African American women administrators in higher education: exploring the challenges and experiences at Louisiana public colleges and universities

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AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES AT LOUISIANA PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

The Department of Educational Leadership, Research, and Counseling

by

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges that African American women administrators experience as professionals in public institutions of higher education and the strategies they employ to cope with the resulting conflicts. It uses Black Feminism and the five dimensions as a framework for understanding the challenges and experiences. The five dimensions that characterize Black Feminist Thought are: 1) core themes of a Black woman’s standpoint; 2) variation of responses to core themes; 3) interdependence of experience and consciousness; 4) consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint; and 5) interdependence of thought and action.

Interviews and participant observations were conducted with 10 African American women administrators at public institutions in Louisiana. Interviews included two presidents, four vice-presidents, and four deans. During open-ended interviews, participants were asked to talk about their challenges and experiences related to their personal and professional experiences as administrators. Ten themes emerged from the research data: spirituality; family support systems; balancing career and family; racism and sexism; lack of respect by colleagues and subordinates; mentoring and networking; isolation and underrepresentation; competency and confidence; professional satisfaction and community consciousness.

This study highlights the 10 African American women administrators’ challenges and experiences in order to help institutions of higher learning become more supportive and reduce the challenges that promote a chilly work environment.
1: Introduction

Historically, African American women have been involved in educational processes in meaningful ways despite challenges to their efforts. During slavery, African Americans were not allowed to read and write. However, despite this prohibition, people like Mary McLeod Bethune and W. E. B. Du Bois forged forward in educating themselves and others (Barnett, 1978; Bethune-Cookman, 2001; Harley, 1978; Littlefield, 1997). After the Civil War, as more slaves and ex-slaves were allowed the opportunity to learn to read and write, African American women were instrumental in the effort to advance their race. As early as the 1800’s, they served as participants, founders, and administrators of institutions of learning (Littlefield, 1997; Perkins, 1993). They took the initiative and served as foremothers to provide opportunities for other African Americans. Their commitment to achieve the goals of uplifting the race would eventually lead black people from legal discrimination and segregation to freedom (Noble, 1988). Additionally, changes in society and significant historical events provided educational opportunities for African Americans, thus affording them access to institutions of higher education.

Federal legislation was implemented in the 1960’s to address racial and gender inequality across professional occupations and educational opportunities. Laws, such as Title VII, The Equal Pay Act, Title IX, The Equal Opportunities Amendment, and policies related to Affirmative Action were enacted to ensure that women and minorities were fairly considered for employment and educational opportunities. Despite these federal initiatives, there continues to be a lack of women and minority administrators in higher education. The American Council on Education (2000) reports that:
The number of women college presidents has increased in the last 14 years, but the growth in the share of minority presidents has been slower. The report, *The American College President: 2002*, edition, notes that since 1986, the percentage of women college presidents has doubled—from 9.5 percent to 21.1 percent—while the percentage of minority presidents increased from 6.1 percent to 12.8 percent during the same time period (p. 9).

Even though the number of women and minority university/college presidents has increased, they are still underrepresented in comparison to faculty and senior staff. Women presidents remain underrepresented by approximately 40 percent (American Council on Education 2000). In addition, while minorities accounted for just over 10 percent of college presidents in 1995, faculty and senior staff accounted for 14 percent that same year. In 1998, six percent of all college presidents were African American, representing more than half of all minority presidents. Another three percent were Hispanic and one percent each were Asian American and Native American (American Council on Education 2000).

Recently, while more attention has been given to women in educational leadership, very few studies have focused on issues pertaining to African American women administrators in institutions of higher education (Rusher, 1990; Tedrow, 1999). This is, perhaps because, “the opportunity to study such women administrators in numbers and content similar to men is still not available; and professional organizations in higher education do not maintain statistical data on women of ethnic groups” (Rusher, 1996, p. 1).

Due to limited research and the paucity of African American women in academe, many find themselves facing numerous challenges in higher education. African American women seek open access to professional opportunities in higher education; with this access they do not want
barriers to promotion, tenure, pay, or administrative positions. Despite their desires, many find themselves responding to a “chilly climate.”

African American women must deal with the special challenges of racism, sexism, isolation, lack of trust and rapport, and tokenism (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Camblin 1998; Moses, 1989; Mosley, 1980; Sandler, 1986; Sandler & Hall, 1991; Shavlik and Touchton, 1986). Therefore, it is imperative that studies are conducted to better understand the challenges of African American women administrators who are working at institutions of higher education, so that change may be implemented to improve the climate at colleges and universities.

Studies highlighting the challenges African American women administrators encounter and the coping mechanisms they utilize to successfully manage those challenges are limited. This study explores the challenges of African American women administrators in the position of dean and above at public institutions of higher education (both Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCU] and Predominantly White Universities [PWU]) and the strategies they employ to address the conflicts they encounter.

**Problem Statement**

Moses (1989) states that, “Black women have been participants in higher education for more than a century, but they are almost totally absent from the research literature; rarely is the impact of racism and sexism on black women in academe examined” (p. 1). Though researchers are beginning to examine the experiences of African American women in higher education, the focus of the majority of studies is on students and faculty.

A search of the research literature reveals that a limited number of studies are available that focuses on African American women administrators (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Camblin 1998; Mosley, 1980; Rusher, 1996). These studies indicate that African American women have
different experiences in higher education based upon the institution where they are employed. The majority of the women are struggling with the stresses of being an administrator, in addition to often being the only African American woman, thus feeling isolated and lonely (Allen, 1995; Carroll, 1982; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Camblin, 1998; Mosley, 1980; Moses, 1989; Sandler, 1986). The research also reveals that African American women administrators often work in environments that may cause them to experience challenges, such as racism, sexism, isolation, and tokenism (Carroll, 1973; Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Camblin, 1998; Green, 2000; Moses, 1989; Sandler, 1986; Shavlik & Touchton, 1986).

What can higher education administrators do to eliminate the invisible barriers in the workplace mentioned above and improve the climate for African American women administrators? In order to create a warmer environment, colleges and universities must know the needs and concerns of African American women, specifically administrators. Universities have not adequately addressed these issues (Harvey, 1999; Moses, 1989).

Past university policies were formulated on the assumption that white and black women or black men and women have the same experiences (Moses, 1989). Because of the lack of studies, the literature does not adequately address African American women administrators’ disparities in higher education. As a result, there is also a lack of recommendations and resources to help institutions be more supportive and aware of the needs of African American women administrators. Higher education has a responsibility to foster an academic climate that is conducive to African American women administrators. This study identifies challenges and experiences and offers recommendations to help institutions be more supportive of African American women administrators in their professional roles in higher education, thus reducing the challenges that promote a chilly environment.
The challenges that African American women encounter and the coping mechanisms they utilize to successfully manage the conflicts as professionals in higher education have not been adequately studied. In this study I provide additional insight into the challenges of African-American women administrators in higher education at public colleges and universities, and the strategies employed to manage the conflicts.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of the study is to explore the challenges that African American women experience as professionals in public institutions of higher education and the strategies they employ to cope with the resulting conflicts. The following questions guided the study:

1. What are the challenges and experiences confronting African American women administrators in higher education?
2. What coping strategies do African American women utilize to successfully manage the conflicts they encounter?
3. What are the differences between the experiences of African American women administrators at Historically Black Colleges/Universities and those at Predominantly White Universities/Colleges?

**Significance of the Study**

There is limited research on African-American women administrators in higher education. While research has been conducted on women’s leadership in higher education (Sandler, 1986; Sandler & Hall, 1991; Shavlik & Touchton, 1986; Tedrow, 1999; Warner & DeFleur, 1993) and African American women faculty (Aguirre, 2000; Allen, 1995; Cook, 1997; Johnsrud & Sadao, 1998; Moses, 1989; Sandler, 1986; Sandler & Hall, 1991; Swoboda, 1990) and students (Allen, 1992; Fleming, 1990; Fleming, 1984; Holland & Eisenhart, 1990; Howard-Vital, 1997; Jackson, 1998; Moses, 1989; Sandler, 1986; Sandler & Hall, 1991), very few studies
have explored the challenges of African-American women administrators (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Camblin 1998; Mosley, 1980; Rusher, 1996). It is crucial that research in this area be conducted so African American women, especially those aspiring to hold leadership positions in higher education, as well as administrators and other individuals across all race and gender lines, can understand the challenges, strategies, and contexts of African American women in higher education.

This study advocates the importance of African American women’s perspectives in understanding their situations in higher education. In order to facilitate this understanding, the theoretical framework of Black Feminism is utilized to examine the issues reflected in the experiences of African American women.

Collins (1991) suggests, “Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women’s reality by those who live it” (p. 22). This approach facilitates the understanding and resolution of social dilemmas of race and gender for African American women. Black feminism can be utilized as a means for implementing social and organizational change for African American women in higher education.

**Description of the Study**

Chapter One includes the introduction, the problem statement, the research questions, the significance of the study, the theoretical framework in which the study was designed, and problems associated with African American women administrators in higher education. Chapter Two - review of literature section - addresses the history of African American women in higher education administration, the challenges affecting African American women in higher education
and the coping mechanisms they utilize to successfully manage the conflicts. Additionally, this chapter focuses on key studies guiding this research. Chapter Three - the methodology section - describes the theoretical perspective, Black Feminism, which is used to better understand the challenges of African American women administrators, as well as the subjective nature of the research. This section also describes the qualitative research methods. An explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures follows along with the subjective nature of the study. The detailed descriptions of the participants’ positions, offices and personal profiles, as well as the rich stories of the participants are presented in Chapter Four. This chapter highlights their unique experiences and challenges as administrators as they describe, in their own words, their day-to-day experiences in public universities and colleges in Louisiana.

In Chapter Five, the emerging themes are represented by data analyzed through the five key dimensions of Black Feminism. Finally, in Chapter Six, I summarize the findings and key points in the study and list recommendations for further research.
2: Review of Literature

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the challenges that African American women experience as administrators in public institutions of higher education and the strategies they employ to cope with the resulting conflicts. To ground my study, I explored literature on challenges concerning African American women administrators in higher education, such as balancing career, family and community commitment, hiring and promotion, isolation/tokenism, sexism and racism. While these factors were used to guide the study, other themes surfaced as the study progressed.

I chose to approach this research from a Black feminist point of view, as I find that it is useful in examining the challenges and experiences of African American women administrators. Black feminism has implications for the literature I selected to review, the participants, the methodological approaches, and the understandings I have formed through this research.

I begin the literature review with a description of how the review was conducted. Next, I present a historical overview of African American women in higher education. Finally, I discuss the challenges affecting African American women administrators in higher education and the problems associated with their recruitment, retention, and promotion. Because there is very little information available on African American women administrators in higher education, the review of literature regarding the various areas is limited.

**Review of Literature Procedure**

My review of the literature involved locating, reading, and evaluating reports of research related to African American women in higher education, specifically administrators. In order to locate information, I conducted a secondary, primary, and library source search.
My initial step was to utilize books, articles, and other secondary sources obtained from previous coursework relating to issues of race, gender, and feminism. I found the references from these sources to be somewhat helpful in building a list of journals and authors to be examined as primary sources. From the secondary and primary list, I compiled my initial source list. Most of the references pertained to African American students and faculty. Finally, I conducted computer searches of several sources, which included Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), Dissertation Abstracts International, and Education Index.

From this literature review, I found “relatively little is known about Black women in pursuing professional careers in higher education, especially those in administration rather than teaching” (Payne & Hyle, 2002, p. 6). As a result, I have had to touch upon information on African American students and faculty to help develop ideas about similar challenges and experiences.

The next section provides a historical overview of African American women in higher education, focusing on significant events that shaped their participation. It is anticipated that the historical, social, professional, and institutional contexts of African American women in higher education will shed light on the educational process and how it underserves, or discriminates against African American women. This historical perspective of African American women as college and university students, faculty, and administrators provides insight on African American women’s race and gender roles, and experiences in higher education.

**Historical Overview of African American Women in Higher Education**

The Civil War marked a new era for education and employment for women, while the passage of the Morrill Act of 1862 (Land Grant College Act) and the supplementary Act of 1890, which included a provision for Negro education, marked a new beginning for public higher
education (Chamberlain, 1991; Cowley, 1961; Lucas, 1996). Before the Civil War, women and African Americans were largely excluded from institutions of higher education. According to Chamberlain (1991), “women first gained entry to institutions of higher education in the United States when Oberlin College admitted female students in 1837 – more that 200 years after Harvard College was founded for the education of young men” (p. 3). This was the beginning for women in formal higher education. Shortly thereafter, African American women were admitted to and obtained degrees from Oberlin College. Among these were Lucy Session who earned a literary degree from Oberlin College in 1850, making her the first black woman in the United States to receive a college degree; and Mary Jane Patterson who earned a B.A. degree from Oberlin College in 1862, making her the first black woman to earn a bachelor’s degree in the United States (Littlefield, 1997, p. 165).

In addition to obtaining degrees, African American women also became administrators at institutions of higher learning. In 1869, Fanny Jackson Coppin was named principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, making her the first black woman to lead an institution of higher learning in the United States (Littlefield, 1997, p. 166). In 1889, Josephine A. Silone Yates became the professor and head of the Natural Sciences Department at Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri (Littlefield, p. 166).

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ushered in change for African American women. However, African American women’s initial entry into higher education was not easy. As Solomon (1985) noted, “in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the black college woman was the exception of the exceptions in that neither black nor white colleges wanted her” (p. 76). Despite the opposition, African American women pushed forward for advanced learning.
By 1890, only 30 Black women in the United States had earned baccalaureate degrees, as compared with 300 Black men and 2500 white women (Perkins 1983). According to a study by W. E. B. Du Bois in 1900, 225 Black women had obtained baccalaureate degrees, 65 from Oberlin College (Littlefield 1997, p. 167). These statistics show that progress was slow, but the number of African American women obtaining degrees at institutions of higher education was increasing.

African Americans’ participation in higher education increased again at the beginning of the twentieth century. This period, referred to by some as the Harlem Renaissance, was a period of growth for African Americans. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909, and shortly thereafter many African Americans migrated to the North (Brown, 1990; Hine, 1997; NAACP, 2002).

African American women set out to make social change. They wanted to increase social literacy in the African American community and promote “racial uplift.” They continued to become the “first African American” and the “first woman” in several areas of higher education (See Appendix A).

In the 1920’s, several institutions and organizations were founded primarily for African American women in higher education. In 1926, Bennett College, founded as a coeducational institution in 1873, became a college for women (Littlefield, 1997, p. 168). Also, Lucy Diggs Slowe convened the first annual conference of deans and advisors to girls in Negro schools, which gave birth to the Association of Deans of Women and Advisors to Girls in Negro Schools (Littlefield, p. 168). The number of African American women obtaining advanced degrees from institutions of higher education continued to rise. Noble (1988) noted that “African American
women earned more college degrees than African American men in the twentieth century with the exception of the decade between 1920 and 1930” (p. 330).

In the 1940’s, African American women continued to obtain advanced degrees, thus setting the stage for desegregation. In 1943, Mamie Phipps Clark became the first black woman to earn a Ph.D. in Psychology from Columbia University (Littlefield, 1997, p. 169). According to Littlefield (1997), Clark’s “research into the racial identity formation of black children (with her husband, Kenneth Clark) would be central evidence in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision” (p. 169).

In 1948, Ada Louis helped set the stage for desegregation of professional schools. In *Ada Louis Sipuel v. Board of Regents*, the Supreme Court ordered the University of Oklahoma School of Law to admit Sipuel, arguing that a state cannot require African Americans to postpone their education until separate black graduate or professional schools are established (p. 169).

During the fifties, African Americans continued to set precedents in higher education. In 1955, Willa Player became the president of Bennett College, making her the first black woman college president (Littlefield, 1997, p. 170). In 1956, Aurtherine Lucy was instrumental in the move for the desegregation of public colleges. Littlefield (1997) noted “under a Supreme Court order and with the aid of Ruby Hurley, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People regional director, Aurtherine Lucy [Foster] enrolled in the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, only to be expelled days later by university officials, who cited her statements regarding race relations at the school as grounds for dismissal” (p. 170).

In researching African American women in higher education, I found that during the 1920’s through the 1950’s there is an absence of statistical information. The reason for this lack of information is unclear. Chamberlain (1991) noted, “prior to World War II, information
regarding minorities in higher education was limited” (p. 9). However, it is known that African Americans were restricted overwhelmingly to the historically black colleges (Green, 1988). Due to segregation, African American women were not afforded increased access to the majority of predominantly white institutions of higher education until the mid-1950’s.

Several significant events in the mid-1950’s and 1960’s increased the participation of African American women in higher education. One of the first steps in achieving equal education for all students, regardless of race, was the 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education decision which set the stage for desegregation (Green, 1988). In addition, Green stated that, “the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s increased the necessity of institutions of higher education to accept more students, and subsequently hire more minority faculty and administrators” (p. 120).

*The Equal Pay Act of 1963* was one of the first pieces of legislation for women, which related to sex discrimination. It prohibits discrimination in payment of wages to women and men performing substantially equal work in the same establishment. Second were *Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* that prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin or sex. Furthermore, Noble (1988) notes that, “the Economic Employment Act of 1964 and the Education Act of 1965 created new educational opportunities for blacks. One of the earliest benefits of this legislation was the rapid entrance of black students into previously segregated white colleges” (p. 331). The passage of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964* and the creation of affirmative action by executive orders resulted in a shift in enrollment of African Americans from historically black colleges and universities to predominantly white institutions.

Overall, African American women continued to make strides in higher education and in the job market. In 1970, Elaine Jones became the first black woman to graduate from the
University of Virginia School of Law, and in 1993 she became the head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund (Littlefield, 1997, pp. 170-171). In 1976, Mary Francis Berry became the chancellor of the University of Colorado, serving as the first African American woman to head a major research university (Littlefield, p. 171).

During the 1980’s, more African American women served in administrative capacities in universities. Johnetta Cole of Spelman University; Marian Wright Edelman of Spelman College Board of Trustees; and Niara Sudarkasa of Lincoln University all became the first African American female administrators of their respective universities.

These are only a few of the notable African American women who made their mark in the history of higher education in the twentieth century. There were others who followed and made contributions to higher education through books, articles, and community involvement. Based on the information presented, it is apparent that the African American woman’s ingression into higher education was slow. While African American women are present in higher education today as students, faculty, staff, and administrators, they have had to deal with many challenges to ensure their participation.

**Challenges Affecting African American Women in Higher Education**

The late nineteenth to the early twentieth century afforded increased access to higher education for African American women. Changes as a result of the sixties initiatives, federal legislation, and Supreme Court cases allowed more African American women to enter into institutions of higher learning, serving as students, faculty, staff, and administrators. Their entrance, however, did not ensure fairness and equity. These women were faced with challenges related to balancing career, family, and community commitment, hiring and promotion,

The literature I reviewed reveals that African American women are facing similar issues today. African American women in higher education come from diverse backgrounds and serve in various capacities at colleges and universities. However, they have one thing in common, “double jeopardy.” Double jeopardy is a term generally used to characterize the position of African American women and other women of color, because they fall into two oppressed categories (Allen, 1995; Etter-Lewis, 1993; Fleming 1996; Mosley, 1998).

Collins (1991) refers to the identity of African American women as a “both/and” construct, i.e., both African American and women. In other words, race and gender are important and related constructs within the self-concept of African American women. African American women share common experiences due to the intersection of both race and gender. The two cannot be separated. If only race or gender is used to define an African American woman’s experiences, a true representation cannot be depicted.

Different perceptions and theories regarding African American women have evolved over time. Fleming (1996) notes:

On the one hand, black women are often portrayed as strong, competent, self-reliant, even dominant – “the matriarch” image introduced by Frazier (1939). On the other hand, black women are often viewed by social scientists as “victims,” suffering under the double jeopardy of being both black and female in a society that is both sexist and racist (p. 233).

As a result of being black and female, African American women are treated differently from white men and women, and from African American men. Etter-Lewis (1993) notes:
Membership into two groups sets African American women apart because they experience double discrimination as a result of their dual status. So what is true for African American men and white women is not invariably true for African American women (p. xvi).

The aforementioned descriptions reveal insensitivity to African American women’s experiences in higher education. Discriminatory behaviors/attitudes can threaten their security on a personal and professional level. Andrews (1993) states:

The double whammy of race and gender, being Black and female, compounded by the attainment of a high level of education, predictably creates problems on both a professional and personal level. Black women must contend with the professional pressures associated with working in a historically White, middle-and-upper-middle class, male-dominated profession, as well as attempt to balance the demands of life outside the professional domain (p. 182).

While gender discrimination affects most women, it is apparent that racial discrimination is an added obstacle for African American women, affecting them on a personal and professional level. As a result, most African American women are faced with challenges, such as balancing career, family, and community commitments.

Balancing Career, Family and Community Commitments

Hensel (1997) indicates, “the biggest barrier to women’s advancement in academe is a lack of a supportive environment for combining family and work” (p. 38). Because women have to balance their time between work and taking care of family, it may be difficult for them to meet the requirements for advancement to administrative positions. The balancing act, while difficult for all women, is even more challenging for African American women. hooks (1984) notes:
Historically, black women have identified work in the context of family as humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care, the very gestures of humanity white supremacist ideology claimed black people were incapable of expressing. In contrast to labor done in a caring environment inside the home, labor outside the home was seen as stressful, degrading and dehumanizing (pp. 133-34).

African American women desired the opportunity to work in their homes, but due to economic conditions as far back as slavery, they were not allowed to serve as homemakers only, while their spouses worked outside of the home. Fox-Genovese (1988) notes, “life within plantation households deprived slave women of the option of traditional gender roles and whatever protections those roles accorded other American females. Being a slave superceded being a woman” (p.4). Once slavery ended, the problem did not cease to exist. Greene (2000) notes:

After the end of slavery, African American women continued to be a significant presence in the American workplace. Racism in the workplace often discriminated against African American men, limiting their ability to support their families in the ways that that their White counterparts were able to do. African American women’s incomes were always required to support their families. When they have assumed the role out of necessity, African American women have often been resented by African American men and pathologized by American mental health professionals for their success at work (p. 4). Despite the negative stigma sometimes given to African American women for working outside of the home, many women, in spite of the odds, move forward professionally. As a result of their requirement to work outside the home, many African American women were
determined to make home a place of care and resistance. This entailed creating and maintaining a safe home environment while excelling professionally. As bell hooks (1990) notes:

This task of making homeplace was not simply a matter of black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that “homeplace,” most often created and kept by black women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop and nurture, to nurture our spirits. (p. 42)

The “homeplace” provided a balance between career and family despite the challenges. Family is a strong component of the African American culture. Extended families are more typical in the African American community than are nuclear families (Greene 2000). Greene (2000) notes:

Motherhood is an important role for African American women, who mother the children of their communities in different ways. African American women often assume responsibility for the children of relatives when needed and provide important support to parents of the family’s children (p. 5).

The balancing act of family and career has an additional element for African American women: community involvement. Community involvement serves as an outlet for many African American women. It allows them to be involved with assisting others, while receiving self-satisfaction.

This added element creates more responsibility for African American women. It is a service that must be provided in addition to career and family. Hughes (1988) notes:
For Black women, roles and expectations regarding the external ethnic community are magnified. Interacting with...political, social, spiritual Black community [networks] is an added professional responsibility...beyond [that which is experienced by] her White colleagues (p. 67).

Many African American women feel they have a commitment to the community. This commitment, in turn, defines their time for family, career aspirations, and successes, weighing on them physically and emotionally. Edwards and Camblin (1998) found, “African American women often feel stretched to their limits physically, emotionally and psychologically as they try to maintain a balance between personal and professional lives” (p. 33).

While African American women must balance career, family, and community commitments, these responsibilities are also utilized as a coping mechanism. In order to maintain a balance emotionally between professional and personal life, African American women rely on support from family, community, and the church. Gregory (1999) found that “family support and community involvement, particularly in church-related activities, were cited as critical factors supporting black women’s career pursuits in higher education” (p. 17).

The African American church is an important institution in the community (Edwards 1998; Greene 2000). Many African American women look to the church and the community for spiritual guidance and support. Edwards and Camblin (1998) note:

The church has historically been and still remains one of the most critical components of the African American community. In a society where minorities are frequently devalued and women often marginalized, African American women rely heavily on the church and spirituality for encouragement, guidance, training and fellowship” (p. 34).
The church serves as an extended family. It provides important contexts for the personal as well as the professional lives of African American women. It allows them to receive support, as well as offer support and leadership in the church and the community.

**Underrepresentation of African American Women in Higher Education Administration**

Men have traditionally held leadership positions in higher education. Prior to the 1970’s, women rarely held formal positions of influence in the administration of higher education, except at women’s colleges. Chamberlain (1991) notes, “in 1970, three quarters of the women administrators at Ivy League universities worked in students services” (p.11). These positions were at lower levels within educational administration. According to Chamberlain (1991):

The few administrative positions that a large portion of women held during this time were dean of women, director of library services, director of food services, dean of home economics or dean of nursing. Even less held positions as registrar, director of student guidance, director of student activities, or director of alumni affairs (p. 11).

These positions generally did not lead to upper strata leadership.

More than three decades later, African American women continue to occupy a disproportionately low number of administrative level positions in higher education, compared to their white female counterparts (see Table 2.1). Historically, African American women have been very instrumental in the development of higher education institutions and educational opportunities for African Americans and women; however, they still remain underrepresented in higher education administration.

This underrepresentation at administrative levels in higher education continues to serve as a constant challenge for African American women administrators. Because they are relatively
few in number, African American women serving in an administrative position must deal with
the issues related to racism and sexism in their respective institutions of higher education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>No. women presidents</th>
<th>% of women</th>
<th>No. male presidents</th>
<th>% of male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>1,634</td>
<td>88.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total No. Women Presidents</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>1,855</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Summary Profile of the American College President: 2001, Compared with 1986

**Recruitment and Promotion Problems of African American Women**

Since the passage of the civil rights initiatives of the sixties and seventies, minority and
female employment at institutions of higher education has increased. Rusher (1996) notes:

Due to a recognition of obvious shortages at ethnic and cultural diversity, and the effects
of racism, and sexism which have plagued the career development of black females,
recent commitments of institutions of higher education has been to diversify staff profiles
by hiring and promoting various minority group members and women (p. 21).

However, research indicates that women are placed in positions as tokens, and passed
over for promotion (Edwards, 1997; Edwards & Camblin, 1998; Rusher, 1996; Sandler, 1986).
It appears that the affirmative action initiatives provided for the hiring of minorities and women
did little for promotion and retention (Edwards, 1997; Rusher, 1996). This holds especially true for African American women.

African American women administrators are often placed in what Sandler (1986) calls “dead end positions.” These positions are usually in areas such as multicultural affairs, minority affairs, and EEOC offices with no possibility for advancement. They are generally placed in jobs previously held by a minority. Konrad and Pfeffer (1991), in their study on hiring women and minorities in educational institutions, found women and minorities were significantly more likely to be hired for jobs, organizations, and positions held by members of their own groups in the past.

Once placed in these positions, African American women are expected to serve as teachers, researchers, administrators, and community servants (Sandler, 1986). However, their culture and values are not considered relevant in academe.

White values, such as Western European or White American cultural values, are institutionalized as the norm and are used as the basis for hiring, promotion, and tenure decisions (Cook, 1997). These values form the structure of an academic department and the entire university. For example, Cook (1997) utilizing a model based on the ideas of Ernest Boyer (1991), “described the traditional university setting as a place where faculty go to hustle private advantage rather than being responsible for the common good and shared values” (p. 101).

Although this refers to faculty, it can also be generalized for administrators as well. This is in contrast to the values of African American women.

Cook (1997) asserts, “black women have traditionally achieved from a collectivist value orientation. Collectivist cultures tend to be other-focused; concerns about the needs, expectations, and evaluations of others are central to one’s own sense of well being” (p. 104).
As a result, African American women tend to be highly involved in community service. Cook (1997) notes, “they may spend excess hours providing service to students, conducting action-oriented research programs, and using experimental learning teaching methods” (p. 102). Even though they gain great satisfaction from service to the larger community, they get little or no rewards from their colleges or universities.

Despite university efforts to recruit minority women, their efforts to retain and promote them have not been successful. Sandler (1986) notes, “[Minority women] are simply not retained or tenured at the institutions which hire them as faculty or administrators…. Although initial opportunities have improved, retention opportunities have worsened considerably” (p. 191). As a result, many African American women find themselves serving as the only African American woman administrator.

**Isolation**

Isolation is another challenge that African American women, especially administrators, encounter in higher education. Sandler (1986) found that, “isolation is an especially pertinent issue for minority women, who often suffer extreme isolation because of their miniscule numbers in higher education” (p. 193). African American women administrators are often the only woman at senior levels at most institutions, especially at predominantly white universities. Mosley (1980) states:

Black female administrators have for many years held positions of leadership in black academic institutions as founders, presidents, deans, and department chairpersons. In white academia, however, black women administrators are, for the most part, invisible beings. Their status in higher education is a reflection of their status on the national scene – at the bottom. They are isolated, and their academic opportunities are limited by
barriers that have nothing to do with their preparation, qualifications, or competency. They have no models, no mentors, and little psychological support. There is no one with whom to share experiences or with whom to identify. The Black female administrator must create herself without model or precedent. She is an alien in a promised land, obscure, unwelcome and unwanted (p. 306).

Carroll (1982) notes:

Black women in higher education are isolated, under utilized and often demoralized. They note the efforts made to provide equal opportunities for black men and white women in higher education, while they somehow are left behind in the work of the black and feminist movement (p. 115).

While this may be socially and professionally acceptable, it reinforces the lower position of African American women in higher education.

Even though African American women have become administrators in higher education, their participation is limited. This has caused many African American women, as well as their colleagues, to question why they were hired at predominantly white institutions (Allen, 1995). One perception is that they were hired only because they are a member of a minority group and a female (Allen, 1995; Edwards, 1997).

**Tokenism**

As a result of being the only black or woman, the “token” label is sometimes given to the African American woman by colleagues. Colleagues perceive that the African American woman was given the job because of the desire to fulfill affirmative action requirements. Edwards (1997) notes:
African American women are at once more visible and equally isolated due to racial and gender differences. The token woman often finds herself in situations where she is made aware of her unique status as the only African American female present, yet feels compelled to behave as though these differences do not exist (p. 33).

Many African American women find themselves responding to situations in higher education in which a non-African American woman may not be expected to intervene. In many instances these tasks are not desirable and may not be relevant to their job, but they almost always involve issues that relate to African Americans. For example, Sandler (1986) notes, “Black women faculty and administrators at one university were told to keep Blacks in line on anti-apartheid issues – as if it were their job to control other Blacks on campus in order to protect the institution from embarrassment or disruption” (p. 192). This example clearly describes an instance where African American women were asked to intervene and be a representative for the race. It was perceived by the White administrators that the African American faculty and staff could control or had influence over other members of their race.

African American women faculty and administrators are often asked to serve in various capacities as the representative for African Americans or as the expert in issues relating to African Americans. Because there are so few African American women on campus, they can easily become overwhelmed with committees and problems, leaving little or no time for required work responsibilities and self. The following is an example given by a respondent to the PSEW (Program on the Status and Education of Women) questionnaire (Moses, 1989):

When I first arrived at the university (my professional appointment) I enjoyed the attention I received. After a short while, however, I realized that the responsibility associated with being the only black female in my college, and only one of a handful in
the university, was overwhelming. I have suffered several instances of burnout and exhausttion. As a consequence I have learned to maintain a less visible profile as a coping and survival strategy (p.16).

Situations, such as the aforementioned, create barriers to inclusion in administrative positions through biased/limited recruitment and expectations for retention/promotion. In order to overcome the challenges of serving as the token, African American women must seek and provide mentoring, especially for and from those of the same sex or race, with similar experiences with whom they can relate to on a professional level.

**Mentoring**

Mentoring plays an important role in the career development and advancement process for women and other minorities. Mentoring generally involves a mentor and a protégé. According to Bauer (1999):

A mentor is anyone who provides guidance, support, knowledge, and opportunity for the protégé during periods of need and is traditionally a more senior individual who uses his or her experience and influence to help the advancement of a protégé. Mentors have been found to provide two major functions: psychosocial support and vocational/career mentoring functions (p. 1).

Mentoring by and for African American women is necessary to increase the number of African American women administrators in higher education. Johnson (1998) asserts, “African American women administrators can be effective mentors because they bring to their jobs a unique and diverse perspective as both women and minorities” (p. 1). However, because of the low number of African American women administrators in higher education, there is a lack of
African American women mentors, thus creating another challenge for African American women aspiring to be leaders.

Johnson (1998) notes, “African American women mentors working in cross-gender and/or cross-race relationships with protégées have faced unique challenges” (p. 1). Studies indicate mentoring generally has a greater impact if the mentor is of the same race and gender, because they can relate to the same issues or challenges, culture, race, ethnicity (Johnson, 1998; Thomas, 1989, 1990; Wilson, 1992;). Thomas (1989, 1990) argues, “cross race mentoring relationships are often highly strained, and when they do exist it is less likely that these relationships will be of the deeper type that includes a socio-emotional dimension” (p. 3). This creates a problem for African American women and other minorities because of the lack of women administrators in higher education.

It is generally difficult for African American women to develop a personal relationship with white men (Johnson, 1998). In many instances, because of the lack of ability to establish a firm working relationship with white men, African American women may get assistance from white men, but not the true support they need to succeed. According to Edwards (1998):

African American women face an interesting challenge in searching for a mentor to monitor their progress and facilitate their professional development. The scarcity of African American women in first line administration on campus makes it difficult to find enough mentors to meet demand. As a result, a functional but ironic professional alliance has often been formed between African American women and white men (p. 27).

In addition to the challenge of not having someone serve as a mentor, African American women are expected to serve as a peer mentor to other African American women and as academic mentor to students. Johnson (1998) indicates, “peer mentoring occurs generally at the
professional level among people at a similar level of authority and decision-making” (p. 3). Therefore, in order for the mentoring process to be most effective the mentor and the protégé should have similar goals, aspirations, and interests. Johnson (1998) notes:

If African American women protégés are able to find these assets in an African American woman mentor, they have secured the help of someone who has a greater chance of understanding the liabilities usually endured by African American women administrators: 1) negative racial stereotypes, 2) the solo role - - being the only African American in the work group, and 3) tokenism, which results in their being viewed as incompetent and their job/position being seen as affirmative action related (p. 4).

In addition to serving as mentors/peer mentors, African women administrators are expected to provide academic and professional mentoring to primarily African American students and, in many instances, African American women faculty and staff. African American women’s duties in relationship to mentoring have an added element, “community othermother”.

Collins (1991) notes, “unlike the traditional mentoring so widely reported in educational literature, this relationship goes far beyond that of providing students with either technical skills or a network of academic and professional contacts” (p. 131). The “othermother” treats the student as if he/she were her own child. She is concerned with the overall well being of the student, including the personal, as well as the professional life of the student. bell hooks (1989) shares the vision of those teachers:

I understand from the teachers in those segregated schools that the work of any teacher committed to the full self-realization of students was necessarily and fundamentally radical, that ideas were not neutral, that to teach in a way that liberates, that expands consciousness, that awakens, is to challenge domination at its very core (p. 50).
The same holds true for African American women administrators serving as mentors in higher education. Serving as a mentor generally involves enhancing academics, as well as sharing and enforcing cultural values that relate to uplifting the race as a whole (Johnson, 1998).

Because of the added responsibilities African American women take on as mentors, they must juggle mentoring with other professional responsibilities. As a result, they have less time to commit to other career obligations. Sandler (1986) notes, “in part because of their small numbers, minority women are even more likely than white women to be overburdened, especially with advising minority students and with myriad committee assignments, thus limiting their time available for research and publishing” (p. 192).

African American women administrators’ responsibilities as mentors generally require them to counsel, advise, support, and serve as role models, in addition to serving as administrators. It is through these diverse and sometimes challenging responsibilities that African American women must develop their careers, build relationships, and advance the process for women and other minorities in institutions of higher education. In the process of carrying out these duties, African American women experience some aspects of racism and sexism.

**Sexism and Racism in Higher Education**

African American women experience sexism and racism in many facets of their lives, even in their work in institutions of higher education. Harvey (1996) notes the, “ivory tower image of academia, so carefully cultivated by institutions of higher education, conveys the impression that these organizations are conveniently removed from the problematic day-to-day concerns most other individuals and institutions have to contend with” (p. 349). The portrayal of
non-discriminatory behaviors at institutions of higher education can be deceiving. Racism and sexism are alive and well at institutions of higher education.

Research indicates that institutions of higher education are not as supportive of African American administrators, especially women, as they are of white men and women, and African American males (Moses, 1989) This implies that though sexism severely affects the lives of women in higher education, racism also has an impact.

Why are African American women more disadvantaged than African American men and white women? Is it because of sexism? Racism? Or both? “Almquist’s analysis suggests that black women are more disadvantaged because of sexism (non-equal pay with men for equal work) than because of racism (inequalities in occupational distribution)” (Fleming, 1996, p. 225). Because both racism and sexism affect African American women, this section describes how sexism impacts the educational environment.

**Sexism.** Since women’s inclusion in the workforce, they have encountered some form of sexism - discrimination due to their gender. They are hired less frequently, paid less, and are promoted at a lower rate than their male counterparts (Aguirre, 2000; Sandler, 1986). Some women experience sexual harassment and other forms of negative behavior by their male counterparts (Sandler, 1986). These problems are even more problematic for African American women. Edwards (1998) notes, “institutionalized systems of sex bias often create impenetrable barriers that halt women’s progress and stifle their professional development. Though sexism can severely affect the lives of all women on campus, racism, and sexism compound the impact for African American women” (p. 33).

Lorde (1984) defines sexism as “the belief in inherent superiority over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 45). Sexism can be categorized as overt/blatant, covert, or
subtle. Benokraitis and Feagin (1995) refer to overt/blatant sexism as “the unequal and harmful treatment of women that is visible, intentional, and easily documented” (p.1). Benokraitis (1997) notes, “much of the openly blatant sexism in this country has decreased because of federal and state laws against overt discrimination” (p. xi), such as *The Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978*. Despite these federal initiatives to combat overt discrimination, covert discrimination remains a problem in institutions of higher education.

Brant (1999) states, “covert sexism, like blatant sexism, refers to the harmful and unequal treatment of women, but this form is hidden and purposeful. Specifically, covert sexism deals with discrimination that consciously endeavors to ensure women’s failure by means such as sabotage or revenge directed at women” (p. 2) This form of sexism may occur when African American women are specifically placed in a position as a result of Affirmative Action requirements. For example, one of the respondents to the PSEW (Program on the Status and Education of Women) questionnaire that Moses (1989) refers to stated: “I was sought out to be the black female hire in the department, and they never let me forget it. I am treated in a patronizing matter. Very few people in the department appreciate my perspective—even now after two years” (p. 15).

Benokraitis and Feagin (1995) define subtle sexism as “the unequal treatment of women that is visible, but frequently not noticed because these behaviors have been internalized as being normal or acceptable” (p. 2). In most instances, this form of sexism is based on acceptable practices of the past, practices that challenge a woman’s intellectual competence and leadership ability. This form of sexism occurs more often in institutions of higher education. Subtle acts of sexism range from appointing women to less powerful committees to assigning women
undesirable office space. African American women, as well as other women, experience this type of sexism.

Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the creation of Affirmative Action by executive orders, minority and female employment and educational opportunities have increased (Aguirre, 2000). However, Edwards (1997) and Sandler (1991) found many women are placed in positions as tokens and passed over for promotion. This implies that though sexism severely affects the lives of women in higher education, racism also has an impact.

**Racism.** In addition to sexism, African American women administrators in higher education must deal with the challenge of racism. As mentioned earlier, many African American women suffer due to their dual identity as Black and as a woman. Lorde (1984) defines racism as the “belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 450). Racism can be categorized as overt, covert, institutional, societal or civilizational.

Overt and covert racism occur at the individual level. Scheurich and Young (1997) note: Overt racism, then, is a public, conscious, and intended act by a person or persons from one race with the intent of doing damage to a person or persons of another race chiefly because of the race of the second person or persons… Persons making covert, racially biased decisions do not explicitly broadcast their intentions; instead, they veil them or provide reasons that society will find more palatable (p. 5).

Overt racism is generally not accepted by society; however, covert racism is still prevalent and presents challenges for African Americans. As one of the participants in Moses’ (1989) report recounts, “Black women faculty and administrators often bear the brunt of jokes
and subtle and overt ethnic and gender insensitivity of their colleagues. Because many of them are junior they feel they have little power to change things” (p. 13).

The prevalence of racism is in existence and experienced by African Americans in institutions of higher education. Harvey (1996) notes that, “the values of the large society – including the pernicious malady of racism – are found on college and university campuses, and are practiced by the individuals who study and work there” (p. 349).

Institutional racism affects African Americans and other minorities in higher education settings. According to Scheurich and Young (1997):

Institutional racism exists when institutions or organizations, including educational ones, have standard operating procedures (intended or unintended) that hurt members of one or more races in relation to members of the dominant race…Institutional racism also exists when institutional or organizational cultures, rules, habits, or symbols have the same biasing effect (p.5).

Institutional racism may be one of the most damaging forms of racism for African Americans. Despite the fact that African Americans have been allowed to enter institutions of higher education and obtain advanced degrees, the resistance to their presence remains. Edwards (1998) notes, “systemic racism may be one of the most covert or virulent forms of racial oppression facing the African American community. While doors have recently opened and African Americans have obtained greater educational opportunities, there has been no fundamental change in the principals and ideologies that fuel racism” (p. 33). One of the participants in Moses’ (1989) report commented:

I have been upset by the racist and sexist treatment that I have received from both white men and white women unable to deal with a black woman in a position of authority.
Frequently they would attempt to go over my head or around me to keep from dealing with me (p. 15).

Administrators higher than this African American woman have allowed the implementation of informal procedures that would allow employees to bypass her authority.

Administrators have not adequately addressed the challenges and experiences of African Americans. Harvey (1996) notes, “the main reason why racism and racial prejudice continue to dominate university policies and classroom practices is because Afro-Americans continue to occupy the lowest sector of the American economy and are still viewed by white society as being socially inferior” (p. 81). These views of African American women and the resistance to their presence are the result of societal racism.

According to Scheurich and Young (1997), “societal racism can be said to exist when prevailing societal or cultural assumptions, norms, concepts, habits, expectations, etc. favor one race over one or more other races” (p. 6). An example of societal racism is the Jim Crow laws established in the late 1800’s. These laws allowed states to separate people of different races as long as the separate facilities were equal. Students received separate educations, but the educations were not equal. Even today, African Americans may experience societal racism when they are in a predominantly white environment. For example, one of the African American women in Moses’ (1989) report states:

I don’t know about other women of color, but black women are expected to work very hard, be very quiet, and be very grateful that they have a job. White women are expected to be just as quiet, but they do not have to work as hard or be grateful. White males can do whatever they want (p. 13).
African American women receive what they believe are equal jobs; however, work expectations are different in comparison to the white counterparts.

According to Scheurich and Young (1997), civilizational racism occurs when “the dominant group creates or constructs the world or the Real and does so in its own image, in terms of its ways and its social-historical experiences” (p. 7). This form of racism dates back to slavery. During this time, the dominant group deemed it necessary to view African Americans as socially inferior. As a result, racism continues to permeate the generations, resulting in minority groups still experiencing discrimination because of race. Overt, covert, institutional, and societal racism are all the results of civilizational racism.

**Intersectionality of Issues**

The intersectionality of racism, sexism, isolation, and tokenism presents unique challenges for African American women administrators in higher education. These women, especially those working at predominantly white universities, must respond to a chilly climate, thus requiring varied factors to meet those challenges (Aguirre, 2000; Sandler, 1986; Sandler & Hall, 1991). Also, the external demands of family and community commitments present additional layers of responsibility. As a result, African American women administrators must develop coping strategies to successfully manage the challenges the encounter.

**Key Studies**

Throughout the literature review, I refer to studies and volumes of collected essays and autobiographical accounts of African American women’s experiences in higher education, which address the impact of race and gender, feminism, the challenge of social forces, and implications for the future. This section focuses on studies I found to be significant in guiding my research.
They are significant in that they seek to understand the experiences of African American women in higher education and how the campus context influences those experiences.

**Essays**

**Black Feminism.** One of the first volumes of collective essays I found to be key in my research of African American women was *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African American Feminist Thought*, edited by Guy-Shetfall (1995). She brought together essays tracing the development of Black feminist thought from Maria Stewart, writing in the 1830’s, through the emergence of Black feminist theory in the 1970’s and 1980s. Guy-Sheftall’s collection of essays contributes to the retelling of American, African American, women’s, and world history. The actions of many of these women centered on seeking education for themselves and others, teaching, and serving as administrators under challenging circumstances.

Another collection of essays and speeches that proved insight on Black Feminism is *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde (1984). She brought together fifteen essays and speeches she wrote over the past eight years of her life that focus primarily on her experiences as a Black lesbian feminist. Lorde identifies herself as a Black woman, lesbian, feminist, mother of two children, daughter of Grenadian immigrants, educator, cancer survivor, and activist. Although she writes from the particulars of who she is, she also expands and improves the meaning of Black Feminism. Her essays and speeches focuses on issues of racism, sexism, motherhood, sexuality, transforming silence into language, and women redefining themselves.

**Administrators.** Harvey (1999), also through essays, offered observations and reflections on the views regarding academic culture and practice of eight African Americans (five women) who currently hold or have previously held senior-level administrative positions in
predominantly white colleges and universities. The women recounted early education and undergraduate studies in segregated, all-black environments, followed by graduate programs in desegregated research universities. They all faced challenges of racism and sexism in their graduate studies and professions as administrators in higher education. The women all stated they were discriminated against because of their race and gender. For example, Farris (1999) in her position as a female African American president of a predominantly white college discovered early in her tenure:

In the case where the president combines more than one visibly observable physical characteristic, which is associated with prejudice, sometimes it is difficult to determine accurately whether the motivation of a specific group’s action is racist, sexist, or some other “ist” (p. 62).

While the majority of the women felt that race and sex were equally detrimental to their careers, DeGraft-Johnson (1999), believed she was discriminated against more often because of her race in her personal and professional life. She states:

Not only have discriminatory acts touched my personal life, but they also have entered my professional life. As in the case with other African Americans, I have encountered numerous discriminatory acts, and I have sometimes reeled in their aftermath. I have felt amazed by actions of people who have treated me as if I were less worthy of treatment simply because of the color of my skin. I once again became aware that, no matter how much I achieve, I remain an African first before other aspects of my being are considered (p. 113-114).

Because of the visible characteristics the women felt their colleagues labeled them in the academic community as the token, fulfilling two of the requirements, female and black. Farris
(1999) states, “the fact that the new president was also an African American gave rise to some comments about an affirmative action candidate” (p.61). The women were not simply viewed as administrators. McDemmond (1999) notes, as an associate vice chancellor, “I was most often described as a woman, rather than as a black or African American administrator. Many people wanted to perceive me as a woman administrator, who just happened to be black” (p. 78).

As a result of their token status, being black and a woman, they reported that their colleagues discriminated against them. Farris (1999) recounts one of her experiences as president of Richard Stockton College where she was mocked by the faculty group through newsletters and caricatures that were placed throughout the colleges’ main buildings.

Despite the fact they were discriminated against, the women believed they had to succeed for the race. Their sense of mission was to pave the way for others in the academy and the profession. King (1999), like other blacks in her generation, knew:

We were always made aware that our experiences as the first black and the first woman were clearly not undertaken for our benefit alone, but they were for the benefit of our whole race, and especially for those who did not have the earlier opportunity (p. 12).

In order to succeed as administrators, these women had to develop coping mechanisms to encounter the challenges as administrators. The women utilized various coping mechanisms. For instance, Farris (1999) states:

The strategy that I employed in each of the acting roles was to keep a daily log of activities and of my thought about the activities and to evaluate my accomplishments on a weekly basis to see if I should have made different decisions (p. 60).
The women cited family, community involvement, church, campus-based African American and/or minority staff and faculty organizations as sources of support in their pursuit of their careers in higher education.

Challenges similar to the ones recounted by the women in Harvey’s (1999) collection of essays are also highlighted in other studies pertaining to African American women administrators.

Studies

**Administrators.** Edwards (1997) conducted one of the studies I found to be closely aligned to my study. Through a qualitative study utilizing interviews and observational techniques, Edwards (1997) examined the experiences of three African American women in upper strata leadership positions in higher education administration at PWU (predominantly white colleges and universities). This study was done in order to understand the conflicts they encounter; the degree of dissonance they experience; and the adaptations they employ. The study was conducted as a naturalistic and anthropological qualitative inquiry. The primary methodology utilized for data collection was informant interviews, with the secondary methodology of non-participant observation.

Edwards (1997) identified and recruited the women through institutional offices of affirmative action. Each woman was observed for one week and interviewed twice. The entire data gathering process was completed within a six-week period. In order to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality the women were assigned pseudonyms.

Through her analysis, Edwards (1997) discovered the women had similarities in both their personal and professional experiences. Issues of racism, sexism, tokenism, and underrepresentation affected all three women. In addition, they all dealt with questions related to
their leadership abilities that subsequently affected their levels of personal satisfaction. The research also revealed they utilized personal support, such as church, family, institutional sponsorship, and community affiliations to manage professional challenges. Finally, Edwards reported that all three women used resistance as an adaptive strategy to cope with their environments. These findings support previous research on issues affecting African-American women in higher educational administration.

The campus environment is crucial to the success of African American women administrators. The climate of a university depends heavily on the attitudes and behaviors of the administration, which in turn determines the degree of racism and sexism that African American women will experience.

Another article pertaining to women administrators is Simpson’s (2001) study that examined the perceptions of Black women administrators in traditionally white universities in areas such as the role of family in preparation for their current leadership positions, current job satisfaction, communication and management style, support systems, and rejuvenation techniques. Twenty-one black women holding administrative positions in four – year, traditionally white universities were interviewed and responded to the questionnaire. The women identified themes and patterns relating to racism, sexism, sexual harassment, isolation, and pressure to succeed. In addition, coping strategies were identified that related to their success. Simpson found that all of the women worked hard to remain emotionally balanced, spiritually and culturally centered, and academically focused. The women utilized family, as well as God, as their primary support systems. Overall, Simpson found that the women:

Have accepted the fact that no one will fight their battles for them. If they are to survive in the academy they must understand the cultural differences regarding the
communication between men and women and understand the social and political fears and bias of the majority race on these predominantly white institutions and act accordingly (p. 20).

Payne and Hyle (2002), through interviews, also examined the career experiences of 16 Black women senior public higher education administrators in a southern state using perpetuation theory and network analysis. Four broad themes emerged from the study as supporting factors: 1) intrinsic value of the work; 2) professional and family support systems; 3) academic and experiential preparation; and 4) networking and mentoring. Factors inhibiting career success were: 1) money – institutional under funding and personal remuneration; 2) workplace politic; and 3) intersection of race and gender. The study also identifies ways to increase gender and ethnic diversity among senior college administrators.

Mimms (1996) explored the characteristics of successful Black women administrators in one state university system through analysis of in-depth surveys and interviews with two Black women who had attained presidencies and two who had not. Mimms identified six factors supporting career success: appropriate credentials (Ph.D.); visibility from participation in national organizations; communication skills; support from the “right” people; previous administrative experience; and willingness to relocate. As identified in this study, obstacles to career success included issues related to lack of socialization in such areas as willingness to travel, professional organization involvement and risk-taking.

Through an exploratory study, Rusher (1996) examined the recruitment, retention, and promotion patterns of 154 African American women administrators in the position of dean and above (with and without tenure) at traditionally white institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) throughout the United States. Through quantitative (survey)
and qualitative descriptive methods, Rusher identified and examined the external and internal human capital factors, which impact the recruitment, retention, and promotion patterns of African American women. As a result, Rusher noted that most administrators reported the following regarding their experiences:

- They feel good about where they work. Their responsibilities are the same as other administrators. Their administrative power is the same as that of other administrators on their campus. Institutions support their professional development. Their appointment is not perceived as tokenism. Isolation is not a factor in their experience. White males and females feel intimidated by their presence. There are advantages to being an African American female administrator on their campus. Administrators receive support from both the black and white communities. There are not signs of these administrators’ campuses that blacks are not welcome. Administrators seldom socialize with non-African American administrators outside of work. Racial and sexual discrimination has been experiences by these administrators (p. 56).

- It should be noted that the majority of the women did not engage in networking or belong to support groups, but they did have mentors. Overall, Rusher asserts that women are making progress in the ranks of higher education, but more could be done to on the part of institutions to eliminate racial and sexual barriers.

**Students, Faculty and Other Professionals**

This unpleasant environment is not limited to African American women administrators only. As mentioned earlier, because of the lack of information on African American women administrators, I also utilized studies on African American students, faculty, and other professionals to help develop ideas about similar challenges and experiences in higher education.
Moses (1989) examined the climate for black women students, faculty and administrators around the country in both predominantly white universities and Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Her study examined the impact of racism and sexism on black women in academe and how stereotypes can combine to create double obstacles for women. Moses collected her data through informal interviews with black women and anecdotal material collected through an informal questionnaire, as well as extensive files and reports obtained from the Program on the Status and Education of Women. She reported the women’s experiences, challenges, attitudes and perceptions of the women. In addition, Moses provided recommendations and resources to assist the institution with being supportive of and aware of the needs of black women in academe.

The report focused mainly on the attitudes and behaviors that raise barriers to the success of African American women in higher education. According to Moses (1989), one of the women recounts the following key issue regarding the professional climate for African American, “Black women faculty and administrators often bear the brunt of jokes and subtle and overt ethnic and gender insensitiveness of their colleagues. Because many of them are junior they feel they have little power to change things” (p. 13). In order to eliminate professional climate issues, Moses offered several recommendations. The following relate specifically to administrators:

- Include black female faculty and administrators in informal gatherings and meetings.
- Give faculty members and administrative colleagues, superiors, and others feedback for any efforts to create an equitable professional climate for women.
- Recognize comments or suggestions by black women by responding in some way (p. 14).
Overall, Moses (1989) found, “the issues and examples in this paper demonstrate clearly that black women students, faculty members, and administrators do not perceive themselves and their concerns as integrated into the mission, goal, and social structures of college campuses” (p. 22). This suggests that colleges and universities should reexamine their diversity efforts and consider African American and other women of color.

Sandler (1991) wrote one of the key reports that provided information regarding the climate for women in higher education, especially African American women. Sandler (1991) “explores the chilly professional climate often experienced by women as faculty and administrators, as graduate and professional students” (p. 1). The report builds on a previous study conducted on climate issues for students. In this study Sandler provides information on African American women, as well as other women of color. The report “discusses common behaviors that create a chilly professional climate and includes numerous specific recommendations for change, an institutional self-evaluation checklist, suggestions for a campus workshop, and a list of resources” (p. 1).

Sandler (1991) indicates the following issues create a chilly environment for women, but are even more problematic for African American women: double discrimination, isolation, tokenism, visibility, lack of or no mentors, sexual harassment, and a heavy workload. She provides the following key recommendation for improving the climate for special groups of women, which includes African American women:

Designate specific offices and staff members such as ombudspersons to be responsible for evaluating and reporting on climate concerns of women. Gather data-statistical and other-to evaluate the climate for these groups. Support the establishment of campus organizations for women from special groups, for example, women postdocs to counter
the effects of isolation and to provide support and information. Ensure that programs aimed at minorities make a special effort to focus on minority women (p. 19).

The behaviors and attitudes towards African American women, because of their race and sex, reported by Sandler (1999) have been reported and experienced by African American undergraduate students and faculty as well.

**Students.** In seeking to understand how African American women define their identity in terms of both their race and gender, Jackson (1998) examined the experiences of 135 African American women sophomore and junior students at four colleges. Two of the universities were Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and two were Predominantly White Colleges and Universities (PWCUs). In order to ensure confidentiality, the schools were assigned pseudonyms. The methodology utilized for collection was mixed methods: quantitative and qualitative. The major findings of the quantitative inquiries support three ideas. First, many women at all of the schools identified race and gender as important within their self-concepts. Second, race and gender for many women function within a relationship that manifest itself through both race and gender in their self-concepts. Third, women at Wesson (a white institution) seemed to experience a pulling apart of their race and their gender.

The qualitative results also clearly show how both race and gender are important within their self-concept. The core themes of struggle, problem, and consciousness represent only a snapshot of what being an African-American woman means to these women on these campuses. The racial and gender composition of schools strongly influences the options available for those women to experience both their gender and racial identity.

Through her analysis of the quantitative and qualitative results, Jackson (1998) found that women experience race and gender within their self-definition differently, depending on the
racial and gender compositions of their school. Colleges and universities need to re-examine their diversity efforts to meet the needs of their students whose experiences are grounded in multiple sociocultural contexts.

Through the narratives of nine successful African American women professionals educated in the decades between 1920 and 1940, Etter-Lewis (1993) reported similar experiences. She conducted a qualitative study utilizing oral narrative, sometimes referred to as oral history. She utilized interviews to examine the ideas and interpret the lives of African American women in the professions. The women discussed their experiences as students in institutions of higher education in the nineteen twenties, thirties, and forties. They discussed how their families influenced their decision to attend college. They also discussed how they faced both sexism and racism in the early twentieth century.

Through the narratives, Etter-Lewis found that family had a large influence on the women’s decision to attend college, and in choosing a career. Many of the women’s fathers had the greatest influence on college and career. The women saw their fathers as mentors. They also viewed their mothers as active and competent women.

Etter-Lewis found that the majority of the women, even if they did not choose teaching, considered it as a profession because, at the time, it was considered an acceptable career choice for African-American women. Etter-Lewis also found the women experienced double-edged reality in their college experiences:

On the one hand, they were regarded as self-sacrificing stewardesses who would usher in a new generation of educated African-American youth and then fade into the background. On the other hand, they were treated as undesirables, incapable of thinking or working beyond domestic concerns (p. 85).
Etter-Lewis also discovered the women were engaged in club activities that were associated with community involvement and activism. These activities were instrumental in the enhancement of the women’s self esteem, self-confidence, and leadership skills.

In addition, Etter-Lewis (1993) found that race and gender were especially evident in the workplace for these women. According to her:

They have been limited by artificial ceilings and double standards. Entering into a profession was as difficult as staying in the profession, and there were no easy choices. Stepping out of the artificial mold of “service” attracted rewards as well as discrimination (p. 112).

However, these women broke tradition and found their own places in the world.

Etter-Lewis’ study was particularly useful in that it was one of the first major studies I read encompassing theoretical interpretations of Black Feminism. It also utilized oral history to capture the experiences of the women, in the same way oral history is utilized for my study. Also, it provides valuable insight into the lives and experiences of African American female students in higher education between the years of 1920 and 1940, and how it relates to today.

Black Feminism

Collins’ (1990) Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment is also significant in that it provided the theoretical framework for my study. Collins compares the ideas of traditional White feminism with that of Black feminism. She bases her discussions on the idea that black women have occupied marginal positions in society. They are outsiders because they are African American women working in the white, male-dominated world. Collins asserts that African American females have made use of their
marginality, their “outsider within status”, to produce Black feminist thought that reflects on self, family, and society.

I also utilized hooks’ (1984) *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. This work was useful in that it provided a history or foundation for feminism. hooks’ introduced and dissected the traditional definition of feminism based on the experiences of white, middle class women. She developed a theory that is reflective and inclusive of African American women and other women of color’s struggle against oppression.

In reviewing the key studies focusing on African American women’s experiences in higher education as students, faculty, and administrators, it is clear how factors, such as race and gender, and other social forces, such as balancing career, family, and community commitments can be seen as challenges. The aforementioned are only a snapshot of what African American women experience at institutions of higher education on a day-to-day basis. In addition, the racial and gender composition of the schools strongly influence the experiences of African American women.

**Description of the Study**

This chapter began with a historical overview of African American women in higher education and their educational philosophy. Next, I discussed the challenges affecting African American women administrators in higher education and the problems associated with recruitment, retention, and promotion of African American women administrators. Then, I discussed key studies I found to be significant in guiding my research. In addition to the factors presented, I remained open in the study to the information provided by the participants.

The literature review revealed that African American women, especially administrators, at institutions of higher education face numerous challenges. If they are to achieve their
leadership potential, institutions must be attuned to their needs and learn all they can about
African American women and their culture. They should also reexamine their diversity efforts and incorporate the experiences and perspectives of African American and other women of color.
3: Methodology

This section of the dissertation proposal includes information regarding research design, setting, population, procedures, data collection, and data analysis. This is a qualitative research study that utilizes oral history as its primary approach. The inquiry includes open-ended interviews, participant observation, and document analysis.

Qualitative research methodology is appropriate for this particular analysis because it allows for the expression and interpretations of one’s own life (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). These characteristics are well suited for this study, which explores the challenges that African American women experience as professionals in public institutions of higher education. It will allow the women’s perceptions of their respective realities to be expressed.

In conducting my research, I found there is very little information available on African American women administrators in higher education. In fact, there is very little qualitative research on African American women in academe. Etter-Lewis (1993) notes, “when applied to scholarly research, the large group norm, which creates a singular reality can be observed by the conspicuous absence of African American women from major studies” (p. xvi). Studies pertaining to African American women administrators are limited because the experiences of the dominant group are viewed as more important by society. As a result, these studies are excluded from mainstream journals.

In my research I found narratives about African-American women, such as Ready From Within by Cynthia Stokes Brown (1990), which was a first-person narrative of Septima Clark’s life in the context of the Civil Rights Movement. In addition, I found oral histories on white women, such as Women in Academe: Outsiders in the Sacred Grove, by Aisenberg and Harrington (1998) Women’s Ways of Knowing, by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule
(1986), and *Educating Feminists: Life Histories and Pedagogy* by Middleton (1993). Even though these works are not about African American women administrators in higher education, they provided insight into oral histories and historical information pertaining to African Americans.

It is my intention to posit a theoretical perspective of African American women, Black Feminism. The challenges of African American women in higher education need to be understood, respected, and discussed, just as the challenges of the dominant race have been expressed. As Krupat (1993) notes from a speech given by Hopi Tribal Council Chairman Vernon Masayesva, “research needs to be based on the reality of our (Hopi) existence as we experience it, not just from the narrow and limited view American universities carried over from the German research tradition” (p. xix). This study is based on the reality of African American woman administrators as they live it; allowing them to reflect on self, family, society, and the traditional values and norms in institutions of higher education.

**Theoretical Perspective**

**Black Feminism**

The definition of *feminism* varies. For example, people have identified themselves as liberal feminist, left feminist, radical feminist, post-structural feminist, critical feminist, and black feminist. bell hooks (1984) notes, “a central problem with feminist discourse has been our inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is or accept definition (s) that could serve as points of unification” (p. 17). Despite the lack of ability to accept one generic definition, feminist have one common goal: improving the lives of women socially, economically, and politically, even though they may take different positions or approaches to change for women. As Perreault (1993) notes, “these feminists share a common concern about
the subordinate position of women in higher education and in society, but they differ in their
goals, analyses of the problem, and recommendations for change” (p. 4).

the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of
women…who live in the margins” (p.1). This study addresses a group of women who, in many
ways, exist at the margins. African American women administrators are “outsiders-within”
because they are African American women working in the white or male-dominated world.
They are aware of at least two perspectives, that of the dominant culture, and that of the less
privileged. These African American women have knowledge of what changes need to be made,
but are not necessarily the ultimate decision-makers.

Collins (1991) supports the “outsider-within” ideology, noting that Black women’s ideas
should be placed “in the center of analysis…not only to privilege those ideas, but to encourage
White feminists, African American men, and all others to investigate the similarities and
differences among their own standpoints and those of African American women” (p. xiii).
Collins and hooks assert that African American females have made use of their marginality, their
“outsider within status,” to produce Black Feminism and Black Feminist Thought that reflects on
self, family, and society. While hooks and Collins utilize slightly different approaches to
defining African American women as “outsiders” and “insiders,” they present the same basic
concept.

hooks (1984) uses as her base an integrated feminist theory developed from the
experiences of white, middle-class women, and inserts and builds upon the ideas and experiences
of women who have knowledge of both margin and center (African American women and other
women of color). She believes that feminism can be productive for minority women by
providing a perspective other than that of the white middle-class woman. hooks (1984) defines feminism as:

A struggle to end sexist oppression; therefore, it is necessarily a struggle to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates the Western culture on various levels as well as a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires (p. 24).

hooks (1984) further states, “its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular class or race of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives” (p.26). Based upon her definition, everyone should be involved in the struggle to end sexist oppression. As part of that struggle, African American women and other women of color can utilize their “marginality” to implement social and organizational change.

Collins utilizes a different approach. Collins (1991) notes, “two basic components of Black feminist thought - its thematic content and its epistemological approach - have been shaped by Black women’s outsider-within stance and by our embeddedness in traditional African American culture” (p.16). She views race, gender, and class of African American women from a historical perspective and relates it to the present. Collins (1991) suggests, “Black feminist thought consists of specialized knowledge created by African American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words, Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women’s reality by those who live it” (p. 22).

To interpret the experiences of African American women, Collins developed a framework with five key dimensions that characterize Black feminist thought: 1) Core themes of a Black woman’s standpoint; 2) variation of responses to core themes; 3) the interdependence of
experience and consciousness; 4) consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint; and 5) the interdependence of thought and action. Through these five dimensions, I developed my research questions, analyzed my data, coded for common themes, and interpreted the interview data.

I chose to utilize Collins’ (1991) theoretical approach of Black feminism because I found it to be the most comprehensive and one of the latest works available on the subject. I like the fact that Collins integrates the works of other Black feminist such as, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and Angela Davis, with musical artists and others who may not identify themselves as feminists, to provide a perspective of and for African American women. This approach facilitates the understanding and resolution of social dilemmas of race and gender for African American women. Hence, Black Feminism - a theoretical approach that clarifies a standpoint of and for black women - is appropriate.

Subjective Nature of the Research

The study uses a Black Feminist analysis to better understand the challenges of African-American women administrators at institutions of higher education. In this paradigm, race, gender, cultural background, social status, as well as the experiences of those involved in research play a significant role.

In this study, I share some of the characteristics of my participants. I am an African American female interested in higher education; thus, we share the same race, gender, and career aspirations. Also, we share similar cultural background and social status, as well as the experiences of marginality. Foster (1994) notes:

Increasingly, those undertaking fieldwork and conducting life-history research are insiders, members of the subordinate groups they have chosen to study. Social science
reveals a growing trend toward native anthropology and other insider research, studies by
ethnic minorities of our own communities (p. 130).

As an African American woman, what impact will my subjectivity have on the data I
collect and my analysis? In what ways will my personal and professional experiences impact my
endeavors? What are the problems and the possibilities associated with my participants and my
being part of the same culture and community? Foster (1994), indicates, “a distinctive hallmark
of the newer literature in ethnographic theory and method, including recent work in education, is
its self-conscious examination of the subjective nature of the research endeavor” (pp. 130-131).

One of the issues I visited a number of times during the course of my research was that of
being an “insider.” On the one hand, being an African American female enabled me to
understand and afforded me a familiarity with a number of the cultural perspectives the
participants discussed in terms of their personal and professional lives and the challenges in both
contexts. On the other hand, as I conducted the study, I wondered how participants might
perceive me. I made a conscious decision not to convey any ethnic messages.

As a qualitative researcher I felt this processing was important, so I did not give cues that
would influence the data gathered during the interviews. And to the extent that such cues are
implicit in qualitative research, I felt it important to do a reflective check regularly with myself
to maintain a perspective on the process.

Despite my reflective approach, I realized who I am does influence the sample I draw and
the data I gather. For example, Kara noted:

So in terms of a professional piece, just being appointed to this position is one significant
thing, I think. You can come and talk to me. And if you were a white, you probably
couldn’t talk to me, you probably couldn’t get to me. Well I am going to tell you why I
do it, because I am sensitive. Because I did this same kind of work. I did a qualitative
study. I know how hard it is to get access. And I know what you are trying to do and I
want you to finish.

Research Design

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research methods were utilized to gather information in the study. Qualitative
research is “a complex, interconnected family of terms and concepts, and assumptions” (Denzin
and Lincoln, 1998, p. 2). As a result, qualitative research can mean different things to different
people. It can be defined as “multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic
approach to its subject matter” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). This means that qualitative
researchers study things in natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena
in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 1988). More detailed
information can be obtained from a smaller group of people, increasing understanding of the
situation.

Qualitative research is “an umbrella term [used] to refer to several research strategies that
share certain characteristics” (Bogden and Biklen, 1998, p. 2). It often includes the collection of
data through case study, personal experience, introspect, life story, interview, observational,
historical, document analysis, interactional and visual texts, such as photos and journals (Bogden
& Biklen, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). These methods usually employ data collection
through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and written document analysis. These forms
of data collection produce information that is rich in description and explanation.

Oral history involves the collection of data through in-depth interviews, participant
observation, and written document analysis. It was through this means I conducted my inquiries.
I selected oral history because it allows new insights and perspectives of African American women administrators in higher education. As Anderson and Jack (1991) note, “Anthropologists have observed how the expression of women’s unique experience as a woman is often muted, particularly in any situation where women’s interests and experiences are at variance with those of men” (p. 11). This study allows participants to use their own voices and experiences to provide a better understanding of African American women in higher education administration.

**Implications of Oral History**

Oral history involves the use of oral interviews of individuals who witnessed or participated in particular events as sources of data about the past, as well as the use of ballads, tales, and other forms of spoken language as sources of data about the past (Gall et al. 1996, p. 764). Oral history is sometimes referred to as a life story, a life history, a case study, a personal narrative, a biography, or an autobiography. Oral histories usually capture the life of a person from birth to present or some particular period in their life, expressing the experiences in their own words. Etter-Lewis (1993) states:

Oral narrative, sometimes referred to as oral history, is a dynamic interactive methodology that preserves an individual’s own words and perspectives in a particularly authentic way. Oral narratives offer an intimate perspective of a narrator’s interpretation and understanding of her/his own life unabridged. An individual’s account of her/his own life is not just personal, but also social, historical, political (p. xii).

This study allows these African American women’s challenges to be expressed through their own words and perspectives.
Bogden and Biklen (1992) note, “feminist approaches to life history tend to emphasize the lived experience of the narrator and how that relates to the intersection of gender, race and social class” (p. 57). This study utilizes Black Feminism through the research questions to emphasize the challenges and facilitate the understanding of race and gender for African American women administrators in higher education. It has been determined that race, gender, cultural background, social status, as well as the experiences of those involved play a significant role in gathering information. Etter-Lewis (1991) notes:

Oral narratives offer a unique and provocative means of gathering information central to understanding women’s lives and viewpoints. When applied to women of color, it assumes added significance as a powerful instrument for the rediscovery of womanhood so often overlooked and/or neglected in history and literature alike. Specifically, articulation of black women’s experiences in America is a complex task characterized by the intersection of race, gender and social class with language, history, and culture. It is oral history that is ideally suited to revealing the “multilayered texture of black women’s lives.” The resulting information is not a mere compilation of idiosyncratic recollections only interesting to a specialized audience; rather black women’s life stories enrich our understanding of race and gender (p. 43).

Bogdan and Biklen (1992) note, “while some life history interviews are directed at capturing the subjects’ rendering of their whole lives, from birth to present, others are more limited. They seek data on a particular period in the person’s life. Like adolescence or elementary school, or on a particular topic, like friendships or courting” (p. 57). My study is limited in that it seeks to explore the challenges African American women experience as
professionals in public institutions of higher education. However, information on significant events in their lives was mentioned to contextualize their experiences in higher education.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

**Identification and Selection of Participants and Sites**

The target population for this study was African American women administrators serving in the position of dean and above in public institutions of higher education in Louisiana. The sample consisted of 10 African American women serving as president/chancellor, vice president/vice chancellor, or dean at traditionally white and historically black institutions. The administrators represent three historically black universities and three predominantly white universities, and two community colleges.

To obtain potential participants, I sought assistance from Human Resource directors at public institutions of higher education in Louisiana. To maintain anonymity, the universities are labeled, University A, B, C, D, etc.

I sent a letter and/or e-mail requesting their assistance, stating the information needed, and how it was to be used. Additionally, I consulted with individuals in the higher education community for possible participants. This is commonly referred to as “snowball sampling”. Gall (1996) defines snowball sampling as a group of cases that are selected by “asking well-situated people to recommend cases to study. As the process continues, the researcher might discover an increasing number of well-situated people and an increasing number of recommended cases, all or some of whom can be included in the sample” (p. 234). Once I selected participants, I solicited assistance from each individual to identify other potential participants.
Biographical Profile/Vitae/Resume

Once potential participants were identified, I mailed a letter requesting participation in the study. If they agreed to participate, I sent a Request for Participation form (Appendix B) and a Biographical and Institutional Data form (Appendix D) to participants. The biographical profile was utilized to obtain background information, so that it was not necessary to collect it during the interview. In addition, I requested a copy of their vitae or resume. An Informed Consent form (Appendix C) was utilized to gain final approval and to confirm acceptance of participation in the study.

Interviews

Once a participant agreed to the study, I contacted them to set up the initial interview. Interviews were the primary method of data collection. For the purposes of this study, I utilized open-ended interviews (See Appendix E). I interviewed each participant at least three times. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) note, “at the onset of a life-history study, when the subject and the interviewer do not know each other well, discussion usually covers impersonal matters” (p. 57). Hence, the first meeting was an introductory meeting. This meeting was done primarily over the telephone.

The second meeting/interview focused on the professional experiences of each participant. It was conducted at the universities where the participants are employed. It was primarily through this interview that the participants’ constructions of their realities were expressed. During this time, information or documents offered by the participants were reviewed to verify credentials, clarify or explain a challenge encountered as an administrator. The interview questions (Appendix E) were used as a guide to elicit the information. All interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants.
In addition, I observed each participant at least one day, spending time in her environment attending meetings and observing the day-today interactions with colleagues, students, and faculty. This allowed me to observe the climate at the university and how the participants interacted with other colleagues and subordinates. Specifically, I noted environmental/institutional and physical attributes, such as office configurations (location, size décor), personal attire, demeanor, etc. This information was recorded manually and it was photographed.

The final interview served as a follow-up. Follow-up interviews were conducted in an effort to verify responses/questions if necessary. Also, this was an opportunity for the administrators to provide additional information that was not provided in the previous two meetings. Several of the follow-up interviews lasted over an hour.

During the three interviews, I also gathered field notes by hand on color-coded sheets of paper corresponding with the color assigned to each participant. These tablets contain the raw form of observations and reflections of the participants, their environment, documents, and any other relevant sources. Upon completion of the interviews, the field notes were typed and saved on a computer and on a diskette for later analysis.

Once the interviews were completed and all the other data had been collected, several precautions were taken to protect the original data. Copies were made of the original tapes, in case the tapes were damaged during transcription.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed and all other data had been collected, the information was separated into color-coded folders, which were then analyzed for common themes. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, then analyzed and coded for themes. This was
a two-step process. First, I separated the interviews into segments by reading and re-reading the transcripts thoroughly for readily identifiable themes and patterns. I made notes in the margins and categorized the areas of the interview guide, placing the topics of discussion under one or more categories. This was the process of developing a coding system for the data. According to Bogden and Biklen (1998):

Developing a coding system involves several steps: You search through your data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics your data cover, and then you write down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. These words and phrases are coding categories. They are a means of sorting the descriptive data you have collected so that the material bearing on a given topic can be physically separated from other data (p. 171).

Once I developed the initial codes, I listened to the tapes while following the transcripts in order to understand and recapture what was being discussed in the interviews. I paid close attention to the comments as well as the manner in which they were stated. The women started out very professional, but as the time progressed, they began to use dialect and terms of the African American community, conveying more of a personal, closer, insider relationship.

I read through the information again, looking for emerging patterns and themes. The interviews were printed on colored paper corresponding with the participants color-coded sheets utilized for note taking. The quotations were then cut out and placed under the appropriate theme. I also utilized the biographical data, the position, office and personal profiles to organize information about the participants.
After the themes and patterns were identified and organized, I moved to the second phase of data analysis. In order to analyze and interpret the interview data, I utilized Collins’ (1991) framework of Black Feminist Thought.

The first dimension is concerned with the “core themes of a Black women’s standpoint.” This is based on the concept that African American women have common experiences based on race and gender. Collins (1991) suggests, “all African-American women share the common experience of being Black women in a society that denigrates women of African descent. This commonality of experience suggests that certain characteristic themes will be prominent in a Black women’s standpoint” (p. 22). In my study I attempted to identify these common themes. Once the themes were identified, I utilized the second dimension of Black Feminist Thought, “variation of responses to core themes”.

Variation of responses to core themes recognizes the diversity of responses by African American women. Collins (1991) notes, “although all African women encounter racism, social class differences among African American women influence how racism is experienced” (p. 24). As a result of their classifications as lower, middle or upper class, African American women tend to experience different forms and degrees of racism. In addition to social class, sexual orientation provides another key factor as to how African American women respond to the core themes. According to Collins (1991) “Black lesbians have identified homophobia in general and the issues they face living as Black lesbians in homophobic communities as being a major influence on their angle of vision on everyday events” (p. 24). Furthermore, Collins (1991) notes, “other factors such as ethnicity, region of the country, urbanization, and age combine to produce a web of experiences shaping diversity among African American women. As a result, it is more accurate to discuss a Black women’s standpoint than a Black woman’s standpoint” (p.
In this study, I acknowledge that while African American women as a marginalized group have shared the experiences of racism and sexism, each individual woman has a unique response to these experiences, depending on her environment and unique life circumstances.

The third dimension of Black feminist thought, “the interdependence of experience and consciousness,” relates to the personal and professional experiences of African American women, in addition to their exposure to cultural experiences, which shapes their everyday lives. Because of their unique experiences, the perspectives of and for African American women is not expressed and adopted by all. According to Collins (1991):

Black women’s work and family experiences and grounding in traditional African American culture suggest that African American women as a group experience a world different from that of those who are not Black and female. Moreover, these concrete experiences can stimulate a distinctive Black feminist conscious concerning the material reality. Being Black and female may expose African American women to certain common experiences, which in turn may predispose us to a distinctive group consciousness, but in no way guarantees that such a consciousness will develop among all women or that it will be articulated as such by the group. (p. 24-25).

In the analysis I note the common experiences and also attempt to determine if the Black feminist consciousness is prevalent individually and as a group. Specifically, I compare the common experiences and attempt to determine if the experience(s) had an impact on changing the women’s perspectives on being black and a woman or influenced career changes.

The fourth dimension is “consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint.” According to Collins (1991), “African American women as a group may have experiences that provide us with a unique angle of vision. But expressing a collective, self-defined Black
feminist consciousness is problematic precisely because dominant groups have a vested interest in suppressing such thought” (p. 25-26). This type of domination implies that one has to be what the dominant group views her to be. This form of suppression does not allow for self-articulation. Collins (1991) notes:

One fundamental feature of this struggle for a self-defined standpoint involves tapping sources of everyday, unarticulated consciousness that have traditionally been denigrated in white, male-controlled institutions. For Black women, the struggle involves embracing a consciousness that is simultaneously Afrocentric and feminist (p. 26).

As a part of this struggle, African American women must make their standpoint known to themselves and to others by articulating and developing a self-defined standpoint. African American women have to let others know that being Black and a woman are equally important. In the analysis I determine if the self-defined Afrocentric consciousness is articulated.

Collins’ (1991) fifth and last dimension, “the interdependence of thought and action,” deals with identifying oppression, mainly through experience, and attempting to rectify it through some means, i.e., thought and action. Collins (1991) notes, “this interdependence of thought and action suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness” (p. 28). In the analysis I note if the women identify oppression in the past or present, and if they attempted to eliminate it from their lives. Specifically, the coping strategies that are utilized to successfully manage conflict are addressed.

The findings related to these five dimensions are discussed in detail in Chapter Five. The implications of these findings are discussed in Chapter Six.
Ethics in Qualitative Research

Bogden and Biklen (1998) note, “two issues dominate traditional ethics in research with human subjects: informed consent and the protection of subjects from harm” (p. 43). Upon agreeing to participate in the study, the women signed consent forms (Appendix C). The consent forms provided a description of the study, what would be done with the study and how confidentiality would be maintained. As the researcher, it is my responsibility to protect the women by maintaining anonymity. To ensure that their identity was protected, I used numbers instead of names on the interview tapes. Participants were also assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity and in some instances, quotations were edited for clarity. Also, the identities of individuals they referenced, locations, and events were altered.

Once the interviews were transcribed, the administrators’ profiles and stories were developed. It became difficult to report the findings and maintain confidentiality; therefore, I asked the participants to review their narratives.

Member Checking

A major purpose of this qualitative study was to represent the perspectives and realities of the ten African American women administrators. In order to accomplish this I took several steps to increase the validity of my reconstruction of their stories. The women agreed to participate with the understanding that all data with the potential to identify participants would be held in confidence. Their names would not be utilized in the study; instead pseudonyms would be assigned. However, quotes and other information obtained from the interviews would be utilized. This agreement was honored. I wanted the participants to have the ability to negotiate control over what was to be reported in an effort not to be identified. Therefore, member checking, “the process of having these individuals review statements made in the researcher’s
report for accuracy and completeness” was used to avoid misrepresentation of the data as well as give the women the opportunity to review the interpretations (Gall & Gall, 1996, p. 575). Each participant was either mailed a hard copy or electronically sent a copy of her profile and story to check for accuracy and respond to any discrepancies. I felt that it was necessary for the women to review the information that was being reported because pertinent information was conveyed throughout the interviews. The women had numerous experiences and challenges they wanted to tell me about. Also, during the interviews important telephone calls, and staff with pending issues that could not wait interrupted our conversations. As a result, in some instances, the thought process was not recaptured and we moved on to discuss other issues.

I found member checking to be beneficial because it revealed several factual errors that were easily corrected (Gall & Gall, 1996). The opportunity to read the profiles and stories also allowed the women to recall the conversations and suggest information be added or removed due to new perceptions of their situations. This approach contributed heavily to the richness of the data collected in the study. It also enhanced the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

Several of the women made corrections and suggestions to the document. The responses were submitted by email, postal mail, telephone and in person. For example, Kara actually went over the entire document, word by word, on her cellular phone providing suggestions for approximately one hour. Ruby, on the other hand, preferred to meet face-to-face. I drove approximately one hour to meet with Ruby to go over the document and discuss the changes. Ruby requested that personnel issues be deleted from her story. She provided the specific examples for me to understand the challenges of being an administrator; however, she felt that they might be identifying factors and could be recognized by staff or other employees of the university. While this approach privileged the voices and interpretations of participants, I felt
this processing enhanced the credibility of the study and the participants’ willingness to assist in my research.

**Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations of this study. First, this study does not speak for all African American women administrators in higher education; however, it is representative of challenges that African American women administrators have encountered. Second, the study was not designed to determine the differences between the challenges that African American and White women encounter and the coping mechanisms they utilize to successfully manage the conflicts in higher education. As such, it provides in-depth understandings about African American women. In addition, private colleges and universities were not included. Lastly, only African American women employed at public institutions of higher education in Louisiana were studied. This focus allows my research to substantially contribute to the body of literature pertaining to African American women in the south. The conclusions from the study may have implications for better understanding African American women administrators in higher education in other regions of the country as well.
4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges African American women experience as professionals in public institutions of higher education and the strategies they employ to cope with the resulting conflicts. The stories in this chapter represent a synthesis of the real challenges, experiences, and reflections of 10 African American women administrators at the dean level and above. Obtained through oral histories and observations, the stories are consistent with findings from other studies conducted pertaining to African American women in higher education, especially in administration.

Participant Biographies

The participants were requested to submit a vitae or resume’ and complete a Biographical and Institutional Data Form to provide background information. This was done to facilitate the interview process and provide a better understanding of their personal and professional experiences. Based on the interviews, observations, and a review of the vitae/resume and data form, patterns and themes began to emerge.

A summary of participants’ characteristics is as follows. All were born in the South; of the 10, two are twins. The average age of the participants was 53 years. Eight of the 10 were married; and one of the 10 had no children. All of the participants had parents who were born in the South. The education level of the parents varied; however, the parents were very influential in the participants’ decision to pursue degrees.

Four of the participants received bachelor degrees from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and the other six participants received bachelor degrees from predominantly white universities, all in the South, except for one.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years of Service</th>
<th>Years in Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernice</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Demographic Surveys

Six of the administrators were employed at PWUs, while only four of the women worked at HBCUs. Collectively, they had a total of 250 years of higher education experience, and 120 years of higher education administration. Two of the participants were the only African American women administrators at their universities. Only two of the participants did not have doctorates.

None of the participants’ initial career choices were higher education. Three initially were in business and private industry, while the others were in counseling or elementary education. All entered higher education mid-career, after working in some other aspect of business or education. All the participants expressed religious beliefs in God.
Many of the women’s personal and career paths are characterized by the “first” – first African American woman to lead a higher education entity; first female president; first African American dean; first African American homecoming queen at a predominantly white university; first African American professor at a south Louisiana predominantly white university; first African American student at a PWU; first Ph.D. in geometry; and first African American chamber of commerce president.

Several of the women were attending institutions of higher education during the struggle for civil rights and desegregation. Others grew up in the 1970’s when the legal barriers were supposedly removed and African Americans were supposed to have equitable participation in higher education. The women in this study persevered and subsequently were promoted to administrative positions in higher education; however, they are the exceptions to the rule.

In the next section, detailed descriptions of the participants’ biographical, positions, offices, and personal profiles are shared in order to place the women and the challenges and experiences they encounter into a broader context. The biographical information provides insight into the personal lives and the professional credentials of the women. The position profiles help to understand the administrators’ experiences and challenges encountered by providing information on reporting lines and organizational structure. The office profiles helps to envision and understand the institutional and office environments of the participants. Finally, the personal profiles and the narratives help to envision their demeanor, how they relate to colleagues and subordinates, their perceptions and the coping mechanisms.
The Stories

Ruby - Dean

When you meet a black woman in this state who has achieved the levels that I and other black women have, we’re not wimps. We’re survivors. And we have had to acquire skills to achieve our goals.


Born in south Louisiana, Ruby is the youngest of a set of twins. Her mother received her Bachelor of Science degree and pursued post baccalaureate work, but never received a graduate degree. She retired from the public school system after 30 years as a high school teacher. Her father did not complete high school. However, despite his lack of a formal education, he was able to support his family, first as a self-employed auto mechanic and later as a mechanic for a sugar mill. Ruby notes that her parents did not allow her or her siblings to work while pursuing their undergraduate degrees, and they paid for their college expenses.

Ruby completed the first of two baccalaureate degrees in Speech Pathology from a private historically black college in south Louisiana in 1976. After graduation, she began working as a speech-language pathologist for a south Louisiana parish school system. In this capacity she was responsible for providing direct school-based services to children in local area schools.

While working as a speech-language pathologist, Ruby earned a second baccalaureate degree in Speech Pathology/Audiology in 1978 as part of her efforts to be certified in education. A year later she married a teacher from the school system. Four years later she earned her master’s of science degree in Communicative Disorders. Shortly thereafter, she gave birth to her children.
In 1985 she was promoted to the position of master teacher of the Speech Therapy program. In this capacity she was the immediate supervisor of over 30 school-based speech-language pathologists. She served in this capacity for one year and was then recruited to teach in the Department of Communicative Disorders at a nearby predominantly white university (PWU) as a full-time faculty member (instructor rank). Her responsibilities included teaching undergraduate and graduate classes and clinical supervision. She also began her doctoral studies at the same time. In 1993, she completed her Ph.D in Communication Sciences and Disorders from University G and was immediately appointed to the graduate faculty and promoted to the rank of assistant professor. In 1998, she was promoted to associate professor. She became acting dean of the College of General Studies in June of 1998. In 1999, Ruby was promoted to her current position, dean of the College of General Studies at the same predominantly white university.

**Position Profile.** Ruby has served as the dean of the College of General Studies for six years. She reports directly to the vice president for academic affairs and sits on the Dean’s Council. Her primary responsibilities are to manage all resources in the college, financial, and otherwise. She has approximately 20 individuals who report to her either directly or indirectly. The College of General Studies organizational structure includes an academic dean, a director of TRIO Programs, administrative coordinators, academic counselors, academic specialists, and program analysts. In addition, she has 11 to 12 student workers.

The college currently has over 800 students pursuing the Bachelor of General Studies degree. The college serves as home to seven programs designed to support the academic efforts of students from first-generation, low-income, and/or minority backgrounds. Seven Office of Education TRIO programs are housed in the college: Student Support Services, Upward Bound I,

On the day of observation Ruby followed this schedule:

7:30 a.m.  Arrive at office
8:00 a.m.  Phone calls and email
9:00 a.m.  Meeting with staff person
10:00 a.m. Interview
12:00 Noon Lunch
1:30 p.m.  Black Faculty & Staff Issues Committee Meeting
3:30 p.m.  Meeting with faculty member
4:30 p.m.  Return phone calls and answer e-mail

Ruby’s typical day is:

Normally meeting in here with my students. I see all the students who are about to graduate. I usually have anywhere from around 150 to 200 students that graduate a semester. So I see all the students who are graduating for graduation check out. I do advising with them, if they have any courses remaining, you know, in the coming semester. I also meet with those who have more than one semester. I will give them a target date for graduation. But we also talk about their goals, the plans they have. What the former students have done with their degrees in General Studies. I answer any questions and try to dispel any misinformation they receive from others about a General Studies degree.
Office Profile. Ruby’s office is housed on the first floor of an administrative building, located on one of the main streets running through campus. The building is one of the university’s older facilities. Although the building has central heating, it is cooled with window units. Her office is on the far right end of the building. There is a door from her office leading directly into the hallway; however, students, staff, and visitors must enter through the main office, which is connected to her office.

Upon entering the main office, visitors are greeted by the receptionist/student worker and her secretary, an African American female. The receptionist’s desk is immediately to the right. The main office has a warm and homey feel. African American angels are strategically placed on a short bookshelf to the left of the entrance and live, potted plants are placed throughout the office.

A narrow short hallway separates Ruby’s office from the receptionist area. Ruby’s office walls are off-white and are decorated with a magnolia border. Her walls are adorned with pictures of magnolias and African American art. Her mahogany bookshelves hold various magazines, her certificates, and family pictures. In addition, she has live plants placed throughout the office.

Ruby’s office is disorderly. Papers are strewn across her mahogany desk, computer stand, and table. She works at a table instead of her desk, because it gives her more space. Despite the disorganization, Ruby knows where everything is located.

Personal Profile. Our meeting was delayed approximately 45 minutes. There were several unexpected incidents involving students and staff. As I waited in a room that had been converted to a student lounge, I observed the students and the faculty. There were a couple of students studying for an exam. The other students appeared to be actively involved in setting up
the room for a Black Faculty Association meeting that was scheduled for the afternoon.

Everyone seemed to be excited making the room as attractive as possible. Students were busy clearing the tables and rearranging plants. Ruby’s secretary came in and provided suggestions for adding a table for refreshments. It seemed as though the students wanted everything to be perfect for Dr. Ruby.

Once Ruby had taken care of the first two crises of the morning, I was escorted to her office by one of the student workers. Ruby was excited about my research and the opportunity to assist with my endeavor.

Ruby described herself as not being the typical looking dean. At age 49, with round, wire glasses perched on her nose, mid-length, mingle, gray hair, and a calm voice, she looked ready to tend to the business of the day. Her attire for the day was a white shirt with French cuffs, black pants, and flat shoes. She said people always expect a stern-looking Black woman in a business suit; that she was not. She wears business attire when necessary, but prefers casual business attire. She wants the students to feel welcomed and at ease.

Even though Ruby characterizes herself as being disorganized, she is involved in numerous issues on campus and in the community. She gives her secretary all the credit for keeping the office functional and running efficiently.

Throughout our day together, Ruby shared her faith in God. She also shared her other interests, including ending healthcare disparities in minority populations. Because of her passion for healthcare, she has embarked upon an effort to involve University A’s academic community in initiatives advanced by the National Institute of Health.
Ruby’s Story. I graduated with my first bachelor’s from a historically black college in communicative disorders. But I came to my present university in January 1976 and enrolled as a second baccalaureate student because I was pursuing certification. My first degree is in liberal arts. And I also enrolled at the same time as a master’s degree student because that was a personal goal. The certification thing was a requirement for me to keep my job in the school system. In 1978 I finished certification. And I remember that I did all of this while working full time, which is why it took so long. And I also earned a second baccalaureate through the College of Education because I had to take sixty plus hours in addition to the ones I had earned at the private historically black college. I finished my master’s degree in December 1982.

My husband and I married in 1978. Our son was born in 1982, the same year I finished my master’s degree in Communication Disorders. And my daughter was born in 1984.

Fall of 1986 I was hired as a full time faculty instructor in the Department of Communicative Disorders. I worked fall 1986 full time at University A. I wanted to fulfill my doctoral residency requirements as quickly as I could. So, after my first semester on faculty I went to a part – time teaching load. This allowed me to pursue my doctoral studies full time. I did it for two years on a full time basis at University G and I was on half time salary here.

I defended my dissertation in the summer of 1993, but I missed the deadline to submit my manuscript with corrections to the graduate school. So, officially I graduated Fall, 1993. After I defended my dissertation, my department threw a party for me. Even my academic dean and our vice president for academic affairs attended the celebration. I was immediately promoted to assistant professor. And I was appointed to the graduate faculty. Tenure was awarded the Fall of 1998. Even though I was a student from 1986 to 1993, I presented papers at national conferences, and wrote grant proposals and submitted them. Some got funded, most did not. I
just wanted to learn how to be an academic researcher. I’ve always looked for mentors, people who could help me grow, who could teach me.

In 1988 I became acting dean and in February of 1999, following a search, I was permanently appointed. When I moved to this office we didn’t have a secretary, because the previous secretary had left to go to the new community college. I hired my current secretary, Jane, three months after I became the acting dean. Jane is extremely organized. She’s a wonderful trainer of our student workers. We have around eleven or twelve student workers at any given time.

The room we now call our student lounge was being used as storage room when I came here. We converted it to a student lounge. I wrote a technology grant to get computers and the printers. Also, we purchased new furniture and now the room is comfortable for our majors.

I love my job. It was hard for me the first year when I came to University A, I almost called my school system and told them I made a mistake. Even though I was fine here and it was nice, it wasn’t as crazy, fast paced as I was used to at the school board, working with administrators there, and the therapists. But it just took me kind of a year to kind of distress. And here, when I became dean, it took me about a year to get used to not having my CODO students.

As an administrator, I don’t believe in micromanagement. I hate to be micromanaged so I won’t micromanage my staff. I believe we have excellent people on staff in our college and I expect that they all know how to do their jobs.

One thing about me being dean is that I haven’t done research as much as I did since 1998. As a matter of fact, I haven’t done anything research wise since 1998. But, you know, I
love students. But I am getting back into the research. Also, the thing I love is facilitating. Helping colleagues, not just black faculty, but I love helping faculty.

We, as African American women don’t always know how to navigate. Like I didn’t know how to negotiate for a salary, you know. We’re also more prone to want to help the students. So we do service. We do a lot of things. We advise. Do committee work. I’ve never believed that advising is something that involves only giving kids class schedules. It was more. It was about also just listening to them and hearing the kinds of things they’re dealing with, answering their questions and directing them to resources on campus and sometimes off campus. To help them be successful, more mentoring as opposed to just class schedules.

You have to establish who you are because people will try you. And that’s in any job, it doesn’t matter what your color is. Race becomes a factor sometimes but I can handle that. There were a couple of deans who thought they could intimidate me. They did find out that I can be pretty confrontational when provoked.

Despite the challenges, this job makes me get up in the morning. I had the opportunity to take a temporary assignment and it was so flattering at first. I was missing my family. The idea of going to NIH for a year was out of the question. But I also realized I had a responsibility to my college. My secretary told me, she said, “if I knew that’s what you were thinking boss, I would have told you, don’t even worry about it because I’ll quit.” I’d have more problems when I returned.

I love my job. And my job does not come before my family. My mother was dieing of pancreatic cancer last year and that’s why I love my university. There was never an issue. And I thank Dr. Doe, my vice president, you know he never made me choose between my job and my mother, my family, because I would not have a job.
I get a lot of feedback from students, female, black and white. They’re usually shocked when they come in here and see me as a dean because they expected a man or they expected a white woman. And if it’s a black woman, she certainly has to look different from me, you know a three-piece suit, I’m sure, and I will not do that. That’s not my personality. Now when I have to dress, I know how to do that. But I’m not going to come into this office when I’m working all day with students and play administrative games. I’m not going to do that. When I first assumed this position one of my colleagues said, “I guess now you going to start wearing the suits and the power earrings and what have you.” Years later I remember her telling me, “you really have not changed.” It’s a job and it doesn’t define who I am.

In terms of outside service work, I’m very involved with my church. And I am on some boards. I do a lot of counseling and mentoring of young people coming to the university. Just to help these kids to find the money, to help them develop into scholars at the university, to make sure they are successful at the university. I’ve done financial aid applications for students, whatever has to be done. That’s what you have to do.

And the higher you get, the more people you can help. I encourage everyone, especially young black women to pursue graduate studies and especially the doctorate. If you have the ability to earn a Bachelor’s degree and a Master’s degree, then why would you not consider the Ph.D.? If we don’t put more people in the pipeline, I don’t things will change.

As for me and my future I have no idea. I’ve exceeded my goals. I have no idea. Ask the good Lord himself. I have no idea. I did not plan to be a Dean. I wanted to be a department head because that’s what my department head had been nurturing me for. And I had such a passion for my department. It was about service. I love what I do.
Lynn - Interim Vice President

And I’ll have some people who call me Lynn as opposed to Dr. Lynn, but would not consider referring to any of the other Vice Presidents as anything other than Dr. whatever. It’s not been a big problem, but in my mind it’s almost a way to bring me down. But to let me know that, well even though you are a vice president and even though you have a Ph.D., I won’t call you Doctor so and so. I’ll either call you Ms. Lynn or Lynn in an effort to let you know that I don’t perceive you in the same way as I perceive the others.

Born 1963; B. S. 1985; Teacher Certification 1986; M. Ed. 1991; Ph. D. 1995

Born in south Louisiana, Lynn shares the spot of being the middle child with her twin sister. Her father, who died when she was only 15 years old, did not complete high school. Her mother, who was a non-traditional student, received her undergraduate degree during her children’s teen years, and her graduate degrees (M.Ed. and Ph.D.) after her children were adults.

Lynn completed a bachelors of science in Economics and Finance from University B in 1985. After graduation, she began working as a certified classroom teacher and workshop presenter in the state of Texas for one of the independent school districts.

During her time as a teacher and workshop presenter, Lynn gave birth to a daughter in 1989. Additionally, she earned her master’s of Education in Guidance and Counseling in 1991. A year later, she left the school system and became a therapist for the Mental Health Mental Retardation Authority in a Texas county. For the next three years Lynn served in various administrative capacities in the child and adolescent mental health field. During this time she also began pursuit of a doctorate degree.

In 1995, she completed her Ph.D. in Curriculum Development and Counselor Education. After earning her Ph.D., Lynn decided to change her focus to higher education. In 1995, she accepted her first position in higher education and became an assistant professor at University E, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). Lynn served in this capacity for three
years and decided to return to her hometown and alma mater, a predominantly white university (PWU) to serve as an assistant professor.

After teaching for three years at University B, Lynn was appointed to interim diversity officer. A year later her responsibilities increased and she was promoted to interim vice president for special services and equity at the same PWU.

**Position Profile.** Lynn has served as the interim vice president for special services and equity for two years. She is the institution’s chief diversity officer and reports directly to the president of the university. As a member of the President’s Executive Staff, Lynn supervises the counseling center, the office of human resources, students’ disabilities services, and Upward Bound. She has approximately 23 individuals who report directly to her.

On the day of observation this was Lynn’s schedule:

7:30 a.m.  Arrive at work
8:30 a.m.  Meet with President of university
10:00 a.m.  Interviews with Athletic Department for two positions
12:00 Noon Lunch (campus cafeteria at least twice a week)
1:30 p.m.  Meet with Human Resource Director
2:30 p.m.  Meet with student
3:00 p.m.  Follow-up calls, e-mails
5:00 p.m.  Community Meeting

According to Lynn, a typical day usually:

I will have two to three hiring meetings going on. I’ll also have someone coming in either to ask a question or looking for some kind of assistance. And that will be student, faculty or staff. Typically I get a lot of students who come by and tell me an incident that
occurred with them and ask me is that workplace violence? Is that discrimination? Is that an academic or an administrative issue? So I actually do a lot of clarification with students, faculty and staff. I have anywhere from two to three community committee meetings. I participate on a number of boards and that’s part of my job to be in the community, be very visible, very vocal. I handle at least ten to twelve calls a day. And that can range from questions about various searches going on to questions about services provided at the institution to clarification about the EEO grievance process. I get emails pretty much all day and a lot them are questions from various employees on either discipline matters or employee actions. Many of the meetings that I attend in the community start later in the day, four or five o’clock.

**Office Profile.** Lynn’s office is located on the second floor of an administration building. The building is one of the university’s more modern facilities. Her office is near the left end of the building. Upon entering the main office, visitors are greeted by her secretary whose desk is to the right.

Lynn’s office is located directly behind the receptionist’s area. The medium-sized office does not have windows. However, Lynn has filled it with life. Upon entering her office, her desk is located to the right of the entrance of the door. Bookshelves line the wall to the left. The bookshelves are filled with family pictures. The file cabinet on the wall in front of her desk holds her piano keyboard, which she is still learning to play. Her walls showcase African American artwork, and pictures she has photographed in her spare time.

**Personal Profile.** Lynn was my second interview. I traveled approximately two hours to spend the day with her. By the time I arrived at Lynn’s office, she had started her day. Her
secretary informed me that she had already left to the go to the athletic department to sit in on two interviews.

Her secretary, without hesitation, walked me to the Athletic Building. When I arrived, the interviews had not started. Lynn was reviewing the applications, resumes, paperwork, and talking the coaches and student representative through the interview process.

As I entered the room, she welcomed me with a huge hug and smile. She introduced me to the coaches, student, and Athletic Department secretary. It was as if we had known each other for some time. I guess my initial telephone contact with Lynn was personable and warm.

At age 40, she has a calm voice, but a lively spirit. Her attire for the day was a purple/plum pantsuit. Her accessories were limited to a gold watch and gold hanging earrings.

Overall, Lynn appears to be very down to earth. She tries to eat at the school cafeteria at least two to three times a week. She believes you need to be as visible and accessible as possible. However, on the day I visited, we had lunch at her favorite Chinese restaurant.

Lynn also has a wonderful sense of humor. Throughout the day she amused me with stories and comments about her personal life. She shared with me her deep and abiding faith in God throughout the day. She presented herself as a deeply spiritual woman who, after years of hard work, finds herself owing her success to the glory of God.

Lynn’s Story. Two years ago the existing vice president for special services and equity went on leave. And many African American students were coming to me and saying “what’s going to happen to us? What’s going to happen to our programs? What’s going to happen to our position here on campus?” They were concerned. I said, “well I really don’t know what’s going to happen, but I feel confident that University B is going to put someone in place that will
continue the work that Dr. Doe started.” And a couple of them asked “Doc, don’t you want to do it? Don’t you want to take his place?” I said, “no.”

Actually I love teaching. I was the new liaison for our first Professional Development School. I was working with the school, supervising student teachers, teaching my classes. But I gave it some thought. I called the president and I asked for a meeting. I told him the students were coming to me and they had their concerns. And I volunteered to serve in that position for any length of time that I was needed. Because I felt like the students were very concerned and the school was in a place where we didn’t want the work to stop. A lot of people felt very afraid that when Dr. Doe left that his work would not continue. So the president considered my offer, called me back in a week, and said, “we would love to have you serve.” So the first year from October 2001 to June 2002 I was interim diversity officer. And I worked and supervised the hiring of unclassified and classified employees. I was still supervising student teachers, teaching and I handled all grievances that came through this office. I was also a community liaison for this office. I spoke about our EEO processes. I continued doing my community service work. And so in July of 2002 until the present, the university gave me a raise and gave me title of interim vice president. As interim diversity officer I think my pay was like $48,000 as vice president it went up to $80,000.

As interim vice president, I became the appointing authority for the institution, which meant I supervised all classified employees and supervised all employee actions. And that was anything from promotions, raises, terminations, disciplinary actions and the like. And I also have four divisions under me: the counseling center, Upward Bound, the office for students of disabilities, and the EEO.
In this position I really use a myriad of skills. I actually do some conflict resolution and I participate in mediation. I also help people to identify what their problems are when they come to me. Many people want to file a grievance and they want to initiate some kind of action against a colleague, but after talking to me I kind of assist them in identifying what it is they really want. Some of them just want to talk about what happened, some of them want administrative support, so I basically do a lot of problem solving. And that’s pretty much what I did as a psychotherapist and as a counselor. I also use a lot of my teaching skills because when I share information it’s very similar to teaching. Also, I do all of the training for workplace violence, sexual harassment prevention and diversity awareness. In those presentations what I do is very similar to teaching. You present content, you try to help the individual to assimilate the information and relate it to personal or to existing experiences.

I make it a habit to be as respectful and as positive as is possible. When people come to this office they either want information, they want understanding, or they want to vent or complain. And I find that when I approach them in a very proactive, positive way, it discourages a lot of complaining and a lot of negativity. Because no matter how angry they are, I remain positive. So I guess my whole focus in the office is to be as cordial, positive and respective as is possible. And in two years I have not had anyone to continue with inappropriate behavior once I responded very positively and respectively. Either they will quiet down, they will shut down, or they will leave, because I don’t reinforce the negativity. If they are angry, I say well you know I understand how you are feeling and that situation would probably be very frustrating for me as well. What can we do about it? How can we address it? So I try to move them into being proactive instead of reactive. And that tends to work.
I am very down to earth. I am a good listener. I am easy to talk to. And I try to use those skills to help to either resolve an issue, get the information they need, or to help them find some kind of path to resolution.

I think many African American administrators in higher education are role models, they are leaders, but they are also servants. And not servants in a negative way but people that are there to serve. And I perceive myself in that same way. I know that I am a role model for the men and women whom I come into contact with, not just the young men and women, but there are people on this faculty who have never interacted with an African American female at this administrative level. So I am giving them experience in learning how to work with someone of a different culture, in a position that’s new to them. I have had college students say to me ‘Dr. Lynn, I never had a black professor. I never had a black teacher. In all of their P-12 and college experiences, so I am giving them a glimpse into what’s it like to interact with someone who is of a different culture, in a position that you are not used to seeing to them in.

I also believe that I am here to serve. I am here to assist. I am here to support. I am here to insure a positive experience for the students who I come into contact with. I am also here to support the academic and nonacademic programs. I am here to provide information. I am here to assist with creating and maintaining a positive and effective workplace for all that are employed here. I also see myself as a leader. I have four divisions under me and it’s very important that I create an environment where the people who work under me are able to do their job to the best of their abilities with the resources they need. And I see that as the role of a really good leader. Someone who encourages people to work hard, who supports them when they are having difficulty but also acknowledges them when they do a good job. So I see myself in all of those
roles and I think that those roles are commensurate with all African American women who are in administrative positions. We are there to serve, support, be role models and be good leaders.

My greatest challenge personally is to maintain healthy appropriate relationships. I think it’s a problem because I am very assertive. I am very direct. I am very goal oriented. And sometimes that can create difficulties in male-female relationships. It’s not that I am not open to it. However, I think sometimes it can be difficult for some men to work with a woman who is very goal oriented, very specific, very single minded. I think sometimes that creates some difficult dynamics.

Another personal challenge, a big challenge, for me is to be less self-critical. I give everybody else the benefit of the doubt except for Lynn. And I have been working on that for forty years. My friend tells me that before anybody can kick your butt, you’ve already done it. They can’t do it better than you, so you may as well not even listen. And I say, “what do you mean?” Well, if anything happens, you automatically assume you had something to do with the situation not going well. Sometimes there are things that are beyond your control. But what I say to him is that if I blame myself then it makes me feel powerful. There are some things that we cannot change, that we cannot affect and for a person like me, I don’t want to hear that. I believe I can change the world. But those are my two biggest challenges personally.

My biggest challenge professionally is that there are still some things I want to do and I don’t know how to do them. I’ve had a childhood dream of going to law school and I have not done that. And after the 9-11 occurrences, and everything that has gone on it, has made me see how short and precious life is and I don’t want to not to fulfill this dream. However I have a fourteen-year-old daughter that I adore. She’s very expensive to maintain. She is a ninth grader and high school is a critical time and I don’t want to be so involved or absorbed in law school
studies that I can’t be there for her. How do I pursue some of my own goals and still be there for her? So I decided to put law school off for four years. And once she finishes high school, then I will offer her the chance to come to University D with me or wherever I am in law school because there will be an undergraduate school somewhere close by.

I think that some of the societal norms contribute to women not being embraced and accepted when they are very singularly focused, when they are very direct. I think society, unfortunately, views women who are very powerful and in control as a bitch or someone who doesn’t need a man or someone who is like a man. Unfortunately I don’t think women in our society or embraced when they are in positions of power. It feels very oppressive to me that we as women sometimes we feel we have to down play our accomplishments in order to make the people in our lives feel okay. And that’s not just men. When I got this Ph.D., I lost a lot of friends and I couldn’t believe it because I still loved my friends. I still cherish those relationships, but I found that they perceived me differently once I got the doctorate. I was still Lynn but that degree and those experiences that came afterwards unfortunately separated me. Whereas when my male friends got Ph.D.s, their wives and their families were so proud. I didn’t see them lose as many relationships as I saw some of my female counterparts.

I am divorced and my daughter right now lives with her father. I think I would be perceived as a truly horrible mother if I decide to go to law school at this time. I see my daughter at least two to three times a month. We talk every other day. But I still get feedback from some friends and family who say, you know, you must be an awful mother for letting your husband raise your daughter. And my comment is I raised her by myself for the first twelve years, I think he can take the next six and do okay. But in this society, women are perceived sometimes as being less feminine or less womanly or less motherly if they are not the custodial parent. And
that is oppressive. I don’t see very many women in our society being praised or acknowledged when they allow the husband to raise the child, and they go off and do different things. Now they are still in contact with the child and maintain visitation and maintain contact, but I think our society can perceive the situation more positively when it’s men who go out there and climb the mountain while the woman stays home and works with the kid. Rather than perceiving a woman positively when she’s the one going to climb the mountain and the child is at home with the father. That feels oppressive to me.

Personally my greatest success is being a mother of that fourteen-year-old daughter. I see it as a true blessing from God that he allowed me to have a role in her life. He allowed me to be the conduit for that child to come into the world. So that’s just the best thing I have ever been involved in personally.

Professionally, well this position is just the pinnacle for me. I never aspired to be a university vice president. I thought, when I was a young girl growing up, I’d get married right out of high school, have five or six babies and that was it. So this position surpasses all of my expectations, just beyond what I could have ever believed in. And I am very proud to have the opportunity to do it.

I could not have achieved this without trusting in God. Put your faith totally in him and his blessing will surpass your wildest dreams. I don’t mix church and state. I am not a religious fanatic, but I know professionally when I was coming up through the ranks and I gave everybody else credit for what I was doing, except for the one who is truly responsible. And once I turned my life, my expectations, my dreams, my problems over to him, it all just fell into place. Now I am not saying that’s easy or that I have things easier but I don’t handle things the way I used to.
You can go through the little crisis, you can go through the little dramas and the difficulties, but when you feel as though he’s that safety net it doesn’t matter what comes through that door. It doesn’t matter what people say to you. Because when you believe that there’s a higher power at work, you tend to view people as less powerful to control you in their life. My mother and my grandmother instilled that strong faith in God in me. My grandmother is going to be ninety-four soon and she’s illiterate. But anytime I tell her there’s a problem, she says “pray about it, baby.” That advice has tended to work.

Another challenge that I have encountered is covert racism. God, I hate to say covert racism. But it’s true, my biggest problem is people wanting to do things the way they have always done them as opposed to doing them in ways, which create equity for all involved. And I say it’s covert because the individuals who attempt to distort the playing field are not very visible or vocal about it. They want to be very quiet, they want to do it in such a way that it doesn’t raise a lot of attention. Where it doesn’t create a lot of controversy, but yet it’s done. So to me that’s covert, if you are attempting to give anyone preferential treatment or deny someone equal treatment for any reason that’s discrimination. So I guess it would be covert discrimination as opposed to covert racism and that’s the biggest problem. A lot of individuals that I come into contact with tell me ”we didn’t have to do it this way until you came along.” And I remind them the Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964.

They should have been doing it this way for about thirty-nine years. And I tell them it’s not me, when you see the increases in discrimination cases or the increases in sexual harassment cases, increases in employment discrimination, all of these things come from individuals not understanding or not applying the law that came from the Civil Rights Act of 1964. So to me that’s the biggest problem, getting people to understand that we are bound by law to create level
playing fields, in hiring, employment, in the way we treat our employees in the work place. It’s not something that Lynn started two years ago. It was a law passed almost thirty years ago.

I guess the secondary problem is being perceived as a professional. I am so down to earth and so approachable that some people mistake that for familiarity. I’ll have some people who call me Lynn as opposed to Dr. Lynn, but would not consider referring to any of the other vice presidents as anything other than Dr. whatever. It’s not been a big problem, but in my mind it’s almost a way to bring me down. To let me know that, well even though you are a vice president and even though you have a Ph.D., I won’t call you Doctor so and so. I’ll either call you Ms. Lynn or Lynn in an effort to let you know that I don’t perceive you in the same way as I perceive the others. I don’t personalize it because I know who I am. But that has been problematic.

In order to cope with problems I encounter I paint watercolor pictures. I’ve had four of my pictures accepted in a gallery in Omaha, Nebraska. I am very proud of that. I started taking piano lessons for my fortieth birthday. And when I feel very stressed or when I feel like I need to wind down, I play my piano, badly, but I play. I also sew and I swim. So those things kind of take me away from some of the stress that goes on.

I have my bible on my desk and I have a list of Psalms that I read on certain occasions and it centers me. Now I don’t advocate the use of prayer to anyone who comes in here because that’s not my role.

But on a personal level, that’s how I cope, I pray. When I know I am going to have a stressful day I will go to mass in the morning before I start my day. And that always puts me in a positive frame of mind. But my mom taught us that. She would wake us up early in the morning when she was going through something and take us to church. Now my siblings and I would be
sleeping on the pews because we’re young and tired. She taught me that years ago, so I still do it. That helps.

I also utilize my family, my mother and my siblings and a family that I have created, with sister friends in Texas and Louisiana and Wisconsin and former students to cope. I’ve created this little, dysfunctional family. And they are like my little advisors. I have created a wonderful, nurturing group of women and men who are in similar positions, some of us are in higher ed, some of us are still in P-12 schools. Some of us have no degrees and no education and are often times way more insightful than those of us that have degrees. And we just nurture and encourage and support each other.

Resigning? Once. But it was that bad, that being at least twice a week for the first year. Last two years have been good but the first two years—were uhhhh. I wanted to quit every week, at least twice a week. But once I got that first year under my belt, it was better.

I am still working on a balance. For me, a balance would be to have a realistic expectation for what I can do and realistic expectation for what can be done in this position. And I guess I am getting closer to it. One thing I’ve learned, I guess I have been learning all my life, is that you can’t make people do or think or feel, what they don’t wish to do, think, or feel. And we have to accept people where there are before we can work with them.

For myself, Lynn has to be taken care of. No one else is going to do it but Lynn and that was the hardest lesson for me to learn. Because I kept thinking that if I found this perfect husband, he would take care of me. And if I was a good daughter, my mother would take care of me. She did it for twenty-two years. After that, I realized I had to take care of Lynn and that meant eating properly, exercising, developing outside interest, saying no, setting limits with
people, creating boundaries for myself and letting people know when they crossed them. I think I am closer to that balance. I work on it everyday. Hopefully, before I die I will have gotten there.

I think African American women should know who they are first. Become comfortable with who they are and then be themselves. I think sometimes we get into positions of authority and we want to become like someone else. We want to mimic the behaviors of someone that we respect or we want to adapt the appearance of people who are in similar positions. I really believe that women in any position or any station of life, when they really know who they are and love and accept themselves are the norm. I don’t know that we as African American women can afford to use a template as far as how we dress, how we speak, how we interact with others. We just have to love and embrace ourselves. Be the best self and that I believe will go further towards becoming the norm as opposed to trying to mimic the behavior of others.

I don’t believe those are barriers for us. I think we create our own barriers, because the opportunities are out there. We have to come to the plate with good qualifications, with well-rounded experiences, and a belief that we can do anything that we set our minds to. Yes, I believe institutional racism exist. Yes, I believe that there is a glass ceiling, but I also firmly believe that we can accomplish those things that we set out to do if our belief in ourselves and our work ethic is stronger and harder than anything we come into contact with. So I don’t believe policies and practices can stop us.

Our work ethic has to be harder and stronger. We have to believe in ourselves more. We have to work harder than anyone else, black, white, Hispanic, male, female, transsexual, whatever. We have to work harder. We have to believe in ourselves. We have to not give up. Not allow the perceived barriers to get in our way. I don’t believe anything can hold us back if this is what we want to do.
In the near future I see more and more of us becoming university presidents. I see more and more of us attaining positions in administration, in the administration of higher education. I also see more and more of us opting out of higher education for better paying jobs in the public sector. Which is not always a good thing, but I think as opportunities expand so will we. We can make more money in the business sector than we can in the education realm.

As for my future, I want to attend law school before this brain peters out. I also want to become an infamous painter. Not famous, infamous. I want to become a photographer where my work is published regularly. I want to be known for my poetry and for my books that I have written in and edited in higher education. So in the future, I want to develop some of my creative talents and become more reliant upon them for income as opposed to my academic background.

For African American women aspiring to become an administrator I advise them to develop a big scam. Meaning, don’t personalize some of the negativity that you will encounter. Secondly, know your job. Know the duties, responsibilities, the populations that you are going to work with, know the rules, policies, and practices that govern that particular situation. Third be damn sure that’s what you want to do. And I guess last, always take care of yourself. Do not put that responsibility on anyone else. Make time to take care of you.

Marie - Dean

It also helps you because if you get to managerial levels you are kind of out by yourself. When you move up it becomes you know when they say it’s lonely at the top? It can be lonely at the top.

Born 1946; B. S. 1966; M. B. A.1967; Ph. D. 1980

Born in Jacksonville, North Carolina, Marie is the oldest of four siblings (one deceased). She is married and the mother of two sons. Her mother received her bachelor of science and
master’s degree in Education. Her father did not complete high school. However, despite his lack of a college degree, he was determined his children would be educated.

Marie completed a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business from University D in 1966. Upon completion of her undergraduate degree, she pursued and earned a Master’s of Business Administration from a Georgia university in 1967.

After graduation, she began working as an internal auditor in a southern state. In 1969, she returned to Louisiana to become an instructor of accounting at University D. This was her first job in higher education. A year later, she left the state to work in corporate America as a general accountant for a publishing company in the northeast.

In 1973-75, she returned to Louisiana and reentered the higher education scene. Marie became an instructor of accounting at University D again. During this time, she also began pursuit of her doctorate. In 1980 she earned her Ph.D. in Accounting. During this time, she also served as a part-time instructor of accounting at University G, and she started a family, giving birth to her first son.

In 1980, Marie returned to University D as a faculty member, and in 1983 became the Acting Director of the School of Accountancy. In 1993, she was promoted to the dean of the College of Business. She served in this capacity until 1998 when she was promoted to vice-chancellor for academic affairs.

After 26 years at University D, a Historically Black College and University (HBCU), Marie decided to take her expertise to another university in Louisiana. In 2003, Marie became the Dean of the College of Business at University B, a predominantly white university (PWU).
**Position Profile.** Marie has served as the dean of the College of Business at University B for approximately two months. She reports directly to the vice-president for academic affairs. Marie is the chief executive officer for the College of Business and is responsible for budget, personnel, and facilities. She has approximately six individuals who report to her directly and approximately 40 who report to her indirectly. The College of Business organizational structure includes the MBA director, director of the Small Business Development Center, and department heads. It has two academic departments and four service centers.

Her schedule for the day that she was under observation was as follows:

7:15 a.m.    Arrive at work
8:30 a.m.    Accreditation meeting
10:00 a.m.   Walk to job fair
12:00 Noon  Lunch
1:30 p.m.    Interview
3:30 p.m.    Plan for Advisory Council Meeting

Marie describes a typical day as:

Talking to faculty members and looking for proposal opportunities to generate some funds. We are working on the reaffirmation of the college’s accreditation now. So I’m usually looking at something that relates to that. See if there is something that we need to change. This morning I walked over to the career fair because it’s going on. There are some new recruiters there. A typical day is seven-thirty to five. I’m not usually here at night.

**Office Profile.** Marie’s office is housed on the first floor of the academic business building. This is the only four-story building on campus. Her office is at the far right end of the
building. Upon entering the main office, visitors are greeted by her secretary. The main area is clean, bright, and spacious. The secretary’s desk is immediately to the left. The main office has a business environment.

The color scheme of Marie’s large office is predominantly blue. Her mahogany desk is located to the right of the doorway. Her computer sits to the right of her desk on a computer table. Two large bookshelves are located to the left of her desk. The bookshelves hold accounting and business books. In front of her desk are two blue chairs with a small table separating them. At this point Marie has not personalized her office with family pictures and or certificates/ diplomas.

**Personal Profile.** When I arrived for our meeting, Marie was on the telephone; however, I did not have to wait long. Once her secretary informed her I had arrived, she greeted me with a warm smile and a handshake and invited me into her office.

Marie, at age 57, appeared to be relaxed and calm. She is approximately 5’1, with brownish hair and a mole on the right side of face. She wore wire rim glasses and was dressed in a navy pinstripe suit with a red sweater shell and navy shoes. Her accessories were also coordinated. She wore a silver and gold watch on her left wrist. A white gold/platinum wedding ring with a round diamond was on her left ring finger. Her overall demeanor indicated she was serious and about the business at hand.

I sat in one of two navy chairs divided by a small round table by the window and Marie sat in the other. She appeared to be interested in my research and assisting me by providing the names of other potential participants for my study.
Based on our conversation, off the record, I could tell there were some unpleasant circumstances that caused her to leave the previous university; however, she did not care to elaborate. As a result, I did not force the discussion.

**Marie’s Story.** I’ve been the dean of the College of Business here since August 1st. I was vice chancellor of academic affairs for five years. Before that I was dean of the College of Business for five years, and before that I was head of the accounting program for seven years. And before that I was a faculty member, I don’t know, in the fifties. It was about seven or nine whatever it takes to make 26. Well, I was leaving academic affairs and going back to the faculty. And this opportunity came up and I decided I would like to try it. I have only been here two months, however, I have a long history in administration.

I think certainly in my experiences I have found that you can work better with people if you have respect for them. Respect for their ideas so that they feel comfortable talking to you and telling you what they think or disagreeing with you. If they feel comfortable in the working environment, I think there can be successful managing. You need to be knowledgeable about what you do. I think that takes either knowing it from past experience or if it’s a new situation, you researching it and finding out what you need to know in order to act on what the situation calls for. You do have to be diligent enough to work and I think you need to be a communicator with a bit of enthusiasm. So that you don’t look like it’s a chore to come to work and it hopefully won’t be. If you don’t have that enthusiasm that gets communicated to the people around you and it causes them to take on lack of motivation or lack of enthusiasm.

Professionally one of my challenges has been getting along with some of the people I have gotten along with. I generally get along with everybody well but some people are more challenging than others and you have to make adjustments. I have come across some jealous
women and men. But that’s a situation to deal with because jealousy is a very ugly characteristic and when you come across it, you really have to pay attention. And some of the things that people do come from that and you kind of have to look over that. It has been mostly women. I can only think of one man where I knew he was jealous.

Now the other challenge has been the fact that since I am in business and the number of academics in business is not unlimited. Going to professional meetings a lot of times, I would be the one of the few African Americans. For example, even in the college of business here, I am the only African American. There is no other African American faculty member here in the college of business. We have authorization to hire for three positions. But we are also in the process of reaffirmation of our accreditation. And it’s a critical issue. So we are going to have to hire who we can hire.

I would like to hire business people. African Americans with Ph.D.s in business areas are extremely difficult. We had difficulty with that at University D. In fact at University D I think there’s only three African Americans on the business school faculty at University D with their Ph.D. and that includes the Dean. So hiring African Americans at the business school is extremely difficult. The supply is very limited. And when the supply is limited that drives the price on them up because the bigger schools will pay more.

My biggest challenge personally is my husband lives in Baton Rouge most of the time and I live here. I have been going home on most weekends and that’s different for me. That’s not something I thought I would be doing at this stage in my life. But that’s a challenge, but it’s not a bad one. But you know solitude is pretty good too. I have my own space. And I just kind of do what I want. I’m sure I will get lonesome eventually but I am not now.
Well, I think professionally, my greatest success for me would probably be bringing University D through its initial accreditation. The colleges of business accreditations are not easy to get. Only about a third of the programs are accredited. I think maybe about thirteen or fourteen HBCUs at the time that University D got its accreditation. We were about number eight or nine for HBCUs and that was something you needed to be. But that what stands out at this point as the greatest achievement I’ve done because of the satisfaction of working for that and actually getting it. University B is up for reaffirmation. University B has been accredited since 1989. I hope that I am going to lead them to reaffirmation, which is real important.

Personally, I have two wonderful sons. One’s twenty-four, a graduate student at a predominantly white university in a neighboring southern state. He graduated from University G year before last, and this is his second year in graduate school. And then my youngest son is a senior at a private historically black college in a neighboring southern state. It’s wonderful, believe me. And both of them are good children and have done well for themselves. Personally that’s my biggest success.

Well like I said, you are always confronted with getting along with the people around you. And at this level you have to get along with people above you as well as the ones below you. And that’s been the hardest. Also being able to plan what you need to do, to be able to work that field, being able to identify the big issues and concentrate on the big issues and not the little things is also very important.

There are a whole lot of little things at University D, that haven’t found here. At university D there were a lot of student problems and a lot of administrative foul ups. When I say a lot of things, I mean you try to do administratively and for some reason or another it was cumbersome to do. A lot of picky problems that shouldn’t have happened that did. For instance,
somebody sent the grade change for a student and it got lost ten times before it happened. And the student keeps coming back nine times to ask you. Well, that’s what I mean by picky, you can get bogged down in that level of detail. Now, here, I don’t know much. I haven’t had a student here yet. Like I said I’ve only been here two months.

In order to cope with these kinds of problems you hold your tongue a lot of times. I try not to lash back at people regardless of what they say or do. I act professionally. I take a lot of deep breaths. Another thing is don’t let work be your whole life. Don’t forget that your family is first, even if you don’t spend as much time as you want with them. They really are the most important thing because you can lose sight of that. You also can lose sight of the fact that you can get awfully busy but it’s still a job. Keep it in perspective.

I have lost some time with my family. I wasn’t a stay at home mother. It was never an option. I didn’t ever think it would be. My mother worked so I had no reference to stay at home mothers. I did travel a lot in the college of business when I was dean and even when I was the vice president, I traveled frequently. And when my children were small my husband kept them, so it worked out alright.

My family is very supportive. My parents are still alive and healthy. My husband was very helpful with the children in terms of picking them up and keeping them if I went out of town or something. And I have good support from colleagues especially when I was in academic affairs.

One of the things about me is I have always come to work very early. Like here I will get to work usually by 7:30. And it was the same thing at University D, I’d get to work from 7:15 to 7:30 and I would work. I would not stand around drinking coffee. I do not stand around chit chatting. I do not take two-hour lunches. For lunch I go, I eat, and I come back. I am doing
something all day. I am not sitting at my desk waiting for a meeting. If I have a half-hour to a meeting, I am going to do something. When I am here I work. But now I get off at 4:30, that’s not going to say that sometimes it might be really busy and necessary to stay longer. Of course I will. But I don’t make it a point to just stay later.

I also get support in the professional realm. One thing about the traveling is you meet a lot of colleague’s, you know people in high positions from around the country because you have to go to meetings with them and all. That brings about a lot of support. So if I had a problem here, there is a number of people I could pick up the phone and call and say, “look what should I do about this?’ ‘Do you know?’ And that’s helpful, you don’t feel like you are out there by yourself.

I remember when I first got to be the dean of the College of Business at University D. I was on this Board with the dean at University I. I met him for the first time at the board meeting right after I had been appointed. He told me he said, “Marie next meeting we are going to stay after the meeting and we are going to go over all of the accreditation standards,” because he was already accredited and was more experienced than me. So we did. The next meeting we sat there for about two hours after the meeting was over and we went over all of the standards. Some people have been very helpful in that regard, and I respect that. I could probably call complete strangers, deans that I really haven’t met and get an answer. So I found a lot of help like that.

And that’s really important. It also helps you because if you get to managerial levels you are kind of out by yourself. When you move up it becomes you know when they say it’s lonely at the top? It can be lonely at the top. Like I am dean of the College of Business. There’s six other deans here at the university, but none of them are college of business deans. We can talk generally about problems with deans, or being a dean or something. But me and the college of
nursing we are totally different. So if you don’t have anybody to talk over the problem with about the job, you can feel like you are out there by yourself. Especially when people are dependent on you to lead. So that can be an issue, so you need to maintain professional contacts.

One of my real problems is quitting. And sometimes you probably ought to quit. Sometimes it’s time to throw in the towel and move on. And I have trouble doing that on my own. It’s more likely that’s something’s going to have to happen to make me move on. It’s been obvious every time it was time for me to go somewhere else. It’s not negotiable. So I can’t say I ever sat down, weighed my options, and took it.

I don’t think I’ve encountered problems because of being an African American. Now let’s take University B, if I had applied for this job. They started looking for it two years ago. If I had just out of the blue, when they first announced sent in my application. What would have been the result? I don’t know. I don’t know if they would have seriously considered me. They knew that they were in the accreditation year and they were facing a crisis. And then when they knew about me and University D I became a good-looking candidate. But just in a normal field, I just really don’t know. I found out since I have been here that I am the first African American that they’ve ever had here.

So the chances of them selecting me? Would I have been a top candidate? I mean I’ll just never know. They could have said that she just won’t fit. As far as I know some of them probably said that when I came. So far they have been wrong already. But one thing with the accreditation looming so large, it’s like everybody’s goal directed. So people are probably acting in a manner that is different from how they will be acting just to make sure that that goal is achieved. Now after it’s over and you are not goal directed and you are concentrated on all of these other scattered things, other problems tend to come.
Overall, my career has been pretty good. I cannot deny that. Sometimes if you are in a group with a lot of males, if you are the only woman you can mingle with them in different states. If they are at a bar drinking, you can sit there with them, the conversation is not going to be the same with a female there. And when I was at University D all of those years, it helped because I am in business and a lot of times it demands for business people and such that you can’t be all that choosy. When you see people who can do the job with credentials, it becomes difficult to say un-un, that’s a woman.

I don’t know if that would have been an issue for them or not. You know, I can’t say because all I know is what the situation was. But at University D, because University D is used to having women as well in fairly high positions, I think it’s different. I was the second African American vice chancellor. I was the second woman business dean and the first woman being the founder of the college of business. I think she founded the college of business at University D in 1937. And she died in a car accident in ’57. And then it was all male deans up until me.

I am very motivated to get a job done successfully and I will pretty well do anything. In fact I tell people, at University D I have done everything including dust the furniture and check the ladies room. If that’s what is necessary to make us do what we need to do, I was willing to do it. And I am still willing to do it. Well, University D is like personal. It’s an African American institution and if anything went wrong, it was like that black school, what’s wrong with the Blacks. And I didn’t like it. I took it personally.

Here it’s different. I don’t want them to run the college of business really wrong and I am going to do whatever’s necessary for us to do well. But still it’s not quite the same. If someone criticizes University D, you think they are criticizing you personally. You know they are criticizing you because you are an African American institution and you are African American.
It’s just personal. And to tell you the truth that is one reason I am glad to get away to University D. That’s a struggle. You would be constantly in defensive mode.

We would have visitors coming to the College of Business of University D and I would check the classrooms and if the desk weren’t straight, I would straighten them. Because I didn’t want anyone to come there and think that we weren’t good. And like I said there is some stress to it. It’s also pride. It’s something instilled in you. I think from day one about your community, and then just the defense, the reaction to being an African American. But you know here, and this is really strange even to me, I don’t even think about being back over there. There's no question. A lot of it probably has to do with the stage in my career where I am.

I am looking for a better situation. I am coming to work and I am not blazing any trails. I don’t want to be the first this or that. You know if it happens it happens. I am not interested in that. At this stage of the game I will come and do the work, but I am not interested in coming into a bad situation. The College of Business here has some challenges but I am not worried. I just don’t think about it. The interesting thing it seems though, since I am the first African American and the college of business is a pretty big college, it seems like the administration is not that interested in playing that up. But it’s different for the African American community. It’s like we want to say hey, we have the first African American Dean at a white university. So it’s really kind of interesting. I am not interested in making a big deal. But that’s just the way I am. I am not much on fanfare.

If you are going to be a College of Business dean, you need to be involved in your business community, wherever you are. I have the opportunity to speak to a Kiwanis Club and I’m going to speak to a Rotary Club in October. I’ve met with the director of the Chamber of
Commerce. I’ve met with a couple of other people, the people who handle the casino. It’s just that kind of involvement. You need to come out and about.

But I am going to work both sides. You see being new to this city is different because I don’t know anything, I don’t know anybody. I don’t know anything about it. But it’s coming along all right. I just need to get out and meet more people.

At home, I was on a lot of not for profit boards. I was board chair for Volunteer Baton Rouge. So I participated in a lot of community organizations. I was on the Baton Rouge Foundation and the Academic Distinction Fund board. I participated in the community.

I have been on a lot of committees for professional organizations. Like I have been on committees for the American Accounting Association, and for the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants that dealt with higher education and students. And then of course when I was in academic affairs, I was on some general higher education kinds of things especially with University E. I was on the team that developed the standards for what accreditations would be mandatory.

Well I think I have been a role model for a lot of women. And one of the things I realized a long time ago is that a lot of times you’re a role model and you don’t even know. And I have been told that especially by students at University D. But I remember when I first got to be college of business dean, you know in Louisiana anytime you get an appointment like that, they put your salary and everything in the paper. And I remember a student at University D came in my office and she said Dr. Marie, she said I want to be just like you and I want to make as much money as you do. So over the years I think I have been one and I certainly think I have for women. I certainly try to help as many students as I can. I haven’t done much here with African American students. They say it’s 19% of African American students in the College of Business.
I will be glad when the fall semester is over. To do something to meet with African American students so at least I could see them, and they could see me. The first few weeks after the students came back a few came in to say hello and to meet me but you know how students get lost. I stepped outside and just said hello to them and there were two or three African Americans in the hall and I want to do that. I mean if I am here I want to be available to them.

Because I think there aren’t many black students at the white schools. They have less people that they feel that they can really talk to and interact with. I want them to at least feel some comfort in knowing there is someone here that is really interested in them.

I think we will see more women in higher education. I think we’ll see higher numbers of African American women. I can see progress. There are 19% African Americans at the whole university. And there are 18% African Americans in the college of business.

There are much more women in business than past years. Twenty-five years ago we had very few. African Americans really just started going into business in the late sixties, early seventies, because that’s when companies, corporations started hiring. So the number of African Americans that went into business really shot up at that point.

You know I have said many times, it must have been on fate because there were certainly no jobs. When I was in high school, I took shorthand and typing and general business. So that seemed to be the courses I had an interest in. But I intended to be a high school teacher. I was going to be in business education. Somehow when I got to college I remember feeling like you can do more than that. But somehow it just clicked. I used to have classes with six people.

That was in the sixties and no corporations were really hiring blacks. When I graduated, I went to graduate school at a University in a neighboring southern state. I finished there in 1967. That was in the south and the corporations had started to recruit at the University, but they hadn’t
quite got to University D yet. When I graduated, I had some job offers. I had a job offer in New York City and that’s pretty scary. I am from south Louisiana and I was 21 years old. New York wasn’t any place common.

I got a job with the Internal Revenue Service in Atlanta, so I stayed there, and I worked for them for a while, and then I came to University D to teach and I taught for a year and got married. And when I got married, I moved to upstate New York and I worked for a corporation there. And then my husband just decided he would like to move back to Baton Rouge even though he was from New York City. And when we moved back to Baton Rouge, I started teaching at University D again. I taught there for a couple of years and then went to University G and got my Ph.D. And when I was done with my Ph.D., I came back to University D.

I had a lot of opportunities that I would have not had had I not gone into accounting. Accounting is a very strong profession. And it is a very strong profession with money. Well, let me say to you, money is good because it sure beats a lot of obstacles. Now when you have money in the bank.

The professional organizations I belong to are really wonderful places. I probably stayed at hotels that I never would have been able to stay in otherwise. I have met people that I never would have been able to meet otherwise. It has been a good choice. I can’t swear that it was all on my own. It’s not like someone growing up wanting to be a doctor. And there are advantages to working at an HBCU like University D too, because when people want an African American or want to ask you about an African American or want to do something African American, they come to HBCUs to talk about it. So I had opportunities at University D that I may not have had at a different time.
I don’t really have any goals to go to other positions or anything. I do not want to say in two years, my work-life is over. I am not sure I am going to do that. I am going to see what other opportunities there are. I might stay at University B, I don’t know what it’s going to be like in a couple of years. Honestly, I have no desire to go back and teach.

A lot of people in administrative positions want to go back and teach a few years. That’s like a transition to retire. Teaching gives you a lot more flexibility, a lot less headaches. You don’t have to manage anybody. I just have no desire to do it. I haven’t taught a class since 1993. And I just really don’t want to.

I don’t have anything in the back of my mind but I am going to have to do something. I don’t think anybody ought to just sit. I traveled a lot in my work life. There are places I haven’t seen clearly and I’d like to see. But I can’t travel most of the year either. I’ve got to do something productive. I like the sense of accomplishment or doing something productive. Also, to get out and be among people. Lots of people can entertain themselves at home. I can’t.

Jean - Dean

I think African American women are seen as motherly and nurturing and we’re not allowed sometimes to step outside of that perception. I think culturally and historically we have been and we’re good at it, obviously. We’ve been doing it forever. We nurture our men. We nurture our communities. We nurture those around us whether they belong to us or not. I think some people have a difficult time seeing an African American woman in a business capacity where you’re dealing with mandates, initiatives, and a responsibility to the public that goes beyond your maternal kinds of impressions.

Born 1951; B. S. 1973; M. S. 1976

Born in south Louisiana, Jean is the middle child and has six siblings. She has been married for 28 years and is the mother of three. She is a first generation college student. Her mother completed the ninth grade, while her father only completed the tenth grade.
Jean completed a Bachelor of Arts in Counseling in 1973 from University A. After graduating, she taught Freshman Studies at University A for four years. While teaching, Jean, began pursuit of her master’s degree. During this time she also served as a residential assistant in the residents hall.

In 1976, Jean received her masters in Counseling from University A. Shortly afterwards she became the assistant dean of students at University A. She considers this to be her first real professional job. During this time she also served as an adjunct instructor.

In 1980, she was promoted to associate dean of students at University A. Jean served in this capacity for approximately eight years and decided she needed a change. In 1988 she resigned from her position as associate dean and worked for the counseling center at University A. This position afforded her more time to be a wife and mother. She served as a licensed counselor supervisor for 23 years. After her last daughter graduated from high school, Jean decided she wanted to return to her first love, student affairs. After serving at University A in various capacities for 26 years Jean decided to leave University A. In 2001, Jean became the dean of Student Affairs at University C, a predominantly white university (PWU).

**Position Profile.** Jean has served as the dean of student life at University C for approximately two years. She reports directly to the vice president of student affairs. Jean is responsible for the day-to-day direct supervision of all department heads and programs in the student life area including: director of university police, director of residential services, director of parking enforcement and judicial affairs officer, director of campus recreation, Greek advisor, coordinator of student activities and organizations, classified clerical staff, and graduate assistants.
Jean assists with planning/coordinating, budgeting, implementation and assessment of student affairs programs, and services as requested by the vice president of student affairs. She also shares “on call duties” and enforces the **Code of Student Conduct**.

On the day I observed Jean, her schedule was as follows:

- 7:00 a.m. Arrive at work
- 7:15 a.m. Read e-mail, sign off on forms
- 8:00 a.m. Respond to students and overnight activities
- 10:30 a.m. Meeting with staff person
- 11:30 a.m. Meeting with another staff person
- 12:30 p.m. Lunch
- 1:30 p.m. Interview
- 4:00 p.m. Meeting with vice president of student affairs
- 5:00 p.m. Respond to students
- 9:00 p.m. Mid-term breakfast

Regarding a typical day Jean states:

I don’t know if there is a typical day because there’s always something going on. I never have a day where I’m bored. I don’t have time. But a typical day might be on a Monday walking in and having reports from university police on issues, confrontations, conflicts that happened over the weekend, especially if it was a football weekend, referrals of students for discipline. Often I’ll have those students waiting outside. I come in and I try to check my e-mail. I try to come in an hour before the office opens. We open at 8:00 a.m.. I would say I’m usually here till about 6:00 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.. If I have a meeting
after 6:00 p.m., I’ll just stay around. You know, grab something in the cafeteria, eat with the students and then go on to the meeting.

**Office Profile.** Jean’s office is housed on the second floor of the student union. Her office is hidden near the back of the building, behind double wooden doors, down a long corridor. The Office of Student Life is located at the end of the hall on the right. The hall has Greek bulletin boards on both sides. Sorority and fraternity information is posted on the walls.

Upon entering the main office, staff offices are located on each side of hall. There are additional bulletin boards in the main office with student information pertaining to Greeks and non-Greeks. The waiting area has beige walls, wood – futon - like furniture with rose cushions. This is the primary operating area for staff and students. There is a large copier, file cabinets, and mailboxes for staff located to the left of the receptionist’s desk.

I did not have the opportunity to see Jean’s office. She prefers to work in a small, green conference room located in the main area. There is a large, rectangular table situated in the middle of the conference room with approximately 10 mauve colored chairs. A telephone is located in the corner on a wooden stand at the back of the room. The room also has flip chart paper on the walls with artwork the staff has done as a part of staff development.

This room also serves as a break room, when it is not occupied by Jean or other staff for meetings. There is a refrigerator, coffeepot, and microwave on the left side of the conference room.

**Personal Profile.** I scheduled my fourth interview with Jean for 9:00 a.m. This meeting required me to travel approximately one hour. In route to meet with Jean, I received a call at 8:45 a.m. from her secretary informing me that Jean was going to have to cancel because her staff meeting was rescheduled to Thursday. I began to panic because I was only a couple of miles
from the university. I talked to Jean and she agreed I could come and interview and observe other
functions in the office, such as interaction with students and individual staff members.

I observed the office environment for approximately one hour and twenty-nine minutes. Two AZ pledges came in to pick up gifts that had been left for them. Students came by to see
Jean. She had summoned some, while others simply stopped by to speak and chat. A couple of
students came in to get dormitory exemption information.

I met Jean shortly before her meeting with one of the newer employees. Jean, age 52, was involved in her work, as well as the life of the students. She apologized for the mix up and invited me into the conference room.

Jean was dressed in professional, casual attire for the day. Her ensemble consisted of a
tan and cream colored gingham shirt and pants, a white t-shirt, and brown sandals. Her
accessories were minimal. She wore silver hoop earrings, a silver watch, and raspberry lipstick.
Her salt and pepper hair was in a conservative “up do/bun.”

Jean is very concerned about her employees and students. She is a nurturing person and provides close guidance, especially for new employees. She does not believe in micromanaging; however, she believes new employees need a lot of guidance to ensure that students do not suffer during the training process. Jean is thorough in providing guidance and instruction for tasks and duties for the upcoming week and taking employees through the process step-by-step. She states she normally takes five minutes to explain something any other person might say in a minute or less.

**Jean’s Story.** Assistant to the dean of students, was my first real professional position. And after about five years, I guess, I became an associate dean. I was at University A for fifteen years in those various capacities. Then I took a break from that. That’s a relatively high burn
out and that’s when I went back and worked for the counseling center. I still maintained my professional license. I had enough of this stuff, going around, being up all night and staying up until 2:00 a.m. in the morning, you know, fooling with students. I had a family. I am married and I have three daughters. And as they were growing up, I needed to have kind of a normal life like an eight to five kind of job. So I went back into counseling and that allowed me to be home by 5:00 p.m. – 5:30 p.m., 6:00 p.m. in the evening and have family time with my husband and my kids.

When my youngest daughter was a senior I started to reexamine my life. I remember it was a weekend in January, and I was taking my daughter to a basketball tournament in Texas. I was sitting in the stands, watching my daughter play. I brought the *Chronicle of Higher Education* because I wanted catch up on my reading. I had a stack of them. As I was reading through I thought, I like what I’m doing, but do I want to keep doing it? My life was changing. My nest was about to be empty because my youngest was about to get out. And I thought oh, I guess I can do this for another ten, fifteen, twenty years I guess. I’m still excited when I get up in the morning. I still love working with students. I still had the motivation and the energy to deal with students, whether it’s 8:00 in the morning or 8:00 at night or 2:00 a.m. if they are in trouble. I still felt like I’m not cenacle about it. I’m not tired. I still like what I do. I still want to do it well.

So as I’m sitting in the stands at this regional basketball tournament, I started reading and I saw the ad for this position, dean of student life. And I looked at the job description University C was advertising. I had been there one time in twenty something years at a workshop, came in, went to the workshop, went home. But my perception of the campus was that it was a really beautiful campus. Not too big. And I could park. So, I saw the ad in the stands and I just kind
of looked at it. And then I put it away. And then I was looking at something else, either online or at my office, and I saw the announcement again. I thought, let me look into this.

I sent in my resume, cover letter and started to get my references together. I thought well, you know, if it’s meant to be. I’m a Christian. I’m not a great Christian. But I’m a Christian. I do believe in God and I try to do unto others as the golden rule says. But I thought, if it’s meant to be, I’ll get a call and I would be happy if I just got an interview. So ultimately I was offered the job. That’s a little over twenty months ago and it’s been a good, good thing.

My first year here I decided, I’m gonna come in and I’m not gonna try and change things. I’m going to come in and be respectful. I’m going to come in and get to know the people that I need to know and the people who help this department because I need to find out who my friends are and I also need to find who the enemies are. And the best way you can do that is to just kind of be quite, listen, be respectful, support people in terms of their professionalism even if you don’t like their ideas, be respectful. And don’t try to get into a battle because I’m the new kid on the block.

But I felt like my second year, that’s when I’m going to implement my change. Because I thought, I need myself a year to earn their respect and to develop my own credibility with them, to let them know that I’m not the enemy and to understand, how to approach people that I might have a difference with.

I’ve found I’ve been able to work with people if I give them that respect up front. And we can agree to disagree. But if you don’t give that respect, you’re not going to get anything. So that was a lesson I learned a long time ago from many wonderful supervisors. Respect, try to understand them, try to meet them where they are in terms of what they see is important and just
take that in and then give yourself some time to figure out, now, how do I meet that person and bring them over here?

I love it my job. I absolutely love what I’m doing. I have had a chance to do other things, but I love this job. I love working with people. I love students and I love working with new professionals and trying to impress upon them that it’s okay to have great ideas. But get to know the people you’re working with because relationships are the most important thing that you will development. And some people just think well, I’ve done this and I’ve done that. I don’t care what you’ve done. And if you don’t develop good relationships, nobody else will care either. That’s what I impress upon people. Get to know your constituents. Get to know your students. Get to know your colleagues, especially those who have an impact or fear that you have entering. Don’t just see people when you’re at a committee meeting. Go on their turf sometimes. Ask them if they need some help in their area and they might be inclined to help you, because we always need help. Student affairs is often the stepchild in higher ed because academics is why universities exist, so, we have to earn our keep. So be nice to people. Be respectful. Care about them. They are more likely to support you when it’s your time to come up to bat, somebody will vote in favor of you just because they know you and they know what you’re doing.

I constantly remind students that I work for them. Most of the time they are taken aback by that. They come in and think oh, God, this is the dean, and I constantly preach to them. You know what? Me and my staff work for you. If you are not here, I would not be here. This university wouldn’t be here. And I think they need to be reminded of that. Didn’t you pay tuition and don’t your parents pay taxes in this state? This is a public university. I work for you and I
have a responsibility to be respectful of you. It’s okay for us to disagree and we’re going to operate by the rules.

With my staff, I tell them everything, unless, the exception might be something very personal or hurtful or that involves someone in a personal way. But if it involves the work or their area, I tell them everything. Because I think they need to know and they need to figure out how we’re going to handle this. When I get into a room with my staff and I say, “y’all the one thing that I need to count on is that a conversation in a staff meeting is always going to be confidential, because I need you to feel like you can be open and honest with me.” I’m not interested in names and singling out people or targeting people. But I am interested in singling out issues and problems that we have because I can’t have one agenda over here and a hidden agenda dealing with you because we deal in life and deaf. We deal in survival of students here. So we can’t be playing games with each other.

But I also know that my biggest fault is that I talk too much. I mean I talk, I talk, I talk. Instead of saying something in five minutes, I take five hours. I say y’all please forgive me, I know I’m going to go to hell for that one, but, I’m going to be honest with you. I’m going to tell you what I expect. I’m going to defend you because I don’t like my people being attacked out there. I tell them if you’re doing the work and we’re doing it together, my job is to defend you. My job is to fight for resources and to help expand the understanding of your program and make it successful, because, I’m interested in success for our students and the profession. The best way to do that in my mind is to be honest and upfront and if I see a mistake, check it early, nip it in the bud, deal with it and move on.

As an African American woman, you know I’ve never been anything other than an African American woman. I don’t have another set of experiences. I think there’s an image of
African American women that we are coarse. We are aggressive. We are not polished. Not necessarily intelligent. You know, we’re just seen loud and aggressive in many instances. I think that’s how black women in general are seen. I talk to students about this, especially African American women students. The perception in class is that all I’m doing is asking a question and the instructor sees it as, being too aggressive, being too assertive or whatever. As I listen to them, I’m thinking, yeah, I remember that feeling if I just spoke my mind or if I disagreed or if I had the nerve to disagree or go against the grain. That’s true to who I am. I’m not going to necessarily go along just to go along. It has to be right and true for me. I’m going to try to be respectful when I question it and I don’t expect to win every disagreement.

I think typically, my experience has been where people just see me, they don’t know my name, they don’t know my title, if they just walk into your professional work space, I’m either the secretary or whatever. I would not be regarded as the person in charge. I get surprise, shock, from parents who come in, students, less so. I mean, not a big deal with students. But parents, grandparents, business people, vendors that come on campus. They see me, and I may be reading into that, but I know that look, I have seen that look long enough and I think as an African American woman you know that look. I can’t define it, but you know it when you see it. And they’re surprised.

Black people can’t be intelligent, articulate, in control. That’s been my experience, one of surprise on the part of “the establishment”. Sometimes I feel that I have to prove something to them that I can do, I can compete with you. I’m not necessarily better than you but I’m not necessarily worse than you either. A dean at University I or University D or University G or University N or University E or University O [large PWUs] is a dean. We all have similar duties
and responsibilities. They may be unique to our campuses but I can compete with anybody with similar experiences and education.

The surprise element, that’s been the experience, because even in my old age I’m saying we’re in the year 2003 race and gender don’t matter. That’s my race and my gender have tended to be, I don’t know, elements that has colored people’s impression or experience with me. So I feel like I do have a duty to do a little bit of work to educate because there’s still a lot of ignorance out there about people. And people still judge you by this. And you do your little part to try and change one person at a time and give them a good experience. For instance, you meet a parent who’s shaking your hand, they’re uncomfortable shaking your hand. Putting a black hand out there and they have to shake it. I mean we go to orientation sessions and we do the parent sessions. And I greet them with, hi, how are you doing So and So, thanks for coming for University C. Thank you for allowing us to serve your student and you and thank you for trusting us with your child’s future. And an hour later it’s different because I’ve had a little interaction with their child, and with students. It’s wonderful because students, they adapt immediately. Even if they come from a home that has been judgmental and prejudicial, you give a student a little bit of time to get away from that, they’re open. They tend to judge people by what you do or what you say not by how you look. But I think my gender and my race has been a factor. Sometimes it’s being a woman but most of the time it’s being African American.

There have only been three [women] in the history of the university. The three that preceded me were all white. I was the first and let me tell you the campus community made me aware of that. The custodians came in after hours and would say, thank you, you’re the first. The ladies in the cafeteria, said “I’m going to give you a little bit extra, you’re the first,” and I’m saying “thank you, I’m just here to do a job.” And we’re all here to do the same thing. Whether
you’re serving a meal to a student or cleaning up a resident’s hall or moving chairs around, I said you know what, they need all of us. I can’t do it. I’m not the second coming but thank you for welcoming me and it just gave me a sense of such pride that your own people would acknowledge you and go out of their way to say, dean, my name is So and So, I’m Joe and I work as a custodian and I been here for twenty-two years and I’m so glad to see one of us in that situation. I let them know, I’m going to come visit you because I need you to show me around the halls and I told them we are here to work for the students but I also want to hear about your perceptions. Where are our problems? What do we do well and what are the things we need to work on? So, thanks for coming in and out.

I sent a thank you letter, probably the first month, I said thank you for your kind words and I appreciate your support and just remember we’re all here to do the same job to support students’ success, all students. I’m here for all students. Because one of the things I want to do is not give people the impression that because I’m black, I’m always going to be giving blacks favors and whatever and doing and making exceptions to blacks at the expense of whites. We all got the same rules and the same expectations. Now our needs may be different and I might have a need to support an individual or a group a little more because they may have a deeper struggle than somebody who’s, they got what they need. But I’m here for all the people. I’m not the black dean for the black students. I’m the dean for all students.

There are probably a hundred women in Louisiana who could do this job. I have many of my peers, women in my generation and many women who have come after me who could do this job. We are all replaceable. And my job is to make sure that generations that are here get out there and aspire to hold jobs in higher ed. I’m not unique. I mean God makes us all unique
individuals, but in terms of the ability to do work, if I got hit by a truck tomorrow, I’m sure that University C would survive and do well.

It may not be the same, but I think they’ll survive and I think that students will be happy and successful. It’s just that I feel blessed that I have an opportunity to be here to do my little part to give to students, to give to society and to feel good about it as well. Because finding a job that you love and have loved for years and years, there are a lot of people who are miserable in what they do and I just thank God that I’m not miserable. When I wake up I look forward to coming to work. Now, I have my days. Like oh, God, I do have my days. But ninety percent of the time I will tell you that I love my job.

There’s nothing that separates me from other women. It’s really a matter of an interest and a commitment and finding your passion. And the willingness to do the work, that is hard and demanding, but when you enjoy what you do, it doesn’t always feel like work.

Personally, this job has required that I move here. My home, my husband, my house is in Townsville. It’s not commutable. I mean it’s not a twenty-minute commute, but it hasn’t been bad. When you’ve been married for twenty-five years and you don’t see your husband Monday through Friday afternoon, that’s okay. We see each other on the weekends. So he’ll either come down or I’ll go home on the weekends. I’m left out of the day-to-day grind of his life and he’s left out of my life. I mean we talk every night on the phone. But I guess that’s the sacrifice.

So I have a small apartment two minutes away from campus. I sort of sacrifice my home life, but not really sacrificing it because I would not have taken this job if I had young children at home. And I think that’s the hardest part for professional women with families. When you have young children, it is sometimes juggling responsibilities. You travel and do the things the job
requires and sacrifice going to your child’s basketball game or soccer game or going to the teacher’s conference. I didn’t have to sacrifice those things for my children.

Professionally, the challenge has been coming to a university and immersing yourself into a culture that is wonderful in some ways, but it comes out of a typical southern tradition. Because, you know, we are still in the south. Race, unfortunately still plays a large part in some people’s minds. So I guess that will be a challenge maybe my children won’t have to deal with or their grandchildren. But race still matters in some situations.

You know, at this age, I think I’m here to do what I can to try to touch people’s lives if they allow me to do that. But I’m not going to waste my time getting angry about somebody who’s ignorant. Because racism is strictly about ignorance and I refuse to align myself with ignorance. What I have an obligation to do is to take a young person, an eighteen – nineteen year old person who comes from such a home, and let them know that I have some things to offer them. And those things can be valuable. Imagine you’re in a classroom and there’s a kid, and you know race is a real issue, and they have to catch themselves because at home the “N” word is tossed around like they are talking about the weather. Then they come to campus and they can’t say the word. But their whole demeanor and the way they look at people and the looks and the attitudes, when you pair people off maybe to work in a group and certain people say I don’t want to work with this or I don’t want to room with so and so. We randomly assign rooms, unless you have a roommate choice. When someone checks into a residence hall you’re put into an empty space. If you’re a female and you don’t have a roommate preference, then whoever walks in the door is going to be your roommate. Obviously, we have people who come down or call down and say well, I’d rather have another roommate. They’re not going to tell you, if it’s a white girl, she’s not going to say that I want a black roommate, because it’s not kosher to
do that. But we know. And so my job is to say, “you know what? We don’t have any other space.” We’re trying to put people together based on their interests or majors or to make sure that smokers live with smokers and non-smokers live with non-smokers. But other than those characteristics, we’re going to encourage people to try to live together, get to know each other, and work out their differences. Be respectful.

I pulled race off of every document that we use in this office, because we don’t need to know. We just need to know that they’re human, just a little bit information about classification because we’re not going to match say senior with a freshman. But why do we need to know if somebody is black or white if they’re coming into a residence hall or if they’re coming into a meeting or if they want to join a club? We need to know if they are a student. So, that’s been the challenge, to remove race. We can remove it from paper, but can you remove it from the mindset?

The other thing is being in the south, women’s roles are perceived a certain way and men’s roles are perceived a certain way. And sometimes you got the good ol’ boys. I think every campus has that. But, they have to change some things. So, that’s been the challenge, the good ol’ boys get in the back room where the real decisions are made and I want to have an impact with the good ol’ boys. My boss is a guy that I totally respect. He has a blended family. His children are adopted and one of his sons is of mixed race heritage, predominately African American. Ever since I’ve known him, he has been accepting people based on their human values. And that’s one of the reasons I came because I needed a person that had a perspective that I could walk out there on the street and say I know that this man will be fair and just to every student on this campus. And I know that he will treat me and support me in a respectful and professional manner.
I look at what impacts my responsibility and the people that I have to be accountable to, which are the students. I haven’t had to go to battle with any good ol’ boy, so to speak. You kind of learn who they are when you’re here, but I trust my vice president will be there to tell me the truth. Because if you tell me the truth, I’ll pick my own battles.

I’ll know which battles to pick and that’s one of the challenges that a senior level administrator, you don’t necessarily have the time or the energy or the resources to fight every battle. As in life, you learn to pick your battles and you pick the ones that are important and the ones that are related to your own personal philosophy, the ones that you say, no, I’m not going to bend on this one. I can compromise on this, but I’m not going to sale my soul to the devil so that somebody over here can have this over here. Because it goes totally against who I am as a person, as a woman, as an African American. I’m not going to betray my values and my beliefs. Am I going to negotiate for resources? You have to do that. You have to be willing to negotiate. I try to confront people honestly and openly. And if I’m in trouble with something I’ll say, Dr. Doe, I need your help on this one. I need you to pull out your big gun or I need you to talk to the President because we really feel like we can’t accept this or we need that. And I must say, thus far I haven been in an environment where he’s very nurturing and supporting. And I appreciate that from him.

My greatest successes personally, I mean, you talk to any mother, my children and my family life. I love my daughters and God knows we have gone through, you know at different stages of their lives. They’re babies and they’re innocent and loving and they’re listen to everything you do and they don’t ask for anything. And then suddenly they develop personalities and opinions and sometimes attitudes. Like when they’re young teenagers and you just want to lock them in their room and not let them out until they’re like twenty-one or
something. My daughters are wonderful young women. I am so thankful that they are. I was the first one in my family to get a college education. And that was one of the things I said, all of my children are going to have the opportunity. And I told them, “y’all not only going to have the opportunity, you will get a degree, if I have to kill you.” You will go to college, get a degree.

And they grew up knowing that that was just part of their life. It wasn’t like a choice and I think that’s something in some of our traditionally African American families, we need to set our expectations for our children, higher than we have been. And we need to have kids growing up in homes where it’s not even a discussion. You’re going to college. I don’t care if you grow up in the poorest section of the projects or in the suburbs, you’re going to college. You owe it to yourself to get that ticket into society.

I feel like I’ve had a wonderful professional life. I mean I’m never going to be Governor of Louisiana. I’m never going to be President of the United States. I’m never going to be the Queen of England. But I feel like I’m a happy person. I still have my health and I’ve been able to make choices in life that have paid off. I’ve had a career, you know, at University A and now I have a career here at University C. And I think those are my successes.

I don’t think there is any one particular thing that I’ve ever done that stands out. I think they all kind of flow into each other. The thing that I’m most joyous about is when you touch the life of a student and years later that person comes back and says thank you. That’s my greatest success. To see them come back and they have careers or they have families and they remind you when you fussed at them or put them on probation.

I get mad quick, but I get glad quick. It’s like students, I want to strangle them. In order to deal with these types of challenges I go in and I count to ten. I use very old strategies. Breathing helps. Go in and do some deep breathing. And especially if I feel like I’ve been
defeated or beaten. I call somebody and just say, “hey, can I come vent.” Identifying a friend, a colleague, somebody you absolutely trust that you can go in and say I need to talk. Can I come by? Those are the things that I do to cope with those times of frustration. But really, it’s as simple as that. There’s no magic.

Counting to 10 works for me especially when I’m talking to students and I know, God, I just told this kid he couldn’t do this and this and he did it anyhow. And I sit in my office and say, could you give me a minute and I’m counting. That way, when he comes in or she comes in, I can smile, I can be respectful again. I can remind myself, wait a minute that’s just a problem, not the person. Separate the problem from the person. Your duty is to focus on the problem and not beat up on the person and make them feel bad. You want them to walk out with a new understanding, not feeling like they’ve been beaten up.

I promised myself I would increase my exercise routine. I’ve been very lazy. Exercise is a good thing for stress. But I would say in the last six months, I haven’t done 30 minutes worth of real exercise. I mean I walk around on campus, but to go in and say do aerobics. And I never run, but I like to walk. I’ll do that on the weekends, but I really need to fit it into my day. So, those are the very small and very simple coping strategies and they seem to get me through. And I don’t take myself seriously. I try to use humor as much as I can to lighten things up. Because there’s a lot of heavy stuff that you can’t be so serious where you find no humor. You’ve got to have fun with what you’re doing. So those are my coping strategies.

I don’t think anybody would describe me as a religious person, but I feel like I’m a spiritual person. And I find strength in my belief in God. Because I really do believe that God has created each of us to be unique and to be capable of whatever. Now I don’t know what his plan for each of us is, but I think if given guidance, direction, and discipline we all can work
toward that. Sometimes when I’m at a lost or if I’m hurting or feel alone, I use prayer for me in my own way. Not that I have to go and kneel in church on Sunday morning and do that, You know, just sitting in a room. I think spirituality for me is the thing that has also provided support.

My parents are still alive. Even though my parents have been divorced for years, since I was a child, they both provide their support and unconditional love. There are people that love you whether you had a good day or bad day or whether you did something wonderful or did something terrible, who’ll be there to love you and accept you and that’s family. So, I really believe very strongly in family. But those are the things that support me and I get strength from.

Does the thought of what I have to do still excite me? Yeah. Am I taking care of myself and eating right and being healthy? Am I giving time and attention to my family because even though my kids are away from home, I’m still their mother? And I’ve got a daughter who is nineteen, and you know, that’s my youngest, and she still needs some nurturing. So in terms of balance, I think I’m okay. You know, I guess the jury will decide on judgment day. Somebody they will tell me and say, “Jean, this was out of balance and this wasn’t.” But I really don’t spend too much time trying to do it by the book. I do what feels right and seems right and when I’m messing up, I know. And I feel like the responsibility is mine to make a decision to get it in balance. If it’s lack of information, I will, go do some research. Go get some more information. If it’s a lack of nurturing and I need my husband to just hold me and love me and tell me I’m okay. It’s that emotional stuff. Or a girlfriend calling me to go and walk. Those kinds of things, I wouldn’t trade it at this point, I really wouldn’t. You know the grass always seems greener somewhere else. But until you’ve been there, you never know.
So, I’m okay. I’ve got a lot to do to improve, but I think I’m okay. And I think the internal balance, my passion, my interest, my motivation, my experiences and my environment, the people that I work with, the work that is imposed upon me. I think it’s a reasonably good balance.

Well, the thing that I’m proudest of is I am a member of the African Americans in Louisiana Higher Education Association. I’ve been chairperson of the scholarship committee for the past six years and we have been able to take money from our association and offer scholarships to minorities who are in graduate programs. And every April or May, we usually have a day and a half conference and a luncheon we give $500 to a student. I’m so happy to have been able to give that back to the community. We specifically earmark it for African Americans, because we felt like there wasn’t enough African Americans going into higher education so we wanted to enhance that in some small way.

I feel like my obligation as a professional has been to try to identify where are people who look like me and who come from where I come from? Where are they doing some good things or trying to do some good things and where can we put money? I mean we can support her or whatever, but often if comes down to where is the money. Yes we support you, we pray for you, we love you but where is a little bit of money we can put in that effort.

And on my own, I give $500 a year out of my own pocket. I do take the tax advantage on it. But I say you know what, those other people do it. We got to do it too. We have to learn how to use our resources better. I identify students that I think are worthy, like a student who just maintains a 2.0, they don’t have to be 4.0 or 3.5 students, they have to have contributed someway to the community either on campus or in their neighborhood. I try to give $250 each semester, $500 over the year to a student who’s done something that is above and beyond the normal
student experience. Whether it’s to work at a boy’s club or the girl’s club or to be a big brother to some kid or read to an adult, an elderly person or to work with the food delivery program for the elderly or come on campus and start a club or organization or to offer free tutoring to somebody.

The other thing, I’m with a women’s group. This is specifically professionally and is in my hometown. And we are sexists, no men allowed. It’s for black women and there are twenty-two of us. The purpose of the group is to do something for ourselves and for the community. The something for ourselves was simply the networking and meeting once a month. We also, once a month, try to do something in the community. We also offer to a high school graduate who’s going off to college, who is a first generation student a scholarship. We want to pick somebody who may or may not make the decision to go to college and they may or may not have the support from family. The amount is not set, because it depends on how much money we raise during the year.

So those are the things that I’m most interested in. I used to be involved in a lot of other things, but when I moved away, you know, your life changes. I don’t know a lot of people here. I’m not really that involved in the community here because I’m still new to it. I go to church stuff. But I’m looking to find my niche here and that’s going to take some time.

I consider those contributions to the community to be significant. I’m not sure about historical. I think if you talk to the custodian who met me the first week that I was here, I think that he would say yes, because it’s really a matter of perspective. The custodian has never seen an African American woman in this kind of a position, so for him, it’s historical. For me, you know when you’re living and you’re doing what you do, you don’t see it. Now when I retire or I read about the history of University C ten years from now if somebody has published it and if I
see my name, I guess I will look at it as history. But I honestly and maybe that’s ignorance on my part, I see myself as somebody coming in to do a job. I feel like I’m capable of doing this. I don’t feel like I’m here making history. That’s for somebody else to determine. That’s for historians and others and intellectuals to determine.

I feel like I have a duty and an obligation to be a positive and professional role model. Because I look back at the women who were role models for me, and they were mostly teachers because that’s what we were allowed to do. They weren’t businesswomen, senators and legislators. You know, they weren’t Condoleezza Rice in Washington, D.C. When I was a kid, a young girl, of 18 there weren’t those role models. But my teachers, you know because I grew up in a time obviously when you could go so far as a black person and that was it. I went to an all black high school, and they put a belief in me that I could do anything that I wanted to do. I got love and I got tough love when I needed it, I got support, but I was told that if I wanted to do something, if I was willing to work hard for it, I could achieve. I feel like I have a duty to pass that message on to every African American woman and man. I feel like I have a duty to pass it on to every human. I feel like I have to give the message, you have to work for it, but you can do whatever you want. You are limited by your own imagination. I feel I have a duty and I have to practice it every day when I see a student slipping, cutting class, and in an altercation, letting them know that okay, this will pass, remember what you’re here for.

Don’t be afraid to take chances. Don’t be afraid to try new things. Don’t be afraid to get involved. Don’t be afraid to be the first black to say, hey, I’d like to know more about that, or to ask a question in class, or to join a club even though there are no other blacks in the club.

I think we just keep on keeping on. That’s an old saying. Because I don’t want to be a novelty, I want to be routine. I want to be able to walk into a room and have young black men,
black women, white men, white women look at me, regard my title with whatever. I don’t want
people to look at me as a black woman. I want people to look at me as a professional, as Dean.
I happen to be black but inside of me there are all kinds of things, there are all kinds of
experiences, thoughts, feelings that are really human. The blood that I bleed is red like any
human. The feelings I have, I hurt, I’m sad, and I’m in pain. I’m also happy and joyous. And
you know, amazed and inspired. Those are human conditions and that’s what I want to be
perceived as human and capable. If you want to see all that other stuff, fill that in. But, don’t, oh,
that black woman. Put that lower on my list of descriptions. If my being black is a problem for
you, well, I’m willing to work with you to get over that problem, but I’m not going to work too
hard because that’s who I am. You can’t change it. And if you’re not comfortable around
blacks, well I deserve to work by making you feel comfortable by being intelligent, being
respectful, being cordial to you as if you were my guest. But if that’s not enough, I can’t help
you, it’s time to move on. I’m not here to change the world. I’m here to do my job and to work
with people and respond.

I think we have to put out more information. I think the media does a disservice, and I’m
going to pick on the black media, the black entertainment media especially. I got a real bone to
pick with the way black women are portrayed in black media, like with rap groups. Because our
students listen to the message, they also see women being treated as objects and the terms these
days “hoochie”. If you’re not a “hoochie”, you’re not with it. And so, a little black girl growing
up is looking at the images on TV and on the street and she’s thinking if I’m not walking around
with my breasts hanging out and short shorts up to here and having a man and being called a
“hoochie” then I’m not with it. I’m not cool. So I think black media is doing a disservice to our
young people. Adults have a right and I know people who say they’ll turn off the TV, but our
kids are impressed by what they see. They want to mimic what they see with their clothes. And when young men walk into my office and their pants are underneath their behinds, excuse my French here, and that’s the “do rag” and whatever and I’m saying you’re going to class like that. You’re okay to walk on the street like that because when you’re on the street, you’re on your own time.

So, the impressions and the images, I think we got to do something. The major society, you have to break the glass ceiling. Women have to be, I think in higher ed, we’ve got to tell our colleagues in grade school because those attitudes are developed by grade school. Your image of yourself, your self-esteem, that’s formed early on.

And we have to be sensitive to our young African American men. We lose them after fourth grade they start getting into other things and the streets commands their attention more than the classroom. And we’re losing too many young men and we’re going to have a lot of African American professional women and they’re going to be looking for husbands and partners. So I think we have a lot to do.

I think some research needs to be done to provide options and I think black folks, we have to be more responsible. We need to let students know we want you to be an astronaut, an engineer, a doctor, a lawyer, a businessman, a politician. What about those? Those are not the nerds. Everybody can’t be, you know, a rap star. Everybody can’t be Michael Jackson. Everybody can’t be MC Hammer or Mr. Cool. Everybody can’t be whoever the hottest act is out there because that’s one in a million. But everybody can be a teacher, lawyer, doctor, or nurse. Everybody can be a professional. And it takes work and discipline.

We’ve got a lot of work to do in the larger community and we have a lot of work to do in our own community. Because we keep looking for somebody to come and do something for us
or we keep complaining this isn’t fair and that isn’t fair. And we need to take our own responsibility and make it work, starting in our own backyards, in our own schools, in our own churches, in our own neighborhoods and having everybody on board. And for me, when I look at the statistics each year, I’ve got to have some goals in my opinion that focus on helping our young black men and giving them support so we can break that tide of coming in and failing. Most of our African American men who flunk out of school can do well. Most of them can get a degree. When you have 2.5 and 3.0 students flunking out of school, something is wrong. It’s not about their ability, it’s about all this other stuff. And I don’t have any quick answers and if I did, I’m sure I’d be a millionaire. I wouldn’t be here because people would be wanting to buy the solution. But I think definitely we need to work together.

In the future I see us [African American women] holding our own. I see us growing. I see us really creating a wonderful network of sisterhood where we nurture each other personally and professionally. Women, we have to feel like we’re doing something purposeful but we also are nurturers and I guess that’s how God created us. We have to be able to feel like we can nurture, whether it’s having children or being involved with someone else’s children and your children can be the students on your campus for those women who choose not to have their own families. But we’re nurturers. And we don’t operate like men emotionally. And that’s a good thing. I don’t want to be like my husband.

But I think in the future, I see more doors opening up for African American women. I see society looking at us for our talents and not at the angry black woman thing. I see that fading and I’m hoping that the media will help to do that to show that, the Cosby’s might be one type of family but there are a lot of families, maybe not a doctor and a lawyer and wonderful kids, but where we’re suburban families, we’re not all from the projects. They are all kinds of women
from all kinds of backgrounds. There are women who are from an upper class who have maids in the house. There are those of us from the projects, but most of us are probably from some kind of middle, somewhere in the middle just like the other folks. The color of our skin is the only difference. As our population diversifies we have to encourage diversity and we have to teach people respect for that diversity. Our largest minority population is African Americans and that’s slowly changing according to the census. It’s becoming the Hispanic. But right now, we got a shot. We don’t want to go to third place. We’ve been in second place, we better take advantage and it really is with making sure that wherever you pass, leave something behind for whoever is coming behind you. And that’s my goal.

And the little community things we do and the little scholarships, I feel like I have a duty to leave something, give something back because somebody is coming behind you because you won’t be here forever, but you need to leave a legacy. And I really think the legacy is positive. I’m totally optimistic about black women who are going to be Generals in the Army, who are going to be other Condoleeza Rice’s, who are going to be astronauts looking at the space frontier.

But I see the future as bright. Having three daughters, three African American young women out there in the world who I’m totally connected to, I have to believe that the future is going to be bright. I just think I have to do my part and to keep investing in it. It’s kind of like a bank account. You can’t keep taking out and using it up. You have to keep putting it in and letting it grow. And so I’m totally optimistic about the future.

I don’t know if my career is going to end here, but I really expect to be here at least five more years. I came in here with a group of students and I cannot leave until I see those students graduate.
In the last ten years I’ve been telling myself I want to write a book but I have no idea about what. Do I want to write a book that deals with professional issues or do I just want to tell a story that might touch people? I told my husband when I retire, I want to be a tour guide in the Grand Canyon. I want to be a senior tour guide because there’s going to be plenty of old people on the planet in America, because our population is older and the baby boomers are getting older.

No matter what path we take African American women must remember to take care of self, be honest in who you are and what you do. Respect everyone, even when someone does not respect you. I tell my girls that, which is hard to do. It’s hard to respect a racist or a bigot, but do it anyhow. Respect everyone. And always be willing to leave something behind for the next person coming behind you. Those are the things that I think I’ve lived by and tried to teach my daughters. I don’t have a recipe in terms of this success because everyone will develop her own recipe.

Because part of it, we don’t know where we are, I didn’t wake up one day as a college student and say, I’m going to be dean of students at a University C. There’s that hand in there that you don’t see God’s hand guiding us. And don’t forget your faith. Faith is important. I mean use God, Allah or Buddha or whoever you want to call them, because in the dark times and in the painful times, sometimes that’s all that’s there for you, your faith and family. If you got that little nutshell of things, I think you will do fine. You don’t need Jean’s Guide to Success, you need your own guide to success. But I think family, faith, taking care of yourself, remembering leaving something back for those who come behind you, contributing to your community, doing good work that you enjoy and love. If you do those things, life usually will reward you with success and happiness.
Victoria - Vice Chancellor

I think one of the things that I can say is that I was mentored by white men in the workplace. And I’ve been in so many opportunities that I was the only woman and the only African American. And when you’re in that kind of an environment, you’re either totally respected or you’re token. But in either case, you have to search yourself and determine which one you’re going to allow yourself to be. And you have to gain from the experiences because they operate totally different.

Born 1949; B. S. 1971; M. S. 1976; M. B. A. 1996; Ph. D. A.B.D.

Born in south Louisiana, to working class parents, Victoria is the second oldest of five children. Her mother and father earned high school diplomas; however, they did not attend college. Victoria’s mother was a teacher’s aide and her father a licensed electrician. Victoria is married and the mother of three children. She also has a daughter-in-law, two granddaughters, and a grandson.

Victoria received a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science/Management, and a Master of Science in Psychology from University A. She received a Master of Business Administration from University G, and is presently a doctoral student in the School of Public Policy (with emphasis on Higher Education Leadership) at University D.

Victoria has had a diverse work history. She began her career as a systems analyst for a private corporation where her primary responsibility was programming for business systems. Victoria served in this capacity for two years and decided to give higher education a try.

In 1973, she accepted her first position in higher education as the assistant union director/counselor at University A, a predominantly white university (PWU). In this job she reported directly to the vice-president. Her responsibilities included serving as the interim student union director, counselor for special services and coordinator of Talent Search. During this time Victoria also started her own company that was not related to higher education.
In 1988, Victoria was appointed as the secretary of a state agency. She reported directly to the Governor of Louisiana. She was responsible for the management of 2,000 employees and a budget greater than $200 million. After her four-year job appointment ended, Victoria served as the director of development for a non-profit community development agency for a year. In 1993, she became the vice president of a proprietary home health agency with 400 employees, seven franchises, two rural health centers, and four branches serving three states. After three years, she switched to another proprietary home health agency where she served as the vice president of operations.

Victoria first reentered higher education as the director of the Business and Industry Institute of College A, a predominantly white university, in March 1997. She was promoted to dean of corporate and community education in January 2000. Her title was changed to vice chancellor in 2001.

**Position Profile.** Victoria has served as the administrator of the Workforce, Corporate and Continuing Education Division for approximately six-and-a half years. She served as the dean for approximately four and a half years, and vice chancellor for approximately two years. Victoria serves as the overall leader for her division. She reports directly to the chancellor and serves on the Cabinet.

Victoria is responsible for leadership, supervision, development, and implementation of initiatives related to continuing, corporate, community, and workforce education and training. She serves as the economic/workforce development specialist for the college. She has seven individuals who report to her directly. In addition, she indirectly supervises 100 employees, which includes full-time and adjunct faculty and staff members. The Division’s organizational structure includes a senior executive director for continuing education, executive director for
workplace training, executive director for community education, executive director for corporate training, program manager for incumbent work training, administrative specialist 1 and a coordinator/executive secretary.

Victoria had the following schedule on the day she was observed:

7:00 a.m. Arrive at work
8:30 a.m. Staff meeting
10:30 a.m. Interview
12:00 Noon Lunch
1:30 p.m. Meeting with corporation for potential training
3:00 p.m. Meeting with corporation to expand training
5:00 p.m. Meeting with chancellor

The building closes at 5:00 p.m. on Mondays; therefore, Victoria must leave the building early. During the rest of the week, Victoria usually stays until 7:00 p.m. to ensure that she stays caught up on her work. Victoria has a highly demanding schedule. According to Victoria:

My day is comprised of a lot of meetings, internal and external partners and a lot of policy development. I generally get to work anywhere between 7:30 a.m. - 8:00 a.m. And I leave about 7:30 p.m. – 8:00 p. m. I have twelve-hour days.

**Office Profile.** Victoria’s office is located off the main campus. The building accommodates Victoria’s staff, the business and technology faculty, and student classroom facilities. The outside of the building is painted cream with hunter green trimmings. Inside, the colors and materials are new and contemporary, mainly gray pastels with hints of green. Parts of the floor are gray tile, and others are covered with gray carpet. The walls and floors are clean, giving the entire area a fresh, look and feel.
Victoria’s office is located on the second floor. Upon entering the administrative office, you are greeted by the receptionist. This area has a more personal atmosphere. Phyllis’ office is nestled at the end of the right hallway. Her assistant, who is African American, sits outside of her office in a large, square, open area with chairs for visitors.

Victoria’s office has a large window to the right of her desk, which extends from wall to wall, and provides direct visibility to the street. Two, large bookshelves stand against the right wall. These shelving units contain a number of neatly organized personal and professional objects, such as binders of various programs/curriculum offered within her division, issues of *Black Issues in Higher Education, The Chronicle of Higher Education*, and other educational journals, books, art, and pictures of her and her family. The walls are also adorned with plaques honoring her accomplishments and efforts.

Victoria sits at an L-shaped mahogany desk. She does not clutter her desk with papers and unfinished business. Instead she has everything organized and in its place. She has her computer to the right; her telephone sits right at her fingertips; and the basic necessities are organized, according to her needs. Also, crystal what-knots adorn her desk. In front of her desk are two mauve chairs separated by a small table. The color scheme of her office is predominantly mauve with hints of burgundy and gray, giving the area a relaxed, yet formal look and feel.

**Personal Profile.** Our meeting was originally scheduled for Wednesday, October 15, 2003, at 4:30 p.m. When I arrived at Victoria’s office, her receptionist informed me, that Victoria was running late due to a previous meeting. Victoria arrived at the office at approximately 4:45 p.m. Dressed in a salmon/coral colored jacket with cream stitching, a black shell and short black
skirt, and black sling backs with a cream stitching, Victoria was ready to attend to the business at hand.

Shortly after taking me back to her office, her executive assistant knocked, entered the office, and informed her that the chancellor had called and she was needed immediately for a five o’clock meeting. Victoria, in her chipper tone, explained that these types of things happened all the time. She apologized for the change of plans and promised we would continue tomorrow after her staff meeting.

On Thursday, October 16, 2003, I arrived at Victoria’s office for her 8:30 a.m. staff meeting. Victoria, as usual, was dressed to impress. Once again, her primary color for her attire was salmon/coral. This is one of her favorite colors and it certainly compliments her complexion. Victoria had on a salmon colored suit with a brown shell. Her makeup was warm and of the same color pattern. Her nails were well manicured and the polish was a coral color. Victoria’s accessories were a gold omega chain, a crystal and gold bumblebee, crystal gold oblong earrings, and a diamond tennis bracelet on each wrist.

Before Victoria could get down to business, her staff presented her with a glass plaque and a large bouquet of flowers for Boss’ Day. Victoria sat at the head of the large rectangular table. It was obvious she was in charge of the meeting. She was not overbearing, nor did she have the attitude I – am – the – boss; but she commanded respect. All of the employees, except for one, appeared to be enthusiastic about the upcoming activities of the division. Victoria did not let the one negative employee bring down everyone’s spirits.

Victoria presents herself as an aggressive woman. She believes it never hurts to go after what you want. You can ask, and if he/she says no, move on to the next person.
Victoria is very involved in the community. She is presently a member of an African American sorority, three chambers of commerce, a rotary organization, the Advisory Boards of College B and University G’s Management in Business Administration, and she serves on numerous other boards, councils and commissions.

Victoria is proud of her work and accomplishments; however, she realizes it is imperative she complete her Ph.D. The stories that she shared about her professional experiences clearly reveal the self-confidence she has utilized to carry her through various challenges as an administrator.

Victoria’s Story. I knew that the college was being formed. They were in planning stages and I just made a decision that I wanted to be a part of the development of this college. So, after getting hired, I started here as the director for business and industry. I knew that that was not the level that I wanted to exist. I mean, it was far below what I was doing over the course of years. I’ve always been a vice president or an administrator or a CEO prior to that. So, being director was a step below where my general administrative abilities would be. But what was exciting was that I was given the opportunity to form a whole new division. That excitement lead me to accept it. My love is for start up. I find that I work so much better, I can adjust to change; and I like the creativity and the innovativeness of making decisions on how to formulate new divisions or new opportunities so I started as director and then I was promoted to dean. I was the dean of workforce development which was the onset of looking at implementation of contract training with corporations and developing an entrepreneurial unit for making profit for the college. The first job, director of business and industry was looking at business and industry relationships and, developing relationships between the college and industry. The second one, the dean of workforce development was actually looking at how can the college become a focal
point for addressing workforce development issues. And the third, the vice chancellor position, in which I was promoted after that point. My promotion to vice chancellor for workforce development came, to be honest, on the hills of adversity. I have been here almost seven years and I have been under six chancellors. And each chancellor came in with a different vision. And I was able to capitalize on each new chancellor by convincing them that I had a vision. And so the last one, vice chancellor for WCCE is a result of Dr. Doe coming and he’s now president of the whole system.

I love what I do. I mean I absolutely love it. I love workforce and economic development. I love working with business and industry to respond to their training needs.

I definitely try to be very professional. I like to dress the part, so I try to dress professionally to send the message that I am in upper management. I like to greet people by their first names. I like to try to remember names. I like to acknowledge people. I like to learn, as I like to share information. I’m a big proponent on sharing information. I believe information is power, but I believe it’s only powerful if you share it. And so, I tend to work with people in a very compassionate manner. I have to always understand beyond the workplace, that people have a life. And they bring a lot to the workplace with them. So, you have to kind of filter through that personal, but you also have to recognize the fact that not everybody’s day is going to be good everyday. But I do have high expectations. I expect accountability.

I think all of us [African American women administrators] pretty much have some similar cultural backgrounds. I think most of our experiences as children of African Americans, you know, most of us are first generation administrators. And so we tend to capitalize on their own models and a lot of us tend to capitalize on models that were not in the administrative workplace like teachers and pastors and so some of our styles are similar. Not many of us have
had opportunities to be mentored by other white men who controlled the workplace. I’ve had that opportunity, but not many of us have. And I recognize that. So, our styles are similar. We are much more comfortable with each other. You know, I can look at you and if you look like me, I’m much more comfortable. You may have shared some of the same barriers and pain that I may have had. It may not be the case, but my perception of that is such that relaxes me a little bit more.

I think one of the things that I can say is that I was mentored by white men in the workplace. And I’ve been in so many opportunities that I was the only woman and the only African American. And when you’re in that kind of an environment, you’re either totally respected or you’re token. But in either case, you have to search yourself and determine which one you’re going to allow yourself to be. And you have to gain from the experiences because they operate totally different. White men in general, think entrepreneurial totally; it’s all about the bottom line. It’s not about whether I like you or not. If I don’t like you, that doesn’t matter. If we can work together to get the bottom line accomplished, the dollar amount accomplished and the profitability, then I’m going to work with you. It’s not so much about, you know, caring, feelings that are more personable. I learned that. I think I learned to adjust to rapid change. It doesn’t ruffle me. And I think I learned to stand in the face of adversity.

My work is mainly administrative in the division of workforce development. I am the only black person who is the leader of workforce development in Louisiana. Nationally, there aren’t that many. We have a lot of African American women who are being mentored. Coming into the field are more and more African American women. But we’re not the majority. We’re very sparing. And in a leadership capacity, it is not unusual that I am the only African American
woman present in a leadership role, on a board, or workforce development board commission nationally or regionally.

Personally my greatest challenge is really learning how to balance work and my personal life. I think I’ve got to be careful, I think I give too much. The scale is tilted. I do give too many quality hours to work. I have to be careful that I have a life beyond University K. I have a husband who needs me to spend time with him and it’s got to be quality time. And I don’t think I do a good job of that. And I have to seriously revisit that. Especially in a startup college that is growing faster, it’s one of the fastest in the nation and I am strapped for time. You tend to have to respond to so many initiatives. I just have to be careful and realize it’s [work] going to be there waiting for me tomorrow. I tend to like to leave my desk clean and I think it’s an addiction. And I have to remember, hey, you have to change your lifestyle.

In the workplace, I think my greatest challenge is that I’m constantly nurturing new employees. There are times when I wish that I could get people who hit the ground running and are independent thinkers and can take the leadership and be responsible and accountable. But right now, there aren’t that many folks in Louisiana, particularly, or who want to come to Louisiana and understand workforce development in a community college setting. So I spend lots of time nurturing. Though I enjoy and I value nurturing, it taxes me that much more in terms of my time and availability. And so, that is one of my greatest challenges. The second challenge is that out of all of the leaders at University K, we’re five – the chancellor and four vice chancellors, I’m the only one who has been here the seven years while the others just arrived, the longest tenure being one year, well, let’s say one and a half years.

It’s a challenge. They don’t have the history and often times they’re, as I said, my chancellor says, “Victoria, you want to change the process.” Well, I’m not actually changing the
process. History took precedence and I’m only doing what the last chancellor wanted, but you want something new but you haven’t expressed it. So, in time, hopefully, this chancellor will have longevity and I won’t, have that challenge.

Personally, my greatest success is being married 35 years and having three adult productive college graduates as, and three grandkids. That’s personal success.

Professionally, I’m so proud to have been a CEO over a multi-million dollar private company for fifteen years. I’m proud to have been the first black Chamber of Commerce president. I’m so proud to have been the first black women to serve in a major cabinet of state government. I’m so proud to have represented the state as the only black and the only woman with three former governors in Taiwan. I am proud of just so many opportunities professionally. And I’m really proud to serve in the capacity that I am, a new community college that we are building to be a world - class institution, one of the fastest growing in the nation. And I happen to serve on the key cabinet as well. It is an honor.

Often times I find, particularly white staff, they will call the white leader “Doctor” or “Mrs.” But they will turn right around and call you Victoria. And, you know, I don’t get angry, I don’t ever let them see me ruffled. What I will do is I will just simply approach them and say, “address me in the appropriate title in the appropriate environment.” In other words, if we are traveling and I agree to you using my first name, then you do so. But if you’re going to address, you know, you’re going to be in a business setting and it’s going to be “Dr. So and So” and “Mrs.” Then do me the same honor. And I tell it to my staff. But they call me Victoria. And, it’s a comfortable working relationship, but when we get external they will say vice chancellor Victoria.
I’ve done so many different things that I’m so comfortable. I’m so comfortable in who I am and what role I play. And I’m not at all uncomfortable and sometimes it’s an advantage, because often times those students who have the greatest needs feel more comfortable approaching me.

When I am stressful I meditate. Sometimes I just have to take a deep breath and say it’s something that I’ve got to tackle. I’ve had incidences where even sometimes African American men, I feel, are not honoring my presence as a vice chancellor and we just have to have a visit about it. I think honesty has been my best way to cope. I’ve tried to have open communications. If something is bothering me, or someone has offended me, I’m going to address it openly. And I think it’s not what’s said, it’s how it’s said.

Certainly my biggest support has been from my family. My family understands my hours, my needs to be flexible. I’m dealing with that right now. I booked a conference only to find that’s my 35th wedding anniversary. I said, woo, here I go again. There’s separation during a major event. I told my husband “there’s no way I’m going to cancel it” and he said, “absolutely not.” After 35 years, he doesn’t want to go with me to these conferences. He understands that when I go to a conference, I don’t select it because it’s a way for me to get away and to travel to that part of the country, but I really select it because I need to learn and network and he just doesn’t want to be involved. Family has been my biggest support and besides that I have a network of business and industry leaders in this community that I have had prior working experiences and have developed credibility that they are my supporters. I can pick up the phone and I can share my concerns and get directions from them. And then spirituality, I’m not one who constantly talks about spirituality, but I do believe there’s a higher power watching over me.
And when I feel like I’m at my lowest sometimes, I just get lifted up. Something just comes to me, the message of what I need to do to get lifted up. Surreal?

At one point I considered resigning. I really felt that there was no good team effort during the first administration. At one point I felt that this wasn’t the environment that I wanted to be in. It was counterproductive. I just had to meditate and see if I felt comfortable that I could work through those tough times. I just made up my mind that I would just try to work through them. And it did work out, though not without a lot of adversity. I did get fired.

Yes, I got fired by the first administrator in the public’s eye and it was both individuals, my supporters, public supporters who had worked with me, who knew my credibility, who just stood firm and said “there’s no way we’re going to allow that to happen.” And therefore, he was fired. I didn’t intend for that happen to him. I never wished the worst on this person. But, I mean, to this day, I couldn’t tell you why that action happened, because there was no indication that this was forthcoming and I could only say that the person was threatened. I tend to walk with a sense of confidence. I don’t know everything and there’s a lot I need to learn, but I’m not fearful. And I’m going to make a decision and I will be accountable for that decision, which I make. But, I love people so, I call upon various people when I have to make a decision. So, I’m comfortable with the decisions that I make.

Being fired was traumatic to me personally. I don’t ever wish this on another person. I hope no body ever has to go through that. I think it ended up being less than two weeks. What was interesting was at the time I was actually unemployed Sue was my assistant. That’s why Sue is valuable to me, she’s still with me. She was my executive assistant. And Sue and I stayed on the phone and nothing went undone. We didn’t skip a beat. We had appointments that we never cancelled. If I couldn’t meet with them personally, we were on the telephone. I didn’t let
anything go undone during that period. And I just kept working along. I made a decision that it was not something that I needed to address legally because I really have a passion for this college. It was not the college that impacted me, it was the man and I had to rise above it. I had to stand firm again in the face of adversity. It wasn’t the first time I was in the face of adversity. But it was the first public humiliation, which is quite different than any other adversities that I had ever faced. For a whole year the news media used it as an advertisement. And, again, I wasn’t offended by the news media because actually they did something that perhaps really told the community publicly that I had a passion for the college, it was a true passion.

During this time I was on leave without pay. In other words, I was just given a leave to kind of think about the impact. I really looked at it as a psychological leave. Leaders said, “it had to be traumatic to you, so take a few days off and relax.” I was visited by the system president and I got calls from beau coups of people that I don’t care to mention. It’s something that you don’t want anybody to go through. And the days off, as I said, I think my rehabilitation from psychological impact was immediately addressed after a few hours because I never missed a beat in terms of responding to what the office needed, the division needed.

Actually, I didn’t know what I was going to do, to be honest. I think there was a sense of contemplation and just thinking about, what did Victoria want to do. What kind of statement I wanted to make to myself as to whether, I could come back to the college and honestly not hold a grudge with anybody in terms of trying to put blame. Could I face up to myself to look at what past things that I have done that could have provoked this that I could have done differently? What was I maybe not doing that I could have done? After I sat down and thought about it in solitude, I realized that, I couldn’t figure what I had done wrong. Everything I thought I was doing right and I needed to continue to do that. And then I had to revisit whether my passion was
still there for the college. And it certainly was and I just made a decision that I was going to just pull myself up by my bootstrap and forgive him and just keep going and that’s what I did. I never revisited with very many people after that except the guy who got fired with me. I found myself consoling him and trying to get some answers from him as to why this occurred because we were not bosom buddies, nor had we participated on any particular project. The question was, why the two of us? In fact, we were sometimes in conflict in our decision-making. So what made the two of us partners on this very embarrassing situation? I think the gentleman probably saw his fate coming to an end with the board and probably identified the two of us as potentials for leadership and was going to make sure that our rise to the chancellorship didn’t happen. That’s the only thing I can account for.

I find that there’s a better balance when I understand what my leader, and that’s the chancellor, what her vision is. And if I buy into that vision things will run smoother. And then, I also make sure that balances are kept by keeping my chancellor informed and keeping the dialogue open if anything changes in her vision, you know, I support that change.

I hope my contribution to women is that I will be a great leader and that every opportunity that I get I’m looking to place African American women on boards and commissions. I get asked to be on a lot of boards and commissions, so every time the door can opens, I am suggesting African American women to be a part. Also, I take the opportunity to speak when I can with African American women, particularly on campus. In fact, Jane on my staff is taking the lead to be the mentor of African American students and I support that. And we will help her. She’s taking the lead over the African American Student Association.

I think it’s important for us to do that. I have talked to a group of women on campus about forming a women’s club, but that has not, come to fruition at this point. But since Jane is
going to be over the African American Association, then that will give me an added opportunity
to work with her and make sure that we incorporate some positive incentives for African
Americans totally, then African American women. Another thing is that I’m trying to develop a
visiting lecture program. One of my goals is to have highly visible, nationally recognized
African American women leaders be part of that program.

As part of my involvement in higher education, I was the first president of the
Educational Alliance. That is a new organization that works to network to bring all the higher
education institutions, both public and private, to look at common resources that we can leverage
and I think that has been a contribution, because there were no collaborative efforts before.
Besides that, I think just taking an active role with certain organizations in the community. You
know, on both boards and on commissions, I am one of very few African American women who
take an active part in Rotary and there are 550 members. It’s the seventh largest Rotary in the
nation. And I feel very comfortable there. And I know if I continue to be active, there is an
opportunity to be president of that organization. And you know, that may be a goal of mine if I
continue over the next year or two.

I am so proud of University K. The community in community college is critical. It truly
means something. That’s why we have community colleges. This college belongs to the
community. And so I’m so proud that one of the most important things that a community college
does is work towards development. So, we are giving an opportunity to folks who want life-long
learning. And, so I feel really great about that, yes.

I’d like to say that I do feel that I rank among women who are dedicated to making a
significant impact for a quality of life for all women, but I do understand and I do act as an
advocate for African American women. And I say it publicly. I don’t think that I want to
separate the fact that I’m African and a woman over here, I’m both. So, I’m very active with
women organizations. In fact, I just got named to the Center for Women in Government at
University C. Because I believe in impacting policies that positively provide us quality of life.
And, so, I am definitely an advocate. I have tried and I haven’t tried hard enough. I just don’t
know where I can pull that extra little time to do an effective job. One of the things we don’t
have in Baton Rouge is a professional African American women’s organization and we got some
wonderful, especially young professional African American women who are up and coming.
And I would love to sit with them and give them the value of my experiences I just haven’t been
able to get that organization going. I just served with, you know, I served with LYNX and with
Delta Sigma Theta, which are African American women organizations, professional
organizations. But, they are more mature women. I don’t think I do enough with young women.
I really do work at serving as a role model any way possible and work to make a positive impact.

Number one, we’ve got to certainly concentrate on education. I’ve got to get that Ph.D.
I’m sitting in an institution where the credentials matter. That’s number one. We have to rise to
the occasion to try. I’ve had this conversation with other women that, especially white women
will tell me, you know, when you start pursuing your Ph.D. be very careful because most of us
don’t have husbands. We’ve lost our husbands in the process of reaching our career goals. So I
have to find that happy medium. Because I love learning. So the pursuit of the Ph.D. is not just
based upon my going to get it. It is based upon my deciding where it fits in my total life goals
and certainly, my family is important to me. My husband is important to me. So, I’ve got to
kind of balance it. But for number one, you’ve got to be educated. Secondly, you’ve got to be
able to network. You’ve got to know what are the trends and what are the latest issues and
you’ve got to be able to articulate that. Another thing is, you have to be very presentable.
You’ve got to have good communicative skills. You have to be able to listen to people and you have to be able to respond appropriately. You’ve got to have technology skills. Today you can’t communicate without internet or email.

And then we have to accept leadership roles. We have to seek opportunities to take leadership roles so that we can be looked upon as a leader. We can’t be fearful, you know, we want to be members of the group, but we don’t want to take the leadership role and that’s where the rubber meets the road. You’ve got to get on the board but you have to be willing to rise up to be the president. It’s a commitment. It’s a lot of effort. When we do take these leadership roles, we got to follow through and be leaders.

Then of course, we have got to have financial stability. You can’t be dependent. You can be independent. To be able to move, make decisions, be able to be where we need to be. And certainly the other things go into plan. We have to have good social skills, no doubt. I mean, if you play golf, play golf. If you can play tennis, play tennis. If you can’t do any of them, enjoy just being out there rooting for them. But every time I travel, I’ve got to be part of the circle. Some people like to go to dinner, some people like to go on the golf course and you have to adjust. I’ve been on a board where I’ve been in the duck blind. Hell, I didn’t like that mess. Standing in a whole lot of water with snakes coming around my legs. But that board was a bank board. I’ve been the only black woman on a bank board. I had to do it. They were making decisions in the duck blind. So you have to be in the duck blind. So you got to do what you got to do!. That’s right. If you make a choice that you want to be part of it, you have to be a fit.

That’s right!

Certainly one of the obstacles is that not enough of us are there to help mentor us and to look out for our best interest. We are too few. And the too few that are there, I think we don’t
network enough. It’s as though we’re a whole new generation of African American women who feel that African American women don’t have African American women issues at heart. We deal with women issues. But, I don’t think enough of us sit down and say, okay, as African American women, we need this or that. And, why don’t we sit apart and talk about some of the issues that we have to address. I think our chancellor does a good job of it. Every once in a while, you know, when we get together, she’ll say, “you know, we’re African American women” and I like that. This is my second opportunity to be in an African American administration in an organization.

I think we need to get pass hierarchy issues. I think one of the things is we have to be supportive of each other. We can’t be intimidated. We have to recognize what protocol is. She’s my leader, so I’ve got to look out for the best interest for her. We can’t be about being envious and jealous. We’ve got to mentor each other. It’s a mutual mentoring, you know. We can’t loose focus. It’s not personal, but it’s business. We got to be compassionate. It’s about business. What job do we have to accomplish and get the job done?

I think in the future we’re [African American women] going to soar. We’re going to bust that ceiling and we’re going to see greater numbers actively engaged. I look at some dynamic African American women who are really very assertive and they’re doing the things they need to do, all those things I talked about. And they’re taking leadership in mid to upper management and there’s no doubt in my mind that they’re coming. And they’re coming in greater numbers. I think the support systems have increased. I think families are more accepting of us as African American women in the workplace as never before. And I think that no doubt we’re going to see greater numbers in leading roles. And therefore, they will open the door to the numbers to be multiplied.
In the near future I would like to get my Ph.D. I have finished all the course work. It’s my unfortunate circumstances that I finished the course work right at the point where I got the public firing. I think what I did was concentrated on coming back and rebuilding. This department had startups because of the new chancellor. It’s been busy, busy, busy. And my participation has grown in this college that’s growing. There’s been so much decision making that I have neglected to carve out time to really concentrate on my Ph.D. And unfortunately, University D has had tremendous change. Every time I’ve gone down there to try to get reinstated, I’ve focused in and said I’m going to go down there and really work this out, and I’ve come back more frustrated. And, I’ve almost come to the conclusion that I may have to redirect and go into another area and just not pursue University D’s degree. I have the opportunity to do just that by registering for another Ph.D. program and I seriously thought about it. It’s a program that is supported by my chancellor and the president and it’s a one-year effort. I have to be one year on site at University of Texas at Austin to get the Ph.D. in leadership development. Then I can do the rest of the courses on site, either at my own institution or at some mentoring institution. And I seriously thought to do that this past year and my husband became ill. So I just don’t know when or what direction I will take in the future, but I know that one of my goals is to start back.

Secondly, for me, my ultimate goal is either to be a vice president of a system office and I say vice president because I would want to be vice president of workforce development and economic development. That’s my love. That’s what I like. I would consider a chancellorship; however, I like economic development and workforce development. I could do that as a chancellor because that is part of the responsibilities. But one of the things that I have not, I feel that I haven’t had enough opportunity to learn about is academic affairs. And I find when I try to
concentrate in that area, I’m bored stiff. It’s too structured. Could I manage a community
college without having had the experiences in that area? Yes, I could. It would be better if I had
the expertise. It wouldn’t close the door to it, but it would make it a little bit more challenging
unless you’ve got someone who is very loyal to you who knew that area. I’m more comfortable
and I’m confident of leading a system office that concentrates on economic and workforce
development.

Another goal that I still don’t throw out the window is that one day I may do
entrepreneurial again, that is own a business. I mean, it’s one of the things I love. I love starts
ups. I love developing profitable successful entities. And that might be an opportunity there
related to higher education. You know, consultations. Who knows what might develop. But I
don’t close the door to it. I always keep my ears and my eyes open because there may be a
possibility that something entrepreneurial will be introduced to me. I never close the door to
that. You know, a company that might interact with higher education, you know, equipment or
supplies or assessments, who knows.

For African American women aspiring in higher education I would recommend that you
get a mentor. Get you a good mentor who has a leadership position in higher education and has
credibility among her peers and allow that person to introduce you to ways which you need to
prepare yourself. Participate in leadership institutes. If there is one specifically for higher
education, you need to participate. Even as a young person who may not be in higher education,
go to the internet and look at leadership institutions for higher ed. The African American
community college leaders have what’s called LAKIN Institute. And the LAKIN institute, why
not write to them and ask if they have a free scholarship for an intern, an intern student or a
future chancellor. That would be an opportunity first hand.
You not only come in contact with those who can be an extend mentoring and networking, but it would also give you an opportunity to understand and decide is this truly what I want to, what level do I want to be. Every time I go to an institute, I have to think, you know, if it is a chancellor institute, it lets me do two things. It lets me learn what I need to know to become one, but it also lets me know if that’s what I really want to do, you know.

Every conference that I register for, I call them to see if they have a free scholarship. You never know. And then if you plead your case, you may be lucky enough to get one. You bet. And if you’re still not successful, there are other options. There are foundations. You, as an individual, can write to the foundation and ask for a scholarship. They have what’s called discretionary dollars perhaps, maybe I’m wrong in doing that, but I certainly would inquire.

Also get your Ph.D. It’s a terminal degree. In order to be at the table, I’m lucky. Honestly, I’m lucky. You generally don’t get to be at this level if you don’t have a PhD. And I think a lot of it has to do with my background in terms of administration. I think, I really do believe most chancellors have been impressed with the fact that we are a community college and a big part of community college is linkage with the business community. And it comes so easy. It’s just been a part of my life to serve in that capacity.

**Rosa - Interim Vice Chancellor**

Some situations you get into, my situation at University G. I don’t think if I stayed at University G that I’d be the person I am now because I was a black woman. And I think when people see that they are intimidated, they should get out of the situation rather than trying to fight it. Because at that time, there was no way I could have fought all men faculty, no women on the faculty, and the superiority, you know, it was, even the other women who were there left. They couldn’t take the pressure. They were white, but, you know.

Born 1933; B. A. 1959; M. A. 1962; Ph.D. 1968

Born in south Louisiana, Rosa is the oldest of eight siblings. She is married and does not have any biological children. However she professes to be the mother of her 32 nieces and
nephews. Rosa is a first generation college student. Her mother had a fourth grade education, while her father only completed second grade. However, Rosa’s parents insured she and her four sisters, and three brothers were educated in the private school system, through scholarships and personal resources.

Rosa completed a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics and French in the northeastern part of the United States in 1959. After graduation, she began working as an instructor of Mathematics and French at a high school in Louisiana. Rosa completed a Master of Arts in Mathematics and French in 1962 from University G. Shortly thereafter she became an assistant professor of Mathematics and French at a Junior College in Louisiana. This was her first job in higher education. In 1968, Rosa earned her Ph.D. in Mathematics and French from a mid-west university. She was offered and accepted a position as assistant professor of Mathematics at University J. Three years later, she accepted a new job at University D as an associate professor of Mathematics.

In 1976, Rosa left the state for a year to serve as a member of the Technical Staff IV. Upon completion of her work, she returned in 1982 to serve as a professor of Mathematics at University D. While continuing to teach at University D, Rosa also served as an exchange professor at University G in 1985. She was promoted to chairperson and professor, Department of Mathematics in 1986. In 1995, she became the executive director, Center for Minorities in Science, Engineering, and Technology at University D. After serving in this capacity for three years Rosa decided to retired. Her retirement was short-lived.

In February 1998, she was asked to come back and serve as interim associate vice chancellor of academic affairs. She served in this capacity through May 1998. In January 1999, she was called again to serve in the same capacity. This time she served for approximately five
months. Because of all her hard work and dedication she was named professor emeritus, Department of Mathematics, University D in 1999.

In 2002 thinking she was permanently retired, Rosa was called and asked to serve as professor and interim chairperson, Department of Mathematics for nine months. Rosa settled into what she thought was retirement again for three months. However, in 2003, Rosa returned to work as appointed interim vice chancellor of academic affairs.

Position Profile. Rosa has served at this HBCU, as the interim vice chancellor for academic affairs, for the third time, for approximately six months. Rosa serves as the chief academic officer of the university and as chair of the Academic Council. She reports directly to the chancellor. She is responsible for all academic programs of the university, including curriculum, faculty, academic publications, accreditation, and other related programs. The Division’s organizational structure includes an associate vice chancellor, two assistants to the vice chancellor, research and information associate, desegregation program coordinator, administrative secretary, and an executive secretary.

Her schedule for the day she was under observation was as follows:

8:30 a.m. Arrive at work
9:00 a.m. Chancellor’s meeting
11:00 a.m. Meet with student
11:45 a.m. Lunch
1:00 p.m. Meeting with assistants
2:00 p.m. Interview
4:00 p.m. Return phone calls, sign paperwork
According to Rosa, on a typical day:

I usually get here about somewhere between 8:30 and 9:00. Most of the time I leave at 5:00 or after. I leave early some days, but not often. I’m very busy. Between meetings, phone calls, seeing students, doing paperwork, busy, busy workday. Most of the time when a student has been at every level, starting with the department and up and they have not gotten satisfaction they come here to see if I can help them. So when a student comes to me, it’s the last resort, to see if I can help him solve problems of whatever type. Sometimes it’s graduation stuff and sometimes it’s conflicts with a teacher.

**Office Profile.** Rosa’s office is located on the third floor of one of the university’s administration buildings. She shares the floor with other upper echelon administrators, including: the chancellor, other vice-presidents, public relations, and budget administration. Therefore, this building is considered the primary decision-making hub of the university.

Rosa’s office is the second office to the right of the main area. The outer office is where her secretary and the other vice-presidents’ secretaries work. This area is clearly marked with gold lettering that identifies this as University D administrative offices.

Upon entering Rosa’s office, visitors immediately notice the five windows, which overlook the campus. The windows illuminate the room and provide a scenic view of the campus. Rosa’s office is spacious. It has a dark blue color scheme, thus giving the office a formal atmosphere. Rosa sits at a large mahogany desk with a glass top and executive black leather chair. Her desk has an empty candy jar, a few sheets of paper, and a folder on it. Directly behind her is a mahogany credenza. To the left of her desk is a navy leather sofa and an end-table. In front of her desk is a round mahogany table that also has a glass top and six chairs. In addition to these items, Dr. Rosa has a black refrigerator, microwave, and a file cabinet. There
are no pictures on the wall or any family pictures. This can be attributed to the fact she is
anticipates serving in this capacity for only a few months.

**Personal Profile.** My meeting with Dr. Rosa was delayed by 15 minutes. She was
gathering information for the chancellor and attending to telephone calls. Upon completion of
her duties, Dr. Rosa, a slightly tall woman, in her 70’s, introduced herself and welcomed me to
her office.

Dr. Rosa’s movements were slow and precise. Her demeanor was warm and welcoming.
She was somewhat soft-spoken, with an easy smile and a gentle laugh. Her attire for the day was
fall-like but colorful. Dr. Rosa wore a multi color jacket (purple, teal, royal blue, and purple)
with a cream shirt/shell, teal pants, and black shoes. Her features were delicate, and her short
gray slightly curly hair was in a natural style (short afro).

Dr. Rosa’s make-up was minimal, limited to a touch of burgundy lipstick. Her jewelry
was also minimal. Her accessories were gold hanging ball earrings, a gold chain with a South
African pendant, and a gold wedding band. Dr. Rosa’s glasses had gold wire rim frames with
small curves that gave her an easygoing appearance. Her fingernails were short, but well
manicured, with my favorite color polish, “I’m not really the waitress.”

Overall, Dr. Rosa appears to be a very easy going individual. Throughout our time
together, she never seemed to allow anything to agitate her. No matter how many times we were
interrupted, she remained composed. Her words flowed easily and were marked with self-
assurance and wisdom. Perhaps this can be attributed to her age?

**Rosa’s Story.** I retired in 1998, January. And since I retired, this is my fourth time
coming back as an administrator. I came back in 1999 as associate vice chancellor for academic
affairs. Last year I came back to University D as chair of the Department of Athletics, which I
had held for nine years when I was working. Now the reason I’m in this particular job is the person left suddenly and they were trying to find somebody that had done the work before and who could just step in and start doing it. I came on July 1st, which means as soon as they’re able to find a replacement, which they’re looking for now, I will leave. I’m going home.

They needed me. Each time I’ve come back, I was asked to come back to fill a void. You see I had to rescind my retirement twice, in ’98 and ’99 in order to come back. I have a long history of administration. I worked nine years as chair of the Mathematics Department. Then I worked three years as executive director of the Center for Minorities in Science. So that’s 12 years administration. And counting the other three years, I stayed 15 years in administration. Before that, I was a professor of mathematics. I came to University D in 1971 and before that I was in University J.

I went to a mid-west University for graduate school. The first year I went there, I was the only women, the only black in a class of forty-two. Then the second and third year more women came but there was never more than about four or five of us in mathematics and graduate school. I think the whole time I was at the university, I was the only black.

As the only black student I was not intimidated. Because I went to a very good undergraduate school, all girls and I think one thing I got out of it was self-confidence. I was never intimidated. Because I remember the first day I went into the class, the professor said, “fifteen drops and one pickup”. Yes, I was the pickup. I didn’t say anything. He just kind of looked. That was 1964. And I graduated in 1968. I’ve been having a degree for a long time. At that time, I didn’t see any blacks, not in mathematics anyway. There were no blacks teaching. But I did not view it as a big challenge, but a challenge.
My biggest challenges, what is my biggest challenge? I don’t have any difficulties as far as doing the work. My difficulty comes in trying to resolve conflicts either between student and professor, professor and professor, at any level. Even though I work at it, I detest it. I don’t like conflicts. So my nature is sometimes to put off facing it until the time I have to. And usually my method of doing it is to have two people in the same room so I don’t have to listen twice to the same thing. Because usually if you are accusing someone and the person you are accusing is there, you usually tell the truth the first time. And after I listen to both people, I may see them separately to talk to them. That’s my biggest conflict that I have.

Well, I talk to people. If somebody’s talking, I listen. I think a lot of people just want somebody to hear what they have to say. And I do listen. I listen to students. I do a lot of conferring with people. If I make a decision, I confer with somebody else to see what their opinion is and I’ve never done that, I’ve never gone to somebody and say, you this, you do that. That’s not my style.

But as far as being able to do the work, I’m a person who does many, many things at one time. I can handle a lot of things. I like to be busy.

I’m here to run an academic program of quality and make sure that everybody who is in that program is doing the best they can do in the program. And therefore, to be sure that the kinds of policies that we have is the best kinds of policies to promote at the University D.

The reason why I retired as early as I did is because I’m a Lupus patient. And sometimes I just don’t feel like coming to work because of my illness. So that’s my biggest challenge. I’ve had Lupus since I was 30 years old. So that has been my biggest problem, illness.

I think one thing I can measure my success by is that I’ve been in demand. In all my life, I have never had to look for a job. People look for me. Some people look for a job, I have never
once in my life applied for a job. And I guess also my ability to do the work, whatever the work is.

I think my greatest success personally is that I am the ninth woman in the United States to receive a Ph.D. in mathematics. As far as I know, I’m the first one to receive a Ph.D. in geometry.

My biggest support is my belief and my faith in God. All the way through my life, it’s always been the grandest. The first thing I always did was pray. And I still do that. I keep before my mind that I am significant no matter how high you get, you need to be humble before God and before other people. And I do believe that. Therefore, I don’t think myself more than other person. You know, most people unless they know what I do and I need them, they will never know what level I’m at, if I’ve finished high school, it’s not my style to do that. A lot of people that I deal with don’t know what I do, and at what level I am. I try not to do that.

I had Bible class and I taught that Bible class for years before anyone knew that I even had a Ph.D. Because you never try to be a know it all. I’m very open to people most times. And I’m not a very talkative person. Most people meet me for the first time and I don’t have too much to say.

I came from a very, very close knit family. Even my cousins, of course, my sisters and brothers and my mother and father, we were very, very close knit. We grew up in a family of love, which also gave me, confidence. We were never at a point that we thought we could not do something.

And, of course, I went to private schools all my life, which is another support. You know, the first time I went to a public school was when I went to get my master’s from University G. I had been in private schools from kindergarten all the way through college.
When I went there in 1961, you can imagine what it was like. The people there were very, very prejudiced. They were not integrated in undergraduate. It was just the graduate program. It was still segregated. And I remember them calling and telling us that we couldn’t go to any of the activities on the campus, even though we paid the fee. But they actually called us and told us we couldn’t go to the games. The only thing that we could take advantage of was the infirmary.

I think there were three of us at University G at that time. Three blacks. In the graduate program. It was two men and myself. There were two white women at the time I was there too.

And I did feel sexism and prejudice at University G that’s why I didn’t continue there. I went there and got my master’s and I left. Eleven months. You know I went in the fall of ’61 and I graduated at the end of the summer of ’62.

During this time I was ill and didn’t know it. This was before I knew I had Lupus, and I was just so fatigued. I was only diagnosed twelve years ago. Well, I began to swell. And then I guess they knew it had to be something. Because all the time before, they would say, awe, it’s nothing. But they investigated and when they took the test, they found out it was Lupus.

And that was the difficult thing. To be fatigued and then I had terrific joint pains, you know. At one time it was hard for me to sit and stand. One time they told me I had rheumatoid arthritis. And someone told me it was psychopathic, that I should go see a psychiatrist. The diagnoses were all different. One guy told me that one leg was shorter than the other. He gave me some stuff to put in my shoe.

But it didn’t hinder me because I got my doctorate while I was ill. And I done a lot of other things since then, so I have never really stopped. I have always forced myself to keep going.
Well, I can’t say it didn’t affect me. I say for maybe four or five months I was feeling sorry for myself. I was a religious nun for 26 years. From the time after high school, I was teaching here as a nun. In 1976, I left the Order. I was sick and didn’t know what it was. I had this Lupus and I didn’t know what it was. I was just getting so fatigued I couldn’t do the two. I couldn’t do the duties of the religious life and also my professional life. So, I let one go.

Well, I was in the Order, and I was the second highest person in the Order so I had all the obligations of being an administrator there and also the job here, and I just didn’t feel that I could do it any more. I actually left the first year just to see if I could back away from it. And after I backed away from it, I decided I didn’t want to come back.

I guess around 1976, I was living a busy life, and being the second person in the Order, I worked here during the week and on the weekend I had to travel. I was going from place to place visiting, you know, and solving conflicts all weekends. And then Monday coming back here, going through the job. And then not feeling well, I think I just became overwhelmed. I got out and I still didn’t know what it was. But I wasn’t under as much pressure, so I did better.

I have learned to live with Lupus. I very seldom have to think about it any more, you know. Try to keep going. The doctor said that I’m a marvel, because most people give up. And if anybody gets Lupus, the thing is you can’t give into it. That’s why I make myself get up in the morning, even when I’m not working. Because if you just lay in the bed, it looks like it just takes over.

I’ll tell you right now, this is the first time I don’t have the motivation because I know this is a temporary job. And so I don’t have the vim and vigor that I used to attack things with. I would go to bed at night and I was solving problems in my sleep. I was that kind of a person, very intense on being the best that I could be. But I don’t feel like that. I guess by now, I know
that I can do the work. I know I don’t have to get emotionally involved because I’m not going to be here that long.

I’m hoping to leave in December, but I don’t know if they’ll have somebody in place by then. But I know for sure it’s going to be sometime between January and June.

I think I have made a difference in thousands of people’s lives. No matter where I go, it’s someone that I touched in some way, whether it’s a teacher or an administrator. They always come to me and tell me how much they appreciated for them. And most of the times I don’t even remember what I did. But, my husband tells me that too. He goes places and they ask him who is he married to and they’ll say, oh, Dr. Rosa did this and that. So, I think I’ve influenced a whole lot of people’s lives for the better.

I see myself as a role model. And I’ve been very conscious of it. That what I do and the way I act will be an inspiration for other girls. The way I taught all the girls in and out of school.

Not directly do I call myself mentor, but I have been one. Because I taught high school for three years and of the three years teaching, I had from just that group about twenty people who either received a Ph.D. or a master’s degree in mathematics. And since coming here to University D, I sent away students to study in high levels. At least seven or eight people have gotten a Ph.D. in mathematics.

I think African American women can achieve a professional persona by being themselves. And do the best that they can do at all times. And never care what anybody else thinks of you and never act to please anybody.

I guess how you are viewed also depends where you go. I don’t think if I stayed at University G that I’d be the person I am now because I was a black woman. And I think when people see that they are intimidated and they should get out of the situation rather than trying to
fight it. Because at that time, there was no way I could have fought all men faculty, no women on the faculty, and the superiority. Even the other white women who were there left. They couldn’t take the pressure.

I have never been back to University G, not even for a job. I go for meetings. But I don’t associate myself with the university, people say that I’m an alumni, I don’t feel like an alumni at University G. I never consider myself alumni at University G even though I went there.

I believe that African American women can go anywhere they want to go. The world is open. If someone is serious and confident and does the best that they can in their studies and achieve at the highest, there’s no limit as to where they can go. If I can do it from my generation, anybody can do it in this generation. Prepare your mind, keep your body healthy, have confidence in yourself and don’t bow down to anybody.

**Lisa - Executive Assistant to the President, Interim Vice President, Associate Professor**

Well, you know, certainly there are some people who still don’t believe that women should be in leadership positions. And there is some resistance even at University E. Certainly has nothing to do with me being black, but just with being a woman. So, that is always something to contend with and there are always challenges …………..


Born in north Louisiana, Lisa is the oldest of two children and the mother of two. She is a fourth generation college student. Her mother, grandmother, and both of her great-grandmothers were teachers. Her father was a college professor and a dean. Her grandfather was also a principal. All of her parents, grandparents, and great-grand parents attended the same historically black college in the south.

Lisa completed a Bachelor of Arts in French/English from University E in 1978. After graduation, she began working as a humanity coordinator for the TRIO Program at an HBCU in Texas. This was her first job in higher education.
While working, Lisa earned a Masters of Public Administration in May 1984. During this time, she met professors who encouraged her and also provided opportunities for her to move up the ladder. One of those major opportunities was to work on her post-masters in Public Administration from a university in the northeastern part of the United States.

Shortly after completion of her post-graduate work, Lisa became a graduate instructor in the Department of Political Science at a mid-eastern university. In this capacity she provided academic instruction in introductory political courses and provided academic advisement and counseling. During this same time, she began pursuit of her Ph.D. in Political Science, Health Care Policy. While earning her degree, another opportunity in administration presented itself.

In September 1991, Lisa became the diabetes coordinator for a mid-eastern department of health. Five years later, 1996, she was promoted to the bureau chief of the same agency. She served in this capacity for one year and decided to change her focus to higher education again.

In 1997, she returned to her undergraduate alma mater and became an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science and Public Administration. Lisa’s responsibilities included undergraduate and graduate instruction in Public Administration, Public Health, and Political Science. In addition, she served on committees, councils, task forces, and conferences; made speeches, wrote articles on community-based interventions and empowerment programs. During this time she also completed her doctorate degree in Political Science, Health Care Policy, from a mid-eastern university in 1999. Three years later, she was promoted to associate professor. In 2002, she advanced to the position of executive assistant to the president. Finally, in 2003, Lisa began to serve in a dual administrative capacity. She was appointed interim vice president of Student Affairs, as well as continuing to serve as executive assistant to the president.
**Position Profile.** Lisa has served as the executive assistant to the president for one and a half years and acting interim vice president of student affairs for four months. She has approximately 200 individuals who report to her either directly or indirectly.

As the executive assistant to the president she advises the president on strategies and methods to improve the university’s operational effectiveness. She ensures that policies and procedures approved by the university’s administration are implemented. Lisa confers on behalf of the president with university governing boards. She interacts and negotiates with administrative officials, business executives, legislators, government officials, community and civic groups and alumni to promote the university’s goals, objectives, and policies, as well as public service objectives. Lisa also investigates conflicts and problems within the university. Lastly, on behalf of the president, she works to implement executive level decisions on internal matters to accomplish the mission of the university.

As interim vice president of student affairs, Lisa strives to anticipate and respond to the changing needs of the students; to advance the integration of the curricular and co-curricular areas of student life; and to enhance student’s affective and cognitive development. She seeks to foster a safe and healthy environment that encourages and supports student involvement, as well as optimum development. Additionally, Lisa provides leadership in building alliances with the university community and its various stakeholders. The Student Affairs Department’s organizational structure includes staff in the student union, the health center, housing, intercollegiate activities, marching band, recreation/intramural sports, residential life, student government association and student judicial affairs, student intervention resource center, student organizations, united campus ministry and university police.
Her schedule for the day that she was under observation was as follows:

5:00 a.m.  Cup of tea/Meditation/Review what needs to be done for the day ahead
7:00 a.m.  Start to receive calls regarding university at home
9:30 a.m.  Arrive in the office
11:00 a.m.  President’s Office
12:30 p.m.  Lunch
2:00 p.m.  Meeting with dean of business
3:00 p.m.  Office (meet with students and others)
4:00 p.m.  Vice President’s Meeting
6:00 p.m.  Teach course (Monday nights)
9:00 a.m.  Return home

Lisa describes her typical day as:

Oh my goodness, I don’t really have a typical day. My day usually starts about 5:00 a.m. and I have a cup of tea and do my little meditation and review what I need to do for the day. I usually start receiving phone calls around seven. I try to make in to the office by nine. I don’t always succeed, but usually I’m some where on the campus because something has come up. Someone has called and I’ve got to be somewhere. I might have to be at facilities, which might have something to do with one of our dormitories. So, you know I don’t really have any typical days. My days are mixed with a lot of paper work, a lot of meetings and a lot of unexpected events. That’s the nature of student affairs. I’m usually away from the office by six o’clock. There are days, last week for example, homecoming week, I was here late. Not physically in the office, but I was around the campus. But generally I try to get out of here by six o’clock on the nights I have class,
but my day may not end until about eight forty five or nine o’clock. I’m on call really twenty-four hours a day and so they may call me because a student has gotten ill. But, I try to have a regular day.

**Office Profile.** Lisa’s office is housed on the second floor of an administrative building located on one of the main streets running through the campus. The building is one of the university’s newer facilities. Her office is on the far left end of the building. Upon entering the main office, visitors are greeted by the receptionist. The receptionist’s desk is immediately to the right. Lisa’s office is to the left and down a hallway to the back of the main office. Her secretary’s office is located to the left of the hallway. A waiting area separates Lisa’s office from her secretary’s office. The waiting area is student-friendly. The beige wall has brochure holders clearly labeled with information on short-term, Emergency, and Stafford loans, as well as other financial aid information. The other walls have black art, and university paraphernalia strategically placed throughout the office. The carpet is tan with black and gold square patterns. The furniture is mahogany and the chairs are burgundy leather.

The walls, furniture, and carpet are the same in Lisa’s office. Her office is a corner office. Therefore, she has a large window behind her L-shaped desk and another large window to the left. Her bookshelves, which are to the right and left of her desk, hold the university’s yearbooks, various university brochures and pamphlets, a dictionary, plants, a university gift basket, a copy of *Ebony* and binders.

**Personal Profile.** Our meeting was delayed by approximately 30 minutes. The prior weekend was the university’s homecoming. The university was inundated with students, alumni, families and friends. As acting vice president of student affairs, Lisa was involved in all of the homecoming activities, including banquets, receptions, football game, homecoming halftime
time show (where she made a presentation), and concerts. As a result, she was exhausted. Lisa rushed in the door with breakfast in hand and apologized for being late. In addition, she had received an early morning call regarding some unpleasant events that had occurred over the weekend.

At age 44, with wire glasses hanging on a silver chain around her neck, short to-mid-length brown hair, and a laid back, but professional voice, she was ready to attend the numerous demands of the day. You could tell that it had been a long week and weekend; however, nothing could stop her from moving forward. Her attire for the day was a navy shirt with white collar, a red scarf tied with a bow to the right on her neck, navy pleated skirt, and navy sling back shoes.

It was obvious from the conversation that we shared that Lisa is very passionate about the needs and issues facing the African American community, especially health. Lisa is also spiritually grounded. Throughout our meeting she shared with me her faith in God and the importance of her church and community.

Lisa’s Story. Well I certainly think my education was part of my preparation to get me here, but it’s been kind of a long and winding road. When I left University E in 1978, I intended to be a lawyer. I left with a degree in English and French, Liberal Arts. But, I got married, and put off law school. I ended up taking a job at a Texas university in the TRIO Programs and was hired as their humanity coordinator and that was really my first taste of university administration. But, I left there and worked in a lot of different fields. But, the one thing I think is consistent is that every place I went, provided me with a new opportunity for leadership. I was very fortunate to run into people in the course of my undergraduate studies that helped me when I went to the university in Texas and received my masters. I also met professors who encouraged me and provided me with opportunities to move up the ladder. Even when I was working on my Ph. D.
in the mid-west, I got a job as a bureau chief and I have steadily gone up. But, I think the key for me was academic preparation. When those opportunities presented themselves, I was able to step right in. I have had leadership opportunities on every job that I’ve had that prepared me for the next step.

I came to University E as an assistant professor in public administration in 1996. That’s when I returned. I had been the bureau chief of Chronic Disease Control. In that capacity I was responsible for all state - line chronic disease programs. I worked with two governors, Mel Connerhan, who is now deceased, and our current attorney general, John Ashcroft. I also had an opportunity to work with David Satcher, the head of the CDC, when he was Attorney General and Jocelyn Elders from Arkansas. I had an opportunity to work with her when she was attorney general. So, I had a variety of experiences when I got ready to come back to University E. An opportunity presented itself, and I thought it was a good opportunity for me to give back.

The one thing I discovered about that job was there were not a whole lot of African Americans in leadership positions in the area of chronic disease health. I was on a mission to try to get other blacks in there. For a long time I was the only black, female bureau chief in the state and there were not a lot of blacks when I traveled to different states. I did some consulting work, and worked with the CDC. There were not a lot of black folks making decisions about us. So that’s why I really came back to University E.

We need to be there at the table to help make decisions. The reality is, it’s the cultural differences; there are differences and blacks are just not in the best position to make decisions about our community and how to get the message out there.

Shaharris Adahlee as you know, is a very controversial lady. She’s the one who wrote *The Black Man’s Guide To*… or something like that. But she’s written a new book and it’s about
how AIDS is devastating our community and the impact it is having on African American women. We are really dying, and falling off the face of the earth. But the world isn’t good enough, and one of the things that struck me about that program is that they were talking about, how they had these pretty little pamphlets and things, but those things are just of no use to us. That’s not what we are; that’s not who we listen to. The hardest thing to get some of them to understand is that in our communities, we’re a little different. There’s some people we listen to, and they’re not always the people they think we will listen to. We listen to the preacher. The preacher says something; a lot of folks do something. We listen to Ms. Sally, and Ms. Sally may not have finished high school, but she’s the wise woman in the community people listen to. We listen to uncle John. We listen to different people. We talk in the barbershop. We do a lot of different things.

We have some programs going. As a matter of fact, they come out of this shop, out of student affairs. We have a couple of grants, but it is very hard to get the word out to students. Young people these days are bombarded with a lot of bad messages. Unfortunately, they just don’t take a lot of this stuff serious. Sex has become like a sport. I’ve heard it referred to as kind of like a good night kiss. You know, we do it and we go on about our business. Damn the consequences. No protection. Then they see people like Magic Johnson. Because he looks healthy, they just think, hey, well, you just get it, and you just keep on with your life. That is not the real world.

Child education is a hard area. Education period is hard these days. Trying to work with our young people. There are so many things, so many obstacles that get in their way; so many little dangerous things.
I think all of those experiences, those kind of things were good. All of those things prepared me, because every step prepares you for what God has planned. I think it helped me in turns of learning how to work with people. Having opportunities to work with politicians helped me learn how to work with people; a diverse group of people. Helped me understand politics; helped me develop compassion, patience, and the ability to listen. I think all of those things helped me to get were I am now.

It’s interesting when I think about it, because, despite all of the opportunities I have had, I could not solve all the problems in administration. As a result, I was just happy as I could be teaching my little classes and decided I was going to give administration up for a while. I wanted to teach. I wanted to give back. I wanted to be able to impart knowledge to kids who look like me. So, I was just as content as I could be; had no desire to do anything and did not seek out to be the president’s executive assistant, but apparently she saw something in me. I think it had to be my role in working with the high school.

I don’t know how she saw me. Apparently she saw some leadership qualities and tapped me for the job. Same thing here, never aspired to be in student affairs, but when Dr. Jane Doe decided she needed to go on medical leave this was tapped. Obviously, not only did the president, but the board felt comfortable in the selection. I don’t know, I guess all those things prepared me.

Every day is a challenge. Every day is an opportunity to do some good. In this particular role I have a lot of interaction with the students very much like my role as a professor. That’s the one thing I like about being back at University E, an opportunity to actually have an impact; to really be able to touch somebody’s life. I like that student affairs is different. It’s busy all the time. I’m working in areas I’ve never worked in before. Under student affairs we’ve got
university police, judicial affairs, health, the counseling center, student activities, housing, and residential life. All those things are so different and provide challenges every day. Then, of course, you know the most important commodity, students. The challenges of working in student affairs are so invigorating, and I’m really enjoying it. It’s really different to me, and I’m loving my experience as the coordinator of the Bayou Classic. Getting ready for that event, the grand daddy of all classics; that’s a lot of fun.

Working with some of the biggest corporations in America; Ebony Publishing, Johnson Publishing, Ebony Magazine, Coca Cola, Ford, State Farm. It’s a whole different world interacting with corporate big wheels. The whole concept of putting on that thing. So much goes into making it a great weekend. I’m enjoying that; it’s kind of fun.

It’s starting to get chaotic because we’re getting close; now we’re in November. Today is the third, so that makes about 26 days to go. I’m enjoying that. Working with the president is always exciting. That job is twenty-four-seven. You never know what is going to happen. I certainly enjoy that role because it gives me an opportunity to do the things that are important and make a difference here at my school. I love my teaching job. I still teach at least one class a semester. It’s a graduate class, and that helps keep me grounded. I’m enjoying it all. It came at a good time in my life.

When I became the executive assistant to the president, the first administrative job I had here, my daughter was a senior in high school. She was going to finish in December, so I took that job in August. It was really just a few more months, and she was going to be in college. My son was already out of school, so it came at a wonderful time when I didn’t have the responsibilities of raising little children. I couldn’t have done it a few years ago, because I had priorities. It was more important for me to be available to my children; to be able to pick them
up, help them with their homework, to be at all their activities. That was most important for me. That’s why I say God is good, and to him I give all the glory because even when I was a bureau chief I had a lot of responsibility. I had a wonderful mentor who enabled me to have the kind of job I needed to be available to pick my kids up and take them to school and go to functions.

There are sometimes when I certainly need to be an authority figure. There are times when I need to be a mother-figure if I’m dealing with students. Sometimes I have to be the teacher, and I need to be a good listener. When you are in a leadership position, it just depends on the setting you are in, the face that you put on. For the most part, I’m generally a pretty laid back individual. Most of the people, if you were to ask people around the campus, would say, “Dr. Lisa’s probably pretty straightforward, pretty laid back, not quick to anger.” If everybody’s doing what they’re suppose to do, everything is wonderful. But if you’re not, then we might have a little difficulty. I’m not a real confrontational individual. My leadership style really varies. But for the most part, I try to have an even gill and you know just try to be thoughtful. I try to always be even in my dealings in business. I try to live by the rules my parents taught me. The Golden Rule is important. You treat people as you would want to be treated, and so I try to always be respectful.

I’m sure there are probably some differences among all of us [African American women administrators]. I don’t know whether I’m really any different, but I think something that stands out to me is I had very good role models. I’m a fourth generation college student. My mother, my grandmother, and two of my great grandmothers were teachers. My father was a college professor and dean. My grandfather was a principal. I also grew up on black college campuses, primarily at an out-of-state southern HBCU and University E. And I think that has probably given me a unique perspective maybe others don’t have.
I think all of us probably have many things in common. We are all very well prepared. I think we are probably all thoughtful thinkers. We certainly have some business acumen and have a lot for young people; a love for education and a determination or a desire to provide opportunities for others. But, I don’t know if I’m just a standout, I do think many times from talking to others and, you know, just casually conversing with others, I think my background is somewhat unique. It’s not often I run across many people who can say not only their parents or their grandparents but their great grandparents went to college. So, I think that sets me apart.

My greatest challenge, personally, is to try and maintain some kind of balance in my life. I have a lot of professional responsibility. I also have a lot of personal responsibility. Just trying to find that balance is my biggest challenge personally. Professionally, things are changing so rapidly and I try to stay on top of all the changes. Higher education is changing even as we speak. Technology, there will no longer be a teacher standing at the class, in the classroom, just writing with chalk on the blackboard. Now we have to be computer savvy.

The same thing goes for an area like this. Look at our new apartment style housing. The days are over where we build high-rise dormitories. It’s always a challenge. How are we going to find the funding? Do we do it state? Is it private housing? The changes that are happening in the field of higher education are due to many factors. I think this is my biggest challenge professionally.

Wow! personally, you know, that I’m still here. The Lord has blessed me to be here; that my children and grandson are healthy. My family is healthy, and I’m very proud of that. I was able to raise them.

Professionally I am certainly proud that University E selected me as one of their outstanding graduates. I’m excited about what I see happening with the Classic this year. I think
we are adding a couple of new dimensions. It is certainly a football game; but we’re talking about two academic institutions.

We’re instituting a couple of different things. The emphasis is on education. We’re having a job fair, but we’re also having a fair for high school students. We’re inviting other schools in the SWAC, not just University D and University E. The goal is to make sure everybody gets to go to school. Of course, we want everybody to come to University E. But, the most important thing to me is that every black child who wants to go to college gets an opportunity to go to college. If not University E, then somewhere. I’m excited about that. I’m also excited we’re adding an Academic Quiz Bowl to the Classic as another academic piece. I just am glad to see University E move forward. Any little part I’ve had to play in it, I was glad to do.

Awards and accolades are wonderful, but ultimately it’s about, what did you do while you were here. Did you make a difference in the lives of others? Did you help your fellow man? I think I’m really pleased, and I really do believe I’m respected in the community. That’s important to me; that people know I am working hard to try and make a difference in the lives of others. Those are the things that really matter to me as I’ve gotten older. I don’t have any money. I’m not making any money. Probably never will make a lot of money, but when people come up to you and former students say, “You know Dr. Lisa, I’m doing so and so and…you remember that day in class you said…” and “That really made a difference, it turned me around,” or “You didn’t know that I was going through this, but you said,” or “You made that phone call and I got that job and I’m doing well.” Those are the things that are important. When a parent whose kid couldn’t get into the lab school and working with some of the others and their association was
able to come up with the tuition money to get that kid in school. Those are the things that are important to me.

Certainly there are some people who still don’t believe women should be in leadership positions. There is some resistance, even at University E. It certainly has nothing to do with me being black, but just with being a woman. That is always something to contend with, and there are always challenges in working with the board. I think there is still a perception of white administrators that we are not competent to take care of business. They need to lead us and guide us and take us by the hand. So that is always a little frustrating, but those are just the things we have to deal with as blacks.

I’ve had many instances where my competency was challenged. They have certain activities on this campus where the Board was going to participate - and I hate to use the word interference - but there’s constant interference. For example, if we’re going to have a press conference in the student union, certainly we have enough common sense to know you use microphones, chairs, and an area for the press. You get a little frustrated when they pick up the phone and say “Now you are going to have chairs?” or “You are going to have microphones?” or “You are going to have the room decorated?” Like we don’t have good sense. Those kinds of little things, or “What are you going to say?” or “Let me read your speech” or “Let me see your report,” and “I might need to…” you know those are things you kind of shake off. If you worried about stuff like that, you’d be frustrated, mad, and upset all the time, but that’s life.

The thought of being black in America. I think that the higher you rise, it does happen. It is still for many segments, not all, but for many you just don’t expect us to have a brain. They really do believe the nonsense that we’re just not as smart; we just can’t think well. We can do fine if we are following, but we are just not supposed to lead. Who would think in 2003, after
Doug Williams has won the Super Bowl, back in the day we would still have people talking about us being leaders on the football field? I used that athletic analogy because it applies to all fields. I think the higher you rise, they just think you don’t have a brain. Not unless they help us. If they help us and we’re fine.

Sometimes, in order to get along, you really have to bite your tongue and just sit, because, if you really said what you wanted to say, you would certainly not be acting professionally. Sometimes you just want to get, as the kids say, you just want to get buck wild and tell them what you really feel.

The other thing you also are going to probably have to deal with, and this is something that hurts my feeling. As you continue to rise, some of your harshest critics are going to be those who look just like you. Because they’re not going to want you to speak up. They want you to just go with the flow. When you don’t go with the flow, you upset the other kind and that becomes problematic. Then you become problematic.

In order to cope with problems, I read a lot. I love to read. Reading is one of those activities that can take you anywhere, anytime. I read a lot, and I read a lot of different things. I read textbooks, but I also read to relax. I play solitaire and enjoy the fellowship of my family and friends.

Despite the challenges, I have never seriously considered resigning. If I resign, then I can’t make or be part of the change. No, I’ve really not thought about that. Of course I get frustrated, but there have been no issues at this point that have come up that made me feel so strongly that I wanted to resign. My attitude has always been that I want to be a player. If I’m not, I don’t have a seat at the table. I can’t have any input, and I like having input. My parents raised me to believe what I had to say was valuable. I certainly don’t have all the answers, but if
I were to give up and throw in the towel, then I wouldn’t be able to be a player at the table. So no, I’ve not really thought about resigning.

I think I have found a pretty good balance, because when I make a decision I try to make it because it’s the best decision at the time. I don’t really try to say, “Well, now if I make this decision is the community going to be upset?” So, I really just try to make the decision that I think is best. I really think I found a good balance and that’s not because I was particularly looking for anything. But because I try to make the decisions I think are best and that are best for the situation.

I’m kind of new in the higher education game, so I don’t know if I’ve really made a whole lot of contributions, yet. I think that’s probably for somebody else to judge, as to what contributions I’ve made. I certainly hope in the future I will make some. Now, I think here at University E, just in the short term I’ve been acting vice president of student affairs, I think we are seeing some positive changes. I think the pride is up on the campus, and the students know I am concerned about them. They know I am going to be responsive to their needs. Parents know I will return their phone calls. That I am concerned about their children, and what is important to them is also important to me. I think that’s a contribution. I think crime is down, and I know it’s a short period of time to judge and all of it didn’t happen on my watch. There were certainly some things in place before I got here. Like I said, I think that’s probably for someone else to really say.

I do think I’ve made a difference in the community. I’ve worked hard to try to bring some respectability and integrity back to the Lab school. We have a long way to go. I am certainly involved, and I am trying to be a part of the team that makes sure that, once again, at the Lab school, we have the best teachers and that are needed for our students. I just try to do my part.
As my mother would say, to be a good family member and a community member. So when the mayor calls, I come. But I think that I would probably make the same kind of contributions that most citizens make.

I’m not the mayor or the city councilman, but I would certainly try to do my part to make this a livable city and to make it comfortable. I think my role in the community is more as an advocate. I think people in the community see me as an advocate. Many members of the community view me as someone who can get things done. I’m a problem-solver and if I can’t solve the problem, I can certainly put them in touch with somebody who can. I think that’s probably how I’m viewed in the community.

My father was really active in community affairs, and I think many of the older members of the community expect me to be active because he was active. Again we often do what our parents did. So I don’t know if there’s anything just particularly outstanding that I’ve done.

As for African American women, I think I certainly am a contributor. I hope whatever I’m doing will make it easier for those who come behind me. I try to be decisive. I try to be thoughtful about the decisions I make. But I think I’m pretty good at understanding. Brought up well, Christian woman trying to do my part with respectful, not going to bring any embarrassment to anybody. Certainly going to try not to. Again, I don’t think I’m any more outstanding than anybody else. I think the Lord has put me here, and this is my time to be here. For some reason I am here.

I certainly see myself as a change agent. Whether or not that’s significant, history will have to judge. I do see myself as a change agent. Yes, and I like that role. I don’t have a problem with that because I know that, if we don’t change, we are going to die.
I like to think I am a role model. I like to think young women see me and see the life I lead and know if you work hard, it pays off in the end, but you can also have fun. College students see me and my daughter, son, and grandson. I certainly can put on my little business attire and go out, and I can certainly interact with all levels and have done that. But, I can also put on my blue jeans and have good clean fun. I’m not drunk on the streets. I’m not drinking, I’m not walking around half naked. But I’m having a good time, living a good life.

I think I’m a role model. I hope I am a positive one. I think all of us are role models, and I think all of us have a responsibility, no matter what position we hold. Be it the janitor, cook, all of us have a responsibility to carry ourself in a positive way, because the children are looking at us and they’re going to behave the way we behave. I think I’m a role model in that respect. Not so much because I’m in this position, but because I have a higher profile.

I do think that this is an additional responsibility or an additional incentive to make sure what they see is something they can be proud of, and something they might want to aspire to and say, “You know, she doesn’t have a bad life.” I’ll tell a young person in a minute, it’s not what I thought I was going to do. I thought I was going be a lawyer and have a whole lot of money. I never saw myself in education because my parents, grandparents, and my great grandparents were teachers. They had no money. They worked all the time. But low and behold, I’m in the family business. I’m glad I am because teaching is the one profession you really can make a difference. I don’t care what you become in life, everybody has to have a teacher, from your mother, whose your first teacher, to whomever. That great astronaut doesn’t get to be an astronaut if he doesn’t have a good math teacher or physics teacher, or astronomy teacher. Somebody had to get him or her excited about space. So, I think that I’m in the most wonderful profession there is and I enjoy it.
More and more African American women are assuming leadership positions, not only in higher education, but in a variety of ways. I think people are starting to see them differently because they are out front; they are out-spoken and articulate. They are smart and they look good. They’re not the stereotypical image that is generally portrayed. They are not loud and shaking. So, I think it’s happening. The more opportunities we have in higher education, black females are getting more and more opportunities, and they are shining. As their light continues to shine bright, I think opportunities are going to open up. Look at the city, you have a female mayor and the city is turning around. That’s not to disparage those who came before. Just within a few short months, our city is turning. We’ve been trying to clean up that park for years, and she comes in and boom.

Look at University E with a female president. Certainly we’ve gotten two unqualified audits and we are well on our way to being reaffirmed with SACS. It took a female to turn the place around. As women have more opportunities, black women in particular, we’re going to succeed. The sky’s the limit with what we will be able to do. I think the other thing, too, I am discovering and has really been a source for black women, is that we work together. Women who are in leadership positions talk to one another; network with one another; and share with one another. That is the difference between men and women. I don’t have a problem with telling you some of the obstacles I’ve encountered. Some of the things I think you might want to share in my experiences, so that in the event that you might encounter that same thing you’ve already heard how one person was able to skirt around it. So, I think women share a little bit more.

I think the future is bright. Having said that, it does mean it’s more important than ever we continue to push education, because we are going back in time. It’s going to take all of us to
make sure America doesn’t lose its ever-loving-mind. The times are crazy. But, I think things look bright; the future’s bright for us.

Certainly there is thinking amongst many in the field of higher education that we are not competent. We have to continue to work harder and be prepared, so that when opportunities present themselves we can show we have the right stuff. I think we have to continue to work amongst each other. The reality is that if there is one, we’ve got to hire one another. I guess what I’m trying to say is we have to hire one another, because there are those unwritten rules that I’m hiring my friend and my friend’s friend, and you’re not that friend. So, you’re not going to get in the door. You see that in the big schools, and I know that because I went to a flagship school. They might let one of “yawl” in, but they not letting too many.

It’s very hard. You almost have to have an inside track. The other thing that happens at a white institution is that we may go, but we don’t stay because the environment is so hostile. You might have one that will stay two or three years. Someone who stays there twenty years or longer, it is only because they live in the community and they’ve just found a way to ride this out to retirement.

In terms of policies, the policies that are on the books are probably fair. but it’s those informal things that prevent us from getting ahead. The policies that are at University G or University J, say the right things. They have to by law, so I don’t think there’s really any problems with the policies. I think it’s the informal network. But as we get in, we’ve got to continue, as that old saying goes, we’ve got to always reach back and get one. Everybody has to that. we have to be unafraid to do so. We need to be politically connected, that’s the other key. African Americans as a group, are not as politically savvy as others, and we need to learn how to do that.
I think African America women are going to be doing what they’ve been doing all along. I think they’re going to be working hard; they’re going to be raising families. African American women have been the backbone of our community. They have been the strength, and they have been a consistent link that has enabled us to move forward and get the promise that we have so far. As I said earlier, the future is bright for African American women.

I think you’re going to continue to see us. America is a funny place. African American women are going to have some opportunities; for African American men it is different. Historically, African American women have not been viewed as the same kind of threat as our men. So, some of us are going to have some real good opportunities in the future.

The next decade looks good. You’re going to see more and more African America presidents, women. Not only at HBCUs, but at majority institutions because we’ve proven ourselves, day in and day out. You’re going to see more and more women serving on their state education boards. I think that you’re going to see more and more women in state houses. As more and more women become the heads of states, you’re going to see more women appointed to various positions. I think over the next decade things look bright. Here we are in Louisiana with the possibility of a woman governor, so who knows. You got a woman president of the ULS (University of Louisiana) system. Amazing. You got a couple of women presidents so I think the sky’s the limit.

My future goals: I want to retire in about ten years. I don’t know what’s in my future. I would like to be the vice president of academic affairs one day. Academics is my love.

University E is home, and I want to do whatever I can for University E. My thing is I go where God tells me, and I think if he says stay here at University E, I’m staying. If he says it’s time to move, I’m gone. Who knows? I want to do his will, and I want to be where he wants me
to be. So, I don’t know. A few of my friends have said maybe presidency one day. Who knows? I never really thought about it. However, with more and more women being presidents, it doesn’t seem as far fetched as it once did. Now I’ve found that kind of creeping into my thought processes every now and then.

I want to live to see my children become successful in their own right, and my grandchildren do okay. I want my community to prosper. I want to see University E continue on. Right now, I just want to do the best job I can as the acting vice president of student affairs. That is my focus right at this moment. I think the future will take care of itself.

Well, on the simple side the three R’s I heard Debbie Allen say on the *Different World* episode: relax, relate and release. I’ve found that to be most helpful. If you stay relaxed, your health stays better, your blood pressure stays down. If you find that you relate and relate to me just simply means to be able to listen and empathize sometimes. You may not always be able to do anything, but sometimes all a person needs is that listening. If you can empathize with what’s going on and be able to release. Some of those things we’ve talked about when the board calls me and gets on my nerves, I can just kind of take a couple of deep breaths and let it go. So those things are certainly important.

The other thing I would say is take advantage of every opportunity because each opportunity is preparing you for the next step. My ultimate advice, and I hope this is not offensive, is to keep God first, because it is through him that all things are possible. That’s ultimately, I think the key to anything. If he is first, and if you listen, and follow his word, everything is going to be okay. So, those would be the things. They are very simple. Keep a balance in your life. Have a life. Don’t ever let the job become the most important thing, because it’s not. Your family is most important and keep them close.
Patricia - Acting President

Well, I think I am still confronted with just being a female. Like I said early the climate is still a little chilly. Some people still think there is a place for the lady and it is not at the top of an educational institution.

Born 1946; B. A. 1967; M. A. 1975; Ph.D. 1991

A native of south Louisiana, Patricia has one son and seven siblings. Her parents completed high school; however, they did not attend college.

Patricia earned a master’s degree in English education from a university in Georgia. She earned her doctorate degree in Curriculum and Instruction from University G. Patricia began her career at University F as an academician and administrator. During her tenure, she served as dean of the junior division, director of the Upward Bound program, coordinator of TRIO programs and associate professor of English. During this time Patricia also authored and co-authored several book chapters, made numerous scholarly presentations, and attended several development and leadership training institutes around the country.

In 1992, Patricia left University F to further her administrative career at University E. Patricia was appointed as the acting assistant vice-president for academic affairs. Upon completion of her duties, she served as the special assistant to the president. She was then appointed vice-president for development and university relations. Later she was appointed as interim vice president for student affairs and acting vice president for academic affairs. Prior to her current position, she served the university as provost and vice president for academic affairs. Patricia was named acting president of University E by the System Board of Supervisors in January 2001.

**Position Profile.** Patricia has served as acting president of the historically black college for approximately three years. She is the first woman to hold this position at the university. She
reports directly to the systems president. Her primary responsibilities are to act as the chief officer for the university. As acting president, Patricia is responsible for the entire university - ranging from athletics to academics to alumni. The vice presidents for administration, office planning, support units, academic affairs, enrollment management, finance and student affairs all report directly to Patricia.

Patricia has been instrumental in the survival of the university for the past three years. She has helped the university renew its accreditation. She has also elevated the academic growth, raised philanthropic dollars, and improved campus finances.

Patricia keeps a fairly rigorous schedule. The day she was interviewed her schedule was as follows:

8:30 a.m. Arrive at office
9:00 a.m. Meet with alumni
10:00 a.m. Attend to paperwork and non appointment individuals
11:00 a.m. Interview
12:30 p.m. Lunch
1:30 p.m. Meet with vice president of Finance
2:30 p.m. Meet with vice president of Academic Affairs
4:00 p.m. Vice president’s meeting
5:30 p.m. Follow-up on phone calls, e-mail, sign paperwork
7:00 p.m. Dinner with alumni president

Patricia describes a typical day as:

Not typical at all. Even though most times, I have a structured schedule put together by my secretary. On any given day, people come in unexpectedly. And if I am available I’ll
see them. I do have an open door policy, because I do know that people want to occasionally see the president. So, a typical day will have all of my structured appointments and it will have those who walk in and need to see me. It will be unexpected telephone calls. It will be having to reroute some of the appointments so I can handle things that are emergency situations. No day is like any other day. It’s not typical. It’s not structured. I come in prepared to handle whatever the day may hold. I come in about 8:30 a.m. and I normally leave around 8:00 p.m. Just about a 12-hour day.

**Office Profile.** Patricia’s office is located on the first floor of the main administration building. Upon entering the large, wooden, double doors on the left side of the building, visitors are greeted by pictures of the former presidents of the university, as well as Patricia’s pictures. The waiting area is merely another entrance before actually entering the president and vice president’s offices. There is no receptionist to provide direction or to answer questions. Upon entering the second set of doors, Patricia’s suite is located to the left.

Patricia’s executive assistant is seated to the left of the entrance. She is an African American woman in her fifties. The office environment is one of distinction. The décor of the office is different from any of the other offices on campus. The furniture, carpet, and drapes allude to the fact this is a very important place on campus. The atmosphere is welcoming.

Patricia’s office is located behind the executive assistant down the hallway. The office is very spacious. There are three, large windows facing the main street that runs through campus. The drapes are only slightly open to let a little sunlight in. The carpet and drapes are the school’s colors.

Patricia sits at a large mahogany desk in an oversized black executive chair. Two wall-to-ceiling bookcases, separated by a large television are located behind her desk. The
bookshelves hold school yearbooks, personal accolades, glass desktop plaques, trophies, and other prestigious awards. Live plants also adorn the bookshelf, as well as the floor and tables throughout the office.

School pride, as well as African American heritage, is displayed throughout the office. Patricia has displayed various stuffed and ceramic replicas of the school mascot. Gift baskets with the school logo and mascot are placed on the end of the oversized black leather sofa. Patricia has African American artwork strategically hung on the walls depicting African American education, women, and children. One of Patricia’s favorite pieces of artwork is entitled “The Woman I Am”, in addition, she has framed university athletic posters, framed pictures of herself and past presidents.

**Personal Profile.** Patricia’s weekend was long and eventful. It was the university’s homecoming, and Patricia had been inundated with alumni, family, and friends. The previous weekend was filled with several breakfasts, banquets, and receptions. Additionally, Patricia hosted the rival school’s president for the weekend. The university was victorious.

When I arrived, Patricia was on the telephone. The vice president for Student Affairs was also waiting, she needed her to sign some paperwork; however, it did not take long for her to see me. She was seated at her desk when I entered the office. She got up from her chair and greeted me with a firm handshake and a huge smile. Patricia was anxious to know about me. She wanted to know about my background and my research.

Patricia explained to me how the weekend had drained her and that such obligations are part of the process of being president. As she travels for the university people are always amazed that she is the president. Patricia is 57 and approximately 5’2” tall. She has mid-length hair with strands of gray that she wears slightly curled under. She is always dressed in
professional attire, even for the football game. Her attire for the day was a tan, pinstripe suit with a black shirt. Her accessories were minimal. She wore gold, wire rim glasses, a gold necklace, and gold ball earrings.

Patricia is committed to the university. She is proud of the progress the university has made in the past three years. She is also proud of the fact she is the first female acting president in the history of the university.

**Patricia’s Story.** I have had several positions here at the University E, some top-level positions in most of the major areas at the university. I’ve served as the top executive of student affairs, academic affairs, and development. For a short time, I had to actually serve as the major supervisor for the finance department before becoming the chief financial officer. After the president of the university resigned, I was approached by our board to take the position. I happened to be in the right place at the right time.

I guess it also means the board felt I had the qualifications and the ability to take care of what needed to be done at the executive level. It is a matter of being prepared for an unexpected opportunity. Three years as the acting president of University E. I worked at University E for nine years.

I have liked every position I have had because I like working with college students, particularly African American students. Each level has its challenges. This one has the most, in that you are responsible for everything at the university, ultimately. But as long as I am able to provide some type of environment for young African Americans and others to go out and succeed and become productive and represent University E, it’s very rewarding and it keeps me going.
I try to present myself as a team player. One who is willing to do what needs to be done to accomplish the mission. I try to present myself as one who is no different from any of the other employees. I am accessible and I am available to listen to things they would like me to hear. I’ll join in and staple papers if I need to, and I will talk with them and listen to their issues. I try to work with them as much as possible.

I try to have people see me as a person of integrity. A very professional person. A person who is concerned about the welfare of the students, faculty, and staff. I want them to see me as a fair person, with no particular special interest group to protect. And expect them to follow my lead with good work ethics. That’s one thing that’s very important to me.

I come to work everyday and I work all day and would like that to be emulated throughout the university. I am happy to say people do come to work everyday and they do work all day. Because they know I am here too, so they are not going to compromise their work ethics. I want to try to establish an atmosphere where people feel good about coming to work. Since we have to work, I think it’s important you come with a good attitude and not come begrudgingly, like this is another day. But come knowing it will be an interesting day; a good day.

Being a female has lots of challenges. One of my expressions is that the climate is still a bit chilly for top-level women executives. If nothing more, I serve as a role model to show that women can ascend to the top of the higher education hierarchy and become the president of a university. At University E, it’s particularly interesting, because so many times people associate our school with an outstanding football team. And it’s very amusing to me when people first learn I am the president of University E they say “oh, with the football team?” I said, “yes, and I am their president too.” So, that’s a stereotypical kind of perception people have of University E.
I have been well accepted by everybody here, because I think they realize I came here to work. And I have not tried to use gender as a mechanism for anything good or bad. I think generally, I serve as a role model for aspiring African American women who want to go to the highest heights. I think I also serve to say to women that we can take charge of situations that can be problematic, because University E has been in a really, really tough situation these last three years.

We have done things to move it from the level of negative publicity and nay Sayers and non-support to people believing we have a new kind of culture at University E. It’s a progressive culture. It’s productive and everybody’s being accountable. That gives the impression women can come in and do some things based on the style of females. And that style is grounded in trying to be all things to all people. Without compromising your own values and without compromising the mission of the university, but using your skills and juggling all kinds of balls, and juggling all kinds of tasks. Coming out being a homemaker, it’s a multifaceted task. But when you come to a university, you face the same kinds of challenges of raising a family of young college students who become your family, so we work at it like that. They are all my children.

I think the one thing that distinguishes me from others is I didn’t really have this aspiration. It happened to me. However, I happened to apparently be prepared. I did not seek it. I did not solicit this position, but it happened. I think that’s the one thing that sets me apart from those who are probably in the same position. They applied and they were given the opportunity. I succeeded, I did not apply, but the opportunity came. I accepted it and I am working as hard as all of them and any of them. Other than that, I think all of us are alike.
My greatest challenge professionally is not being able to do a lot of the professional
development activities I would like to do. I have not been able to do as much professional
development as I have done in the past; and that is attending a lot of my professional meetings
and institutes. I like to do that because you get such growth and you get a chance to meet your
peers and colleagues. I pretty much have to stay around campus all of the time. Something is
going on all of the time, not only with our SACS piece in jeopardy, but we have a lot of
accreditation teams coming in for reaffirmation. So, to be away from the campus would not be in
the best interest. Because we have lots of reports always being done, I just couldn’t do anything
but work, work, work for University E. I mean, for three solid years all I have ever done is work,
work, work. I didn’t have a lot of free time because there was so much work that needed to be
done. I worked late nights, and all I could do was go to bed. Take work home on the weekends
and in the evenings, because we had a lot of stuff to do.

We had to read, engineer, and restructure this university. It took a lot of work. So, I didn’t
have a lot of personal time. That was okay with me, because I enjoyed seeing things happen. I
enjoyed seeing things come to fruition. I enjoyed seeing some of those reports turn from negative
to positive.

I think my greatest success to this point is having people feel differently about University
E. Having all of the constituents, the students, the faculty, the staff, our board, the community,
the alumni feel that University E is back to prominence. First, in its academic programs and its
environment, and its enrollment efforts, and certainly in its finances. I guess my greatest success
culminated at homecoming, this weekend, when we had so many people come back with such
spirit, and delight.
We received all kinds of compliments about how the financial piece now looks; the number of academic programs that we have accredited; and the new dormitory that is the housing complex; how the campus looks; and the marquee we have out front. People are very excited about University E. And I saw that evolve. When I first took over this job it was nothing but complaints, complaints, criticisms, disbelievers, and nay Sayers. We have seen that come around. Of course, we still have those people.

It’s never going to be perfect. But the majority of our constituents feel University E is on its way. What a difference all of the media says about University E and how my own colleagues feel about University E. Because it was in a rocky situation and they knew if University E went, the next one would be one of them [other HBCUs]. My greatest success I would say is having been able to change the culture; the impressions that people have of University E. And having people want to support it in ways we never thought would happen - morally and financially. And like I said, that record attendance we had this weekend was just phenomenal.

We attribute that to people feeling good to come back to University E because now everything is blooming and blossoming and changing. That was a great tribute to us. We still have a lot of work to do. We are not going to let up. We had a SACS visit, but we don’t know the results of it but we feel very good. Because we did what we were supposed to do.

In December they will make the call but we feel pretty good about it. And my greatest triumph will be when SACS takes us off probation. Then I will really feel we have worked together. One thing I want everyone to always understand is you have to be a team member. It was not one individual person or one individual group. One thing I am pleased about is I was able to put a team together and to make us work together and enjoy. I have the most outstanding team. I let them do their job, because that’s what they are good at. When I am in situations that
deal with their role and responsibility, I am not too shy to call and ask them for help and suggestions or recommendations. I give them a lot flexibility to do what it is they are supposed to do. They keep me informed. As a result, I am able to inform others about everything that happens across the campus. I don’t deal with turf situations because it sends the wrong message. I don’t let anybody set up little kingdoms, it sends the wrong message.

I try to do the same thing with alumni. I write to them frequently to keep them abreast of what’s going on. Anytime there are any contributions made, I do a personal letter to them. I do a lot of writing. I’m keeping in practice. I am an English education major.

I think the success that we have experienced is because it is a team effort. I do believe that my leadership has facilitated that because of my personality of being inclusive. If you always surround yourself with competent people it will always turn out good. You can lead people and let them work.

I am so much a proponent of letting people do their work because they have come up with some of the most creative pieces that have helped us. In enrollment management, a real creative piece came up through our ambassador program. Dr. Doe, I had put her in student affairs and some creative things started coming out, although I lost her from this office. She was my executive assistant. In academic affairs, the right person is in there to get all these accreditations to come up, so it’s great.

I still think I am confronted with just being a female. The climate is still a little chilly. Some people still think there is a place for the lady and it is not at the top of an educational institution. I don’t compromise my morals and my values so that has not been a problem for me. I am a single female, but it hasn’t created an issue. I didn’t let it create an issue.
I am an old fashioned traditional person. That means I have the same kind of values that were put into me by my daddy and my mama. I went to school in the sixties when we did not have visitation in the dormitories, where girls did things they were instructed to by our dean of women. And that you stayed on your side of the campus and the men stayed on their side of the campus. I am coming into the twenty-first century in moderation.

The people who I grew up with in the sixties and the early seventies have come out. They have done well and have not been faced with a lot of the issues that our young people have today. I think it was a good era. Some of those things we have tried to bring back to the university. The students are accepting of many things. Of course, I recognize the generations are different, but there are some things I think you just don’t compromise on.

I went to a graduation rehearsal and I try to go to all of them, but some of them I miss. Each time I go to a graduation rehearsal I say to them, “wear dark clothes under there [robe].” I say “young ladies, you need a dark black dress or skirt or navy blue.” I said, “because if you don’t have one, you need to get one.” Each time I’ve been able to go to practice, I say that. At graduation everybody has on dark stuff. When I don’t go, I see them with white stuff under the robes. I am not afraid to say anything to students. They just don’t know and need to be told.

Another thing that I will be concentrating on once we get our accreditation, is to prompt our alumni to be more philanthropic. They call and give us lots of suggestions of how we need to improve the school and what went wrong when they came for a weekend. But, we don’t have our alumni giving back in ways in which they should. Right now they use the excuse, “well, we don’t know what’s going to happen to the school.” I am ready to take that excuse away from them.
We are going to go after it with a passion to help University E move forward. We get state funding, but it’s never enough money and we need to have our alumni help us to do things to enhance the university. So, we are going to be putting together a real creative fundraising campaign. That’s what we are going to be focusing on in addition to trying to add some new academic programs. So we are excited about that. But none of that is going to happen until we solidify SACS.

In order to cope with the challenges, I say my prayers and meditate. I talk with family and friends, none who are located here on this campus. Believe it or not, I have to do a lot of driving. That really serves as a good time for me to be reflective. It’s a four-hour drive, so I use that time to get a little piece of mind. Sometimes I get books on tape because I am not able to read as much as I’d like to or I get some very good comforting music and just enjoy the ride. That is really a coping mechanism for me. I mean, as opposed to me looking at it as a dreading ride. Because it’s four hours, but it’s refreshing to me. It’s in south Louisiana, where I am from. So, it’s going close to home.

I have found support from my family first and foremost. I get a lot of support from the campus. The community people, our board is very supportive, and certainly we could not have made many of the strides we have made without the support of our board.

When people saw we had a mission and we were trying to fulfill a mission, they got on board. So, we got support in the last few years. Initially it was just very difficult. People were disbelieving. We came in to make some changes, and change is always difficult for people. We got a lot of resistance, but I could not retaliate with negative pieces as they came to me. I had to stay focused. That’s the one thing I found was most helpful; to remain focused on what we were doing and not be sidetracked by everything.
Never have I considered resigning. Only because this is my alma mater and it was in trouble. The board felt I could move through these troubled times, and I didn’t want to let myself down, the board down, and all those people who need to come to University E in the future. I never wanted to resign. Never. I never wanted the position in the beginning, but since it came to me, I did it. Nothing in life is easy, but you don’t get over it by resigning. You just buckle up and do what you got to do.

I don’t know if there will ever be a complete balance. The balance for me comes when I know I have done the best I can do. People’s expectations are always going to be what they are, but I can’t do anymore than what I can do. Once I have given it the best I can give, then that’s all I can do. So, I am satisfied at what I have done, and I am going to always give it my best. It doesn’t matter how long it takes or what it takes out of me, I am going to give it my best. If it’s not what people expect I am not shattered, because I gave it my best. Like I say to them at home, I am still here in the office at 7:30 p.m. or 8:00 p.m.. I always give it my best. So the balance comes in knowing that whatever I have done, it’s the best I could do. Somebody else may have been able to do it better, but that’s the best that I can do. And you’ve been successful.

I’m most proud that our school has a new level of respect. I am most proud that, despite all of the negative articles our enrollment is increasing. We built a new residence hall and all of our academic programs are sound and of great quality. Also, our campus environment is attractive. That took awhile. We picked out thirteen spots and planted flowers, so the campus would look like a very nice blooming campus. So, beautification is another thing that I am proud of.
Also, we have been able to remove some of the problems the school faced. It appears as though we are not going to lose this outstanding HBCU because it was on the verge of being destroyed. I’ll put it like that.

We’re also bringing University E back as a cultural center of the community. We’ve been favored to bring to the campus some activities the community people wanted to come out and participate in like last night - the Georgia Mass Choir. We had community people. We had buses from around the area. So we are reestablishing University E as a cultural center for African Americans, particularly. And we are reestablishing University E as an outstanding Historically Black Institution by clearing up the financial piece and, of course, we are reclaiming University E’s legacy in athletics.

Surely, I view myself as an agent of change because there are not many of us. And seemingly, we are going to make the necessary changes to put University E on solid ground. If that is the case, then I have been the supervisor for that effort. I am trying to live up to restoring University E’s legacy of excellence and achievement.

I think African American women can be viewed as the norm by continuing to achieve and simply by staying focused on the mission and not being sidetracked by diversions. Also, to believe in yourself and not try to be somebody else, just try to be who you are using the skills and expertise you have to accomplish your mission. Although all of us are women, each is different.

I think the biggest obstacle for African American women is others’ stereotypical concept of what a woman should do and how high she should go. Another obstacle is the non-supportives of the field of that area. You are going to always get a little bit of that. It’s just kind of, I don’t know, kind of the nature of females sometimes. I’ll put it like this; those who supported it are not
at the same level as you, because other African American college presidents really support each other, females. But you are going to have some persons working under you. They’re not going to be supportive. Not a lot. I got a little. I deal with it because I stay focused. It doesn’t stop any progress. It doesn’t change anybody’s mind. It doesn’t change me, but it’s there.

In the future I see a lot more female presidents and a lot more females in some of our higher executive positions. I think this group is in position right now. They are setting the example that women can run a major university. I think the HBCUs, we have thirteen, maybe. Doing it in grand style too.

It’s challenging, but it’s rewarding when you see things coming together and your school has a better reputation. Because you see, this is my school. This is where I went to school. I am not an outsider trying to get a name. I am the person who gained a lot from University E. So, if I can give anything back, I certainly am willing to do it. I have been doing it for three years.

As for my future, I haven’t decided. I don’t know, December or January or February. I haven’t decided whether I am going to apply for the president position or not. I haven’t decided, because I got to keep my focus. We got SACS, that’s the main thing. Although we had our community visit, we still have a few more responses. I would rather focus on that.

Always do your best without expecting any kind of special praise or recognition. I say that given my own situation, I always did what I was supposed to do. I tried to do it to the best of my ability and apparently it paid off. Because each time I got a job here, I never applied for any of them. I was always called. So, it meant my work must have been speaking for me. If you do your work without expecting praise or accolades and you do it to the best of your abilities, somebody’s going to be watching; somebody you least expected.
These opportunities will come your way, either coincidentally, like it did for me, or either when you apply. Your credentials will be such that they will be acceptable. That’s the best advice and you know people who do things for recognition purposely they don’t succeed. Because I never would have been a president had this opportunity not jumped up and said, hey.

**Bernice - Dean**

One of the obstacles that maybe is a myth of the past, which is sexism, but it is not insurmountable. And African American women have the dual battle to fight because not only do we have to fight racism but we have to fight sexism. But when we are strong, we are capable of conquering goals.

Born 1941; B. A. 1972; M. A. 1978; Ph. D. 1980; Tenured

Born to sharecroppers in south Louisiana, Bernice is the youngest of three children. Neither her mother nor her father completed high school. Bernice is the mother of five children. She was a high school dropout who decided, after her children were teenagers, to get her GED and pursue a college degree.

Bernice was a non-traditional student completing a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from University A in 1972. After graduating, she began working as a kindergarten teacher for the parish school system. While working in early elementary education, she earned her Masters of Education in Guidance and Counseling from University D in 1978. A year later, she accepted her first position in higher education and became a teaching associate. In this capacity she was responsible for teaching and supervising approximately 20 college student teachers working in public schools in the mid-east.

In 1980, Bernice earned a Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Curriculum Development, Child Psychology, and Multicultural Education. With this accomplishment in hand, Bernice returned to Louisiana to serve as a professor of Teacher Education at University B.
In 1984 she was promoted to the director of Minority Affairs/Equal Employment Opportunity Officer. She served in this capacity for five years and decided to change her focus back to the academic side of higher education. During this time, she also served as core faculty for a graduate school doctoral program in the eastern part of the United States. In 1989, she became the dean of the College of Education and Superintendent K-12 Laboratory School at University D.

In 1999, Bernice was promoted to sr. vice president of the eastern university. In 2002, she retired from higher education. Her retirement was short lived. After only two weeks, she reentered higher education in her present capacity at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) as the dean of the College of Education in August 2002.

**Position Profile.** Bernice has served as the dean of the College of Education for approximately one and a half years. She reports directly to the vice chancellor for academic affairs. Her primary responsibilities are to manage all resources in the college, financial, and otherwise. She has approximately 31 individuals who report to her either directly or indirectly. The College of Education organizational structure includes two department chairs, 29 faculty, a director, administrative coordinators, academic counselors, academic specialists and program analysts.

Her schedule for the day that she was under observation was as follows:

7:30 a.m. Leave home
8:00 a.m. Check email, meet with individuals that did not have appointment
9:30 a.m. Interview
10:25 a.m. Photographer arrived to take pictures for university public relations
12:00 Noon Luncheon – Board of Directors meeting at restaurant
1:30 p.m. Administrative meeting
3:00 p.m. Observe faculty, provide input
5:00 p.m. Return telephone calls, check email, wrap up day

According to Bernice a typical day:

Actually it’s not bad. I enjoy what I do. I try to get here in the morning between 8:00 a.m. and 8:30 a.m. When I get here, I try to turn my computer on. Usually somebody’s waiting to see me. The phone rings and I try to do that, because I could sit and let the phone ring, but I don’t. Then we have meetings. I try to observe faculty when I have time. Not to spy on them but just to enjoy what they are doing. I also try to provide input in what the faculty members are doing. And then we have meetings, meet, meet, meet. That’s what this job is about. A lot of meetings. Actually, mostly administrative meetings. You know decision making, that kind of stuff, which is nice. As a rule I try my very best to be in by 6:00–6:30, but mostly I am home by 7:30.

Office Profile. Bernice’s office is housed on the second floor of an administrative building located on one of the main streets that runs through campus. The building is one of the university’s newer facilities. Bernice’s office is on the far left end of the building. There is a door from her office leading directly into the hallway; however, students, staff, and visitors must enter through the main office, which is connected to her office.

Upon entering the main office, visitors are greeted by the receptionist/student worker and her secretary. The receptionist’s desk is immediately to the left. The main office has a large window facing the main street. African American art and pictures depicting the school mascot are hung on the walls to the left and right of the entrance.
Bernice’s office is spacious and has two, average-size windows that offer a view of the main street. The walls and tile floors are white, and there is a large multi-colored, round rug on the floor in front of the desk. The color scheme of the office is predominantly rust, gold, and green.

African American culture and pride is displayed throughout the office. To the right of her mahogany desk is an African American flag hanging on the wall. Bernice has African American artwork strategically hung on the walls. One of the larger pictures depicts a mother breastfeeding her child, while another child is standing by observing. Bernice also has her awarded and honorary degrees on the wall.

To the right of her desk, near the far left window is a gold love-seat with rust and green stripes in a vertical design. Next to the sofa is a large ficus plant nestled in a brown basket in the corner near the window. Live plants and family photographs of her children, grandchildren, and husband are placed throughout the office on bookshelves, the desk, computer, and computer stand.

One picture I found to be really neat was sitting on her desk. The picture contains Bernice, her husband, and all of her daughters in their caps and gowns. Bernice explained that the picture was simulated. The pictures were taken as each one of them received their Ph.D.s, which were at different times and in different years. The photographer took the separate pictures and fused the images and made it into one photograph.
**Personal Profile.** When I arrived at Bernice’s office she, like the others I interviewed, was not ready to meet. She had received a call from the chancellor regarding academic matters. Once she had handled the crisis, she welcomed me into her office. She explained that her schedule today was going to be tight.

Standing approximately six feet tall, her stature alluded to her stamina and strength. At age 62, Bernice is full of energy and vigor. She is a very fashionable person and likes to dress the part of an administrator. Bernice’s attire for the day was a red suit with matching accessories. Her auburn-color hair is layered and stylish. She was upset with the photographer for not showing up the previous day. She had purchased a new outfit for her new photograph, and he did not show up or call to reschedule. As a result, she did not expect him to come to take the photos and was wearing the colors she had worn in previous photos.

Bernice’s schedule was full. She had several meetings scheduled; however, it appeared that a luncheon she was hosting was a priority. Bernice serves on the board of directors for a prominent league in her area. It was her turn to host the event. As a result, she was concerned about the centerpiece for the tables and how much money she was spending. As the host, she was responsible for paying for the members’ lunches at a nice restaurant.

She believes that as a leader you have to make sure that no stones are left unturned. She believes she is a good leader. Born and raised in the South during a difficult period in the history of African Americans, she believes her leadership skills were developed early in life. Bernice states, “it seems like I am always breaking barriers and breaking laws. I was invited to go to University A in the early sixties, because they needed black people who were strong enough to endure.” She notes it is important to make sure you treat everyone with dignity and respect, especially if that’s the way you want to be treated.
Throughout our time together Bernice shared her faith in God and how he has helped her to overcome many personal and professional challenges. She also shared her desire to assist others, especially African Americans, including me. Bernice offered information on publishers and names of other African American women administrators to further my research.

**Bernice’s Story.** The chancellor called to tell me the person they had hired for this position died of a heart attack when he was packing to come here. He needed help to get accredited. I said, “I am retired.” Because I was retired, not retired. I was a working partner of the university, but I was working at home. Long story short, he convinced me they were not going to get accredited if I wouldn’t come. So, that’s the name of that game. I came here August 12, 2002. I was here for four and half months and I got them totally accredited.

The accrediting team was here in April. They stayed three and half days and they bartered up. They felt there was a woman on the committee who was very concerned about University F and she said rather than have University F, be denied, they bartered the trip. I got here and had the support of many of the faculty members and we joined forces. It was a united effort. You had a handful of people who did not want it to happen. But, thank God, the vast majority of people worked with me. Together we made it happen.

It seems like I am always breaking barriers and breaking laws. I was invited to go to University A in the early sixties because they needed black people who were strong enough to endure. I was getting my undergraduate and they paid for my tuition and for my children’s babysitting. So, I went over to fight that barrier. Some of the behavior I endured, I could only laugh at. It really helped me to realize that racism is a disease and a lot of people are suffering from it.

I participate in the decision making process because I believe good leaders make decisions from a group level; get input from everybody. I want to be a good leader. I am not
saying I am a good leader. You have the bottom line, but you still need input. If people are at the table in the decision making process, they tend to accept it as their own. Then they feel validated. We all need to feel validated. We all need to be empowered. When you do that with human beings, you get people to do great work. If you pretend like you know everything and you are the only person who can think, you’ll be out there by yourself.

I try to present myself as a servant. What may I do to help this process? To enhance the university? To make what you are doing easier? How do I elicit your help? Just to make sure I treat everyone with dignity and respect, the way I want to be treated.

Actually one of the things I enjoy doing more than anything else at this stage in my life is being a mentor. To be able to nurture and reach out to young people so that they will not have to overcome the obstacles I had to overcome. So they will have a vision and a clear path to know that, hey, she did it in worse times, and if she can do it, I can do it. To empower young people, to know it’s possible and to help them not to allow racism and any kind of negativism to serve as a block in their path. Because, if you are focused and you really strive, you will consort, however, if you are looking for excuses and crutches, racism is out there big as life. If you go around it and know that it is a myth and know that it’s grounded in nothing, you can look at the people who are suffering from it, try to help them with it and move on with your life. That’s my big claim to fame.

I think we all have to fight the battle, not only of racism, but also sexism. We also have to fight the battle of being attacked by our own people. You have many of your own people who for some reason or another expect so much of you. If you do not measure up, they will attack you. Now that's a sad piece, and I think that’s with all professional women.
I think one thing that distinguishes me from other African American women is, well, a physical thing. Very few African American women are six feet tall. I think another thing that distinguishes me from many African American women is the fact that I took a different path. Because I dropped out of school at sixteen, got married, wasn’t pregnant. Got married had five children, stayed married twenty years, and my husband died. Raised my children by myself after that. Because, when he died I had a sixteen-year-old, I had twins who were twelve years old, and I had a ten year old. So I think that piece made me stronger. I know a lot of women had rough roads to go, but I think everybody else may think the same way; that path was worse. Another thing is that twelve years ago I had breast cancer.

I was determined. I took two weeks off of work. I took chemotherapy and radiation therapy and went back to work. I took the chemotherapy once a week. But I left work like two o’clock on Friday afternoon and I went back Monday. I did the radiation therapy at three in the afternoon and went back to work the next day. I tell you it wasn’t easy.

I never shall forget when I had a radical mastectomy. I left the hospital and I told my daughter, “I don’t want to go to your house.” I said, “lets go shopping.” So, we went shopping. We picked some stuff out and got to the dressing room to try it on. I was so weak I just fell on the chair. She said, “mama, you are sick, we need to leave.” I said “no, let me rest for a few minutes.” I rested for a few minutes and we left and went to her house. The next day I said I am going to get my hair done. I am going to lose it, so I want to get it done. I went to get my hair done and then the doctor said I am not going to allow you to fly because I was living in Louisiana and I had the surgery in Texas. He said I am not going to allow you to fly for seven days. I am a holistic nut. If it works, if there’s a remedy I use it. Okay!
I knew about aloe vera. I put the aloe vera over the tubes because I had tubes in my side and I went to see the doctor on the sixth day and he touched the tubes and they popped out at him. And he said, “what did you do?” I said, “I taped aloe vera on them,” and it healed the wound and it popped out. And I said, “I am going home tomorrow.” He says, “you are going home tomorrow?” I said “yeah” and I did just that. And two weeks later, I went back to work. That’s when I was dean of the College of Education at University D. And when I went back to work, I was determined to go up the stairs. I said, “you got to get there, you have to look strong.” And I did it. After the first two days my strength was back and I was doing what I needed.

So I think the average professional woman did not have to go through that. But my major thrusts, was I refused to get sick, I refused to let this get me down. It was nothing but the will to live and strong faith.

Personally, my challenge is to stay healthy. That’s number one on my list. If I can stay healthy, I can do anything. Also, all my girls have Ph.D.’s. So that’s my greatest success. I have a son. My son chose not to graduate from college but he drives for UPS so he makes more money than all three.

And professionally having our students pass. Also, I am the founder and first president of the National Association for Multicultural Education. I started it on my credit card in 1988. And today we have an office in Washington, D.C. with over a million-dollar budget. We have close to five hundred members. We just had our last conference with fifteen hundred people there. It really brought people together from all different nationalities to talk about issues and programs to address multicultural education. So that’s one of my greatest success. And there’s a Bernice luncheon at all of the national conferences, so it’s really good.
I started that organization because of criticism. I was a member of the Association of Teacher Educators. We had a meeting and they had a special interest group on multicultural education. The meeting was in Atlanta and they changed our room five times. And they end up having us meet in the bar. It was dark, it was smelly and it was terrible. I told the group that day I am going to start a national organization because they won’t do this to me. And they were like Bernice we don’t have any money. We can’t do that. I called my major professor who was black. He said, “Bernice, you will lose your house unless you get a sponsor.” I said, “I will lose my house. I am a single parent with four children.” And I said, “I am going to do it.” I had a five thousand-dollar limit on my credit card and I charged everything on my credit card. And thank God we made $27,000 at that conference. So I could pay all of the bills and we had about $5,000 left. And that’s the way it got started. But the infinite trust I refused to have my people and I discriminated against by an organization that was predominantly white. But guess what? After the organization started really moving forward, they asked me to run for their president. Is that obvious or what? And there was only two percent African American. When the woman called me, “I said I won’t win.” In seventy-three years they never had a black president. Why would they ask me? I just knew that I was not going to win. Guess what? I won.

My first speech was, “Black Women Do Not Throw Their Babies Out With the Bath Water.” I will be your president but NAME is my baby and I will nurture that. And I was trying to make sure that NAME’s conferences were in the same city with them. And here I am taking chemotherapy. I just had surgery. They told me the meeting was in Detroit and the moment I called them and said Detroit, they moved to Atlanta. So in not a hundred percent health, I had to go to Detroit and speak for that and then go to Atlanta. But God is so powerful. You got to
believe in Him. The conference in Detroit for NAME had more people than their conference in Atlanta. Well, you know God’s hand was in that.

And then when I became president, my platform was, *Educators Healing Racism in Education*. And the board said, you do that white people are going to protest. I said they protest and you lose money, I will give you money back. I said but that’s my passion. They had more people at that conference than any one they ever had. So you see we can fight racism.

One of the major coping strategies I use is I meditate and I pray. I also exercise. We belong to the club. My husband doesn’t go unless I go. Oh God I wish I could go every day. I also use my family and friends and actually the administration to cope.

I think being a quitter is worse than anything any woman can do. Because actually it empowers me when I have a challenge. I am empowered to conquer the challenge. Now when things are going well, smoothly I have said to myself, “Bernice, you have done what you came here to do it’s time to go home.” That doesn’t last long. I dismiss it and move on. I dismiss it and reiterate in my mind that one of the greatest things that has happened here recently is the fact that students walk in and say thank you. Thank you for being here. Now we are proud of our school. And that is fuse for my energy. Because it makes me feel I have made a difference and I want to make a difference. I think internally, when you are motivated to do something and you know what the expectations are and you see that you are making progress, that is enough to keep you going.

To the community, I think the major contribution that I have made is developing programs such as the Reading Contest for Bicycles, the Christmas gifts for the students in K-12 schools, also the parenting programs that we developed from here. Last summer we offered
etiquette for young women, girls from twelve to sixteen. Teaching them how to be a lady, as old-fashioned as that sounds. And that has been a contribution to the community.

To the students, I think the fact that we restructured the college of education. Faculty are more caring and nurturing now so that’s helpful to them. And for women, I think my attitude of making it happen no matter what the obstacles are. To prove to young women that women can do it as well as anyone given half a chance. And I know I am a role model for women. And also the fact that I reach out as a professional woman, I reach out to people who I think are unsung heroes. Unsung hero means someone who works really hard in the background but never gets the light of the Lord.

I make a point of reaching out to those people. And God has given me the insight to identify phony people. People who are trying to climb on the backs of other people, who are doing very little. So I think that’s a gift.

I do not believe in excuses. My philosophy is it can happen, you can make it happen, and do not allow any obstacles to stand in your way, because people who utilize excuses as an obstacle for non-productivity are never going to succeed. Some challenges are more difficult than others, but if you believe in yourself and have strong faith it can happen.

We must focus on number one, being honest. Number two, giving a hundred percent in anything that we do. Number three, always reaching to help others and viewing ourselves as servants because anything we do and anything we accomplish those are gifts from God. Just like they are given they can be taken away.

Actually I think that there are no major obstacles. One of the obstacles that maybe is a myth of the past, which is sexism, but it is not insurmountable. African American women have
the dual battle to fight because not only do we have to fight racism but we have to fight sexism. But when we are strong, we are capable of conquering goals.

I would think based on the recent election, African American women will be the majority of the university presidents, policy makers, and change agents. But we will have to fight about it. We will have to continue to the struggle to make sure we are recognized, accepted and allowed to contribute. You just have to hang on in there.

My future goal is to become the best grandmother in the world. I have seven grandchildren. I remember my grandfather living until he was 99. And I can remember him sitting on the porch and sharing with us the facts of life. He was a slave and he told us how to do things. So that’s my next position. Pass that on to my grandchildren and any other children who will listen. You know my mother is 93 and she and her twin sister are living together in a retirement community. So I am collecting an oral history from them. And I do see myself after retiring going to schools, telling stories rather than read a lot of those books that are racially biased. So that sounds like a good thing to do.

Be persistent and believe in yourself no matter who says what. And unfortunately in this country black women have to empower themselves. And by empowering yourself, I think you empower yourself with faith. I believe when you step out of your house in the morning, you look in that mirror that last look before you head back and say I am going out there and do it because I know I can do it.

And have that attitude that I can do it. Because people will try to intimidate you, they will try to make you feel nervous about yourself. They will try to make you feel that you can’t do it and who are you to think that you can do it. And you come right back. And say I know I can do. I am a child of God, I am persistent, and I work hard. I had a philosophy when I was at University
B and it’s a life philosophy. I don’t care whether you like me or not, but I demand your respect based on the way I carry myself. And that offended a lot of people but I meant that. I demand your respect. I want you to respect me and I don’t care. I don’t want you to like me, because if you get tied down with wanting people to like you, you’ll compromise yourself. But if you maintain yourself in a certain way, at a certain level, they will respect you whether you know it or not.

**Kara - Chancellor**

And it doesn’t matter who you are, what you are, when you walk into a room. You can have alphabets before your name and behind. You are still a black woman. They rarely will say that Kara, a black woman. They will say a black woman, Kara. So I don’t think we will ever get to the point where that is gone. I just don’t see it.


Born in south Louisiana, Kara has three siblings, and is the mother of one son. Neither her mother nor father completed high school. As a result of not receiving high school diplomas, they were determined that all of their children would be educated.

Kara completed a Bachelor of Arts in Marketing from University I in 1977. After graduation, she began working in retail; however, this career path was not long-lived. In 1979, she accepted her first position in higher education as the assistant to the vice president for academic affairs and provost and director of Faculty /Staff Development at University M. During her tenure in this dual position she also was an adjunct faculty member at University M.

During this time, Kara began pursuit of and earned her Masters of Public Administration in 1983 from University H. Afterward, Kara continued to move up the ranks at University M. In 1985, she was again promoted with dual responsibilities. Kara accepted the positions of director of Institutional Research and Evaluation and Title III Coordinator/Activity director. In 1988, she
was promoted and agreed to wear triple hats. She served as the director of Research, Planning and Development, director of Grants, and Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Officer.

In 1991-1995 she was promoted to assistant to the president. While serving in this capacity, Kara also began pursuit of her Ph. D. In 1996, she earned her doctorate in Higher Education Administration from University H. Shortly thereafter she was promoted to dean of the Community Campus. In 1998 she served as interim executive dean to another campus. In 1999, she was again promoted to provost of another campus. In 2002, Kara was promoted to senior vice president of academic and student services at College B. In this capacity she emphasized effective leadership and management, outreach, planning, curriculum development for academic and workforce programs, e-learning, recruitment and retention, articulation and partnerships and collaborations with governmental agencies. In 2003 Kara became the chancellor of College B, a predominantly white college. Kara has over 23 years of leadership in higher education administration.

Position Profile. Kara has served as the chancellor of College B for six months. She is the institution’s chief executive officer for all operations of the College. Kara reports directly to the president of the system and serves at the pleasure of the Board. She is the single, authoritative representative of College B and executes and enforces all policies, orders, rules and regulations applicable to the college. Kara assumes extensive responsibility for administrative and fiscal management, academic and workforce development program planning, faculty and staff development, resource development and planning, community outreach and marketing. Kara has approximately 14 individuals who report to her directly and 200 who report to her indirectly.
Her schedule for the day that she was interviewed was as follows:

7:30 am Arrive at work
8:00 am Meeting with vice chancellor
9:30 am Meet with assistant to sign paperwork and discuss upcoming events
11:30 am Business luncheon
1:00 pm Meeting with systems president
3:00 pm Brief meeting with finance staff
3:30 pm Interview
5:30 pm Dinner with other chancellors in the system

According to Kara a typical day is:

No day is the same. I still live in my hometown. So if I talk about a typical day, I leave home somewhere around a quarter to seven and I drive up to my office here. I am in and out of here all day long. If I am here, I am in a meeting. We have two floors in this building, and I am usually in meetings or on the phone. I meet a lot. But a typical week for me is probably two days in the office, two to three days out of the office. Like tomorrow, I leave to go to Alexandria and I’ll stay there until Saturday. I usually have one or two dinner engagements a week, lots of evenings. I can get called by a legislature, parent, or student from Tallulah to Winnsboro, Farmerville. You name it. I get calls from all of those places and actually the technical colleges in many of the communities are really very vital and valuable to the community. No day is the same. That’s all I can tell you, and it’s exciting. It really is.
Office Profile. Kara’s office is located in one of the newer renovated state office buildings. A glass entrance separates the office from the main hallway. Upon entering the entrance, Kara’s office waiting area is located to the left through large wooden doors.

Her office is divided into several working areas. The center of the outer office is a waiting area. From the entrance visitors immediately notice there is a large glass wall separating Kara’s administrative assistant from the waiting area. The office area is warm and welcoming. The glass gives the area a sense of openness and the blue colors convey a peaceful atmosphere. Poinsettias still remain from the Christmas holidays.

Kara’s office is to the left of the entrance. One door connects her office to the area where the administrative assistance is seated, and another door leads to the outer hallway. The conference room in which the interview took place was located to the left of the entrance to the main office. In the conference room, a large, mahogany, rectangular conference table sits in the middle of the floor to the left of the room. Approximately, 10 chairs surround the table. The room has a large arch window.

Personal Profile. Kara was my final interview. Like all of the other participants, she has a very hectic schedule. I was not able to meet with her in the Fall because of the various demands placed upon her by the college and the higher education community. However, because of her admiration and understanding of the dissertation process, Kara agreed to reschedule with me in January.

The meeting was scheduled to start at 3:00 p.m. Kara’s administrative assistant called and informed me that the meeting time needed to be changed to 3:15 p.m., because Dr. Kara was running behind schedule. She arrived at the office at 3:30 p.m. in a rush and apologized for her tardiness. She explained she needed to meet with two of her staff persons regarding the budget.
The governor’s office had submitted a proposed budget for the state for the new fiscal year, beginning July 1, 2004. Kara and her staff needed to provide comments and amendments. This meeting lasted approximately 30 minutes. I finally had a chance to speak with Kara.

Kara was very apologetic for the delays in starting the meeting. She was nothing like I imagined. First of all, she appears to be much younger than her age, 47. She is a petite woman with auburn-colored hair with hints of gray. She was dressed in a black stylish sweater dress with ruffles down the front. Her accessories were well coordinated. She had on a multi-color-block scarf (black, blue and tan), pearl earrings and necklace, and black pumps.

Kara’s personality was warm. She greeted me with a hug and wanted to know all about me. Kara was interested in my research. Her willingness to participate can be attributed to me being a native an “insider”. She admitted had I not been an African American she would not have agreed to participate in my study because of her time constraints.

**Kara’s Story.** I started in retail. I have a Bachelor’s in Marketing and a Masters in Public Administration. I did retail and came into education on a fluke. I didn’t intend to stay when I came to work with University M. I went to University M to help to expand community college education in the State of Louisiana particularly in South Louisiana on the north shore. And I ended up staying at College C for twenty-three years. And I just loved it. To me and for most of us I would say, we don’t see higher ed as a profession. Because most of the times women are in HBCUs, the black colleges, and in Louisiana since we didn’t have a community and technical college system, there wasn’t a lot of options. So I ended up at College C, but I was in a very, very fortunate position.

I do believe that your destiny is kind of already established or in place. Because I love people and I find this job is about people. It’s about helping people realize dreams. In the
business that we are in, we get the people who are in many cases not expected to be successful. So it’s an opportunity to help people and to serve people. I got here because my boss told me “you really have the personality to be in a community college setting”. I really didn’t know what he was talking about. And he said also, “there’s not a lot of African American women in community colleges” so encouraged me to go back and work on a masters. And once I worked on the masters, I said I would never go back to school again in ‘83. By ‘85 I was back in school because I still was too young and I had worked too much longer to not actually pursue a doctorate.

I was recruited by the president of the System to serve as his senior vice president of academic and student affairs. He recruited me. I really was very comfortable at College C at the time. I was provost of the main campus. And wasn’t thinking about leaving. He approached me in January and I had applied to go to an Ivy League Institute for Education Leadership of Management. I got selected and I told him when I returned I would tell him yes or no, if I would come in the fall. The Ivy League experience was really good. It got me out of my comfort zone somewhat, forced me to think about my career a little bit more and I made a decision to leave University M and it’s been good.

I’ve been in this position for six months. When I started working in the technical college it was transitioning from BESE. We are building a college, so my franticness, my running around is all because I am having to be more involved probably than most chancellors in a day-to-day operation of my college. We are in the mist of putting in an ERP, which is a management information system. We’re building a Developmental Studies program. I got here and I didn’t know what I was coming to, but I think I am drawing everything from 1979 when I started at University M till now. It was preparation for me to do this work. I have had a wonderful
experience, a wonderful opportunity. I have been exposed to tons and tons of stuff and I just feel very fortunate to be here.

I love my job. I am the chancellor of one college with 40 campuses, so I get to travel across the State of Louisiana and meet all kinds of people. I guess the hardest lesson in this job is that all politics is local. I just got off of the phone with the speaker of the house, who is over some little parish somewhere. His district is not really large but his constituents call him regularly and he calls me because they call about things they don’t like. But I have learned so much in my time in this job. I went on a state tour and I’ve been to of all my campuses. And I have had fun.

Actually I have been like the princess who comes to visit. When I go out to the various campuses in the college, I have television shows, a press conference, I’ll meet with the community leaders, meet with faculty, meet with the mayor. I’ll go out and visit campuses, talk to students. I love meeting with the students. I’ve had one campus roll out the red carpet from the parking lot to the door.

They always had someone who was in charge, but they rarely ever came to see them. And I think the community can’t know me if they never see me and I can’t know them. I run one college and I have these 40 campuses. I have a philosophy, a good community and technical college is of and for the community it serves. Meaning that you will do some things that are just special to that community. And I have to do that I can’t change. There are sixty-two school districts in the State of Louisiana. Of the sixty-two there are sixty-two different relationships with the college. I don’t think we can do vanilla, because vanilla doesn’t work for everybody.

My people will tell you that I am a roll up your sleeves kind of high energy person. I present myself as a professional but one who is approachable. They say she’s a workaholic. But
basically, I think I present myself as a professional who’s open. You know everybody talks about
the energy. I think you have to have energy to have a job like this.

I think we all of are similar as far as academic preparation. I think we all have to carry the
card. I call a doctorate a card, because I don’t know if you are smarter when you finish this thing.
I know you are just qualified if you have credentials. I think that’s a common thread among all of
us. We know that our work is about the service we give to people.

I am married, but most women are not because you work all the time. So I think the
common element for all of us is that we work a lot. We are workaholics. We are focused.

I have this list of things I’ve created that I am calling the fifteen in twenty five. Fifteen
gmetics in twenty-five years. My nuggets is not a unique thing. With that you are focused, you
are persistent, you are consistent, you have a servant heart, you have integrity. I think that is so
important in a job and really it’s only about your character and who you are. I think in this
business, you can’t survive too long if you’re double minded. You can’t make it. You have to be
honest and trustworthy, open with people. Open to ideas too, you are always ready to learn. You
will have some things that you are well learned in. You have lots of experience. But you don’t
discount because particularly in our case, we are building a college. You got to know what you
don’t know.

The thing that makes me unique is being at this college. There were twenty plus people
who applied for this job. I was the only woman in the final cut. I think it’s unique that I would do
this. I had technical programs. I have vocational skills. So people don’t usually associate a
woman with wanting to have an automotive program or a welding program. They don’t think
you know much about that. And I know enough to know my good shops and my bad shops. I
think that’s unique. My energy and my experiences. My professional experiences have been a
little different. I was in the classroom for a little while. A lot of people come from faculty ranks. I was always primarily an administrator and manager. I guess there’s no real trend. I hadn’t seen it because most people have had some classroom experience at some point either elementary or secondary. So I don’t know if that’s a trend. I’ll say this we are getting more chancellor positions and president positions.

I have all women as my vice chancellors and I didn’t intend for that to be. I just don’t think there’s one path to this and there’s no sure path how you get where you are going. You got to have a vision for your life and goals for yourself.

It’s a wonderful time to be in higher education in the State of Louisiana. You just got to get your dust in the road and start working. I think it can only get better, especially as this college evolves. It takes some time to change the structure.

My greatest challenge is transforming a college and changing the culture from a secondary to a post-secondary environment. And that’s the whole college. It’ll take ten years, it’s five already, to really get where it comes into its own and people accept it as a post secondary institution of higher education. It’s going to be a slow walk. I also see it as opportunity to create something great in the State of Louisiana.

My personal challenge is staying focused, because I really don’t feel like I have. In terms of not allowing people to distract me from what I know I have to do. I am a person who sometimes let people put too much on my platter. Learning to say no, spelling it out, N. O.

My personal successes are getting a doctorate and my son. He wouldn’t believe I said that, but he is. He’s doing good. He’s in college now? He’s twenty. My greatest professional success is this job, the next thing, the next challenge, the next opportunity.
I have been an administrator so long I don’t guess I am confronted by racism because I recognize it, just recognizing who you are and dealing with their real motives. People will try you and in this job. I have just been so straightforward and direct and I don’t pull punches. I can’t cause scenes. I cannot play games. And that’s the way I deal with those things. I know who I am. I know whose I am and I am clear, so I deal with that.

I keep it light. They will tell you I make them laugh. That’s one of my coping strategies, keeping it light. Not taking myself so seriously. I take my work very, very seriously. I am kind of the symbolic humanistic, structured leader. If you come from MBA school organization of theory structure, I am kind of a structurist symbolic humanness structure. I like structure, sensitive people, and love to tell a story.

I also pray all day and use my family. I was divorced for thirteen years and my parents are just everything. I never would have made it without them. My husband is a good support, but my parents and God are the resources for everything.

The race issue it’s not going to die and go away. It’s 2004, the twenty-first century. Well we have to go on, it’s just an issue.

I am tenacious and I know it. I am persistent and I am consistent. And I don’t allow myself to get distracted by people and things and their issues. And I have not been in a position, thank the Lord, to have to deal with blatant racism.

I am tested all of the time. I have had good support from my boss and the Board. I have people who care enough about me to make sure I keep a balanced life. I have girlfriends who say, “it’s time for us to do this or that.”

What I have come to know is most people just want you to give them some attention. But I am learning to be an accommodator, not a compromiser but an accommodator. Give them
attention. For example, I have the Speaker of the House that calls me on my cell phone. He
doesn’t know me when he sees me, but he calls me. He knows my phone number.

My major professional accomplishment is just achieving this. This is different. Most
people still congratulate me because it’s all in the paper. They tell your whole life story, your
money, everything. Everybody knows, so I am proud. I am probably the one the world least
expected to do this.

I was surprised I would do it myself. You know people have aspirations. I don’t
remember ever aspiring to be a chancellor or a president, not until I became a dean. And then
when I became a dean, and a provost and by the time I was a provost I was still too young to
quit. So what else am I going to do? Well I became the senior vice president and it has flown.

To my community, I made them proud because I am a first generation college student.
And to my family, I grew up in south Louisiana I am a product of all public education. I think to
my family and my community it is the same thing. To education, I made a commitment and I
have been dedicated to the work of building two-year education and providing access. And my
access opportunities have come in various forms, because I have worked with church based
groups. I’ve worked with public housing before coming here. There is one part of this job that I
miss in my other work. I was really attached to my community. I went out and I met with the
community people. I worked with the community groups, the housing development. I got
programs in the housing development. I brought literacy classes out to the housing authority.
And I work with my church and other churches. I brought classes to the churches. Wherever I
am, I work to make myself available to all people. So I think I have made a contribution. And
maybe that has a lot to do with why I think some people probably thought I would be the last
one, because I am first generation. And it’s all about God, it’s not about me. This is me you don’t
see, people see and my mama used to all ways tell us “Heap seek but few know.’ This is the glory people he sees. But few know what really went on. And I see this as my glory, people don’t know my story. So I think I have made a contribution.

I am a people person and I didn’t know it. My pastor said I had more influence than I thought I had. And I bring people along with me. Both me, and one of my vice chancellors are first generation college grads. We are. It’s a story.

I hate to be the role model but I am. I have several mentees and I don’t spend as much time with them now that I am in this job. I see myself as a role model. I just think I should make myself available to people like you.

I don’t think women in general in certain positions will ever be viewed as the norm. There are more of us now. Lots of people have broken the glass ceiling. And it doesn’t matter who you are, what you are, when you walk into a room. You can have alphabets before your name and behind. You are still a black woman. They rarely will say that Kara, a black woman. They will say a black woman, Kara. So I don’t think we will ever get to the point where that is gone. I just don’t see it. That’s just this world. It’s going to be a long time coming. I won’t see that happen.

Well, you have to allocate the good ole boy network. You are going to have that informal practice of the good ole boy. And I’ve never seen relational situations like I have seen in Louisiana. I mean confidence is not necessarily what is required. It is relationships here. That’s a little disappointing to me but I think you know at the end of the day that you need to just get credentials and always take the high road.

I just think that we have to be sure there’s equity. There are people that think that I pay my people too much. And in fact that’s why some people want to take them out because the
salaries are not low. But the expectations are high. And I think that you have to pay people for what they do and for the skills they bring to the table. I believe in that.

I see African American women everywhere in the next century. The boss of everything. I just know men are scared. It’s a girl’s world. It’s really everywhere. We have to encourage more African American women to get the doctorate, to get the credentials, to hang in there. It’s a learning curve. It’s a deep and wide learning curve, so you have got to serve some time. But I see it, it’s everywhere, in every area. Not just student services or African American studies, a lot of times they will have you over affirmative action programs, diversity programs, I see us as chancellors, presidents, vice chancellors of finance. Running stuff, because we can.

I don’t know where I go from here. My main goal is to build this college. Long term thing I hope we build a structure such that I can look back and say I made a difference. But right now I just want to do what I am doing.

My major professor was white, but she was great. She really was. And that’s why you can’t always play the race card. Just let people be who they are. You need to be a good judge of people and their character and that will help you go along way. Don’t be afraid to work hard. You have to work hard if you really want to be in this business.

**Summary**

The stories began with the participants describing how they got to their current administrative positions. Fortunately, through observations and initial telephone contacts, I was able to establish a rapport immediately with the participants that led to rich explanations of their challenges and experiences.

In the interviews, the women reflected on their day-to-day activities, disclosing their challenges and experiences as African American women administrators in higher education in
Louisiana. The participants discussed the challenges of managing administrative responsibilities, balancing career family and community commitments, as well as how they made meaning of their day-to-day interactions with colleagues. The participants discussed the future of African American women in higher education, as well as their own futures. They shared long-range goals, ranging from aspirations of one day being presidents of universities to retirement. In addition, they elaborate on how family, friends, and spirituality have been key in coping with the challenges.

Overall, the African American women’s views presented in this study express a wide array of perspectives on being an administrator in higher education. The stories presented are valuable because they come from unique and revealing points and allow then women’s challenges and experiences to be expressed in their own words.

While the stories are diverse, there are commonalities that link them to one another. The challenges and struggles of being an administrator, the dilemma of being black and female, and family as a support system, to name a few, will be discussed in Chapter Five in addition to other themes that represent the core themes of Black Feminism.
5: Emerging Themes

This chapter identifies the emerging themes and how they relate conceptually to Collins’ (1991) five key dimensions that characterize Black feminist thought: 1) core themes of a black woman’s standpoint; 2) variation of responses to core themes; 3) interdependence of experience and consciousness; 4) consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint; and 5) interdependence of thought and action. These five themes of Black feminism are used in analyzing and interpreting the data to explore the challenges that African American women experience as professionals in public institutions of higher education and the strategies they employ to cope with the resulting conflicts. The following questions guided the study:

- What are the challenges and experiences confronting African American women administrators in higher education?

- What coping strategies do African American women utilize to successfully manage the conflicts they encounter?

- What are the differences between the experiences of African American women administrators at Historically Black Colleges/Universities and those at Predominantly White Universities/Colleges?

This analysis was a two-step process. First, I separated the interviews into segments. I searched through the data for consistency of patterns, as well as topics that my data covered. Then I wrote down words and phrases to represent these topics and patterns. The responses to the specific interview questions ranged from the personal issues of marriage and motherhood to the institutional issues to societal issues of racism and sexism. The first words and phrases I identified were: balancing career, family and community commitment, mentoring, networks, role model, isolation, tokenism, underrepresentation, sexism, racism, competency, professional satisfaction, servants, respect, and spiritual guidance and support (God). After identifying the words and phrases, I looked at some of the similar characteristics of the participants.
For all of the participants, their professional work seemed intertwined with their private lives. Their work involved supporting and encouraging educational attainment for other African Americans. Participants expressed personal pleasure and comfort working in higher education institutions, even though it could be challenging at times. All of the participants expressed commitment to the value of creating a positive and nurturing environment for others, in institutions of higher education, especially for African Americans.

Based on the words, phrases, and similar characteristics, I identified the following eleven themes: balancing career and family, racism and sexism, lack of respect by colleagues and subordinates, mentoring and networking, isolation and underrepresentation, competency and confidence, professional satisfaction and perseverance, community consciousness, spirituality, and family support systems. After identifying the themes, I analyzed and interpreted these themes and how they related conceptually to Collins’ (1991) five key dimensions characterizing Black feminist thought. Through the five dimensions, I developed and interpreted the interview data.

**Core Themes of a Black Women’s Standpoint**

The first dimension of Black feminist thought is concerned with the “core themes of a Black women’s standpoint” (Collins, 1991). This is based on the concept that African American women have common experiences because of race and gender and certain themes will be prominent in a black women’s standpoint, such as the legacy of struggle, interlocking nature of race gender and class oppression, call for replacing denigrated images of black womanhood with self-defined images, belief in black women’s activism as mothers, teachers, and black community leaders, and sensitivity to sexual politics (Collins, 1991).
As stated earlier, I identified the following eleven themes: spirituality, family support systems, balancing career and family, racism and sexism, lack of respect by colleagues and subordinates, mentoring and networking, isolation and underrepresentation, competency and confidence, professional satisfaction and community consciousness. The women may not have stated them exactly the same, but the underlying message is present.

**Balancing Career and Family**

Concerns about balancing family and career were frequently mentioned by the women and is described as one of the key challenges. These women indicated there was always a struggle to maintain a balance emotionally and physically between professional and personal life.

All the women wanted to enhance their careers, spend time with their family, and work in the community. This has been a long standing tradition of African American women. Historically, they have served as mothers, teachers, and black community leaders. As bell hooks (1990) notes:

Their lives were not easy. Their lives were hard. They were black women who for the most part worked outside of the home serving white folks, cleaning their houses, washing their clothes, tending their children-black women who worked in the fields or in the streets, whatever they could do to make ends meet, whatever was necessary. Then they returned to their homes to make life happen there. This tension between service outside’s one home, family, and kin network, service provided to white folks which took time and energy, and the effort of black women to conserve enough of themselves to provide service (care and nurturance) within their own families and communities is one of the many factors that has historically distinguished the lot of black women in patriarchal white supremacist society from that of black men (p. 42).
The women in this study all work outside of their homes in public colleges and universities and return to their homes to make life happen there as well. Their decision to promote the university, spend time with family, and to give back to the community meant they had to try and find a balance, which could be cumbersome at times. All of the women felt that family was a very important thing. Professional responsibilities and community commitments were of equal importance and closely connected to one another, because they both involved small knit African American communities. For example, Lisa believes that serving in her dual administrative capacities, as well as community commitments would not have been possible in the years prior to taking this job. Lisa states:

The first administrative job I took here at University E, my daughter was a senior in high school and she was going to finish in December, so I took that job in August. It was really just a few more months and she was going to be in college. My son was already out and it just came at a wonderful time when I didn’t have those kind of responsibilities of raising little children. I couldn’t have done it a few years ago because I had priorities. It was more important for me to be available to my children, to be able to pick them up, help them with their homework, and be at all of their activities.

Jean changed careers to have more time with her family. She gave up her administrative duties and returned to her previous job as a counselor working from 8:00 am to 5:30 pm to have more time with her family. Jean resumed her administrative duties after her last daughter graduated from high school, giving her more time to devote to professional endeavors again. However, like all of the participants, when she took on this new role, she also lost time with her husband. Jean found herself moving away from home. According to Jean:
Personally, this job has required that I move here. My home, my husband, my house is in Townsville. It’s not commutable. I mean, it’s not like a 20 minute commute. …….We see each other on the weekends. So he’ll either come down or I’ll go home on the weekends. I’m left out of the day-to-day grind of his life and he’s left out of mine.

Marie in pursuit of her professional administrative career has also found herself moving away from home, which has caused an imbalance in her personal life. Marie states:

Well, actually right now since my husband lives in Townsville and I live here, I have been going home on most weekends. And that’s different for me, that’s not something I thought I would be doing at this stage in my life. But that’s a challenge, but it’s not a bad one.

Moving away from home also forced Jean and Marie to give up some of their community activities. Jean noted:

I used to be involved in a lot of other things, but when I moved away, you know, your life changes. I don’t know a lot of people. Here, I’m most involved in the counseling thing, that’s my background. I can at least meet professional counselors and educators, but the community, I’m not really that involved in the community here because I’m still new to it. I go to church stuff. But I’m looking to find my niche here and that’s going to take some time.

**Racism and Sexism**

The interlocking nature of race and gender oppression was also viewed as a challenge by the women. In many instances, racism and sexism were often alluded to but not identified as the primary issue when the women spoke about challenges as African American women
administrators in higher education. The majority of the women believed that they all suffer racism more so than sexism.

All of the women indicated they were taught the harsh lessons of racism and sexism through experiences early in life and developed mechanisms to cope. Rosa noted:

You know, from the age I come from. And the fact that I came up during a very segregated time and coming from a town in south, Louisiana, where racial violence, prejudice was extreme and that I was able to come where I am. You know, coming from a very poor family, able to get the kinds of scholarships to get the education that I needed.

As a result, they anticipated encountering these issues when they became administrators. They knew how to identify racism and sexism and deal with it in an appropriate manner. Rosa and Bernice discussed their roles in integrating predominantly white universities in the sixties and the seventies in Louisiana, and how racism and sexism affected them then and today. Rosa stated:

When I went there in 1961, you can imagine what it was. It was really, the people there were very, very prejudiced. They were not integrated in undergraduate. It was just the graduate program. It was still segregated. And I remember them calling me and telling us that we couldn’t go to any of the activities on the campus, even though we paid the fee. But they actually called us and told us we couldn’t go to the games. The only thing that we could take advantage of was the infirmary. I think there were three of us at University G at that time. Three blacks, in the graduate program. It was two men and myself. There were two white women at the time I was there too. And I did feel sexism and prejudice at University G that’s why I didn’t continue there. I went there and got my master’s and I left.
All of the participants acknowledged they are confronted with some form of racism and as African American women administrators. They were faced with covert and institutionalized systems of racism on a day-to-day basis. Lynn found:

My biggest problem is people wanting to do things the way they have always done them as opposed to doing them in ways, which create equity for all involved. I say it’s covert [racism] because the individuals who attempt to distort the playing field are not very visible or vocal about it. They want to be very quiet, they want to do it in such a way that it doesn’t raise a lot of attention. Where it doesn’t create a lot of controversy, but yet it’s done.

Ruby discussed how her university had been under the spotlight in terms of hiring practices and retention and how she addressed the issue to the Dean’s Committee:

And I made mention at the table, you know, that this university even before, you know, required integration, this was in the ‘50s. And I was born in ’54. This is now the 21st century. I said, “you still have never ever had a black faculty member to lead faculty at this university.” And everybody got quiet and I know they wish they hadn’t brought the conversation up.

Victoria, Jean, Marie, and Kara felt that institutionalized systems and informal practices such as the “good ole boy network” also discriminates against African American women. Meetings were held in informal settings so as to not include them. Jean stated:

The other thing is being in the south, women’s roles are perceived a certain way and men’s roles are perceived a certain way. And sometimes you got the good ol’ boys. I think every campus has that. But, they have to change some things. So, that’s been the
challenge, the good ol’ boys get in the back room where the real decisions are made and I want to have an impact with the good ol’ boys.

Marie further noted:

But informal practices are the same. That would be if discussions are held outside of normal business meetings, of course meeting in someone’s office doesn’t qualify as a meeting that has to be open. Networks that you are not a part of. Somebody hears about something and a network that you are not a part of.

The women also spoke of the glass ceilings that had been put in place in an attempt to hamper their efforts to succeed in higher education. Jean noted:

Well, the good ol’ boys, you know, we tend to relate to things that are closest to who we are. If I’m a good ol’ boy, I’m gonna pick a young good ol’ boy or a good ol’ boy. And I think, breaking down the class ceiling, because women historically, not just African American women, women period, have consistently fought with the glass ceiling. And there still are very many people who think that women have no business in business, in Washington, D.C., in Baton Rouge, in the military, in whatever. There’s still many men unfortunately who think that women and men shouldn’t have the same choices and I just respectfully totally disagree. Some women don’t belong in certain areas. But some women, if they feel like that’s what they want to pursue, absolutely belong, and will outperform men if given a chance.

The women also spoke of negative stereotypes of African American women. They believed that in their current capacities they could replace those denigrated images of black women with positive, self-defined images. They felt African American women have been portrayed as loud, harsh, and uneducated. They all set out to prove that African American
women are educated and capable of anything that a white man or woman, or African American man could accomplish.

Lack of respect, professional mentoring opportunities, questions of competence, isolation, underrepresentation, and professional dissatisfaction all related back to issues of racism and sexism. Throughout their personal and professional lives, racism and sexism have affected them; however, they have not allowed them to hinder their success. They acknowledge it, adapt, and move on. As Kara noted:

You get—the race issue it’s not going to die and go away. It’s 2004, the twenty-first century. Well we have to go on, it’s just an issue. You know you can’t be bothered. I’m not going to be bothered. I am not going to let them stop me. You can’t.

Lack of Respect by Colleagues and Subordinates

To be treated with respect by their colleagues and subordinates was identified as another challenge. In the process of reading the transcripts I was surprised to find that the women repeatedly mentioned the issue of respect. In my review of the literature I found issues alluding to lack of respect; however, it was not specifically mentioned. Throughout the interviews the women discussed how there was a lack of respect by colleagues and subordinates and how they focused on giving respect to other.

The women particularly felt that because of their race and gender, they are not always respected in the higher education community. Victoria states, “I’ve had incidences where even sometimes African American men, I feel, are not honoring my presence as a vice chancellor and we would just have to have a visit about it.”

Lynn and Victoria felt that people did not show respect when addressing them because they did not use the proper title. Lynn notes:
Victoria states:

Often times I find, particularly white staff, they will call the white leader “Doctor” or “Mrs.” But they will turn right around and call me Victoria. I don’t ever let them see me ruffled. I will simply approach them and say address me in the appropriate title in the appropriate environment.

All of the participants noted that African American women who are usually not their equal may also have less respect for them than they would for a white man or woman or an African American man administrator. They felt these types of women could be their harshest critics and very problematic. Instead of providing support, these women have attributed to the chilly climate and attitudes of other employees. They tend to talk negative about the women and refuse to promote a positive environment. Lisa noted:

The other thing you also are going to probably have to deal with, and this is something that hurts my feeling. As you continue to rise, some of your harshest critics are going to be those who look just like you. Because they’re not going to want you to speak up. They want you to just go with the flow. When you don’t go with the flow, you upset the other kind and that becomes problematic. Then you become problematic.
All of the participants felt it was important to treat others with respect. When they discussed how they interact as administrators with their colleagues they all stated “with respect.” The participants give and demand respect. For example, Lynn stated:

Well, I make it a habit to be as respectful and as positive as is possible. I guess my whole focus in the office is to be as cordial, positive and respective as possible. And in two years I have not had anyone to continue with inappropriate behavior once I responded very positively and respectively. Either they will quiet down, they will shut down, or they will leave, because I don’t reinforce the negativity. If they are angry, I say well you know I understand how you are feeling and that situation would probably be very frustrating for me as well. What can we do about it? How can we address it? So I try to move them into being proactive instead of reactive.

**Mentoring and Networking**

Mentoring and networking were identified as a means to a better administrative experience. All of the women indicated their initial mentors were teachers and other African American professionals in the community. According to Jean, “I feel like I have a duty and an obligation to be a positive and professional role model. Because I look back at the women who were role models for me, and they were teachers, they were mostly teachers because that’s what we were allowed to do.” As the women increased in the ranks, many had to seek out formal mentors. They indicated that mentors especially helped in their capacity as administrators. They all described their experiences as positive.

In some instances there was no one at the college/university to mentor the participants as a result they sought professional support systems. Ruby stated:
I just wanted to learn how to be in academics and how to be a researcher. I looked for people who could help me, who could answer questions, who I felt were very good at what they did as far as research, teaching, who could show me, who could teach me. And that’s how I’ve always done things, by seeking mentors. Along the way it helped.

Because of the limited number of African American women administrators in higher education, Marie, Ruby, and Victoria sought mentors outside of their race and university to establish relationships that have been critical to their success.

All of the women view themselves as role models and serve as mentors for administrators and future administrators, faculty, and students. Some of them assumed the role unknowingly. As Marie notes, “well, I think I have been a role model for a lot of women. And one of the things I realized a long time ago is that a lot of times you’re a role model and you don’t even know it. And I have been told that especially by students at University D.”

Several of the participants felt they are not doing enough. Victoria states, “I don’t think I do enough with young women. I really do work at serving as a role model any way possible, to have a positive impact.”

The women also noted that mentoring by and for African American women is necessary to increase the number of African American women in higher education. These perceptions and beliefs are closely aligned to the belief in black women’s activism as mothers, teachers, and black community leaders.

In addition, the participants provided academic and professional mentoring to African American students. They found themselves serving as community “other mothers.” They all received personal satisfaction from former students telling them how they influenced their personal and professional lives. Bernice stated:
Actually one of the things I enjoy doing-- hearing more than anything else at this stage in
my life, is to be a mentor. To be able to nurture and reach out to young people so that
they will not have to overcome the obstacles that I have overcome.”

All of the women also believed networking was important, in that it allowed for
assistance from others, especially when there was no formal mentor. The women all
recommended I seek out mentors as well as serve as a mentor to others. Victoria sums it up:

Certainly one of the obstacles is that not enough of us are there to help mentor and to
look out for our best interest. We are too few. And the too few that are there, I think we
don’t network enough.

Isolation and Underrepresentation

Another challenge identified by several of the women is isolation and
underrepresentation. The women identified themselves as the only or one of the few African
American women in senior level administrative positions at the institutions, especially at
predominantly white universities. As Lynn notes, “there are very few African American women
at this level in higher education in Louisiana. You know at University E (HBCU), you’ll have a
ton to interview. But at the predominantly white institutions very, very few.”

In addition, several of the women noted they are the only or one of the few in the United
States to be an administrator in their field. Marie notes that she suffers from isolation at her
university and in her discipline:

Now the other challenge has been the fact that I am in business. And going to
professional meetings a lot of times, I would be the one of the few African Americans.

For example, even in the college of business here, I am the only African American. There
is no other African American faculty here.
As a result, they lack same sex and race mentors or have no mentors, and little psychological support. There is no one with whom to share experiences or with whom to identify. As Kara notes:

When they say it’s lonely at the top, you can get lonely at the top if you don’t have good support. Yesterday I probably was down on the ground because we just got a lot of bad news. Everything we were trying to do seemed to just fall apart. And you got to stay up for your people. I was like oh, God, it’s a tough day today.

Jean notes that her African American colleagues saw her being the only African American woman at her institution as a big thing. She represents hope for the future of African Americans in higher education.

Ruby feels that the underrepresentation at her institution is a challenge she has had to deal with on numerous occasions. She spoke of an incident in a dean’s meeting where she had to question why she is the only African administrator and why African Americans do not want to come to the university.

**Competency and Confidence**

All 10 women, while extremely confident in their roles as administrators, have had their competencies questioned by professional colleagues. These incidences, which could have been detrimental to their confidence, did not affect their sense of assurance, value, and worth. Each one attributed their success to their academic and experiential preparation prior to accepting their administrative positions. As a result they assumed their current positions confidently believing that they possessed the necessary qualifications. Ruby noted, “But, you know, I think we all have skills and confidences that allow us to survive.”
Patricia acknowledged she was appointed to the position of acting president because she had already served in top-level positions at the university and perceived it as an opportunity to further her commitment to enhancing the university. Patricia notes, “but I guess it also means that the board felt that I had the qualifications and the ability to take care of what needed to happen at the executive level.” Rosa also felt she was repeatedly asked to come back because of her credentials. She states “they needed me. Each time I’ve come back, I was asked to come back to fill a void.”

Kara states, “my experiences—I guess the academic preparation. I think we all have to carry the card, I call a doctorate a card, because I don’t know if you are smarter when you finish this thing. I know you are just qualified in credentials.”

Despite confidence in themselves, many of the women noted that questions of competence continue to permeate their professional experiences. Many of the women believe their competency was questioned because of their race and gender, as opposed to the quality of their work. For example, Lisa noted that her competency is constantly questioned:

Certainly there are some people who still don’t believe women should be in leadership positions. There is some resistance, even at University E. It certainly has nothing to do with me being black, but just with being a woman. That is always something to contend with, and there are always challenges in working with the board. I think there is still a perception of white administrators that we are not competent to take care of business. They need to lead us and guide us and take us by the hand. So that is always a little frustrating, but those are just the things we have to deal with as blacks.
Professional Satisfaction & Perseverance

All of the women expressed satisfaction in their positions and what they were doing. The majority of the women stated they loved their jobs. They expressed pleasure when students came back and expressed how they had been an inspiration to them to excel in school and succeed in life.

Rosa was the only one who was ready to give up the job. She stated, “temporarily I like it, but, it’s not something I would want to do permanently.” Some of the women have considered resigning out of frustration, but never for more than a couple of hours. Lynn stated she had considered resigning “at least twice a week for the first year. But, once I got that first year under my belt it was much better.” The women all felt it was imperative they not quit. They had a responsibility to their universities, community, other African Americans and themselves. If they quit, they would not be a part of change, empowerment.

Community Consciousness

Community consciousness was prevalent among all of the women. It was seen as a challenge to balance family and professional obligations. Community allows them to be involved with assisting others and receiving self-satisfaction for the services rendered. All of the women participated in community initiatives ranging from sororities to student dissertation committees.

Kara stated:

There is one part of this job that I miss in my other work. I was really attached to my community. I went out and I met with the community people. I worked with the community groups, the housing development. I got programs in the housing development. I brought literacy classes out to the housing authority. And I work with my church and other churches.
I brought classes to the churches. Wherever I am, I work to make myself available to all people.

Kara also serves on various dissertation committees. Victoria, “served with LYNX and Delta Sigma Theta, which are African American women organizations” that serve the community. Jean contributed money in the form of scholarships to students who provided unsolicited community service. Kara finds herself serving on various dissertation committees. All of the women spoke of their involvement with their churches, which ranged from serving on committees and organizing activities.

All the women spoke of paving the way for others, especially for future African American women administrators. They all believed their personal and professional actions would make a difference and increase the likelihood other African Americans, especially women, could attain administrative positions. All of the women indicated that although they were hired for a specific job and purpose, their intentions were to make changes that would benefit African Americans in the future.

**Spirituality**

The most prominent theme identified in the data analysis was spirituality. All the women identified it as way of life, as well as a coping mechanism to deal with the challenges as an African American woman administrator. They were all taught at an early age that God and spiritual guidance were the keys to success in life. Lynn talked about how, as a little child, her mother used to take them to church to pray:

That’s how I cope. I pray. When I know I am going to have a stressful day, I am Catholic, so I will go to mass in the morning before I start my day. And that always puts me in a positive frame of mind. But my mom taught us that. She would wake us up early in the
morning when she was going through something. Now my siblings and I would be
sleeping on the pews because we were little.

Rosa was a former Nun. Despite the fact that she is no longer a Nun, God is still the
guiding force in her life. Rosa noted:

Well, I suppose my biggest support is my belief and my faith in God. That’s one of my
biggest, all the way through my life, it’s always been. It’s the grandest, the first thing I
always did was pray. And I still do that. I keep before my mind that I am not significant
no matter how high you get, you need to be humble before God and before other people.

As a result of the challenges they encountered personally and professionally, the women
prayed and sought guidance and support through the Bible, church, and other spiritual literature.
Several of the women recommended scriptures and religious inspirational books for me to read
to cope with the challenges I encounter on a day-to-day basis. Kara recommended, “girl, you get
you a psalm, a scripture in your heart and you say it in your head. And it’s you and God, God
and you.”

The church also serves as an extended family. It provides important contexts for the
personal, as well as the professional lives of African American women. It allows them to receive
support, as well as offer support and leadership in the church and the community.

**Family Support Systems**

Although the women identified balancing family and career as a challenge, they also
viewed family as a support system. It was ranked second to God as a coping mechanism. All of
the women conceded that family was the driving force behind their success. Their parents,
siblings, spouses, extended family, and friends were instrumental in their coping with
professional and personal challenges. bell hooks noted (1990)
Historically, African American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however, fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one’s homeplace was the one site where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world (p.42).

Ruby who heavily relied on her family stated:

I think we are our mother’s daughters and a lot of us I think are grounded in family. And I think that’s one of the common things. I always relied on my family for advice. As I said, to filter the garbage out. When people are rude to me and said things to me that were just so hurtful, insulting, I would go home and my mother, she would just put it just the way it was. And you know that’s a lot of garbage, you know. And my father, these are the other things that I sit and listen to them how they dealt with their colleagues or supervisors in their day-to-day lives. And I knew there was a way to handle myself professionally because it had been modeled for me by my parents.

Rosa also discussed how her family gave her support. In her words:

My family. I came from a very, very close knit family. Very close knit. Even my cousins, of course, my sisters and brothers and my mother and father, we were very very close knit. We grew up in a family of love, which also gave me confidence. We were never at a point that we thought we could not do something.

The extended family in many instances included a created family. The created family included individuals that are not biologically related, but contribute to the emotional well-being
Lynn refers to her created family as “sister friends.”

**Variation of Responses to Core Themes**

The second dimension of Black Feminist Thought - variation of responses to core themes - recognizes the diversity of responses by African American women (Collins, 1991). African American women tend to experience different forms and degrees of racism as a result of social class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, region of the country, urbanization, and age. These factors combine to produce a web of experiences shaping diversity among African American women.

The interview questions evoked different responses from each of the women, and revealed a lot of information about the ways in which they perceived their world. For example, when asked about their greatest personal and professional challenges, each one responded differently focusing on those things that have affected her most extensively. I found that while African American women, as a marginalized group, have shared the experiences of racism and sexism, each individual woman has a unique response to these experiences depending on the environment she is in and her unique life circumstances.

In analyzing the data, the responses of the participants showed variations by the type of institution, Historically Black College and University (HBCU) v Predominantly White University (PWU), where they were employed. Women who were the only or one of the few African American women administrators reported they suffered from isolation. However, they did find support from other African American women and men at other institutions.

Several of the women struggled with being a woman who is different from what the school environment considers an administrator, especially a female administrator. Patricia described it as “a stereotypical concept of what a woman should do and how high she should
go.” Ruby indicated her attire was not the stern business look of a suit and high heel. Jean indicated when parents came to the university, they were surprised to see she was an African American. Patricia believed “the climate is still a little chilly; some people still think there is a place for the lady and it is not at the top of an educational institution.”

The majority of the women discussed some form of sexism at their school. However, it was more prevalent at PWUs. The women who worked at HBCUs did not report racist incidents from colleagues and only occasional incidents from outside the university. Rosa, who works at an HBCU stated, “I think the people here at this university treat women on a level as far as I can see. I have never witnessed anyone treating me any differently because I was a woman.”

Collins (1991) notes, “the racist belief that African Americans are less than intelligent whites remains strong” (p. 24). Lisa discussed how she has dealt with this notion at her HBCU:

I’ve had many instances where my competency was challenged. They have certain activities on this campus where the Board was going to participate - and I hate to use the word interference - but there’s constant interference. For example, if we’re going to have a press conference in the student union, certainly we have enough common sense to know you use microphones, chairs, and an area for the press. You get a little frustrated when they pick up the phone and say “Now you are going to have chairs?” or “You are going to have microphones?” or “You are going to have the room decorated?” Like we don’t have good sense. Those kinds of little things, or “What are you going to say?” or “Let me read your speech” or “Let me see your report,” and “I might need to…” you know those are things you kind of shake off. If you worried about stuff like that, you’d be frustrated, mad, and upset all the time, but that’s life.
Several of the participants noted that when whites were coming to their colleges, they had to struggle with the issues of white and their negative perceptions of African Americans. Marie described how she had to make sure everything was in place, from chairs in classrooms to paperwork, when non-African Americans were visiting her HBCU. Jean discussed the stereotypical images of African American women. She indicated that African American women are typically seen as loud, harsh and uneducated; however, they are completely the opposite.

**The Interdependence of Experience and Consciousness**

The third dimension of Black feminist thought - the interdependence of experience and consciousness - relates to the personal and professional experiences of African American women, in addition to their exposure to cultural experiences which shapes their daily lives (Collins, 1991). Interdependence of experience and consciousness is a combining of what one does and how one thinks. Because of their unique experiences, the perspectives of and for African American women is not expressed and adopted by all. According to Collins (1991):

Black women’s work and family experiences and grounding in traditional African American culture suggest that African American women as a group experience a world different from that of those who are not Black and female. Moreover, these concrete experiences can stimulate a distinctive Black feminist conscious concerning the material reality. Being Black and female may expose African American women to certain common experiences, which in turn may predispose us to a distinctive group consciousness, but in no way guarantees that such a consciousness will develop among all women or that it will be articulated as such by the group. (p. 24-25).

All of the women experienced PK-12 in a predominantly black educational setting. They were all raised in black communities and churches and indicated a strong family support system.
Four of the participants attended HBCUs, and the other six attended PWUs, all in the South, except for one. As a result, they were exposed to certain common experiences, especially related to racism.

Two of the women spoke of their direct involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. The other women spoke of stories told by the parents, grandparents, and the laws and policies today as a result of the 60’s movement. Bernice and Rosa discussed their involvement in the 60’s and 70’s, and how it shaped their perspectives on life and what they desired for their families and other African Americans. Bernice discussed how integration influenced her career path:

It seems like I am always breaking barriers and breaking laws. I was invited to go to University A in the early sixties, because they needed black people who were strong enough to endure. And they paid for my tuition, for my children’s baby-sitting, everything. So I went over to fight that barrier. And some of the behavior that I endured, I could only laugh at. It really helped me to realize that racism is a disease and a lot of people are suffering from it.

Rosa discussed how her experiences at a Louisiana predominantly white university shaped her perspectives about racism and that university. According to Rosa:

I don’t think if I stayed at University G that I’d be the person I am now. I think when people see that they are intimidated, they should get out of the situation rather than trying to fight it. Because at that time, there was no way I could have fought all men [white] faculty, no women on the faculty, and the superiority, you know, it was, even the other women who were there left. They couldn’t take the pressure. They were white, but, you know. And I have never been back to University G, not even for a job. You know, I go for meetings, you know, but I have never gone back. People say that I’m an alumni, I
don’t feel like an alumni at University G. I never consider myself alumni at University G even though I went there.

Others talked about the struggle of the forefathers and paving a way for future African Americans, especially women. They discussed how they are the only one now, but their role is to reach back and bring another African American women to the rank of administrator. They all believe they have to increase the number of African American women.

All of the women indicated that being an African American woman means being conscious. Throughout their careers, they were aware of how the larger society might perceive them. They also realized they needed to be political and reserve energy for battles that can be won.

**Consciousness and the Struggle For A Self-Defined Standpoint**

The fourth dimension - consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint - infers that one has to be what the dominant group views her to be (Collins, 1991). According to Collins (1991), “African American women as a group may have experiences that provide us with a unique angle of vision. But expressing a collective, self-defined Black feminist consciousness is problematic precisely because dominant groups have a vested interest in suppressing such thought” (p. 25-26).

Throughout the interviews, the self-defined Afrocentric consciousness is articulated by all of the women. The women discussed how colleagues use race, in many instances to define who they are in relation to being an administrator. All of the women refused to allow society to define them.

The dominant group has attempted to define African American women through negative stereotypes. All of the participants believed that in their current capacities they could replace
those denigrated images of black women with positive, self-defined images. They felt African American women have been portrayed as loud, harsh, and uneducated. Jean states:

As an African American woman, you know I’ve never been anything other than an African American woman. I don’t have another set of experiences. I think there’s an image of African American women that we are coarse. We are aggressive. We are not polished. Not necessarily intelligent. You know, we’re just seen loud and aggressive in many instances. I think that’s how black women in general are seen.

They all set out to prove that African American women are educated and capable of anything that a white man or woman, or African American man could accomplish.

Several of the women believe they are seen as the black woman, then as an administrator.

For example, Kara stated:

I don’t think women in general in certain positions will ever be viewed as the norm. There are more of us now. Lots of people have broken the glass ceiling. And it doesn’t matter who you are, what you are, when you walk into a room. You can have alphabets before your name and behind. You are still a black woman. They rarely will say that Kara, a black woman. They will say a black woman, Kara.

As a part of this struggle, African American women must make their standpoint known to themselves and to others by articulating and developing a self-defined standpoint. African American women have to let others know that being Black and a woman are equally important. Jean’s self-defined standpoint encompasses a both/and construct. As Jean notes:

I don’t want to be a novelty, I want to be routine. I want to be able to walk into a room and have young black men, black women, white men, white women look at me, regard my title with whatever. I don’t want people to look at me as a black woman. I want
people to look at me as a professional, as dean. I happen to be black but inside of me there are all kinds of things, there are all kinds of experiences, thoughts, feelings that are really human.

Lynn has a self-defined perspective growing from her experiences that enables her to reject duplicating the standpoint of others or what is considered the norm. Lynn suggest that African American women:

Should know who they are first. Become comfortable with who they are and then be themselves. I think sometimes we get into positions of authority and we want to become like someone else. Or we want to mimic the behaviors of someone that we respect or we want to adapt the appearance of people who are in similar positions. I really believe that women in any position or any station of life when they really know who they are and love and accept themselves and then be that, then they will be considered the norm. I really believe that. I don’t know that we as African American women can afford to use a template as far as how we dress, how we speak, how we interact with others. We just have to love and embrace ourselves and then be that. Be the best self and then that I believe will go further towards creating or—becoming the norm as opposed to trying to mimic the behavior of others.

All of the women acknowledged that despite the challenges, and conflicts encountered, each attained administrative positions within institutions of higher education. These women navigated their way through the higher education system to some of the highest levels of leadership while maintaining their identities, principals, values, and ethics. These women beat the odds, coming from lower or middle class homes of parents with little or no education, to becoming administrators of higher education.
The Interdependence of Thought and Action

Collins’ (1992) fifth and last dimension - the interdependence of thought and action - deals with identifying oppression, mainly through experience, and attempting to rectify it through some means, i.e., thought and action. Collins (1992) notes, “this interdependence of thought and action suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness” (p. 28).

The women refused to label challenges they encountered as forms of oppression in the past or the present. They merely viewed them as bumps in the road or stumbling blocks. This is a form of resistance expressed by all of the women. The women expressed how they resist and are empowered to overcome the challenges. For example, Bernice thinks, “being a quitter is worse than anything any woman can do. Because actually it empowers me when I have a challenge. I am empowered to conquer the challenge.” Ruby followed with:

You’ve been trained now to learn how to handle, to deal with all kinds of people, some are going to be very difficult because they’re going to be unfair because they don’t like your skin color or they just don’t like you as an individual, you clash, and some of the other people are wonderful and supportive. You take it as it goes and you just continue to develop and you’re fine as a person. But you don’t let them destroy you.

Lynn summed it by stating:

I don’t believe those are barriers for us. I think we create our own barriers, because the opportunities are out there. We have to come to the plate with good qualifications, with well-rounded experiences, and a belief that we can do anything that we set our minds to. Yes, I believe institutional racism exist. Yes, I believe that there is a glass ceiling, but I also firmly believe that we can accomplish those things that we set out to do if our belief in ourselves
and our work ethic is stronger and harder than anything we come into contact with. So I don’t believe policies and practices can stop us. Our work ethic has to be harder and stronger—Yes. We have to believe in ourselves more. We have to work harder than anyone else, black, white, Hispanic, male, female, transsexual, whatever. We have to work harder. We have to believe in ourselves. We have to not give up. Not allow the perceived barriers to get in our way. I don’t believe anything can hold us back if this is what we want to do.

The women did not allow the white culture of domination to completely shape and control them. They resisted. bell hooks writes about the importance of homeplace in the midst of oppression and domination, of homeplace as a site of resistance and liberation struggle:

Historically, black women have resisted white supremacist domination by working to establish homeplace. It does not matter that sexism assigned them this role. It is more important that they took this conventional role and expanded it to include caring for one another, for children, for black men, in ways that elevated our spirits, that kept us from despair, that taught some of us to be revolutionaries able to struggle for freedom (p. 44).

All of the women are strong willed and determined to succeed in their jobs as administrators. They all elevated their spirits by simply devising a mechanism or utilizing coping strategies, such as spirituality, family, friends, networks, and the community to successfully manage conflict.

Spirituality served as the key component in enabling these women to deal with the professional and personal challenges. All of the women expressed their belief in God and his powers. Jean stated:

I don’t think anybody would describe me as a religious person, but I feel like I’m spiritual, a spiritual person. And I find strength in my belief in God. Because I really do believe that
God has created each of us to be unique and to be capable of whatever. Now I don’t know what his plan for each of us is, but I think if given guidance, direction, discipline, information we all can work toward that. So I rely very heavily on, sometimes when I’m at a loss or if I’m hurting or feel alone, you know, prayer for me in my own way, not that I have to go and kneel in church on Sunday morning and do that.

Family, friends, and professional support also provided these women with the support and encouragement they needed to manage adversity in their professional careers. Family provided the primary layer of support that gave these women the strength to endure and sustain through difficult, as well as good times. Ruby believes, “That’s why we have families. Our families help us to filter the garbage that we get on a daily basis. So I talked to my husband and my parents. My mother was alive at that time, very strong people.” In addition to family, friends provided another layer of support. Kara noted, “I have people who care enough about me to make sure I keep a balanced life. I have girlfriends who say ‘It’s time for us to do this, this, and this’.” Jean also utilizes friends and colleagues. She stated:

   Especially if I feel like I’ve been defeated or beaten. I call somebody and just say, “hey, can I come vent?” Identifying a friend, a colleague, somebody you absolutely trust that you can go in and say I need to talk. Can I come by? Those are the things that I do to cope with those times of frustration.

   The women also identified networks and mentoring, often referring to individuals at institutions in the same or similar professions. Kara found support from her boss, however this has not always been the case. According to Kara:

   I have had them before and they haven’t been very supportive. I guess with all of the political pieces, you know the expectations of what we are going to do. How we are going to do it. I
am very fortunate to have a boss and a board that’s very supportive too. And they help me deal with the external expectations.

Community commitments served as an additional support connecting these women to the African American community and giving their work meaning and purpose. Community service served as a way of giving back to the community and enables them to make an impact on the lives of other African Americans, especially women.

Personal interest served as the final layer of support, such as reading, driving, and painting. These interests allowed the women to remove themselves from the day-to-day operations and indulge in relaxation and comfort, leaving little room for intense thinking. Kara noted, “I like to read motivational books. I like that. I get a lot of comfort there in doing that.” Lynn said:

Actually I paint, I do watercolors. I paint watercolor pictures. I’ve had four of my pictures accepted in a gallery, an art gallery in the mid-west. I am very proud of that. I started taking piano lessons for my fortieth birthday. And when I feel very stressed or when I feel like I need to wind down, I play my piano, badly, but I play. What else do I do? I sew. I swim. So those things kind of take me away from some of the stress that goes on.

Jean utilizes even simpler mechanisms to cope with the challenges. She stated, “In order to deal with these types of challenges I go in and I count to ten. I use very old strategies. Breathing helps. Go in and do some deep breathing.”

Unfortunately, the same elements that provided support also created difficult circumstances and caused them to rethink/reconsider situations and come up with alternatives or advice for a more positive outcome. Collins (1992) notes that, “this interdependence of thought and action suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness” (p. 28). The changed consciousness
allowed for the women to offer advice and recommendations for current and future administrators. The advice offered by the women ranged from, “keep God first” to “know your job.” Lynn suggested:

Don’t personalize some of the negative, some of the negativity that you will encounter. Secondly, know your job. Know the duties, responsibilities, the populations that you are going to work with, know the rules, policies, and practices that govern that particular situation. That’s the second thing. Third be damn sure that’s what you want to do. And I guess last, always take care of yourself. Do not put that responsibility on anyone else. Make time to take care of you.

Victoria believes that mentoring is also important. Victoria recommends:

Get a mentor. Get you a good mentor who has, you know, a leadership position in higher ed and has credibility among her peers and allow that person to introduce you to ways which you need to prepare yourself. Participate in leadership institutes.

The majority of them felt they had not given as much time to the community as they have in the past. However, they all made special efforts to juggle their professional, family, and community commitments. They felt a need to give back to the community.

They also displayed a desire to improve the conditions for African Americans in their institutions and in their communities. They also were concerned with improving the climate for future African American women administrators. The women were concerned with erasing the stereotypical images and perceptions of African Americans, especially women.

**Summary**

This chapter identified the emerging themes and how they related conceptually to Collins’ (1991) five key dimensions that characterize Black feminist thought: 1) core themes of a
black woman’s standpoint; 2) variation of responses to core themes; 3) interdependence of experience and consciousness; 4) consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint; and 5) interdependence of thought and action. These five themes of Black feminism were used in analyzing and interpreting the data to explore the challenges that African American women experience as professionals in public institutions of higher education and the strategies they employ to cope with the resulting conflicts.

The following major themes were identified: balancing career and family, racism and sexism, lack of respect by colleagues and subordinates, mentoring and networking, isolation and underrepresentation, competency and confidence, professional satisfaction, community consciousness, spirituality, and family support systems. These themes provided insight into the unique experiences of the African American women as administrators in higher education.

In the next chapter, I draw on the emerging themes to provide a final discussion on the challenges that African American women experience as professionals in public institutions of higher education and the strategies they employ to cope with the resulting conflicts.
Chapter 6: Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to explore the challenges that African American women experience as professionals in public institutions of higher education and the strategies they employ to cope with the resulting conflicts. The following questions guided the study:

- What are the challenges and experiences confronting African American women administrators in higher education?
- What coping strategies do African American women utilize to successfully manage the conflicts they encounter?
- What are the differences between the experiences of African American women administrators at Historically Black Colleges/Universities and those at Predominantly White Universities/Colleges?

**Discussion of Findings**

Using Collins’ (1991) five key dimensions that characterize Black feminist thought: 1) core themes of a Black woman’s standpoint; 2) variation of responses to core themes; 3) the interdependence of experience and consciousness; 4) consciousness and the struggle for a self-defined standpoint; and 5) the interdependence of thought and action, the analysis provided a different perspective and interpretation of the data than what is normally provided in mainstream discourse. Analyzing the data with a theoretical approach that clarifies a standpoint for black women facilitates the understanding and resolution of social dilemmas of race and gender for African American women, especially as they assume leadership positions in higher education.

**Question #1: Challenges and Experiences**

What are the challenges and experiences confronting African American women administrators in higher education? This research was done in order to gain a better understanding of the challenges and experiences confronting African American women administrations in higher education. Challenges, such as balancing career and family, racism and
sexism, lack of respect by colleagues and subordinates, mentoring and networking, isolation and underrepresentation, competency and confidence, professional satisfaction and community consciousness, were identified by the women.

Challenges, such as racism and sexism, are a part of these women’s personal and professional lives, regardless of their positions in higher education. Racism has been a challenge throughout their lives. Sexism affected the majority of the women later on in life; after they were removed from their communities, they gained a better understanding through education and experiences of racism. The women learned to quickly identify racism and sexism and not allow it to hamper their efforts. Although they did not perceive it as a barrier to their professional success, they were frequently judged on their sex and race, and not their professional credentials.

**Question # 2: Coping Strategies**

What coping strategies do African-American women utilize to successfully manage the conflicts they encounter? This research found they all consciously devised a mechanism or used coping strategies, such as spirituality and prayer, family, friends, networks, the community and personal activities, to successfully manage conflict. In addition, the women focused on keeping positive attitudes regarding their challenges.

All of the women reported that spirituality, prayer, and religion were the primary coping strategies they utilized to cope with the challenges as a administrator. The church has been and remains to be one of the most critical components of the African American community. This study found that all of the women ultimately believed that God was the higher being and controlled the universe. Faith and a grounded belief in God is the key to success and managing personal and professional conflicts.
The women all felt that family and friends were also used as a coping mechanism. Although the women felt that it was a challenge to balance family and professional responsibilities, they also viewed them as a support. The women reported the support came from parents, husbands, children, siblings, and extended family. Without the support and confidence given to them by their families, the women would not have risen to their present administrative positions.

All of the women were actively involved in their communities. These community commitments made their lives more challenging, adding another component to juggle; however, they also served as an outlet for the women. Family support was definitely reinforcement and helped the individuals move forward professionally and personally. Some of the women reported receiving some personal and professional support from certain individuals at their institutions. The majority of the women managed to obtain support and affirmation from African American women external to their institutions and from men external to their institutions.

Finally, all of the women realized they could not change the issues of racism and sexism, but they could change their own thinking about the issues. Throughout their personal and professional lives, these two issues have affected them; however, they have not allowed them to hinder their success. They acknowledged it, adapted and moved on.

**Question # 3 HBCU v PWU**

What are the differences between the experiences of African American women administrators at Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCU) and those at Predominantly White Universities/Colleges (PWU)? Based upon the surveys filled out by the human resource directors of the public colleges in Louisiana and the information provided by the participants, it was determined that PWUs have a smaller number of African American women administrators
in comparison to HBCUs. As a result, HBCU personnel and students are accustomed to having more women in highly fair positions. While several of the women have worked at and are administrators PWUs, only one, Marie, had the opportunity to work as an administrator at both a PWU and a HBCU.

Lisa, who worked as a professor at a PWU and an administrator at a HBCU found the environment to be less welcoming at the PWU. According to Lisa:

The other thing that happens at a white institution is that we may go, but we don’t stay because the environment is so hostile. You might have one that will stay two or three years. Someone who stays there twenty years or longer, it is only because they live in the community and they’ve just found a way to ride this out to retirement.

The women at the HBCUs did not experience racism from their counterparts. However, they reported being treated differently by counterparts from other universities and the governing board. The women at PWUs did not feel the staff gave them the respect they gave non-African American men and women equal to or below them in rank - of not addressing them as Dr. or Ms. as they did others; they were more likely to use first name. They felt this was a lack of respect.

The women at the PWUs received more professional recognition from subordinates than at HBCUs. Subordinates viewed their positions as an administrator as a historical and significant indication of change for African Americans. The first African American women holding an administrative position was also hope for the future that more African American women would become administrators.

The women at the PWUs found that they came in contact with white men and women (students and faculty) who had never interacted with an African American woman at an
administrative or authoritative level. Also, women at the PWUs noted that the people are often shocked they are the dean or the vice president because of the color of their skin.

Several of the women at the PWUs indicated that as the only African American and the only females at their levels of leadership, they often felt themselves as being owned by the African Americans on their campuses. As a result, they sometimes believed they would give favors to African Americans simply because they were black. Jean supported this notion:

One of the things I want to do is not give people the impression that because I’m black, I’m always going to be giving Blacks favors and whatever and doing and making exceptions to Blacks at the expense of whites. We all have the same rules and the same expectations. Now our needs may be different and I might have a need to support an individual or a group a little more because they may have a deeper struggle than somebody who’s got what they need. But I’m here for all the people. I’m not the black dean for the black students. I’m the dean for all students.

Implications for Further Theory, Research, and Practice

This work has provided additional insight into the challenges of African-American women administrators in higher education at public colleges and universities in Louisiana, and the strategies employed to manage the conflicts. I recommended that further research utilizing qualitative methods and Black Feminism/Black Feminist Thought be conducted to further supplement the research on African American women administrators in higher education, specifically the research should address: 1) the recruitment, retention, and promotion patterns of African American women administrators in the position of dean and above (with and without tenure); 2) the attitudes and behaviors that raise barriers to the success of African American
women in higher education; and 3) the salaries of African American women administrators in comparison to African American men, white men and women.

Second, this study revealed that several of the women’s personal and career paths are characterized by the “first” – first African American woman to lead a higher education entity; first female president; first African American dean; first African American homecoming queen at a predominantly white university; first African American professor at a south Louisiana predominantly white university; first African American student at a PWU; first Ph.D. in geometry; and first African American chamber of commerce president. It would be beneficial to conduct additional research to identify additional African American women in or outside of Louisiana and examine the experiences and perceptions of these women in their roles as the first African American woman.

Third, including institutions outside of Louisiana would provide a national perspective on the challenges and experiences of African American women administrators. Fourth, it might be useful to investigate the differences in the identified issues between African American women and white women. Fifth, I recommend conducting focus group interviews with African American women administrators from Louisiana or throughout the United States to allow the participants to freely talk with and influence each other in the process of sharing their ideas and perceptions regarding being an administrator. Sixth, further studies are needed to identify the problems and issues that African American men and women face in academia in a variety of positions.

In terms of practice, African American women might benefit from professional development programs designed specifically with them in mind. It is recommended that this and previous research be utilized for the coordination and implementation of leadership development programs focusing on the needs and concerns of African American women. In addition, colleges
and universities should reexamine their diversity efforts and consider African American women and other women of color. Faculty, staff and administrators might benefit from professional development programs that address diversity issues.

Finally, as bell hooks (1990) suggest:

Black women and men must create a revolutionary vision of black liberation that has a feminist dimension, one which is formed in consideration of our specific needs and concerns. Drawing on past legacies, contemporary black women can begin to reconceptualize ideas of homeplace, once again considering the primacy of domesticity as a site for subversion and resistance. When we renew our concern with homeplace, we can address political issues that most affect our daily lives. Calling attention to the skills and resources of black women who may have begun to feel that they have no meaningful contribution to make, women who may have begun to feel that they have no meaningful contribution to make, women who may or may not be formally educated but who have essential wisdom to share, who have practical experience that is the breeding ground for all useful theory, we may begin to bond with one another in ways that renew our solidarity (p. 48).

Summary

The women in the study displayed confidence as they managed the adversarial situations as administrators in higher education in Louisiana. Coping strategies, such as spirituality and prayer, family, friends, networks, the community and personal activities, served as supports that strengthened these women against much of the difficulty they encountered in their professional roles. Though they served as supports, these mechanisms could not protect these women entirely from the presence of racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination.
Even though federal legislation was implemented in the 1960’s to address racial and gender inequality across professional occupations and educational opportunities, there continues to be a lack of African American women administrators in higher education. In addition, they continue to struggle with racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination, that in many instances, excludes them from the highest level of administration.

Change has come slowly. The number of women college presidents has increased in the last 14 years, but the growth in the share of minority presidents has been slower. Despite the small number of African American women administrators in higher education, all of the women in the study believed that in the future African American women will rise to the top, despite the systematic discrimination aimed at minorities and women.

While more attention has been given to women in educational leadership, very few studies have focused on issues pertaining to African American women administrators in institutions of higher education. Educational administrators across all race and gender lines must be aware of the challenges that African American women encounter in higher education, especially administrators. They must provide more attention to the issues and needs of African Americans and plan and realign their universities accordingly.
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Appendix A - Chronology of the Advancement of African-American Women in Higher Education

1850 - Lucy Session earned a literary degree from Oberlin College, making her the first Black woman in the United States to receive a college degree.

1862 - Mary Jane Patterson earned a B.A. degree from Oberlin College making her the first Black woman to earn a Bachelor’s degree in the United States.

1864 - Rebecca Lee [Crumpler] became the first African-American woman to graduate from a U. S. college with a formal degree, and the first and only Black woman to obtain the Doctor of Medicine from the New England Female Medical college in Boston, Massachusetts.

1865 - Fannie Jackson Coppin became the second Black woman to earn a Bachelor’s degree from Oberlin College.

1866 - Sarah Woodson Early was appointed preceptress of English and Latin, and lady principal and matron at Wilberforce University, making her the first African-American woman on a college faculty.

1867 - Rebecca Cole became the second Black woman to receive a medical degree in the U.S., graduating from the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia.

1869 - Howard University Medical School opened its doors to women both black and white; by 1900, 103 women had enrolled, 48 of whom – 23 black women and 25 white women had graduated.

Fanny Jackson Coppin was named principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, making her the first black woman to lead an institution of higher learning in the U. S.

1873 - Lucy Laney was one of the first African-American women to graduate from Atlanta University.

1879 - Mary Eliza Mahoney graduated from the School of Nursing, New England Hospital for Women and Children in Boston, and became the first African-American in the U. S. to receive a diploma in nursing.

1883 - Hartshorn Memorial College for Women was founded in Richmond, Virginia, and became (in 1888) the first educational institution in the U. S. chartered as a college for Black women.

1884 - Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell and Ida Gibbs (Hunt) graduated from Oberlin College in 1884.
1886 - the first school for Black nursing student was established at Spelman Seminary, Atlanta, Georgia.

1889 - Josephine A. Silone Yates became professor and head of the Natural Sciences Department at Lincoln University (Jefferson City, Missouri), earning $1,000 per year.

1892 - Mary Moor Booze, Harriet Amanda Miller, and Dixxie Erma Williams graduated with B. S. degrees from Hartshorn Memorial College making them the first woman to receive college degrees from a black woman’s institution.

Anna Julia Cooper published book *A Voice from the South*, which championed the cause of Black women’s education

1893 - Meharry Medical College awarded it first medical degrees to two women, Georgianna Patton and Anna D. Gregg.

1897 - Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, with the help of Jessie Dorsey founded the Denmark Industrial Institute School in Denmark, South Carolina, which was later renamed Voorhees Industrial School, and is now Vorhees College.

1901 - Spelman Seminary granted its first college degrees to Jane Anna Granderson and Claudia Turner White.

1904 - Mary McLeod Bethune founded a normal and training institute for African-American girls in Daytona Beach Florida, that would later become Bethune-Cookman College.

Jessie Redmon Fauset was the first woman to gain entry into Phi Beta Kappa and graduate from Cornell with a Phi Beta Kappa Key.

1918 - Nora Douglas Holt became the first African-American to earn an advanced degree in music, receiving an M.Mus from the Chicago School of Music.

1921 - Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander became the one of the first Black woman to earn a Ph.D., in economics from the University of Pennsylvania and the first Black woman to pass the bar (law) in the state of Pennsylvania.

Georgiana R. Simpson, earned a Ph.D. degree in German, from the University of Chicago.

Eva Dykes, earned a Ph.D. degree in English philology, from Radcliffe College.

1923 - Virginia Proctor Powell [Florence] became the first African-American woman to
receive professional training in librarianship from the Carnegie Library School in Philadelphia.

1924 - Spelman Seminary changed its name to Spelman College and began to offer college courses on its own campus.

1926 - Bennett College, founded as a coeducational institution in 1873, became a college for women.

1925 - Anna Julia Cooper became one of the first African-Americans to receive a Ph.D. in French from the University of Paris.

1929 - Lucy Diggs Slowe convened the first annual conference of deans and advisors to girls in Negro schools, which gave birth to the Association of Deans of Women and Advisers to Girls in Negro Schools.

Anna Julia Cooper was named the president of Frelinghuysen University in Washington, D.C.

Jane Ellen McAlister was the first African-American women in the United States to earn a Ph.D. degree in education.

1931 - Jane Mathilda was the first Black woman to graduate from Yale University.

1932 - Hartshorn Memorial College, the first black woman’s college, merged with Virginia University.

1934 - Ruth Winford Howard became the first woman in the United States to receive a Ph.D. degree in psychology from the University of Minnesota.

1935 - Jessie Jarue Mark became the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. degree in botany from Iowa State University

1936 - Flemmie P. Kittrell became the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. degree in nutrition from Cornell University.

1939 - Tuskegee Institute established a school of nurse-midwifery.

Mary T. Washington became the first African-American woman Certified Public Accountant, after graduating from Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois.

1940 - Roger Arliner Young became the first black woman to earn a Ph.D. degree in zoology from the University of Pennsylvania.

1942 - Margurite Thomas became the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. degree in geology from Catholic University.
1943 - Mamie Phipps Clark became the first black woman to earn a Ph.D. in psychology from Columbia University in 1943. According to Littlefield “her research into the racial identity formation of black children (with her husband, Kenneth Clark) would be central evidence cited in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision.

1947 - Marie M. Daly became the first African-American woman to earn a Ph.D. in chemistry from Columbia University.

1948 - Ada Louis Sipuel, help to set the stage for desegregation of professional schools. In *Ada Louis Sipuel v. Board of Regents*, the Supreme Court ordered the University of Oklahoma School of Law to admit Sipuel, arguing that a state cannot require African-Americans to postpone their education until separate black graduate or professional schools are established.

1949 - two women became the first African-Americans to earn Ph.D. degrees in mathematics: Marjorie Lee Brown (University of Michigan) and Evelyn Boyd Granville (Yale University).

1950 - Norma Merrick Sklarek graduated from the School of Architecture at Columbia University and in 1954 she became the first woman to be licensed as an architect in the U. S.

1951 - Mildred Fay Jefferson became the first African-American to graduate from Harvard University’s Medical School.

1955 - Willa Player became the president of Bennett College, making her the first black woman college president of a college since Mary McLeod Bethune.

1956 - Atherine Lucy, help to set the stage for desegregation of public colleges. According to Littlefield, “Under a Supreme Court order and with the aid of RubyHurley, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People regional director, Atherine Lucy [Foster] enrolled in the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa, only to be expelled days later by university officials, who cited her statements regarding race relations at the school as grounds for dismissal.

1960 - Ruth Simmons became the ninth president of Smith College, and the first black woman to head a Seven Sisters college.

Historian Mary Frances Berry, was the first Black woman to serve as the president of the Organization of American Historians.

1961 - Charlayne Hunter [Gault] and Hamilton Holmes became the first African-American woman and man to be admitted to the University of Georgia in the 175 year history of the University.
1970 - Elaine Jones became the first black woman to graduate from the University of Virginia School of Law and in 1993 she became the head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund.

1976 - Mary Francis Berry became the chancellor of the University of Colorado, serving as the first African-American woman to head a major research university.

1979 - Jenny Patrick became the first black woman to earn a Ph.D. degree in chemical engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

1981 - Mariam Wright Edelman became the first black person and second woman to chair the Spelman College Board of Trustees.

1987 - Johnnetta Cole became the first black woman to head the oldest college for black women still in existence in the United States, Spelman College.

Niara Sudarkasa became the first woman president of Lincoln University, the nation’s oldest black college and, for much of its history, an all male institution.

1988 - Charlayne Hunter-Gault became the first black person in the 203 year history of her alma mater, the University of Georgia, to deliver the commencement address. She was one of the first blacks to be admitted to the university twenty-five years earlier.

Note: From Facts on File Encyclopedia of Black Women in America: Education (pp.164-172).
Appendix B - Request for Participation

Dear Prospective Participants,

My name is Germaine M. Becks and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership, Research and Counseling at Louisiana State University. I am currently conducting research on African American women in higher education administration as part of my completion of the doctoral degree in higher education administration. This is a qualitative study using primarily interviews to explore the challenges that African American women experience as professionals in public institutions of higher education and the strategies they employ to cope with the resulting conflicts. One of my career goals is to increase the amount of research in this area.

If you agree to participate I am asking for a commitment of three interviews scheduled at your convenience throughout the fall semester. Upon completion of the interviews you will receive a $25.00 gift certificate (to a place of your choice, Barnes and Nobles, Amazon, Books-A-Million, Bath & Body Works) in appreciation of your time.

Your response to this request is important to the advancement of my research on African American women in higher education administration. Your participation is greatly needed, valued and would be deeply appreciated. If you are interested in participating please submit a vita/resume and complete the enclosed biographical profile in the self-addressed envelope by (date). Shortly after receiving your vita/resume and profile I will call you to set up interview dates and times.

If you have questions or need additional information please feel free to contact me at (225) 272-5667 or (225) 210-0403 or you can e-mail me at becksg@worldnet.att.net. You may also FAX the information to (225) 272-5667.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Germaine Becks
Appendix C - African American Women Administrators in Higher Education
Informed Consent Form

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of African-American women administrators in higher education in Louisiana. This study involves the collection of research materials, the outcome of which will be utilized toward the completion of a Doctoral Degree for Germaine M. Becks in Educational Leadership, Research and Counseling from Louisiana State University.

This study will employ qualitative methods, specifically open-ended interviews and observational sessions in order to obtain an understanding of the experiences of African-American women administrators in higher education in Louisiana. If you agree to participate, three interviews will be scheduled at your convenience throughout the fall semester. The interviews will consist of a series of questions on topics related to, but not limited to your personal quest as an administrator, the role of race and gender in your job as an administrator, coping strategies, mentoring and the role of family in your success. Interviews will be conducted utilizing audiotape equipment. In addition to the audio recordings, notes will be taken. The notes and tapes will be kept confidential.

All data with the potential to identify participants will be held in confidence. Participant’s names will not be utilized in the study. Instead, pseudonyms will be assigned to each participant. However, quotes from the interviews will be utilized to support general themes. Finally, there is no foreseeable risk or financial benefits to the participants.

Upon completion of the interviews you will receive a $25.00 gift certificate (to a place of your choice, Barnes and Nobles, Amazon, Books-A-Million, Bath & Body Works) in appreciation of your time.

Your participation is voluntary, and if you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw consent and terminate participation at any time. Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information and willingly signed this consent form.

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board (225) 578-8692. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the researcher’s obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if signed by me.

________________________________________________________________________
Participant Name (Printed)
______________________________________________________________________
Participant Signature                                                                    Date

Questions and concerns about the research and/or your rights may be directed to:
Doctoral Student: Germaine M. Becks  Major Professor: Dr. Becky Ropers-Huilman
becksg@worldnet.att.net                              broper1@lsu.edu
(225) 272-5667 or 219-0403                        (225) 578-2892
Appendix D - Prospective Participant Biographical and Institutional Data

Part I: Biographical Data/Personal Data:

Name_________________________________________________________________________

Address________________________________________City_________State_________Zip__________

Phone(____)____________Ext_______Birthdate_____________Birthplace__________________

E-mail address__________________________________________________________________

Age:
• 20-29
• 30-39
• 40-49
• 50-59
• 60 +

Date of Birth____________________Place of Birth____________________________________

Marital Status_______________________________________________________________

Children_______________________________________________________________________

Siblings_______________________________________________________________________

Years of Experience in Education

Primary/Secondary School Teaching__________________________________________

Primary/Secondary School Administration_____________________________________

Post-secondary Teaching___________________________________________________

Post-secondary Administration_______________________________________________

Years of Administrative Experience: (Please list name and title at each university)

Department Head/University__________________________________________________

Dean/University________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________

Vice President/University__________________________________________________
President/University

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Other

________________________________________________________________________

Educational Background (Please list degree and university)

None

________________________________________________________________________

High School

________________________________________________________________________

Bachelors

________________________________________________________________________

Masters

________________________________________________________________________

Doctorate

________________________________________________________________________

Mother’s Birthplace______________________ Father’s Birthplace_______________________

Mother’s Educational Background (Year & Type of Degree)

None

________________________________________________________________________

High School

________________________________________________________________________

Bachelors

________________________________________________________________________

Masters

________________________________________________________________________

Doctorate

________________________________________________________________________

Father’s Educational Background (Year & Type of Degree)

None

________________________________________________________________________

High School

________________________________________________________________________

Bachelors

________________________________________________________________________

Masters

________________________________________________________________________

Doctorate

________________________________________________________________________

Part II: Institutional Data

Institution

________________________________________________________________________
Street Address__________________________________________________________________
Enrollment_____________________________________________________________________
Size of Administrative Staff_______________________________________________________
Percentage Female______________________________________________________________
Percentage African-American______________________________________________________
Percentage African-American Female_______________________________________________

**Part III: Position Data**

Title__________________________________________________________
Department_____________________________________________________
College/Division__________________________________________________
Job Description (Please attach if you have a written one)
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
Size of Direct Staff ________________________________________________
  Titles______________________________________________________________
  ________________________________________________________________
Primary Reporting Line______________________________________________
Secondary Reporting Line____________________________________________
Years in Current Capacity____________________________________________
Years Planning to Remain in Capacity____________________________________
Comments__________________________________________________________
Appendix E - Interview Questions

1) How did you get to this position?

2) Do you like what you are doing?

3) What is a typical day like for you?

4) How do you try to present yourself to (or interact with) others in your workplace?

5) In what ways do you think your experiences are located in your specific context, or are generalizable to other African American women administrators in higher education?

6) What (if anything) distinguishes you from other African American women who had similar career aspirations?

7) What are your greatest challenges, personally and professionally? Do you view these challenges as forms of oppression?

8) What are your greatest successes, personally and professionally?

9) What issues, if any, are you confronted with as the only African-American woman at this level of leadership at this institution?

10) What coping strategies do you utilize in your position?

11) From what source (s) have you found your support?

12) Have you ever gotten to the point where you considered resigning due to some of the issues you face as an African-American woman? If so, why did you decide to stay?

13) Have you been able to find a balance between the internal motivations and external expectations? Explain.

14) Of what are you most proud?
15) What do you consider to be major contributions that you have made to the community? To higher education? For women?

16) Do you view yourself as an agent of significant historical change for African-American women or any race of women in higher education?

17) Do you view yourself as a role model for other African-American women?

18) How do you believe that African-American women can achieve a professional persona, i.e., they can be viewed as the norm instead of the exception?

19) What do you see as factors that serve as obstacles to African-American women’s full and equitable participation, such as structure, policies, and informal practices, etc.?

20) Where do you see African-American women in higher education in the next decade? Century?

21) What are your future goals?

22) What advice can you offer that will help to prepare me to be an African-American administrator at an institution of higher education?
Appendix F - Participant Background Data

Personal and Professional Data:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Administrative Title</th>
<th>HBCU/PWU</th>
<th>Number of African American Women Administrators</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Ruby</td>
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<td>PWU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lynn</td>
<td>Interim Vice President</td>
<td>PWU</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>PWU</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>PWU</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>Vice Chancellor</td>
<td>PWU</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Interim Vice Chancellor</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Executive Assistant to the President and Interim Vice President</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
<td>Acting President</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bernice</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>HBCU</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kara</td>
<td>Chancellor</td>
<td>PWU</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Participant Biographical and Institutional Data Form
Vita

Germaine Monquenette Becks-Moody received her bachelor of public administration
degree in 1990 from Grambling State University in Grambling, Louisiana. She received her
master of public administration degree from Louisiana State University in 1992 in Baton Rouge,
Louisiana. In 1997, she entered the doctoral program in Educational Leadership, Research and
Counseling at Louisiana State University. For six-and-a-half years Mrs. Becks-Moody worked
for the Legislative Fiscal Office as an analyst.

Currently, Mrs. Becks-Moody is an Education Program Consultant 2 with the Louisiana
State Department of Education, Office of School and Community Support. Additionally, she
completed the doctoral program and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Educational Leadership, and Research at Louisiana State University in December 2004.