AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF FAMILY OF ORIGIN INFLUENCES ON AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

A qualitative research methodology incorporating a case study approach was utilized in this exploratory study that investigated the impact of family of origin dynamics on African American women’s experiences in the workplace. Ten single, African-American women participated in the study and were interviewed about their current work and past family of origin experiences. This research builds upon a previous study of White women (Philpot, 2004) and examines the extent to which individuals replicate the interpersonal patterns learned in their family of origin at work. Specifically, this study asked individuals to discuss five topics regarding their family and work-related experiences: relationships, authority dynamics, methods for dealing with conflict, role dynamics and influence of race and gender. Interviews were conducted by the same gender, same race investigator of the study. Case analyses were then completed for each interview and overlapping themes were examined across family and work domains in a side by side table. Findings from the study revealed that the participants did replicate some of the interpersonal patterns learned in their family of origin at work. Additionally, six major themes from the interviews were identified: (1) religion was important in participants’ family of origin; (2) female authority figures were dominant in participants’ family of origin and at work; (3) participants held various roles in their family of origin and at work; (4) participants dealt with conflict directly at home and at work; (5) race influenced interactions with family members and colleagues; and (6) gender influenced interactions with family members more often than colleagues. Implications for organizational professionals and managers are discussed. Due to the exploratory nature of the study, generalizability of the findings is limited. Instead, the findings should be used to
contribute to future research in this area by incorporating larger samples of African-American women and exploring these issues in studies with other ethnic groups and men.
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

The definition of “family” differs greatly among groups. While the dominant American definition refers to the traditional nuclear family, African-American families rely on a wider network of kin as well as the community (McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). According to Boyd-Franklin (2003), “Kinship ties make up what is perhaps one of the most enduring and important aspects of the Black African heritage.” (p.6) She stated that strong kinship bonds and relationships with extended family members are characteristic of Black families, and as a result of these strong relationships, many Black families have become extended families in which “blood” and “non-blood” relatives have provided emotional and economic support. Although many writers have discussed both the strengths and deficit views of Black families (Boyd-Franklin, 2003; McCray, 1980), few have discussed the strong work ethic of African-Americans (McLoyd & Enchautegui-de-Jesus, 2005), and even fewer studies have discussed African-American women’s experiences working outside of the home or the influence of family of origin dynamics on the behavior of African-American women in workplace.

Work is an essential part of life for most people living in the United States, as it provides a vehicle for individuals to support themselves and their families. This is especially true for people of color, particularly African-Americans, despite racial
inequalities and institutional barriers that have restricted the career success of African-Americans from one generation to the next (Bowman, 1991). Black women have historically worked outside the home long before it became the norm in the United States and perceive work and educational achievement as critical to their psychological and physical survival (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). African-American parents expect their children to surpass their achievements and to pursue careers that will offer them economic security. Although these parents are very supportive of their children who make an honest living and are self-supporting, those who are able to achieve success in careers where access was previously denied to Black people are often held in high regard (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). Thus, work is highly valued in the African-American community, despite the perception that African-Americans do not work and survive mainly due to welfare (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005).

In addition to the economic security that individuals obtain by working, for many individuals, the workplace provides a vehicle for interacting with others, often leading to increased self-confidence and a sense of self. Many theories of psychology support the idea that childhood experiences influence the lives of adults. Sigmund Freud believed that adult personality is dependent upon early childhood experiences, which contribute to adult behavior. Other psychologists have supported the idea that an individual’s ability to function in adulthood is largely determined by their experiences as children (Bowen, 1985; Miller, 1983). Kern and Peluso (1999) believe that employees may use the patterns of interaction that they learned from their family-of-origin and behave in similar ways with their colleagues. Both family systems and psychodynamic theorists have posited that
adults will interact with others in ways that are reminiscent of the patterns initially expressed in their family of origin (Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991).

In family systems theory, a primary concept is that the family includes interconnected members who influence each other in predictable and recurring ways (Van Velsor & Cox, 2000). Individuals learn skills that enable them to function in larger and more formal settings, such as school and the workplace, from their families. Family experiences also help individuals understand and shape their expectations of how the world will interact with them (Kern & Peluso, 1999). Bowen (1985) believed that members of families replicate the same emotional patterns in society and that family and societal emotional forces are reciprocal, each influencing the other and being influenced by the other.

Family of origin theory has gained great acceptance when applied to marital dynamics, but there has been considerably less research extending this theory to relationships occurring in the workplace (Weinberg & Mauksch, 1991). Kern and Peluso (1999) agree, stating that “one important aspect that has received little attention in the field of organizational behavior is the interactional effects of one’s family-of-origin dynamics and workplace behavior.” (p. 236) They believe that there are similarities between families and organizations, particularly that both “depend on a hierarchical model of relationships- coupled with a number of other equally important organization and family dynamics- to achieve their goals.” (p. 237) Given the similarities between families and organizations, it seems feasible to suggest that organizational consultants and executive coaches could utilize family systems principles with individuals in the
workplace in an effort to resolve potential interpersonal conflicts or other organizational difficulties.

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**Review of the Literature**

*Families and Organizations: A Comparison*

There are similarities and differences between families and organizations. According to Kern and Peluso (1999), the family unit can be viewed as an organization: “The family is the social organization from which one acquires skills to lead and interact within more formal organizational settings, such as school and the workplace.” (p. 237) Just as in organizations, individuals are assigned tasks within their families and roles that they are expected to take up. Additionally, like organizations, the family is made up of hierarchical structures of relationships and boundaries, and individuals may have multiple roles within both their families of origin and at work (Kern & Peluso, 1999; Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1980). Also, each system has implicit and explicit rules that members are expected to abide by (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1980).

There are also differences between families and organizations. Members are born into their families but are able to choose the organizations in which they become members. Carter and McGoldrick (1999) supported this concept, stating that “unlike other organizations, families incorporate new members only by birth, adoption, commitment, or marriage, and members can only leave by death, if then.” (p. 2) Additionally, while familial relationships are generally more intense, loving, emotional, nurturing and complex, behavior at work is largely due to financial need and personal accomplishments (Kern & Peluso, 1999). It is generally more difficult for individuals to
exit their family than it is for them to leave organizations (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1980). Even if individuals chose to end relationships with family members, they would still hold membership in the family, as opposed to individuals who are able to terminate a relationship with an organization and join another one. Carter and McGoldrick (1999) agree, asserting that organizations can fire members or members can choose to resign from an organization if they wish.

Race, gender and culture can also influence individuals’ experiences in their families and workplaces. Although there is no such thing as the African-American family, researchers have identified five commonalities of African-American families: (1) kinship bonds, (2) role flexibility, (3) strong religious orientation, (4) a strong work and education ethic, and (5) flexible and strong coping skills (Kane, 2000; Boyd-Franklin, 2003). Kinship bonds can take several forms in African-American families. Examples include the three generation household where family members share financial and human resources for the family; family members living in separate residences but maintaining a close relationship with relatives who do not live together; and adopting relationships with individuals who are not biologically related but are regarded as family members. These non-blood relatives are often neighbors or close family friends who are sometimes regarded as “aunts” or “uncles” (Kane, 2000). These kinship networks help to maintain close extended family ties and are regarded as positive in the African-American community. Family roles in African-American families are flexible and shared between men and women (Kane, 2000). Responsibilities for financial support, childcare, elderly care, and any other household responsibilities are based on abilities rather than gender, and can be shared by parents as well as extended kin such as grandparents, aunts and
uncles. The Black church provides opportunities for leadership, support and self-expression and teaches values that African-Americans rely on in times of struggle and adversity. Because African-American parents hope for their children to surpass them socioeconomically, they encourage high academic performance and ambitious career goals (Hines & Boyd-Franklin, 2005). They believe that academic success as well as responsibilities in the home will lead to career success despite societal barriers for African-Americans. Finally, a combination of the previous four factors is believed to lead to flexible coping skills among African-Americans (Kane, 2000). These coping skills are viewed as necessary for survival in an environment filled with racism and oppression, and children are taught about various forms of oppression and how to survive despite the oppression they may encounter.

In a study by Connie Kane (1998) examining self-perceived levels of health in the families or origin of African-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic-American college students, African-American students rated their families higher than the other two groups in their perceptions of autonomy, clarity of expression, range of feelings and respect for others. This study supports literature asserting that African-Americans tend to have strong kinship bonds and extended family networks, and that African-American children are expected to assume greater responsibility in the family at an early age. Additionally, the higher rating on clarity of expression is consistent with the literature claiming that African-Americans favor a more direct style of communication. Finally, African-American students reported perceptions of greater awareness of each other’s feelings among family members and freer self-expression. Given the level of interdependence between families and organizations, it is necessary to examine the interpersonal patterns
of individuals in their families of origin and at work. Additionally, as the United States becomes more ethnically diverse, the influence of race and gender in families and in the workplace must also be explored.

*Family Systems Theory*

Family systems theory emerged from the work of Ludwig Von Bertalanffy (1973) on general systems theory, which posited that organisms are complex, organized, and interactive. General systems theory examines the way components of a system interact with one another to form a whole. Rather than focusing on the separate parts, a systems perspective focuses on the interrelation and interdependence of all the parts (Bertalanffy, 1973). A systems perspective permits one to see how a change in one component of the system affects the other components of the system, which in turn affects the initial component. Because the family is a complex organization, the application of the systems perspective has particular relevance to the study of the families.

There are a variety of approaches to studying families. With experiential approaches, the main focus is on becoming aware of feelings, being able to express feelings to others, and having more spontaneous relationships (Bowen, 1985). The structural approach uses theory to focus on the nature of the family problem and a therapeutic method based on theory. Structural family therapy provides a framework that brings order and meaning to transactions that occur in families (Nichols and Schwartz, 2008). There are also problem-solving and humanistic methods for working with families, as well as methods derived from psychoanalysis. For the purposes of this research, the Bowen approach to family therapy is discussed in detail because of its
concentration on individuals and their extended family relationships (Nichols and Schwartz, 2008). Additionally, this method supports the idea that individuals’ family of origin experiences influence adult behavior and relationships and thus, this approach is applicable to the workplace.

*The Bowen approach to family systems theory.*

Murray Bowen utilized a systems approach in thinking about the family. He viewed the family as a multigenerational set of relationships that shaped the extent of individuality and togetherness of family members, and used six concepts to help explain the dynamics of family relationships: (1) differentiation of self, (2) triangles, (3) nuclear family emotional process, (4) family projection process, (5) multigenerational transition process, and (6) sibling position (Nichols & Schwartz, 2008). *Differentiation of self* is the ability to think, reflect and control emotionality so an individual does not respond automatically to internal and external pressures and is able to be objective and act rationally. Undifferentiated individuals react emotionally while differentiated individuals are able to think things through before responding to a situation. Individuals often manage undifferentiation through *emotional cutoff,* avoiding personal conversations or having third parties present when they are with family members. *Emotional triangles* are relationships involving third parties that usually involve anxiety. When two people have an issue that they are unable to work out and tension increases, a third party becomes involved to help manage the anxiety between the two people having problems. Triangles are problematic because they have the ability to damage the original relationship if they are ongoing. The *nuclear family emotional process* refers to the
pattern of emotional forces that occur in a family over a period of time. A high level of emotionality in the family results in fusion of families. The family projection process occurs when undifferentiated parents transfer this trait to their children. The mutigenerational transmission process occurs when anxiety is passed down from generation to generation. Bowen believed that the child most involved in the family fusion will be the most undifferentiated. Also, he asserted that the sibling position influenced the personality characteristics that children developed in their families. He believed that firstborns identified with power and authority and used their strength to prevent younger siblings from dominating them, while laterborns were more likely to identify with the oppressed and to question things. Lackie (1983) provided another example of how the birth order position affects children, stating that “the overly parentified child has access to authority that the parents delegate or abdicate.” (p. 313)

According to Bowen, the major problem in families is fusion and normal family development occurs when family members are differentiated and anxiety is low (Nichols and Schwartz, 2008).

*Gender and ethnicity in family therapy.*

Bowenian therapists Monica McGoldrick and Betty Carter added gender and ethnicity as factors of concern when working with families (Nichols & Schwartz, 2008). According to McGoldrick (1998), gender, ethnicity and culture were previously perceived to be features of some families rather than characteristics to be observed and understood in all families. Additionally, one of the critiques of family therapy has been the notion of the nuclear family as the only type of family. The nuclear family was
previously seen as the ideal, self-sufficient model, with other family structures being perceived as deficient. However, research has shown that ethnic groups such as African-Americans rely on a wider kinship network, which often includes grandparents, aunts and uncles, and even non-blood neighbors in the community (Boyd-Franklin, 2005; McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005). African-Americans regard these networks as strong and crucial to childrearing and the survival of the family. As the United States continues to become more ethnically diverse, it is important for professionals working with families to adopt a more flexible definition of family to include members outside of the immediate family. Professionals working with families must take into consideration the role of the communities in which families live as well as relationships with extended family members, teachers, mentors, neighbors and other community members (McGoldrick, 1998). McGoldrick and Giordano (1999) elaborate, stating:

“Ethnicity is a social reality that will require the therapist to be more culturally competent as we enter the 21st century. Race gender, religion, class, immigration status, age, sexual orientation and disability are also critical identity issues that we must consider in order to understand our clients. Add to this the rapidly changing nature of family life, and it becomes clear that we need to reexamine our therapy approaches in a larger multicultural context.” (p. 25)

*Family systems theory applied to organizations.*

An individual’s family of origin provides the first opportunities for developing interpersonal skills that he or she will use in relationships in more formal organizations, such as school and work (Kern & Peluso, 1999; Nichols and Schwartz, 2008). Like organizations, families can be viewed as groups of individuals with specific tasks that they are assigned to in order to achieve organizational goals and have a hierarchical structure of relationships and tasks. Additionally, organizations, like families, have
cultures where the values and norms are explicit and implicit and members are expected to follow them (Kern & Peluso, 1999). Because of the assumption that family of origin experiences influence experiences in other organizational settings, it is suggested that family systems theory can be used as a lens for understanding behavior in organizations and to deal with interpersonal issues more effectively (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1980; Kern & Peluso, 1999).

Organizational Theory

Organizational Theory was also derived from systems theory. In his work with organizations, Peter Senge (2006) used systems theory to understand organizational questions and issues. He believed that the theory was useful for comprehending and addressing the whole system as well as the interrelationships between the parts of the system. Although systems theory was originally proposed by Bertalannfy in the 1920’s, it was not applied to organizations until many years later.

Classical Organizational Theory was one of the first organizational theories and represented a merger of Scientific Management, Bureaucratic Theory, and Administrative Theory. Frederick Taylor (1911) developed Scientific Management Theory, which had four basic principles: Find the one “best way” to perform each task; carefully match each worker to each task; closely supervise workers and use reward and punishment as motivators; and the task of management is planning and control. While Taylor’s theory was successful in industrial settings, it was not as successful in modern organizations. Max Weber (1974) expanded on Taylor’s theory, stressing the need to reduce ambiguity in organizations. He believed that organizations should have clear lines of authority and
control. His Bureaucratic Theory emphasized the importance on a hierarchical structure of power in organizations. Classical Management Theory was rigid and maintained an emphasis on being able to control and manipulate workers and their environment. Systems theory, however, viewed individual and organizational functioning in the context of living systems that were interactive (Bertalanffy, 1973).

Kurt Lewin (1975) was very influential in developing the systems perspective within organizational theory and one of the first to study group dynamics and organizational development. Currently, organizational theory views organizational structure as a pattern of relationships among the parts of an organization, and posits that the relationship between the environment and the organizational structure is important. Other theories, such as Embedded Intergroup Relations Theory, Emotional Intelligence, and Role Theory provide additional perspectives for working with individuals, groups, and organizations.

*Embedded intergroup relations theory (EIRT).*

Alderfer (1994) believed that individuals are influenced by the effects of group and intergroup dynamics on human relationships, and that the patterns that individuals develop for relating to their own or other groups influence their individual experiences. According to Alderfer (1982), membership in different groups exist in the workplace as well as all other facets of an individual’s life. Two types of groups exist: identity groups and organizational groups. Identity groups are usually groups that members are born into (i.e. race, ethnicity, and gender) and often consist of members that share some common biological factors or similar historical experiences. Organizational groups, on the other
hand, are made up of members who share common positions within an organization, have similar work experiences, and have similar organizational views. Organizational groups usually follow a division of labor and a hierarchical system of authority (Alderfer, 1982).

Alderfer posited that intergroup relations should be examined by the following characteristics: (1) group boundaries, (2) power differences, (3) affective patterns, (4) cognitive formations, including distortions, and (5) leadership behavior. *Boundaries* around a group determine the membership within the group, and can be physical or psychological. Permeability refers to the way in which groups regulate its transaction with other groups. Groups can be overbounded or underbounded. When groups are underbounded, members feel fragmented, conflicted, and isolated and may become immobilized because they lack a sense of direction (Alderfer, 1980). Additionally, role expectations tend to be unclear and conflicting. When groups are overbounded, people feel restricted and there is a lack of creativity and stimulation (Alderfer, 1980). Role expectations tend to be highly precise and detailed. Optimal boundedness occurs when groups have an adequate amount permeability to allow for transactions with their environments (Alderfer, 1980). *Power differences* between groups often result in the varying availability of resources to different groups. For instance, the more resources that are available to a group, the more power the group has. *Affective patterns* include both positive and negative feelings in reference to members of the in-group and members of out-groups (Alderfer, 1988). Specifically, affective patterns refer to the extent to which groups attribute mainly positive feelings toward their own group and project negative feelings onto other groups. *Cognitive formations* arise as a result of power differences and affective patterns; for instance, groups may develop their own language and
condition members’ perceptions in order to explain the nature of members’ experiences and influence relationships with other groups. Leadership behavior refers to the behavior of formal or informal group leaders, which causes and is caused by the pattern of intergroup relationships and behavior (Alderfer, 1986). Although Embedded Intergroup Relations Theory acknowledges individual characteristics and personality, in practice it places more emphasis on salient group memberships in helping to understand organizations and group behavior. Embedded Intergroup Relations Theory is relevant to this study because of its focus on identity (e.g., race and gender) and organizational groups in understanding group and individual behavior.

Emotional intelligence.

Emotional Intelligence (EI) has become a widespread interest to psychologists in recent years, and there are many debates over the definition of EI, arguments that regard both terminology and operationalizations. Although Daniel Goleman made the concept widely popular with the publication of his book, Emotional Intelligence, it was Peter Salovey and Jack Mayer (1990) who first introduced the term “emotional intelligence,” describing it as a type of information processing that includes accurate appraisal of emotions in oneself and others, appropriate expression of emotion, and adaptive regulation of emotion in such a way as to enhance living (Tsaousis & Nikolau, 2002; Cherniss, 2001). This definition has been amended and conceptualized EI as the ability to recognize the meanings of emotions and their relationships and to reason and problem-solve on the basis of them.
There are three main approaches to studying EI. The first model is the ability-based model, proposed by Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (1998). According to this model, EI exclusively describes abilities such as perceiving emotions, using emotions, understanding emotions and management of emotions. The second model is trait EI, produced by Goleman and Bar-On (Bar-On, 1997). They argued that trait EI refers to an individual's self-perceptions of his or her emotional abilities. This includes behavioral dispositions and self perceived abilities. The third model is the mixed model of EI, which was introduced by Goleman. The mixed model of EI focuses on various competencies and skills that drive leadership performance and identifies four main constructs in which these competencies are included: self awareness, self management, social awareness and relationship management. Although there are three different models of emotional intelligence, all of which reflect disagreement in the precise measure of EI, there is a general consensus that EI is the ability to recognize and manage one’s emotions, as well as to recognize and manage the emotions of others, with self awareness being the cornerstone of EI (Goleman, 1995). Emotional Intelligence is relevant to this study because of its influence on quality of relationships between individuals (Cherniss, 2001) and members of groups in organizations. Additionally, research suggests that individuals with the ability to perceive, identify, and manage emotions have the emotional competencies that are important for success in any job (Cherniss, 2000).

Role theory.

According to Levinson (1959), “Roles represent ways of carrying out the functions for which positions exist- ways which are generally agreed upon within a
Levinson (1959) believed that individuals in organizations developed patterns of role behavior based on the expectations of the organization as well their personal values, beliefs, abilities, and group memberships. One of the major questions regarding role theory is: Does an individual shape the role, or does the role shape the individual? According to Lieberman (1950), one of the fundamental beliefs of role theory is that an individual’s attitude will be influenced by the role that he or she occupies in the social system. Katz and Kahn (1978) agreed stating, “In formal organizations, the roles individuals play are more a function of the social setting than of their own personality characteristics.” While Katz and Kahn (1978) minimized the role of personality when discussing roles within an organization, Levinson (1959) paid more attention to the relationship between personality and role. Levinson (1959) took into account the unconscious processes that come into play when looking at role. He viewed role as an interdisciplinary concept. Levinson (1959) also believed that hierarchy played an important role in how much choice an individual has within his or her role. For example, the more elevated you are in the hierarchy, the more choices you have in how you define your role. Levinson (1959) stated, “Our understanding of personal role definition will remain seriously impaired as long as we fail to place it, analytically, in both intrapersonal and structural-environmental contexts.”

Another question regarding role theory is: What makes people engage or disengage from their roles? William Kahn (1990) described engagement and disengagement as the “behaviors by which people bring in or leave out their personal selves during work role performances. He stated that personal engagement was “the harnessing of members’ selves to the work role,” (p. 694) while personal disengaging
was the “uncoupling self from the role; people’s behaviors display suppression of their expressive and energetic selves in discharging role obligations (p. 701).” Sometimes individuals’ decisions to engage or disengage from their role is based on whether they believe that their work is perceived as important or valuable. Zurcher (1983) described role marginality as being situated in complicated social settings and involving multiple pushes and pulls in behavioral expectations from different groups of people. Some proponents of Role Theory emphasize the social system in which individuals are placed when looking at roles, while others places more emphasis on individual characteristics and personality in helping to understand behavior in organizations.

Because people often have multiple roles at home and at work, it is likely that individuals experience role conflict between multiple roles in the home, multiple roles at work, or between roles at home and work. Role conflict occurs when two or more sets of pressures act so that compliance with one set of roles make it more difficult to comply with the other set (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Work-family conflict is a type of role conflict that occurs when pressure to comply with the roles at work are incompatible with the roles at home, or vice versa. This conflict represents the belief that work and family lives are interdependent (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), and thus role theory is relevant to this study.

The Research

This research builds upon a previous study (Philpot, 2004) and examines the extent to which family of origin experiences influence the experiences of African-American women at work. The areas of focus for this study are work and family
relationships, authority at work and at home, work and family conflict, role dynamics at work and in the family of origin, and the influence of race and gender at work and in the family of origin. The study examines five question areas:

1. Do individuals replicate the same interpersonal patterns at work and in their family of origin?

2. Do individuals deal with authority in the workplace in the same way as they deal with authority in their family of origin?

3. Do individuals deal with conflict at work in the same way that they deal with conflict in their family of origin?

4. Do individuals take on the same roles at work and in their family of origin?

5. Does race and gender influence individuals’ experiences at work and in their family of origin?

Although some research has begun to examine the relationship between work and family life in general, studies focusing on African-Americans, and African-American women in particular, are limited. Thus, this study will hopefully influence the creation of new theories regarding the influence of family of origin experiences on the experiences of African-American women at work. This study is exploratory, and thus a qualitative approach to research was employed. As a result of this research, major themes were identified and discussed in detail.
CHAPTER II

Method

Participants

A total of eighteen African-American women were interviewed for this study. Of the eighteen participants, the investigator identified ten women for participation in the study. Ten women were chosen as participants for two main reasons. First, the previous study on this topic (Philpot, 2004) included ten White, female participants, and the investigator wanted to maintain some consistency with the previous study. Second, although several of the women interviewed indicated that they were African-American in the initial screening, it was found that some of them identified as Black, but not African-American. Therefore, they did not meet all of the criteria for the study and were not chosen as participants. Additionally, in order to have spread in the age range of participants, the investigator chose ten participants who varied in age. All ten participants were currently living in large cities in the United States and were between twenty-six and thirty-nine years of age. Seven of the participants held master’s degrees and three held bachelor’s degrees. One of the participants with her bachelor’s degree was working towards her master’s degree at the time of the interview. All of the participants had at least four years of professional work experience as managers, analysts, human resources professionals, programmers and business owners and worked in various industries, including public relations, healthcare, government, banking, higher education,
entertainment and media. All of the women were single and had no children. Two of the participants were engaged at the time of the interview and several other participants were involved in romantic relationships.

Several family structures were reported by participants. Three of the participants’ parents were married at the time of the interview; three of the participants’ parents were divorced; two participants had one parent who was deceased; one participant was part of a blended family with one step parent; and one of the participant’s parents were never married and she had no contact with her father. All of the participants grew up with at least one sibling and five of the participants had half or step siblings.

Recruitment of Participants

To recruit participants, the investigator sent a brief description and criteria for participation in the study to individuals in her personal and professional network and asked them to forward the information to any individuals who they thought would be interested in participating in the study. Once potential participants were identified- they either emailed the investigator directly to express interest or their contact information was forwarded by someone in the investigator’s network- they were contacted by phone and provided with the purpose and a brief description of the research as well as details regarding participation. Additionally, a screening was completed to ensure that the women met all of the criteria for participation in the study, including: (1) Identification as an African-American woman between the ages of 25 and 40, (2) Single, with no children and (3) Currently employed with at least four years of full-time work experience. Finally, each participant was sent an email confirming her interview date and time. Additionally,
participants were asked to forward information regarding the research to people in their personal or professional networks who could be potential participants. Participation in the study was voluntary and none of the participants were paid.

Procedure

Interviews were conducted either in the home of the participant or investigator. Before each interview was conducted, the purpose of the study was reviewed and the participant was given the opportunity to ask questions. Each participant was reminded that her responses to the interview questions would be kept confidential, that her participation was voluntary, and that she had the right to refuse to answer any of the questions or stop the interview at any time. Next, each participant completed a background information form and a consent form, including authorization to audiotape the interview. Once the forms were reviewed to ensure completion, each interview was conducted and written notes were taken.

The length of interviews ranged between seventy five and one hundred fifty minutes. At the end of each interview, the participant was provided with another opportunity to ask questions and reminded that she could contact the investigator at any time with additional questions or concerns. Finally, each participant was verbally thanked for her participation and a card thanking her for her participation in the study was sent within one week following the interview. All consent forms, background information forms, audio recordings, transcripts and written notes were reviewed and handled by the investigator only and were concealed in a private location in the investigator’s home.
Instruments

Telephone Screening (Appendix A)

Once potential participants were identified through personal and professional networks, each was contacted by telephone and the purpose and details of the study were provided. Additionally, individuals were given the opportunity to ask questions about the study and were asked if they were interested in participating. If individuals were not interested in participating in the study, they were thanked for their time and provided with the investigator’s contact information in case they had additional questions or changed their minds about participating in the study. If individuals were interested in participating in the study, the investigator verified that participants were 1) African-American women between the ages of 25 and 40, 2) Single, without children and 3) Currently employed with at least four years full-time work experience. Once this information was verified, an appointment was set up for the interview and a confirmation e-mail was sent to the participant, including the investigator’s contact information in case participants had questions prior to the interview.

Consent Form (Appendix B)

Prior to the start of the interview, participants were asked to sign a written consent form to confirm their voluntary participation in the study and to provide permission for the interview to be audio taped. The consent form explained the purpose of the study and details for participation, risks and benefits of the study, a confidentiality statement, and contact information for the investigator and study advisor in case participants had questions over the duration of the study. It also explained the voluntary nature of the
study and the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any questions without penalty. Further, participants were informed that they could decline to have the interview audio taped and still participate in the study. Participants were asked to sign the consent form before the interview was conducted and provided with a copy for her records.

*Background Information Form (Appendix C)*

Prior to the start of the interview, participants were asked to complete the Background Information Form, which asked for information regarding contact information, employment, education level, birth order and number of siblings. For the employment section, participants were asked to include the following information for at least two positions: Title/position, type of industry, length of time in position and work responsibilities.

*Interview Protocol (Appendix D)*

Because this study builds upon a previous study (Philpot, 2004), the interview protocol was adapted from the previous study and designed to examine the interpersonal patterns used by African-American women in their family of origin and at work. During the interview, participants were asked to answer questions about work and family relationships, authority at work and in the family of origin, work and family conflict, role dynamics at work and in the family and influence of race and gender on interactions with family members and colleagues. The race and gender portion of the interview protocol was added because the investigator’s sample consisted of all African-American women. The interview protocol consisted of 50 questions. The first part of the interview protocol
consisted of work-related questions, the second part of the protocol consisted of family of origin questions and the final part of the protocol focused on similarities and differences between participants’ experiences in their family of origin and at work.

*List of Common Roles (Appendix E)*

This instrument was also adapted from a previous study (Philpot, 2004) and included 21 archetypal emotional and/or relational roles. Additionally, an “other” option was included so participants could identify a role that may not have been included. During the family and work sections of the interview, each participant was asked to select the role that most applied to her in her family of origin and at work.

*Treatment of the Data*

The names of participants as well as any names that were mentioned in the interviews were changed to protect the confidentiality of participants. Additionally, company names and any other information that would reveal the identity of participants was deleted or changed. Finally, any quotations with information that would reveal the identity of participants were changed to ensure confidentiality of participants.

*Analysis of the Data*

After each interview was completed, it was transcribed verbatim. Interviews were then analyzed against the five original research topics: relationships, authority relations, methods for dealing with conflict, role dynamics and influence of race and gender on interpersonal relationships. In order to identify themes across family of origin and work,
responses to questions on each topic were placed side by side in a table and compared across the family of origin and work domains.

A multiple case study design was used for this study. According to Yin (2009), the case study method is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political and related phenomena. Further, the case study method allows investigators to retain meaningful characteristics of real-life events, such as small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, individual life cycles and the maturation of industries (Yin, 2009). When considering which research method to use, researchers need to consider three conditions: (1) the type of research question posed, (2) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavioral events, and (3) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events. The case study method is often used to answer more exploratory “how” and why” research questions, requires no control over behavioral events and focuses on contemporary events (Yin, 2009). This method is helpful for investigating a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context (Yin, 2009) and therefore was chosen as the research method in this exploratory study on how an African-American woman’s family of origin experiences influence her experiences at work.

The case study design was previously considered to be the exploratory stage of other types of research methods rather than a formal research method, and has been viewed as a less desirable form of inquiry for a variety of reasons. Concerns include the lack of rigor of case study research, the inability to generalize case studies and the amount of time it takes to write case studies, which often end in large, unreadable documents (Yin, 2009). Every research design has advantages and disadvantages, and the
case study design is no exception. However, according to Yin (2009), the case study has a distinct advantage when a “how” or “why” question is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control. Despite its limitations, the case study method poses as distinct advantage for the purpose of this study.

Ten cases were completed and responses to questions were placed side by side across the family of origin and work domains in a table in order to identify themes. Although the interview began with questions regarding the participants’ work experiences followed by family of origin experiences, the order was reversed when writing the case studies in order to provide a chronological order of events (Yin, 2009). Each case was divided into three sections: the participant’s family experiences, work experiences and a comparison of family and work experiences. The structure for each case study was Family Relationships, Family Authority Dynamics, Family Conflict, Family Role Dynamics, Race and Gender in Family, Work Relationships, Work Authority Dynamics, Workplace Conflict, Work Role Dynamics, Race and Gender at Work, and Comparison of Themes. Direct quotations were used in each of the case studies but all identifying information was deleted or modified in order to protect confidentiality of the participants.

The Investigator

Some social science researchers believe that an investigator’s personal experiences influence what he or she chooses to study and how he or she understands the material being studied (Alderfer & Thomas, 1988). In this chapter, I am disclosing
relevant information about myself as well as my experience as the investigator of this study in an effort to provide the reader with additional context to the study.

I am an African-American in my late twenties. I am single and have no children. I grew up in New York City with a single mother and am the middle child with two siblings: an older sister and a younger brother. My parents were never married and my father died when I was five years-old. I have half siblings on my father’s side of the family with whom I have no relationship. My mother earned her GED and has worked in the mail/postal and food service industries. My father was a small business owner before he passed away. Prior to pursuing a doctoral degree in organizational psychology, I earned a master’s degree in applied psychology and worked for several years as a vocational rehabilitation counselor in non-profit and hospital settings. Additionally, I briefly worked as a recreation therapist in the healthcare industry.

When I began this study, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of family of origin dynamics on the workplace experiences of African-American women. In the end, I accomplished my task and gained much more from the women in the study. Although I was optimistic that I would have no problem recruiting participants, I was not prepared for the overwhelming amount of support that I received from the women who participated in the study. They were extremely kind, open to sharing some of their most intimate experiences with me and not afraid to show their emotions as they shared their experiences with me. Many of the participants allowed me into their homes, offered me food and drink during the course of the interview and had a genuine interest in my academic and professional career goals. I spent time talking with many of the participants after the interviews were completed and the conversations were very light-hearted and
informal exchanges about family, work, school or social interests. I enjoyed conducting
the interviews with each of the participants and I am grateful for the opportunity to have
met a wonderful group of talented, supportive, caring, humorous and ambitious women.
CHAPTER III

Results: Case Studies

Each of the women who participated in this research has her own story that she has shared in the following cases. These women shared their experiences in their family of origin and at work, and discussed positive and negative occurrences and how they dealt with them. Their stories are ones of happiness, love, trust and connectedness as well as sadness, struggle, separation and perseverance. Despite their experiences, the women were extremely open to sharing some of the most intimate parts of their lives. Although some may have had setbacks in their lives, they have also accomplished so much.

Each woman had a different story to tell. However, many of their experiences in their family of origin and at work were similar. Accordingly, the focus of this study is to examine these commonalities. Each of the cases follows the same structure and is written to address the five original research topics: relationships, authority dynamics, conflict, roles, and race and gender, first in the family of origin and then at work. At the end of each case study is a table that compares experiences in the participant’s family of origin and work domains side-by-side. Following the comparison table is a narrative that encapsulates the participant’s experiences in the two domains. Finally, the next chapter discusses the major themes that were identified in each of the case studies.

All names and some identifying details have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the participants.
Case One: “Karen”

Karen is a 27 year-old African-American woman from New Jersey. She is currently working at an academic institution in the Public Relations field.

Family

*Family relationships.*

Karen grew up with both of her parents and five siblings in New Jersey. She is the youngest of six children. When asked to describe what her life was like growing up, Karen said that everything revolved around the family. She has siblings who are much older than she is and they began having children when she was very young, so she remembers always having people around. Growing up, Karen had the closest relationships with her brother “Ronald,” who is a couple of years older than she is, and her oldest sister. Although she and Ronald fought a lot, Karen said that they “clicked” more than the other siblings because they were so close in age and because they lived and went to school together. She said that her brother also understood her “enterprising” nature very early and helped her follow out her plans for making money as a kid. Karen described an example of how Ronald helped her sell candy after she was suspended from the school bus and told that she could not sell candy in school because they had vending machines. She explained “he would arrange for people to meet in between the buses so that I could go sell candy. He’s the only one who would understand me.” Karen believed that she got her business sense from her father. Karen’s father was a pastor and she stated “my father never accepted any money from the church, so I got to learn a little bit of my enterprising from him because he owned his own business.” Karen considers her oldest
sister, with whom she is also close, to be her twin. She said “we look just alike and our birthdays are on the same day.” Karen said she is as close as she could possibly be to her oldest sister, considering that her sister is almost a decade her senior.

When asked about challenging relationships in the family, Karen described her relationship with her other sister, “Christine,” as somewhat strained. She said that her sister did not like her and she did not talk to her much when they were younger. When she did talk to her, Karen said that Christine said mean things to her. At one time she and Christine became close, but then their relationship deteriorated again when they got older. Karen believes that their relationship changed because their lives took different paths and she believes her sister became upset by this. Christine did attend college but came back home when she became pregnant. By the time she eventually graduated from college, Karen was graduating with her master’s degree. Therefore, Karen senses a little bit of tension from Christine. Karen also has two older brothers with whom she had fairly good relationships.

In general, Karen was very fond of her parents. When describing them, she said “they were providers. They were the lawmakers. They were pretty strict but they had a lot of love.” Because her father was a pastor and her mother the first lady, the entire family attended church very often. Also, holidays never consisted of only family members because her parents opened up their home to others. Karen remembers:

“They were very giving– I never had a normal Thanksgiving with just the family. Thanksgiving always included a lot of other people: people from church, anybody- they might meet someone on the street. It was whoever. There were always other people in my home. It was never just us and my parents.”
Karen was closer to her father than her mother because she believed that her mother favored her brothers. She did not become close to her mother until she graduated from high school and moved out of the house. It was then that Karen was able to understand her mother better. However, when describing her mother now, she has the utmost respect and admiration for her. Of her mother, Karen says “My mother is the epitome of a virtuous woman.”

**Authority dynamics in the family of origin.**

Karen viewed her father as the greatest authority in the family. Because he was a pastor, she viewed him as the authority in her household as well as in the church and she referred to him as her spiritual mentor. Whenever Karen had questions about something, she sought the advice of her father. Karen’s father passed away a few years ago and her brother who is 17 years her senior became the pastor of the same church that her father presided over. Now, her brother serves as her spiritual mentor in the same way that her dad did in the past. When asked who had the least authority in the family, Karen said her oldest brother “Richard” had the least authority. She described him as very serene and uninvolved. Richard was the one who sat in a back room of the house when they had family gatherings and never got involved in family issues. He is not married and has no children, so he is a bit of a loner. When asked if Karen had authority over anyone, she said she has authority over her nieces and nephews. Karen is the godmother to two of her 13 nieces and nephews, but she treats all of them the way that she would treat her own children.
Family Conflict.

When asked about conflict in the family, Karen spoke about the tension between her and her sister Christine, who were not speaking at the time. When asked why they were not speaking, Karen initially said she was unaware of the specific reason why Christine was not speaking to her. However, Karen believed that her sister was upset because she “has not given in, and I used to when I was younger.” As we discussed the conflict further, Karen revealed that she thinks Christine is upset because her life had different challenges. She said “It’s not that I didn’t have challenges but my route in life was different from hers. So I think part of the conflict is that I have things that she wants for herself that she hasn’t received yet. I don’t know, but she gives me a lot of grief.”

In addition to the conflict with her sister Christine, Karen expressed a general issue that she has with her family. She believes that because her siblings’ bad decisions put her parents in debt, Karen had to grow up quickly and provide for herself. She put herself through school and provided for herself because her parents were unable to support her as they had all of her other siblings. She said, “I don’t understand how my siblings are the way that they are because they got everything growing up. There were five people that came before me, and every one of them had a new car. Everyone had a house. And I had nothing. By the time I grew up I had to pay for my own way through college and I bought my own car.” Now, although Karen has warned her mother about providing for her adult siblings, she has also taken on the responsibility of “bailing them out” financially when necessary. Karen does not mind providing for her mother, who has never asked her for financial support. However, she is frustrated that she often has to help her older siblings, who she feels should be helping their mother and her. She said “It
stinks because they’ve received too much and now I’m being the older sibling that they should be.” Karen’s sister Christine lives with their mother in the family home and Karen has tried to convince her mother to sell the home and downsize so she would not struggle so much financially. However, her mother refuses to sell the home because then Christine and her two children would not have a place to live. Therefore, Karen continues to support her mother and siblings financially. Although Karen believes that most of her siblings do not realize or care how their behavior is affecting her, she believes that her brother Ronald does. When discussing this issue with him, Ronald tried to convince Karen that she was the one “chosen” to take care of the family. She continued “Ronald says that I am the way that I am because that is who God wants me to be. So God has made me the mold that keeps everyone together, and God has chosen me to be the person who can provide for the rest of them.” Although Karen does not totally disagree with this, she feels that this is an excuse that her siblings would use to get financial support from her. She said “yeah right, like I should feel blessed that I can pay their bills.” Although the financial bailout that her siblings constantly require frustrates Karen, her biggest issue with her siblings is that they did not “do their job of preparing me or their children for moving forward– none of them told me about college or anything. I had to do all that stuff on my own.” As a result, Karen tries to prepare her nieces and nephews for their milestones with the hope that they will do the same for the younger family members who come after them. When asked if she discussed her issues with anyone other than her mother and brother Ronald, she said no. However, she did express that she was going to have a family meeting and address some of the issues she has with her siblings at the next family gathering, at her mother’s request. Karen typically does confront her siblings
when she has issues, but she has not visited with her family in a while so she has not been able to express herself.

*Family role dynamics.*

Growing up, Karen was the peacemaker in the family. She believes that there were benefits and challenges to having this role. Being the peacemaker allowed Karen to have a voice in the house despite a very large family. However, Karen remembers getting involved in too much and at times she felt she should have stayed out of things. As a result, it is easier for her family to come to her now to resolve issues even when she doesn’t want to be involved. Karen took up the peacemaker role mainly with her siblings. She was more careful with her parents, making sure to provide the utmost respect and not to get involved in their personal matters. Currently, Karen describes herself as the mediator and protector in her family. Because she is usually the one to resolve family conflicts, her family does not know how to help resolve the issues between Karen and her sister Christine. She explained “I am usually the mediator, so they don’t know what to do now that my sister and I aren’t speaking. I’m usually the one that will come in and say alright you guys this is really stupid, you can’t do this. Mommy is getting old and you only have one parent and blah, blah, blah. They don’t know how to do it.”

*Race and gender in the family.*

When asked if being African-American influenced her interactions with her family members growing up, Karen said no. However, she does believe that being female
influenced her interactions with family members. She said “you had to conduct yourself as a lady. My mother is very classy, very meek. She wears dresses every day. She has high standards for how women should speak and dress and all of that. So being a woman was tough.”

\textit{Work}

Karen graduated from college and received her master’s degree in communications. Previously, she worked for a public relations agency for a couple years before gaining a position in her new role. At the age of 27, Karen currently works in the Public Relations field in a university setting. She holds a management role, leading a team that provides marketing, communications, event management and media relations services to the federal government. Karen has been in this role for less than one year.

\textit{Work relationships.}

Karen is the only African-American employee in her department but not the only person of color. In addition to her, there are two other people of color, both males. The other employees in Karen’s department are middle- to late- aged white men. Karen is closest to her coworker “Sam,” who is one of the people of color in the department. Karen describes her relationship with Sam as professional, yet casual. Karen explained “he was the first person who welcomed me and he’s closer to my age than the rest of my colleagues. I feel like I can open up to him more than everyone else.” Whenever she needs to discuss work-related issues, she talks to Sam. In addition to Sam, Karen had a good relationship with the secretary, a female woman of color who was terminated
shortly after Karen was hired because her colleagues believed that the secretary could not perform her job well. Karen believed that the secretary was a good worker; however, the decision was finalized before Karen began in her position so she was not able to make the decision about whether the secretary should remain in the department. When describing her relationship with the secretary, who was also close in age to Karen, she stated that when they were in the office, they maintained a professional relationship. However, they often ate lunch together and during that time, they discussed things unrelated to work. According to Karen, “I was more casual with her. We talked about clothes and shoes and things of that sort. But in the office I would have to be the boss, so my role would be different. It’s not that I looked down or talked down to her but I wouldn’t talk about clothes and shoes and things like that in front of the guys who would take that and run.”

When asked who Karen has the most challenging relationship with, she described a tense relationship between her and a contractor in the department. Karen believed that the relationship between her and the contractor was challenging because he was intimidated by her and her ability to lead a group of men. During her first few weeks in her new position, the contractor challenged her in front of others, forcing her to assert her authority very early in her position in the department.

Authority dynamics at work.

When asked who she considers to have the most authority over her at work, Karen responded that her boss (her direct supervisor’s boss) had the most authority at work. When she needs approval to make a decision that is out of the realm of her authority, Karen goes to him for approval rather than her direct supervisor. Karen describes her
boss as very supportive and accommodating. She is more comfortable going to her boss because he is the other person of color in the department, so there is a commonality with him and her other colleague that she does not have with anyone else. Karen explained “He is also a person of color so that has something to do with my comfort level with him. He understands the barrier of race – he understands it because he has a language barrier. He still carries his dialect. So I think he understands my challenges a little bit more.” When asked who has the least authority, Karen responded that the administrative assistant and the consultant had the least authority in the department. Once a new administrative assistant was hired, Karen would supervise him or her, and therefore she would have authority over someone.

*Workplace conflict.*

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Karen explained that when she was hired to lead the public relations function in her department, her boss called a meeting with the entire team to explain her role. For the most part, her colleagues seemed to be respectful of her and the role she was hired to take up. However, the contractor, who was previously doing much of the work that Karen was hired to do, has challenged her a couple times in front of the team. She talked about a time where the contractor became very upset with her in a meeting because she would not let him run the meeting based on his agenda and as a result she asked him to leave. After the meeting Karen explained to the consultant the proper protocol for submitting agenda items for a meeting. In order to allow others to have input at the meetings, Karen encouraged team members to send their agenda items to the secretary ahead of time and the secretary
would create the agenda with the agenda items of all team members. Karen believed that she had to handle this issue in a way that was “more forceful”, but not representative of an “angry black woman.” She believed that the men she worked with initially perceived her to be nice, and maybe even a pushover, until she handled this situation with the contractor. Karen stated that this is usually the way she would deal with a colleague or peer at work, but not her boss. She explained “if the same situation with the contractor happened with my boss- if my boss came with his own agenda I think I would have approached him after the meeting and asked him if he felt my leading the meeting was inappropriate or if he had a different agenda for any particular reason. Either way, Karen would address the situation; the difference is the timing of when she would address it. She said “I would typically try to seek resolution and resolve an issue without resorting to any heated discussion or debate, because I feel like I constantly have to be on guard at work.”

_Work role dynamics._

When asked how Karen generally relates to others, she suggested that she is a “people person.” When people meet her, they think that she is nice. At work, Karen is very careful to balance being cordial with people but also being firm when leading her team and making decisions. When asked to choose the role that best described her at work, Karen chose both leader and coordinator and said that her colleagues would perceive her as a leader and advocate. Her self-selected roles of leader and coordinator benefit her at work because they help her to keep the group on task in order to receive funding in the next couple years. She also believes that her self-selected roles pose a
challenge because she is the sole female in an all male team and they are not used to having a woman lead the team. Therefore she has to assert herself more but without appearing rude or aggressive. So far, Karen believes that she has been able to have good relationships with most of the men on her team.

**Race and gender at work.**

When asked if being African-American affects the way Karen interacts with her colleagues at work, she responded affirmatively. At work, she has to be very careful about what she says and how she responds to issues. For example, Karen described an incident where she was in her office watching the Election Day coverage when her boss walked in and asked if she voted. When she responded that she voted earlier that morning, her boss proceeded to talk about how confident he was that Barack Obama would win the election. Karen had not told her boss that she was supporting Obama so she sat quietly as he continued to speak about Obama. The next day, Karen's boss walked in and said “I knew our guy was going to win.” Karen was very uncomfortable by his comment because she believed her boss assumed that she voted for Obama because she is Black. Karen said she did not correct him because she was not offended by his comment, and even if she was, she didn’t believe it would resolve anything if she confronted her boss about his assumption.

Similarly, being female also affects her interactions at work. Karen is very careful about how she dresses at work. She makes sure that she always looks neat: Karen doesn’t wear her clothing too tight or too loose. She further explained “I pay a lot of attention to what I wear to work because I don’t want to get certain attention because I work with
men.” In addition to being careful about how she dresses, Karen is also very careful about not being emotional at work. Although she describes herself as a naturally emotional person she “turns her emotions off like a light switch” when at work. When asked if being African-American or being a female was more salient for Karen at work, she said that they carry equal saliency. She explained “there aren’t any African-Americans or females at work so I am conscious that I am different from my colleagues due to both my race and gender.”
Table 1

*Comparison of Themes for Karen*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Work Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Relationships</strong></td>
<td><strong>Work Relationships</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen’s family is geographically separated; She had the closest relationship to her father (deceased), but was close to oldest sister and one older brother. She had the most challenging relationship with her other sister.</td>
<td>Karen has good relationships with one colleague and her boss, who are also people of color. She has no close relationships at work. Karen prefers to remain professional but cordial at work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Work Role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen was the peacemaker growing up. Currently, she is a mediator and protector.</td>
<td>Karen is a leader and coordinator at work. Her colleagues would describe her as a leader and advocate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Authority</strong></td>
<td><strong>Authority at Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen’s father was her spiritual mentor. Her parents were strict but very loving. Karen had good relationships with both parents, but she was closer to her father.</td>
<td>Karen has a good relationship with her male boss. Her perceptions of her boss are mixed (accommodating and supportive, but “weird” and “anal retentive”). She has no real relationship with her direct supervisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Family Conflict</strong></td>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Work Conflict</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen deals with conflict directly if necessary and is emotional. She is careful when addressing conflict with parents.</td>
<td>Karen deals with conflict directly and immediately if necessary. There are no emotions involved. She is more careful in addressing conflicts with her boss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Race in Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influence of Race at Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was no influence of race due to having an all African-American family.</td>
<td>Karen feels like she is different because she is the only African-American person in her department, although she is not the only person of color. She has a fear of being labeled “nice” or the “angry black woman.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender in Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender at Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen’s family was a Christian family with strong beliefs about how females should behave (e.g., “behave like a lady”). These messages that Karen received from her mother may have influenced her behavior at work.</td>
<td>As the only female in her department, Karen is very “careful” about what she wears and how she deals with conflict at work. She has a fear of being labeled “nice” or the “angry black woman.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of Themes: Summary

There are some layers of overlap between Karen’s family of origin and work experiences. Karen is the youngest in her family and at work, but she has a lot of responsibility in each of these areas. As the youngest of six children, she assumes much of the financial responsibility for her mother and her five siblings and at work she leads the public relations initiatives for her department. Growing up, Karen had a good relationship with her family for the most part, but as she got older, it has been more difficult to maintain close relationships with them, particularly some of her siblings. Similarly, Karen is very hesitant to form close relationships at work mainly because she works mostly with older white men but also because she does not want to blur the lines between professional and personal relationships. In both her family of origin and at work, Karen has a few people with whom she connects. In her family her mother, oldest sister, brother Ronald, and her brother who is now a pastor serve as the people with whom she still maintains connections. At work, she has a closer relationship to her colleague Sam, one of the other people of color in the department.

In Karen’s family and at work, men have assumed the roles of authority. She described her father as the person who provided her with the most guidance growing up. When it comes to authority at work, however, her perceptions of her boss are mixed. Karen is more likely to report to her boss rather than her direct supervisor when she needs approval on important matters and feels more comfortable with him than her direct supervisor. She described her boss as supportive and accommodating. However, Karen also described her boss as “weird” and “anal retentive,” always needing things exactly the way he wanted them. Despite her mixed views about her boss, she was still more
comfortable with him as the authority because they had more in common than she had with others at work.

When dealing with conflict, Karen does not hesitate to confront the behaviors of her colleagues and family members when she feels it is necessary; however, she is more careful when handling conflict with people in authority. In her family of origin, Karen’s role was the peacemaker growing up and currently she still sees herself as the mediator and protector. At work, however, Karen described herself as a leader and coordinator and said that her peers would also describe her as a leader and advocate. Karen’s self-selected role as a peacemaker in her family reflects her ability to have an important role in a large family where normally youngest children would not have a voice. Her self-selected role as a leader and coordinator reflects her desire and ability to prove that she can move her work team forward and make decisions in the best interest of her team and her department.

Karen’s race, culture and gender influenced her experiences in her family of origin and in the workplace. Growing up, religion was an important part of her upbringing and this affected her behavior as a female in a Christian home. As a result, she is very conscious about how she speaks, what she wears and how she responds to issues with family members and colleagues. Although her gender affects both her family and work environments, Karen denied that being African-American influences the way she interacts with family members because everyone is African-American in her family. As a result, she is comfortable sharing her emotions and being more casual with family members. At work, Karen’s race does affect the way she interacts with others. Particularly when dealing with conflict, Karen has a fear of being labeled as “nice” or
“the angry black woman.” She tries to balance this by being firm and professional, and “checking her emotions at the door” when she arrives to work. Additionally, she tends to have closer relationships with the people at work with whom she has more in common with: her colleague who is young and a person of color and her boss, who is also a person of color. Having connections with these individuals helps to make her work environment more comfortable.

Generally, Karen believes that there are some similarities in her family of origin and work experiences. Her comfort in accepting males as the figures of authority and cautiousness in the way she dresses and responds to issues are similarities that may have been influenced by her mother’s messages about how women should behave. Additionally, Karen’s ability to deal with conflict directly and express her concerns or stand up for herself in both her family of origin and at work serve as additional examples of similarities. She described a situation where she was asked to take on an assignment that was out of the realm of her responsibilities:

“I was given a project that was different from my job responsibilities and I decided to take it on without question. When I got home I realized it was outside of my expertise and I knew I wouldn’t be able to do it and I was stressing about it. Once I got to work the next day I was able to resolve it. I told my boss that this project was outside of what I’m supposed to do and that we could outsource this to someone else. My boss was very appreciative of my honesty and I was glad that I spoke up.”

Although Karen identifies some similarities, she also notices some differences in the experiences in her family of origin and work environments. For example, Karen believes that when dealing with conflict in her family, it is an emotional process while at work, no emotions are involved. Additionally, while it is easier to deal with conflict at home because her family is more open to dealing with conflict, Karen’s coworkers are
much more conflict avoidant and tend to deal with conflict in clusters to avoid dealing with the conflict with an entire group. Karen said that her family sometimes deals with conflict in clusters, but this is due to the family size as well as family members being separated geographically. For the most part, however, it is easier to deal with conflict in her family because of the emotional nature, especially since Karen is naturally an emotional person.

Finally, Karen believes that her experiences in her family of origin have prepared her for her work experiences, and combined, these experiences have influenced her relationship with her boyfriend of two years. Specifically, Karen believes that because she had to grow up earlier and take on more responsibilities in her family as the youngest child, it prepared her to be successful at leading her team of all older white men in her department. Being in a leadership role has come naturally for Karen because of her experiences in her family. In terms of her relationship with her boyfriend, Karen said “He gets to see both sides of me: the softer side that my family sees and the more serious side that my colleagues see.” She also explained that it is often difficult for her boyfriend because she can shift from one side to the next very quickly: “Sometimes the two sides conflict because I can be emotional with him one hour and the next hour I can be very stern, telling him, get out of my face I don’t feel like this. I’m doing my work. Sometimes I think he thinks I’m crazy!” However, Karen does seem to be happy in her relationship and hopes that it progresses into something more serious over the next few years.
Case Two: “Natalie”

Natalie is a 38 year-old African-American woman from New York. She is currently working for a health care organization as a manager.

Family

Family relationships.

When asked to describe what her life was like growing up, Natalie said that she moved around a lot. She was born in New York but grew up in numerous states on the east coast. As a child, she and her two siblings were sent to live with her paternal grandmother for a few years before being taken in by her aunt and uncle. She said “I feel like I grew up on the east coast, up and down the east coast. I can’t really say here or there because I have very clear and separate memories of growing up in different places on the east coast.” Natalie does not know why her mother sent her siblings and her to live with their grandmother and she did not have a relationship with her father growing up.

Natalie is the middle child. She has an older brother and younger sister. She is very close to both her sister and brother because they were the only constant people in her life. However, Natalie is closer to her sister because as females they have shared experiences that she and her brother have not. She was also very close to her paternal grandmother. Natalie said “my grandmother was my maternal figure. She and I had a mother/child type of bond- she was to me what someone else’s mother would be to them.” Natalie described her aunt and uncle as caring people but not demonstrative in how they showed their love. She knew that they cared about her siblings and her because
they had children of their own but they took them into their two-bedroom home even though it was not easy for them. Of her uncle, Natalie said “I was afraid of that man. He showed love by coming home every night when Black men were disappearing. He showed love by putting food on the table. You didn’t really hear from him unless you did something wrong.” She said if her uncle was having a conversation with any of the children it was because they did something wrong and would be disciplined for it.

Natalie had the most challenging relationship with her mother, mainly because she has never provided a reason for her absence when Natalie and her siblings were growing up. Natalie and her siblings returned to New York to live with her mother when she was 15 years old. She said “I survived a lot of things even though my mother wasn’t there and I would like to share them with her, but she will not let me nor will she tell me why she wasn’t there. That was our major issue.” Natalie and her mother also had power struggles because her mother viewed her youngest daughter (Natalie’s sister) as “her baby” and became upset when she went to Natalie first with a problem. Natalie believes her mother was jealous and angry because she continued to support her sister even though her mother was back in their lives. Currently, during holidays and at family functions, Natalie explained that she does “drive-by appearances” because the level of dysfunction with her mother and within her family is too much for her. She and her sister plan these appearances together so neither has to be at an event alone with the family and they can support each other.

When asked if religion played a part in her family, Natalie said yes and no. Her grandmother was Baptist so she attended church regularly while living with her. Natalie’s aunt and uncle did not attend church so she did not have to attend church on a regular
basis. However, she was allowed to go to the neighborhood church whenever she wanted to attend and Natalie did attend church often on her own. She said her grandmother “planted those seeds” in her as a child and as a result she continued to attend church even when no one else was interested.

**Authority dynamics in the family of origin.**

Growing up, Natalie had many authority figures in her life. She viewed her grandmother as the authority when she lived with her. Natalie described her grandmother as a loving, nurturing person who also knew how to send the message that she meant business without being mean. When she lived with her aunt and uncle, they were the authority figures for her and they displayed this authority by providing for the children and disciplining them when they did something wrong. In addition to her aunt and uncle, Natalie also viewed their children as authority figures. She said:

“In my aunt and uncle’s house, their children made sure that we did not forget that we were not cast to the winds because their parents took us in. They never let me forget that I was in their house and everything that I had belonged to them. With any one of them from the oldest, who made my life miserable, to the one who was younger than I am, it was like, okay well you know I’m in your house so whatever you say, I’m going to do. Can I breathe now? I just felt like I needed to ask permission to do anything all the time. I felt powerless.”

As a result of her experiences with her cousins, she is not close with any of them. However, she has addressed her issues with her oldest cousin who has apologized to her but did not believe that she treated Natalie as badly as Natalie remembers. Natalie’s youngest cousin is deceased and she is estranged from her male cousin. She said “My female cousin and I are not best friends or anything like that, but we can be in a room together. Her brother and I, however, we can’t be in a room together.”
Family conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict or problem that she faced in her life growing up, Natalie had some difficulties. She said:

“I guess I’m having a hard time answering that mainly because for me, conflict would indicate that I fought back, and I really never found my voice to fight back growing up. I might not have liked something, but most of the time my response was internal. I would think, I can’t wait until I am old enough, big enough, strong enough to protect myself – to do something about this. But right now, today, I just have to swallow it.”

Despite her feeling of powerlessness as a child, Natalie was able to identify two conflicts where she was able to protect herself. When she was 15 years old, Natalie and her siblings moved back to New York to live with their mother. Although there were other issues, there was one conflict that led Natalie to the point where she was able to advocate for herself. One day, her mother’s boyfriend fondled her and she began to argue with him. When her mother walked in on the argument and Natalie tried to tell her mother what happened, her mother slapped her down to the ground. Natalie was 18 years old at the time and made the decision at that point to leave her mother’s home. About this experience, she said:

“There was no way I was going to allow this to happen to me again. This was not okay. I am big enough and I am strong enough now. This was just not going to happen. Also, I seriously came as close to hitting my mother as I ever want to come so I got up, threw some stuff in a bag and I left. I knew that I would not live under the same roof, because I didn’t know if I would be able to restrain myself from hitting her next week, next month or next year so I left. I guess this was the day I found my voice.”

Although Natalie and her mother speak, they still have somewhat of a strained relationship due to these childhood experiences.

The next conflict Natalie discussed involved her male cousin who she was raised with and from whom she is currently estranged. Natalie explained that her cousin
molested her for three years when she was living with her aunt and uncle and their children. Although she never told anyone growing up, she confronted her cousin at a family barbecue when she saw him picking up her niece and asked him to never touch any of her nieces and nephews again. Natalie said that he “played dumb” when she confronted him in front of the family and she has not spoken to him since then. Because of her experiences with her mother’s boyfriend and her cousin, Natalie does not trust any of her male relatives, especially around her nieces and nephews. When asked if this is usually how she deals with conflict now, Natalie explained that in the past she never dealt with conflict because she never found her voice but now she addresses conflict directly whenever possible. She attributes the difference to many years of therapy. Natalie said “I speak up for myself on a regular basis now and because of therapy I understand that if I would have hit my mother back that day, she would have become the punching bag for every time I buried my anger and wanted to protect myself but couldn’t.”

*Family role dynamics.*

Growing up, Natalie felt like the victim and the abused person most of the time. Although she felt unable to advocate for herself Natalie believes that her role as the victim and the abused one helped her become more vigilant about protecting and supporting her younger sister. Currently, Natalie describes herself as the rebel in the family. She does what she wants to do even if it does not please the family and she is fine with doing things on her own. She describes her sister as the go-between, particularly when it comes to her mother and her, and her brother as the loner outside of the sibling group. Finally, Natalie described her mother as “fake.” She explained that her mother is
all about appearances. She said “We could be miserable, but as long as everybody thinks that we are happy, it doesn’t matter.”

*Race and gender in the family.*

When asked if being African-American influenced her interactions with her family members growing up, Natalie said that she was sure it did, but could not explain how her race influenced her family relationships. She also believed that being female influenced her interactions with family members. She believes that she is not the only female family member who has been molested, so she is able to relate to family members through this experience even though she has no confirmation from any female relatives that they too were molested by male relatives. She also said that she was never discouraged from doing anything because she was female.

*Work*

Natalie has her bachelor’s degree and has worked in the health care industry for over 10 years. Prior to her current job, she worked for nine and a half years as a provider relations associate. At the age of 38, Natalie currently works in the health care insurance field as a provider relations manager. She is responsible for recruiting physicians and negotiating contract wages for her company. Although she has a management title, Natalie does not have any direct reports. She works from home and only goes into her office to drop off or pick up paperwork or to attend staff meetings. Natalie has been in her current role for less than one year.
Work relationships.

Natalie works with physicians, nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, physical therapists and other medical professionals in addition to the employees in her department, which include other provider relations managers, associates, marketing directors and other administrative professionals. Her department is predominantly female but is ethnically diverse. She has the closest relationship with her immediate team, including her director, network developer and other provider relations managers and associates. These are the people she has the most direct contact with and they work well together as a team. Natalie has the most challenging relationship with the operations department because when she completes her contracting paperwork and sends it to the operations department they do not always act on it in a timely manner, causing her contracts to expire. This means that Natalie has to renegotiate her contracts and resubmit the paperwork. She said “When the operations department does not process paperwork in a timely manner, contracts expire, which means I have to redo what I have done already. Although they always have a reason why the work is not done, I don’t want to hear it. I don’t want to do what I did yesterday; I want to focus on what I need to do today because my desk is never empty.” Natalie’s sole issue with operations is over the paperwork being processed too slowly.

Authority dynamics at work.

When asked who she considers to have the most authority over her at work, Natalie initially said that she does not think anyone had authority over her. She explained that because she works from home, there is no one that really manages her work hands-
on. She said that her boss just wants the work done and leaves her alone to do the job. However, if a decision needs to be made about something that she has no authority to make decisions about, Natalie would go to her boss, the director of her department.

Natalie used to work with her current boss at the job she had prior to her current position. He was her boss at her previous job and when he left the company and became settled in his new role and the current company, he asked Natalie to come work with him. They have always had a good working relationship. She described her boss as very supportive and believes that they work well together because they understand each other. Natalie does not supervise anyone and does not have authority over anyone at her job. However, the members of her team have a high level of accountability to one another, which is why Natalie believes they work well together.

*Workplace conflict.*

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Natalie discussed an issue she had at her previous job with a director. Natalie received a call from a provider stating that she was not paid for services she provided to a client over three years ago. Since Natalie could not process the provider’s claim and cut her a check personally, she sent the provider’s information to a director in the claims unit with all of the supporting documentation showing that the provider had been trying to collect her money for three years. The director said that he would process the claim but he never did and after nine months the provider continued to call Natalie to inquire about her payment. Natalie gave the provider the director’s number and explained that she should call the director to see when she would be paid. After the provider called the director in the
claims unit, he became angry and sent Natalie an email asking why she had given the provider his number. Natalie became so frustrated that she decided that she could no longer deal with this director who was not taking responsibility for his role in the matter, so she discussed the issue with her boss. Natalie explained “I took a deep breath and walked over to my boss and explained what I had done with this issue. Then, I gave the information to him and asked him to resolve the matter with the other director because if I knocked on that man’s door, I would have gotten fired.” In the end, Natalie’s boss worked with the other director to make sure the provider was paid and Natalie did not have to address the situation again. When asked if this is usually the way she would deal with a conflict at work, Natalie said that she examines every situation before she responds. If she had a conflict with an associate or manager, she would deal with the conflict on her own before going to her director. However, if she had a conflict with a director, she would go to her boss for support and intervention. In the situation with this particular director, Natalie knew that their personalities would clash and that there was potential for her to “lose it” with him, so she decided that it was best to allow her boss to work with the director in order to resolve the issue.

_Work role dynamics._

When asked how Natalie generally relates to others, she responded that she treats people in the same way that she wants to be treated. Although she only goes to her office an average of one day per week, Natalie has a good relationship with her team because she treats them with the respect that she expects. However, she has very few friends at work and prefers to keep work and personal relationships separate. When asked to choose
the role that best described her at work, Natalie chose leader and said that her colleagues would perceive her as a leader as well. This self-selected role benefits her at work because it helps to boost her confidence in her work. She believes that her confidence makes her willing to take risks and when things work out well, it boosts her confidence even more. She said “I am taking risks and doing things that nobody else has done before, which reinforces my status as a leader.” Natalie’s leadership role poses a challenge because she does not always want to take up the leadership role but is pushed into it because other people choose not to take up the role. She said “sometimes I’ll have a day where I just want somebody to tell me what to do and let me go out and do it. I don’t want to think. I don’t want to problem solve. I want somebody else to come up with the solution.” As a result, sometimes Natalie will push back and force others to come up with solutions on their own rather than coming to her to resolve issues or to tell them what to do.

**Race and gender at work.**

When asked if being African-American affects the way Natalie interacts with her colleagues at work, she responded affirmatively. She said:

“I work with people with different ethnic backgrounds, and I have to say I don’t really think that I have encountered blatant racism in the workplace. I do know that, especially with people of other races and ethnicities, I feel as though they look at me and they see a Black woman. When I look at myself, I also see a Black woman. That influences everything that I do, because even if it’s not right there in my face, I can’t help but think that the powers that be, the folks that make decisions, look at me and they see a Black woman.”

Natalie also discussed how being African-American influences how she dresses at work. Although the dress is casual in her work environment, Natalie wears a full suit in the field
and in the office. She is unable to dress down when at work or in the field because she wants to be perceived as professional at work at all times. When asked if being female affected Natalie’s interactions at work, she said that her race plays more of a role than her gender, primarily because there are more women at her job than men. She said “for me, it’s more about the color of my skin than my gender.”
Table 2

Comparison of Themes for Natalie

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Work Domain</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Relationships</strong></td>
<td><strong>Work Relationships</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie’s family is geographically separated. She had the closest relationship with her sister but she was also close with her brother. Natalie’s most challenging relationship was with her mother.</td>
<td>Natalie is closest to the people on her team, including her director, network developer, and provider relations managers and associates. However, she is physically separated from them since she works from home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Work Role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing up, Natalie was the victim and the abused. Currently, she is the rebel.</td>
<td>Natalie is a leader at work. Her colleagues also perceive her to be a leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Authority</strong></td>
<td><strong>Authority at Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a child, Natalie’s paternal grandmother, aunt and uncle, who all raised her, had authority over her. Her older cousins also had some authority.</td>
<td>Natalie’s director has the ultimate authority, although he is not a hands-on manager.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Family Conflict</strong></td>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Work Conflict</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing up, Natalie did not deal with conflict at all. She felt powerless as a child. Currently, Natalie deals with conflict directly. An example of this was when she confronted her male cousin who molested her to protect her niece and nephew.</td>
<td>Natalie deals with conflict directly and on her own with peers and managers. With directors, she seeks out the support and assistance of her boss if necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Race in Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influence of Race at Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie believes there is some influence but could not provide specifics.</td>
<td>For Natalie, her race influences how she dresses, speaks, and treats others at work. Race is more salient than gender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender in Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender at Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie believes that other females in the family were molested but have chosen to “sweep it under the rug.” She was not sent different messages about education, work, etc. just because she is female.</td>
<td>Gender is not as salient for Natalie at work mainly due to the fact that she works in a predominantly female department.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of Themes: Summary

There are minimal layers of overlap between Natalie’s family of origin and work experiences. As a child, Natalie moved around a lot and the only constant people in her life were her older brother and younger sister. As an adult, she has been more stable in her work positions, spending many years at a time in an organization before moving to another organization. Growing up, Natalie had a good relationship with her grandmother, aunt and uncle, and siblings but she had no relationship with her mother. Currently, she continues to be close with her siblings, but her relationship with her mother is strained. At work, Natalie has very few friends and prefers to keep her personal and professional relationships separate. In both her family of origin and at work, Natalie has a few people with who she maintains close relationships. Additionally, she is geographically separated from some of her family members and physically separated from her coworkers since Natalie works from home.

In Natalie’s family, women have assumed the roles of authority. At work, however, men have most of the management roles and have assumed the roles of authority. She described her paternal grandmother as the person who has shaped her values as a child and as an adult. When it comes to authority at work, Natalie’s perceptions of her boss are also very positive. She described her boss as supportive and hands-off, allowing her autonomy to perform her job with minimal supervision. When dealing with conflict as an adult, Natalie does not hesitate to confront the behaviors of her colleagues and family members when she feels it is necessary; however, she is more careful when handling conflict with people in authority. As a child, she was very quiet and unable to advocate for herself when she wanted or needed to. In her family of origin,
Natalie’s role was the victim and the abused growing up but she currently sees herself as a rebel. At work, however, Natalie describes herself as a leader and said that her peers would also describe her as a leader. Her self-selected role as a rebel in her family reflects her ability to speak up for herself and make her own decisions despite what family members think. Her role as a leader at work reflects her ability to take risks and help others make important decisions.

Natalie’s race, culture and gender influenced her experiences in her family of origin and in the workplace. Religion was an important part of her upbringing and Natalie has maintained the values she learned as a child in her adulthood. As a result, she is very conscious about how she treats people. Natalie’s gender and race affects both her family and work environments. Although Natalie believes that being African-American influences the way she interacts with family members she was unable to say how. However, she said that she believes her gender contributed to her experiences of being molested by relatives and as a result she does not trust any males in her family. At work, being African-American affects the way Natalie interacts with others. She prefers direct confrontation and believes in being professional and dressing professionally at all times.

Natalie believes that there are very little similarities between her family of origin and work environments. As a child she felt invisible and managed to remain quiet yet observant. She said “I was a people watcher. As a result of my evil cousins, I usually stayed off somewhere in a corner and hoped that nobody noticed or bothered me.” As an adult, she deals with conflict in her family and at work differently. She addresses issues with relatives when necessary and stays away from them when she does not want to deal
with family issues that do not involve her. At work, Natalie is also outgoing and more vocal.
Case Three: “Lisa”

Lisa is a 30 year-old African-American woman from New York. She is currently working as a Publicist in higher education.

Family

Family relationships.

Lisa grew up in New York with her mother and three siblings. She has a sister who is one year younger and twin brothers who are about eight years younger than her. Growing up, Lisa was close to her mother and siblings but not her dad. She said that her mother was very strict because she did not want her children to be teenage parents like she was and that was sometimes hard for Lisa. Lisa’s dad left the home when she was five years old and he has children with someone else. She is not close with her half siblings. Lisa considers her younger sister to be a friend and said that they have the same friends. She is closer to her brother who lives in Buffalo than to the one in Georgia because her brother in Georgia is usually in and out of touch with the family. When asked who she was closest to, she said she was very close to her mom and her sister but closest to her mother. She said:

“I would say I am close with my mom and my sister, but I am probably closest to my mom. My mom and I have a real friendship now since I have moved out. I think it's so much better. We're able to relate to each other in a different way, you know, beyond the mother-daughter thing. We butt heads a lot and we're both strong women, but she's always supportive even if she doesn't agree with what I'm doing. With my sister, I can tell her pretty much anything.”
Growing up, Lisa had the most challenging relationship with her father because he was not around. He is back in her life now and they have a good relationship, but it took a while to get to that point. Her relationship with her brother in Georgia is also a bit challenging because he has had a lot of problems growing up and lived apart from the other siblings due to bad behavior and poor decisions that he has made. She said “I had a challenging relationship with my brother in Georgia because he is the black sheep of the family. He's the one who has had the most problems and warranted lots of family meetings.”

When asked if religion played an important in her upbringing, Lisa explained that her parents were Jehovah’s Witnesses when she was young so she and her siblings were also practicing Jehovah’s Witnesses until her mother got disfellowshipped. Her mother then started going to a Baptist Church, and Lisa and her siblings were forced to go to church with their mother. For a while, Lisa’s mother would go to church regularly and then she would stop and go every so often. Lisa and her sister eventually told their mother that they did not want to go to church anymore so their mother stopped making them attend with her.

*Authority dynamics in the family of origin.*

Growing up, Lisa’s mother was the authority figure in her life. She said “My mother was the boss. She displayed her authority by punishing, yelling and threatening us when we did something wrong. We got beatings too but that stopped when I became a teenager.” Her brothers had the least authority because they were the youngest. Lisa also had authority over her brothers. They are eight years younger than she is, so Lisa and her
sister helped raise them. She and her sister had equal authority over their brothers since they are so close in age.

*Family conflict.*

When asked to describe a conflict or problem that she faced in her life growing up, Lisa talked about a conflict between her family members when one of her twin brothers, “Dennis,” became involved in gang activity. They had a family meeting and Lisa’s mother expressed her desire to send Dennis to live with his father in another state. Dennis and Lisa’s sister were in agreement. However, Lisa and her other brother were in disagreement with the decision. In the end, Dennis was sent to live in Florida and he spent time coming back and forth and having a lot of issues over the years that he moved back and forth between New York and Florida. There was conflict because of the decision to split up the twin brothers and as a result Lisa would do anything she could to help Dennis when he needed their help. Her mother would get angry at Lisa when she questioned her mother’s behavior towards Dennis because she saw Lisa’s questions as an attack on her parenting. Lisa said this was an ongoing issue that has continued into their adulthood. When asked if this is the way that she normally deals with family conflict, Lisa said that the family did have a lot of family meetings when all of the children lived at home so everyone could express their opinions and resolve family conflicts. Now that all of the children have moved out, her mother usually calls Lisa and her sister and they have a conference call to resolve issues. She said:

“Well, we had family meetings when we all lived together. Now we have conference calls. My mom always conferences with my sister and me in a phone call to tell us whatever drama is going on with my brothers. What she doesn’t know is that sometimes we already know because my brothers sometimes call us
first. So now we don't have family meetings but everybody ends up knowing what's going on.”

When asked to describe her general style of relating to others, Lisa said she is the honest and strong one. When her mother found out that she had cancer, she told Lisa first. Then she held a family meeting and told Lisa’s siblings. Although her siblings took the news pretty hard, Lisa said she did not. Instead, she wanted to decide on a plan of action to help her mother and family get through that tough time. She said “I don't think I took it hard, I was like, okay, so what do we do now? What can we do? Let's do this.”

**Family role dynamics.**

Growing up, Lisa said that her dominant role was leader, but she was also a rebel and go-between. Her family members would also say that she was a rebel. Lisa said that being a rebel allowed her to bond with her siblings because they could talk to her about anything since she was away at college and doing whatever she wanted. However, being a rebel and leader caused problems between Lisa and her mother. She said “I didn't always agree with my mother and I would tell her so. This was hard because she was always right even when she was wrong, so we argued quite a bit.” Currently, Lisa describes herself as a friend and advocate. Her siblings continue to talk to her about anything and she continues to support and advocate for them.

**Race and gender in the family.**

Being African-American influenced Lisa’s interactions with her family members growing up, particularly in terms of how she believes people perceived her family. She said:
“I know that some of my friends didn't understand the way that my family was. I had a lot of friends – I always went to basically white public schools – and sometimes they didn't understand why I couldn't do as many things. I had to go home because my mom was a single parent and she had to work two jobs and Dad wasn’t around. Sometimes I think they saw us as the stereotypical black family with the single parent, young mother with all these kids by two different dads.”

Additionally, Lisa talked about internal issues within her own family regarding race. She explained:

“...My sister is darker than I am, so I know that sometimes people treated her differently because she's darker. Also, one of my brothers specifically had this thing where he would not date a woman who's – the darkest he would go is my complexion and that's even still too dark for him. This has caused issues because he has a sister who's darker than him. Additionally, my first boyfriend in college was white and that caused some problems in the family.”

Lisa also believed that being female influenced her interactions with family members, especially her brothers. Lisa, her sister and her mother all raised her twin brothers and they worked hard to teach them how to treat women and how to be respectful men. When one of the twins told the family that he was gay at age 16, they all supported him but continued to teach the other twin how to have successful relationships with women. Additionally, Lisa was responsible for dropping her brothers off at school and picking them up, making sure they did their homework and feeding them dinner since her mother worked two jobs. Therefore her brothers had three women caring for them as children.

Work

Lisa has her master’s degree and has worked in her current position as Publicist for two years. Prior to this position, she had another position in Public Relations in higher education. At the age of 30, Lisa is responsible for providing publicity for all events and
faculty and student accomplishments, in addition to providing website news and writing articles for the organization’s website and alumni magazine.

*Work relationships.*

Lisa works in a small office that consists of six women, including the VP of Marketing and Communications, Director of Communications, Creative Services Director, Assistant Director, Office Manager and her. She has the closest relationship with her coworker, “Alyson,” the Director of Communications. She said “My boss has an office and the rest of us are out in the open together. Alyson sits across from me, so we basically look at each other all day. Also, we're the same age and we get along very well.” Although she has the best relationship with Alyson, Lisa gets along with all of the women in her department. She has the most challenging relationships with the faculty in the organization, mainly because they often question whether she has done her job.

*Authority dynamics at work.*

When asked who she considers to have the most authority over her when at work, Lisa said that her boss, the Vice President has the most authority over everyone in her department. Her boss is the person that she goes to when she has issues with faculty. Lisa said that her boss is supportive and always “backs her up.” She also has some authority at work, particularly over any interns, contractors that are hired to help with publicity and the office manager.
Workplace conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Lisa shared a conflict that she had with a professor at her job. The professor had received an award and he wanted the marketing office to publicize that. Lisa wrote a press release and sent it out to the media in addition to sending it to his alumni publications. A couple weeks later, the professor came to the office and he was pretty upset because none of the publications had published any of the information, so the professor questioned whether Lisa had sent out the press release. The professor went directly to Lisa’s boss and her boss came to her to ask if she sent out the press release. Although Lisa was upset that the professor questioned whether she had done her job, she provided her boss with documentation to prove that she issued the press release. Her boss then followed up with the professor and resolved the issue. When asked if this is usually the way conflicts are resolved at work, Lisa said that she sometimes deals with conflicts directly when faculty come to her first, but most of the time they go directly to her boss so she is unable to deal with the conflict directly in these cases.

Work role dynamics.

When asked how Lisa generally relates to others, she responded that she is laid back and usually gets along with everyone that she works with. She also described her department as laid back and hard working. They are always working later than people in other departments and everyone is very supportive of each other. At work, Lisa describes herself as a comedian and friend and believes that her colleagues would agree with these roles. Lisa’s roles as friend and comedian allow her to connect with people. She said “I would say that being a friend and comedian at work helps me because I'm able to connect
with people and that's basically what my job is about, connecting with people and making people feel at ease. Being a comedian helps because if you can make someone laugh they feel more comfortable.” Lisa does acknowledge that these roles are specific to her department. While she is friendly to people in other departments, she is not friends with anyone outside of her department and is a little more serious when dealing with them.

Race and gender at work.

Being African-American affects the way Lisa interacts with her colleagues at work. She is the only Black person in her department but not in the organization. When she sees other Black people or other people of color, there is an unspoken connection. Lisa said “I'm the only Black woman in my department but there are the other Black people in the organization. There's a certain kind of camaraderie even if we don't know each other’s names. I don't know everyone's names because I don't deal with them every day, but we still speak. We say hi, good morning and things like that.” When asked if being female affects Lisa’s interactions at work, she said yes, especially when they have male interns or contractors working in the office. When no men are present in the department, they are more carefree but when they have male interns or other temporary workers in the department, the women are more careful about what they say or talk about with each other.
Table 3

Comparison of Themes for Lisa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Work Domain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Relationships</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa’s family is geographically</td>
<td>Lisa is closest to one of her coworkers who she sits next to and who is close in age to her.</td>
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<td>separated. She had the closest</td>
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<td>relationship with her mother but</td>
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<td>she was also close with her sister.</td>
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<td>Her most challenging relationship</td>
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<td>was with her father.</td>
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<td><strong>Family Role</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Growing up, Lisa was a leader, rebel</td>
<td>Lisa is a friend and comedian at work. Her colleagues also perceive her to be a</td>
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<td>and go-between. Currently, she is</td>
<td>comedian.</td>
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<tr>
<td>an advocate and friend.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Family Authority</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>As a child, Lisa’s mother had</td>
<td>Lisa’s female boss, the Vice President has the ultimate authority in Lisa’s department.</td>
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<td>authority over her. This authority</td>
<td>However, Lisa does have authority over the interns, contractors and office</td>
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<td>was displayed through yelling,</td>
<td>manager.</td>
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<td>threatening, punishing and “beatings.”</td>
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<td>**Method for Dealing with Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Growing up, Lisa dealt with conflict</td>
<td>Lisa deals with conflict directly. Sometimes she is unable to do so because</td>
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<tr>
<td>directly, mostly through family</td>
<td>employees go directly to her boss. When she can, she prefers to deal with</td>
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<td>meetings. Currently, Lisa continues</td>
<td>conflict.</td>
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<td>to deal with conflict directly when</td>
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<td>possible.</td>
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<td><strong>Influence of Race in Family</strong></td>
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<td>Lisa believes that people formed</td>
<td>For Lisa, her race influences how she speaks and treats others at work.</td>
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<td>stereotypes about her family because</td>
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<td>of her race. Also, there were</td>
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<td>internal family issues around race</td>
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<td>particularly related to different</td>
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<td>preferences for dating people with</td>
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<td>lighter complexions and dating</td>
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<td>outside of the race.</td>
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<td><strong>Influence of Gender in Family</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa, her sister and mother raised</td>
<td>Gender also influences the type of conversations that Lisa has with her</td>
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<td>her younger brothers and taught them</td>
<td>colleagues at work. The environment is more casual when men are not around but</td>
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<td>how to have successful relationships</td>
<td>there is more careful conversation when men are working in the department.</td>
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<td>with women and to be respectful men.</td>
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<td>Lisa and her sister were also</td>
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<td>responsible for caring for their</td>
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<td>brothers while their mother worked.</td>
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<td><strong>Authority at Work</strong></td>
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<td>Lisa’s female boss, the Vice</td>
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<td>President has the ultimate authority</td>
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<td>in Lisa’s department. However, Lisa</td>
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<td>has authority over the interns,</td>
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<td>contractors and office manager.</td>
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Comparison of Themes: Summary

There are some layers of overlap between Lisa’s family of origin and work experiences. Growing up, Lisa grew up in a single parent home with her mother and three siblings. She is the oldest so she and her sister shared responsibility for helping to take care of their younger twin brothers. Lisa was a leader, but she was also a rebel and go-between. Now, she is an advocate and friend. Lisa and her mother argued frequently when she lived at home but now they have a close relationship since she has moved out and lives with her fiancé. Lisa also has close relationships with her sister and twin brother. Although she does not have a close relationship with her other twin brother, she continues to support and advocate for him. At work, Lisa considers herself to be a friend and comedian and gets along well with all of her colleagues. She has a close relationship with one of her coworkers with whom she is close in age. However, Lisa is more laid back with her family than with colleagues at work. She is a comedian at work but is also very professional. She said “I do have to be professional, especially with the way that I talk. For example, I have a work voice. I don't use that voice with my coworkers, but I mean if somebody calls me, I speak professionally.” In both her family of origin and at work, Lisa has people with whom she maintains close relationships.

In Lisa’s family of origin and work environment, women have assumed the roles of authority. At home, her mother was the ultimate authority, and she displayed her authority by being very strict with Lisa and her siblings. Lisa assumed this role when her mother was working. At work, Lisa’s boss, the Vice President, is the ultimate authority. Her perceptions of her boss are very positive. Lisa described her boss as supportive. Lisa also has authority at work, particularly with the office manager, interns and temporary
workers. When dealing with conflict, Lisa prefers to deal with conflict directly. At work, she is not always able to do so but this is easier to do in her family of origin.

Lisa’s race, culture and gender influenced her experiences in her family of origin and in the workplace. Growing up, she went to predominantly White schools and believed that her friends formed stereotypes about her family because she came from a single parent home with four children and two different fathers (Lisa and her sister have the same father and her twin brothers have a different father). There were also internal issues in the family regarding race and dating preferences. At work, Lisa is the only African-American person in her department and she has only superficial connections with other people of color in her organizations. As the oldest siblings and females, Lisa and her sister made sure that their twin brothers were cared for when their mother was at work and ensured that they learned how to be respectful of other females. At work, Lisa works with all females except when they have a male intern or contractor, so the environment is more laid back. When males are around, the female employees are more careful about what they say or how they behave. Finally, as a child, religion was an important part of her early upbringing. Lisa and her family were practicing Jehovah’s Witnesses and then Baptist until her teenage years when she decided to stop attending church. Currently, she is still not active in the church although her mother continues to attend church regularly.
Case Four: “Danielle”

Danielle is a 31 year-old African-American woman from New York. She is currently working as a Program Coordinator for a government agency.

Family

Family relationships.

Danielle grew up in New York with her mother, father and two of her three siblings. She has a sister who is 10 years older, a brother who is 13 years older and a sister who is 17 years older than she is. Growing up, Danielle was close to her parents and her sister and brother who lived with her. She was not as close to her oldest sister because she did not live in the home with them. Her oldest sister has a different mother and grew up in a different state. Although Danielle’s brother also has a different biological father, he was adopted by her father and lived in the family home. Growing up, she was close to her brother’s biological father in addition to her parents. Danielle said that by the time she was eight years old, her sister that is closest in age to her went off to college so for a large part of her childhood, she felt like an only child. She said “I’m really close to my parents. There were times we went on vacation, just the three of us, and I did a lot of things with just them because my brother and sister had moved out already.” When asked who Danielle was closest to, she said she was closest to her sister “Rochelle” who is closest in age to her. Danielle had the most distant relationship with her oldest sister because she lived far away and she was basically an adult by the time
Danielle was born, so she does not feel like she knew her well. They are closer now, however. Danielle continues to be close to her parents and siblings.

When asked if religion played an important role in her upbringing, Danielle responded yes. She said:

“My parents are both very religious so church was a big part of my upbringing. My paternal grandfather was a bishop, so we definitely grew up in the church. We went to church every Sunday. We were very active in the choir. My dad was and still is a trustee and my mom is still the church administrator. They are very active in the church. Also, my brother is now the minister of music and my sister is a choir director so most of my relatives are still active in the church.”

Although Danielle is not currently active in the church, her relatives continue to attend and participate in the same church that they attended growing up.

Authority dynamics in the family of origin.

Growing up, Danielle’s mother had the greatest authority in the family. Her mother was the disciplinarian of the house and was very vocal whereas her father was quiet. Danielle said “My mother had no problem expressing what she expected of us so we always knew what she was thinking, what she wanted and what her expectations were.” Although she spent a lot of time with her siblings they did not have any authority over her. Additionally, Danielle did not have authority over anyone growing up.

Family conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict or problem that she faced in her family growing up, Danielle said that she rarely had conflict with her relatives when she was younger. However, she did talk about a conflict between her mother and her after college. When she first graduated from college, Danielle moved back home and that was difficult
because when she left for college, she was 17 years old and when she moved back, she
was 20 years old. She thought that she was an adult but her parents still treated her like a
child because she was eating their food and not contributing to the household. Danielle’s
parents expected her to clean the house, cook dinner for the family every night and do
additional chores since she was at home and unemployed but Danielle did not agree that
she should be forced to do these things every night even though she was living at home.
This definitely caused some conflict between Danielle and her mother and this was the
first time she felt that she and her mother were battling each other. She said “I know a lot
of mothers and daughters butt heads in high school and I didn’t go though that with my
mother in high school, but I definitely did when I returned from college.” Danielle said
that her sister served as the buffer between her mother and her because she was unable to
deal with the conflict with her mother on her own. Danielle eventually found a job and
moved out of the house and her relationship with her mother improved.

*Family role dynamics.*

When asked to describe her general style of relating to others in her family,
Danielle said she has always been the one in her family that had the least conflict with
everyone else. Now, she is still the same but is more likely to speak up for herself or
other family members when necessary. Growing up, Danielle was a peacemaker,
mediator and comedian in her family. Currently, she is still a comedian and mediator, but
she is also more of a rebel. Her roles as peacemaker, mediator and comedian helped her
remain close to her siblings even though they are much older than her. Also her parents
were the leaders and caretakers and they never expected Danielle’s siblings to care for
her, but her siblings always wanted to spend time with her and take her places with them. About Danielle’s relationship with her siblings, she said “Whenever I’m around my siblings, I feel like they want me around. I felt very wanted by my brother and sister.” She said that her role as peacemaker did not cause problems in the past but sometimes causes problems now, particularly with her parents. As a peacemaker in the family, her parents are in shock when Danielle expresses that things are bothering her. She said “Anytime I express dissent, my parents don’t take it well. They expect it from my brother and sister, but it’s not really expected from me.”

Race and gender in the family.

When asked if being African-American influenced her interactions with her family members growing up, Danielle said no because everyone in her family is African-American. Additionally, she said that being female did not influence her interactions with family members because her family is largely matriarchal. She explained that there is a larger female presence on her mother’s side of the family and although there is a larger male presence on her father’s side of the family, the males are more quiet and the women have a larger leadership role. Danielle was never provided with any specific messages regarding what she could or could not do because of her race or gender.

Work

Danielle has her master’s degree and has worked in her current position as a Program Coordinator for almost two years. Prior to this position, she worked as a
research scientist for approximately two years. At the age of 31, Danielle is a project manager for a health promotion initiative for a government agency.

*Work relationships.*

Danielle manages three full-time outreach staff and interns in her department and coordinates a health-related program. She works in the main office but her staff works in satellite offices. In addition to the staff that she manages, Danielle has the closest relationship with the evaluator who works in the main office with her and who started the job on the same day as she did. She said “We’ve been at the job growing together. The project has grown and we really have a collaborative effort. As far as the team that I supervise, even though they are not in my office, I still feel close to them.” Additionally, Danielle and the evaluator in her department used to work on a different floor in the main building due to space limitations, so they spent a lot of time together and as a result Danielle feels closer to her than anyone else. When asked who Danielle has the most challenging relationship with, she said her direct supervisor because her supervisor is distant and Danielle does not trust her. Additionally, Danielle had a challenging relationship with one of the outreach coordinators that she supervises. She explained that her direct report applied for the position that she has, so at first there was a power struggle. However, they have a better working relationship now.

*Authority dynamics at work.*

When asked who she considers to have the most authority over her when at work, Danielle said that her direct supervisor and her boss, but her boss is more hands-off.
Therefore, if she needs something she goes to her direct supervisor first. Although Danielle’s working relationship with her direct supervisor is fine, she sometimes wonders if her supervisor is being truthful about certain situations. Danielle further explained that her supervisor once gave her and her closest colleague informal reviews at their request. Initially, they both received excellent reviews and were told that they were meeting expectations by their supervisor. A couple months later, however, her colleague was told that she was not meeting expectations, she did not have the skill set to do her job well and that she would be moved into a new role as a result. Both Danielle and her colleague were shocked because they were given excellent reviews a couple of months earlier. This situation made Danielle skeptical of her supervisor and less confident about her job because now she does not know if her supervisor is being honest when she acknowledges that Danielle is doing a good job. At work, Danielle has authority over the outreach coordinators and the interns that she supervises. She works in a different office from her staff so they have regular in-person staff meetings in order to maintain communication and address any issues that may arise. Because of Danielle’s feelings about her supervisor, she tries to be as honest and direct as possible with her direct reports.

*Workplace Conflict.*

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Danielle talked about her conflict with one of her direct reports when she first started working in her current role. Danielle explained that the outreach coordinator would make decisions about work related to the project without discussing it with Danielle first and would claim that she was unaware that she was supposed to discuss these things with Danielle before proceeding. Additionally, the outreach coordinator would take on more work than she
could handle and then ask Danielle to help her get the work done. Danielle’s direct report refused to recognize that Danielle was her supervisor. When Danielle addressed these issues, her direct report initially made excuses for her actions but when she realized that Danielle would not let her continue with her actions, and that she genuinely wanted to help her, their working relationship improved. Danielle initially did not like her direct report, but she made sure to directly address the behavior rather than the personality of her direct report so the conflict was not perceived as personal in nature. When asked if Danielle usually addresses conflict in this way, she said yes and added that she tries to avoid dealing with conflict when she is angry so she is able to address the behavior rather than attack the individual. Danielle believes that she is able to do this well whether she likes an individual or not because she believes that she does not have to like everyone that she works with; however, she does believe it is important to have a professional working relationship with her colleagues.

*Work Role Dynamics.*

Danielle is usually relaxed and friendly with colleagues at work. When she first started working in her current role, she would come into the office and speak to everyone and no one would respond. This was hard for her because she could not understand how people could work together every day and not acknowledge each other. It took her some time to get used to the culture on the floor on which she worked. Recently, Danielle has moved to the floor where the rest of her department is located and she said the environment is friendly.
At work, Danielle describes herself as a supporter and coordinator. She believes that her colleagues would describe her as a supporter and leader. Her self-identified roles as supporter and coordinator help Danielle in her work because with the new project that she is working on, it is important for the staff to be creative and innovative. Danielle believes that being supportive encourages her staff to be comfortable with being creative when working in the communities to which they are assigned. Additionally, she believes that her roles make it easy for other people to work with her because she is pretty open and enjoys working with and helping others.

Race and gender at work.

When asked if being African-American affects the way that Danielle interacts with her colleagues at work, she responded affirmatively. Danielle feels that she has to watch what she says and how she says it because of the stereotype that African-American women have attitudes. She does not believe that she can express her frustrations because she will be perceived by her colleagues as having an attitude. Danielle also believes that she has to prove herself before getting more challenging assignments while her White peers are chosen first to receive challenging assignments. She said “My coordinator who I work with is a White woman and many times when opportunities come up, they’ll give them to her first just because they assume she can do it, not that she’s proven anything. But for me, I have to prove everything that I can do. Once they’ve seen that I can do it, then it’s fine.” When asked if being female affects Danielle’s interactions at work, she said:
“I’m sure it has, but I perceive more of how I act to what I experience first as a black person and second as a woman. I’m definitely sure that being a woman has affected my interactions with my colleagues, but I’ve worked predominantly with women so it is not as clear to me. If I interacted with more men in a work setting, I would better understand how my gender affects my interactions with colleagues.”

The organization where Danielle works is predominantly women and the staff is predominantly White. Also, while there are many people of color in the organization, the majority of them work in lower-level positions. In terms of gender, Danielle is in the majority and in terms of race and organizational level, she is in the minority at work.
Table 4

Comparison of Themes for Danielle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Work Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;Danielle had the closest relationship with her sister “Rochelle” who is closest in age to her. Her most challenging relationship was with her oldest sister who did not grow up in the same house as her.</td>
<td><strong>Work Relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;Danielle is closest to one of her female coworkers with whom she started the job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Role</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Danielle was the peacemaker, as well as the mediator and comedian. Currently she is the rebel, mediator and comedian.</td>
<td><strong>Work Role</strong>&lt;br&gt;Danielle is a supporter and coordinator at work. Her colleagues also perceive her to be a supporter but also a leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Authority</strong>&lt;br&gt;As a child, Danielle’s mother had authority over her. Her mother was the disciplinarian. Danielle’s father also had authority over her, but he was less vocal than her mother.</td>
<td><strong>Authority at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Danielle’s female direct supervisor has the ultimate authority over everyone in her department. However, Danielle has some authority over the outreach coordinators and interns that she supervises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Family Conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Danielle was a peacemaker and rarely had conflict with relatives. Currently, she deals with conflict directly with relatives.</td>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Work Conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;Danielle prefers to deal with conflict directly but professionally. She discusses behaviors rather than personality so the conflict is not perceived as personal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Race in Family</strong>&lt;br&gt;Danielle does not believe that race influenced the way she interacted with her relatives.</td>
<td><strong>Influence of Race at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;For Danielle, her race influences what she says to colleagues and how she speaks. She does not want to be perceived as having an attitude so she is careful about how she expresses her frustrations with colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender in Family</strong>&lt;br&gt;Danielle does not believe that gender influenced the way she interacted with relatives.</td>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Danielle said that gender is not as salient as race when it comes to her interactions with her colleagues because most are female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of Themes: Summary

There are similarities between Danielle’s family of origin and work experiences as well as some differences. Danielle grew up with her parents and two of her three siblings. She is the youngest and her siblings are at least 10 years older than her. Danielle felt like an only child because at a very young age, her siblings had left the family home and were living on their own. Although her siblings are much older than her, Danielle is close to them. She is closer to the siblings who she grew up with but has also become closer to her oldest sister over the years.

Growing up, Danielle was a peacemaker, mediator and comedian. Currently, she is more of a rebel, but also a mediator and comedian. At work, Danielle considers herself to be a supporter and coordinator and enjoys working with and helping others. She has a close relationship with one of her colleagues who she spends the most time with. Danielle also feels close to the staff that she supervises even though they work in different locations than her. At work and in her family of origin, Danielle is able to balance between being the leader and the follower. She said:

“Because I’m the youngest in my family, I’m used to following directions and going with the flow and I don’t have a problem with that. However, if a decision needs to be made in my family and we can’t make a one, I’ll make suggestions about what should be done. I can flow between a leadership role and a supportive role in my family and I think I do that well at work too. I know there’s a lot of people who are usually comfortable in one or the other but I am comfortable with both roles.”

Danielle is more serious at work than at home and she trusts her relatives more than her colleagues at work because she knows that if a relative says something to her they are being honest. Danielle believes that there is less trust and honesty at work than at home.
In Danielle’s family of origin and work environment, women have assumed the roles of authority. At home, her mother was the ultimate authority and she displayed her authority by being the disciplinarian. At work, Danielle’s direct supervisor has ultimate authority. While her perceptions of her mother are generally positive, her perceptions of her supervisor are not. When dealing with conflict, Danielle prefers to address issues directly. At work, however, she is careful about how she addresses issues or expresses frustration because she does not want to be perceived as having an attitude.

Danielle’s race influenced her experiences at work but not in her family of origin. Gender, however, was not as salient in her family of origin or at work. Danielle grew up in an African-American household so race was not a huge influence on her relationships with relatives. At work, however, she is one of the few African-Americans in her department to have a supervisory role so she is careful about what she says and how she says it so she is not perceived negatively by colleagues. Next, religion was an important part of Danielle’s early upbringing. Her parents held leaderships roles in the church and her siblings remain active members of the family church. Danielle is currently not an active member in her family church because she does not live in her hometown and has not found a church home where she currently lives. When she visits her parents, however, she attends church with her family. Finally, gender was not as salient in Danielle’s family of origin or at work. She explained that women take up the leadership roles in her family so she was never sent any messages about what she could or could not do as a result of her gender. Similarly, since her work environment is predominantly female, Danielle does not believe her gender significantly influenced her relationships with colleagues at work.
Case Five: “Lori”

Lori is a 35 year-old African-American woman from New Jersey. She is currently working as a Human Resources Manager in the Banking industry.

Family

Family relationships.

Lori grew up in New Jersey with her mother, stepfather and two of her three siblings. She has a sister who is nine years younger, a brother who is seven years younger and a stepsister who is one year older than she is. Lori also has eight siblings on her biological father’s side of the family (she is number six of nine children) but she did not have a relationship with them or her father when she was a child. Growing up, Lori was close to her mother. She had a rocky relationship with her stepfather but it improved once she left for college. Lori described her relationship with her mother as typical. She said “My mother and I have always had a typical mother-daughter relationship. Some days we like each other and some days we don’t.” Lori was closest to her brother because he looked up to her and respected her opinion and judgment. She also had close relationships with some of her male cousins. Lori is especially close to one cousin in particular with whom she is very close in age. She was not as close to her stepsister or her younger sister. Her stepsister lived with Lori and her family at one time for approximately six months but grew up in a different home for most of her upbringing. She had the most challenging relationship with her younger sister who she described as
“difficult to deal with.” When asked if religion played an important role in her upbringing, Lori responded yes. Her family was Baptist and they attended church regularly growing up. She continues to attend church regularly as an adult.

Authority dynamics in the family of origin.

Growing up, Lori’s mother had the greatest authority in the family. She said “My mother had a very strong personality. She always backed me up and stood by me if I needed her, but if I was wrong she definitely let me know.” Lori’s biological father had the least authority over her because he was not present in her life and did not take part in her upbringing. They did not have a relationship until Lori was 20 years-old. Lori had authority over her younger siblings who she helped care for when needed.

Family conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict or problem that she faced in her family growing up, Lorie discussed a conflict that she had with her stepfather. Lori believed that when her stepsister came to visit, her stepfather treated her stepsister better than he treated Lori. When she discussed her feelings with her stepfather, he did not agree with Lori’s perception. Lori said that her mother tried to stay neutral but supported both her and her stepfather. She said “My mother made points on both sides. She pointed out that some of the things I was saying were true and did happen and then she tried to make me see things from my stepfather’s perspective as well. She was kind of neutral, but she did recognize that what I was saying was reality and not imagined.” Lori said that it was not an ongoing issue since her stepsister did not live with them. Rather, it was a sporadic issue that arose only when her stepsister came to visit. Lorie said that discussing the issue was typical of
the way that she usually dealt with conflict in her family. She described her family as great conversationalists who were able to resolve conflicts without yelling or becoming overly angry.

*Family role dynamics.*

When asked to describe her general style of relating to others in her family, Lori said that she is generally known to be aggressive and sometimes bossy. Her current family role is coordinator because she manages and orchestrates most things in her immediate and extended family. Growing up, Lori said that she was very outspoken. Her role as the outspoken one caused problems because family members perceived her to be overbearing and too opinionated. Lori was known for speaking out of turn and saying things that her family really did not want to hear. Now, she believes that she is more accepting but acknowledges that she can still be aggressive at times.

*Race and gender in the family.*

When asked if being African-American influenced her interactions with her family members growing up, Lori said no because everyone in her family was African-American. However, being female influenced Lori’s relationships with family members, particularly with her male cousins. She said “Most of my cousins were older males and because I’m so aggressive and was able to keep up with them, I think at times they would have preferred that I wasn’t like that. They probably would have preferred that I was more of a follower, a little more laid back and a little less vocal and opinionated.”
Work

Lori has her master’s degree and has worked in her current position as a Human Resources Manager for five years. Prior to this position, she worked as a Human Resources Representative for five years.

Work relationships.

In her current position, Lori handles employee relations issues within the human resources department of her organization and oversees all of the employee relations representatives in the field. She also manages the claimant litigation in her organization, seeing cases through to fruition with the employment counsel. Additionally, Lori educates the employee relations representatives and ensures that they are current on related employment laws that are relevant to their jobs. Through the organization’s university, she teaches employment law and best practices of performance management to all levels of management.

Lori works with everyone in the human resources department, including the employee relations representatives and office assistants, as well as the company attorney and occasionally the employees. She has the closest relationship with the human resources staff because she supports them as they support the employees in the organization. Lori has the most challenging relationships with senior management and some of her peers. When asked what she attributes to these challenging relationships, she said:

“My interpretation is intimidation on their part. I’m a very straightforward, strong willed, go get ‘em type of person. I don’t back down or take no for an answer. When I want things done, I want them done a certain way and I think the people
that I deal with would rather for me to be more passive than aggressive. It is a challenge.”

Lori’s company was recently acquired by another company, and as a result, she has a new boss with whom she has a challenging relationship.

*Authority dynamics at work.*

When asked who she considers to have the most authority over her, Lori said that the managers that are three or four levels above her have the ultimate authority in the organization. However, her newly appointed supervisor, who came from the company that her organization was acquired by, has immediate authority over her at work. Lori’s working relationship with her supervisor is challenging because they are still getting to know each other better, including each other’s work styles and preferences. Lori believes that there are some differences in their skill sets and knowledge and implied that her supervisor is not as skilled or knowledgeable as she should be in her position. When asked who had the least authority over her at work, Lori said that the administrative assistants and file clerks have very little authority at work. Lori has authority over the employee relations representatives and one of the administrative assistants.

*Workplace conflict.*

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Lori described a general conflict that she had with her supervisor. She said “It has been very stressful. I have a new boss and we are in the middle of an integration. We were recently bought by another company and my new boss is from the other company. She and I are struggling with how to manage the workload, what needs to be done in terms of priority, time
management, meaning hers, and the level of knowledge, meaning hers.” Lori said that when dealing with her supervisor she tries to be patient and often gives her the pros and cons of whatever situation they are dealing with. She also points out potential risks that her supervisor may not have recognized. At times, Lori does not say anything to her boss and allows her boss to make certain decisions on her own. She said “Sometimes I just don’t say anything because at the end of the day, she has the authority and she’s going to do things the way she wants to do them. I will give my opinion and when things don’t work her way, I’ll be there to pick up the pieces.” Lori said that this was her usual style of dealing with conflict with her current supervisor, but in the past she was able to speak more freely with her former boss because he respected her opinion and she did not have to “jump through all of the hoops” and do as much reasoning with him.

Work role dynamics.

Although Lori has toned down a bit, she describes herself as being aggressive at work. With her subordinates, she provides learning opportunities for them so they understand what they need to do and only need to check in occasionally. She recognizes that her subordinates come to her for guidance and she tries to guide them while empowering them to be able to do their jobs with minimal supervision. With senior management, however, Lori spends more time trying to get buy-in for initiatives she wants to implement. Her role is very different with senior management than with her direct reports.
Lori perceives herself to be a leader at work but her peers, subordinates and management perceive her to be a rebel. When asked how her role as a leader contributes to her success at work, Lori said:

“I’m really crafting my own destiny. It has gone well thus far and by being a take charge person and a leader, I’ve been able to acquire a lot more skills than some of my peers have. This makes me a go-to person and if people feel that you are a reliable source for them to go to that helps to move you up in the organization.”

However, she does recognize that being a leader comes with challenges as well. She said:

“Being a leader poses challenges because on one hand, I have to say no a lot and be the ‘hatchet’ woman because I do fire people. Also, I have to oppose employees on a lot of things that may be near and dear to them, but my interests are for the company and I have to protect the organization. From the subordinate’s perspective, I can be overbearing at times and I recognize that. I’m not a micromanager but I am very ‘in your face,’ and if there are things that I believe they should know I’ll let them know and tell them to figure it out and come back to me with the information.”

Lori recognizes that her aggressive style intimidates some people but she believes that when people get to know her, they understand that she is passionate about what she does and they get a different perspective about who she is as a professional.

Race and gender at work.

When asked if being African-American affects the way that Lori interacts with her colleagues at work, she responded affirmatively. Lori said “At work, I have to tone it down. I have to speak softer. I’ve even been sent to a professional coach to interact better with senior management and my peers so that I don’t come off as abrasive. I don’t think I’m abrasive, and I can say the same thing that a White person says and they’ll have a fit if I say it, but if they say it, it’s okay.” Lori does not believe that her gender has
influenced her interactions with colleagues because her department is made up of predominately females. She believes that her race has more influence on her relationships with colleagues than gender.
Table 5

Comparison of Themes for Lori

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Work Domain</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Relationships</strong></td>
<td><strong>Work Relationships</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori had the closest relationship with her brother but she was also close to her parents. Her most challenging relationship was with her younger sister who she describes as “difficult to deal with.”</td>
<td>Lori is closest to the employees in the human resources department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Role</strong></td>
<td><strong>Work Role</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing up, Lori was the outspoken family member. Currently she is the coordinator in her family.</td>
<td>Lori describes herself as a leader at work. Her colleagues perceive her to be a rebel. Lori is also outspoken at work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Authority</strong></td>
<td><strong>Authority at Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a child, Lori’s mother had authority over her. Her mother had a strong personality but was also very nurturing and guiding. Lori’s biological father had the least authority because he was not in her life growing up. Lori had some authority over her siblings.</td>
<td>Lori’s female direct supervisor has ultimate authority over her at work. However, Lori has some authority over the employee relations managers and an administrative assistant. She has a strong personality at work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Family Conflict</strong></td>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Work Conflict</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growing up, Lori was very outspoken and opinionated. Currently, she deals with conflict directly and believes that she can be a little “aggressive and overbearing.”</td>
<td>Lori prefers to deal with conflict directly. She admits that she can be outspoken and aggressive at work at times, but is more careful when addressing conflicts with her supervisor and senior management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Race in Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influence of Race at Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori does not believe that race influenced the way she interacted with her relatives.</td>
<td>Lori’s race influences her interactions with colleagues. She has been sent to work with a professional coach in order to improve her communication with colleagues, as she is perceived to be aggressive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender in Family</strong></td>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender at Work</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori believes that gender influenced the way she interacted with relatives, particularly her male cousins.</td>
<td>Gender is not as salient as race when it comes to Lori’s interactions with her colleagues because most are female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of Themes: Summary

There are similarities and differences between Lori’s family of origin and work experiences. Lori grew up with her mother, stepfather and two of her three siblings. She has a stepsister who is one year older and two siblings who are younger than her. Lori’s biological father was not part of her upbringing but they do currently have a relationship. She was closest to her brother growing up and had more distant relationships with her sister and stepsister.

Lori’s family of origin behavior helped to shape her experiences at work. Growing up, Lori was very outspoken and opinionated. Currently, she is a coordinator and recognizes that she is perceived by her relatives to be overbearing at times. At work, Lori considers herself to be a leader but her colleagues perceive her to be a rebel. She is closest to the employees in the human resources department because she supports them in working with employees. She has the most challenging relationship with her new supervisor who came from the company that recently acquired her company. At work and in her family of origin, Lori is very outspoken and sometimes aggressive when relating to others. Additionally, she has had closer relationships and less conflict with males in her family of origin and at work.

In Lori’s family of origin and work environment, women have assumed the roles of authority. At home, her mother was the ultimate authority and she displayed her authority by being the disciplinarian. At work, Lori’s direct supervisor has authority over her. While her perceptions of her mother are generally positive, her perceptions of her supervisor are not. When dealing with conflict at work and at home, Lori prefers to address issues directly. At work, however, she is careful about how she addresses issues
because she has been sent to work with a professional coach as a result of being perceived as abrasive by senior management and peers.

Lori’s race, culture and gender influenced her experiences either in her family of origin or at work. She grew up in an African-American household so race did not influence her relationships with relatives. At work, however, Lori believes that her behavior is scrutinized more closely and frequently than her White counterparts because she is African-American. Next, religion was an important part of Lori’s early upbringing and it continues to be an important part of her adult life. She continues to be active in her church. Finally, gender was salient in Lori’s family of origin but not at work. She explained that she grew up with a lot of male cousins and when she was around them she was very aggressive so she could fit in. This may have shaped her tendency to be aggressive with other family members and colleagues. Lori was very aware of her gender and believed that her cousins would have preferred if she was less aggressive and more laid back when she was with them. At work, gender is not as salient because her department is predominantly female and therefore she does not believe her gender significantly influenced her relationships with colleagues.
Case Six: “Maria”

Maria is a 29 year-old African-American woman from Maryland. She is currently working as a Policy Analyst in a government agency.

Family

Family relationships.

Maria grew up in Washington DC with her mother, maternal grandmother and oldest sister. Her sister is three years older than her. They have the same mother and different biological fathers (although her sister considers Maria’s father to be her father). Additionally, Maria has siblings who have the same father as her but different mothers. She has a brother who is eight years older, a sister who is 3 months older and a brother who is eight years younger than her. Maria is the only child that her parents have together. Her mother and father are married and he was a part of her early upbringing, but he first moved out of the home after having an affair that led to the birth of Maria’s younger brother. After he left the home, Maria’s father supported her but was not always there physically. She said “Whenever I needed to go somewhere he would come pick me up and take me places, but he wasn’t involved. He would take credit or be very proud of me when I accomplished something positive, but he wasn’t really a hands-on father.” Maria’s mother and father were separated and reunited several times and her father has been in and out of the family home over the years. Currently, they are still married and living together.
Growing up, Maria was closest to her maternal grandmother, mother and oldest sister. She described her grandmother as very nurturing and giving, often providing necessities for the family when her mother lacked finances to provide for them. Maria described her mother as her best friend when she was growing up and said that she could talk to her mother about anything. Maria’s oldest sister was her caregiver while her mother worked two jobs outside of the home. Her sister took her to school, checked her homework and made sure she ate dinner when her mom was gone. Although Maria had a relationship with her other siblings because they visited during summer vacations, her relationships with them were not as good as they are now that all of them are adults. Maria had the most challenging relationship with her youngest brother because she believed that he was the reason why her parents were separated. She said:

“I had issues with my younger brother initially. I took some of my and my mother’s anger out on him because I believed he was the reason why my father left. My father had an affair and had a baby outside of my parents’ marriage and because my mother was frustrated and angry, I was frustrated and angry. As a result, our relationship was a little hostile for a little while.”

Religion played an important role in Maria’s family. When she was younger, her family went to church every Sunday and for every event. They were very involved in the church, in children’s choir and the usher board. At one point Maria’s mother sent the children to church but she did not go. Once her mother and father were separated for a while, her mother became involved in the church again. Whether Maria’s mother attended church or not, she always made sure that the children attended.
Authority dynamics in the family of origin.

Growing up, Maria’s mother had the greatest authority in her family. She said that her mother did not have to express authority. Her mother’s authority was just understood and Maria never tried to question her mother. She said that her siblings had the least authority and she did not have authority over anyone.

Family conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict or problem that she faced in her family growing up, Maria talked about a conflict between her father and her. During one of the periods when Maria’s father was living in the family home, he would pick up his youngest son and bring him over to the house, expecting Maria to babysit him. On one occasion, her father brought her brother over and Maria refused to take him with her because she was going out with a few girlfriends. Her father became angry with her and when he came towards her, she became so afraid that he was going to hit her that she urinated on herself. Maria further explained that although her father had never hit her prior to this situation, he had a history of abusing her mother as well as her older sister’s mother so she thought he was going to hit her. Maria was so afraid that she packed her things and moved to her older sister’s home for a few months until she was ready to return home. Maria’s mother was sad that she moved out but she was also afraid to discuss the situation with her husband so the conflict was never resolved. When asked if this was the way that Maria usually dealt with conflicts in her family, she said yes. However, she now expresses her emotions more openly and deals with conflict more directly and immediately with family members.
*Family role dynamics.*

Growing up, Maria was the abused person because her oldest sister used to beat her up a lot. She also was a friend. Currently, Maria is the go-between, peacemaker and leader. She described her grandmother as the supporter of the family and the one that “held everything together.” Maria described her mother as a fighter. She was very emotional as she talked about her mother’s role in the family. Maria said “My mother took a lot, but she did the best that she could as a single parent. We had everything that everybody else had. My mother was nurturing. She definitely exhibited strength, particularly around how to go on without a man, how to provide and how to be a fighter.” Maria believed that her role as a friend helped her younger brother adjust to her household when he came to live with them for a short period of time. Maria noticed that her mother treated her brother differently from the other children because she resented him. As a result Maria befriended him and showed him support, especially since her brother noticed that he was being treated differently.

When asked to describe her general style of relating to others in her family, Maria said that she is the link for all of the family members. She is the person that everyone comes to when they want to communicate a message to other family members. Maria often felt guilty because her siblings accused her of being the one that her mother and father favored because she is the only child that they had together. She said “I’m a link when it comes to my family. For a long time, I felt bad because I was the only child that my parents had together and I was the only one that spent a lot of time with both of my parents. My older sister went away to school and my other brothers and sisters weren’t my mother’s kids, so they weren’t there, so I got to spend more time with my father.”
Currently, Maria has a good relationship with all of her family members.

**Race and gender in the family.**

When asked if being African-American influenced her interactions with family members growing up, Maria said no because everyone in her family was African-American. However, being female influenced her relationships with family members, particularly her brothers. She said “I don’t like to talk to discuss certain things with my brothers. They can be so protective so I just finesse some of the things that I talk to them about. I cannot be very candid about certain subjects with them.”

**Work**

Maria is 29 years-old and works for a government agency. She has her master’s degree and has worked in her current position as an analyst for a little over one year. Prior to this position, she had an administrative position for 10 years.

**Work relationships.**

In her current position, Maria and the other analysts write federal regulations and mandates for specific federal issues that states use to implement state policies. They also interpret some of the regulations when states contact her office for clarification about a particular issue. Maria’s department consists of 10 women. She works with the Division Director, the Secretary, one Senior Policy Analyst and six Policy Analysts. Of the 10 women, five are Caucasian, three, including Maria, are African-American, one is Ethiopian and one is Latina. Maria has the closest relationships with the Ethiopian and
Latina analysts. She said “We are very close. I’m not sure if it’s because of our age-we’re the younger generation of the division, because we’re women of color, or because I support them with certain areas of responsibility so we work together often on our subject matters. I think it’s a combination of all three.” She has the most challenging relationship with her immediate supervisor who is the Senior Policy Analyst. About her supervisor, Maria said:

“I have an administrative background, and when I was first hired we didn’t have a secretary, and I think she assumed that because I was the lowest ranked policy analyst and because I had an administrative background that I was the secretary. She’s somewhat of a micromanager. Also, there are cultural differences and she says some things that I think are inappropriate. For instance, she calls me ‘girl’ and she’s very ‘touchy feely,’ which I don’t like.”

Although Maria has a challenging relationship with her supervisor, she said that she learns a lot from her. However, she is still trying to adapt to her supervision style.

*Authority dynamics at work.*

When asked who she considers to have the most authority over her, Maria said that her division director has the ultimate authority in the organization. However, her supervisor has immediate authority over her at work. Her immediate supervisor does her performance evaluations and makes recommendations to the division director regarding Maria’s work, but the division director is also hands on and very thorough. When asked who had the least authority over her at work, Maria said that the secretary has very little authority at work. Maria occasionally assigns tasks to the secretary because Maria is responsible for the budget and the secretary orders the supplies, travel vouchers and other necessities.
Workplace conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Maria described a conflict that she had with her supervisor. Her supervisor incorrectly interpreted a policy and asked Maria to send the information to the regional office. Although Maria knew that the interpretation was incorrect, she sent the information to the regional office at her supervisor’s request. When the division director questioned Maria about the incorrect information that was sent to the regional office, her immediate supervisor did not take responsibility for providing the interpretation or the directive to send it to the regional office. Instead, she sent an email to Maria and copied the division director informing Maria that she needed to resolve the situation as if she had no knowledge or involvement in the situation. Maria did not inform the division director that she received the information and directive from her supervisor. However, when she approached her supervisor to discuss the issue, Maria’s supervisor verbally took ownership of the mistake but did not tell the division director about her mistake verbally or in writing. As a result of this situation, Maria decided that if she had to discuss an issue with her supervisor, she would put it in an email because she wanted to keep a paper trail for herself. When asked if this is how Maria would usually deal with an issue at work, she said yes, particularly in this position. She explained that she is still trying to figure out the dynamics among her coworkers and she does not speak up a lot because she is also trying to adapt to her supervisor’s style of relating to her. Maria said:
“In this office I’m still trying to feel out the dynamics of how everything works. Sometimes my immediate supervisor says things in a joking or sarcastic way but I know she’s being serious. I’m not very aggressive so I’m trying to figure out how I can have that same approach to say something that I really mean, but to say it in a joking way where she knows I’m serious. She only does this to me, not to the secretary or any of the other policy analysts. I think she does it to me because I don’t speak up a lot. Therefore, I’m trying to feel my way around it to figure out what’s the best way to say something back to her when she behaves this way.”

*Work role dynamics.*

Maria relates very well to the younger policy analysts at work because they have many things in common. Additionally, one of the policy analysts is a lesbian and Maria relates to her because many of Maria’s friends are gay. Maria perceives herself to be a supporter at work and her colleagues perceive her to be a supporter as well. She explained that she is the co-lead on many large projects so a lot of her success comes from helping and assisting the leader of those areas. However, Maria also believes that being a supporter sometimes gives people outside of her department the impression that she does not have expertise in her field if she is not the lead on a particular project. For example, people sometimes question her interpretation of policy or refuse to speak with her unless the leader of the project is unavailable. Maria is respected in her division but outside of her division she is not respected as much when she is not the leader on a project. She believes that she does not have as much respect outside of her division because she is new to the organization and because she does not have a background in policy. She said “I came from an administrative position, so some people believe that I still have to learn. I’m still in the learning curve to them.”
Race and gender at work.

When asked if being African-American affected the way that Maria interacts with her colleagues at work, she responded affirmatively but believes that age affects her interactions more than race. The younger analysts who are also women of color tend to do things together outside of work. Additionally, Maria explained that the older employees are trying to bring in younger analysts because many of them will be retiring soon and they are in the process of doing succession planning in her department as a result. Maria does not believe that her gender has influenced her interactions with colleagues because her department is made up of all females. She said “This is the first time I’ve ever worked with all women and we all get along. It’s a very supportive office. Even though I have some challenges with my supervisor, my division is very supportive of one another and we work really well together.”
Table 6

*Comparison of Themes for Maria*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Work Domain</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Maria had the closest relationships with her maternal grandmother, mother and oldest sister. Her most challenging relationship was with her youngest brother.</td>
<td><strong>Work Relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;Maria is closest to the younger female analysts in her department who are also women of color.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Role</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Maria was the abused family member. Currently she is the go-between, peacemaker and leader.</td>
<td><strong>Work Role</strong>&lt;br&gt;Maria describes herself as a supporter at work. Her colleagues perceive her to be a supporter as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Authority</strong>&lt;br&gt;As a child, Maria’s mother had authority over her. Her siblings had the least authority. Maria had no authority over anyone.</td>
<td><strong>Authority at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Maria’s female division director has ultimate authority over everyone at work. However, her female direct supervisor has authority over her at work. Maria does not have authority over anyone, but she does assign tasks to the secretary occasionally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Family Conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Maria was very quiet and did not deal with conflict. Currently, she expresses her emotions more openly and deals with conflict more directly and immediately with family.</td>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Work Conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;Maria does not speak up much at work and does not address conflict directly most of the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Race in Family</strong>&lt;br&gt;Maria does not believe that race influenced the way she interacted with her relatives because all of the family is African-American.</td>
<td><strong>Influence of Race at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Maria’s race influences her interactions with colleagues but she believes that age is more salient at work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender in Family</strong>&lt;br&gt;Maria believes that gender influenced the way she interacted with relatives, particularly her brothers.</td>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Gender is not as salient as race or age when it comes to Maria’s interactions with her colleagues because all are female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of Themes: Summary

There are similarities and differences between Maria’s family of origin and work experiences. Maria grew up with her mother, maternal grandmother and oldest sister. She has three older siblings and one younger sibling. Maria’s parents are married but her father moved out of the home after having an affair when Maria was young. Although her father did not live with her and was not always physically supportive, Maria had a good relationship with him.

Growing up, Maria was very quiet. While her mother worked two jobs, Maria’s oldest sister cared for her and Maria said that her sister “beat her up” often. She described herself as the abused person growing up. Currently, she is the mediator, go-between and leader in her family. At work, Maria considers herself to be a supporter and her colleagues perceive her to be a supporter as well. She is closest to the younger analysts in her department because she works with them on some of her projects. Additionally age and race play a factor in Maria’s ability to relate to her colleagues as they are the youngest employees as well as women of color. Maria has the most challenging relationship with her female supervisor who sometimes makes sarcastic and inappropriate comments to her. At work and in her family of origin, Maria is very quiet when relating to others. However, she addresses conflict more often and openly with family members than colleagues. Maria believes that she will be able to address conflict at work once she has adapted to her work environment.

In Maria’s family of origin and at work, women have assumed the roles of authority. At home, her mother was the ultimate authority. At work, her direct supervisor has authority over her. While her perceptions of her mother are generally positive, her
perceptions of her supervisor are somewhat mixed. Maria believes that her mother is strong because she has been able to take care of her and her oldest sister on her own. Although she has learned a lot from her supervisor, she also has some challenges in communicating with her.

Maria’s race, culture and gender influenced her experiences either in her family of origin or at her workplace. She grew up in an African-American household so race did not influence her relationships with relatives. At work, however, Maria’s race has helped her relate to the other people of color at her job. In additional to her race, Maria’s age has influenced her relationships with her colleagues. She has the closest relationships to the younger analysts who are also women of color. Next, religion was an important part of Maria’s early upbringing. Her family went to church every Sunday and for every event and they were very involved in church events. Finally, gender was salient in her family of origin but not at work. Maria explained that she does not share some details with her brothers because it feels awkward and she prefers to be more discrete with certain types of information. At work, gender is not as salient because her department is all female and therefore it has not impacted her relationships with colleagues.
Case Seven: “Tara”

Tara is a 39 year-old African-American woman from Tennessee. She is currently working as a Marketing Representative and is also co-owner of a business.

Family

Family relationships.

Tara moved around a lot as a child because of her father’s career. Although she has lived in numerous places throughout her life, Tara grew up primarily in Tennessee and Maryland. Currently, she lives in New York City. Tara lived with both of her parents until her parents divorced when she was 11 years-old and then she was raised by her mother. Tara had a great relationship with her mother and remembers having a great childhood despite her parents getting divorced when she was young. She said “When my parents were married, their relationship was somewhat strained because my father was an alcoholic. I would observe the fights and sense the tension and I knew something was up. However, I had a great childhood because I was an only child. My family was blessed so I had a lot of things that made for a comfortable childhood.” Tara’s father later remarried and had another child with whom Tara has no relationship.

Growing up, Tara had the closest relationship with her mother. She said “I have been so blessed by everything that my mother was able to give me as my guardian and provider. I never wanted for anything.” She was also close to her maternal grandmother. Tara and her mother even lived with her grandmother for a short period of time when she
was growing up. She had the most problematic relationship with her father. Tara said “My dad was an alcoholic and he had a hard time communicating with me. The only way he was able to communicate with me was to take me shopping. There wasn’t a lot of communication between my father and me.” Tara resented her father because she often had to act like the parent in their relationship due to her father’s drinking. Additionally, he had a hard time managing conflict, so she always addressed situations as a child and as a teenager, and Tara said she “just got tired of doing so.”

When asked if religion played a role in her family, Tara said “We went to church. I attended Catholic schools. I went through baptism, first communion and confirmation and also attended church pretty regularly. I had a strong religious Christian foundation that carried me throughout adulthood.” Tara and her parents went to church as a family once a year but she and her mother attended church regularly. Even when her mother could not attend church because she was studying for school, Tara attended church by herself.

Authority dynamics in the family of origin.

Growing up, Tara’s mother had the greatest authority in the family but her grandmother also had some authority over her. She said that her mother and grandmother displayed their authority by example. Tara knew what was expected of her and she hated disapproval from her mother or grandmother. However, there were times when Tara was yelled at, grounded and even spanked. Generally, however, she tried to follow the rules so she would not have to be disciplined.
Family conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict or problem that she faced in her family growing up, Tara talked about a conflict between her father and her. When she was in college, her father stopped speaking to her and cut her off financially. She believes that her father’s second wife “drove a wedge” between her father and her, causing him to cut off communication and financial support to her. Tara also believed that her father’s drinking caused him to make up stories about bad behavior on her part that never happened. This caused conflict between Tara and her paternal grandmother because her grandmother would reprimand her for behavior that never happened. In the end, Tara cut off communication with her father and grandmother for several years. She did write a letter expressing her feelings and expressing her forgiveness to her father but did not receive a response until a couple of years later. Although Tara and her grandmother have mended their relationship, her relationship with her father is still strained. She said “My father communicates with me through letters because it’s an easy, safe out. He’ll write letters around the holidays but we have not spoken on the phone in years because I think he has to come to terms with whatever guilt he feels in dealing with our relationship. Until he comes to that point, I don’t think he can move past it.” When asked if she usually handles conflict with family this way, Tara said she does try to address conflict before severing ties with relatives but admitted that this is something she learned with maturity. In the past, Tara did not know how to deal with the conflict with her father so she stopped speaking to him but currently she has decided to at least have written communication with him at least a couple times a year.
Family role dynamics.

Growing up, Tara was the supporter and protector on her mother’s side of the family but was the outcast with her paternal relatives. Currently, she is a supporter and friend. Tara described her mother and maternal grandmother as nurturers and protectors, her father as a loner and her paternal grandmother as a peacemaker. Tara’s role as a supporter contributed to her positive relationship with her mother. She said “My mother and I – we saw each other as a team, and it was just us, so we supported each other to make sure the other person succeeded.” When asked to describe her general style of relating to relatives, Tara said that she is cordial and friendly. She works hard to keep the peace with relatives, especially family members on her father’s side of the family.

Race and gender in the family.

When asked if being African-American influenced her interactions with family members growing up, Tara said yes. She said:

“I think it’s just relational – how we relate to each other – my maternal grandmother was very active in our church before she passed away, and I’m still active at church. The Black church experience has influenced my relationships with family. Also, I am a member of my paternal grandmother’s and my mom’s sorority, an African-American sorority, so that also gives us another commonality.”

When asked if being female influenced her relationships with family members, Tara said no because her family is largely female. Additionally, she was never sent any messages about things that she could or could not do because she is female.
**Work**

Tara is 39 years-old and works as a marketing representative and also co-owns a small business. She has her master’s degree and has worked in her current position as a marketing representative for approximately one year. She has co-owned her small business for five years. Prior to her position as a marketing representative, Tara worked as a corporate manager for nine and a half years.

**Work relationships.**

In her current position as a marketing representative, Tara does campaign and data analysis for a media corporation. In her position, she works with managers and directors and has very limited opportunities to work with other groups of people and in other departments outside of marketing. Tara’s work is mostly autonomous because she does data analysis. Because she has been in the position for a short period of time and also due to the independent nature of her role, Tara has not developed any close relationships and does not have any challenging relationships with anyone. In her business, however, she has the closest relationship with her business partner who is also a friend from college. She said “Initially, she started helping out as a legal advisor, because she’s an attorney, and really just jumped in there and voluntarily helped me out when she saw I needed help.” Their relationship further developed into a co-ownership. Tara also identified her business partner as the person who she has the most challenging relationship with because they have different personalities and sometimes they do not see things in the same way.
Authority dynamics at work.

When asked who has the most authority over her at work, Tara said that her manager has authority over her but the director has ultimate authority in the organization. When asked who had the least authority, she said that her peers have the least authority over her at work. In her small business, Tara and her business partner share authority but her partner has ultimate authority over the interns who work for them. Tara does occasionally delegate tasks to them when necessary, however.

Workplace conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Tara described a general conflict that she had with her supervisor at her previous job where she worked for almost 10 years. She was reporting to a manager who had poor management skills which created some frustration and additional work for Tara. She said:

“My supervisor’s management style was known as being one of the poorest in the company. She was a very nice person, but she just did not have very strong management skills. She was disorganized, didn’t give direction well, and created a lot of extra work. I was challenged with helping her to become a better manager, helping her to stay organized and to pull out of her clear direction. She meant well, but she just was not a good manager so she was moved from many different departments because people just didn’t like working with her.”

In order to deal with the conflict with her supervisor, Tara did two things. First, she sought outside help from a career coach to help her manage the conflict because it was becoming extremely stressful for her. Then Tara confronted her supervisor and clearly communicated what she needed in order to be productive. This led to weekly meetings where she and her supervisor prioritized the projects that were delegated to Tara. When asked if this is the way Tara would normally deal with a conflict at work, she said:
“I always try to think of solutions and find a way to speak to a person in a way that they’ll be receptive. I find some way to praise them and then come back with the constructive criticism rather than being accusatory. If this route doesn’t work, I will confidentially consult a senior manager to get feedback on how to manage the situation or speak to the person’s direct manager. I did speak to my supervisor’s manager a couple times and asked him to intervene on a couple things. I don’t like having to circumnavigate somebody because nobody likes that but if that’s my only choice, I will do so.”

Tara tries to step back from any situation, observe it, think of a solution and then deal with it. If she needs to consult others, she will do so, but only if she cannot resolve the conflict on her own.

Work role dynamics.

Tara described herself as laid-back. She said “If there is a situation where I feel I have something of value to add in terms of a comment, I will speak up. I do like to work autonomously but I can be a team player, and sometimes I enjoy working on a team as long as it has good team dynamics. I am not easily ruffled, although it has happened.” Tara tries to keep a very calm demeanor versus just getting worked up. She works well with people, and even if they are running around frantically, she remains calm so their energy does not affect her energy.

Tara believes that she is a coordinator at work and said that her colleagues would also describe her as a coordinator. In her small business, she considers herself to be an advocate but believes her colleagues would call her leader. The coordinator role allows Tara to meet her goals and deadlines at work. The advocate role helps to build her business by telling people about the business and building a customer base.
Race and gender at work.

When asked if being African-American affected the way that Tara interacts with her colleagues at work, she said that it mainly affects how she relates to other African-Americans. She said “We may have more things in common or things that are of interest to us that may not be appealing to other races. Also, I might use terms with other African-American colleagues that I would not use with some of my other colleagues.” Tara also said that being female affected her interactions with male and female colleagues. She has worked with women who were not friendly and maybe even jealous of her, and therefore was very careful about how she communicated with some of them. Additionally, Tara said that she has come across male colleagues with “big egos” and was also careful about how she communicated with them.
Table 7

Comparison of Themes for Tara

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Work Domain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Tara had the closest relationships with her mother and maternal grandmother. Her most challenging relationship was with her father.</td>
<td><strong>Work Relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;Tara is closest to her business partner. She has not developed any close relationships at her office job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Role</strong>&lt;br&gt;Tara was a supporter and protector on her mother’s side of the family and the outcast on her father’s side of the family. Currently she is a supporter and friend.</td>
<td><strong>Work Role</strong>&lt;br&gt;Tara describes herself as a coordinator and advocate at work. Her colleagues perceive her to be a coordinator and leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Authority</strong>&lt;br&gt;As a child, Tara’s mother had ultimate authority over her. Her father had the least authority once her parents divorced. Tara had no authority over anyone.</td>
<td><strong>Authority at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;At her office job, Tara’s female director has ultimate authority over everyone at work. However, her female supervisor has authority over her. At her office job, Tara has no authority over anyone but she assigns tasks to the interns occasionally in her business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Family Conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Tara would cease communication with family members if there was a conflict that was unresolved. Currently, she expresses her issues more openly and forgives relatives for conflicts in order to move on.</td>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Work Conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;Tara addresses conflict directly and seeks assistance from senior managers if necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Race in Family</strong>&lt;br&gt;Tara believes that race influenced the way she interacted with her relatives. She has important connections with relatives as a result of her race and cultural experiences.</td>
<td><strong>Influence of Race at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Tara’s race influences her interactions with colleagues, particularly how she communicates with other African-American colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender in Family</strong>&lt;br&gt;Tara’s gender did not influence the way she interacted with relatives because most of her relatives were female.</td>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Gender influences the way she interacts with colleagues, particularly those who are not as friendly or who have “big egos.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparison of Themes: Summary

There are more differences than similarities between Tara’s family of origin and work experiences. Tara grew up with her mother and maternal grandmother. Her parents divorced when she was younger and as a result Tara spent more time with her maternal side of her family. Tara was very close to her mother but her relationship with her father was strained due to his alcoholism. Their relationship continues to be somewhat strained.

Tara described herself as the outcast on her father’s side of the family and the supporter and protector on her maternal side of her family growing up. Currently, she is a supporter and friend. At work, Tara considers herself to be a coordinator and advocate and her colleagues perceive her to be a coordinator and leader. She does not have any close relationships at her office job but she is very close with her business partner and friend in her small business. Tara also has the most challenging relationship with her business partner because they are polar opposites and sometimes disagree on business-related issues. At work, Tara addresses conflict directly but in her family of origin, she used to cut off communication with relatives with who she had conflict. She has learned to address conflict with family members and forgive them rather than cutting them off and attributes this change to maturity.

In Tara’s family of origin and at work, women have assumed the roles of authority. At home, her mother was the ultimate authority. At work, her manager has authority over her. Her perceptions of her mother are very positive. Tara believes that her mother is strong because she was able to provide for her as a single parent while pursuing her career. Tara did not provide positive or negative views of her current supervisor and
said that she works autonomously because of her role as an analyst. In her business, Tara is co-owner so she does not have a boss.

In her past job where she was employed for almost 10 years, Tara discussed some challenges in communicating with her supervisor. In addition to working with a career coach to help her deal with conflicts with her supervisor Tara also discussed her concerns with her supervisor directly as well as her supervisor’s manager when necessary. In the past, it was easier for Tara to address conflicts at work than in her family of origin. However, she is more laid back, less guarded and more transparent with family members than colleagues. Tara believes in work and social separation so it is rare for her to have friends at work, although she is friendly to colleagues. She said “I am definitely less guarded, more casual and probably more vibrant in my personality with family. I have fun and joke a lot more with family but at work, I’m definitely more guarded and censored.”

Tara’s race, culture and gender influenced her experiences in her family of origin and at work. She is a member of the same African-American sorority as her mother and paternal grandmother and believes that this experience is an important part of her race. At work, however, Tara’s race has helped her relate to her African-American colleagues. Next, religion was an important part of Tara’s early upbringing and she is still very active in the church. Tara and her mother went to church regularly when she was growing up and she continues to attend and hold leadership positions in her church. This is another attribute Tara attributes to her race. Finally, gender was salient at work but not in her family of origin. At work, Tara believes her gender affects how she deals with male and female employees, particularly with those with who she has more difficulties. In her
family of origin, gender was not salient for Tara because most of her relatives were female.
Yvette is a 28 year-old African-American woman from New Jersey. She is currently working in Higher Education/Student Affairs for a college in New Jersey.

Family

Growing up, Yvette lived with her mother, father and three siblings in New Jersey. She has a brother who is three years younger, a sister who is four years younger and a brother who is 10 years younger than her. Yvette’s parents were married for 25 years when they recently got divorced. Yvette said that although all of her siblings were adults when her parents divorced, it was a shock to all of them and it was difficult to handle the dissolution of their parents’ marriage.

Yvette was close to her family. She described her mother as a good homemaker. Yvette said “If you’re sick, she’ll make you better. She cooked and cleaned and taught me all that womanly stuff. I have her personality. She gets along with anybody and she talks a lot, and so do I.” Although Yvette thought highly of her mother, she was closer to her father. She said “I talked to my dad more than my mom because he’s more logical. My mom is fun but my dad is my best friend. He was super strict but he was a great guy. He provided for us- he’s my hero.” She was also close to her siblings but she was closest to her sister, who she also described as her best friend. Yvette is the oldest so she took up the “big sister” role with her siblings and checked in with them regularly to make sure
that they were doing well. Yvette had the most challenging relationship with her mother because her mother struggled with Yvette’s relationship with her father and because they often disagreed about things.

When asked about religion, Yvette said that religion was an extremely important part of her upbringing. She said “We’re Christians. We’ve been everything: Pentecostal, Baptists, I was in a Methodist church at one point in time. We went to church regularly, and there was a lot of praying in my home.”

*Authority dynamics in the family of origin.*

Growing up, Yvette’s father and mother had authority over her family but her father made most of the family decisions and displayed his authority more often. She said “Even though my dad was strict, he would sit you down and talk to you about stuff. If you got in trouble or got a spanking, even when you were sobbing, he’d come over and talk to you about what you did, talk about why it happened and how it could be prevented in the future.” Yvette had authority over her siblings and she displayed her authority by constantly checking in with them to make sure that they were doing positive things with their lives.

*Family conflict.*

When asked to describe a conflict or problem that she faced in her family growing up, Yvette discussed a general conflict between her mother and her. She explained:
“I can’t put a finger on why my mom and I argued so much, but it was a consistent conflict. She and I would just go back and forth but the craziness about it was she was there for everything. I was in every organization at school and she would drive the station wagon around picking everybody else’s kids up and doing everything, but we would fight, and then it would be okay. It was just our relationship until I was in my early 20’s.”

Yvette resolved conflicts with her mother by discussing them with her father, who often found himself in the middle of the conflicts between the two of them. When asked if she usually handles conflict with relatives this way, Yvette said yes she always talked to her father about any issues she had whether they involved her mother or not and he helped her to resolve them.

*Family role dynamics.*

Growing up, Yvette was the leader in her family. Currently, she is a leader and coach. She recognized that when she was younger, being a leader had some drawbacks. Yvette said:

“The people in my family were afraid to talk to me about things because they thought I would judge them. I don’t think I judge people; I just come down on them at times. I can be soft, but I don’t think people should expect pity all the time. Sometimes people come to me and they want pity, and I am more interested in helping them figure out how they can resolve their issues. I’m about making it happen, and people don’t always want that. They’d rather make excuses for things.”

Yvette said that her role as a leader and coach helped her to support her younger siblings during their parents’ divorce because they were shook up by the separation.

*Race and gender in the family.*

When asked if being African-American influenced her interactions with family members growing up, Yvette said yes. She said that her family got together to celebrate
holidays such as Kwanzaa and to discuss historical events in African-American history. Additionally, Yvette explained that her mother’s side of the family is more affluent than her paternal side of the family, and therefore there were many expectations around career and dating choices. When asked if being female influenced her relationships with family members, Yvette also responded affirmatively. She said “I had a lot of male cousins and I got along very well with them because I had masculine tendencies. However, I’ve gotten a little bit more feminine as I’ve gotten older in the sense of my thought process and how I come to different conclusions and I still have a good relationship with my male cousins.

Work

Yvette is 28 years old and works as a Student Affairs professional for a small college. She is currently pursuing her master’s degree and has worked in her current position for approximately five months. Prior to her current position, Yvette worked as a residence life staff member for four years.

Work relationships.

In her current position as a student affairs professional, Yvette is responsible for overseeing the development of students, facilities and programming. She works with a director, associate director, assistant director, residence coordinator and resident assistants. Yvette has the closest relationship with her supervisor, the associate director because he is the person who hired her and has been very supportive of her. She said “He and I just clicked. We have lunch all the time and he has been able to recognize and admit that there are some racial issues that have occurred in the department.” When asked
who Yvette has the most challenging relationship with, she said the director. Yvette explained that she believes that the director is racist and unqualified to do her job. Additionally, she believes that the director is intimidated by her because Yvette has more experience than everyone in the department, including the director and is also very outspoken about issues that have occurred in the department.

Authority dynamics at work.

When asked who has the most authority over her at work, Yvette said that she believes she has the ability to make decisions on her own but her supervisor has authority over her at work. She goes to her supervisor when she has issues and the two of them are usually able to resolve them. When asked who had the least authority, she said her officemate, the assistant director, has the least authority but partially due to her own personality and limited ability to exercise the authority she does have. Yvette is co-supervisor of student staff members but tries to leave the decision-making for student staff to her coworker since supervision of the staff is supposed to be her coworker’s major responsibility.

Workplace conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Yvette described a situation that she had with her director. When she was first hired, Yvette was told that she would be temporarily placed in housing that was not ideal (there was no kitchen) until they were able to move her into better housing within a month. After a couple months of living in the temporary housing, Yvette asked her director when she would be able to move into a better apartment but was not given any specific answers. After a few times of
inquiring about her permanent housing, the director complained to Yvette’s supervisor, who then spoke to Yvette and asked her to be patient. Eventually, Yvette was moved into better housing (although still temporary) but she was frustrated that her director was not advocating for better housing for her. Additionally, Yvette believed that her director purposely placed her in worse living accommodations even though she was hired before her coworker, who was provided with great housing accommodations. This was one of the reasons why Yvette thought she was experiencing racism as the only African-American person on her staff.

In order to deal with her conflict, Yvette expressed her concerns with her director and supervisor. Although she felt justified in advocating for herself, Yvette also believed that her director perceived her to be “the angry black woman” and Yvette does not believe that she addressed the conflict in an angry tone. When asked if she usually addresses conflicts directly, Yvette said “Yes because I’m a hard worker, and I feel like my delivery is always correct. I pray a lot and I know that there are some conflicts that I have to deal with. As an adult I have learned that everything’s not always going to go my way, but there are battles that I must fight.”

*Work role dynamics.*

Yvette believes that she is a leader at work and said that her colleagues would describe her as an advocate. The leader role allows Yvette to help develop others into leaders but also poses a challenge because she speaks up for herself and others as a leader. She said “I speak up for myself, and I’ll speak up for people that don’t speak up for themselves. However, I won’t keep speaking up for people that don’t know how to
and don’t do it for themselves. I’m not afraid to tell the truth, though; it’s all about the delivery.”

_Race and gender at work._

When asked if being African-American affected the way that Yvette interacts with her colleagues at work, she said yes because she believes that the other staff members automatically clicked and shunned her from the very beginning because she is African-American and also very outspoken. Yvette also said that being female affected her interactions with colleagues. The only person with whom she has a good relationship is her male supervisor and she has found the relationship to be easier because her supervisor is male. Additionally, Yvette said that she is more “mothering” with some of her student staff members. She wants to help them with whatever situations that they might be dealing with and believes that her interactions are warmer now that she is older.
Table 8

*Comparison of Themes for Yvette*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Work Domain</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Yvette had the closest relationships with her father and sister. Her most challenging relationship was with her mother.</td>
<td><strong>Work Relationships</strong>&lt;br&gt;Yvette is closest to her male supervisor. She has the most challenging relationship with her female director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Role</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Yvette was the leader. Currently she is a leader and coach in her family.</td>
<td><strong>Work Role</strong>&lt;br&gt;Yvette describes herself as a leader at work. Her colleagues perceive her to be an advocate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Authority</strong>&lt;br&gt;As a child, Yvette’s parents had equal authority over her but her father displayed his authority more often. Yvette had authority over her younger siblings.</td>
<td><strong>Authority at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Yvette’s female director has ultimate authority over everyone at work. However, her male supervisor has authority over her. Yvette has some authority over the student staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Family Conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;Growing up, Yvette would address conflict and talk to her dad about any issues that arose. Currently, she continues to address concerns openly and directly.</td>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Work Conflict</strong>&lt;br&gt;Yvette addresses conflict directly and seeks support from her supervisor when necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Race in Family</strong>&lt;br&gt;Yvette believes that race influenced the way she interacted with her relatives and has shared important events with relatives as a result of her race.</td>
<td><strong>Influence of Race at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Yvette’s race influences her interactions with colleagues because she is the only African-American person in her department.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender in Family</strong>&lt;br&gt;Yvette’s gender influenced the way she interacted with relatives, particularly her male cousins with whom she was close.</td>
<td><strong>Influence of Gender at Work</strong>&lt;br&gt;Yvette believes that gender influences the way she interacts with colleagues, particularly her female colleagues with whom she is not close.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Comparison of Themes: Summary**

There are similarities and differences between Yvette’s family of origin and work experiences. Yvette grew up with her parents and siblings. Her parents divorced recently after 25 years of marriage. This came as a shock to Yvette and her siblings and they had a difficult time dealing with the divorce. Yvette was close to her family but she had the closest relationships with her father and sister, who she described as her best friends. She had the most challenging relationship with her mother because they often argued and disagreed on various issues.

Yvette described herself as the leader in her family growing up. Currently, she is a leader and coach. At work, Yvette also considers herself to be a leader and her colleagues perceive her to be an advocate. Yvette has the closest relationship with her male supervisor and the most challenging relationship with her director, who she believes is intimidated by her experience. At work and in her family of origin, Yvette addresses conflict directly and seeks support from male authority figures when necessary. Additionally, she has more challenging relationships with the females with authority at work and in her family of origin. Yvette believes that she addresses conflict in an appropriate manner but is perceived as the “angry black woman” at work.

In Yvette’s family of origin and work environment, women and men have assumed the roles of authority. At home, her father and mother had equal authority but her father displayed his authority more often. At work, her female director had ultimate authority but her male supervisor also has authority over her. Yvette’s perceptions of her mother and father were very positive. Her perception of her female director is negative but her perception of her male supervisor is positive.
Yvette’s race, culture and gender influenced her experiences either in her family of origin or at her workplace. In her family of origin, Yvette shares important experiences and events that are specific to her race. At work, however, Yvette has had trouble relating to her colleagues as the only African-American person in her department. Next, religion was an important part of Yvette’s early upbringing. Her family attended church regularly and she said there was a lot of prayer in her family. Finally, gender was salient at work and in Yvette’s family of origin. At work, she believes her gender affects her relationships with her male and female colleagues and she has a closer relationship with her male supervisor. In Yvette’s family of origin, gender was salient, particularly in her relationships with her male cousins with whom she is close.
Case Nine: “Tina”

Tina is a 26 year-old African-American woman from New Jersey. She is currently working as a promotions manager for an entertainment company.

Family

Growing up, Tina lived with her mother, father and two siblings in New Jersey. She has a sister who is three years younger and a brother who is 10 years younger than her. Tina’s parents are married, and she was close to both of them as a child. She was also close to her brother but not her sister. About her relationship with her sister, Tina said “Growing up, my sister and I didn’t get along very well. I used to torment her. Looking back on it, I didn’t want her in my stuff and she didn’t want me in her stuff. It’s only in the past few years that I have noticed my sister and me becoming really close, even friends.” Currently, Tina and her siblings all get along very well and they each have a special bond. However, she is closest to her mother and her sister. While Tina does not have challenging relationships with any of her family members, she has the most distant relationship with her father because they do not talk often.

Religion was an extremely important part of Tina’s upbringing. Attendance at church was expected by her mother so her family attended church together on a regular basis. Tina and her siblings were in the dance ministry, the choir and other children’s activities that took place at church. When she went to college, she initially decided
not to attend church regularly, but eventually she realized that attending church was important to her so she continued to attend on her own. Tina said:

“When I went to college, I decided that I was not going to attend church every Sunday any more, and that worked for like two Sundays. By the second Sunday it didn’t feel right not going to church. I felt like I was supposed to be in church. Once I went to college, I built my own relationship with God that was separate from my mother’s, so going to church was something that I had a desire to do.”

Tina and her family continue to attend church together on a regular basis.

Authority dynamics in the family of origin.

Growing up, Tina’s mother had the greatest authority over her siblings and her. Her mother was the primary disciplinarian and she yelled and sometimes spanked the children when they did something wrong. Tina’s father also had authority over the children but he did not reprimand them as much as their mother. While Tina did not believe she had authority over her younger siblings growing up, she did care for them while her mother and father worked outside of the home. She said “I watched my brother and sister – we were latchkey kids, so we came home after school, did our homework, ate dinner and got ready for bed. We didn’t answer the door; even if Jesus was knocking we still didn’t answer the door. I didn’t have authority over them, but I watched over them. You know being the oldest that’s what you do.”

Family conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict or problem that she faced in her family growing up, Tina discussed a conflict that she experienced between her parents. She explained “My father had an issue with my mother having two jobs. He believed that she should be
home more often and because she wasn’t, my sister and I weren’t getting that motherly figure in our lives. My mother refused to stop working two jobs because she didn’t believe that my sister and I lacked anything that we needed.” Tina believed that her mother was able manage her jobs outside the home and be a good homemaker, and this conflict helped her understand the importance of the message that her mother was sending to her sister and her: A woman’s role is more than knowing how to take care of the household. Tina said:

“While I never said anything about this conflict to my parents because I was young, it made me realize the conflict in roles that a woman plays in having to work, take care of a family and take care of herself and how important it is to do all three. It’s challenging, but it can be done, and there’s some sacrifices you have to make.”

Generally, when Tina has an issue with her father, she vents to her mother and asks her mother to speak to her father about the issue. However, if she has an issue with her mother, she discusses it directly with her mother and they come to a resolution quickly and move on.

*Family role dynamics.*

Growing up, Tina was the protector in her family, particularly with her siblings and her mother. Currently, she is a mediator and go-between. She usually finds herself in the middle of conflicts between her mother and sister, mother and brother, and brother and sister. Being a protector allowed Tina to form close bonds with her mother and siblings. She said “My mother and I talk at least once a day, usually when I’m on my way to work. My sister and I also talk through text messages, the telephone or email, so we definitely touch base with each other daily. Being a protector also had some drawbacks as
Tina sometimes found herself in the middle of a conflict between her mother and father which usually left her angry with her father. She explained:

“My parents argued a lot when I was young and I would get mad at my dad for yelling at my mom. I always defended my mother and got mad at my dad, and I would stop speaking to him for a while. Now that I’m older, more aware and wiser about relationships, I’m more understanding that sometimes people get mad and have arguments.”

Tina described her mother as a nurturer and her father as a cheerleader because he attended all of the children’s extracurricular events while her mother was at work. Her sister was a troublemaker and abuser. Tina’s brother did not take up a specific role in the family, but she described him as “an angel.”

*Race and gender in the family.*

Being African-American influenced Tina’s interactions with family members growing up. She said “All of my family members are African-American, so there were certain things we expected when we had family dinners. There were certain foods we expected to eat, certain music we expected to be playing around Christmastime and cultural things like that.” When asked if being female influenced her relationships with family members, Tina also responded affirmatively. As the oldest female sibling, she was responsible for caring for her baby brother when her father took Tina and her siblings to visit his relatives. Additionally, she had the responsibility for caring for both of her siblings while her parents worked.
Work

Tina works as a promotions manager for an entertainment company. She has her master’s degree in Communications and has worked in her current position for over two years. Prior to her current position, Tina held another position as a promotions manager for approximately two years.

Work relationships.

In her current position as a promotions manager, Tina is responsible for creating and implementing radio, television and print promotions for specific shows that take place in her organization. Her department consists of approximately 15 employees and is predominantly female. Tina is the only African-American person in her department and there are four Caucasian males. Tina works with other Managers, Directors, Vice Presidents and the Senior Vice President. All of the managers are in their mid- to late 20’s, the directors range from their early 30’s to early 40’s, and the Senior Vice President is in her mid-30’s, so it’s a very young department. Tina is closest to her supervisor, who is a director. About their relationship, she said “We’re a great team, but then we’re also very good friends. Even after we go our separate ways and take our separate career paths, we’ll be the best of friends.” She has the most challenging relationship with one of the male assistants, who she describes as being rude. However, Tina also explained that because she spends so much time working with the people in her department, they have all “gotten on her nerves” at some point.
Authority dynamics at work.

When asked who has the most authority over her at work, Tina said that her supervisor has the most authority over her. Although Tina and her supervisor have a great friendship, they also work well together and Tina respects her supervisor’s authority. Tina manages the interns who work in the department each semester so she has some authority over them. She described her work with the interns and her boss as collaborative because they often work on projects together. Additionally, they all communicate very well. Tina provides the day-to-day direction for the interns but as bigger projects or issues arise, she brings them to the attention of her supervisor. She said “I keep her abreast of what’s going on so if someone addresses a situation with her, she’s always aware.”

Workplace conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Tina described a situation that she had with another manager. Tina’s department was given complimentary tickets for a dress rehearsal performance that they were going to give to some of their partners. Tina asked one of the interns to count out a specific amount of tickets to distribute to her partners and to give the rest to another manager who also needed to distribute tickets. At her request, the intern separated the tickets and sent them out. When the other manager received her tickets, she realized that she did not have as many good seats to give to her partners because Tina’s intern had taken most of the desirable seats and sent them to Tina’s partners. Because Tina had not checked the tickets beforehand, she was not aware that the seats were in different sections. Tina took responsibility for
the situation and apologized to the manager. However, she did not think it was an extremely big deal because the show was a dress rehearsal performance. She explained “The other manager was a little upset about the situation, and at first I felt bad. Then I remembered that it was just dress rehearsal tickets and people will get over it. However, I’m sure the other manager had some negative things to say about me because of the situation.”

In order to deal with her conflict, Tina informed her supervisor and the intern about the incident but assured him that it was not his fault. She took full responsibility for the situation and apologized to the other manager even though she believed that it was not a huge deal. When asked if she usually addresses conflicts in this way, Tina said that she tries to resolve the conflict first, but then she reviews the situation to understand the role that she played in the situation. She said “Once a situation arises I try to do two things at once. I try to come to a resolution of some sort, but then I also want to figure out how the situation came about. I think about whether there was something that I forgot to do or something that I could have followed up on so that the problem wouldn’t have been created. I definitely try to see what my role was before I apologize or call somebody else out.”

In general, Tina is a team-oriented person and enjoys working with people. However, in her current position, she is in an environment where she believes she has to do her best and make minimal mistakes. She said “In this corporate environment, people will be quick to ‘throw you under the bus.’ That’s why you have to make sure you cover yourself; you have to make sure you’ve got your I’s dotted and your T’s crossed and you’ve done what you’re supposed to do.”
**Work role dynamics.**

Tina is a team player and supporter at work and her colleagues would describe her as a friend. She also has been told by colleagues that she is humorous and her laugh is infectious. Tina said “My colleagues tell me that when they hear me laugh it makes them laugh too because I have this very unique laugh.” The team player and supporter roles allow Tina to help her team accomplish tasks in a timely manner. She works very well with her colleagues and has been told that people enjoy working with her because she is easy to work with and gets the job done. Tina does not mind being asked to assist others on projects and often initiates support by asking her supervisor if she needs help in getting projects done. She believes that when she supports her colleagues, they are appreciative and more willing to help her when she needs additional support.

**Race and gender at work.**

Although Tina is the only African-American person in her department, she did not believe that her race affects the way that she interacts with her colleagues at work. However, Tina did admit that her supervisor uses certain terms with her and she wonders if her supervisor does this because she thinks it is the way that Tina communicates with her African-American girlfriends. When asked if being female influenced the way she interacted with colleagues, she said no because most of her colleagues are female. However Tina admitted that she would like to work in an environment with more men because women can sometimes be “catty.”
### Table 9

**Comparison of Themes for Tina**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Domain</th>
<th>Work Domain</th>
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<td>She has the most challenging relationship</td>
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<td><strong>Family Authority</strong></td>
<td><strong>Authority at Work</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>As a child, Tina’s mother had the</td>
<td>Tina’s female Senior Vice President has</td>
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<td>cared for them in her parent’s</td>
<td>interns in her department.</td>
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<td>**Method for Dealing with Family</td>
<td><strong>Method for Dealing with Work Conflict</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict**</td>
<td>Tina addresses conflict directly and keeps</td>
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<td>Although Tina is the only African-American</td>
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</table>
Comparison of Themes: Summary

There are some similarities and differences between Tina’s family of origin and work experiences. Tina grew up with her parents and siblings and she described her relationship with her family as close. Tina had the closest relationships with her mother and sister, but she had a close relationship with her brother as well. While she did not have any challenging relationships with relatives, she had a distant relationship with her father because they did not talk much. She often stopped speaking to her dad when her parents got into arguments and served as her mother’s protector. This also affected her relationship with her father. However, Tina currently lives with her family and they continue to do family activities and vacations together.

In her family of origin and at work, Tina took up helping or supporting roles. In her family of origin, she was the protector growing up and currently is a mediator and go-between. At work, Tina is a team player and supporter. She believes that these roles have helped her make better connections with family members and colleagues and helps to get things done at work. Tina also recognized that being a team player at work was a result of being a team player at home. She believes that helping her parents by caring for her siblings when they were at work prepared her for helping her colleagues at work.

In Tina’s family of origin and work environment, women have assumed the roles of authority. At home, her father and mother both had authority but her mother displayed her authority more often because she was the disciplinarian. At work, her female Senior Vice President has ultimate authority and her female supervisor has authority over her. Tina’s perceptions of her mother and her female supervisors are very positive. She has the closest relationships with females and more challenging relationships with males in
her family of origin and at work. She has the closest relationships with her mother and sister, as well as her female supervisor at work. Her most challenging relationships are with her father and a male assistant at work.

Tina addressed conflict differently in her family of origin and at work. In her family of origin, she addressed conflict more often with her siblings and her mother, but not with her father. Tina explained that growing up, her mother was the person who mediated or resolved any conflicts that arose because family members were less likely to resolve issues on their own. At work, Tina addresses conflict more directly because she believes that there is more of a concerted effort of colleagues involved to resolve conflicts. As a result of her ability to resolve conflict at work, she has taken up the role as mediator and go-between in her family in order to help resolve conflicts more directly in her family.

Tina’s race, culture and gender influenced her experiences in her family of origin but not at work. In her family of origin, Tina and her family participate in cultural activities that are specific to her race. At work, however, she does not believe race is salient, even though she is the only African-American person in her department. Next, religion was an important part of Tina’s early upbringing. Her family attended church regularly and they were active in many activities. Tina continues to attend church on a regular basis. Finally, gender was salient in Tina’s family of origin. She was responsible for caring for her siblings when her parents were not around. Tina believes that she was given this responsibility not because she was the oldest sibling, but because she is female. Her mother and father expected her to take care of her siblings and the home when they
were at work. At work, she does not believe her gender affects her relationships with her colleagues because most are female.
Gloria is a 29 year-old African-American woman from Washington DC. She is currently working as a programmer for a media company.

**Family**

*Family relationships.*

Growing up, Gloria lived with her mother and older sister in Washington DC. Her sister is six years older than her. Although Gloria lived with her mother, she was raised by her mother and maternal grandmother. She said:

“My mother raised me. She was a single mother with two girls. However, my grandmother helped to raise us too. It was kind of similar to having two parents. After school we went to my grandmother’s house and stayed there until my mother came home from work. We also stayed at my grandmother’s house over the weekends because we went to church with her. I spent probably half my time at my grandmother’s and half my time at my mom’s.”

Gloria’s father was not present in her life as a child, but he resurfaced when she was 21 years-old and attempted to have a relationship with her. At first, she was receptive to having a relationship with her father, but eventually Gloria decided that she did not want a relationship with him because she felt that she did not need a father figure in her life at that point.

Gloria described her family as close in the sense that they did things as a family, such as ate dinner and watched television together. However, she explained “We weren’t all about hugs and I love you’s. I can probably count the number of times I said I love
you to my mother or vice versa. It’s not that we didn’t feel that way, it’s just that it wasn’t openly communicated.” Gloria’s grandmother and mother lived five minutes away from each other and her sister actually stayed with her grandmother for a lot of her formative years while Gloria stayed with her mother. Therefore, she was raised like an only child and did not spend much time with her sister. Gloria had the closest relationship with her mother and she described their relationship in the following way:

“My mother was kind of quiet, a little introverted. I can just recall us just camping out in the living room with our blankets and watching television. To me those are some of the fondest memories that I have of just being close with her. It was a quiet closeness. I guess I was kind of a mama’s girl. Yeah, we were pretty close.”

Gloria’s mother passed away when she was 21 years-old and she often thinks about her mother and wonders how close they would have been now if she were still alive. Her grandmother has also passed away in recent years. When asked who Gloria had the most challenging relationships with, she said initially her relationship with her sister was challenging because they are six years apart and did not have much in common. Although she wishes that they had a closer relationship when they were younger, Gloria and her sister do have a close relationship now. Gloria’s relationship with her sister is especially important now that their mother and grandmother have passed and she considers her sister to be her maternal figure at this point in her life. Now, Gloria has the most challenging relationship with her father because he was not around for the majority of her life. About her relationship with her father, she further explained:

“I didn’t necessarily forgive my father for being absent in my life, but I wanted to get to know who he was. After my mother passed, I started to resent him for the simple fact that I just didn’t feel like it was fair that he was back in my life but my mother was gone. Maybe for a few years after that I tried to talk with him, to create a bond but it just didn’t happen and it was more so on my part. I just didn’t think I really wanted it or needed it.”
Gloria has not had any contact with her father in the past two years. However, she spends as much time as possible with her sister, brother-in-law and nieces and nephews.

When asked about religion, Gloria said that religion was an extremely important part of her upbringing. Although her mother did not attend church, Gloria and her sister attended church every Sunday with their grandmother. Her grandmother was very religious and attended church for the entire day on Sunday, and this was something that Gloria did not enjoy as a child. When she got older she was allowed to decide whether she wanted to attend church, but as a child, Gloria was expected to attend church every Sunday, even though her mother did not attend. Currently, Gloria goes to church sporadically and believes that she does not go to church as often as she should.

*Authority dynamics in the family of origin.*

Growing up, Gloria’s mother had the greatest authority over her sister and her. However, her grandmother also had some authority and was the main disciplinarian. Gloria explained that she received more spankings from her grandmother but she also challenged her grandmother more often. About her mother, however, Gloria said “my mother wasn’t trying to be my friend and she let that be known. Her authority meant a lot to me for the simple fact that she didn’t have to do anything to get me to check myself. She never really spanked me; it was just her look or tone and that was it.” Her father had the least authority because he was never around. Because Gloria was the youngest member of her immediate family, she did not have authority over anyone.
Family conflict.

When asked to describe a conflict or problem that she faced in her family growing up, Gloria denied experiencing any major conflicts. She said “we weren’t really conflict driven. Outside of the little fights that I had with my sister there wasn’t much conflict in my family.” After some thought, Gloria was able to recollect a conflict that she had with her grandmother because she was defending her sister. Gloria explained that her sister had a baby when she was 19 years-old and her grandmother did not like the baby’s father so she would constantly say mean things about him to Gloria and her sister. On one particular occasion, Gloria’s grandmother began to talk about her nephew’s father while Gloria was holding her nephew and she became angry. Gloria does not remember what she said to her grandmother but the comment made her grandmother lunge at Gloria, and as a reflex, Gloria pushed her grandmother, causing her grandmother to fall. About this experience, she said “oh my gosh, that just traumatized me because I didn’t expect her to do that.” Although Gloria believed that her grandmother was being disrespectful of her nephew’s father and her nephew, she was regretful that she pushed her grandmother even if it was an accident. In addition to this conflict, Gloria remembers having occasional arguments with her grandmother because she was strict with Gloria. She believes that her grandmother feared that she would get pregnant at a young age like her sister did and Gloria challenged her grandmother because she was trying to prove that she was her own person. She said “I wasn’t a busybody and I wasn’t always out in the street. I think, if anything, she had the fear that I would probably follow in my sister’s footsteps. My sister was into boys and she was into being out at all times of night. She got herself pregnant while she was in college, so I think my grandmother put a lot more pressure on me.”
When asked if this is usually how she dealt with conflict in her family, Gloria said no because there was rarely any major conflict to react to other than the occasional fights with her sister or arguments with her grandmother. Gloria was quiet and did not like to argue so these situations were not her usual way of responding to conflict. With her family, Gloria said that she was non-confrontational and described herself as “passive aggressive.” Even now, Gloria does not like to argue with her sister. She explained:

“I try to make sure we don’t argue. I know her personality and there are certain things I just don’t press about her. I just try to keep the peace and if an argument does arise I try to pacify or resolve it. I don’t want there to be turmoil especially since my mother and grandmother have passed on. She’s my only sibling so I try to stay as non-confrontational, even if there are things that I disagree with.”

Gloria likes to resolve issues and move on from them as soon as possible. She will address an issue if she has to but does not like to have conflict with anyone, especially family members.

*Family role dynamics.*

Gloria was the loner in her family growing up. She said “I kept to myself a lot and I didn’t like being around a lot of people. When we had family reunions I’d try to disappear. I was pretty quiet.” Currently, she is a supporter and peacemaker. Gloria described her grandmother as a nurturer, her mother as a leader and her sister as a troublemaker. When asked if her role as a loner contributed to any positive or challenging relationships with family members, she said no. Gloria explained that her role as the loner did not make her stand out and people did not seem to mind that she preferred to be alone. Additionally, Gloria said that she was more like her parents than she realized but believes that she eventually grew out of her role as a loner. She said:
“My mother and my father were both like me. They were introverts and they didn’t like to introduce themselves to others. I think that’s where I got it from. However, I don’t think I’m that way anymore, at least to a certain extent. I mean there are times when I like to be to myself. However, I’ve opened myself up to others and I like having people around now.”

Gloria attributes the change in her role to surrounding herself around friends and coming out of her shell.

Race and gender in the family.

Being African-American did not influence Gloria’s interactions with family members growing up because all of her family members were African-American. However she realized that she was much more open to other races than her relatives, particularly when it came to dating preferences. Gloria explained:

“I remember having a discussion with my mother, sister and my mother’s friend. I don’t know how we got into the conversation about dating outside of our race but my mother was adamant about her preference to date someone black. I had all these questions and I remember my sister jokingly making a comment that I was going to come home with a ‘curly head Jewish person.’ I took offense to her comment because I was getting the message that if I did it would be a problem.”

Gloria did not let the fact that she grew up in an African-American family influence her dating preferences or life experiences. She went to a historically black college and has worked for a company with predominantly Black employees for over six years. As a result, she began to feel like she was “living in a bubble” and desired to have different experiences when it came to dating. She has dated mostly Black men but is open to interracial dating and is currently in a serious relationship with a Caucasian male.

Additionally, Gloria noticed that her friends who went to schools with different groups of people have developed friendships with people from different racial and ethnic
backgrounds and she would like to have relationships with people from other cultures as well.

When asked if being female influenced her relationships with family members, Gloria also responded negatively because all of her immediate family was female. However, she did explain how being female influenced her thoughts about relationships with men. Gloria said:

“Growing up female with all other females made me very independent. After my father, my mother had a few relationships, but no one so serious that she brought him around us. I didn’t have a male influence so I looked at my mother who was single and doing it all on her own. She was capable and it made me realize that I could do it all on my own. I almost got to the point where I was writing off men and thinking that I didn’t need a man to be happy. Then I felt like I was becoming too independent, when deep down I knew that I wanted to be married before I had children. I wanted to date. I wanted to have a boyfriend. However, the way that I was raised was preventing me from going out to do that.”

Growing up, Gloria was told that she could do whatever she wanted to do, be whoever she wanted to be and make the money that she wanted to make, and she did not need a man for anything. However, she now believes that while she does not need a man, it is nice to have a man in her life for companionship.

Work

Gloria works as a Programming Coordinator for a media company. She has her bachelor’s degree and has worked in her current position for six and a half years. Prior to her current position, Gloria was an intern for one year.
Work relationships.

In her current position as a programmer, Gloria works in the programming department and is responsible for gathering and consolidating programming information that she distributes to other departments in the organization as well as external media organizations. She describes her department as the “nucleus” because other departments rely on her department in order to do their jobs. Gloria’s department is small and consists of a Vice President, Programming Manager, Acquisitions Manager, Senior Programming Coordinator, Programming Assistant and her. Additionally, they occasionally have an intern who works in the programming department. All of the people in her department are African-American women.

Gloria is closest to the Acquisitions Manager. About their relationship, she said “When I was hired, I was actually replacing her because she had been promoted. As I trained for her job, I worked with her and we developed a friendship. We have remained friends both at work and outside of work and I believe we bonded partially because we are two of the youngest people in the organization.” Although they are friends, Gloria and “Liza” maintain a professional relationship at work. Gloria has the most challenging relationship with her direct supervisor, the Programming Manager. About her manager, Gloria said:

“She’s very nice when she wants to be but she’s also very manipulative and very ‘shady’ if she feels like you don’t support her. Also, she doesn’t have the natural filter that most people have when speaking to others and she takes a lot of things personally. Additionally, she questions things a lot and sometimes stirs up conflict when there doesn’t need to be any conflict.”

Gloria further stated that her supervisor can be professional at times and seems to be unable to address situations with other employees without belittling them. For the first
two years, Gloria had a hard time working with her supervisor. However, she has learned how to deal with her. She said “She’s not going anywhere so I had to learn to work around her.”

When talking about her department, Gloria described it as “divisive,” explaining that people are quick to “throw others under the bus,” withhold important information or try to “divide and conquer” in order to get ahead. As a result, Gloria tends to keep to herself and sees Liza as her ally in remaining honest at work. She also said that it is nice to have someone to vent to when she needs to talk about an issue.

*Authority dynamics at work.*

When asked who has the most authority over her at work, Gloria said that the Vice President has the most authority over her. She makes sure to get the Vice President anything she needs whenever she needs it. Even though Gloria believes that the Vice President is very passive, secretive and not overly ambitious, she is the person who hired Gloria and Gloria recognizes her authority in the department. Additionally, Gloria believes that the Vice President is “professional” and “diplomatic” so she does not have a problem doing things for her boss despite the fact that she does not agree with her management style. When asked who had the least authority over her at work, Gloria said that her supervisor has the least authority over her. She said “As bad as it sounds, I’ve lost so much respect for my supervisor that she could give me something to do but I won’t necessarily jump and do it or I may find a way to ignore her emails.” When asked if she had authority over anyone, Gloria said “Not really. I really don’t even like the word
authority. There are certain people that I work with that I may delegate some work to but I don’t like to come off like I’m delegating or telling someone what to do.”

*Workplace conflict.*

When asked to describe a conflict that she dealt with at work, Gloria described a situation that she had with her Vice President and someone in another department. She explained that she was asked by her Vice President to deliver a package to an employee in another department but the employee was not there so she left the package with the person’s assistant, along with a detailed note to pass the package to the intended person. When the intended employee returned to her office, she was upset that Gloria did not leave the package in her office so she sent an email to Gloria’s supervisor and boss, the Vice President, berating Gloria. Instead of the Vice President asking Gloria about the situation before responding, she responded to the email apologizing to the employee, telling her that she was correct for being angry. Gloria was very hurt and angry with her Vice President’s response to the email, especially since she had not discussed the situation with her before responding to the email, but also because Gloria did not believe she had done anything wrong. She said that the vice President’s response “sent her over the edge,” and as a result, she cried at her desk before taking the rest of the day off. Gloria clarified that any other day she probably would have had “thicker skin,” but she was already stressed out about another situation so this situation made it worse. Gloria’s Vice President called her when she found out how upset Gloria was and explained that the situation was not a big deal and that she thought Gloria was doing a great job. However, Gloria explained that it was a big deal to her and told her boss why she was
angry. She said that her Vice President’s desire to avoid dealing with the situation was indicative of her management style.

When asked if she usually addresses conflicts in this way, Gloria said “As far as handling this situation at work, you know I didn’t like the fact that I got upset and I left for the day. It was just something I had to do for me personally because I wouldn’t have been productive that day thinking about it. However, if I do have an issue, if it’s big enough I will talk about it.” She said that there are not too many times when she has to pull someone to the side and address a situation, but she will if she believes that it is important to do so. Gloria supported this statement by discussing a time when she confronted her supervisor for making inappropriate comments and discussing Gloria’s personal business during a staff meeting. She told her supervisor that she did not appreciate her tone and did not believe it was appropriate to discuss the specific issue in front of other employees. Although her supervisor was not receptive to her feelings, Gloria was glad that she confronted her supervisor and informed her that her behavior was inappropriate.

In general, Gloria is a team-oriented person and she enjoys helping people get the information they need. In her current position, information is constantly changing and everything is always tentative, so it is difficult for Gloria to perform her role which is predominantly gathering and disseminating information to others.

*Work role dynamics.*

Gloria is a coordinator at work because it really is her role to coordinate with others to make sure that they understand what is going on in the organization. Her colleague Liza would describe her as a friend and other colleagues would describe her as
a supporter. She works very well with others and does not have a problem lending her help to others when needed. Being a coordinator contributes to Gloria’s success at work because people are happier when they know what is going on and she is able to provide information to them so they can perform their roles effectively. She said “Everyone’s happy when they’re informed about something. Even if some people do not need certain types of information, they feel good when they know that something’s happening.” She also added that at times it is difficult to provide others with information because she may not have the information and that frustrates people. Gloria said “When people become frustrated about the constant changes or lack of information, I try to keep my patience. I have to because I know people are losing theirs.”

Race and gender at work.

Gloria believes that her race positively and negatively affects the way that she interacts with her colleagues at work. Most of the people that she works with are African-American and went to predominantly African-American institutions so there is an instant connection. As a result of the similarities, Gloria feels comfortable around the people with whom she works. On the other hand, she also believes that this could be a hindrance and wants to be sure that she does not pass up opportunities to work with others due to fear. She would like to move out of her comfort zone eventually and work with people from different cultures. When asked if being female influences her interactions with colleagues she said no. However, Gloria does believe that her gender could influence how she does her job so it is important for her to remain objective. Because she is a
programmer, she has to schedule programming for men and women and she must be fair and strategic about when and how she schedules certain programs.
Table 10

*Comparison of Themes for Gloria*

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<th>Family Domain</th>
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| **Family Relationships**| Growing up, Gloria had the closest relationship with her mother. Her most     | Work Relationships
|                         | challenging relationships were with her sister and father.                   | Gloria is closest to the female Acquisitions Manager. She has the most challenging relationship with her female supervisor, the Programming Manager. |
| **Family Role**         | Growing up, Gloria was a loner. Currently she is a supporter and peacemaker. | Work Role
|                         |                                                                 | Gloria describes herself as a coordinator at work. Her colleagues perceive her to be a friend and supporter. |
| **Family Authority**    | As a child, Gloria’s mother had authority over the family. Her grandmother    | Authority at Work
|                         | also had authority and was the disciplinarian. Her father had the least      | Gloria’s female Vice President has ultimate authority at work. She believes that her female supervisor has the least authority over her. Gloria delegates tasks to others but does not have authority over anyone. |
|                         | authority and did not have any authority over anyone.                        | Method for Dealing with Work Conflict
|                         |                                                                 | Gloria does not like to deal with conflict at work but will confront someone if she needs to do so. |
| **Method for Dealing with Family Conflict** | Gloria did not have much conflict with family members other than occasional fights with her sister and grandmother. She did not like to deal with conflict. As Gloria became older, she tried to keep the peace with family members and avoided conflict. | Influence of Race at Work
|                         |                                                                 | Race does not influence Gloria’s interactions with colleagues. However, she wishes that she was able to work with a more diverse group of people. |
| **Influence of Race in Family** | Race did not influence Gloria’s interactions with relatives but it has influenced her views on interracial dating. She is open to dating outside of her race and wished that she had relationships with people from other races. | Influence of Gender at Work
|                         |                                                                 | Gloria’s gender did not influence her interactions with colleagues because most are female. However, it could affect how she does her job so she makes sure that she is objective when scheduling programs. |
| **Influence of Gender in Family** | Gloria’s gender did not influence the way she interacted with relatives because all were females. However, it did affect her thoughts about and relationships with men. | In the absence of gender, her interactions are not influenced by gender. |
Comparison of Themes: Summary

There are many similarities and some differences between Gloria’s family of origin and work experiences. Gloria grew up with her maternal grandmother, mother and older sister. Although she described her family as close, she explained that they did not verbally express their love for each other; it was more of an unspoken connection. Gloria had the closest relationship with her mother and the most challenging relationship with her father, who was not present in her life growing up. Gloria also had a challenging relationship with her sister, but they are closer now that their mother and grandmother have passed away.

In her family of origin, Gloria was a loner growing up. Now, she is a supporter and peacemaker. At work, Gloria believes that she is a supporter but also a coordinator. She also believes that her friend and colleague at work would describe her as a friend. Additionally, Gloria considers herself to be a team player at work and believes that she gets along well with others. She believes that these roles have helped her make better connections with family members and colleagues and helps to be successful at work.

In Gloria’s family of origin and work environment, women have assumed the roles of authority. At home, her mother and maternal grandmother had authority but her grandmother displayed her authority more often because she was the disciplinarian. At work, her female Vice President has ultimate authority over her at work. Gloria’s perceptions of her mother were very positive while she often challenged her grandmother’s authority. Additionally, although she does not support her Vice President’s management style, she gets along well with her. However, she does not view her supervisor as having any true authority over her and often challenges her supervisor.
by not doing work that she has been assigned to do. She has the closest and challenging relationships with females in her family of origin and at work. In her family of origin, she had the closest relationship with her mother, and at work, with her colleague and friend Liza. Her most challenging relationships were with her sister and father as well as her female supervisor at work.

Although Gloria does not like to deal with conflict, she addressed conflict differently in her family of origin and at work. In her family of origin, she addressed conflict more often with her sister and grandmother but explained that she was very “passive aggressive” when dealing with conflict. At work, Gloria addresses conflict more directly, but only if she believes that it is necessary. Conflict is scary to Gloria and she has admitted that she tries to alleviate situations before they get worse in her family of origin and at work.

Gloria’s race, culture and gender influenced some, but not all of her experiences in her family of origin and at work. In her family of origin, Gloria did not allow her race to prevent her from being open to cultures that are different from her own, especially as it relates to dating. At work, Gloria related better to her colleagues because they were all African-American but she recognized that this could hinder her if she never decides to take steps out of her comfort zone and gain experiences working with a more diverse group of people. Next, religion was an important part of Gloria’s early upbringing. She attended church regularly with her grandmother even though she did not like to go to church as a child. Currently, Gloria attends church only sporadically. Finally, gender was not salient in Gloria’s family of origin as all of her family members were female. However, she was sent messages that she could accomplish whatever she wanted without
a man and as a result, she did not believe that she needed a man for anything. As Gloria
got older she recognized her desire for companionship and decided to date. Currently, she
is in a relationship and enjoys having someone to spend her time with. At work, Gloria
does not believe her gender affects her relationships with her colleagues because most are
female. However, it does affect her role and Gloria is sure that she is fair and objective
when scheduling programs.
CHAPTER IV

Results: Major Themes

The participants in this study were unique. Each had her own story to share and experiences that influenced the person she has become today. Despite their differences, there were also similarities in each of their stories, which emerged as themes. The following themes were identified:

1. Religion was important in participants’ families of origin.
2. Female authority was dominant in participants’ families of origin and at work. While participants held positive views of female authority in their families of origin, perceptions of female authority figures at work were negative or mixed.
3. Participants held multiple roles in their family of origin and at work.
4. Participants described patterns of dealing with conflict directly in their families of origin and at work.
5. Race influenced interactions with family members and colleagues.
6. Gender influenced interactions with family members more often than colleagues.

*Importance of Religion in Family of Origin*

All of the participants in the study stated that religion was an important part of their upbringing. Additionally, 40 percent of the participants currently attend and are active participants in their churches. Participants expressed the importance of religion in the following ways:
Danielle: “My parents are religious so church was a big part of my upbringing.”
Tara: “I had a strong religious foundation that carried me throughout adulthood.”
Yvette: “We went to church regularly and there was a lot of praying in my home.”
Tina: “I have been going to church since I was in the womb.”

**Female Authority Dominant in Family of Origin and at Work**

Of the ten participants in the study, 80 percent revealed that their mothers, grandmothers or aunts served as authority figures in their families of origin. Also, 80 percent of the participants stated that they have female bosses who either have authority over them or over their entire department or organization. While 60 percent of the participants expressed positive views of the female authority figures in their family of origin, only 20 percent expressed positive views of their direct female supervisors at work. Some participants expressed the following perceptions of their female authority figures in their family of origin:

Maria: “My mother was – she was nurturing. She definitely exhibited strength of life and how to go on without a man, how to provide, how to be a fighter.”

Natalie: “My grandmother was a very loving person, but somehow you knew that she meant business.”

However, some participants described their female supervisors in the following ways:

Gloria: “She is very nice when she wants to be but she’s also very manipulative and very ‘shady’ if she feels like you don’t support her.”

Danielle: “It’s hard to get a good read on her, so I don’t necessarily trust her.”
Participants Held Multiple Roles in their Family of Origin and at Work

When asked to self select one applicable role in their family of origin and/or at work, most of the participants in the study had difficulty. Of the ten participants, 90 percent selected more than one applicable role in their family of origin. Additionally, 50 percent of the participants selected more than one applicable role at work. Growing up, the roles that participants identified with the most in their family of origin were peacemaker, protector, leader and the abused person. Currently, the most common roles that participants take up in their family of origin are friend, supporter, leader, peacemaker, mediator, go-between and rebel. At work, participants identified most with the following roles: Leader, coordinator and supporter. Additionally, they believed that their colleagues would describe them using the following roles: Leader, supporter, advocate and friend.

Participants Dealt with Conflict Directly in Family of Origin and at Work

When asked to discuss methods for dealing with conflict in one’s family of origin, 50 percent stated that they directly addressed conflict with family members growing up and 90 percent stated that they currently confront relatives or deal with situations directly. The participants who did not address conflict directly when they were growing up cited the following reasons: They felt powerless, did not notice any conflict, were afraid to deal with conflict or did not feel comfortable confronting certain family members. Additionally, many participants shared that although they have more intimate relationships with their family members and are more likely to confront relatives now, it
is more difficult because they often fear that they will risk hurting relatives’ feelings or damaging relationships if the conflict is not handled appropriately.

In terms of conflict at work, 90 percent of participants in the study revealed that they address conflicts directly when necessary. However, 30 percent said that they are more careful when confronting a supervisor or boss about a conflict and another 40 percent explained that they keep their supervisors informed about any conflicts and seek out assistance and support from supervisors when addressing conflicts with colleagues at work. Many of the participants stated that although they will confront someone or address a conflict directly, they only address the most important issues because they do not want to be perceived as “aggressive” or “angry.”

Race Influenced Interactions with Family Members and Colleagues

Forty percent of participants did not believe that race influenced their interactions with family members, mostly because their family members are also African-American. Thirty percent of the participants who believed that race influenced their interactions with family members discussed experiencing cultural connections with their relatives, such as being a member of the same African-American sorority as other female relatives; celebrating holidays such as Kwanzaa or cultural events; and even eating certain foods or having certain rituals during other holidays. One participant believed that her race influenced how people outside of her family perceived her family because of race as well as some of the internal conflicts between relatives because of race. Also, one participant believed that while her race did not influence her relationships with family members it helped her to be more open minded to other races, particularly when it comes to dating,
despite her family members’ objections to interracial dating. Finally, one participant stated that she was sure that race influenced her relationships with relatives but could not explain how.

At work, 80 percent of participants stated that race influenced their interactions with their African-American and other colleagues. Of this group, 30 percent shared that they are the only African-American employees in their departments. Additionally, 50 percent specifically shared that they are careful about the way they dress, speak and/or treat their colleagues because they do not want to be perceived as “the Angry Black Woman” or as someone who has an attitude. One participant stated that she was assigned to work with a professional coach because she was perceived as aggressive at work and senior management thought that coaching would help her get along better with her colleagues. Finally, 30 percent of the participants believed that they have to work harder than their White colleagues and make minimal mistakes so that they are not “thrown under the bus” by colleagues and/or management, and some of them attributed this to being African-American. One participant supported this idea with the following statement: “In this corporate environment, people will be quick to ‘throw you under the bus.’ That’s why you have to make sure to cover yourself; you have to make sure you’ve got your I’s dotted and your T’s crossed and you’ve done what you’re supposed to do.”

**Gender Influenced Interactions with Family Members More Often than Colleagues**

In their family of origin, 70 percent of participants believed that gender influenced interactions with family members. Fifty percent of these participants believed that their gender specifically influenced their relationships with male family members.
such as brothers and cousins, or that they were given the role as caregivers to younger siblings because they are female. Further, one participant lived in a Christian home with a strong belief that a female should “behave like a lady.” Additionally, all of the participants denied being sent messages that they should take up certain roles because they are female or that they could not accomplish certain goals because of their gender.

At work, 60 percent of participants stated that gender did not influence their interactions with colleagues because most of their colleagues are also female. However, one of these participants believed that her gender could affect the way she does her job, and as a result, she is careful to be objective and fair when performing her role at work. Forty percent of participants stated that gender was salient for them at work. One participant stated that she is very careful about what she wears to work because she does not want to be perceived as unprofessional. Additionally, two participants shared that gender is more of an influence with colleagues with who they have more challenging or distant relationships. Finally, one participant revealed that her gender influences the types of conversations that she has at work with colleagues. Specifically, she said that when male interns are working in the office, the conversations in the office are more professional but when no males are present, the females in the department are able to have more casual conversations with each other.
CHAPTER V

Discussion

Explanation of Results

This research study examined the extent to which family of origin experiences influence the experiences of African-American women at work. Specifically, the study focused on whether individuals: replicate the same interpersonal patterns at work and in their family of origin, deal with authority in the workplace in the same way as they deal with authority in their family of origin, handle conflict at work in the same way that they deal with conflict in their family of origin and take on the same roles at work and in their family of origin. Additionally, the study examined the influence of race and gender on individuals’ experiences at work and in their family of origin. From the study, six major themes were originally identified and discussed previously in the major themes section. However, because participants discussed how race influenced their interactions at work more often than gender, the race and gender themes were combined. Therefore the five major themes that will be discussed in more detail are:

1. Religion was important in participants’ families of origin.

2. Female authority was dominant in participants’ families of origin and at work. While participants held positive views of female authority in their families of origin, perceptions of female authority figures at work were negative or mixed.

3. Participants held multiple roles in their family of origin and at work.
4. Participants described patterns of dealing with conflict directly in their families of origin and at work.

5. Race was more salient than gender in the workplace.

This is a small exploratory study that was used to generate hypotheses about the relationship between family origin dynamics and workplace experiences. Therefore, readers should treat these themes as hypotheses and avoid generalizing from these results.

Importance of Religion in Family of Origin

The Black church was the first major social institution in which Black people had full control. Many obtained their first leadership roles outside of the home in the church. All of the women in this study shared the importance of religion in their families growing up. Many of the women participated in church activities and events and their parents were active leaders in the church. Almost half of the participants continue to attend or hold leadership positions in their churches. This is consistent with the review of the literature, which identifies strong religious orientation as one of the common characteristics of African-American families (Kane, 2000; Boyd-Franklin, 2003).

Although some of the women were not currently attending church, they recognized that church was an important part of their upbringing and many carried the values that they learned from church to their adult family and work relationships. Additionally, church was identified as a haven and a number of the women reported that their faith helped them to get through difficult times. While religion was very salient to the participants in this study, it was not explored in the previous study (Philpot, 2004).
Female Authority Dominant in Family of Origin and at Work

The majority of the women in the study identified female authority figures in their families of origin and workplaces. While over half of the women with female authority figures shared positive views of their female family authority figures, most of them viewed their female bosses negatively. When participants spoke of the female authority figures in their family, they used terms such as “strong” and “honest,” as well as terms such as “caring,” “loving,” and “nurturing.” However, when they spoke about their female supervisors or managers, many of the women often described them as incompetent, ineffective, untrustworthy, racist, complacent, manipulative and conflict adverse. With the exception of one participant, all of the participants had White supervisors or managers. They attributed their perceptions of their supervisors to race and experience. Additionally, participants who described their supervisors as manipulative and conflict-adverse also attributed their perceptions to their supervisor’s race. Finally, participants often compared their current bosses to former bosses or to themselves if they were also managers, rather than to female authority figures in their family of origin. For example, Lori, who was also a manager, believed that she was being supervised by someone who had less experience in the field than her and that her supervisor obtained this position partially because she was White. Additionally, Danielle described her experiences of having to prove that she could perform critures tasks before being provided more challenging assignments, while her white colleagues were offered these types of assignments more quickly and more often. Yvette, Lori and Tara also found it easier to work with previous male and female bosses over their current bosses, who they described as more competent than their current bosses.
Research supports the idea that Black women are promoted at lower rates than White women. According to a study examining Black and White women’s struggle for professional identity conducted by Bell and Nkomo (2001), obstacles to advancement for Black women include racism and sexism, and often, Black women perceived their advancement to be thwarted by a concrete wall topped by a glass ceiling (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). They explained: “While the glass ceiling represents the inability of women to rise above a certain level in the corporate hierarchy, the concrete wall is more persistent and pernicious. It manifests itself in six ways: daily doses of racism, being held to a higher standard, the invisibility vice, exclusion from informal networks, challenges to authority, and hollow company commitment to the advancement of minorities.” (p. 140) While White women have also experienced derailed career advancement due to the glass ceiling, they have been able to shatter the glass ceiling to a certain extent in order to be promoted more often and more quickly than African-American women. This is partially due to the fact that while White women are also subordinate to White men, they share the same race, which often affords them some of the benefits and privileges that White men have in major corporations. Additionally, the study revealed that white women were less willing to speak out against injustices than Black women. Even when they encountered exclusionary practices against them because of their gender, White women still felt that they would be able to fit in if they worked hard and did the right things. Black women were more likely to address injustices and often had more difficulties fitting in to an organization as a result of their race and gender.
Participants Held Multiple Roles in their Family of Origin and at Work

When asked to select one applicable role in their family of origin and at work, most of the participants had difficulty doing so. During the interviews, participants commonly asked “am I only allowed to choose one role?” and initially they were told yes. However, upon noticing the difficulty in identifying one specific role, participants were told that they could identify multiple roles but to identify a dominant role, when possible. This also proved to be difficult because most of the participants took on multiple important roles in their family of origin and at work. This is consistent with the review of the literature which posits that roles in African-American families are often multiple and flexible, and that roles are taken up based on ability rather than gender (Kane, 2000).

The role that emerged in every domain (family of origin growing up, family of origin currently, self-selected role at work, and colleagues’ perceptions of participant at work) was leader. African-American women are viewed as leaders in their family of origin because of their ability to play various roles within the family and in the community: breadwinner, homemaker, spokesperson, caregiver, and disciplinarian, among others. Bell (1990) explained that African-American women are anchored in the Black community by kinship ties and significant relationships. They are members of organizations such as the N.A.A.C.P., Urban League, church affiliated groups, sororities and women’s associations. Thus, they are actively involved in the community and this involvement in a source of empowerment for African-American women because it provides an opportunity for professional development that is not always provided in other settings. Although African-American women also play many roles in the workplace, they
experience leadership differently. According to Kram and McCollom Hampton (1995), “Women leaders experience visibility more negatively than their male counterparts because of the more complex array of conscious and unconscious expectations for their behavior.” (p. 199) When women behave assertively at work, they are criticized for being too masculine or aggressive, and when they are nurturing, caring and collaborative at work, they are viewed as too emotional and thus not suited for leadership roles. These competing role expectations, in addition to the barriers imposed by racism and sexism, make it more difficult for African-American women to gain leadership status in organizations.

\textit{Participants Dealt with Conflict Directly in Family of Origin and at Work}

In her study on the influence of family of origin dynamics on behavior at work, Stacey Philpot (2004) found that the eight of the ten White women who participated in the study avoided conflict. In the current study, however, half of the participants reported dealing with conflict directly in their family of origin growing up and nine of ten of the African-American participants reported that they currently deal with conflict directly. The discrepancy between the past and current ability of some participants to deal with conflict directly was due to participants showing respect to parents or other elders, the belief that all conflicts were not worth addressing, not recognizing conflicts, or feeling powerless and thus unable to address conflict with those with more authority than them when they were younger. At work, nine of ten participants stated that they dealt with conflict directly when necessary. The African-American participants’ ability to deal with conflict directly is consistent with research explaining that African-Americans prefer a
more direct style of communication and are encouraged by family members to express themselves more freely (Kane, 1998).

Race More Salient than Gender in the Workplace

While less than half of the participants in the study reported that gender influenced their interactions with colleagues, eight of ten participants identified race as salient in their interactions with people at work. Natalie summed this idea up in one sentence: “When I look at myself, I see a Black woman- I see my race before my gender, and I believe that others do as well.” One of the reasons that race was more salient than gender at work was because 70 percent of the women reported being the only, or one of few, African-American employees in their department, while 90 percent of the study participants worked in an all female department. Therefore, while they were members of the majority group in terms of gender, the participants in the study were conscious of the fact that there were few, if any, people in their department who shared the same race.

Another finding was that many of the participants were very “careful” in their interactions with colleagues. They reported being careful about how they dressed, what they wore to work, and what they discussed at work. Additionally, study participants were careful about how they addressed concerns or resolved conflict due to fear of being labeled as the “angry black woman” by their white colleagues. Karen specifically addressed this fear when she discussed her method for dealing with a male subordinate. She said “I knew I had to handle this issue in a way that was firm, but without being perceived as ‘an angry black woman’.” While other participants did not use this specific term, they described being careful when communicating with colleagues so they don’t
appear too aggressive or as having an attitude. These are two stenotypes that are often attributed to African-American women and many of the study participants perceived these characteristics as derailers to advancement in their careers.

Many of the participants shared experiences of feeling like they have to behave one way at work and another way in their family of origin in order to be successful at work. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) describe this process as “shifting,” or the process of compromising their true selves in order to accommodate others, including White colleagues, Black men, and others in their communities. They further explain the process of shifting for Black women:

“Shifting is what she does when she speaks one way in the office, another way to her girlfriends, and still another way to her elderly relatives. It is what may be going on when she enters the beauty parlor with dreadlocks and leaves with straightened hair, or when she tries on five outfits every morning looking for the best camouflage for her ample derriere.” (p. 7)

In a study conducted with four hundred Black women from the United States, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) found that most of the women “shifted” their behavior to put others at ease. Fifty eight percent of the participants in the study reported that at times they have changed the way they speak, toned down their mannerisms, talked about what they felt White people were interested in, and avoided controversial topics. Shifting is both internal and invisible, and while it may help Black women succeed in the workplace, shifting is damaging to their sense of self.

Bell (1990) also describes this experience, referring to it as the bicultural life experience. She describes the bicultural experience as the process by which Black women manage both their professional and personal life spheres by conforming to dominant culture values while managing expectations, values, and roles in the black community.
Because the Black community often has an impact on the identity of Black women, the bicultural life experience can lead to an acute identity conflict (Bell, 1990) because assimilation to the values of the dominant culture may mean betraying the values of the Black community. She says:

“Organizational cultures- large, hierarchical, white, and male-dominated- have their own set of norms, traditions, and values and, in the extreme, are prototypes of the Anglo-Saxon tradition and the Protestant Ethic. Circumstances often dictate that, in order for a Black woman to be successful in and organization, she must adopt a ‘corporate’ identity that could be characterized as masculine and white. If such action is necessary, she may acutely sense that she has betrayed the cultural identity stemming from her race and gender, thereby triggering an identity conflict.” (p. 465)

While the bicultural life experience can be empowering for Black women, it can also be a source of psychological distress (Bell, 1990).

**Research Questions**

This study explored five question areas:

1. Do individuals replicate the same interpersonal patterns at work and in their family of origin?

2. Do individuals deal with authority in the workplace in the same way as they deal with authority in their family of origin?

3. Do individuals deal with conflict at work in the same way that they deal with conflict in their family of origin?

4. Do individuals take on the same roles at work and in their family of origin?

5. Does race and gender influence individuals’ experiences at work and in their family of origin?

Each of these questions will be discussed in more detail below.
Do individuals replicate the same interpersonal patterns at work and in their family of origin?

The majority of the participants in this study replicated the same interpersonal patterns at work and in their family of origin to some extent. Seventy percent of the participants recognized a connection between their interpersonal patterns at work and in their family of origin and believed that family of origin dynamics do influence some, but not all of their workplace experiences. Additionally, for most of the participants, this was the first time that they had thought about the ways in which their family of origin dynamics influenced their workplace experiences.

Do individuals deal with authority in the workplace in the same way as they deal with authority in their family of origin?

All of the participants recognized authority in their family of origin and at work. However, their perceptions of their authority figures in their family of origin were often more positive than their perceptions of their authority figures at work. This was especially true for participants who identified female authority figures in both their family of origin and at work. While Philpot (2004) found that participants in her study compared their work and family authority figures, the findings in this study were that participants often compared their current bosses to former bosses or to themselves if they were also managers, rather than to authority figures in their family of origin, particularly if their boss was female. This was discussed previously in theme two.
Do individuals deal with conflict at work in the same way that they deal with conflict in their family of origin?

As mentioned previously in theme four, most of the participants dealt with conflict directly at work and in their family of origin. While some participants found it more difficult to confront others when they were children, most of the participants preferred to deal with conflict directly as adults in their family of origin and at work. However, many of the participants were more careful when confronting people who had authority over them in their family of origin and at work. Also, some participants handled conflict more cautiously with family members because they did not want to damage relationships with relatives by dealing with conflict inappropriately.

Do individuals take on the same roles at work and in their family of origin?

As mentioned above in theme three, participants held multiple roles at work and in their family of origin. The role that was consistent across each of the family of origin and work domains (family of origin growing up, family of origin currently, self-selected role at work, and colleagues’ perceptions of participant at work) was leader. However, participants held other roles and some participants held the same roles in both their family of origin and at work.
Does race and gender influence individuals’ experiences at work and in their family of origin?

Race and gender generally influenced participants’ experiences in their family of origin and at work. However, both race and gender were not always salient in each participant’s family of origin and at work. As discussed in detail in theme five, race was a more salient influence than gender for participants at work. Most of the participants believed that their race influenced their relationships with colleagues more often than gender and reported that they are more careful in their interactions with colleagues due to race more so than gender. Additionally, many of the participants expressed that they prefer to dress professionally at all times, even when they have the opportunity to dress casually at work, because they want to be perceived as professional at all times. This was also attributed to the participants being African-American rather than being female. Although participants were aware of their gender at work, they were constantly reminded that they were African-American and more aware of their race, especially if they were the only African-American employee in the organization or department.

Limitations of the Study

The small sample size (N=10) and the homogeneity of the sample (single, employed, African-American women with no children), limited the ability to generalize this research. Additionally, the women in this research study were from four cities in the northeastern part of the United States, which also limited the ability to generalize the findings, as the experiences of these women could be impacted by a variety of factors that may be different from the same population in different parts of the country. Further, the
ability to generalize results from this study is very limited due to potential response bias, investigator bias and the instrument used to interview participants. Participants could have answered the interview questions in a way that they thought was expected by the interviewer (response bias), which could have affected the findings in the study. Also, it is possible that the investigator asked the questions in a manner that led participants to answer questions in a particular way (investigator bias). Additionally, the findings of the study were interpreted by the investigator and there is the potential for the investigator to view the themes based on her personal experiences. Finally, the interview protocol relied on self-reporting and asked participants to reflect on childhood experiences, which could be subject to memory distortions.

The purpose of this study is to increase the understanding of the influence of family of origin dynamics on workplace behavior of African-American women and to add to the limited knowledge in this area. It is not intended to be used for purposes of generalization. However, the findings in this study could be used in future research in order to expand knowledge in this area and improve professional work with African-American women in- and outside of the workplace.

**Implications**

This study suggests that family of origin dynamics, group memberships, and societal influences all affect individuals’ experiences at work. In order to be successful in working with African-American women, it is imperative that organizational professionals are culturally competent. They must reject the notion of being “color blind” and explore how race, gender and family of origin experiences have influenced the experiences of
African-American women in the workplace. Below are implications for future research, organizational consultants and executive coaches, as well as managers in organizations.

*Implications for Future Research*

This study is exploratory in nature and only focused on one specific group: African-American women. Thus, this study cannot be generalized to other groups. Consistent with the implications from the previous study on this topic (Philpot, 2004), the influence of family of origin experiences on workplace experiences should be examined with other racial and ethnic groups and men. Additionally, further research on the impact of family of origin experiences and group memberships on individuals’ experiences in the same organization is warranted. Another research option would be to conduct this study with African-American women on a larger scale, with a large number of participants from all over the country and a larger age range, in an effort to compare the experiences of younger and older women. This could allow for greater generalizability and a wealth of information on this topic. Finally, the effect of family of origin influences on career choice could be studied further.

*Implications for Organizational Consultants and Executive Coaches*

This research is relevant to organizational practitioners, whether their focus is on working with individuals or groups in organizational settings. Organizational consultants and executive coaches could especially benefit from the research findings since their focus is on the interdependence of individuals, groups and organizations. According to Orenstein (2002), executive coaching is a complex and demanding process that includes
multidimensional interrelationships among the individual, organization, and consultant. She asserts that there are four premises that guide the process: the impact of unconscious forces; the interaction between the individual, organization and consultant; the inextricability of simultaneous multidimensional forces; and the consultant’s use of self as a tool (Orenstein, 2007). Because this study suggests that family of origin experiences, group memberships and societal factors can all influence an individual’s behavior at work, the findings are relevant to executive coaches. By helping clients understand how past family experiences, race, and gender influence their workplace experiences, clients can make positive changes to improve workplace performance. Similarly, organizational consultants working with individuals or groups can help members gain a similar understanding in order to work effectively with others in their organizations.

Implications for Managers

As large corporations begin to recognize the business case for diversity, it has become increasingly important for managers to become more culturally competent in order to maintain positive working relationships with the people that they supervise. Therefore, managers may also find this research relevant. A study done by Catalyst (2004) on the advancement of African-American women reported that managers needed to (1) understand the business case for recruiting retaining, and advancing African-American women in the workforce; (2) be aware of the diversity of African-Americans in terms of their background and experiences; (3) create an open dialogue with employees, particularly finding out how African-American women define family and use an inclusive definition when planning events, and (4) learn about the company’s benefits and
programs designed to help employees manage family responsibilities. Additionally, managers can support African-American staff by becoming aware of and challenging negative stereotypes about African-American women, and challenging individuals who make disparaging remarks about African-Americans. Being open about issues of race and gender in the workplace is the first step towards building better relationships and communication patterns among managers and the diverse employees that they manage.

**Conclusion**

The goal of this research was to examine the extent to which family of origin experiences influence experiences at work. This study found that workplace experiences were influenced not only by family of origin dynamics, but also by group memberships and societal factors. This was consistent with the findings in the previous research conducted on this topic. However, the influence of group memberships, particularly race, was more salient with the African-American participants in this study. Although the findings from this research cannot be generalized to other settings, they are relevant for professionals working with African-American women in organizational settings. Organizational theories such as Embedded Intergroup Relations Theory, Emotional Intelligence and Role Theory are all relevant lenses for understanding the relationship between individuals, groups, and organizations. When used properly by organizational practitioners, these frameworks can be valuable tools for helping African-American women understand how family of origin experiences, race, gender, and societal factors influence their experiences at work.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Telephone Introduction to the Study and Invitation to Participate

“Hello, ________________ my name is Ebony Evans, and I am calling you at the suggestion of __________, who thought you might be interested in participating in a research study that I am conducting. Is now a good time to talk?  (If yes, continue; if not, schedule another time to talk.)

I am presently enrolled at Rutgers University in the Organizational Psychology doctoral program and am working on my doctoral dissertation. The topic of the research is “An Exploratory Study of Family of Origin Influences on African-American Women’s Experiences in the Workplace.” To understand this experience, I would like to interview employed African-American women who have at least four years of full-time work experience. Therefore, I am looking for women ages 25 to 40 to participate in the study. Participation is voluntary and completely confidential. It includes signing an informed consent form and being interviewed in person for approximately 90-120 minutes. During the interview, I will ask questions regarding your family relationships, work experiences, and interpersonal communication patterns. With your permission, the interview will be audio taped for accuracy. The total time commitment for participating is approximately two hours. Does this sound like something that you would be interested in doing?  
(If no, state: That’s okay. Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. If you change your mind, want to ask additional questions, or think of others who may be interested in participating, please feel free to give me a call. My number is 917-670-9438.)

(If yes, state: Great. Before we go any further, let me just ask you a few questions in order to verify your eligibility for the study:

- Are you an employed, African-American woman between the ages of 25 and 40?
- Are you single, with no children?
- Do you have four or more years of full-time work experience?)

If the participant answers yes to all of the above, set up an interview: Great, well what I would like to do now is set up a time for the interview (set up time and place of interview and get participant’s e-mail address to send a confirmation email). Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. I look forward to our interview on (verbally confirm date, time and place of interview). If you have any questions before we meet, please feel free to call me at (917) 670-9438 or e-mail me at eevans79@msn.com. Thanks again.

Adapted from Philpot (2004)
APPENDIX B

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Ebony Evans, a student at the Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, as part of my dissertation.

**Purpose:** The purpose of my study is to learn about the influence of family of origin experiences on the experiences of African-American women in the workplace. I became interested in this topic after a GSAPP alumna came to one of my classes and discussed her dissertation on this topic with single, Caucasian women. As an African-American woman, I decided that I would like to study this topic with other African-American women.

**Participants:** The participants for the study will include a total of 10-12 single, African-American women without children, who are currently employed and have at least four years of full-time work experience. You will be contacted and asked via phone if you would be willing to participate in the study, and will be asked to sign a consent form in person before you participate. Participants between the ages of 25 and 40 years old will participate in the study, and each interview will last approximately 90-120 minutes.

**Procedure:** The study procedures include the following:

1. Initial contact via telephone to provide a description of the purpose of the research and to provide details of participation. Additionally, a brief telephone screening will be conducted to ensure that you meet the criteria for participation. If you meet the criteria and verbally agree to participate, an appointment will be made for the interview. Additionally, you will receive an e-mail from the researcher confirming your interview date and time.

2. An interview that will last 90-120 minutes. Before the interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form confirming your voluntary participation and to fill out a Background Information form. During the interview, you will be asked a series of open-ended questions regarding family and work experiences. After the interview, you will be thanked and given the opportunity to ask questions. You will also receive the researcher’s contact information in case you have any additional questions in the future.

**Risks and benefits:** There are minimal risks associated with this study. There is a small risk that speaking about ethnicity, family relationships, and workplace experiences will produce some anxiety as these topics may be sensitive given the history of African-American women in the United States. When speaking about workplace issues, participants may bring up a variety of concerns that may not be expected by the researcher. To minimize this risk, all information provided by you will be confidential,
and if you express any stress or anxiety as a result of your participation, you should contact the researcher who will debrief with you and help you find resources if you need to speak to a professional about any issues or concerns that you may be experiencing. However, you could benefit greatly from being given the opportunity to reflect upon family relationships and work behaviors and make improvements at work, if necessary.

____________ (participant’s initials)

Additionally, you may receive satisfaction in knowing that you have contributed to a body of research regarding a population that is often overlooked in the organizational literature, and that could help other African-American women understand how their family of origin experiences may influence their workplace behaviors.

**Voluntary participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate, and may withdraw at any time during the study without any penalty. In addition, you may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable.

**Confidentiality:** This research is confidential. In this study, confidential means that the research records will include some information about you, such as your name, address, email address, telephone number, marital status, racial & ethnic identification, and other demographic information. I will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. The research team and the Institutional Review Board at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All demographic information collected will be kept in a secure location in the researcher’s home. Following data collection, files retained will be coded and will not contain potentially identifying information. Data will be kept for at least three years. After this time, study data will be destroyed.

**Questions:** If you have any questions about the study or study procedures, you may call me at (917) 670-9438 or email me at eevans79@msn.com, or you may contact my dissertation faculty chairperson, Dr. Nancy Boyd-Franklin at boydfrank@aol.com. You can also mail either of us at: The Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology, 152 Frelinghuysen Road, Piscataway, NJ 08854-8020. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
This consent form is for your records. You will be asked for verbal consent prior to the interview. Please sign below if you agree to participate in this research study:

Participant’s Name (Print) ________________________________

Participant’s Signature __________________________ Date ________________

Principal Investigator’s Signature ______________________ Date ________________

Adapted from Philpot (2004)
Audio Tape Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled, “An Exploratory Study of Family of Origin Influences on African-American Women’s Experiences in the Workplace,” conducted by Ebony Evans. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audio tape the interview as part of this research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the study.

The recording(s) will be used to ensure that the information disclosed in the interview will be accurately rendered during the transcription process and to ensure accuracy of the data.

The recording(s) will include information about your family and work experiences. Your position in the company and name of your employer will not be recorded.

The recording(s) will be stored in a secure location in the researcher’s home and linked with a code to the subjects’ identity, and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Participant’s Name (Print) ______________________________________

Participant’s Signature ____________________________ Date ________________

Principal Investigator’s Signature _____________________ Date ________________
APPENDIX C
Background Information Form

Please provide the following information:

**Contact Information:**
Name: ____________________________ Age: ____________________________
Telephone number: __________________ Address: _________________________
Email address: ______________________ _________________________

**Employment Information:**
Current Title/Position: ________________________________________________
Type of Industry: _______________________________________________________
Length of time in this position: _________________________________________
Work responsibilities: _________________________________________________

Previous Title/Position: ________________________________________________
Type of Industry: _______________________________________________________
Length of time in this position: _________________________________________
Work responsibilities: _________________________________________________

**Education:**
What is the highest level of education you have attained? (Please circle one)
a. No college Degree  f. MA/MS/MPH
b. 2-yr. College Degree  g. MBA
c. Bachelor’s Degree  h. Doctoral Degree
d. LLM/JD  i. Other: _____________
e. MD/DDS

**Birth order:** (Please check one)

___ Only child  ____ 1st  ____ 2nd  ____ 3rd  ____ 4th  ____ 5th  ____ Other:

**Number of siblings:** _____

*Adapted from Philpot (2004)*
APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Thank Participant. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Briefly explain the study. As I previously mentioned to you, I am investigating the experiences of African-American women at work. As part of the study, I am interested in learning about the different interpersonal styles that women use and where they come from. I am going to ask you questions about you, your job, and your family. This is a long series of questions so at times I may have to interrupt you to make sure that we cover all of the questions. It will take approximately two hours to complete the interview.

Inform participant of her rights. As a reminder, your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to answer any questions with which you are not comfortable. Additionally, you may withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty.

Explain confidentiality. This interview will be kept strictly confidential. The information that you provide will be used for research purposes only, and will be made available only to myself and my research advisors. Excerpts of our interview may be included in the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or other identifying information be included in the report. Additionally, none of the information that you give me will be linked with your name- either written or in conversation with others.

Use of tape recorder/Note taking. As we previously discussed, I will record our conversation so that I can concentrate on our discussion and listen closely. I will also take some notes so I can accurately record what you are saying.

Participant Questions. Do you have any questions before we begin?
I. Work:
On the questionnaire you indicated that you are currently working as a ____________. To help me get an idea of what your job is like, please describe your job.

Work Relationships:
1. Who are the people that you work with?
2. Who do you have the closest/best relationship(s) with? Why?
3. Who do you have the most problematic relationship(s) with? Why?

Authority at Work:
4. Who has the greatest authority over you?
5. Who has the least authority?
6. Do you have authority over anyone? If so, who?

Work Conflict:
In order to understand your work experience better, please tell me about a conflict or problem that you recently faced at work.
7. Who was involved?
8. How did you handle the situation with those who have more authority than you? Less authority than you? Peers?
9. Would you say that this is the way that you usually deal with a conflict or problem? If not, how is it different?

Role Dynamics at Work:
10. As you think about current and previous work experiences, how would you describe your general style of relating to others?
11. Using the attached list of common roles, what role would you say best describe you at work? Would others describe your role in the same way?
12. Does your role contribute to your success at work? If so, how?
13. Does your role contribute to the problems that you have at work? If so, how?
14. How does your role affect the way that you work with others?
15. Has your race/ethnicity influenced the way you interact with others at work?
16. Has being a woman influenced the way you interact with others at work?

17. Are the roles that you play at work different with subordinates, peers, and your boss?

II. Family:

Family Relationships:

To help me get an idea of your relationships with family members, please describe your family.

18. Who would you include as members of your family?

19. Were you close to your family growing up?

20. Where did you grow up?

21. Who raised you? What was your relationship like with him/her/them?

22. When you were growing up, did you live with both parents? What was the relationship like with your parents?

23. How many siblings do you have? What is your birth order in relation to your siblings? What was your relationship like with your siblings?

24. Who else lived in your home growing up?

25. Did religion play a part in your family? If so, how?

26. What family member(s) did you have the closest/best relationship(s) with? Why?

27. What family members did you have the most problematic relationship(s) with? Why?

Authority Dynamics in the Family of Origin:

28. Who had the greatest authority over you? How was that authority displayed?

29. Who had the least authority?

30. Did you have authority over anyone? If so, who?
Family Conflict:

In order to understand your family experience better, please tell me about a conflict or problem that you faced in your family growing up.

31. Who was involved?

32. How did you handle the situation with those who have more authority than you? Less authority than you?

33. Would you say that this is the way that you usually deal with a conflict or problem? If not, how is it different?

Family Role Dynamics:

34. As you think about current and previous experiences, how would you describe your general style of relating to others in your family?

35. Using the attached list of common roles, what role would you say that you played in your family growing up?

36. What role do you currently play in your family?

37. What role did other family members play (e.g., parents, siblings, etc.)?

38. Did your role contribute to positive relationships with family members? If so, how?

39. Did your role contribute to the problems that you had with family members? If so, how?

40. Has your race/ethnicity influenced the way that you interacted with other family members growing up?

41. Has being a woman influenced the way you interacted with other family members growing up?

42. In the past, were the roles that you played with family members with more authority different than the roles that you play with those with less or equal authority? If so, how?

43. Are there similarities between the interpersonal patterns that you use at work and those that you used in your family growing up? If so, what are they?

44. Are there any differences? If so, what are they?
45. Have you noticed any patterns in our discussion?

46. To what degree is your organization’s way of dealing with conflict similar to the way that your family dealt with conflict?

47. To what degree is it different?

At the end of interview:

We are at the end of the interview, so I wanted to know what you thought about the things that we have discussed.

48. Were there any thoughts or ideas that came to you regarding your work and family interpersonal patterns?

49. Is there anything else you would like me to know?

50. Do you have any questions for me?

Thank participant. Thank you again for taking part in this research project. This has been very helpful to me, and I hope that it has been a good experience for you as well.

Confidentiality. As I previously mentioned, our conversation will be kept confidential, and all identifying information will be removed from any transcripts and/or reports.

Follow-up information. Please feel free to contact me with any additional questions, thoughts/ideas, etc.

Adapted from Philpot (2004)
APPENDIX E

List of Common Roles

Listed below are roles that people may take up in dealing with others. Please select **ONE** role that you believe most applies to you:

Advocate
Abuser
Cheerleader
Coordinator
Fighter
Follower
Friend
Go-between
Comedian
Leader
Loner
Mediator
Nurturer
Outcast
Parental child
Peace-maker
Protector
Rebel
Supporter
Coach
Trouble-maker
Other: ___________ (please specify)

*Adapted from Philpot (2004)*