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# An Exploration of the Identity and Career Development of African American Women in Higher Education Leadership: Does Hair Style Make a Difference?

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AN EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN  
AMERICAN WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP: DOES HAIR STYLE  
MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **AN EXPLORATION OF THE IDENTITY AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP: DOES HAIR STYLE MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

Yasmine Osir Farley  
Old Dominion University, 2016  
Director: Dr. Dana Burnett

African American women, a group that endures the intersectionality of being both a woman and an African American, have many obstacles in their path as they advance in their career. Despite the strides that have been made in America to improve things for women and people of color, the interwoven societal standards of beauty do not include African American women. This standard of beauty affects women in that no matter how intelligent they are, looks play an important part in their professional life. For African American women, hair is a large part of who they are and how others perceive them. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived career and identity development experiences of African American women in as they ascended the career ladder to reach top-level positions within higher education to examine what role hairstyle choice has played in their career progression. The research found that race played a role in the career development of African American women in higher education leadership. Though the role it played depended on the respondent. When it comes to the role that hairstyle choice plays in the upward advancement of African American women, it would seem it is not a very significant role. Though the women had plenty to say about their hair often being a topic of discussion in the

work place and having some worries about how they present both their hair and overall outward look in an interview, most of the women stated that hair has not been a factor in their upward advancement. This study sought to learn how racial identity affects the career advancement of African American women in higher education and it succeeded in learning that the affect will differ depending on who you ask. Some of the participants to the study were very grounded in who they are as Black women and felt that their upbringing was influential in that. Lastly, this study sought to examine the intersectionality of career development, racial identity, and hairstyle choice on the career development of African American women in higher education leadership. This study found that the three are intertwined and that hairstyle choice and racial identity cannot be separated. Many of the women expressed that their hair was an extension of them, which aligns with previously mentioned literature. Overall their racial identity was both a hindrance and a positive influence on their upward advancement in higher education.

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This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory to my mother, Cynthia Benetta Farley, who was my biggest supporter throughout my education. She passed away on October 7, 2014 and unfortunately did not get to witness the completion of this degree. It was her pride in me that gave me the strength to continue in this endeavor and not give up after her death. I would also like to dedicate this to all those who took up the mantle of supporting me through the completion of this degree after her passing, my sister, Tuere Fa'aola, my brother, Kala Farley, and my mom's best friend, Denise Taylor. Their support was much appreciated as I dealt with insurmountable grief while trying to complete this dissertation. Thank you all for your love, support, and encouragement.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

For many years African Americans have sought to embrace their racial identity and break the psychological chains of oppression, and that struggle continues today in the area of African American hairstyle choice, career development, employment, and perceived self-efficacy. During the civil rights era, African American women began wearing their hair in afros as a symbol of solidarity and as a political statement that they would not conform and were proud of their Black identity (Tate, 2007). During the height of the civil rights movement many researchers constructed various theories on racial identity development. William E. Cross whose model of psychological nigrescence, or “the process of becoming Black,” (Cross, 1991, p 147) describes five stages that African Americans go through as they begin to identify with their racial group. The stages progress from an African American who is socialized to identify with the White perspective on life to an African American who is confident in their Blackness, embracing the differences in themselves and others (Cross, 1991).

### **Problem Background**

Throughout the years, African American women have had to deal with the politics of their hair in the workplace. Seen as something that needs to be tamed in order to be professional, many African American women choose to chemically alter their hair for a variety of reasons, two of which revolve around ease of care and attainment of mainstream beauty ideals. Chemically straightened hair, or relaxed hair, is a practice that many African American women have experienced in their lifetime as it gives them the hair that most aspire to, straight hair that is more manageable. In recent years policies have been brought to the attention of the media that discriminate against African American women specifically by banning hairstyles such as afros,

braids, and dreadlocks, styles most commonly adorned by African American women. An example of this discrimination is the United States Army policy regarding hair in which the aforementioned styles as unacceptable (Cooper, 2014). This policy was disputed by the Congressional Black Caucus after 16 women filed discrimination complaints over the policy (Cooper, 2014). The policy was later reversed by Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel after a three month review of the regulations (Henderson, 2014). This is just one example of hair in workplace politics; how successful African American women are in navigating the unspoken biases and microaggressions against them can be predicated on their level of racial identity development.

As racial identity is explored, some theorists hypothesize that the development of one's racial identity affects the career development of African Americans, and in particular, African American women; because those who have yet to develop a strong sense of racial identity are more likely to lack a clear idea of their future career path, or tend to have a lower sense of self-efficacy (Brown & Pinterits, 2001; Hackett & Byars, 1996). Due to the mixed signals received through academia and in the work place pertaining to their level of performance, African American women may be unable to predict their performance outcomes (Hackett & Byars, 1996). These mixed signals can manifest in situations such as an African American woman performing the same task at the same caliber as her White counterpart, but receiving either a higher or lower evaluation due to the evaluator's personal prejudices (Hackett & Byars, 1996). The internalization of that situation will differ depending on where one may be in their racial identity development. Someone in the early stages of racial identity may not be aware of any prejudice and still be naïve in recognizing the bias they may be experiencing from those who unjustly stereotype. Whereas, for another, this may spark a progression in their racial identity

development in which they recognize the bias and are dislodged from their white prospective world view. A person that is more grounded in their racial identity however, may be extremely reactive to any perceived threats or biases in the environment. As a result, this person may become proactive to address the cultural issues in the workplace.

The progression of one's racial identity, along with the reactions created, causes an inner conflict in being able to attach true meaning to outcomes or predict outcomes based on previous experiences therefore crippling their development of coping strategies (Brown & Pinterits, 2001; Hackett & Byars, 1996). If women are at a lower point (stage 1) in their racial identity development they may be unable to reconcile and recognize the times in which they are being treated differently because of racism or sexism (Hackett & Byars, 1996). The women in stage 1 may internalize bias outcomes as a reflection of their ability whereas those who have a stronger sense of self and racial identity are more adept at recognizing racism and sexism (Cross, 1991; Hackett & Byars, 1996). Those in a later stage of racial identity development are more likely to identify discrimination as such; and not internalize it as a reflection of their personal performance; but rather a projection of society's perceptions imposed upon them (Hackett & Byars, 1996).

Despite the many factors that join together while one is forming a racial identity and sense of self, for African American women, hair has been an important factor in "defining one's identity" (Bellinger, 2007, p 65). In our early stages of development African American women are largely influenced by the world around them which often involves the media portrayal of beauty standards (Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Hackett & Byars, 1996; Rahman, 2012). How society views us is often how we interpret our "self" in the early stages of identity development (Savickas, 2013). Susan Brownmiller, a feminist theorist, asserts that for women, hair is a large

defining factor of one's self (Brownmiller, 1984; White, 2005). The factor left out in Brownmiller's assertions of hair, is how painstakingly difficult it is for African American women to maintain their hair in an unnatural state in order to conform to the societal standards of beauty (White, 2005). Bellinger (2007), states that "straight hair is still the North American norm and is often needed to secure employment for African American women" (p. 65). The damaging chemical process of straightening African American hair irreversibly changes the hair follicle. The continuation of this practice means that straight hair has been internalized as desired while different/curly hair has been deemed undesirable by the culture. This sends a negative message to African American women.

As a result, a movement has begun in which African American women are disposing of their relaxers in favor of hair that is natural and chemical free. Unlike the movement of the civil rights era when women wore their natural hair as a political statement, today's return to natural is driven by self-acceptance as one woman stated "It's like, I'm embracing who I am and I'm going to rock my natural curls, my locks, or my afro" (Wilson, 2012, p. 96). Though the movement in the 1960s and 1970s also celebrated the natural texture of African American hair, it also became associated with the Black power movement. The sit-ins, Freedom Rides, marches and speeches became an avenue for Blacks to find both their pride and beauty within themselves (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). The afro of the 60s and 70s allowed Blacks, both men and women, to display solidarity with the larger Black community by adopting this aesthetic (Byrd & Tharps, 2014).

In today's African American community, women are again beginning to celebrate and embrace the natural texture of their hair causing a major shift in the 684 billion dollar African American hair care industry (Holmes, 2013; Wilson, 2012). According to a consumer spending and market research firm, Mintel, the number of African American women who no longer

chemically alter their hair has increased by 10% from 2010 to 2011 (Wilson, 2012). A survey conducted by Procter & Gamble in which more than 50% of the African American women surveyed either had natural hair or were in the process of making the transition (Celebrate, 2013). Consumers can see this shift in the stores as big companies such as Soft Sheen-Carson begin to roll out products geared toward those with natural hair and as relaxer sales have declined 30% between 2010 and 2012 (Holmes, 2013; Wilson, 2012).

Much like the issues of skin color, hair in the African American community carries much historical and social baggage dating back to slave times when slaves were forced to cover their offensive “wool like” hair in order to be presentable in front of Whites (Bellinger, 2007; Johnson, 2004; Patton, 2006; White, 2005). For decades the hierarchy among African Americans suggests that the closer one’s features are to European, such as lighter skin and straighter hair, the greater one’s social value (Bellinger, 2007; White, 2005). This notion, though still an undercurrent in the African American community, is slowly beginning to fade as African American women begin to further explore their racial identity. Hair plays a large part in this reconciliation of identity and self (Ferguson, 2004; Synnott, 1987).

Despite the fact that African American women face some of the issues that all women face, and issues that all African Americans face, they are also confronted with a unique set of issues due to their intersectionality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). “Intersectionality means the examination of race, sex, class, national, origin, and sexual orientation, and how their combination plays out in various settings” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, “Looking Inward,” para. 2).

Research focused on race discrimination in the workplace has shown that African Americans are less likely to be hired and more likely to earn lower wages than their White

counterparts (Brown, 1995; Leong, 1995; Marshall, Stamps, & Moore, 1998; Walsh, Bingham, Brown, & Ward, 2001). Furthermore, the rate of unemployment for African Americans is consistently higher than it is for Whites (Brown, 1995). One of the many issues affecting African American employment are the result of discriminatory policies that target hairstyles of African Americans such as dreadlocks, braids, and afros (Payne & Thakkar, 2012). These policies have been challenged in the courts such as the often cited case *Rogers v. American Airlines* in which the plaintiff sued American Airlines claiming she was fired due to wearing a braided hairstyle (Greene, 2011). The court did not rule in favor of Ms. Rogers stating that the policy applied to all employees and not specifically Black women (Greene, 2011). The court rejected the Rogers claim that cornrows (a braided style) were unique to Black women citing Bo Derek as an example of a White woman who adorned the style before Rogers began wearing it in the workplace (Greene, 2011). Subsequent claims similar to *Rogers v. American Airlines* were rejected by other courts which cited this case. The lack of recognizing such discriminatory policies causes detriment to African American women regardless of industry. It upholds the unspoken rule that African American women, in order to obtain and keep employment, must conform to the mainstream ideals of professional hairstyles and beauty (Bellinger, 2007). A lack of empirical research exists to show how hairstyle choice specifically affects the upward trajectory of the careers of African American women. In the field of higher education, the employment of African American women holding upper administration roles is significantly lower than their White counterparts (Evans, 2007). Women in general have lower earning across most fields than their male counterparts. African American women are often slighted in employment and other career related issues because they represent more than one protected class as both a woman and an African American (Evans, 2007; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Payne &



Thakkar, 2012). African American women are also more likely to earn less than their White counterparts despite having more education (Evans, 2007). African American women deal with many issues when it comes to employment, one of which is their hair. This study seeks to examine the lived career and identity development experiences of African American women in varying higher education administrative roles to examine what role hairstyle choice has played in their career advancement.

African American women may have a variety of hairstyles depending on their personal preference however few studies exist in the field that have examined the role natural hair plays in employment discrimination. The studies that do exist focus more on beauty ideals and the history of African American hairstyles, not the intersectionality of hair, career, and racial identity (Chapman, 2007; Gillespie, 2013; Rosado, 2008; Swain, 2012; Tate, 2007; White, 2005). Therefore, this study will purposefully select participants to ensure a variety of hairstyles are represented, in particular, women with natural hair and straightened hair in order to gain a better understanding of how these administrators perceive the role their hairstyle choice has played in their career trajectory.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Racism in America is not isolated to the few instances that make national headlines; it is something that is normality in the life of African Americans (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Researchers (Evans, 2007) have noted the lack of African American women in leadership roles within higher education. This is due to the systematic cycle of oppression that is embedded into the very fabric of America which favors Whites over persons of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This subtle racism permeates many aspects of life including educational experiences and careers. For African American women, especially those looking to advance in their careers, it is

important for them to alleviate the unconscious biases they may face from their White colleagues in their daily lives. One way African American women can do that is through their hairstyle.

Hairstyle choice is a well discussed topic amongst African American women as it tends to be connected to one's identity. For women who want to advance in their career, it can also pose a problem. Many women on the website CurlyNikki.com (a site dedicated to educating women on a variety of natural hair topics) cite hairstyles that leave the hair in its natural unprocessed state as a hindrance to advancing in their careers. This may be due to the Eurocentric thoughts on beauty in America which paints the ideal woman as having long, straight hair (Brownmiller, 1984). Unfortunately for many African American women, obtaining such a hairstyle requires repeated chemical treatments to their hair to make it straight or utilizing weave; both of which can cause serious damage to one's hair. Despite this, many African American women will go to great lengths to obtain this hair if they feel it will help their career prospects.

This notion, though still an undercurrent in the African American community, is currently being challenged as large numbers of African American women begin to wear their hair in its natural state. For many African American women looking to advance in their career hairstyle choice is a concern yet there is no current empirical literature to confirm that fear. This study seeks to fill that gap in the research regarding the hairstyle choice of African American women and to examine their lived career and identity development experiences as higher education administrators.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived career and identity development experiences of African American women in varying higher education administrative roles to examine what role hairstyle choice has played in their career progression.

## **Research Questions**

This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How does race affect the career development and advancement of African American women in higher education leadership?
  - a. What role, if any, does hairstyle choice play in the career development and upward advancement of African American women in higher education leadership?
2. How does racial identity affect the career advancement of African American women in higher education leadership?
  - a. What role, if any, does hairstyle choice have in the identity development of African American women in higher education leadership?
3. How does the intersectionality of career development, racial identity, and hairstyle choice affect the careers of African American women in higher education leadership?

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

Due to the nature of self-reporting, the researcher cannot guarantee that all responses from participants are factual; they are the perceptions those individuals have of their life and career experiences. The interview questions utilized in this study were developed to gain information regarding the lived experiences of African American women in higher education leadership. The sample of this study was limited to women who identify as African American and who are in a senior level leadership position at a four-year institution of higher education.

This qualitative research study does not seek to provide an all-encompassing exploration of the identity and career development of African American women in higher education, rather it seeks to provide a glimpse into the lived experiences of study participants. The results of the

study are limited to a small number of African American women in higher education.

Furthermore, given the boundaries and design of this study, it does not seek to generalize its results to the larger African American population.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that in order for a study to have trustworthiness it must have these four elements: truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. To establish truth value, a thorough literature review has been conducted which shows that others have found that the choice of hairstyle an African American makes does impact their identity and career development. Due to the importance of hair for all women regardless of race (Bellinger, 2007), one can determine that such a study, if utilized for a different group of participants, may yield findings that hairstyle affects these groups as well.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In qualitative research it is imperative that the researcher address ethical issues such as “informed consent procedures; deception or covert activities; confidentiality toward participants, sponsors, and colleagues; benefits of research to participants over risks; and participant requests that go beyond social norms” (Creswell, 2007, p. 141). To address these issues the researcher will distribute an informed consent form to participants and disclose how the information will be handled. Participants will be given a pseudo name for the research to ensure anonymity. The researcher recognizes that the topic may be of a deeply personal nature to some as the participant will be delving into their personal identity and career development. The nature of the questions may cause them to have more self-awareness of their hair and how it has affected, if at all, their development. Though minimal, both benefits and risks will be expressed to the participant.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Natural hair* – the hair of an African American that has not been altered with chemical treatments (Jones, 2012)

*Relaxed hair* – the hair of an African American that has been permanently altered from its natural curly/kinky state to an irreversible straightened state

*Transitioning/Going Natural* – the process of growing one’s natural hair out while still having relaxed ends (Jones, 2012)

*African American* – an American person whose heritage traces back to Africa, this term is interchangeable with Black

*Identity Development* – the process of becoming black as one socializes within a racial and un-racialized view of the world (Cross, 1971; Cross 1991)

*Locs/Dreadlocks* – A style achieved by binding the hair with beeswax and twisting. As the hair grows the kinks and twists in the hair interlock creating dreadlocks.

### **Researcher’s Background and Qualifications**

In qualitative research it is important to understand the background of the researcher to grasp their positionality in conducting their research (Greene, 2014). As the sole researcher, it is important to note that I am somewhat of an insider to the population that I am studying.

According to Greene (2014) “insider research is that which is conducted within a social group, organization or culture of which the researcher is also a member” (Greene, 2014). I am an

African American woman with natural hair and I am currently employed in a mid-level administrative role within the field of higher education. As an insider, I have the advantage of a pre-existing knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon being studied; as well as unspoken familiarity with participants due to shared identifiers (Greene, 2014). As a result, this

can also create a threat to objectivity and compromise validity (Greene, 2014). Creswell and Greene suggests that to assist in avoiding these threats as an insider, the researcher should collect reflective personal data to acknowledge one's position as both the researcher and researched (Creswell, 2007; Greene, 2014).

I joined the movement that is sweeping through the African American female community to let go of our relaxed tresses and opt for natural hair. This movement largely started after the movie "*Good Hair*" was released. Consumers, such as myself, have seen the shift in the stores as big companies such as Soft Sheen-Carson begin to roll out products geared toward those of us with natural hair and as relaxer sales decline (Wilson, 2012). Many small businesses have emerged that are selling homemade hair products that are all natural and healthier for our textured hair. I personally have both made and bought some. Many of the big brand companies are beginning to catch on and having to change their marketing to reach both relaxed and natural haired Black women. YouTube is booming with tutorials that are giving natural haired women like me the knowledge to do intricate hairstyles at home.

Despite all these positive changes for us natural haired women, many of us are worried that our hair has either helped or hindered our career progress. Blog posters on popular websites such as curlynikki.com assert that it is necessary for us naturals to alter the state of our natural hair in order to make Whites more comfortable. Having only been fully natural since May of 2012, I found this alarming. Just as I was embracing this new aspect of myself and growing into it, I read from other naturals that our hair is unacceptable. Though there are issues with Whites and our hair, what hurt the most was that other African Americans often demean our natural hair.

My personal hair journey began at the start of my PhD program. I decided to go natural because I wanted to know what my hair looked like sans relaxer, and also because I saw how much thicker and healthier my sister's natural hair was compared to mine. Though similar in length, my hair was much thinner, and I was a bit jealous. The issue for many with going natural and for me has been the challenge of re-learning how to do my hair along with the identity development that has transpired since the decision to go natural. I feel as though I am looked at in a different light now that my hair is no longer straight. It is as if I am considered extra Black because of my hair. Even though I have a curl pattern that is envied by many other naturals, I still feel it is so "Black." I feel like people see me way more with my natural hair. Almost as if my hair demands the attention of others. But from Whites, I feel that that attention is unwanted. I feel self-conscious about certain hairstyles when dealing with White people. I feel as if they are judging me because my hair is too Black and I am being too in touch with my Black identity to fit in...to assimilate. I know that I, along with many other naturals wonder how our personal decision affects our career paths and options. Due to my own personal identity development since going natural, both it and career issues sparked my interest in this study.

As an aspiring leader in higher education, I often take notice of the hairstyle choices of women who have made it to the upper administrative levels. It has fascinated me to learn more about their personal career development and if at some point in their career they too endured the issues that come along with hairstyle choice. My intention is that this study will give other aspirant African American women leaders in the field of higher education the empirical knowledge of how hairstyle choice can affect their career path.

### **Importance of the Study**

It is the stories of others that can cure the silencing of people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Having someone else stand and say that they have endured similar experiences can assist in building the awareness of the career and identity issue African American women face. Within the stories of career, identity and hairstyle choice of African American women in higher education leadership, strategies to combat unspoken bias can emerge. The idea that African American hair is something that should be tamed and put away is a constructed idea that started in the time of slavery and persisted through the generations. If this idea is only a constructed one as a way to make one feel inferior, then it is one that can also be deconstructed (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). By capturing the experiences of these African American women, their narratives can call to attention the hidden issues that women of color encounter in higher education as they aspire to greatness.

Many theorists have purported that African American women have received negative messages concerning their natural hair due to its kinks and coils however these theories are often unsupported by empirical research (Bellinger, 2007; Patton, 2006; White, 2005). The empirical research that does exist is often lacking in identifying how the negative message of African American hair can affect women who are in leadership positions. This study is important to the field of higher education due to the large number of African Americans that receive PhD degrees, often do so in the field of education. To assist the faculty and leadership of the future it is important to understand the lived experiences of African American women and the obstacles their hair may have presented during their rise to the top.



### **Summary**

African American women, a group that endures the intersectionality of being both a woman and an African American, have many obstacles in their path as they advance in their career. Despite the strides that have been made in America to improve things for women and people of color, the interwoven societal standards of beauty do not include African American women. This standard of beauty affects women in that no matter how intelligent they are, looks play an important part in their professional life. For African American women, hair is a large part of who they are and how others perceive them. This study seeks to explore their career and identity development through their experiences as they ascended the career ladder to reach top-level positions within higher education.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

The negative social constructs surrounding the hair of African American women have been around since slavery. There is a cultural hegemony that has made it difficult for African American women who do not conform to societal standards of beauty, which consider long, straight hair the norm. The purpose of this study is to explore the identity and career development of African American women in higher education leadership. This study will also explore the role their choice of hairstyle has in regards to their identity and career development. Chapter II is organized as follows: first, literature related to African American hair and identity will be presented. Second, literature outlining the progression of African American identity development will be reviewed. Third, literature addressing African American women's hair and career issues will be discussed. Lastly, literature concerning the career development of African American women in higher education and related career theories will be conferred.

### **African American Women's Hair and Identity**

#### **Slavery and African American Hair**

The influence of the Eurocentric measure of beauty by which African American women are subject to has a history which extends back to slavery (Bellinger, 2007; Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Johnson, 2004; Patton, 2006; Tate, 2007; White, 2005). Prior to their enslavement in America, the kinky hair of Africans was embraced for its physical beauty (Byrd & Tharps, 2014); those with thick coarse hair were revered because their coarse hair was a symbol of wealth (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). It was the slave system that instilled the modern day standards of beauty which hold Eurocentric features as the epitome of physical attractiveness (Byrd & Tharps, 2014). Both European skin color and hair texture was to be desired, signifying the inferiority of African Americans to the White race (Weathers, 1991). Slave children were taught to refer to

their hair as wool, and women were forced to shave their heads, which in Africa was a crime (Buchman, 2001; Johnson, 2004). Slaves were being encouraged by their White slave masters to iron their hair because in its natural state it was messy and hard to care for (Buchman, 2001). Because White hair was the archetype, black hair could not be judged by its own standards. Over time, both Whites and African Americans internalized the notion that African American hair in its natural, unaltered state is unacceptable (Bellinger, 2007; Johnson, 2004; Patton, 2006; White, 2005).

During slavery, field slaves were forced to cover their offensive “wool like” hair while house slaves were expected to groom their hair in order to be presentable in the presence of Whites (Bellinger, 2007). Despite their lack of grooming resources, slaves were expected to look as White as possible because their slave master was judged on the appearance of his slaves (Bellinger, 2007; Weathers, 1991). As time progressed and racial intermingling produced offspring, a hierarchy among African Americans formed solidifying the notion that European features such as lighter skin and straighter hair signified greater social value (Tate, 2007; White, 2005). Those with lighter skin and straighter hair would try to have children with White men with hopes of eliminating traces of African ancestry to lead to the possibility of freedom (Tate, 2007). It was during this time that the notion of “good hair” and “bad hair” came to fruition. This created a divisive hierarchy in the African American community which favored those with a fairer skin complexion and hair that was straighter and softer in nature (Bellinger, 2007; Patton, 2006). Having “good hair” and a lighter complexion signified many things within the African American community such as the difference between being a slave and having free person status (Patton, 2007). During slavery, a slave’s hair was often used as an identifying trait to locate a runaway (Johnson, 2004). Hair became the test of true “blackness” because despite one’s

complexion, if their hair was kinky in any way their African ancestry was known (Bellinger, 2007; Byrd & Tharps, 2014; Tate, 2007). In attempts to pass for White and be free, adopting the White standard of beauty became embedded in the African American community as a way of survival because it helped them get ahead in life (Bellinger, 2007; Patton, 2006). Many slaves would go to whatever extreme necessary to alter their hair in order to better appeal to Whites.

### **Altering the Natural State of African American Hair**

Many African Americans today still hold the belief that they need to “fix” their hair; and it is reaffirmed by other African Americans and Whites that natural hair is harder to style and requires extra materials (Buchman, 2001). The concept of good hair is well known in the African American community, often referring to hair that is long, silky and straight (Bellinger, 2007). Epitomized as a woman’s crown and glory, it is deeply embedded in the African American psyche that straight hair should be attained in order to reach a high status in society. This of course is due to the privileges some slaves could obtain as a result of their fair skin and wavy hair. For those whose African bloodline was not diluted with White ancestry, the challenge of achieving hair closer to Whites was daunting until products were created to aide in their dilemma. It was Madame CJ Walker who first began to recognize the lack of African American hair care products and she built a business empire on this void, making her the first female African American millionaire (de Sa Dias, Baby, Kaneko, & Velasco, 2007; Weathers, 1991). Her products provided a way for African American women to have the hair that could assist them in being considered beautiful in the European context, with straight hair. Walker changed the industry of black hair care by creating a product that aided in the African American woman’s pursuit of straight hair. Her product was an ointment, created in mid-1900, which was put on the hair and followed by a “hot comb” to straighten the hair (de Sa Dias, Baby, Kaneko, & Velasco,

2007). The first chemical straightening products were developed in the 1940s and marketed for both professional and home use by 1965 using a sodium hydroxide formula which promoted the permanent straightening of the hair (de Sa Dias, Baby, Kaneko, & Velasco, 2007). The chemical straightening products allow the hair to stay straight even when exposed to water (Quinn, Quinn, & Kelly 2003; de Sa Dias, Baby, Kaneko, & Velasco, 2007). These products however are highly irritating to the scalp and can cause severe damage with prolonged use. Aside from scalp irritation, chemical straighteners can weaken the hair strands and if left on too long dissolve the hair (Quinn, Quinn, & Kelly 2003). For many within the African American community these dangers are a risk they are willing to take, but others prefer their hair as is. This is the case as time progresses, as there seems to be a historical pattern in the African American community as to which natural hairstyle choice is more acceptable.

During the civil rights era, African American women shunned the chemical straightener and embraced their natural hair as a silent protest to White supremacy. Afros, with all their kinky coils, became a symbol of power, recognition and paid homage to one's African heritage. Leaders during that era, such as Malcolm X, spoke out against the straightening of one's hair asserting that doing so caused African Americans to be ashamed of their own unique beauty and, by devaluing black hair, they devalue their blackness (Buchman, 2001; Patton, 2006). As time progressed however, natural hair began to lose its appeal as a symbol of power and solidarity with the African American race and became associated with delinquency and lower economic status (Bellinger, 2007). Some studies show that for many African American women, the choice to chemically straighten their hair is no longer hinged on one's feelings toward one race or another as it may have been in the past.

Weathers (1991) ethnographic study of African American oral tradition to document the hair experiences of African American women in college gathered testimonies that hair was an issue of emotional, political, economic, and historical significance for African American women. More recent studies however challenge that notion as their study participants posit their hair is just a personal choice (Bellinger, 2007; King & Niabaly, 2012). Despite the gap in time, Weather's findings (1991) did have some similarities to newer studies in which participants felt the need to chemically straighten their hair out of convenience. Those who are natural saw their choice as a liberating one, while those with relaxers see it as the more practical choice (Weathers, 1991). A more recent study by Bellinger (2007) was conducted to examine why African American women are raised to change their hair from its natural state. Using a qualitative approach, study participants were interviewed to determine their motivations for chemically straightening their hair (Bellinger, 2007). Her results showed that these young women chose to relax their hair for the following reasons: to obtain "good hair," because their mother's also used relaxers, and to have a higher probability of obtaining employment (Bellinger, 2007). Another study by King and Niabaly (2012) also used a qualitative approach interviewing both African and African American college women to examine their feelings toward chemically straightened and natural hair. Their findings revealed that participants with straightened hair were influenced by a variety of factors including family with relaxed hair. Participants with natural hair were opposed to the thought of their hair being a political statement as it once was in the Civil Rights era, and now view their hair style as a personal choice (King & Niabaly, 2012).

Participants in both studies liked relaxers due to the ease it creates in maintaining their hair and asserted that it did not mean they were trying to conform to White standards (Bellinger,

2007; King & Niabaly, 2012). The age range of those participating in the aforementioned studies was 16-25. In another study conducted with African American girls aged 9-18, their conversations on hair did not mention straight over natural, the emphasis was if one's hair was "done" or not (Hesse-Biber, Howling, Leavy, & Lovejoy, 2004). Much of the literature about the hair of African American women is not based in empirical research. Not all of the aforementioned studies have hair as the main focus leading to the need of more empirical research on the hair of African American women and its effect on career and identity development.

### **Return to our Roots and Media Perceptions of Beauty**

Hair is rhetorical and it influences people's perception of a person (White, 2005). In a society where the norms are constantly changing, the view on hairstyle seems to remain the same. The epitome of femininity and beauty is heavily dependent on long flowing hair regardless of race (Bellinger, 2007; Brownmiller, 1984; Patton, 2006; White, 2005). "Straight hair is still the North American norm and is often needed to secure employment for African American women" (Bellinger, 2007, p. 65). Much like the issues of skin color, hair in the African American community carries much historical and social baggage (White, 2005). Though straight hair is still very prevalent in the African American community, there is a movement sweeping across the nation that is encouraging African American women to embrace their natural hair. "When African American women challenge the coded meanings related to their hair, a personal metamorphosis for the woman who has defied the status quo occurs" (Weathers, 1991, p. 60). Hair can also be a political statement. "This is because hair is an extension of self, and as such it can be a symbolic manifestation of a power that might be denied to one in everyday life" (Weathers, 1991, p. 60). Hair is a way that African American women can subtly combat the

authority that is White America and the Eurocentric beauty standards imposed on women of all races. Weathers (1991) posits that through the wearing of one's natural hair African American women bear heritage on their heads when they wear styles that originated in Africa.

The personal choice of going natural holds many implications, one of which can be interpreted as a “rhetorical statement that resists Eurocentric standards of beauty while engaging in an act of self-definition and liberation” (White, 2005, p. 295). The politics of hair carry such a heavy historical and social weight that it can often leave African American women feeling at a loss when it comes to the choices they have of how to wear their hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2014; White, 2005). The measurement of beauty is so absurdly skewed in favor of White women that for years African American women also measured themselves by this highly unattainable standard of beauty. African American women go to the lengths of chemically straightening their hair and bleaching their skin to obtain the mainstream definition of beauty which centers on Eurocentric attributes (Bellinger, 2007; Louis, 2009; White, 2005). These standards of beauty are perpetuated in our society through the advertisements of products which disproportionately feature African American models with light skin and long straight hair (Gooden, 2011; Gilchrist & Thompson, 2012; White, 2005). These types of media images can convey to those of a darker hue or with short and/or natural hair that their appearance is not beautiful.

**Media influences.** Psychologists have long studied the effects that media images of the idealized female beauty have on women and their relationship with their own bodies and appearance (Engeln-Maddox, 2006; Rahman, 2012). Some researchers (Engeln-Maddox, 2006) have shown that when exposed to media images of the ideal beautiful woman, there was a consistent increase in body dissatisfaction. The problem with this is that many of the images portraying ideal beauty are photos that have been altered by photo shopping therefore making it



unattainable for the average woman to meet those standards. There is the Objectification Theory which is a “cultural climate in which a woman’s physical appearance is in constant evaluation” (Engeln-Maddox, 2006, p. 259). Women are aware that their attractiveness acts as sort of a currency, adding to their obsession with their appearance. Many women internalize these ideals of beauty, or “buy-into” these socially defined ideals.

Studies have shown that women who have internalized these images of beauty believe that if they meet them, their lives would be better. Engeln-Maddox (2006) conducted a study using a diverse sample of 109 women participants from a private Midwestern university with a mean age of 18.28 years. Participants were asked to write about their cultural idea of the ideal woman, then imagine what their lives would be like if they looked like that. Then they were asked to fill out a survey to rate the life change they described and how likely it would happen if they looked like the ideal woman. The results showed several expectations that participants stated would change if they looked like the ideal woman: positive psychological impact, position social attention (nonromantic), romantic success with the opposite sex, employment/economic success, apparel, less pressure about appearance from others, negative consequences, negative personality consequences. The results were mainly that women felt that they would have a better life all around if they looked like the media ideal. Though there were some downsides, the main themes were that life is better when you’re attractive, which agrees with most research on attractiveness (Bóo, Rossi, & Urzúa, 2013; Tews, 2009; Hesse-Biber, Howling, Leavy, & Lovejoy, 2004; Johnson, 2010). Women may seek to emulate their ideal because they seek the social, psychological, and practical rewards associated with the ideal. This is rather tragic considering most of the media images are manufactured; women should be more critical of

media images by questioning the realistic representations of these images (Engeln-Maddox, 2006).

It has long been asserted that long, silky straight hair is the crowning glory of an African American woman, but to obtain such hair most have to go through the itching and burning that is synonymous with chemical straighteners (Louis, 2009). Often referred to jokingly as the “creamy crack,” in order to obtain “good hair,” many African American women believe that they must suffer through the temporary pain in order to gain access and upward mobility into the mainstream White America (Louis, 2009). In a time when natural hair is becoming more prevalent in the African American community there is a divide in reasons behind the change (Bellinger, 2007; King & Niabaly, 2012; Louis, 2009). Some women relinquish their chemical straighteners in an attempt to have a healthier lifestyle and no longer subject themselves to the harsh chemicals used in chemical straighteners while others are making a political statement that they will not subject themselves the debauched notions of American standards of beauty (White, 2005).

Louis (2009) quotes comedian Paul Mooney who states that “If your hair is relaxed, white people are relaxed, [but] if your hair is nappy, they’re not happy.” The politics of African American hair are best summed up in Louis’s (2009) article quoting a professor of black studies who states “for black women, you’re damned if you do and damned if you don’t.” The ones that choose to stick with their “creamy crack” can be pegged as sell-outs and those that chose to wear their natural hair may be seen as lacking good personal hygiene. In today’s society, the choice of wearing one’s hair natural or relaxed is a big deal and a very personal one, especially for those whose choice was taken away at a young age. This is why it is imperative to have empirical research on how hair affects the identity development of African American women.

Being an insider to this population, White (2005) conducted a study to examine how a Eurocentric standard of beauty was constructed and why African American women were choosing to challenge and transform the Eurocentric standard of beauty. She used an 11 item questionnaire to survey African American women which concluded that for many African American women the decision to go natural was deeply personal and a significant self-transformation experience. The women surveyed described the shame they felt in connection to their natural hair. At an early age many of them learned that their hair was unacceptable which they internalized therefore solidifying in their minds that the Eurocentric standard of beauty was the true standard of beauty. When they decided to go natural it was a freeing decision and an attempt to define themselves and their beauty for themselves and no longer be subject to the Eurocentric standard. By embracing their natural hair, the women in White's (2005) study felt a greater sense of inner pride and strength.

### **African American Racial Identity Development**

Though many African Americans and Whites see us as different, race is a constructed identity; it is one's actions in relation to the culture rather than genetics that distinguishes between Black and White (Buchman, 2001). Our "Blackness is a state of mind" (Cross, 1971, p. 15) and one of the ways we construct our blackness is through our hair. White (2005) leaned towards asserting that racial identity is connected to our hair, however her study like many others fails to reach further to connect hair to the racial identity development of African American women. African Americans are often faced with a duality of sorts when it comes to their racial identity. They must fit into both the White and Black boxes of what is acceptable. Hair for African American women is often an attempt to conjoin our roles within both the African American and White cultures, (Hesse-Biber, Howling, Leavy, & Lovejoy, 2004; Bellinger,

2007). During the transition from chemically straightened hair to natural hair, one may experience feelings similar to the stages of William E. Cross's nigrescence theory.

### **Racial Identity Conceptual Framework**

**Nigrescence Theory.** The nigrescence theory proposed by William E. Cross (1971) explores the stages of African American racial identity development. This theory was formulated during the tumultuous time of the Civil Rights movement in which the allegiance to one's race was quite imperative. During this time African Americans were experiencing both individual and collective change resulting in a sort of psychological liberation (Cross, 1971). Many African Americans were experiencing a conversion from Negro to Black as a result of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the process to becoming Black one must "pass through a series of well-defined stages [as] the Black experience is a process.

In stage one, pre-encounter, "nigrescence is a resocializing experience" in which one typically moves from a "non-Afrocentric identity into one that is Afrocentric" (Cross, 1991, p 190). In this stage the African American is in a state of nativity. They are ruled by Eurocentric worldviews. In this phase many are still content with their station in life and may wonder why others are trying to cause strife. The White standards of beauty are wholly accepted and White women are deified as the ultimate beauty. African Americans in the pre-encounter stage are inherently anti-Black because they have bought into the Western standards which view Whites as the superior race. All these African Americans want to do is assimilate (Cross, 1971). This could be equated with an African American woman who chooses to chemically straighten her hair.

Stage two, encounter, centers around a verbal or visual occurrence or event in one's life that shatters the previously held identity and world view in the pre-encounter stage (Cross, 1991). During the time in which Cross wrote his original theory in 1971, the experience most

African Americans had in the encounter stage was the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When an African American has this kind of experience it can shatter her or his feelings towards the conditions being tolerated by African Americans (Cross, 1971). This state has two parts, the first is experiencing the encounter, and the second is reconciling within oneself the new world perspective that is forming. This stage makes people consider a different interpretation of the African American condition” (Cross, 1971, p. 17). For the first time they may realize “Black is beautiful” (Cross, 1971, p. 17). This may throw the person into an angry frenzy as they obsess over finding their Black identity. In the world of natural hair, this state could describe an African American woman who has seen the movie *Good Hair* (2009) that enlightened her on how damaging chemical relaxers are to the hair and scalp – step one. Upon watching this movie, the African American woman now begins to look into how to transition to natural hair – step two.

During stage three, immersion-emersion, the person is reconciling themselves with the new identity they are forming due to their now changed societal view (Cross, 1991). Another two-part stage, during the immersion phase, African Americans are throwing themselves into any and everything Black. During this phase everything Black is good which may also result in a rage and dislike for Whites. African Americans in stage three begin to accept themselves from their hair to their skin complexion. If they remain in the immersion phase, these people may be considered by others as having a pseudo Black identity because they cannot see the bigger picture. However, those who progress to the emersion phase are beginning to see the bigger picture and how they can help the advancement of their race (Cross, 1971). For African American women experiencing a transition from chemically straightened to natural, this stage may include doing the “big chop” and fully embracing her natural hair. Following the big chop

one may feel a heightened awareness of their identity and how her hair defines her as well as feeling concern over learning how to care for natural hair.

In stage four, internalization, the person has worked through the challenges associated with a changing identity and is settled into their new Black identity (Cross, 1991). This stage may be difficult to progress to depending on how one does in stage three. There are three options that one can move one past the immersion-emersion phase: disappointment and rejection, continuation and fixation, and internalization. Some may have a negative experience in stage three causing them to become frustrated and revert back to previous stages. For those that do move on, they internalize their experiences and newfound Blackness evolving into a clear sense of inner self. This is a critical stage in both racial identity development and for the African American woman with natural hair as this can make or break one in their quest for inner fulfillment as it relates to their identity. In stage five, internalization-commitment, the person has committed to a life-long journey to ensure that their personal sense of Blackness is fulfilled (Cross, 1991). Cross (1991) describes this stage as one that not all enter because some African Americans find a way to constantly translate their Blackness into a plan of action. At this stage African Americans have a sense of inner confidence that is no longer predicated on the ideas and thoughts of others. It is during this stage that an African American woman with natural hair would no longer subscribe to the thoughts and feelings of others concerning her hair.

## **African American Women's Hair and Career**

### **African American Hair and Career Issues**

African American women in corporate American often have to endure various biases due to their choice in hairstyle. These biases can range from gender biases and stereotypes to forced assimilation and lack of leadership development. Despite the strides made to help end

discriminatory practices, gender biases now present themselves in more subtle ways such as policies in “grooming, make-up, hairstyle restrictions and clothing requirements”(Payne & Thakkar, 2012, p 422). Despite the laws in place to prevent discrimination such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act which makes it unlawful for an employer to hire or fire or discriminate against a person due to race/color/religion, employers have found other ways to exclude certain groups (Payne & Thakkar, 2012). By having appearance- based requirements, employers can often slip through the cracks in Title VII because often an employee’s complaint does not meet the standards of imposing undue burden on one sex over the other; or, if the policy is a uniform policy for all, then it does not violate Title VII (Robinson, Franklin, Epermanis, Stowell, 2007). Payne & Thakkar (2012) argue that there is an unconscious gender bias and stereotype in which employers may “unconsciously use physical traits that are irrelevant to employment as criteria [to determine whether an applicant has qualities such as] intelligence, honesty, loyalty, and competence” (Payne & Thakkar, 2012, p. 423). Many African American women in corporate America feel the pressure to assimilate in order to gain social status, but it involves some degree of harm to them as it forces them to abandon their cultural identity, i.e. their natural hairstyles (Onwuachi-Willig, 2010; Payne & Thakkar, 2012). Being forced to conform to social norms perpetuates the bigotry and promotes intergroup hostility. This hostility can lead to negative stereotypes, stigmatization and isolation (Payne & Thakkar, 2012). African American women often have to assimilate into a bicultural role that allows them to conform to professional and dominant culture values while still trying to hold on to the values and behaviors associated with the African American community (Payne & Thakkar, 2012). It is imperative that companies begin to make changes in their grooming policies that ensure equality under the Title VII law.

This means that policies such as no braids, afros, or dreadlocks, which unfairly target African Americans, are enacted because they reflect the White male dominant cultural views.

### **African American Women's Career Development**

#### **Social Cognitive Career Theory**

Social cognitive theory indicates that “career and academic self-efficacy significantly predicts the academic achievement and career choice of people of color” (Hackett & Byars, 1996, p. 323). Cultural influences (such as hair), have yet to be investigated as to how they affect the academic and career self-efficacy (Hackett & Byars, 1996, p. 323). According to Brown (1995) racism and discrimination may play a larger role in the career development of African Americans than has previously been determined. African American women are a population that needs to be studied due to being doubly marginalized on the basis of race and gender. It is important that we do not lump all women together because of this, as African American women have a much different experience and their career efficacy and self-esteem may be influenced by early and ongoing learning experiences (Hackett & Byars, 1996). “There are four major sources of efficacy information: performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, physiological and affective states, and verbal persuasion” (Hackett & Byars, 1996, pg. 324). By utilizing these four sources of efficacy in career development it can create a positive enhancement of one's career efficacy. When a person has a strong efficacy they are more likely to not allow things such as negative comments, racism, or sexism influence their positive expected outcome.

**Performance in the Higher Education Setting.** African Americans, in particular women, are often unable to predict whether their performances will be rewarded or punished because of the mixed signals they often receive (Hackett & Byars, 1996). This creates an inner conflict in the ability to attach true meaning to outcomes, or predict outcomes based on previous



experiences. The mixed signals may come from differential standards applied to African Americans for the same behavior, which is a form of subtle racism (Hackett & Byars, 1996). Differential standards are a serious disservice to those being served because such behavior creates may cause them to believe that their work is not truly adequate despite positive praise from those in authority. If self-efficacy is something that was confirmed and encouraged at home and it has been established as a strong personal element to an African American woman, then they are more likely to recognize situations involving subtle racism and not allow it to erode their efficacy (Hackett & Byars, 1996). But for those who do not have pre-existing, strong self-efficacy, situations in which they receive praise and encouragement may be looked upon as a happenstance situation and not necessarily attributed to their own efforts (Hackett & Byars, 1996, p. 327). When African Americans see that they are not getting the same or similar outcomes as their White peers when the effort put in was matching, it can cause feeling of resentment resulting in diminishing efforts. This is called the “low-effort syndrome” by Ogbu (1991). African Americans become disillusioned because of observed actions and experiences that have presented as barriers to their success. This also creates mistrust among African American employees and their colleagues. This can also cause African American women to strive harder as they often express a desire for a higher education more so than White women but it is often due to the belief that blacks have to work harder and over-prepare in order to get ahead in life (Hackett & Byars, 1996).

**Vicarious Learning.** African American women can greatly benefit from modeling, in which they see someone, preferably someone closer to their age and still trying to make it, achieving their goals. This allows them to build upon their self-efficacy and see that if this person they relate to can make it, they can as well. Age is just as important as race when it comes

to modeling. Aside from giving career inspiration, models can influence style of dress and even hair. Often the models African American women have are other African Americans with straight hair, leaving that aspect of modeling lacking for those with natural hair. The main model that most African American women have is their mothers who often model non-gender specific characteristics and often foster a tradition of independence and resilience (Hackett & Byars, 1996, p. 331). As found in previous research, the hair of an African American woman role model is often very influential in how she too will wear her hair. Career services advisors should consider bringing in models to show African American women that they too can make it. Too often college administrators bring in people that are too far removed from the hardships of being entry-level that the women have a hard time relating to the role models being provided (Hackett & Byars, 1996). In the African American community there tend to be a trickle up effect in which children have a deeper desire to achieve more than their parents when it comes to career and educational success. The models can also display coping skills to these young women such as how to deal with racism and sexism (Hackett & Byars, 1996).

**Physiological and Affective States.** For African American women “the experience of being ethnically different can cause anxiety” (Hackett & Byars, 1996, p 333). As a result, having natural hair can contribute to this anxiety of being “different”. As previously discussed studies suggest, when one straightens their hair, it helps them feel like they stand out less. Feeling anxious or self-conscious, can in turn, impact their sense of self-efficacy. In order combat this anxiety, African American women must develop coping strategies in order to self-soothe and not internalize or overgeneralize racism or discrimination (Hackett & Byars, 1996). Furthermore, these women need to develop a coping skills to help dispel negative efficacy perceptions.

For African American women with natural hair, I would hypothesize that their efficacy may be slightly higher than others. Regardless of their current phase in ethnic identity development, their hairstyle choice can heavily influence their efficacy and self-esteem. Those in the beginning stages of their identity development may have a higher tendency for low-self-esteem and self-efficacy because they have yet to reconcile how they fit into both their ethnic and mainstream roles. Yet those with a greater sense of racial identity may have an increased sense of efficacy and self-esteem because they have reconciled those two aspects of themselves and are more adept at recognizing discrimination or preferential treatment for what it may be. The women further in their development will not allow racism or prejudice to affect how they feel about themselves and their performance.

**Verbal Persuasion.** Verbal encouragement, either positive or negative, will likely have an effect on African American women's self-efficacy (Hackett & Byars, 1996). How their parents teach them as they grow about being an African American can influence their outcome expectations. Some parents may teach their children that success is possible despite their own lack of success, or they may teach that as an African American one must work harder to make it, because of inequality.

It is important that career counselors realize the various factors that may affect African American women in their career development such as racism and racial identity. Interventions need to be made such as encouraging them in their endeavors and modeling to them the success of other African American women who are either close role models such as their mothers or close in age. It is also imperative that we further examine the affects hair has on the career self-efficacy of African American women as the literature currently lacks that information.

## Summary

The previous studies (Bellinger, 2007; Hesse-Biber, Howling, Leavy, & Lovejoy, 2004; Engeln-Maddox, 2006; King & Niabaly, 2012; Weathers, 1991) show that though African American women may differ on opinions of how to style their hair, there is an agreement among African American women that their hair style choice affects multiple aspects of their life, including their career. The hair of an African American woman is an extension of self and a way to subtly combat those Eurocentric beauty standards. However, if it has been embedded into the inner psyche of both African Americans and Whites that Black hair is inferior and unacceptable, so much so that the court system has yet to rule in favor of an African American woman claiming discriminatory practices on the basis of hairstyle (Greene, 2011); how are African American women in higher education leadership navigating through the intersectionality of their racial and career identity and how their hair, if at all, affects their progression? The hair styles of African American women are widely talked about, but few empirical research studies exist on the topic. This study will add to the existing literature on African American hair styles while creating new knowledge on the intersectionality of the career and identity development of African American women in higher education as they navigate through societal constructs of beauty standards while advancing in their career by addressing the following questions.

1. How does race affect the career development and advancement of African American women in higher education leadership?
  - a. What role, if any, does hairstyle choice play in the career development and upward advancement of African American women in higher education leadership?

2. How does racial identity affect the career advancement of African American women in higher education leadership?
  - a. What role, if any, does hairstyle choice have in the identity development of African American women in higher education leadership?
3. How does the intersectionality of career development, racial identity, and hairstyle choice affect the careers of African American women in higher education leadership?

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived career and identity development experiences of African American women in varying higher education administrative roles to examine what role hairstyle choice has played in their career progression. A phenomenological qualitative research design was utilized to carry out this study. This method was chosen due the theoretical framework which posits that how we process the way others perceive us aides in creating our personal narrative (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Savickas, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Qualitative research is the best method to gain knowledge on how participants “interpret their experiences, how they construct their world, [and] what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14).

Qualitative research is a broad and widely accepted term used to describe research that studies a particular phenomenon in context that has yet to be investigated or needs investigation from another angle (Hays & Singh, 2012). In educational disciplines administrators and educators “encounter phenomena that need[s] to be understood in a context to guide our work as well as influence policy” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 4). Phenomenological research is defined as a qualitative research method used to discover and describe the lived experiences of participants in a study (Hays & Singh, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The purpose of this type of study is to be able to understand and view a phenomenon through the eyes of those with direct experience (Hays & Singh, 2012). “There is a unique dialogue between the person and the ordinary world, as self and world cannot be separated according to this approach” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 50). This research utilized a phenomenological qualitative approach to understand and describe how African American women in higher education leadership experience identity and their career

path and the extent to which their hairstyle choice has influenced that development is the focus of this study. Career related activities include but are not limited to job interviews, interactions with co-workers and field colleagues, work evaluations and promotions, job security, and more.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was framed using the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) which postulates that in order to effectively manage our career development we must be able to identify perceived barriers in order to challenge those beliefs and expectations – both real and perceived (Lent, 2005). Through both their self-efficacy and racial identity development one can create a sense of self that can handle the ups and downs one may encounter due to while navigating the world of higher education leadership and the unconscious biases societal constructs of beauty may create. The nigrescence theory by William E. Cross explores the stages of racial identity development. In stage one, pre-encounter, “nigrescence is a resocializing experience” in which one typically moves from a “non-Afrocentric identity into one that is Afrocentric” (Cross, 1991, p 190). Stage two, encounter, centers around an occurrence or event in one’s life that shatters the previously held identity and world-view in the pre-encounter stage (Cross, 1991). In stage three, immersion-emersion, the person reconciles themselves with the new identity they are forming due to their now changed societal view (Cross, 1991). Stage four, internalization, the person has worked through the challenges associated with the changing identity and is settled into their new Black identity (Cross, 1991). In stage five, internalization-commitment, the person has committed to a life-long journey to ensure their personal sense of Blackness is fulfilled (Cross, 1991). Cross (1991) describes this stage as one that not all enter because some African Americans find a way to constantly translate their Blackness into a plan of action. These theories support the research

allowing for a point of reference as the experiences of African American women in higher education are explored.

### **Methodological Assumptions**

To understand the world around us researchers using a qualitative approach often approach their study from a particular worldview to guide their research (Creswell, 2007). A worldview is the basic belief that the researcher brings to the research and often referred to as a paradigm (Creswell, 2007). This study, which seeks to understand the lived workplace and career related experiences of African American women in higher education leadership, employed a social constructivism worldview. Social constructivism focuses on how individuals understand the world around them and their interactions with others (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Utilizing this paradigm allows the researcher to study the complexities of individuals' interactions with the world around them and how they develop and interpret the meanings of those interactions (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). From a social constructivist viewpoint, two people can live and experience the same event but based on their historical and cultural experiences construct different realities of what took place (Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). One truth cannot be relied upon and facts do not exist in social constructivism because each person constructs their own reality based on their experiences and those experiences cannot be discounted (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). This study was influenced by the social constructivist paradigm.

### **Research Design**

This study followed a qualitative phenomenological approach in order to describe the lived career, identity, and hairstyle choice experiences of female African American students with



natural hair. “The purpose of phenomenology is to discover and describe the meaning or essence of participants lived experiences” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 50). To better understand these lived experiences one must learn the internal consciousness and thoughts of the individuals experiencing the phenomena by asking broad, general questions that will lead to a thick description of the experiences. (Creswell, 2007, Hays & Singh, 2012).

In general, phenomenological studies seek to gain knowledge of the lived experiences participants report with regard to a specific phenomenon. In this study the phenomena were the experiences female African American college leaders had in their careers in relation to their identity and hairstyle choice. This topic was chosen by the researcher due to being a quasi-insider of this population. It is the intention of the researcher was to examine whether or not the personal career development of African American women in higher education administration have had to endure issues that may come along with a hairstyle choice.

### **Interview Procedures**

Approval from the college Institution Review Board was obtained prior to any interview taking place. This procedure was completed to ensure the confidentiality and safety of participants’ interview recordings and transcripts. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form stating that they agree to participate in the study and that they understand the process that will be used to protect their right to confidentiality. Contact information for the researcher, committee chair and chair of the Darden College of Education’s Human Subjects Review Committee was provided to participants. The interviews were conducted on the phone. The audio recordings of each interview was saved to the researcher’s hard drive in a password protected file. All participant data were analyzed solely by the researcher, results of which are reported in chapter 4. A reflective field journal was kept throughout the data collection to maintain

reflexivity. Information obtained in this study will remain strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. While parts of the study will be reported in terms of individuals, no identifying information are included in the report that would allow the identity of the participants to be known. In reporting of findings, individuals and affiliated institutions have been given pseudo names. The individual interviews were recorded and transcribed solely for the purpose of the researcher identifying and analyzing themes. The recordings (and any notes from the sessions) are being kept in a locked office drawer of the researcher. All electronic copies are being kept in a password protected file on the researcher's personal computer. Destruction of all data will occur no later than five years after the study has concluded.

### **Selection of Participants**

Forty-three women were invited to participate in this study. The researcher targeted four-year universities with African American women in upper administrative positions. Participants were solicited through an internet search of a variety of colleges and universities personnel listings. Participants were also solicited through the Facebook groups Black Student Affairs Professionals (BLKSAP) and 1922 Administrators, Faculty & Staff at American Universities and Colleges. An email invitation was distributed to women that the researcher had deemed as being of African ancestry. Participants from the Facebook group self-identified as being of African descent and were subsequently sent an email invitation to participate in the study. An attempt was made to identify an equal number of women at both predominately white institutions (PWIs) and historically black institutions (HBCUs). Of the forty-three invitations sent 27 went to PWI and 16 HBCU administrators. Twenty-five responded in the affirmative to participating in the study, but only nineteen were interviewed. This exceeded the desired minimum goal of eight participants. The women self-identified in a set of preliminary questions to ensure they met the

study qualifications, any invited participants who do not self-identify as African American was excluded from the study. Also, to be eligible to participate in this study, participants were to be at the Director level or higher. After agreeing to participate in the study participants engaged in a 30+ minute semi-structured interview with the researcher (Appendix A).

### **Participants and Sampling Criteria**

This study used purposeful sampling in the selection of its participants. Purposeful sampling establishes a specific set of criteria in order to obtain information-rich data (Hays & Singh, 2012). Participants were chosen based on criteria established by the researcher: African American, female, and hold a leadership position at the director level or higher at a four-year institution of higher education. Purposeful sampling was selected to provide a rich-information sample in order to gain an in depth understanding the career and identity development of African American women in higher education leadership and how/if their hairstyle choice made a difference in their career advancement.

### **Interview Location**

The interview location was virtual due to travel constraints of the researcher. Participants were asked to participate in a phone interview that was recorded. This form of data collection “enables the researcher to use the immediacy of the internet [and telephone] to access participants and gather data” (Turney, 2008, p. 925). The virtual nature of this data collection did not present an increased probability to bias however telephone interviews can compromise rapport and lack nonverbal cues (Novick, 2008). Despite this, virtual interviews can also yield more personal accounts to be shared from participants because the nature of a telephone interview causes them to feel more relaxed (Novick, 2008). The researcher will utilize a transcription service to transcribe all interviews.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data analysis consisted of transcribing the interviews, coding, and searching for themes. Each interview was recorded during which the researcher jotted down field notes (Hays & Singh, 2012). Interviewees were asked a series of standardized questions (Appendix I) with follow-up questions asked if elaboration was needed. If an interviewee answered more than one question within a single answer, the second question was subsequently skipped. After all interviews were completed, the researcher read through all transcribed interviews writing margin notes in the process to begin the coding. Information found in the transcribed notes was coded by identifying themes and patterns. A codebook was created with thick descriptions of each code. Once broad themes were identified, the researcher revisited the interviews to identify meta-codes and update the codebook.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

The purpose of this study was to explore the identity and career development of African American women in higher education leadership. This study also explored the role their choice of hairstyle had with regard to their identity and career development. A phenomenological qualitative research design was utilized to carry out this study. This study originally included 19 participants, however 2 participants were excluded due to their inability to complete the interview and the fact that they were not the head of their department. All participant names and other potentially identifying factors have been changed to protect participant confidentiality and anonymity. This chapter will summarize the experiences of the participants utilizing identified themes as compared with those uncovered in the literature review: hair and identity, racial identity development, hair and career, and career development.

### **Participant Demographics**

In the initial contact with participants they were asked to fill out a short demographic survey. Out of the 17 participants, all but two identified as having natural hair. They currently resided in range of areas within the United States. Utilizing the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (<https://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/regions>) categorization of regions the participants live and work in the following areas: 2 in the Region I New England area, 5 in the Region II Northeast area, 6 in the Region III Southeastern area, and 4 in the Region IV-E Upper Midwest area. Twelve of the participants work at predominately white institutions (PWIs) and the remaining five work at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The majority of participants have between 10-15 years of experience in higher education and are at the director level. Only two participants were at the Vice President (VP) level. Slightly more than half of the participants have doctorate degrees while some with their masters mentioned

during their interview that they are currently enrolled in doctoral degree programs. The majority of the participants self-identified as Black versus African American, while two of the participants self-identified as their ethnic heritage/culture. Appendix B offers a more in depth description of each participant.

### **Hair and Identity**

For African American women hair tends to be a popular subject, this was very evident when double the target number of participants volunteered to participate in this study. When the interview moved into the questions about hair, the participants tended to loosen up and be very transparent about their hair experiences.

#### **I am not my Hair, but my hair is me**

In African American pop culture, a song that became an anthem for some entitled “I am Not My Hair” by neo-soul artist India Arie purported that as African American women we are more than our outer appearances. Though this was true for some participants, it was also true that their hair was who they are and heavily represented them and their personality. “When African American women challenge the coded meanings related to their hair, a personal metamorphosis for the woman who has defied the status quo occurs” (Weathers, 1991, p. 60). Their hair can be a representation of how they want others to view them. “This is because hair is an extension of self, and as such it can be a symbolic manifestation of a power that might be denied to one in everyday life” (Weathers, 1991, p. 60). Dr. B, who has been in the field between 10-15 years and currently at the dean level, described her hair as an extension of herself.

I would describe [my hair] as a Scorpio because that’s what I am. It would be kind of like me I guess. I go with the flow and if I feel like I want to go straight, I will go straight, I

want color in it, I put color in it. I want it curly, let's do curls, I want to do weave, let's do weave. My hair is definitely an extension of me.

Her statement also echoes the sentiment of others in which their hair is something they often change, it ebbs and flows with their mood. Another participant, Ranita, who has been in the field between 5-10 years and also at the dean level, has gone as far as to give her hair a nickname. "When I wear my natural hair, I call it my name. My wigs, they all have names, so my hair is [Nita]. Which is a variation of my name, [Nita], and that's just me. It's free, it's fun, it's just nobody in the world like me and I like that, and so I love it." Many others felt similarly about their hair being an extension of themselves. When asked if their hair had a personality, many participants described it as if they were describing themselves because to them, their hair represented who they are and how they want to be viewed by others. Many also chose to wear their hair in a variety of styles often warning their colleagues of their affinity to change their hair, so as not to shock them when their hair is short one day and long the next.

### **Unapologetically Black**

Hair is a representation of their identity as a Black woman, a sentiment shared by some throughout the data. The way in which many of the participants chose to wear their hair reflected prior studies in which African American women's hair is a personal choice rather than one motivated by historical or political influence (Bellinger, 2007; King & Niabaly, 2012). As Layla, a director who has been in the field between 10-15 years put it, "I'm black, and I'm unapologetic about that, so this is what I'm going to do with my hair" when speaking of her decision to go natural, or "go back to my roots" as she put it. Layla, like others wanted to own her blackness and wearing her hair natural was one way in which she could do that. Zoe, also a director in the field between 10-15 years, stated that wearing her hair allows her to "reclaim my

definition of beauty, but at the same time my definition of my own identity. I'm going to represent myself as opposed to conforming to what I believe to be European standards of being beautiful, which to me is long straight hair, and not anything that's considered to be kinky or unattractive or unprofessional.” Hair is a way that African American women can subtly combat the authority that is White America and the Eurocentric beauty standards imposed on women of all races. Weathers (1991) posits that through the wearing of one’s natural hair African American women bear heritage on their heads when they wear styles that originated in Africa.

Despite most describing their hair as having a personality similar to their own, many could not give a clear answer on whether or not the history of African Americans in the US has influenced their hairstyle choice and how it affects their identity. For some, the way they choose to wear their hair is a choice of convenience and ability to rid themselves of expensive salon bills, while others simply enjoy the flexibility of natural hair. The one participant that has a relaxed style, Salexis, who has been in the field for 5-10 years and at the director level, echoed the sentiments of those with natural hair, she chose her hairstyle out of convenience simply stating “I don’t have the time.”

### **Racial Identity Development**

When did you first realize your race? This is not often a question that is posed to Whites; however it is a question and answer that most African Americans are familiar with as was evident in the responses from the study participants. Racial identity development for all participants started at a young age when they either had an encounter that made them realize they were different, or they were taught by their family about the history of their race and the challenges that come along with being African American.



## **The Encounter**

In life, it is the experiences we have that shape who we are. This statement was very true for most of the participants in that it was their experiences throughout life that shaped their view of themselves as Black women. The nigrescence theory proposed by William E. Cross (1971) explored the stages of African American racial identity development or the process of becoming Black in which one must pass through a series of well-defined stages before becoming fully immersed in the black experience. For some like Wanita, who has been in the field for over 30 years, it was her upbringing in the early 60s that influenced her pride in herself and her race. Her description of herself and her pride in her heritage as a Black woman was reminiscent of Cross's stage four, internalization stage in which one is accepting of who they are and grounded in their Black identity. In her family they were taught to be proud of their race and not to care what white folks thought about them. "I've never been one to feel as being challenged or really care as how folks saw my color, just always felt I was [as] competent as them if not more competent." For Wanita, she has always been grounded in who she is as a woman of color. She may have noticed when she was the only woman of color in various settings, but it did not shake her or make her feel less than. Zoe was another participant whose family played a large part in her knowing who she was as a Black woman. Her family was instrumental in helping her understand the stereotypes and negativity she may encounter as a Black woman.

As a child, my family spent a lot of time reinforcing and helping me understand that because we are identified as black in our society, not all people will accept us for who we are based on our skin tone. [...] And being aware that certain situations may come out different because of who we are and what our skin tone may be.

This caused Zoe to be cautious about her language and actions in certain situations due to feeling like stereotypes are being projected on her by Whites. Layla also attributed her strong identity as a black woman to her upbringing in which her mother would make her read various African American history books to ensure she was aware of and proud of her heritage.

My mother was very intentional of making sure we knew our history and we knew where we came from and that we should be proud of those things. Growing up I read a lot of books about slavery and those sorts of things because she made me. And so I think that is a paramount contributor to my identity and I'm very happy with that.

For these women, their upbringing was very influential in shaping how they viewed the world and themselves in it. It was their families that helped them to skip some of those stages Cross speaks of when one "becomes black" and move into the latter stage of being comfortable in who they are as Black women.

For Allendale, a director who has been in the field between 10-15 years, it was the negativity from those of her own race taunting her for her fair skin and long hair that shaped her perception and knowledge of herself as a Black woman. She always felt pride in her background and heritage, but her surroundings:

living in a predominately black neighborhood and seeing all the ills that are results of systemic oppression, you know they stuff that puts us in a position to be second to be last and to be anything by first, and to less successful. I think that put a fire under my butt and motivated me to be more. I think race gave me a tough skin growing up because I am very, very fair. I have pretty long hair, and so some of my earliest critics and criticism about my blackness and questioning about my blackness immediately came from us.

So for Allendale, it was not this sense of pride that was automatically instilled in her due to her surroundings, it was more of a questioning of who she was as a Black person. This also came from Whites as well when her White friends in middle school told her “you’re black, just not black like them” referencing a group of Black girls. For Allendale, she internalized this as having to be based on her skin and hair because she looked more like the White girls than her Black girl friends. It is unfortunate for Allendale, but her encounter came from both fellow Blacks and White peers in which she was subjected to her black experience being invalidated by others.

### **Hair and Career**

The politics of hair can often leave African American women feeling at a loss when it comes to the choices they have of how to wear their hair (Byrd & Tharps, 2014; White, 2005). The participants echoed much of what was found in the literature review when it concerns hair and their career (Bellinger, 2007; King & Niabaly, 2012; Weather, 1991). It was mentioned that there was a concern over the professional perception their hair may create, however not all felt the same. There was a clear distinction between those who were consciously aware of how their hair may be perceived, and those who did not care. The concern of their hairstyle choice and its perceived professionalism often came from other Blacks and specifically when one needed to interview. “I was wearing a short afro trying to let my hair grow out [before starting locs]. I went on a job interview, and I should also say my parents weren’t the most thrilled about my hair choices. [...] My mother was concerned about me going on an interview with an afro in 2005.” This sentiment of having family members tell them their hairstyle choice was inappropriate for the professional setting was echoed by other participants as well.

## **Interview Consciousness**

What should I do with my hair? This was a question that many of the participants pondered when preparing for job interviews. Concerns of how their hair would be perceived by perspective employers was a theme that occurred in this study. Dr. B stating very directly that “it’s known that you don’t go to interviews with braids and stuff. It makes people feel weird. [...] Do something that’s going to be more acceptable to the viewing party. [...] After you get the job you can do what you want.” This was a sentiment echoed by more than half of the participants. Their concern also was influenced by family members who told them they would not get the job with their hair looking “like that,” which was referencing either afros or locs. Many have lived under the impression that when in pursuit of a position, it is important that African American women “tame” their hair to ensure it is aesthetically pleasing to the eye so as not to draw attention to their hair. Many of the participants such as Monique, an Associate VP who has been in the field for 15-20 year, felt as if they had to make a conscious effort for their intelligence and skills to be the focus point and not their hair. “I’ve certainly made an active attempt to style them [my locs] in ways in interviews that wouldn’t pose a distraction from my abilities or perceived distraction from my abilities to demonstrate my fit and potential for a position that I was interviewing for.” She goes on to say

I think my goal has not necessarily been to make them absent from my presentation of self. I have thought to remove them, at least as I seen it as a distraction or potential distraction for people being able to focus on my record of performance, my experience, my potential fit, etc. for the position.

So for Monique, it is about ensuring that her hair does not detract from her accomplishments as a professional. Though it was the same for others, not all felt it was something they needed to consider.

Other participants such as Moni Tee, an Associate Vice Chancellor who has been in the field 15-20 years, felt that “what you see is what you get.” Nicole Moore, a director with 10-15 years in the field, who describes herself and her hairstyle choices as more conservative, did not feel the pressure others felt concerning their hair and pursuing other positions. Others like Nia, a director in the field for 5-10 years, felt there are other aspects of her outward appearance that she is more concerned about when interviewing such as height and weight. Overall, the participants had a varied view of how their hair may or may not have affected their career advancement. All, however, did mention that either they or other Black women colleagues have been consciously aware of how their hair may be perceived by others in an interview.

### **Frequent Hair Changes**

The concerns for their hair choices are not just limited to the interview process. Many of the women discussed their affinity towards changing their hair often. As African American women they feel their choices are so vast including weaves, wigs, and braids in their style rotation along with wearing their natural/real hair. The typical reasoning for wearing styles that use hair that has been purchased is the ease of styling and to protect their natural hair. Those who change their hair frequently have made it known to their peers and superiors when they arrive in a new position to try and thwart any alarm it may cause. Tashay, a director who has been in the field 10-15 years, puts it out there fairly early on with her co-workers that she changes her hair often.

“I pretty much just go ahead and warn my co-workers. Look, I change my hair often, it almost goes with my mood, so just prepare. I will come in with short, long, curly, anything. I just want to put that out there and there’s no need to discuss it further in the day. No you can’t touch my hair unless I tell you [that] you can. Like, I am just very upfront and blunt with it.”

For Tashay, clearly this is her approach to try and minimize the office chatter about her hairstyle choices.

Layla is another participant who frequently changes her hairstyle. Currently sporting a very short cut after being bald for a year, her hair it is often the focal point of discussion in professional settings.

“It doesn’t matter where I work, it doesn’t matter black or white or other, doesn’t matter. It’s [my hair] always the topic of conversation and I think it puzzles people because it’s so drastic when I change it. So I have this full head of hair and then the next week I come in and I don’t have any. And so it’s like what’s going on with her? Is she alright? Do we need to bring her in and have a conversation? But when I did assume this [current work] position, I did inform the person whom I report to that I just want to let you know I change my hair a lot, so don’t think something is going on. So if I have to do that, it’s funny to me at this point and I’m accustomed to people making comments. Not negative, but more inquisitive, I think, about my hair.”

### **Perceptions**

When presented with questions about their thoughts on how others may perceive their hair, most of the women were adamant that the perception of others did not matter to them.

Though they did believe their hair was a representation of them, their personality and how they

wanted others to view them. For Ranita it is a matter of people of all backgrounds realizing that we are diverse and should be accepting of one another's differences. "Whether it's a different eye color or a different shade of skin, it's just an attribute that God has given me. [...] If others can't accept my hair that means they can't accept my racial identity; they can't accept the essence of me." In the field of higher education where diversity is a word so heavily used it has almost become meaningless, are Ranita's sentiments ones that should be shared by others simply in the spirit of diversity?

Others in the study, though they strongly felt that others must take them as they are, did voice the concern they have at times of being viewed as the stereotypical Black person. The cautiousness some had in regards to their hair at the work place was to ensure that they were not viewed as ghetto, militant, or uneducated. For Leslie, when she wears her locs in an intricate hairstyle, she is concerned that others may misjudge her or think she is not intelligent enough to be around the table.

"Sometimes I'm nervous about my hair and how others may perceive it in a professional setting. Because if I do a unique style, and I go to a meeting, I'm wondering if they think I am intelligent enough to be around the table. [...] People can misjudge me based on my hair in other settings. It kind of makes me a little self-conscious and concerned in some areas but I try for the most part [to] be like, this is my hair, I'm going to look nice, I'm never going to look crazy. But then other times, I'm like, I understand the big picture. I never want for myself professionally or any organization I'm representing to be judged because of my appearance, my outward appearance."

For African American women it is a push and pull type of situation when it comes to how they choose to wear their hair. The politics of African American hair are best summed up in

Louis's (2009) article quoting a professor of black studies who states "for black women, you're damned if you do and damned if you don't." Hair is rhetorical and it influences people's perception of a person (White, 2005). It is a legitimate concern that Leslie has in regards to her hair and how she is perceived.

### **Career Development**

In higher education the career path is rarely a straight one that was the case for most of the participants in this study. Coming from a variety of backgrounds from k-12 to healthcare to traditional student affairs, the women in this study often landed in higher education by happenstance. The responses to this study heavily mirrored the social cognitive career construction theoretical framework which indicates that "career and academic self-efficacy significantly predicts the academic achievement and career choice of people of color" (Hackett & Byars, 1996, p. 323). It is the experiences one has that shapes their self-efficacy and provides them with predictors of future performance outcomes (Hackett & Byars, 1996).

### **Performance in the Higher Education Setting**

Prior researchers have theorized that African American women often have difficulty predicting the outcome of their performance whether it is in their academic or career life due to the mixed signals they receive (Hackett & Byars, 1996). This creates an inner conflict in the ability to attach true meaning to outcomes, or predict outcomes based on previous experiences. The mixed signals may come from different standards applied to African Americans for the same behavior, which is a form of subtle racism (Hackett & Byars, 1996). The participants in this study mentioned instances in which these different standards were true in their professional and academic experiences. One respondent, Tashay, a director who has been in the field 10-15 years, mentioned her issues with receiving mixed signals.



“I remember when the director called me in the office to offer me the job, it came with a list of professional development, one being how to talk and I had never heard anybody, including my mentors discuss how I talk and how I present. And that was an exciting moment [being offered the job]. But also it deflated me as I was reminded I didn’t talk good enough for a room full of predominately white people who work in student health. When I interviewed [for another position] [...] there were rams in the bushes over there who were telling me I was the top candidate in this hire process. And when I asked why I didn’t get the job offer, he read the comments and once again my speech, and how I talk, and when I use slang even when it was in reference to how I would engage with students was part of why they think I didn’t fit. [...] And so, I’m always reminded especially when I put myself out there and I have learned to still walk in my authentic, slang, southern self and I’m good enough. It’s just taken me longer than what I wanted it to be.”

Tashay’s experience was not uncommon, though for another participant, Ranita, it started at a young age in her academic studies. It was after Ranita’s family made a move to Kentucky and despite getting all the answers correctly on her assignment, her teacher gave her a B+ grade. When her mother confronted the teacher about her lesser score for grade A work the teacher responded that Ranita could not always expect to receive an A. The issue of not being recognized for her stellar academic achievements came again when she tested into the academically gifted classes but was not allowed to enroll. “Things like that, it did impact me, but I don’t think it affected my personal self-esteem because again, the messages I received at home were very different from the messages I received in the classroom.” Luckily for Ranita, her family put an emphasis on her academics and encouraged her to excel, but for other African Americans it can cause a feeling of resentment resulting in the “low effort syndrome” (Ogbu, 1991) when they

are putting forth the same efforts as their white peers yet not receiving similar results. In the workplace setting when instances like this or Tashay's happen it can create mistrust among African American employees and their colleagues. This can also cause African American women to strive harder as they often express a desire for a higher education more so than White women but it is often due to the belief that blacks have to work harder and over-prepare in order to get ahead in life (Hackett & Byars, 1996).

Several of the participants mentioned their willingness to work harder and take on extra tasks in the workplace just to show their white peers that not only were they capable of doing certain high level tasks, but feeling as if this was necessary to assist in their upward advancement. Monique, a Vice President who has been in the field 10-15 years, felt the pressure to say yes to most service requests. For her "that was really the mechanism, I guess, that I used to let people know that I had some things to offer and that I had some experience." It was the feeling that by agreeing to service requests it demonstrated her ability to lead and manage projects. Though she did her work well and received tenure in her faculty position, she had a sense that those around her felt as if she could not obtain another job. She did not get that same sense when it came to her colleagues however whom she felt received overt attempts to ensure that person stayed at their institution. It is mixed signals such as Monique's experience that can cause African American women to have difficulty predicting their performance outcomes which for some can cause them to lack the confidence in their talent and abilities. Luckily, that was not the case for Monique as she went on to excel in higher positions.

### **Vicarious Learning**

African American women can greatly benefit from modeling, in which they see someone, who is similar to them, achieving their goals. This allows them to build upon their self-efficacy

as they watch others, who look like them, achieve greater heights of attainment. For all of the women in this study, it was the influence of several mentors that helped them reach the level they are at today. These mentors came in the form of faculty, staff, supervisors, colleagues, friends and family. The first influence came from family. Many mentioned their families emphasizing the importance of education and doing better than their parents. While for others it was the influence of other higher education professionals that influenced their entrance into the field. These influencers helped them with advice along the way and even advancement opportunities. Participants often mentioned the importance networking made in their careers, how knowing someone who knows someone was beneficial to their career advancement. Many of the women were also adamant in their own career about being a mentor or encouraging others to find a mentor because from their own experiences, they realize how important it is to have a mentor. When asked what advice they would give to others Tashay stated “mentors are necessary, those who look like us and those that don’t.” Salexis also suggested to “do everything that career services tells you to do, and your mentors tell you to do.” While Moni Tee’s advice was to “mentor up and mentor down.”

### **Physiological and Affective States**

According to Hackett and Byars (1996) African American women can experience anxiety due to being ethnically different from those around them. This was expressed by several study participants when trying to ensure that their hair was not a distraction. For one participant, Salexis, a director who has been in the field 5-10 years, it comes in the form of having a short relaxed hairstyle because she wants to be viewed as conservative. This is not to say that women like Salexis do not like natural hair, but for her it is a matter of convenience and the professional look she wants to portray. Her leaning towards this as a conservative and professional look aligns

with previously discussed studies which suggest that when one straightens their hair, it helps them feel like they stand out less (Bellinger, 2007; Buchman, 2001; Payne & Thakkar, 2012; Weathers, 1991). Salexis had previously had natural hairstyles including no hair at all, but her short relaxed look was the one that made her feel most professional. If one feels anxious or self-conscious about their presentation of self, it can impact their sense of self-efficacy. If a certain hairstyle helps one combat their anxiety or lack of self-efficacy in how others may view them, then it is important to encourage African American women to develop coping skills, such as choosing hairstyles that make them feel professional, to help dispel negative efficacy perceptions.

### **Verbal Persuasion**

Verbal encouragement, both positive and negative, is likely to have an effect on African American women's self-efficacy (Hackett & Byars, 1996). Several of the women within this study expressed their gratitude towards their parents and other family members who encouraged them growing up to excel in academics and career. How their family taught them about being an African American influenced their outcome expectations. Most have now done much better than their parents and continue to strive for greatness because of the high expectations their family instilled in them. For Dr. B her academic achievement was influenced by her mother's two master's degrees stating "I think the only way to beat two masters' degrees is with a PhD." For Moni Tee, it was her grandfather that pushed her to succeed.

My grandfather probably had the greatest influence on me as a little girl, to aspire, to always pushing me to be great and not be so narrowly focused on just the world of Louisiana. He would often tell me that the world was so much bigger than [that area] of Louisiana and to think broadly about what I want to do with my life because the world

was out there waiting on me and so I was never denied an opportunity from growing up to aspire to be great.

### **Summary**

The experiences of these participants helped shape not only who they are as a person, but how they identify as Black women, and how they present themselves in a professional setting. Hair style choice was an integral part of who they are as a person, and many unapologetic in how they chose to wear their hair. All were very grounded in who they are as Black women and how it may affect their professional life. The influence of family was heavily represented in their responses and carried past their academic achievement into their professional development as well. Overall, despite small challenges and concerns along the way, these women were very confident in their skills and ability and how they presented themselves to others.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived career and identity development experiences of African American women in varying higher education administrative roles to examine what role hairstyle choice has played in their career progression. A phenomenological qualitative research design was utilized to carry out this study. This method was chosen due the theoretical framework which posits that how we process the way others perceive us aides in creating our personal narrative (Merriam, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Savickas, 2013). Qualitative research is the best method to gain knowledge on how participants “interpret their experiences, how they construct their world, [and] what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14). This study sought and succeeded to address the following questions:

RQ1. How does race affect the career development and advancement of African American women in higher education leadership?

- a. What role, if any, does hairstyle choice play in the career development and upward advancement of African American women in higher education leadership?

RQ2. How does racial identity affect the career advancement of African American women in higher education leadership?

- a. What role, if any, does hairstyle choice have in the identity development of African American women in higher education leadership?

RQ3. How does the intersectionality of career development, racial identity, and hairstyle choice affect the careers of African American women in higher education leadership?

## Summary of Findings

### Research Question One

The research found that race played a significant role in the career development of African American women in higher education leadership. Though the role it played depended on the respondent. For some, such as Wanda, it was a positive influence as she was an affirmative action hire at an institution that was in the northeast area. She also had many White women who were influential in helping her advance in her career by giving her different opportunities. There were others who felt their race had a positive impact on their advancement such as Layla who sought after specific positions/institutions that she felt allowed her to advance quickly. That was not the case for all however, as others had race negatively impact their career development and advancement, Monique, who stated that when she received tenure at a southern institution, her colleagues seemed to feel as if she had reached her career peak and were surprised when she left to take on a higher role at another institution. She felt that had it been one of her White peers that did the same, they would not have been as shocked. Then there were instances where some felt like they were misinterpreted as the “angry black woman” when a non-person of color could say the exact same thing but it would not be taken offensively. This was also true for bringing ideas to the table when they were with others in leadership if they worked at a PWI. It was like their voice was not heard, but if someone else said the same thing, it was considered a great idea. Other participants however did not feel that race had an effect on their advancement at all but that it was other things that either hindered or helped their ascension. The things that were mentioned as hindrances were weight, ageism, and gender. Participants also mentioned networking, mentoring, and attaining their doctorate degrees as having a positive impact on their advancement.

When it comes to the role that. Though the women had plenty to say about their hair often being hairstyle choice plays in the upward advancement of African American women, it would seem it is not a very significant role a topic of discussion in the work place and having some worries about how they present both their hair and overall outward look in an interview, most of the women stated that hair has not been a factor in their upward advancement. Many did however make mention that most of the African American women you see in higher positions tend to have similar hairstyles, short , convenient styles were mentioned as the “gold standard.” Overall, the women felt that their hair is who they are, it is an extension of themselves and they will wear it how they please and not apologize for its appearance whether or not it makes Whites feel comfortable.

### **Research Question Two**

This study sought to learn how racial identity affects the career advancement of African American women in higher education and it succeeded in learning that the affect will differ depending on who you ask. Some of the participants to the study were very grounded in who they are as Black women and felt that their upbringing was influential in that. Those who mentioned their family upbringing as instilling pride in their heritage were also more prone to being unapologetic in how they presented themselves and how others viewed them. In terms of how hairstyle choice affected the identity development of the study participants, most chose their hairstyle due to convenience versus feeling a connection to their roots as African Americans as some of the literature would suggest. However, they were aware of the current natural hair movement and encouraged by it. For Zoe, it was "the way the US defines beauty. And how it is a way for me to reclaim my definition of beauty, but at the same time my definition of my own identity. [...] I'm going to represent myself as opposed to conforming to what I believe to be



European standards of being beautiful, which to me is long straight hair, and not anything that's considered to be kinky or unattractive or unprofessional." For two participants, Jenny and Leslie though going natural was a freeing choice they made to have control over something in their life and to symbolize a new start. The supposition on what role hairstyle choice has in the identity development of the women in the study is a small one. Most of the women's racial identity development started at a young age when they had their first encounter that made them realize they were different. It was also the mentoring and interactions they had with other people of color that helped to shape their identity and who they are today.

### **Research Question Three**

Lastly, this study sought to examine the intersectionality of career development, racial identity, and hairstyle choice on the career development of African American women in higher education leadership. This study found that the three are intertwined and that hairstyle choice and racial identity cannot be separated. Many of the women expressed that their hair was an extension of them, which aligns with previously mentioned literature. Overall their racial identity showed to be both a hindrance and a positive influence on their upward advancement in higher education. The participants responded that their hair was a part of their overall professional presentation and that they always made sure it was in a neat and preferably non-distracting style whether it was when representing their institution or themselves in an interview.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Due to the nature of self-reporting, it cannot be guaranteed that all responses from participants were factual; they were the perceptions each individual had of their life and career experiences. The interview questions utilized in this study were developed to gain information regarding the lived experiences of African American women in higher education leadership. The

sample of this study was limited to women who identified as African American and who were in a director level or higher position at a four-year institution of higher education.

This qualitative research study did not seek to provide an all-encompassing exploration of the identity and career development of African American women in higher education, rather it sought to provide a glimpse into the lived experiences of study participants. The results of the study are limited to a small number of African American women in higher education.

Furthermore, given the boundaries and design of this study, it did not seek to generalize its results to the larger African American population.

### **Implications for Practice**

It is an unfortunate, yet normal occurrence for African Americans to experience some form of prejudice or racism, the participants to this study revealed the differences they often saw between themselves and their White colleagues when it came to upward advancement and everyday interactions. Evans (2007) noted the lack of African American women in leadership roles within higher education, and though this study was conducted in 2016, almost ten years later, it proved difficult to find African American women participants for this study who worked in positions higher than the director level. The experiences of these women who dealt with feelings of isolation and being undervalued is an important story for the field of higher education to hear in order to help elicit change. Despite spouting rhetoric of diversity, many institutions do not actively display their commitment to diversity. This was evident in this researcher's difficulty in finding a substantial number of African American women at the Vice-President level or higher. It is not enough to just try and increase the number of African Americans or other minorities enrolled in institutions of higher education, it is just as important for diversity to be reflected in the leadership of the institution. All of the participants mentioned the importance

of mentors in their lives and their careers, most of whom looked like them. In order for other African American women to be inspired as these participants were, higher education needs to do a better job at increasing the population of minorities in high level positions so that they can mentor the next generation of leaders in this field.

African American women, a group that endures the intersectionality of being both a woman and an African American, have many obstacles in their path as they advance in their career. Despite the strides that have been made in America to improve things for women and people of color, the interwoven societal standards of beauty do not include African American women. Regardless of how intelligent one may be, the outward appearance plays an important part in one's professional life. For African American women, hair is a large part of who they are and how others perceive them. It is important that the White peers of African American women listen to their experiences and do not dismiss them as novelties. Whites and other peers need to also self-educate themselves about African American culture because it is not the sole responsibility of African Americans to do so. There are so many resources available on the internet that teach anyone about the microaggressions and macroaggressions that plague the Black experience. Each of the women in the study mentioned hair as being a subject that has been approached in a variety of professional settings. Whether it was a curiosity factor from a colleague of a different race or an in depth conversation about their current hairstyle with another African American woman, hair is always a topic. It is important for peers to realize that it is not appropriate for them to touch their African American colleague's hair out of curiosity. It is also not okay to assume a colleague that changes their hair often is ghetto, uneducated, or unworthy of the position they have. These are experiences the women in this study have had to combat in their professional lives and it is a problem. If others would open themselves to self-reflection and

self-education it would make the diverse workplace a much better place for African American women.

It is vital that decision makers in higher education make a commitment to bring more African American women to the table with the policy makers in order to create a better working environment for all and show our students that it is possible for them to attain greater heights within this field. African American women, despite how much they may try to mentor and help others, cannot improve the diversity within the leadership of higher education on their own. It is imperative for Whites to be open to giving opportunities and helping to call out the injustices they see occurring. Simply put, be an ally to a colleague of color.

### **Future Directions**

Though this study gave great insight into the lived experiences of African American women in higher education leadership, the findings would be enhanced with further research. There are several directions one could take however this researcher would suggest a similar study with women in lower level positions. It would be interesting to know what women who are at the entry level are experiencing as they try to ascend the career ladder. Would these women still be as grounded and secure in their identity and hairstyle choices as the women in leadership?

### **Summary**

It is important in the field of higher education that one stays true to the diversity rhetoric that is so often boasted. Embracing different cultures should be one of the main learning priorities higher education leaders have not only for students, but for themselves as educators in this field. The experiences of these women highlight the work that those within this field still have left to do in order for all to feel welcome and embraced. It is also just as important for

African American women to boldly stay committed to being themselves both in character and hairstyle choice and to assist in educating others on why it is okay to do so.

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## APPENDIX A

### Semi-structured Interview Guide

- Identifier:
  - What is your current title?
  - How long have you been in your current position?
  - How many years have you been in higher education?
  - How would you describe your ethnicity?
- Career Path: Please describe your career path up to your current position.
  - Probing questions:

- Do you feel that your racial identity has impacted your career trajectory? If yes, how so? If no, what do you feel had the biggest impact?
  - What was the major influence that helped shape your career path?
- Identity: Describe what role race has played in your identity development?
  - Probing Questions
    - Tell me about the first time you realized you were an “other”?
    - Tell me about the first time, if at all, you recognized that difference in the work place.
    - In your career, do you feel that has race affected your advancement?
- If yes, how so? If no, what do you feel had the biggest impact? Hairstyle Choice: Describe your current hairstyle choice.
  - Has the history of African Americans in the United States influenced your hairstyle choice?
  - How would you describe your hair?
  - Why did you choose your hairstyle?
    - If natural, how many years have you been natural?
    - If relaxed, what other hairstyles, if any, have you worn in your career?
  - In the pursuit of higher positions, has your hairstyle choice ever been something you were consciously concerned/aware of?
    - If so, can you give an example?
  - Has your hair ever been the focal point of discussion in a professional setting?
    - Can you elaborate more on that?
    - Do you feel your current position/upper administration in higher education prohibits, either implied or in policy, that certain types of hair styles are unacceptable?
    - Do you feel your hairstyle choice at any point in your career prohibited you from gaining a prospective job or personal relationship?
      - If so, what has been affected?
  - Does your hair reflect how you want to be perceived by others?
  - In your experiences, what is your worst fear of how others may perceive your hair?
  - Have you encountered a professional or faculty member on campus that has made a positive/negative comment about your chosen hairstyle?
- What advice would you give to other African American women trying to advance in higher education?
- Do you have anything else you would like to add?



## APPENDIX B

### Participant Profiles

<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Years Natural</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Institution Location</u>	<u>Level of Education</u>	<u>Ethnic Self Description</u>	<u>Years of Experience</u>
Allendale	Associate Director	more than 20	PWI	Region IV-E	Masters	Black	10-15
Dr. B	Associate Dean of Student Life and Learning	4 years - but without weave 1.5 years	PWI	Region III	Doctorate	Black	10-15
Tashay	Director, Office of Health and Wellness Promotion	11	PWI	Region IV-E	Masters	Black	10-15
Salexis	Director, Undergraduate Student Success	Relaxed	PWI	Region III	Masters	Haitian	5-10
Layla	Director of Undergraduate Admissions	11	HBCU	Region III	Doctorate	African American	10-15
Monique	Assoc. VP for Academic Affairs	6 years with locs	PWI	Region II	Doctorate	Black	15-20
Gail	Director, Office of Curricular and Academic Support	7-8 years	PWI	Region II	Masters	Jamaican	15-20
Jessica	Director of Student Involvement and Leadership	20+	PWI	Region I	Doctorate	Black	10-15
Wanita	General Counsel	25	HBCU	Region III	Doctorate	Black	30-35
Moni Tee	Senior Associate Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management & Academic Affairs	Short	HBCU	Region III	Doctorate	African American	20-25
Nicole Moore	Director, Building Bridges Between Employment and Education	3	PWI	Region II	Masters	Black	10-15
Ranita	Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Intercultural Life	18 years	PWI	Region II	Doctorate	Black American	5-10
Decatur	Interim Vice President for Student Life/Associate Dean of Students and Special Assistant to the President on Diversity	6-7 years,	PWI	Region III	Doctorate	black	10-15
Nia	Director: Residential Education and Hall Staff	4 years	PWI	Region I	Masters	Black	5-10
Zakiya	Director of Student Engagement & Campus Life	6 years	HBCU	Region IV-E	Masters	African American	10-15
Leslie	Vice President For Student Affairs and Enrollment Management	9 years	HBCU	Region IV-E	PhD	African American	10-15
Jenny	Director, Diversity and Culture Center	12 years	PWI	Region II	PhD	African American	25-30

## VITA

### **Education:**

**Old Dominion University**, Norfolk, VA

**Doctor of Philosophy** in Higher Education, December 2016

Dissertation: An exploration of identity and career development of African American women in higher education leadership: Does hairstyle make a difference?

**North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University**, Greensboro, NC

**Master of Science** in Adult Education with a concentration of Higher Education, May 2011

**University of North Carolina at Wilmington**, Wilmington, NC

**Bachelor of Arts** in English with a minor in Music, July 2007

### **Experience:**

**Office of Student Success** • Barton College • Wilson, NC

**Assistant Director for Career Development** • June 2015 – Present

- Provide career advising sessions in person and virtually on career assessment, career/major decision-making, CV/resume critiques, and job search strategies
- Serve as the primary administrative lead in scheduling and managing student workers.
- Create and present career specific events and workshops to teach career goals that cover all aspects of the career development process
- Maintain content and resources that provide employment information and strategies and assessments such as job posting sites, Optimal Resume, and FOCUS2
- Plan and organize programs that incorporate employers into career services initiatives
- Provide curriculum content for professional development workshops to appropriate target audiences on topics including but not limited to: resume writing, interviewing techniques, job searches, and graduate school preparation
- Provide strategic guidance and leadership to manage the day to day operation of the area of career services
- Supervise student support staff and practicum students by directing job performance standards and promoting accountability
- Collaborate with advising community including academic deans, faculty, and colleagues across campus and beyond
- Collect, tabulate, and compile internship and employment data for graduates according to NACE first destination survey standards
- Oversee annual career fairs
- Enhance internships and job opportunities through partnerships with employers and engaging Barton alumni
- Serve as the Treasurer in the Eastern North Carolina Career Alliance, managing an account over \$30,000 to plan and execute the annual career fair
- Named the Strategy Champion to develop and lead the professional development and leadership program for students
- Increased 2016 annual career fair attendance by 100% from the previous year
- Secured a practicum student for career services to assist in staffing shortage while providing the student with valuable resume building experience in career services



- Administer and interpret FOCUS2 career assessments
- Provide written and video contributions for online and print media for the Office of Student Success
- Promote the Office of Student Success services and events to students, faculty, and employers
- Serve as a member of the International Studies, Community Welfare, and Staff Development committees

**Residence Life • Bethune-Cookman University • Daytona Beach, FL**

**Residence Life Coordinator/Adjunct Professor • July 2014 – May 2015**

- Planned, organized, and coordinated the day-to-day activities and facility maintenance of a 216 bed residential hall
- Exercised and maintained professionalism, confidentiality and respect in addressing a range of issues presented by residents
- Provided lead supervision, training, and evaluation of residence hall staff, including 2 full-time professionals, 6 resident assistants and 2 work-study program participants
- Resolved issues through independent judgment and accurate interpretation of university rules and regulations to ensure the smooth and orderly operation of residence hall
- Managed in-hall budget funds
- Co-chaired resident assistant selection committee to interview and hire over 50 students
- Served on several committees to enrich residential experience including: Residential Curriculum, and Residence Hall Association
- Taught a one credit hour freshmen seminar course instructing 25+ students on subjects such as time management, school history, and college adjustment

**Community College Leadership PhD Program • Old Dominion University • Norfolk, VA**

**Doctoral Graduate Assistant • June 2011 – June 2014**

- Primary administrative point of contact for CCL students assisting with registration, admissions, and distribution of graduate paperwork
- Served as the primary administrative lead in planning the annual summer orientation programming for CCL and Higher Education PhD graduate students
- Planned communication of organizational publications to maintain favorable public and stakeholder perceptions of the CCL program's accomplishments and agenda
- Represented both the CCL and Higher Education PhD programs at conferences and other events to recruit potential students
- Communicated with a variety of top administrators of Virginia Community College system on behalf of the program
- Teaching Assistant for HIED 808 Contemporary Issues in Higher Education
  - Responding to the trends in the market, lead discussion sections to keep students abreast on current issues in Higher Education
  - Served as liaison for students to assist with clarifying assignments
- Researched, developed and implemented opportunities to enhance the student experience; i.e., community and cohort building as well as leadership development through the coordination of the CCL Summer Institute
  - Arranged on campus accommodations for the CCL distance learners

- Coordinated transportation for participants to and from airport or bus station
- Reserved rooms and communicate proper set-up for a variety of events
- Ordered catering for various events and maintaining up-to-date RSVP list to ensure proper amount was served
- Created and distributed all marketing materials to event invitees
- Ensured campus media was present at appropriate events
- Worked with university government relations office to acquire special guest speakers such as Dr. Dietra Trent, Deputy Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Virginia
- Coordinated CCL program Advisory Board meeting; corresponding with members; coordinating free parking; reserving meeting space; ensuring proper technology was in place for distance attendees
- Planned and coordinated annual award luncheon: reserving space; ordering plaques; creating invitations; inviting students, university administration, alumni, and community constituents; creating program and coordinating event speakers
- Coordinated visit of guest scholar: work with fiscal manager to create a contract; maintain communication with guest scholar to provide hotel, flight, meals, and schedule of events
- Ensured that all events remained within allotted budget
- Coordinated networking dinner at the home of a faculty member

**Career Management Center • Old Dominion University • Norfolk, VA**

Instructor/Graduate Intern • August 2012-May 2014

- Teach UNIV 120 Career and Major Exploration (1 section Fall 2012, 2 sections Fall 2013, 2 sections Spring 2014)
  - Designed and taught curriculum related to career and academic major decision making
  - Provided guidance and interpretation of using of self-assessment tools
  - Guided students in exploring individual interests, skills, and career resources
  - Assisted students in defining goals and developing strategies to achieve them
  - Held individual conferences with students to help further explore their interests and decide on a major or career path
- Served as liaison to College of Arts and Letters to provide direct career advising to undergraduate, graduate, and alumni
- Assisted with career related student programs, job fairs, and panel discussions
- Assisted in planning to bring guest speaker to campus for women in leadership series in collaboration with the Women's Center
- Delivered professional development workshops
- Advised students in areas of career planning, resume writing, job and internship searches, and interviewing skills
- Stayed knowledgeable of CareerLink tools to encourage students to utilize it

**Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA**

**Instructor • Spring 2012-Spring 2014**

- Courses taught: UNIV 110 Academic Success (1 section spring 2012, spring 2013, spring 2014), UNIV 120 Career and Major Exploration (1 section Fall 2012, 2 sections Fall 2013 and Spring 2014)
- Counseled, mentored, and advised undergraduate students who are undecided in their major or students on academic warning
- Teach students decision making skills to assist them in selecting a curriculum
- Provided early alert interventions to enhance student success
- Utilize self-assessment inventories and occupational resources to aide in students' career development
- Counsel students on personal issues that may affect their academic progress and refer them to appropriate student support offices when needed
- Engaged students in discussions related to course
- Created activities and lesson plans designed to aid in student success
- Helped students create a plan of action to either choose a major or improve their grades
- Choose appropriate class materials and activities to create a positive learning environment
- Evaluated and graded examinations, assignments, or papers and record grades.
- Informed students of the procedures for completing and submitting class work
- Scheduled and maintained regular office hours to meet with students.

**Career Services • Regent University • Virginia Beach, VA**  
**Cyber Career Coach (Internship) • Fall 2012**

- Provided career advising to undergraduate, graduate, and alumni to help them understand and overcome problems affecting their vocational situations
- Developed and implemented workshops on aspects of career planning
- Assisted with career events such as job fairs
- Evaluated students' or individuals' abilities, interests, and personality characteristics using assessments, interviews, or professional sources
- Conducted follow-up interviews with advisees to determine if their needs have been met
- Advised students regarding resume construction, interviewing techniques, job search strategies, and career-related resources
- Created instructional presentation on using CareerLink
- Facilitated career-related presentations to groups
- Incorporated mission and values of university into work
- Served as a liaison between the Career Services office and the Disability Services for the Workforce Recruitment Program

**Center for Continuing Education • Guilford College • Greensboro, NC**  
**Graduate Intern • August 2010 – April 2011**

- Worked closely with grant team that created Gateways to Success program for adult first-generation students
- Mentored and assisted new and continuing first-generation adult students in need of assistance
- Coordinated and advertised student success workshops for all adult students with emphasis on first-generation

- Assisted with peer mentoring program and training of mentors
- Assisted with new student orientation and other programs or tasks related to retaining new and continuing adult students
- Created a database in both Microsoft Excel and SPSS to track first-generation adult students for research and grant reporting purposes

**Center for Leadership and Service** (now Community and Civic Engagement) • University of North Carolina Pembroke (UNCP) • Pembroke, NC

**AmeriCorps\*VISTA/NC-ACTS! Coordinator** • July 2008 – July 2009

- Connected students with experiential learning opportunities through volunteerism
- Coordinated, advertised, and implemented volunteer opportunities for students such as blood drives and UNCP Day of Service
- Organized and created UNCP's first annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service Challenge
- Served as co-advisor the student service organization
- Managed 50 students in the North Carolina – Activating Citizenship Through Service (NC-ACTS!) AmeriCorps program which awards students \$1000 for 300 hours of service
- Planned the 2008 UNCP homecoming parade
- Planned and coordinated the annual volunteer fair
  - Reached out to local partners and organizations to come to campus and recruit students
- Served as On-Site Coordinator for LeaderShape Institute
- Overall recruitment of student volunteers surpassed 70 organizations served by over 350 volunteers through 13,000 volunteer hours.

### **Awards, Grants, and Activities**

- North Carolina Association of Colleges and Employers (NCACE)
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)
- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)
- Chi Sigma Alpha Student Affairs Honors Society, Old Dominion University, 2014
- President, Graduate Student Organization, Old Dominion University, 2013-2014
  - Provided and implemented a vision for the academic year
  - Acted as chief liaison between university administration and the Graduate Student Organization
  - Managed the organization budget alongside the treasurer
  - Managed a three person executive board
  - Planned both social and professional development events and programs targeted towards graduate students
  - Assisted in planning of the Southeast Regional Conference of the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students
  - Secured guest speaker from the Office of Personnel Management in Washington D.C. for the spring 2014 Legislative Action Days for the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students
- Doctoral Student At-Large, Higher Education Student Association, Old Dominion University 2012

- National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)
- Southern Association for College Student Affairs (SACSA)
- The Golden Key International Honour Society, 2011
- 2011 North Carolina Adult Education Association Spring Scholarship Recipient
- Wadaran L. Kennedy 4.0 GPA Scholar, 2011
- Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society in the field of education, 2011
- The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, 2011
- Co-Author of UNCP's 2009 MLK Challenge and awarded the North Carolina Campus Compact MLK Challenge Grant (\$200)

### **Other Skills and Qualifications**

- Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Publisher)
- Internet Applications (Internet Explorer, Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Safari)
- Banner and Jenzabar student information software
- Blackboard, Adobe Connect, Class Climate, and Moodle web-based course management programs
- FOCUS and Kuder Career Assessments tools
- CareerLink and College Central Network job search tool (Simplicity/NACELink)
- Optimal Resume/Interview
- Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, SnapChat, PowToon)
- Internationally travelled (France, England, Mexico, Scotland, Iceland, Bahamas)