-Lily	0	1	1	0	6	2
Ginger	0	3	6	0	12	12
Holly-Berry	0	1	0	0	5	7
Mimosa	0	2	3	0	4	5
Narcissus	0	1	0	0	5	4
Orchid-Corsage	0	2	0	0	3	7
Poppy	0	0	0	0	5	6
Scarlet-Plume	0	1	0	0	2	3
Tuberose	0	0	1	0	2	2
Turtlehead	0	1	0	0	6	1
Tulip	0	2	1	0	4	8
Wormwood	0	0	1	0	2	0
Yarrow	0	0	1	0	6	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>16/9<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>18/10<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>1</b>	<b>67/39<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>67/39<sup>a</sup></b>

*Note.* Technical college system and names are fictionalized to protect study participants' identities. Data were taken from Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) at <http://nces.ed.gov>. Executive level staff category classifies persons whose primary function within the institution is managerial or administrative, and less than 50% instructional. This category classification includes titles such as president, vice president (including assistants and associates), deans (including assistants and associates), directors and department heads (including assistants and associates). Only race, ethnicity, and gender categories represented at the technical colleges are included in this table, and in accordance with the new federally-required guidelines. New definitions and reporting requirements to the federal government for race and ethnicity have been adopted in accordance with the final guidance issued by the U.S. Department of Education on October 19, 2007. These changes are necessary to implement the US Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) 1997 Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. For more details on the changes, please see the following website:

<http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/reic/resource.asp>

<sup>a</sup> These numbers represent the group's percentage of the total number of executive level staff within the institutions (170).

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