Motivational Factors That Influence African American Women to Serve as Michigan State Legislators

Rogenia Goza
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MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN TO SERVE AS MICHIGAN STATE LEGISLATORS

A Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Rogenia Goza
July 2006
MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN TO SERVE AS MICHIGAN STATE LEGISLATORS

A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Rogenia Goza

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July 26, 2006
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ABSTRACT

MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN TO SERVE AS MICHIGAN STATE LEGISLATORS

by

Rogenia Goza

Chair: Hinsdale Bernard
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

Andrews University

School of Education

Title: MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN TO SERVE AS MICHIGAN STATE LEGISLATORS

Name of researcher: Rogenia Goza

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Date completed: July 2006

Problem

The purpose of this study was to discover factors that influence the political career choice of African American women legislators to serve in the State of Michigan Congress. Therefore, this study focused on motivations that affected three African American women legislators’ political experiences.

Method

This study used a case-study approach, and the end result is a multi-faceted case study of the political experiences of three State of Michigan African American women legislators. The techniques used in the ethnographic research — interviews, observations, note-taking, and reviews of public and personal documents — were intended to increase
understanding of the observed phenomena. Data from these different sources enhanced the analysis and interpretation of the narrative portion of the three case studies.

Results

Throughout this study the three informants spoke of influences that affected their political career decisions. Descriptive narrative accounts of various political challenges that each research subject experienced while seeking election and upon becoming an elected official are also provided through the context of this research.

Conclusions

According to the research findings, informants were encouraged by family, friends, and other members of their support networks to pursue political aspirations despite the frequent gender and racial discrimination encountered throughout the informants' political experiences. Internal and external motivators such as personal resolve, sheer determination, and reliance on spiritual guidance enabled these informants to achieve political success.

Political neophytes may use these findings to analyze and, where suited, re-chart their efforts or energies and political career advancement. Additionally, this study may serve as a motivational resource for professionals in various fields by identifying and describing individuals who demonstrated persistence to achieve their desired career goals.
I humbly dedicate this dissertation in the spirit of thankfulness to my wonderful daughter, Vanessa; my loving son, Robert; my mother, Frances Collier, who still proves to be my source of wisdom and insight; and to my sisters, Lorraine, Yvonne, Rosalind, and Viola. Also, to my brothers, Erving and Albert, my granddaughters, Eshayla and Nicole, to Drs. Coleman, Bernard, and Johns and my many friends. It is because of your love, faith, and encouragement that I have been able to complete this journey that began July 1998.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

African American women with political aspirations have been faced with an intriguing and unique disadvantage – being Black and female. African American women have often been labeled or targeted as unsuitable political candidates and have been discouraged from becoming viable political hopefuls (Clayton, 2003; Clayton & Stallings, 2000). Chang and Hitchon (1997) suggested that even as children, African American girls are vicariously socialized (influenced) toward different career perspectives relative to political behavior and/or encouraged to model career behavioral patterns that focus quite differently from those of individuals who are not African American (King, 1975, 1977).

According to Bandura (1965), individuals are vicariously socialized or motivated when they observe the behavior of others. Vicarious punishment bears proof that a particular action or choice is not tolerated, whereas reinforcement would indicate acceptance. The reaction to, or the influence of, learned socialization may not appear until a later point in time, such as when one is deciding on a particular career choice (Ormrod, 1999).

Rather than assume political leadership roles, African American women are encouraged or expected to pursue less aggressive types of careers (King, 1975). African
America women have been led to seek career roles typically characterized as motherly or encouraged to serve in the capacity of supporter or caretaker behind the political front lines in fields that are governed by nurturing types of responsibilities. African American women who have entertained the notion of running for political office have generally been expected to foster docile characteristics ascribed to them in their daily role as mother, daughter, sister, and/or wife (Chang & Hitchon, 1997).

Yet, typically, political candidates are expected to possess attributes such as being aggressive, opinionated, ambitious, and given to rational thinking. Elected political officials and political candidates must demonstrate a persona that denotes willingness to be the leader of the pack. According to Carroll (1994), these personality traits are traditionally considered to be masculine characteristics and are representative of the majority of political candidates and elected officials (Carroll, 1994; Chang & Hitchon, 1997). Public electoral patterns seem to affirm the double disadvantage premise: African American women suffer politically from being both female and Black (Baxter & Lansing, 1981; Carroll & Stallings, 1983; Epstein, 1973; Githens & Prestage, 1977; King, 1975).

**Background of the Problem**

Current scholarly literature vaguely addresses the subject of African American women in their role as political activists at local, state, and/or federal levels as it relates to motivation (Darcy, Hadley, & Kirksey, 1993; Lusane, 1994). There is a paucity of documents that have addressed the presence of African American women in politics and the perceptions and behaviors directed towards these women as they seek to fulfill their aspiration to serve legislatively (Reuter, 1995). In particular, Baxter and Lansing (1981) have documented a number of situational struggles encountered by African American
political leaders while serving in key roles related to politically driven events. Examples of the experiences of African American female legislators encountered are the segregation struggles of Rosa Parks, the Civil Rights activist known for her leading role in the Birmingham Bus Boycott; the silent treatment Shirley Chisholm encountered as the first African American elected to the United States Congress, and the first one to seek the Democratic nomination for president; and the relentless political badgering of Barbara Jordan, an elected official who spoke before Congress during the Watergate hearings.

Clayton and Stallings (2000) explored various factors that have proven to be career turning-points for African American political leaders. While it is noteworthy that these authors acknowledged African American women political leaders and their career struggles, their research provided no indication of the motivations and common influences that may have served to pave the way and encourage endurance prior to and during the aforementioned political experiences (Baxter & Lansing, 1981; Clayton & Stallings, 2000; Washington, 1995).

Despite the rich tradition of African American legislators in American society, discourses that speak to the types of influences that have contributed to African-American women's career paths have actually been minimal. There are studies of African American political candidates and those who were elected, both male and female, yet there remains an intellectual void concerning the documentation of factors that describe or speak to motivations that have influenced African American women in their journeys towards congressional service. Jackson's (2000) exploratory account of the political and social movement of women examined race, class, age, and previous work-
related experience in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of being female and Black. Jackson (2000) notes,

Research on African American women... examines political activism and social movements as they relate to a select group of African American leaders in the United States. Race, class, gender, and age are important factors to consider as they affect their decision to engage in political activism. (p. 15)

However, with a few isolated exceptions, there have been no attempts made by scholars to truly explore or disseminate a supportive body of research dedicated to the understanding of motivational factors that contributed to or shaped the political experiences and career choice of African American women in Michigan's Congress. As a resident of the State of Michigan, I am sensitive to its political landscape; hence, I was drawn into this particular topic.

The challenges and political career obstacles African American women in the Michigan Congress have encountered and must overcome before, during, and after attaining congressional leadership status are unlike those experienced by their political counterparts. For the most part, African American women who seek to gain political appointment are routinely shut out or barred both from elections and from the opportunity to serve politically (Berg, 1994; Darcy et al., 1993; Darcy, Welch, & Clark, 1987). This racial- and gender-driven isolation, known as "Congressional career blockage," is evident throughout Michigan's political arena, and, to varying degrees, is replicated throughout the other 49 states. Tables 1 and 2 portray both racial and gender representation in the Michigan Legislature.

Most, if not all, of the small representation of African American congresswomen in the State of Michigan (currently eight women) who managed to rise beyond various
Table 1

Profile of the Membership of the Michigan State Senate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congressional Session</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>African American Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>African American Females</th>
<th>Vacant Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>87th (1993-1995)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88th (1995-1996)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89th (1997-1998)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90th (1999-2000)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91st (2001-2002)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92nd (2003-2004)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Profile of the Membership of the Michigan State House of Representatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Congressional Session</th>
<th>Total Members</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>African American Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>African American Females</th>
<th>Vacant Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>87th (1993-1995)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88th (1995-1996)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89th (1997-1998)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90th (1999-2000)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91st (2001-2002)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92nd (2003-2004)</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
discriminatory political career barriers have also struggled to overcome racial and professional stereotyping. These African American women proved savvy enough to be elected and discovered that the nearly insurmountable hurdles that they overcame to be elected signaled only the beginning of their battle to stay politically viable. As a minority within a minority, African American women have faced discrimination and have been challenged to overcome negative stereotypes (Gill, 1997).

As reflected in Table 1, membership of African American women in the Michigan Senate has been consistently lowest in number. Table 1 does indicate a modest increase of African American women during the 92nd congressional session.

The practice of Congressional career blockage hinders African Americans from seeking political service and has resulted in direct political bias, political void, and a political representation vacuum, as noted by Darcy et al. (1993): “At the local and state legislative levels . . . the under-representation of Blacks is almost entirely due to the under representation of Black women” (p. 187).

As depicted in Table 2, African American women rank fewer in number in the Michigan House than the other racial and gender groups represented there. During the congressional session of 1999-2000, African American women experienced a notable increase from the previous session (1997-1998). However, following the banner session (1999-2000), membership of African American women began to decline.

In their book about United States congresswomen, Clayton and Stallings (2000) explained the political career dilemma of African American women as follows:

As a minority within a minority, black women face sexual discrimination as well as racial discrimination by voters who expect African American women to represent only a narrow constituency. African American women are often considered or treated as invisible in today’s political arenas. Their good deeds seem to fade into the larger
groups of either Blacks or women in general. African American women must struggle to overcome negative image stereotyping that portrays them. (p. 126)

My study highlighted some of the experiences of African American women in politics.

**Statement of the Problem**

The experiences of African American women legislators in Michigan needed to be brought to light regarding the motivators and triggers that propelled and sustained them in political office.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to discover motivational factors that influenced the political career choices of African American Michigan congresswomen. As used in this study, motivation refers to actions and behaviors that influence change, while career choice focuses on the progression from one’s initial political aspirations, through the gaining of skills and abilities that afforded African American women the opportunity to serve in the State of Michigan Congress. I endeavored to provide insight about factors that influence political achievement for African American women legislators in Michigan. Through this study I hoped to allow and encourage women to recognize these factors and sought results to provide support for future candidates.

**Conceptual Framework – Attribution Theory**

Theorists contend that attributions play a major role in the choices people make and the behavior they ultimately exhibit (Dweck, 1986; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Weiner, 1980; Werner, 1977; Werner & Schoepfle, 1987). Attribution theory explains how people interpret and behave towards the reinforcement and punishment they
experience. The reactionary of a particular behavior means whether or not the event occurred as a result of something that the individual made happen or instead something that had been done to them. Attribution, the lens in which “one’s self-concept and existing schemas about how the world operates,” motivates behavior (Dweck, Astin, & Suniewick, 1974; Paris & Byrnes, 1989). Werner and Schoepfle (1987) proposed that attributions differ from one another in five dimensions.

1. Whether locus (place) is internal versus external: Internal locus means the cause of events within ourselves; external locus means the belief that factors that contributed to a particular outcome were based on factors outside ourselves.

2. Whether temporal stability is stable versus unstable: Stable factors will not change much in the near future. Unstable factors can change from one time to the next.

3. Whether cross-situational generality is global versus specific: Global means it influences many aspects of our lives. Specific means it impacts a particular situation.

4. Whether controllability is controllable versus uncontrollable: Controllable factors can be influenced and changed. Uncontrollable factors are things over which we have no control.

5. Whether intentionality is intentional versus unintentional: Something is intentional if an individual is purposeful about doing or not doing it. Something is unintentional if an individual is not purposeful about it (Ormrod, 1999).

A person’s attribution toward a scenario is an essential variable that affects motivation. When people believe that they are responsible for their own success, they are more likely to take pride in the outcome and repeat the event. Conversely, individuals are most likely to change or modify their behavior after a failure if they believe that the
failure occurred due to internal, controllable factors. The specific attributions that people make may be influenced by cultural variables (Andrews & Debus, 1978).

As noted by Byrnes (1996), DiSessa (1996), Duit (1991), and Greene et al. (1989), among others, attributions are derived from various sources. Sometimes an attribution is encouraged by common expression in one's language. People may infer incorrect cause-effect relationships when events occur together, or are correlated. People often hold stubbornly to their misconceptions, even after being shown evidence that explicitly contradicts those misconceptions.

Ormrod (1999) states,

Unfortunately it is sometimes the case that we acquire erroneous ideas because we have seen or heard such ideas from others; in some instances teachers or textbooks even give us such misinformation. . . . Some erroneous beliefs are integrated into a cohesive whole, with many interrelationships existing among various ideas; in such a situation, changing misconceptions involves changing an entire organized body of knowledge rather than a single belief. (p. 309)

Other theorists have proposed that beliefs about the world, even if scientifically incomplete or inaccurate, may be useful for interpreting experiences. Most knowledge is a summary of gained experiences rather than information about specific events. As time passes, people tend to generalize specific experiences into concepts, whether they are thought to have positive or negative cultural consequences. Cultural beliefs have some degree of validity and should be viewed so (Linn & Muilenburg, 1996).

**Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What factors have motivated the career choice of African American Michigan congresswomen?
2. Are there common factors that influence African American women toward careers in politics?

**Overview of Research Design**

According to Creswell (2003), the design of ethnographic research "typically evolves contextually in response to the lived realities" (p. 14). To learn about the cultural behaviors of African American Michigan congresswomen, I used ethnographic research tools. The design of the study emerged based on field notes of activities observed as they occurred in a natural setting, interviews using structured and open-ended questions, and audio tape-recorded messages as an unobtrusive method of preserving events. Historical documents such as minutes from meetings, journals, diary entries, and email were used to supplement primary data. Personal information was desensitized to protect the anonymity of informants (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 1987; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Merriam, 1988; Spradley, 1972, 1979).

**Significance of the Study**

The primary significance of this ethnographic study is to allow political leaders in Michigan to gain greater insight and understanding of common motives that influence African American women to serve political public office (Eisner, 1998). An understanding of the motivations of African American Michigan women legislators is crucial because it will reveal a great deal about the way and reason why they carry out their political commitments (Frantzich, 1999). Michigan congressional leaders and political officials of other states may gain information from these findings. Such information could lead to and promote tolerance of others as they pursue their political
endeavors. According to Creswell (2003), understanding significant cultural practices
could lead to a more balanced, unprejudiced decision-making.

Political career neophytes can use the findings of this study to analyze, pattern,
and, where suited, re-chart their efforts or energies and political career advancement.
Possibility, as noted by Freeman (2000), “must always be the measure of success and
failure. Assessing what was done and not done requires an understanding of what could
be done in a particular time and place” (p. xii).

Lastly, this study could serve as an additional motivational resource for
professionals in various fields by identifying and describing individuals who
demonstrated steadfastness, persistence, and endurance to achieve career goals. Cultural
stories essentially give people a clearer picture of what their lives will be like to help
them achieve or create a desired future (Tichy, 1997).

**Definition of Relevant Terms**

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study.

*African Americans*: Citizens of the United States of America with ancestry and
cultural practices that can be traced back to the continent of Africa (“Afro-centric”
connections). Related terms that are often used interchangeably are Blacks, Afro-centric
Blacks, and People of Color (Meux, 2002).

*Career development*: Activities in which career actionable goals are implemented;
evidence of operational career match between an individual’s skills and abilities and
organizational realities; the progressive level of work responsibilities to full competency
or the point of mastery; the ability to develop and direct untapped professional
potentialities of others (Heneman, Schwab, Fossum, & Dyer, 1989).
Congressional career blockage: This concept implies a political strategy employed by congressional leaders to limit political affiliation or collaboration of professional energies and/or resources. It is also the actions of key leaders who attempt to inhibit others from fully participating in activities that could lead to political career popularity or growth (Freeman, 2000).

Extrinsic influences: Influences that originate from outside of innate choices and that are considered to be extraneous, or foreign, forces. Extrinsic influences are actions driven by external processes. They are directive rationales, whether positive or negative, derived from sources other than one’s own accord, or are events or motives that happen that are not within an individual’s control (Gibson, Ivancevich, & Donnelly, 1988; Ormrod, 1999).

Gerrymandering: To divide a state, country, or city into districts to give unfair advantage to one party in election; the division of voting areas, process of dividing voting areas; to machinate or alter to one’s own advantage; an official act of restructuring; realigning territory within political districts (Morris, 1979).

Informants: Informants are individuals who are knowledgeable about everyday life and experiences unique to particular cultural beliefs and behaviors; persons with whom the ethnographer communicates to acquire knowledge; the ethnographer’s teacher (Spradley, 1979).

Intrinsic influences: Intrinsic influences pertain to the essential nature of a thing and/or inherent action; they are initiated and driven from the inside, and belong solely to the process owner. They are processes originating from within, such as self-governable
activities. They are innately driven; events that an individual contributes and bears personal responsibility for their occurrence (Gibson et al., 1988; Ormrod, 1999).

**Michigan Congress:** The Michigan Congress is a legislative power consisting of a bicameral (2-chamber) body comprised of a Senate and a House of Representatives. The Senate consists of 38 members. Senators are elected at the same time as the governor and serve 4-year terms. Senators may not be elected more than 2 times. The House of Representatives consists of 110 members. Representatives are elected in even-numbered years to 2-year terms. Representatives may not be elected more than 3 times. Members of the Michigan Congress enact the laws of Michigan, levy taxes, and appropriate funds. Michigan Congress legislatively oversees the executive branch of the government (Legislative Council, State of Michigan, 2004).

**Motivation:** Motivations are stimuli that cause, create, or promote movement and are influences that may sustain and/or direct behavior. They are biological and emotional factors inferred from observed behavior and are forces that target performance and awards. A motivation is an inducement resulting in reason for action; a factor that is considered to incite action (Gibson et al., 1988).

**Political action committee:** A political action committee is an organized group of individuals dedicated to promoting particular political interest (Bernotas, 1990).

**Political term limits:** In the 1992 election, Michigan voters approved a proposal (Proposal B) that would limit the terms of a number of elected officials. The amendment to the Michigan Constitution attempted to limit the number of terms that Michigan officeholders could serve either in Lansing or in Washington. The new amendment restricted the Michigan Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, and Attorney
General to two 4-year terms. It also limited members of the House to three 2-year terms and the senators to two 4-year terms. Term limits began on January 1, 1993 (Legislative Council, State of Michigan, 2004).

*Racially polarized voting*: Political endorsement or support driven by racial divides, such as when African Americans vote for or support African American candidates and non-African Americans vote for or support non-African American candidates (Clayton, 2003).

*Suffrage*: A consequence, as well as a cause, of the movement of women entering into politics; political reform vehicle used to change rules and politics as related to women citizenry and voting privileges. The women of Michigan won school suffrage in 1875, as well as the right to vote on tax and bond issues. In 1917, the legislature extended suffrage to women in presidential elections, and, in 1918, Michigan’s state constitution was amended to give women full suffrage (Harley & MacDowell, 1995).

*Value system*: A value system is composed of action items or rational posturing deemed important to the possessor; utility or merit. It is learned fundamental life principles that are held in high behavioral regard; deeply held standards or esteemed motives and goals that govern day-to-day actions and/or non-actions. A value system results in actions or non-actions that showcase dignity and honor (Spradley, 1979).

**Delimitations of the Study**

This study is delimited to a small group of African American women actively serving in the capacity of congressional legislators for the State of Michigan. Results are based on ethnographic research and individual face-to-face interviews. Hence,
documentable findings may not be generalizable to other congressional state government settings and/or women in politics who are not of African American heritage.

Limitations of the Study

This research study focuses on African American women currently serving as a member of the State of Michigan Congress. Though an attempt was made to interview each African American woman currently serving as an elected official in the Michigan Congress, the ethnographic study was limited to those individuals who made themselves available to participate in the research. Findings depict beliefs and viewpoints of the informants and therefore may not in their entirety be applicable to other congressional entities.

Organization of the Research

This research study is organized into seven chapters. Chapter 1 highlights the political career obstacles encountered by Michigan African American congresswomen, thereby laying the purpose and conceptual framework for the study. In addition, chapter 1 outlines select research questions, provides rationale for the design, and gives the significance of the study. Included in chapter 1 are definitions of relevant terms and delimitations and limitations to establish the scope of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature in the following areas pertinent to this study: motivation, politics, the democratic process, women in politics, African American political influence, and African American women legislators in the State of Michigan. The third chapter describes the qualitative methodology used. In addition, in chapter 3 the population that
was studied is defined, the data collection instrument is discussed, interview procedures are described, and data analysis is emphasized.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 contain the results of the qualitative research study. The final chapter, Chapter 7, contains a summary and discussion of the phenomena, including recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of the literature speaks to documented accounts and research related to motivational factors that African American congresswomen at all levels of political public service have identified as influential to their political career choices and advancements. I have attempted to convey a representative account of current literature and at the same time demonstrate justifiable reason for further research. Documented research on motivational factors that influence African American congresswomen is limited, at best (Jackson, 2000). This chapter outlines existing literature on motivations and career influences of African American women in political service (Fitzpatrick, Secrist, & Wright, 1998).

Current literature that has explored the sociological aspects of political career enhancement choices and/or achievements has only a limited written account of descriptive motivational influences as voiced by successful political women of color – African American congresswomen. Political achievement and key motivational factors that influence African American congresswomen in their career quests have received relatively little attention in mainstream literature (Berstein, 1997; Chang & Hitchon, 1997; Gaddie & Bullock, 1995; Leeper, 1991).
Lacking in mainstream analyses of African American Congressional leaders are descriptive first-hand accounts of how and what roles personal ambition played in the career growth of Black female political leaders. Omitted from documented research are inquiries with regard to educational opportunities, career resources, past political legislative exposure, and/or experiences that contributed to the success of elected African American women leaders. Such influential matters need to be examined.

Also requiring further (or in some instances initial) examination are studies about motivational influences on politically driven African American leaders (forerunners), such as support of friends and family and spiritual convictions. Clearly, there is a paucity of studies that address contributory influences that affect African American women's political motivations and their relentless drive as political trailblazers (Jackson, 2000).

**Motivation**

Motivation is an internal and/or external state of affairs that arouses individuals to action, pushes individuals in particular directions, and keeps people engaged in certain activities. Jeanne E. Ormrod, in her book *Human Learning* (1999), discussed and described the effects of motivation, as follows:

People are almost always motivated in one way or another. . . . Motivation determines the extent to which we exhibit the particular responses we have learned. It also affects the ways in which we process the information we receive. Not all forms of motivation have exactly the same effect on human learning and performance. In fact, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation yield somewhat difference results. Intrinsic motivation is ultimately more beneficial than extrinsic motivation. (pp. 407, 431)

The motivation for individuals who excel beyond seemingly insurmountable career odds has been a topic for discussion at management career seminars and in classroom settings (Baron, 1983; Locke, 1968; Vroom, 1964). Concepts of behavior
motivation have been examined and theorized in several different ways. In commenting on professional career motivation, Khillah (1986) said,

Motivation is a popular subject among school principals, educational leaders, managers, and those who are in administrative office. These people have to manage (motivate) employees whether teachers, factory workers or persons in business. Motivation is probably the most prominent topic in management seminars and in-service training for career professionals. (p. 17)

According to Trotter and McConnell (1978), a great deal of motivated human behavior can be explained in terms of needs driven or defined as social guidelines:

Social motives influence our behavior by guiding our perceptions. Societies set up certain goals that tell us those goals are valuable, and motivate us toward those goals. One of the most powerful social goals or motives in the United States is need for achievement, the need to strive for higher standards of performance in school, on the job, in social groups, and in a wide range of situations. The need for achievement (unlike the need for food or water) differs from person to person, from time to time, and from one society to another. While some people appear to be highly motivated by the need for achievement, others seem to be less interested in success. No matter what type of success a person is interested in, however, the need for achievement can be one of the most powerful and important motivating forces in anyone’s life. (p. 166)

Through the study of human behavior, researchers such as Abraham Maslow and David McClelland have made significant contributions to assumptions about motivation or how people are energized to action (Certo, 1983). I provide an overview of motivational theories developed by Maslow and McClelland and how each has shaped our perception of motivational conduct.

Abraham Maslow’s Motivation Need Hierarchy Theory

A once-popular motivation theory developed by Maslow in the 1940s, as a result of clinical research on the study of personality development, is Maslow’s Need Hierarchy theory. Maslow’s theory on motivation focused primarily on the needs of individuals.

According to Maslow (1968), people are motivated for various reasons, ranging in degree of goal achievement and personal satisfaction. Maslow’s need theory is arranged in a hierarchical order and depicts a pyramid. Maslow’s need theory has two categories: Deficiency Needs and Growth Needs.

Deficiency Needs are those primitive in nature or basically encompassing simple day-to-day survival requirements. These requirements can be defined as physiological needs (attaining food and water), safety needs (the desire for personal protection), avoidance of physical harm or injury, and the need to belong. Maslow defined the need to belong as a sense of social acceptance, membership affiliations, and the need to be loved by others (Hall & Nougaim, 1969; Maslow, 1968; Tuzzonlino & Armandi, 1981).

The second category, Growth Needs, is considered to be intellectually superior to Deficiency Needs and is denoted as behavior geared toward “growth and development to one’s full potential” (Baron, 1983). Growth Needs are generalized into two types: Esteem and Self-actualization (Maslow, 1970). Baron (1983) described Esteem Growth Needs in terms of the motivation and the tendency “to try to maintain self-respect and to attain the respect and admiration of others” (128). Baron (1983) summarized the concept of Maslow’s Self-actualization Growth Need as “the need to find out who we really are and the challenge to develop our potentials to the fullest extent possible” (p. 129).

David McClelland’s Motivation Learned Needs Theory

McClelland (1964), a noted psychologist, theorized that social motivations are associated with learned concepts. Through his Learned Needs Theory, McClelland
proposed that many needs and/or motivates are acquired from culture. Within a cultural setting, most individuals are expected to acquire learned needs such as the need for achievement ("n-Ach"), affiliation ("a-Aff") and power ("n-Pow"). Individuals with high need for achievement are motivated to set and attain challenging yet achievable goals. People who demonstrate intense desire or need for social affiliation are motivated to attain membership associations, thereby forming organizational allegiance. McClelland contended that the third and most influential aspect of motivated human behavior is power. Grimes (1978) noted that the need for power signals the ability to control or dictate actions of others so as to advance or promote one's own goals. Power is a contest of wills, strengths, and influences.

**Motivation Theories – A Synopsis**

From the standpoint of career choice, the importance of motivation is obvious (Heneman et al., 1989). Yet defining the source or influence of motivation can prove problematic. Some authors believe that “motivation has to do with (1) the direction of behavior, (2) the strength of the response (i.e. effort) . . . or course of action, and (3) the persistence of the behavior, or how long the person continues to behave in a particular manner” (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, & Weick, 1970, p. 340). Others suggest that the analysis of motivation should concentrate on factors that incite and direct behaviors of individuals. These theorists emphasized conclusions that focused on the goal-directedness aspects of motivation (Atkinson, 1964; Bindra, 1959; Jones, 1955).

Gibson et al. (1988) contend that the universal premise of all motivation theories, whether Maslow's, McClelland's or otherwise, is to seek to explain behavior through different perspectives, either the content or progress of motivation. Ultimately, the
theorist’s attempt is to unravel the specific thing that motivates, or how behavior is “aroused, started, sustained and stopped” (p. 12).

Within the past four decades, theorists have radically changed their approach to the study of human motivation. Most theorists describe human motivation as a function of human cognition. According to Dweck (1986), people set specific goals towards which to strive. They form expectations with regard to likelihood of success in careers or other choices in life. Some contemporary cognitive theorists contend that motivation, “rather than being a relatively permanent characteristic that people bring with them to various situations,” can be thought of as largely a function of the particular context in which individuals may find themselves, for example, the political arena (Ormrod, 1999, p. 419).

Politics: The Democratic Process

To some extent,

American politics can be compared to a game. This game analogy is not intended to imply frivolous enjoyment, but rather to promote understanding. Analogies allow us to take familiar concepts and apply them to new situations. Like all games, politics has players, rules, strategies and losses. (Frantzich, 1999, p. 7)

The United States exercises political authority through a democratic process called Democracy. The democratic system is a decision-making selection process intended to establish elected officials into one of three governing branches: Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary, as mandated by the Constitution of United States at the federal level, and at the state level by means of each individual state’s Constitution (Bernotas, 1990). This governing enabler – the democratic process – when working properly, does provide opportunity to those who seek it (Boyers, 2000).
Politics is essential to the democratic process in action. It is an expression of public sentiment, or sentiments made known through the use of voting. At the signing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Lyndon Baines Johnson (past President of United States: 1963 – 1969) expressed his convictions about constitutional voting: “The vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustices and destroying the terrible walls which imprison men and women” (Ornstein, 1975, p. 9).

**Congress: The Legislative Body**

The legislative governing branch is known as Congress. At the state and federal levels the legislative body consists of two chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Both chambers are primarily made up of members belonging to either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. Legislators, as elected political leaders are called, are responsible for making laws that govern the citizenry proportional to a given population at either the regional, district, or federal level (Bemotas, 1990).

Michigan’s congressional body is patterned after the United States political structure. Michigan’s congress is a bicameral body comprised of a Senate and a House of Representatives. Michigan’s Senate has 38 members; term-length is 4 years and senators may serve for a total of two terms. Michigan’s House of Representatives has 110 members; term-length is 2 years and representatives may serve a total of three terms. Electoral districts for both the House and the Senate are shown in Figures 1 and 2. Congressional members of the State of Michigan uphold the political interests of the citizens of Michigan (Legislative Council, State of Michigan, 2004).
Figure 1. Map of Michigan's 38 Senate districts.
Figure 2. Map of Michigan's 110 House of Representatives districts.
Women in Politics

In 1892, J. Ellen Foster spoke before the Republican National Convention (Minneapolis) and said, “We are here to help you, and we are here to stay” (Freeman, 2000). Women first ran for the Michigan State legislature in 1920, when Eva McCall Hamilton was elected to the state Senate. Cora Belle Anderson was the first woman elected to Michigan’s House of Representatives. Women’s interest and entry into politics did not come without challenges and false expectations. In her book *A Room at a Time*, *How Women Entered Party Politics*, Jo Freeman (2000) described the political stigma women encountered in their attempt to redefine politics and voting. Freeman stated,

Historians as well as men were disappointed when, after gaining universal suffrage, women did not go into politics with sabers drawn and banners flying. Many lamented the failure of feminism to use women’s votes to reform the political system and radically alter public policy. . . . Despite suffragists’ claims that women would transform politics, many failed to vote, and those who voted did not vote as a bloc. As a result, politicians quickly lost their newfound respect for women voters, and women were relegated to a minor role in party politics. Furthermore, the massive and cohesive women’s movement, have lost – by winning – the issue that held it together, disintegrated, with many former suffragists becoming politically apathetic and the few that remained active locked in bitter combat with one another over the Equal Rights Amendment (introduced in 1923). Such theories imply that women suffrage was a failure, or, at best, a great victory that led ironically to a decline in women’s political activism. (pp. 1 & 2)

Phases of political improvement for women evolved in stages and have often been categorized into social movements. Beyond women’s suffrage of the early 1800s, the social revolution of the 1830s and 1840s, with the support of women, began to take shape. This movement attempted to abolish slavery and to enforce more uprightness for those who did not do so on their own initiative. The revolution movement was followed by what was known as the Populist/Progressive movement. The twofold crest of this social movement sought to re-capture and redirect government to better serve all people,
not just the male political bosses, and to curb economic power of corporations. The movement that decisively impacted women in politics was the Sixties movement, although it began in the 1950s and remained a key political force into the late 1980s. The Sixties movement extended the effects of the Populist movement in that it championed to a greater extent common cause issues such as economic equality, preservation of the planet, redistribution of resources, and opposition to war (Freeman, 2000).

Today, women politicians in the United States represent a voice of importance. Congresswomen hold legislative positions throughout the local, state, and federal levels. Regrettably, in most cases women have and continue to exercise their policymaking abilities as “unsung heroines” (Gill, 1997). The history of women’s journey into politics has not been easy. The active passage has been compared to a “flowing river: at times death-defying raging waves to periods of seemingly calmness.” Despite the misinterpretations (or different interpretations) of the intention for women’s desire to reform politics, women have proven to be a major political force. From an institutional perspective the female activists’ movement, including women’s suffrage, was a rousing success (Freeman, 2000). Despite the disparity in the number of women legislators in relation to their male counterparts, the presence of female politicians unequivocally “dispels the perception and belief that politics is a male’s domain” (Haynie, 2001).

African American Women’s Political Influence

Do African American women legislators have an influence on political processes? What is the political focus of African American women legislators and does it differ from that of other elected officials? The response to these and other questions depends upon the perspective of the respondent and the era of interest. Gill (1997) noted that women,
in particular African American women, have long been relegated to a position behind the scenes of activities of mainstream politics and that the credit due to them has frequently been obscured and claimed as interventions and/or the initiatives of their male counterparts. Gill stated (1997),

For the most part . . . virtually all the major early works about the period portray the movement through the filter of the men and their organizations. Only in the past few years has significant attention been paid to the political inroads of African American women and their singular achievements. (p. 15)

Recent historical accounts indicate that the influence of African American political efforts trailed considerably behind that of other elected officials, and when they were invited to participate in the activities, the gesture was more symbolic than substantive. Yet the tides have turned somewhat. As the 19th century drew to a close, the political interest of African American women began to gather steam (Freeman, 2000).

Today, while politics may still appear to be a man’s world, women leaders have made some advancement, such as Secretary of State, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, for example. This growth in the political arena indicates resounding proof that the stage for women in politics is changing. As discussed in the Kerry L. Haynie (2001) book, *African American Legislators in the American States*,

increased descriptive representation of women in legislatures would dispel the perceptions and beliefs that politics is a “male domain,” the increased presence of African America [women] in public policy-making institutions challenges the notion that African Americans cannot or should not be trusted in positions of authority and power. (p. 63)

**African American Women State Legislators**

Darcy et al. (1993) document the fact that marginal electoral gains have been made for African American women to a large extent as a result of re-districting.
alignments (boundaries established within dominated Black districts). Nevertheless, there still exists a need to identify and understand influences that either encourage or discourage career patterns of African American women legislators (Baxter & Lansing, 1981; Moncrief, Thompson, & Schuhmann, 1991).

An examination of research that has attempted to explore accounts of the successes of Black political leaders revealed obstacles encountered by African American males and females. These accounts fall short in their descriptive analysis of motivational sources that influence these congressional leaders (Clayton & Stallings, 2000). Gill (1997) argued that African American women have met the challenge and risen above their long political invisibility at both the state or local political levels. However, Gill provided little mention of how these individuals have managed such remarkable outcomes. Only narrowly does the aforementioned literature expound on inherent factors that can be considered motivational contributors toward long-term political growth patterns or sustained development – career development (Gill, 1997).

The work of Clayton (2003) and Clayton and Stallings (2000) highlights formidable challenges encountered by a number of African American female candidates, such as African American political hopeful Eleanor Jordan, the 2000 congressional challenger in the third district of Louisville, Kentucky, and Eva Clayton, an African American candidate who sought to represent the constituents of the first district of North Carolina. Eva Clayton actually won the majority vote and was elected to office in 1992. Yet again, there exists only a minimal accounting of motivational influences, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, that enabled or contributed to career success of these politically minded leaders.
To be noted, there are several third-party sources (comments not directly contributed by the political leaders themselves) that tout a number of theories that could serve as a basis or reason for the political successes of African American congresswomen. Some reasons cited are the number of seats open during a given election period and the opponent’s political position or slate relative to domestic issues, such as child and elder health care (Rule, 1990). Others have addressed political platform issues with regard to support of education reform, local and/or national budget constraints, images and personas of the candidates, and districts in which the election was held (Berstein, 1997; Chang & Hitchon, 1997; Gaddie & Bullock, 1995; Leeper, 1991). However, coverage of motivational influences has not been addressed.

African American Women Legislators in the State of Michigan

From the period extending beyond the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, African American political leaders have changed their approach to politics. African American candidates elected in Michigan have gained a seemingly larger view of what is required to effectively serve politically and have taken on the challenge. Michigan congresswomen have begun to steer their approach toward political reform away from pressuring constituents, to an approach that would ultimately appeal to more than a single race of people.

African American women in the Michigan Congress lag in membership when compared to their White male counterparts. Records show that African American women typically decrease in the number of congressional seats from one electoral session to another (Michigan Senate, n.d.). A look at the 38 elected officials of the Michigan Senate over the last 10 years reveals that not once did African American women obtain...
more than two political seats (Table 1). Likewise, a look at the 110 elected officials of the Michigan House of Representatives over the last 10 years indicates that not once did African American women obtain more than seven seats (Table 2).

Summary

History has failed to capture and/or record the motivational influences that have allowed African American congresswomen to successfully pursue and achieve political office. There are accounts of African Americans and their various encounters and personal or collective struggles (Darcy et al., 1993). However, current scholarly literature only vaguely documents influential factors. This chapter provided an analysis of recent literature that has shaped current theories regarding motivation. In addition, this chapter reflected on past political interest and efforts of women in politics focusing primarily on the political efforts of African American congresswomen. African American candidates elected in Michigan have seemingly gained a broader perspective of the requirements for effective political service and have embraced the challenge (Haynie, 2001). African American have fought, suffered, and sacrificed for the right to participate in the political process. My study revealed common motivations for such steadfastness.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The chosen research method for this study was ethnographic qualitative research. This method of research was chosen primarily because ethnographic study lends itself to flexible inquiries of sociologically driven occurrences and events. Merriam (1998), Lofland (1971), and Lofland and Lofland (1995) insisted that the use of ethnographic qualitative research best allows for natural discovery and revolutionary insights of individuals being studied. Accordingly, Merriam (1998) contended that an ethnographic study facilitates focus on the culture and social regularities of everyday life (p. 156).

This ethnographic study allowed me to probe the experiences of African American congresswomen and elicit detailed accounts of common motivational factors that influenced their career choices. To capture the daily realities as they occurred, I attempted to learn from selected informants relative to career experiences during routine daily congressional work sessions. This ultimately transpired during candid discussions between myself and each informant. Informants were individuals who are actually involved in or living the phenomena that I sought to understand.

Along with the above-stated observational process, data collection included reference to conversational comments shared by a number of individuals familiar with the informants, all who are African American congresswomen in the State of Michigan. The
qualitative interviews served to substantiate and explore detailed accounts of events. According to Merriam (1988), qualitative, multi-faceted interviews are considered among the best data collection tools to capture or embrace the flavorful human lifestyle tones as told through informants' descriptive voices within their given social settings or environments.

The benefit and/or necessity of using more than one form of data collection source favors a more plausible explanation of the phenomena being researched (Matheson, 1988). The research technique of collaborating further details with comments and viewpoints that surfaced during the interviews helped to ensure triangulation and supported "dependability" or "consistency" of the results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 288). Triangulation of data gathered during the interviews, observations, and document analysis gave credence to the personal perspective of the informants. Merriam (1998) stated, "Using multiple methods of data collection and analysis . . . strengthens reliability as well as internal validity" (p. 207).

**Data Collection**

Prior to actual data collection, I provided each informant with a written consent letter/form and an explanation of the purpose for conducting the ethnographic study. The interview instrument included a limited number of questions constructed to record various demographic details. Identity of contributing individuals was held in the strictest confidence. The identity of participating informants was kept anonymous – names were withheld, and the study became the property of the researcher. To facilitate data collection, I sought and received permission to audiotape each individual interview (Creswell, 2003; Fitzpatrick et al., 1998).
Selecting from among the qualitative research inquiry methods, I chose an ethnographic study. An ethnographic study supported the purpose of this research because the focus of the study was on African American Michigan congresswomen operating and existing within a multi-cultural environment. This line of reasoning is reiterated through the words of Spradley (1979):

Ethnography is the work of describing a culture. The essential core of this activity aims to understand another way of life from the native point of view. The goal of ethnography, as Malinowski put it, is "to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world" (Malinowski, 1922). Fieldwork, then involves the disciplined study of what the world is like to people who have learned to see, hear, speak, think, and act in ways that are different. Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people. (Spradley, 1979, p. 23)

Qualitative questioning and ethnographic inquiry allowed for the informants’ stories to be told in their own voices. An ethnography research approach ultimately entails descriptive accounts of socio-cultural behaviors (Merriam, 1998). In this ethnographic study, highlights of social realities depicted by individuals who share in the cultural phenomena are expressed in the tones of their own language. D’Andrade (1992) emphasized that an ethnographic data collection typically extracts in the clearest way the beliefs, values, and attitudes of a cultural pattern of a group of people. Through the data collection process, this method allowed discovery of a number of common motivational influences that have shaped the career choices of African American congresswomen in the decision to serve as members of the State of Michigan Congress.

**Procedures**

I sought to identify common motivational career influences among Michigan African American female congressional legislators. The voices of the informants – three
State of Michigan African American congresswomen – were captured through two primary means of data collection.

The initial data collection method consisted of my in-depth attempt to learn and gather information by means of a review of current literature. Eisner (1998) contended that the benefits of observing ordinary circumstances provide for a special kind of perception. He stated,

In ordinary circumstances, being situated in a state of affairs means essentially that the events will wash over us; we are often not particularly conscious of life as lived – ordinary experience is part of the ebb and flow of being. When we are functioning as connoisseurs, it is important to focus our attention on two targets: one of these is the events themselves; the other is what those events do to our experience. Obviously these two targets are not separable in the way I have suggested. I make the distinction because I wish to highlight the importance of being conscious of the situation. This awareness provides the stuff out of which educational criticism is built. Thus, the kind of consciousness I am referring to is a kind of enlightened self-consciousness. Our ordinary experiences are not characterized by such an acute level of awareness. (pp. 182-183)

This research focused on the observation of routine daily activities carried throughout the political annals of the State of Michigan congressional offices. My role in this stage of the data collection progress was to gather and record descriptive accounts of the how, the where, and the when of events as they occurred and to get a feel for, or a sense of, congressional political surroundings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

Face-to-face interviews were my second data collection method. The remaining interview questions were structured to elicit or allow for useful human lifestyle tones and verbal details to surface as processed and told through the informants’ descriptive viewpoints within their given social settings or environments (Emerson et al., 1995).

In conjunction with the above, Patton (1990) explains,

Interview people to find out from them those things we cannot observe. . . . We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that
took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective. (p. 196)

Direct contact with informants allowed for the opportunity to note conditions that contributed to or invoked particular responses. Triangulation of various data collection methods served to reveal different dimensions of the same phenomenon from several vantage points. Opportunities of this magnitude proved favorable to enable mental immersion into an unfamiliar world. I gained the ability to see from the inside and learn first-hand how the informants live their lives (Emerson et al., 1995).

The Interviewer

Research studies are undertaken to explore initial curiosity and/or enhance the inquirer’s understanding of a particular phenomenon. In ethnography studies the researchers are by far the primary instruments for gathering and analyzing culturally based data (Merriam, 1988). As receptor and compiler of data, certain research biases cannot be completely omitted from the reported conclusion. Research biases may occur due to communication error, preconceived perceptions of a particular culture, or based on personal life experience. LeCompte, Preissle, and Tesch (1993) observed, “Qualitative research is subjective perceptions and biases of both the participant and researcher” (p. 3). Researchers are human, and human traits can often cause data analysis to be filtered or altered through the worldview and value system of the individual (Merriam, 1993).

My personal biases and subjectivity stem from over 20 years of experience as a motivational and international public speaker. As an African American female professional, my sensitivity concerning motivational development of other African
American women, I believe, is warranted. In the instances where my subtle personal biases could not be contained, acknowledgments of such were ethically communicated according to Dienir and Crandall’s recommendations (1978).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is highly intuitive. In qualitative research, the researcher will not usually know every individual who might serve as an interviewee or the specific questions that will make up the interview. Respectable data analysis is dynamic and recursive. Yet recorded experiences are simply nothing more than bits of unstructured data if the researcher neglects to extract and/or define categorized themes (Eisner, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Peshkin, 1985). Research findings were organized and categorized into common themes and/or issues to facilitate relationships. Creswell (2003) states,

A researcher may quantify the qualitative data. This involves creating codes and themes qualitatively, the counting the number of times they occur in the text data. . . . This quantification of qualitative data then enables a researcher to compare quantification of qualitative with the qualitative data. (p. 221)

Validity

Care was taken to ensure that the interview questions actually measured the concepts I wanted to measure. A research study proves valid if the behavior patterns as recorded reflect evidence of actual observed events. In the words of Sharan B. Merriam (1998), “Regardless of the type of research, validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study’s conceptualization and the way in which the data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted” (pp. 199 – 200).
Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. An ethnographic study provides a revelation of a culture of people seldom explored. For this reason, to the extent possible, I established an audit trail detailing how the study was conducted and how the findings were derived from collected data. To promote credibility, rich, thick verbal descriptions were used to convey findings, combined with triangulation of information sources (Creswell, 2003; Ellis & Fouts, 1997). Eisner (1998) believed that the use of thick descriptive details to record observed events “is an effort aimed at interpretation, at getting below the surface to the most enigmatic aspects of the human condition: the construction of meaning” (p. 15).

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a descriptive account of the qualitative research methods used in this ethnographic research study (Merriam, 1998). I set forth the selection rationale for the data collection process and showed the basis for the two principal procedures for data collection – interviews and documentation. Patton (1990) explained that for ethnographic research, the data collection method “is to understand the nature of that setting – what it means for a participant to be in that setting” (p. 1). This chapter provided a discussion of the data analysis process, including the relevance of data validity and the importance of replicable, reliable findings (Eisner, 1998; Zikmund, 1988). My potential biases have been disclosed to avoid the appearance of pre-established bias, or manipulation of data (Fitzpatrick et al., 1998).
CHAPTER 4

MOTIVATIONS, INFLUENCES, AND CAREER CHOICE
OF LEGISLATOR DORA MORETHANSOME

Introduction to the Three Ethnographic Case Studies

This chapter and the two that follow capture the essence of events and statements that occurred during three ethnographic case studies conducted in the summer and fall of 2005. Collectively, chapters 4, 5, and 6 provide descriptive insights that allow the reader opportunity to participate vicariously in career experiences of the interviewed informants (Eisner, 1998). According to Rudestam and Newton (1992), descriptive insights of “events, situations and behavior, as well as direct quotations from people about their experiences and beliefs” afford the reader the ability to visualize what a place, process, and/or an experience is like as told by the informant. Accounts and events of the ethnographic research case studies follow.

In June 2005, through use of consent for participation letter, a request was presented to eight African American women in the Michigan legislature, asking permission to interview them on the subject of career motivations and influences. Research participants would have an opportunity to share their views and beliefs that motivated their career choice to serve as an elected official in the State of Michigan Congress.
Each of the eight individuals was chosen as a potential research candidate/subject because she met the pre-established criteria for the study. The pre-established criteria for participants of the research study were required to be an African American woman serving in legislative capacity as a member of either the Michigan Senate or House of Representatives. Participation in the research was voluntary, and the willingness to serve as a research subject was documented through a signed and dated consent form returned to me. Appendix A is a sample of the consent letter sent to each of the eight legislators.

Three legislators agreed to participate in the study: Legislator Dora Morethansome, Legislator Anna Flagstarr, and Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford. Interviews with these legislators were transcribed into three separate volumes. Accounts shared by each individual informant have been captured as a separate case study in chapters 4, 5, and 6. The case study of Legislator Dora Morethansome is recorded in chapter 4 and references volume 1 of the transcriptions. The study focusing on Legislator Anna Flagstarr is described in chapter 5 and references volume 2 of the transcriptions. Chapter 6 focuses on the story of Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford and refers to volume 3 of the transcriptions. Research participants’ names were intentionally changed as a means to “protect personal privacy” (Eisner, 1998, p. 225) and to maintain confidentiality. Interviews of the three legislators occurred in pre-arranged locations throughout the state of Michigan in three separate cities: GateUnion Park, Valley Belt, and Lumbus.

While each case study reveals life and career experiences of the individual informant, several patterns were replicated throughout the case studies. Common themes seemed to surface during the research review and analysis of the combined statements.
provided by all three informants, as well as informative materials from other data sources. Other data sources used to capture and support the essences of the case studies are the websites, biographies of the legislators, historical minutes of previous congressional sessions and/or committee meetings, comments and documents shared by public relations managers and administrative staff, telephone conversations, and reflective field notes, etc.

A narrative account of the ethnographic case studies is contained in a confidential transcribed manuscript of over 125 pages. In addition, volumes of documents of various reference materials were made available to me. These materials included out-of-circulation textbooks, unpublished papers, manuscripts, photos, maps, and abstracts from personal (private) journals chronicling over 100 years of the rich historical accounts of African Americans (both men and women) in Michigan politics. According to Creswell (2003), incorporating information from other sources adds trustworthiness and credibility to the informant's comments.

Creswell (2003), who champions the use and/or collection of multiple data sources, states, "During the process of research, the qualitative investigation may collect documents. These may be public documents (e.g. newspapers, minutes of meetings, official reports) or private documents (e.g. personal journals and diaries, letters, emails)" (p. 188). He further admonishes,

Include data collection types that go beyond typical observations and interviews. The unusual forms create interest . . . and can capture useful information that observations and interviews may miss. Collect personal letters from participants; examine autobiographies and biographies; have participants take photographs or videotapes (i.e. photo elicitation); gather observations notes by conducting or observation as an observer. (pp. 188-189)
For practical reasons, not all responses and/or informational data received during the research study have been included in this paper. However, findings of relevance to the study are illuminated for the benefit and appreciation of the reader. Regarding what should and should not be included in the results section — in this case, chapters 4, 5, and 6 — Rudestam and Newton (1992) state,

> The task is to give a simple, clear and complete account of the results, without getting into an extended discussion of the meaning of the findings, and without rehashing all the information. . . . Lead the reader carefully through the findings, making sure that the reader knows what you consider to be important observations. (p. 80)

Several common themes were identified in my research, themes that seemed to indicate or provide a summary of essential categorical elements throughout the research. Themes that seemed to be replicated within the documented accounts of the three ethnographic case studies are political career motivations, aspirations and education, election challenges, and strength of family, friends, and spiritual convictions. These themes, or categories, did not become evident until each of the transcripts was read and analyzed several times. According to Eisner (1998), themes are often created or derived from the researcher's "sensitivity to the situation . . . enhanced by what the writer was able to learn" (p. 192).

**An Interview With Legislator Dora Morethansome**

**Introduction**

In this chapter, which is the first of three case studies, I seek to describe the cultural phenomenon of political career motivations and influences as related through the words and experiences of my first interviewee. Legislator Dora Morethansome serves as
one of 38 members of the State of Michigan Senate. She is in her first full term, which
will expire in 2006 (Michigan Senate, n.d.).

Members of the Michigan Senate are elected at the same time as the Michigan
Governor and serve 4-year terms. Senators may not be elected more than two times.

Members of the Michigan Congress enact the laws of Michigan, levy taxes, and
appropriate funds. Michigan Congress oversees the executive branch of the government.

Each Michigan Senator has a constituency population ranging in size from 225,000 to
265,000 residents (Legislative Council, State of Michigan, 2004).

Professionally, Legislator Dora Morethansome is addressed as Senator
Morethansome; however, during the interview session she asked that she be simply
referred to by her first name: Dora. Senator Morethansome has served in the capacity of
elected political official for over 30 years, and has received various outstanding
achievement and leadership awards and commendations for her dedication and service on
behalf of the constituents of the State of Michigan. As an indication of Senator
Morethansome’s willingness and eager, selfless service on behalf of others, I received her
signed consent letter within the week of its original date of post. Senator Morethansome
has two children and two grandchildren. The Senator is a dedicated member of the
Baptist faith and attends Christian church services in Detroit, Michigan.

On Location

At about 7:50 on a bright sunny Monday morning in July (2005), with Mapquest
® driving directions in hand, I prepared for my journey to the first of two scheduled
interview sessions with Senator Morethansome, the first research informant. According
to driving directions, the 30-plus mile drive requires less than 40 minutes; however, to
assure early arrival, I allowed an additional 30 minutes between departure time and the 9:00 interview session.

After taking time to offer up prayer for a safe journey and productive interview session, and to give thanks, I began the 30-plus-mile drive. Too afraid to turn on the radio, I drove pretty much in silence, except for the sounds of early morning rush hour traffic. Arriving safely at the meeting location, I elected to park towards the back of the parking lot, allowing the opportunity to observe a few of the people entering and exiting the establishment. Prior to entering the café I made a quick review of my briefcase items to ascertain that plenty of pencils, note pads, a copy of the Initial Schedule of Interview Questions, tape recorder, batteries, and tapes for the tape recorder were in place.

Upon entering the café that teemed with sights, sounds, and the aroma of premium coffees, I received a warm yet professional greeting from Senator Morethansome’s public relations manager and was escorted toward the area in which Senator Morethansome was seated. As I made my way to one of the cushion-padded seats, I could not help but notice that the pictures that hung on the walls throughout the café were original artwork and were tagged for sale.

Mr. Public Relations is of African American descent, was professionally suited in a dark-colored suit with white shirt, and also wore a tie. He introduced himself as a friend and public relations manager to Senator Morethansome. Once administrative matters, such as signing the guest sign-in sheet and responding to the one-question questionnaire confirming the purpose for contacting the senator, were taken care of, I nervously took my seat among the few remaining vacant chairs. Notwithstanding my previous acquaintance with the Senator during her tenure as State Representative, Senator
Morethansom was easily recognizable among the crowd. She, her public relations manager, and myself were the only African Americans present in the café. As the interview session progressed, two other African Americans arrived at the café. Both individuals were present due to scheduled time slots with the Senator.

My well-planned-out early arrival afforded time to observe Senator Morethansom as she met with and discussed various political issues and concerns of a group of individuals (four men and three women of Caucasian descent) scheduled prior to my slated time slot. During the period of observation, discussion between the constituents and the Senator took on various conversational tones and expressions. Tones of explanation ranged in content from agreement on some issues, to acknowledging the likelihood that a particular proposed suggestion was not realistic or supportive of the overall good of the majority of individuals who would be impacted by such a request.

Also, while waiting for my scheduled interview session, I observed a number of individuals continuously entering and exiting the small café. At different times, there were as many as 20 customers seated throughout the café. Individuals with their food selections for the most part were able to secure seating towards the front portion of the coffee shop café, allowing for Senator Morethansom to receive constituents seeking advice and political updates.

Let the Interview Begin

After I had been seated for approximately 20 minutes, Senator Morethansom concluded the earlier scheduled sessions, at which time she motioned to me that we could begin the interview session. The interview session began with an embrace initiated by the Senator. I was unable to emotionally refrain from or fight back tears — tears of
acceptance – and silently offered up a prayer of thankfulness. Dora’s embrace served to ease the built-up tension that I had experienced in connection with the fearful expectations of conducting the first interview with a highly esteemed, highly respected State of Michigan elected official. Then, with renewed courage, I exchanged my seat for a chair closer to the Senator. We sat side-by-side at a small café-style table.

The narrative portion of the research session began with initial testing of the voice-activated tape recorder, which would serve to capture verbal exchange during the research session. The 2½-hour interview session held in an open seating area towards the back of an upscale café packed with customers lasted well beyond the pre-scheduled time of 30 minutes. About mid-way through the interview, when the flow of incoming customers seemed to slow down, the manager of the café came over and was introduced to me by Senator Morethansome. The Senator seemed to emphasize the fact that the person conducting the interview is part of a Leadership Ph.D. program, that I am a single parent, employed by the Federal Government, and a native of DeVineview.

Motivations and Political Career Influences

The initial career path for Dora was not in politics. Dora entered public political service after years of working for a well-established international information provider corporation. Dora's political aspirations were motivated and induced by rather unusual circumstances pretty much not of her own doing. Extrinsic influences of politically minded individuals and supporters who would plant seeds of politics in Dora would later see her pursue a political career. In discussing how she initially became motivated and interested in the political process and serving as an elected official Dora stated,
Well... mine is kind of unusual. It was a friend of mine who was working for a State Representative. And she stopped by my home and asked me if I would run for Precinct Delegate. And I said, “No, I did not want to have anything to do with politics.” Because I thought it was doomed. And she said, you can come in and clean it up. And she said it would be no different that what you have been doing at the PTA [Parent & Teacher’s Association] for your children. And I said, “Well, I think that’s different.” But I said, “What does the Precinct Delegate do anyway?” And she said, “The Precinct Delegate works with all the elected officials in the/your area, and what you/the Precinct Delegate do is stay up on issues and views and that you probably have 3 or 4 blocks that you are required to keep them informed when legislators, council people and mayor call upon you to help them do their work.” And after talking to her about 10 minutes she said, I only have a half hour to get these signatures. And she and I were on a committee together and because of that, our friendship, I said ok. So I got the signatures. She took them downtown. And I became a candidate for Precinct Delegate. At the time, I was still working for Fran’s Tele-communications and when I told my colleagues that I was running for Precinct Delegate, well they came out and helped me win the election. You thought I was running for President of the United States. They were so excited, and I got the highest number of votes in my precinct. (Vol. I, p. 5)

It seemed evident that even after achieving election, as Precinct Delegate—an uncompensated elected position – Dora was not fully convinced that politics was part of her professional calling. Further motivation was required. Dora reflected on how she was further influenced to take up the banner of political service and pursue other political appointments. Early on in Dora’s political career, while rather content with serving as Precinct Delegate, a friend approached her about entering the race to serve in a political capacity that would involve voting statewide for the State of Michigan. Not yet convinced that political service was for her, she said “No.” Her friend persisted.

Dora continued her verbal journey down memory lane by sharing the following career-motivating experiences:

And there was a friend of mine named Rita Parks. She and her sister were very active in the District and when it came time to appoint... people to serve on State Central they suggested that I be an alternate and so I of course said “No.” And so they said [Rita and her sister] we are asking you to serve. And I guess it was because I had known Rita Parks and when I was in grade [school] and now Rita Parks, we hadn’t seen each other since grade school and when I lived in DeVineview before moving to

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Grand Land. So she had suggested that I serve, and her sister and a number of people, so that's why I served then. (Vol. I, pp. 6 – 7)

Now an elected official with political voting responsibilities for constituents of the State of Michigan, Dora began to weigh the importance and possible impact of her political actions or non-actions. As in the sentiments of Lyndon Baines Johnson (past-President of the United States: 1963 – 1969), Dora seemed to recognize that “the vote is the most powerful instrument ever devised by man for breaking down injustices” (Omstein, 1975, p. 89). Unlike earlier political appointments, when encouraged to consider stepping into the race as a candidate for a very high profile position, Dora decided to become familiar with what would be the duties and responsibilities of an individual serving in such a high profile position. This quest for understanding led to her educating herself about various political career opportunities. Dora visited her local library, talked to a number of politically knowledgeable individuals, and discussed possible career choices with her mentor. Dora decided to forgo entering the race for that high-profile office. She decided to focus her political aspirations on a position more suited for her professional background and her experience with politics. Highlights of a meeting she had with a mentor provide insights regarding her internal motives for seeking election as a political servant for the county in which she lived.

Sharing particulars of her meeting with Mr. Lonnie Collins (her mentor) Dora revealed,

There was a gentleman by the name of Lonnie Collins who while we were sitting there one evening, said to me, “You should run for office.” He continues to talk to me, and then I said to him, “Well what would I run for if I decided to run?” He says, “Now that’s not something I can tell you what to do, but I can bring you a number of books and you can read up and then you can make your decision.” Well after reading . . . I said, “County Commissioner that really sounds like something I would really like.” (Vol. I, p. 8)
Dora's initial race for County Commissioner was unsuccessful. She actually came in second place. However, within less than 1 year the office became vacant again and this time Dora's political savvy and her relentless drive garnered her the highly sought-after appointment of County Commissioner, over 13 other candidates vying for the position. When asked to describe the events and her emotions leading up to, and her being elected as County Commissioner, Dora said,

There were 14 of us vying for that appointment. It was 13 White males and myself. And when I found that/when I got there that day, I said “OH MY GOD, Oh my goodness.” Well, so many of them had so much more experience than I. I didn't have experience in politics except being Precinct Delegate. Well, I walked away that day with that appointment. And when I received that appointment, I knew then that it was a mission from God. (Vol. I, pp. 8 – 9)

Senator Dora Morethansome served on the Board as County Commissioner from 1977 through 1987. In 1979 she served as Vice-Chair of the County Civil Service Commission in the county where she was appointed and lived. Three years of this 10-year period she served in the capacity of President. During her tenure as County Civil Service Commissioner with the County she led the charge and fought for various issues that were beneficial for her constituents.

Career Challenges and Overcoming Political Misconceptions

African American women have been stereotyped as unsuitable political candidates. This is an unsubstantiated myth. This social psychology myth shared by people of various walks of life stems from the axiom that people will believe what they want to believe, using stereotyping or other misconceptions of truth to provide credence to their choice of action and/or non-action. African American legislators have been faced
with discrimination and have been challenged to overcome negative stereotyping (Gill, 1997). In an attempt to address how African American women legislators came under such unwarranted scrutiny, Freeman (2000) states,

Myths are not merely a misinterpretation (or a different interpretation) of something that happened in the past. It is the acceptance as fact for which belief is strong and evidence is skimpy. Myths don’t just happen. They are created to serve a purpose, usually the legitimization of one’s action or the delegitimization of opponents. When they live on long after they have served (or failed to serve) their original purpose it is because they ‘fit’ people’s expectation or values. . . . They (myths) are repeated ad infinitum until they become part of common knowledge, accepted and uncontested even by well-trained historians. And when evidence is presented that undermines an ingrained myth, it is ignored. (p. 2)

In the interview, Senator Morethansome began talking about several challenges she encountered during her political career and what she did to endure or overcome them. Dora recounted how her presence at a social event resulted in a high profile elected official to outwardly demonstrate his prejudice towards people of her descent – African Americans. She stated,

Well, my first was . . . I think . . . in Level Square I was representing. I’m sure I was the first Black woman to represent Level Square as County Commissioner. I will never forget the Mayor has his annual picnic and I remembered our PR [Public Relations] person going over there with me and taking pictures. And he was afraid to get close to me. And I never forget, I said, “My color won’t rub off on you, now.” And I kind of laughed. And he just kind of looked at me, you know . . . . I was never fearful, however. I felt that I belonged and, you know, I would just challenge them. I would go to committee meetings not afraid to talk with people or express my convictions about issues during those meetings. After all, I was their Commissioner . . . But after all those years. I’m truly just being accepted now in almost 30 years; by, you know, the whole city. But I never stopped, continued to work with them . . . . I can tell you this, when the Mayor died, he didn’t die in office. He had retired, and it ended up he has a Black granddaughter . . . and he truly mellowed over the years. We became good friends. (Vol. I, pp. 16 & 18)

It was visibly noticeable that Senator Morethansome had been struggling to recall or relive the emotionally charged experiences in her career. However, at the conclusion of telling her story about the picnic, the Mayor, and the picture back in the early 80s,
Dora said, “I never held resentment towards him” (Vol. I, p. 18). Having the ability and conviction to not use retaliation tactics or hold resentment seemed to affirm Dora’s belief, as she puts it “on a mission from God” (Vol. I, p. 13). In full realization of why she has remained a public political servant Dora said rather solemnly, “to help the least of the children” (Vol. I, p. 13). Dora endured various challenges because helping those who needed help or those who could not help themselves motivated her. This proved to be a tremendous source of motivation for Dora to keep going and to stay on track.

Remarking of her sense of steadfastness and political focus Dora stated,

I understood why I was here and I just continued to work with those who would work with me. You know, my thing everyday is to ask God to direct my steps and give me the strength to overcome whatever adversity. . . . You know I never ask Him to move my mountains. But to give me the strength to go through them or go over them, you know. Because I learned through every one of my challenges. (Vol. I, p. 20)

The Senator, then fully engaged in talking about various situations she has had to deal with, shared another more recent account of her political career experiences. Dora became so absorbed in recollecting a particular experience while serving as president of the City Council that it appeared as if she was mentally transported back in time to the actual event. Senator Morethansome became withdrawn from those around her. According to Attribution theory, such reactionary behavior can occur whether the event happened as a result of something the individual did or something that was done to the individual (Dweck, 1986; Paris & Byrnes, 1989).

One of the cities under her jurisdiction had received a substantial amount of money for neighborhood improvements. However, the mayor of the city defiantly chose to deposit the funds into his own newly established personal bank account. Upon
learning of what the Mayor had done and as Council president, Dora felt it was her duty to question such blatant disregard for the well-being of the people and the city.

Dora explained what happened next,

So it didn’t take long before my Mayor who had been in office a long time, a long time, over 20 years, so he knew how to get other Council members on his side. So it was really challenging [for me]. The meeting ended without the Mayor answering my question. But before I left the meeting, I stood before the entire body and citizens and let everybody, and let them know that I was one tough cookie, one tough lady and the money would be repaid. (Vol. I, p. 19)

Concerned with not grasping the rationale for the Senator’s statement regarding tough cookie, tough lady, I candidly asked for some type of clarification. The Senator explained that there were three voting members on the council and the Mayor, all of who were African American males except for her.

Dora continued,

Anyway, the Mayor went away on vacation and I had him to come all the way back to the City Council meeting one night to pay this money back. And so, I guess he borrowed the money from different people to get the money to pay back. (Vol. I, p. 19)

Most intelligent individuals would reasonably conclude that the basis for the actions and conduct of the Mayor and his supporting council members simply attested to deeply rooted discriminatory bias toward women in politics. There seemed to be no other possible rational conclusion given that council members and the Mayor were also African American, as Council President Morethansome was. Council Morethansome was the only female member at the voting body. Such opposition almost certainly stemmed from such long-held beliefs as “politics is man’s work, man’s domain” (Wolcott, 1999). As Councilwoman, Dora’s presence challenged the notion that women should not, could not, be trusted to serve in public policy-making positions of authority and power.
Councilwoman Morethansome’s steadfastness in upholding her oath to perform her responsibilities as a political public servant served as an impetus for other women, African American women in particular. The political oath, which Dora swore to uphold, states, “I do solemnly swear [or affirm] that I will support the Constitution of the United Stated and the Constitution of the State of Michigan and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office [office stated here] according to the best of my ability” (Michigan Constitution).

Her leadership and political presence in spite of the challenges she encountered conveyed career significance that symbolized a political milestone for women, African American women in particular. Councilwoman Morethansome’s political steadfastness, persistence, and endurance demonstrated and signaled possibility for political career hopefuls. Possibilities, as noted by Jo Freeman (2000), “must always be the measure of success and failure. Assessing what was done and not done requires an understanding of what could be done in a particular time and place” (p. xii).

Dora’s election challenges and obstacles frequently manifested themselves throughout her political career. During the early stages of Senator Morethansome’s political career, she found it painfully difficult to gain financial supporters beyond a few supporters, friends, and family members. Determined to meet the challenge of securing the needed funds, Dora took to the street, going door-to-door speaking to everyone who would listen and allow her to share with them her political platform. Dora stated, “While I was running, it was hard getting the funds to run. I tell you, it was very hard. So, I had to do grass-root campaigning, talking to anybody that would listen. I knocked on so many, many doors. . . . We would everyday walk the beat” (Vol. I, p. 22).
Dora felt that while securing the needed funds to effectively launch, promote, and carry out a viable election campaign was significant, she does not consider it her most formidable challenge. Senator Morethansome considered her biggest challenges to be the experiences she endured while seeking election of her current political appointment. The emotionally draining electoral experiences occurred some 20 years into her political career. Dora had successfully campaigned for and was elected as State Representative – for the State of Michigan – of which she served three 2-year terms. However, because of political campaign guidelines and term limitations, Dora was ineligible to run for another term as State Representative.

Term limitations imposed by the voting citizens of Michigan prohibit political leaders from continuous nominations and/or elections beyond designated term provisions. Representatives are elected in even years to 2-year terms and may be elected three consecutive terms for a total of 6 years. Senators are elected at the same time as the governor, serve 4-year terms, and may be elected for two consecutive terms for a total of 8 years.

Historically, members of either chamber have been known to seek election within the other chamber once they become ineligible to maintain office in a particular political capacity. This political career option affords members of the House of Representatives to campaign for a district seat in the Senate, and Senators are free to campaign for a district seat in the House of Representatives (Legislative Council, State of Michigan, 2004; Michigan Senate, n.d.; Michigan House of Representatives, n.d.).

Dora, in full compliance with the State of Michigan campaigning guidelines, began to focus her political attentions on serving as a Michigan Senator. Dora attested, “I
ran for a seat in the Senate after serving 6 years in the House” (Vol. I, p. 22). She also
confided that this was when her biggest political challenge began to take shape. She
endured outright devious back-stabbing by people as well as by candidates who were
seeking election to the same district seat she had vigorously campaigned for. She
experienced unethical behavior from others, behaviors designed to portray her as
unsuitable to serve in the sought-after political appointment.

In describing the events that occurred during her quest for a district seat in the
Senate, Dora told about what she was required to endure that would ultimately test her
political convictions as an elected Senator for the district in which she resided.

Dave Vontage who came in closest to me demanded a vote recount. This was
extremely costly for a District that truly could not afford it. Well, Dave insisted that
the recount be done. I had no choice in the matter.... Well I was getting more votes,
so he just called it off. But it's the way he called it off. Mr. Vontage said that if he
could have paid the counters the outcome of the recount would be in his favor also.
(Vol. I, p. 23-24)

The expense incurred as a result of the unfounded request for a recount of votes depleted
financial resources initially designated for various programs and district improvements to
an all-time low. Yet her political woes did not stop there.

Senator Morethansom's district came under the attack of gerrymandering. Every
10 years, election districts in the State of Michigan are redrawn. The effects of
redistricting and gerrymandering have resulted in a different political balance of
constituents. Because of redistricting, many officials have been faced with the unpleasant
task of fighting for reelection in their new territory, perhaps against a well-known
incumbent. This can prove to be political assassination, most devastating to a politician’s
career (Hanley & Rozycki, 1990). Senator Morethansom felt that realigning the
boundaries in her district was intended to devise an unfavorable political partisan
representation among voting constituents. As the Senator put it, “They just knew I
wasn’t going to make it, because they said over half of this district was new. I had never
had that Riverfield area” (Vol. I, p. 27).

Dora recalls how hard she fought against an unfavorable redistricting of her
territory. This was the battle of her political existence. Senator Morethansome had no
choice but to stand her ground. Taking nothing to chance, she sought and obtained legal
representation. Armed against this challenge, the Senator addressed members of the
Redistricting Committee and warned them that if they continued their effort to unfairly
realign her district she would see them in court.

And I said, “Oh no, oh no you will not do that to me. I’m not the lady you want to
come up against.” I said, “I will not only take the Republicans to court, I will take the
Democrats to court also.” (Vol. I, p. 27)

The original plan to gerrymander Senator Morethansome’s district did not
materialize as intended; however, Dora did fall victim to some territorial changes.
Forced with the nearly impossible task of remaining accessible to the people in her newly
expanded district, the Senator started her Coffee Hour with State Senator Morethansome
in 2001. Senator Morethansome’s coffee hours are held every Monday of the month.
Coffee hour locations are rotated each Monday so as to accommodate constituents
residing throughout the five cities and suburbs of her district (D. Morethansome, personal
communication, June 2005).

Dora reflected on the receptions she received when she first began hosting her
coffee hour in the café in which we were having the interview session, “Folks didn’t
come, but I came anyway. . . . But now, as you can see, I have more than I can handle
[laughs] in my hour” (Vol. I, p. 28).
Strength of Family, Friends, and Spiritual Convictions

Throughout history, parents, siblings, children, and members of a person's extended family have proven to be among the most notable human sources of motivations, stability, and the necessary encouraging influence to pursue career hopes and dreams. Genuine strength from dear friends can lessen the pressure of going it alone on a long and unfamiliar career journey. Faith, belief, and the desire to do His will bring meaning, substance, and purpose to an individual's very existence (Ehrhart-Morrison, 1997).

The Family – Believers

Senator Morethansome's story reveals unmistakable evidence that she has been surrounded by loving, supportive family members her entire political career. Her family, through their encouragement and sometimes wise counsel, has motivated and continues to demonstrate their understanding and belief in her sound conviction to faithfully uphold the oath of political office. Senator Morethansome's career values stem from or are attributed to her childhood training to achieve her potential. Theorists contend that attributions play a major role in the choices people make (Dweck, 1986; Graham & Barker, 1990; Werner, 1977).

Dora's father, until his death, was a true source of support. He influenced her to follow her political career goals. Reminiscing on how her father motivated her to excellence, Dora spoke of him as the individual who kept her focused, even during some of her most stressful experiences. If he felt that she was not living according to what was best, he would let her know his opinion. And if he thought what he told her was right, he would not back down. Such was the case with Dora's smoking habit.
During the eighties, Dora had successfully given up a 20-year smoking habit. Her dad was among the first to let her know that she had made a wise decision. However, because of several stressful situations at work and in her family life, she resumed smoking. She would secretly smoke out of sight of her colleagues and family. But one day after long stressful hours at the office, she actually chain-smoked her entire drive home. Her body engulfed with the scent of cigarettes, she walked into her dad’s home.

At this time, she and her two children were living with her dad. Her dad, being the no-nonsense person he was, after patiently listening to how her day at work had gone, reminded her that certain things remained in a person’s control and she needed to make wise choices as to how she reacted to them, under pressure or otherwise. He often insisted that she think about how her actions and decisions impacted her political career or life in general. She recounted,

And so one night my dad was asleep when I got home, and so he woke up because there was a lot of smoke in the house. And I commenced to tell him what I had gone through . . . and he said, “So that’s worth dying for? You got to put those cigarettes down before they kill you, then where will you and your career be?” (Vol. I, p. 21)

Shaken and influenced by his harsh words of wisdom, she never picked up a pack of cigarettes again. The senator revealed, “My father had a way of saying things to me that stuck” (Vol. I, p. 21). Senator Morthansome acknowledged the motivation and support she has received from her two children. Her son has served as campaign manager several times. Her daughter, the older of her two children, served as her treasurer during the earlier stages of her political career. Her children remain among her strongest supporters.

In response to how other family members felt about her choice to serve as an elected official for the State of Michigan, Dora assured me that she has always had their...
100% support as well. She said, "They are all proud of me, but they have no problem calling me to let me know what's right, wrong, or things like that. I can't tell you how many times over the years I have gotten phone calls or had political conversations with them" (Vol. I, p. 3). She also shared comments about how they not only benefit from the political decisions she makes on behalf of the constituents of the State of Michigan, but also benefit directly because a number of her family members live within her district. She seems not ashamed to mention, "Believe me, they keep me on track" (Vol. I, p. 3). From the tones of Dora's reply to the question about family influences and motivations, her stellar political service has been influenced by both her immediate family and her extended family members. Behind the strength and motivations of every great and successful woman is her family.

Friends – Everybody's Got to Have Them

When talking about experiences and motivations she has had with friends, Dora conveyed that she is convinced that she could not have made it without them. Dora is the only member in her known family to serve as an elected official, so when she sought political guidance based on political experience - the political 'How To', she "had no one to lean on except some friends" (Vol. I, p. 20). "You know God puts angels in your way everyday, everyday of your life" (Vol. I, p. 20). "You know there has always been somebody there to help me when I was in fear about doing anything" (Vol. I, p. 21).

Senator Morethansome articulates an experience she had with an individual she became dear friends with:

One of my friends that I had worked with just before I got the appointment for office was a lady by the name of Martha Owens . . . a mail lady. And, she had invited me to speak on a couple of occasions at her lodge, and I did. I didn’t see her for a long time
and she invited me to her birthday party. And somehow the invitation got misplaced. And I missed it. And when I found it again it was over. So I felt so bad. So when I ran for State Representative I had a breakfast and I invited her and sent her a complementary ticket. And she came. And I apologized to her (you know) and told her why I couldn’t make it and she understood. And she said, while she was sitting there at my breakfast, God spoke to her and said to “HELP HER.” And she was in, I am sure, in her good 60’s. And we went sometimes it was just the two of us going up and down the stairs, door to door. . . . I guess, gosh, she did that for a couple of years.

(Vol. I, p. 22)

Emotionally moved by this experience, I asked whether she remembered any other accounts she would be willing to credit as a source of influence or strong supporter or motivator. Dora replied to the question by saying, “Let me go back to the point about when I ran for the Senate district seat I have now” (Vol. I, p. 23). Dora began to provide details of what led up to a close vote, yet a political victory for her. She actually won the election by a small margin of only 33 votes.

She added,

When you are in the partisan election it usually is Republican and Democrat. So I won the Democratic spot to be placed on the ballot. So I just knew that this is my race – my seat. But two of my colleagues joined together, one of them became a ‘write-in’. But again there were folks. One lady in particular called me and she said, “I never met you. I know somebody who knows you.” And she said, “I don’t like what’s going on in my building.” She said, “There’s someone there who is a candidate that’s running against you. He is coming down today.” She said, “I couldn’t invite you to come”, because she was the president of the group having the meeting. She said, “If you will come down and see me, I have something for you.” And I did. She met me in her lobby and she gave me, she folded up this piece of paper. She put it in my hand and she said, read it when you get in the car. And what it said was, “Donald Vontage wants you to write in his son, Dave Vontage’s name.” So that made me work even harder in the Primary, because I wasn’t taking anything for granted. (Vol. I, p. 27)

There were others friends who understood the historical significance of women – African American women in particular – serving as an elected official. When Dora was appointed as County Commissioner, she was responsible for the third largest county in the nation. That translated into being responsible for one of the largest budgets in the nation.
State of Michigan. She mused about how she was “deathly afraid when I accepted that job. . . . Actually the secretaries helped me make that decision. . . . The secretaries said to me, ‘If you have some problems we will help you’” (Vol. I, p. 10).

There were also mentors who proved to be staunch political friends. While appointed as County Commissioner, Dora’s leave-of-absence expired at the Fran’s Telecommunications company. This turn of events presented her with a career dilemma. If she did not want to forfeit her length of service she had accumulated at the telephone company, she would have to return to work as a full-time employee. What should she do? As it turned out, she sought guidance from her mentor at the telephone company:

And I went to him and told him my story. And he said, “Oh no, oh no. You were the first Black woman. We have to keep you there.” So rather than have me go back full time, I was able to work part time at the telephone company. I was able to do this because my mentor had requested that from the president of the company. So they allowed me to be part time there and then of course my Civil Commissioner job was part time. (Vol. I, p. 14)

**Spiritual Convictions – The Wind Beneath Thy Wings**

Throughout the entire interview, Senator Morethansome made known that her faith and belief in her Heavenly Father’s Holy Word and God’s promise for all mankind have proven to be her rock and have given her a source of divine inner strength. Senator Morethansome’s spiritual convictions may be reflected in the following scriptures: “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your path straight” (Prov 3:36). “He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. . . . Those who hope in the Lord God will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not be faint” (Isa 40:29-31). “You are my rock and my fortress for the sake of Your name lead and guide me” (Ps 31:3).
Dora believes that, above all things, her political career efforts have, and still do, afford her the opportunity to share her God-given talents with others. She believes that her prior work assignments simply served to prepare her for the time when she would leave it all behind to do the work she does today. Convinced of that, she stated, regarding her election to Precinct Delegate,

When I received that appointment, I knew then that it was a mission from God. And I have always reminded myself that I am there because God wants me to be there. It's not because I'm so great, because I know that me alone, I could not. I didn't have the political experience. But I believed I had a mission. (Vol. I, p. 9)

The divine order of events that led to Dora being able to freely pursue her political career as a full-time elected official is truly remarkable. Senator Morethansome believes that throughout each and every stage of her career development, she has been guided by God's Spirit. Dora being appointed as mayor of the city in which she lived bears proof of strength beyond human capabilities, beyond her abilities. Dora's appointment to mayor resulted in a 20-year incumbent being ousted. It is hard to conclude that the events leading to her being elected to the highest office in her city were anything other than divine intervention.

The particulars of the events follow:

I ran for Mayor and ousted a 20-year incumbent. . . . And at the same time, the way I was able to – the reason I was able to – run for Mayor is my job folded at the telephone company. It ended. They closed up. There was no place to transfer in the whole State of Michigan. But, I was able to retire. Of the 400 of us, only 3 of us were able to retire. And I was one of those three. If my birthday had been one month sooner, I wouldn't have been able to retire. So God has truly blessed me all along the way. (Vol. I, p. 16)

Interesting are the events Senator Morethansome continued with, indicating her solemn commitment to include spiritual guidance in her daily activities. According to minutes of congressional and individual committee sessions, she and her 37 colleagues in
the Senate commence each meeting in prayer. Members of the Senate join in unity and say the Lord’s Prayer. Charged with the responsibility to ‘take care of the least of them,’ Senator Morethansome has made it her political focus, her mantra, to uphold that mandate. Her passion and sometimes her lone stance of helping those unable to help themselves are captured in the words that follow:

My colleagues and I say a prayer everyday. But you know sometimes they don’t seem to do what the Bible says. God says take care of the least of them. And I’ll take care of you. And that’s my mantra. And that’s what I do. (Vol. I, p. 34)

As the research session concluded, I asked permission to have a picture taken with Senator Dora Morethansome. Dora graciously consented and asked her public relations manager to snap the picture of us. Two pictures were taken. Afterward, Senator Morethansome encouraged me to feel free to contact her if for some reason the background noises of the café had drowned out a clear recording. We hugged, and I thanked the Senator for her time. Enthralled by the events of the interview, I just seemed to magically make my way to the front door of the café and quietly exit the parking lot. Behind every great and successful African American woman is our Lord.

A Summary of Senator Dora’s Story

This chapter documented significant events and statements captured during a 2½-hour interview session with Senator Dora Morethansome in July 2005. Throughout this reflective ethnographic case study are narratives of Dora’s various decisions to serve as an elected official, leading up to and including her current appointment in the Michigan Congress Senate. I have attempted to provide accounts of events in a manner that favors the reader’s ability to visualize what an experience is like as shared by the informant (Rudestam & Newton, 1992). This chapter revealed extrinsic and intrinsic motivations,
political career challenges, and the influential strength of family, friends, and spiritual convictions of the informant Dora Morethansom.
CHAPTER 5

MOTIVATIONS, INFLUENCES, AND CAREER CHOICE
OF LEGISLATOR ANNA FLAGSTARR

An Interview With Legislator Anna Flagstarr

In this chapter I have sought to provide a descriptive account of events and statements that occurred during an ethnographic research study conducted in the summer of 2005. This chapter, Legislator Anna Flagstarr's story, also contains information shared with me through the use of various sources intended to enhance and bring clarity to the informant's recollection of political events and/or otherwise. Anna Flagstarr's story yields conclusions about the nature of reality as well as specific information about her political career, which spans a period of more than 20 years.

Legislator Anna Flagstarr serves in the Legislative Branch as one of 110 members of the State of Michigan House of Representatives. In a description profile of the State of Michigan House of Representatives, the Michigan Manual 2003 – 2004 (Legislative Council, State of Michigan, 2004) states,

The State of Michigan House of Representatives consists of 110 members who are elected by the qualified electors of districts that range in size from approximately 85,900 to 94,800 residents (under a redistricting plan enacted in 2001). Representatives are elected in even number years to 2-year terms. Legislative districts are drawn on the basis of population figures obtained through the federal decennial census. Terms for . . . Representatives begin on January 1, following the November general election. Effective with terms of office beginning on or after January 1, 1993 state legislators (as well as the governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state and attorney general) are subject to term limitations. State senators may not be elected
more than 2 terms and state representatives may not be elected more than 3 times. . . . The state legislature enacts the laws of Michigan; levies taxes and appropriates funds from money collected for the support of public institutions and the administration of the affairs of state government; proposes amendments to the state constitution, which must be approved by a majority vote of the electors; and considers legislation proposed by initiatory petitions. The legislature also provides oversight of the executive branch of government through the administrative rules and audit processes, committees, and the budget process; advises and consents, through the senate on gubernatorial appointments and considers proposed amendments to the Constitution of the United States. The majority of the legislature’s work, however, entails lawmaking. Through a process defined by the state constitution, stature, and legislative rules, the legislature considers thousands of bills (proposed law) during each 2-year term. (p. 2)

Legislator Flagstarr was elected to the House of Representatives in 2002 and is currently serving her second term, which will expire in 2006. She will then be eligible to run for an additional 2-year term. During the interview she indicated her intention to run for re-election. Representative Flagstarr stated, as if making a public announcement,

I'm now looking at running for the Democratic Caucus of the State of Michigan House. Running for leadership for the Caucus. So that will happen after the November election in 2006. And I hope to be positioned at that point. . . . If we happen, by some Godly miracle, to take control of the Chamber, and I win Leadership of my caucus, I would be the Speaker of the House. (Vol. II, p. 11)

Introduction

This case study produced an enormous amount of data. Understandably, some findings and comments lacked direct relevance to my overall research objective and thus have been withheld from the descriptive accounts presented here. However, in recounting the true essence of this case study, the second of three case studies, particular attention is devoted to culturally driven behaviors and/or attitudes that reveal the “perceptions and meaning attached to those significant experiences as expressed by the informant” (Creswell, 2003, p. 201). The subtle culturally driven aspects in this case
study will be conveyed in such a matter as to grant insight into another way of life for the benefit of the reader (Spradley, 1979).

For more than 20 years, Anna Flagstarr has demonstrated remarkable political aptitude and leadership ability. Her distinguished career includes both local and state appointments. Anna was the first African American to run for governor on the Michigan Democratic ticket. She is the first woman to lead an Appropriations Caucus in the Michigan Legislature. She has served, and continues to serve, in capacities such as committee chair, vice-chair, and senior committee person. Representative Flagstarr has received high praise for her performance of political duties. Her colleagues state with regard to a recent political appointment, “She is unquestionably one of the most respected members of the legislature... She brings her integrity, knowledge, and strategic skill back as a sub-committee vice-chair” (Michigan House of Representatives, n.d.).

Anna Flagstarr is a Southern belle, the youngest of three girls of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Milford. Her parents actually had a fourth daughter; however, due to inadequate medical treatment for Blacks in the South, Anna lost her twin sister. Andrea Milford passed away before she had reached school age. In speaking of that very painful time for her and her family, Anna commented:

I had an experience – death of a family member, my twin sister. But this was before the Civil Rights program kicked-off... This was in 1943, and you know the medical treatment for us back in those days was certainly not like the treatment of Whites. (Vol. II, p. 3)

Anna’s parents moved their three daughters to Michigan in the mid-40s seeking respectable living conditions. After the death of Anna’s twin sister, Anna’s father justified their move from the South by saying “I still have three girls and the world, there has to be a better place” (Vol. II, p. 3). Representative Flagstarr also commented on what
she believes to be one of her dad’s most famous sayings, “his mantra” (Vol. II, p. 4). She shared that her dad would from time to time say, “I don’t want you girls to get hurt” (Vol. II, p. 4). Anna’s two sisters, Diane Ruth and Linda, are also elected officials – judge and county commissioner, respectively. Anna is college educated. She has a bachelor’s degree in journalism, her initial passion and career focus. Representative Anna Flagstarr is divorced, and has three adult children (Michigan House of Representatives, n.d.).

On Location

Representative Flagstarr elected to be interviewed at her district office in a quaint little township in mid-Michigan, where she lives. The interview location was some 70 miles from my residence. According to Mapquest® driving directions it would take about 1½ hours of driving time. To help locate the district office, for the 9:00 a.m. interview, office manager Brian Turner included driving directions along with Representative Flagstarr’s signed and dated consent letter. The signed consent letter acknowledged Representative Flagstarr’s willingness to participate in the research study.

I prayed,

Heavenly Father, thank you. Please allow, please let this interview to be productive. Please grant a safe journey. Please allow the time spent to be of praise to Your Holy Name. Thank you for this learning opportunity and blessing. Please may the interview take place. . . . In Your Most Holy Son’s Name. Amen.

The drive was without incident. The directions were excellent, it was mostly expressway, and for an early morning workday the traffic was not too congested. After circling around the block a couple times in an effort to find a free or metered parking space, I located a nearby parking lot, paid the attendant and walked back the two and one-half blocks to the designated interview location – Representative Flagstarr’s district
office. It occurred to me that people walking by her office could not miss it, because *Representative Anna Flagstarr* is boldly stenciled in red, white, and blue, along with a contact number where she can be reached.

Upon arriving back at the office and peering into the large storefront window, I made a mental note that there was no one in the small reception area of the office and the door was locked. I rang the doorbell. It chimed, yet no one came to the door. I rang the doorbell again, still no one answered. There was nothing to do but to wait in hope that the interview was not cancelled without someone notifying me.

After about 10 or so minutes, Representative Flagstarr walked up in gym shoes and introduced herself. She also apologized for being late as she unlocked the door leading to the lobby. The quaint little office is actually divided into two smaller offices. The Representative’s district office is on the south side toward the back of the building, and the north office is occupied by a law firm. The law firm’s name appears on the opposite storefront window and is stenciled in noticeably smaller letters.

Representative Flagstarr’s district office seems to be just large enough for the few items of furniture: a medium size desk, a small writing/worktable, along with two four-drawer file cabinets lined against the back wall. Apart from the large storefront window, there are no other windows to let in natural sunlight or to serve as a source of ventilation. A Tiffany lamp, which is in the center of the writing/worktable, a couple of family photos, and a few achievement awards offer a personal touch. On the wall just above the worktable is a framed prayer. Before the actual interview began, Representative Flagstarr commented that, on the days when she comes to her district office, she walks, because she does not live far away and parking spaces are scarce.
Let the Interview Begin

Just prior to the actual narrative interview portion of the research, the voice activated tape recorder is allowed to run for 15 – 20 seconds to test whether background noises coming from the other office or outside traffic would prove to be an interference. It was. The research subject stands and walks to the door and closes it. After she closes the door leading to her small office space, all thoughts or hopes of early morning cool, summer breezes entering the office vanished. With the only door closed, the walls seemed to move closer, causing the interview office to appear even smaller.

Motivations and Political Career Influences

Representative Anna Flagstarr’s decision to pursue a career in politics was influenced by the actions and beliefs of her politically active parents and extended family members. Both her mother and father were active in equal rights activities in the South. When the Milford family moved North to Michigan, they joined a nationally known organization whose mission was to promote social acceptance and equal justice for people of color. In response to the first interview question regarding what motivated her decision to enter politics, Representative Flagstarr stated,

I grew up in a politically active family. My parents were very active in Civil Rights. . . . Especially in Michigan, my parents learned and taught my two sisters and me that being politically engaged working as they did in a pressure group was a means of change. We learned, we believed that a few people working together on a focused matter or an issue could make a real difference in people’s lives. . . . So having learned that at an early age, I knew I would somehow always be willing to take a personal stand for equal rights for our people and actually for people in general. (Vol. II, p. 2)

Anna’s political interest was not only motivated by the events of her childhood experience, but as an adult she had political concerns. In the late 1970s, now a parent
herself, she became concerned with biased teaching practices of the public school system in the district in which she lived. “I had some concerns about curriculum and how it was functioning” (Vol. II, p. 3). Anna believed that the school curriculum disenfranchised an important contributing sector of society and in doing so, deprived students of their rights and privileges of learning various aspects of America’s history.

Anna Flagstarr, as did noted author Jeanne E. Ormrod, through her actions and/or written works fought against perpetuating America’s historical events through the social lens of a single sector of society. In her book _Human Learning_, Ormrod (1999) theorizes, “Unfortunately . . . we acquire erroneous ideas because we have seen or heard such ideas from others; in some instances teachers or textbooks even give us such misinformation. . . . In such situations changing misconceptions involves changing an entire organized body of knowledge” (p. 309).

Concerns with proper education and classroom-teaching deficiencies motivated Anna to run for her first publicly elected office. In 1994, she was elected to serve as a member of the Valley Belt School Board. Anna Flagstarr served as a member of the school board from 1984 through 1992. Throughout her political career Representative Flagstarr has always advocated “a voice for our children, tomorrow’s future” (Michigan House of Representatives, n.d.).

**Career Challenges and Overcoming Political Misconceptions**

When the March on Washington took place in August 1963, political interest, social and economic equity, and social strivings of women were for the most part forgotten and were left off the agenda. African American women were not mentioned
during the events of the day. In the later years, the March would be remembered as a most glorious moment for equal rights and social justice. On this highly publicized day – this red-letter day – women who actually played a vital role in launching the modern-day movement and propelling it to the forefront of social interest were thrust into the background. Not until a few days before the March on Washington actually took place and because of the relentless insistences and badgering by Sharon Johnson, the only recognized female member on the planning committee was there a brief tribute made to women. This low-key event took place before the actual march; however, it was not publicized (Baxter & Lansing, 1981). Women were not invited to meet with the President of the United States after the march had concluded.

The struggle for political freedom is a multi-layered saga. Throughout the struggle for civil political acceptance and social justice, African American women have been there to help mold, lead, and organize this remarkable journey from the very beginning. It has not been easy. African American women have figuratively wrestled with the complexities of their political relationships with other elected officials once they (African American women) have achieved political appointment. In part, the misconception concerning whether or not they (African American women) are actually worthy of or have the ability to hold political office or their political intentions stems from the poisonous by-products of the days of slavery. The ways in which Black women were perceived and treated during slavery profoundly affects the ways in which they are regarded today politically, socially, or otherwise (Baxter & Lansing, 1981).

Early on in Anna Flagstarr's political career, she became stigmatized as a politician for Black America. To this day, Representative Flagstarr surmises that the
"false labeling" (Vol. II, p. 11) of her political platform could have had something to do with the area where she lives. Throughout her political career Anna has always lived in an area in which the overwhelming majority of residents are from one race. Residents in the district where she lives would say, “Can she really win in the Majority District? Now my district has always been a majority White district” (Vol. II, p. 5). Political misconceptions such as being stereotyped as a politician for Blacks proved time and time again to be the source of Anna’s career challenges.

Representative Flagstarr’s campaign efforts while seeking political supporters who would be willing to help finance her run for office or would serve as volunteers on her behalf frequently proved unsuccessful. She admitted that the biggest challenge of her political career was creating a network of supporters. She stressed that her most challenging experiences and perhaps the experiences of other female political hopefuls have a lot to do with the perception of the candidates and possibly the personal esteem of the women political supporters in general.

In response to the question regarding the career challenges she encountered, Representative Flagstarr acknowledged,

That’s a tough one. . . . The hardest part for women running for office is we have to create our own network. Especially in the early days. It’s easier now. But in the early seventies it was hard. Women never gave themselves and are still reluctant to give themselves permission to spend money on campaigns. Women usually would ask if they could write a check for a delegate. But not men, they just write the check. . . . We have to teach women, still today, that they have the power to write the check. (Vol. II, p. 6)

In response to career challenges, she continued by sharing accounts of experiences she had with Inez’s Political Purse, a nationally known political action committee.

The challenge has always been, can she win? My experience with one of the national groups – Inez’s Political Purse – has been that because I am a Black
Minority running in a Majority District they were very reluctant to participate, even when they would come to me and say, we want to help fund your race. In the case of Election 2004, the Inez’s Political Purse talked about supporting my campaign because they hadn’t supported me in the governor’s race. It was a lot of hard feelings about their pulling out their support in my race for governor . . . hard feelings against Inez’s Political Purse. So in 2004 they [Inez’s Political Purse] tried to build a bridge and talked about donating $5,000 in support of my campaign. But for some reason, they never did. (Vol. II, p. 6)

It is apparent that Representative Flagstarr found ways to overcome her political challenges. In some instances she has risen beyond her career challenges through her own sheer determination, tenacity, and personal resolve. This approach has proven extremely helpful at the grass-roots level of politics. However, in terms of solutions that required an overarching quest for political inclusion, she has seen the wisdom and benefits of joining forces with others to galvanize their collective political strengths in the form of various political action committees (Bernotas, 1990).

Alluding to this most critical aspect of politics, the political experience, and how she gained reconnection and political support she said,

You overcome by putting your name out there. You decide to run for office. I was willing to build my base, build my constituency of supporters (Vol. II, p. 7). It’s a question of credibility and you got to be willing to answer to it (Vol. II, p. 7). African American elected officials along with their supporters have formed a PAC. A federal PAC called . . . which raises money to help Minority Women to participate in elected offices. So that’s a positive outcome of the experience of a number of us running for statewide office and are now being able to get the resources that it takes to mount a campaign. (Vol. II, p. 10)

In earlier comments regarding political contributions and the less than respectable treatment of women in politics, Anna remarked, “Women have always been active at almost every level in political parties, but we haven’t run the ship. We work without getting our credit, our due. . . . We need to stop being forced behind the scenes” (Vol. II, p. 5).
Strength of Family, Friends, and Spiritual Convictions

Politics is not for everyone. Individuals who seek to become an elected official whether it is at the local, state, or federal level must possess the inner strength and personal conviction of a modern-day gladiator. Stephen Frantzich has contended that the concept of the political process can be compared to a game, a game where the players seemingly command gladiator-type strength as it were. Frantzich (1999) stated,

American politics can be compared to a game. This game analogy is not intended to imply frivolous enjoyment but to help understanding... Like all games, politics has players, rules, winners and losers... Understanding the motivations, resources and effectiveness of the player reveals a great deal about the way the game will be played and what the likely outcome will be. Players seeking personal benefit play the game in one way; players getting more joy out of playing than in winning in another. Players expecting to be on the field for a long time play in one way; those recognizing politics as a passing fancy in another... Politics like many games includes fans in the stands that cheer their favorite partisan or ideological teams on, but seldom get involved personally. (pp. 7-8)

Elected officials are frequently motivated and gather their strength from being surrounded by the loving support of their fans (family members). They are guided by the encouragement of their cheer team (friends). The unmistakable Holy Grace of our Heavenly Father grants them endurance.

The Family – Believers

Representative Anna Flagstarr was raised in a politically active family. As a child, Anna was taught the importance of political consciousness. She and her two older sisters were fortunate in that their parents instilled uncompromising social values and strong work ethics in their most prized possessions – their three daughters. Anna’s opening words at the very beginning of the research interview reflected on how she and
her sisters', Diane Ruth and Linda, career choices proved to be an extension of their childhood experiences and training. Representative Flagstarr revealed,

I grew up in a politically active family... We learned that a few people working together on a focused matter or an issue could make a real difference in people’s lives... My sisters were much more politically active than I... We grew up in politics as foot soldiers (Vol. II, pp. 2 and 7). You know we really did learn the value of public service. (Vol. II, p. 9)

Anna’s parents led by example. Her dad was the first Black faculty member appointed to the University of Michigan Board of Governors (Vol. II, p. 2). Her mom worked behind the scenes to support her husband. However, she would not miss an opportunity to encourage her young adult daughters to be persons of their own choice and to follow the career of their dreams. All three of the Milford girls sought a career in politics. Anna’s mom “certainly inspired me and my sisters to greater heights. And demanded it of us. Her passion for being a part of social change just flowed over into our efforts and passion” (Vol. II, p. 15).

Anna’s two older sisters were also her role models. Her sisters were pillars of strength. They had experience in the political process. They were able to coach and guide her through various political decisions. Legislator Flagstarr’s political career may have very well not been as successful without the foresight, motivations, and guidance she received from her two older sisters – her career role models. “They were the core; they knew how to do it. They helped put my viable campaign together” (Vol. II, p. 17). She beamed, “I was fortunate” (Vol. II, p. 17).

Representative Flagstarr had an aunt, her mom’s sister, who was politically active at the local level. She lived in the South, and remained a resident of the small town in which she was born. In the early sixties before she passed away, she engaged in what
Representative Flagstarr believes was her most formidable political battle. A strong advocate for higher education, Aunt Mable (Mable Spencer) took on a nearby prestigious university. Anna recounted how Blacks were being turned away from enrollment despite their high academic achievement. Among those refused admission into the university was Aunt Mable’s son Lamar. Aunt Mable took the university to court. She won her son’s admission into the university. Anna Flagstarr’s cousin “integrated the university” (Vol. II, p. 19). This experience served to attest to what individuals can do with and for the benefit of family and others.

Representative Flagstarr had another aunt. She referred to her as a “Fire Brat” (Vol. II, p. 10). Realizing that the term “Fire Brat” could possibly be a term of endearment, I asked Anna to help me understand what she meant. Representative Flagstarr laughed and then explained,

Well she was a hell raiser. Aunt Brenda was absolutely fearless. She worked for/with mental health issues in South Limpkins, her hometown. You know, the institutions were segregated and the dollars spent were absolutely out of line. . . . And conditions in the Black mental health hospitals were abhorrent. She was working with her two sisters, my mother being one of them. They just kept stirring things up on the mental health front for a number of years, until changes were made. That I mentioned her, because when I was in the Senate, I got a call from Representative Peacock from South Limpkins saying that they were preparing a tribute for my aunt. And she was going to have a portrait hung in the state capital. So I wrote back. My sisters and I couldn’t go. . . . I wrote her a letter and asked her to read my cover letter during the ceremony. My cover letter said that my Aunt Brenda would be amazed to find herself hanging in the capital building. . . . It was a great tribute to her and it was women like my Aunt Mable, Aunt Brenda who inspired me and my sisters. . . . They insisted that we do as well or better. You know it’s just a great foundation. (Vol. II, pp. 10, 13, 15, 16)

In the early stages of her political career, Anna frequently received advice from her then husband with regard to issues she would either support or elect to withhold her support. Serving on the Valley Belt School Board was very stressful and exhausting.
Some days she would come home with barely enough energy to walk in the door. Her ex-husband was very supportive and concerned for her well-being, and one evening he pulled up a chair where she had just dropped herself in.

My ex-husband was actually very supportive and gave me a very sage piece of advice. An observation based on my first year on the Valley Belt School Board. I was in the minority and I was constantly working against issues and came home after a board meeting one night. And Malcolm said, “How many times did you vote NO tonight?” And I looked at him and said, “Well a lot.” And he said, “You know, the people elected you because they wanted leadership. And they need to know when to take your opposition serious. And if you vote NO all the time, they don’t know how to put weight on your NO.” He said, “You know, there are issues that you do on the board that have little importance. And you should just give them a YES vote. And those that are heading the district in the wrong direction, in terms of the education of the students, and the effectiveness of the institution ought to be the things you focus on. So when you say, NO, your electorate says this is serious. And we need to pay attention.” (Vol. II, p. 20)

Tears begin to swell up in Anna’s eyes after recounting this very emotional experience. Respectfully, I shut off the tape recorder, and diverted my eyes away from Representative Flagstarr in an effort to allow some form of personal privacy. After a brief moment of gathering her composure Anna said, “Hey, I am back” (Vol. II, p. 20). She concluded by saying,

So I took that to heart and I have followed his advice throughout my career. I will stand on the NO vote from time to time. But there are issues that are so crucial and so principled that my saying NO signals to a whole lot of people of liberal persuasion . . . there’s something wrong here. (Vol. II, pp. 20-21)

As a final word concerning the tremendous support she has received from her family she said,

It’s a lesson – a lesson of life. They are very valuable to me, my parents, my sisters, my ex-husband Malcolm, and my aunts. Because of them I have brought a tremendous amount of understanding and compassion rather than hard-headed defiance to public office. I can’t thank them enough. (Vol. II, pp. 20-21)
Friends – Everybody’s Got to Have Them

Representative Flagstarr spoke only of one individual, apart from her family, whom she credits as helping to shape her political career – Senator Ann L. Mack. Anna worked for Senator Mack for over 8 years. During that time they became friends, and Senator Mack began to mentor her. Once when Anna was discussing her career aspirations she mentioned to her boss that she would like to run for legislative appointment. Senator Mack showed her delight in Anna’s decision to run for office by helping Anna learn the things she needed to effectively launch a political campaign at the State of Michigan level.

Representative Flagstarr spoke of that stage as a metamorphosis, a turning point in her career. Being mentored by Senator Mack helped the informant move beyond the duties of an office manager for an elected official to that of becoming a viable political candidate in her own right. Details of the account follow:

And my boss, Ann L. Mack, had decided to run for the U.S. Senate and her senate seat opened. And I talked with Ann about running for her senate seat now vacant. And she said, ‘I will help you do that and she did. She supported my decision to run. She made her list available of the people in the district who would volunteer for the campaign and contribute money. And it was a whole learning experience for the 8 years while I was with her in office. (Vol. II, p. 23)

As every woman knows, friends will always bring a little something extra to a person’s life.

Spiritual Convictions – The Wind Beneath Her Wings

Representative Anna Flagstarr is very small in stature. Her presence or persona is very low key. Throughout the entire interview the voice-activated tape recorder would pause while Representative Flagstarr was speaking. More than once I repositioned the
recorder closer to Representative Flagstarr with the hope that the recorder could continue to record her statements. Representative Flagstarr's small stature and low vocal presence are quite different from the majority of her colleagues. According to Carroll (1994) and Chang and Hitchon (1997), political officials typically possess attributes such as being aggressive, opinionated, ambitious, and even boisterous. They are also expected to demonstrate a persona that shows willingness to stand out from the pack.

At a judgmental first-surface glance, Representative Flagstarr should have long ago met her political demise. However Anna's courage and endurance are not solely of her strength. Among the few items hanging on the walls in her small office is a prayer, signed by An Author Unknown To Me, which reads:

Thank you, Lord, for the great promises
Your word gives.
You guide me always on the journey that
You planned for me before
I was born.
Your design of life is perfect.
Thank you for being ever faithful to me
as I move along the path created
for me to follow.
You lead me, and even carry me
when I'm tired.
You are so wonderful and faithful to me.
I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me
Philippians 4:13
Amen

What a profound gift. The strength of every successful African American woman comes from our Heavenly Father.

A Summary of Representative Flagstarr's Story

Chapter 5 captured events of a research case study conducted in the summer of 2005. The research subject is Representative Anna Flagstarr. She is an African
American serving her second term as an elected official in the State of Michigan House of Representative in the 93rd Congressional Legislative Body. This chapter, the second of three case studies, entails descriptive accounts of Anna Flagstarr’s career development as it relates to the profession of politics.

In an effort to depict actual life experiences, various data sources were used to complement things discussed during the narrative discourse of the research. The first of two intended 30-minute interviews actually lasted for more than 90 minutes. This lengthy interview session of 90 minutes precluded the need to schedule a follow-up research interview session.
CHAPTER 6

MOTIVATIONAL INFLUENCES AND CAREER CHOICE
OF LEGISLATOR CHRISTI PEOPLES-STANFORD

An Interview With Legislator Christi People-Stanford

This chapter and the two previous chapters capture the essence of events and provide narrative reflective accounts shared during three in-depth research case studies conducted in the summer and fall of 2005. Chapter 6 is Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford's recollections of her motivations, influences, and political career challenges. Chapter 6 also includes information made available to me through the use of various resources. Resources include websites, photos, legislative newsletters, emails, records both current and historical, along with minutes of legislative committee meetings and chamber congressional sessions. Also included are elements of significant conversations shared with administrative staff and a host of other published media.

The inclusion of selected materials serves to provide clarity to certain statements made by the research subject and others. Merriam (1998) advised the use of multiple data sources for the benefit of the reader and to provide validly to the informants' responses to the interview inquiries. She stated,

In addition to recording interview data for analysis, it is important to assess, as best you can, the quality of the data obtained. Several factors may influence an informant's response, factors that may be difficult for the researcher to discuss. The informant's health, mood at the time of the interview, and so on may affect the quality of data obtained, as might an informant's ulterior motives for participating in
the project. . . . Furthermore, all information obtained from an informant has been selected, either consciously or unconsciously, from all that he or she knows. What you get in an interview is simply the informant's perception. While this personal perception is, of course, what is sought in a qualitative research, information may have been distorted or exaggerated. Such distortion can be detected by checking the plausibility and the reliability of the informant's statements. . . . The major way to detect and correct distortion according to Whyne, is by comparing an informant's account with accounts given by other informants. . . . The researcher might also confirm the informant's accounts by checking documentary materials or directly observing the situation. (p. 91)

Introduction

Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford has journeyed through every aspect of her life, including her professional careers, with a purpose. She is a product of a small-town community, Frankfort, nestled in a rural Southern state. During the Great Migration to the northern states, Christi and her family moved to DeVineview, Michigan. Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford was the first in her family to complete high school and graduate from college. She has earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in Public Administration. Her love for knowledge and learning has fueled her resolve to be a life-long advocate of education.

Legislator Peoples-Stanford's career is inspiring. Nearly 40 years ago, Christi Peoples began working for the DeVineview County Commission. Her illustrious service with the county spans 31 years. She retired in 1998. In 1998, Legislator Christi Peoples was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives in the district in which she lived. She dutifully served two terms. During this period, as evidence of her determination and hard work, she sponsored various legislation designed to promote equal and effective education throughout the public school system.
In 2002, the newly married Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford became an elected member of the Michigan Senate. Consistent with her political interest, she continues to initiate resolutions before the Michigan Congressional Chamber legislators designed to uphold higher standards for pupil promotion and to allow students in Theology, Divinity, or religious programs to receive state aid and grant funds.

A snapshot of her civil, political affiliations, and community services reveals that she holds membership in several grass-roots and prestigious organizations. Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford has received several awards acknowledging her dedication to the citizens of the State of Michigan. Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford dedicated her life to God in the traditions of the Baptist faith at a very early age. She is the First Lady of the God’s Peoples Baptist Church at which her minister husband pastors. Their church is located in the city of DeVineview, Michigan.

On Location

The research interview with Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford took place in her spacious Lumbus, Michigan, office. The initial research interview was scheduled for 9:00 a.m.; however, because of the intense downpour of heavy rain during the entire 90-mile drive, I arrived late. My arrival time just in the city of Lumbus was closer to 9:30 rather than 9:00. When I was finally able to secure parking and make my way to the actual meeting place, I was almost 1 hour late.

The office building’s entrance where the interview was scheduled was highly guarded with security cameras. There were also two uniformed guards stationed in the lobby. One guard was located at an information desk and the other guard stood at the elevator. A metal detector cubicle was posted in the lobby just a few feet away from the
front-door entrance. Everyone entering the building was required to pass through the metal detector. Also, as a measure of caution, there was an information sign-in sheet for all individuals who were not identified with a picture badge.

A few individuals were required to show the content of their briefcase, purse, or both. Having an unfamiliar face, I was among the individuals required to undergo inspection of my purse and briefcase after passing through the metal detector. Once the initial inspection was completed, I was required to sign in on a visitor’s log. Not until a telephone inquiry was made to confirm the schedule and meeting purpose was I cleared to take the elevator to the fifth floor of the Farnsworth State Building.

Once exiting the elevator, I took note that the fifth floor is arranged completely different in appearance from the first-floor lobby. The walls are paneled. They have pictures of a number of dignitaries, including President George W. Bush. The open area that is directly across from the elevator is arranged as a seating lounge and is appointed with the finest of furnishings. There is also a United States flag on a gold base flagpole, which stands in the corner further away from the elevator doors. Each of the legislators with offices on the fifth floor is listed with their office numbers on the marquee floor directory.

Still rain-soaked, I mustered my best possible positive demeanor and walked into Senator Peoples-Stanford’s office and introduced myself to the lady sitting behind a desk that seemed to be completely covered with papers, personal decorative desk items, and food. There seemed to be very little space in which to work. I attempted to conceal my surprise at the laid-back, unprofessional appearance of the office manager, who had on sweatpants and a sweatshirt. Mrs. Mable Johnson, whom I had spoken with several times
before with regards to scheduling the interview introduced herself and explained that on Fridays when the Congressional Chamber is not in session, the staff is allowed to come to work in causal dress.

Mrs. Johnson offered me a seat and began to explain that the Senator had not arrived and that she called to say she would be a little late. Mrs. Johnson also informed me that her boss, Senator Peoples-Stanford, had me scheduled on her calendar for the previous week and that I was a ‘no-show’ and ‘no-call.’ The apparent schedule miscommunication was resolved when an email I was able to produce indicated the date and time for which I was scheduled.

In the meantime, while waiting for Senator Peoples-Stanford to arrive, Mrs. Johnson provided several documents that were set aside for my use. She also shared comments regarding a number of the accomplishments of her boss and managed to highlight a number of her professional and personal experiences. Mrs. Johnson also introduced the two other staff members, explaining that the young lady was an intern and the gentleman was Senator Peoples-Stanford’s public relations manager.

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford arrived in the office around 10:30 a.m. She greeted everyone and introduced herself and then immediately asked, “What happened to last week?” In my defense, even before I could explain the situation, Mrs. Johnson explained to the Senator that she (Mrs. Johnson) had written the wrong date in and that today was the date actually scheduled for the interview. Thankfully, Mrs. Johnson’s comments seemed to ease the tension somewhat.

As Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford walked toward the separate area where her office is located, she turned and told Mrs. Johnson to bring her a cup of coffee and asked
whether I would like some coffee and/or water? Shaken by the reception I had just received, I muddled out a “No, thank you.” As if by second nature, Mrs. Johnson rushed a cup of coffee to the Senator. When she returned to her desk, Mrs. Johnson told me that Senator Peoples-Stanford would need a few minutes to take care of a few items before she would be ready for the interview. After what seemed to be about 15 minutes, the Senator appeared at her office door and invited me in to begin the interview.

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford’s office is a pictorial tribute to her many career accomplishments. Her actual office is extremely large and spacious enough to hold an extra large rich oak wood desk, a computer console with bookcase shelving on both sides, a trophy and special artifacts table, and a conference table with eight wood and leather chairs. There are two guest leather chairs, which have an end table between them, arranged just back of the senator’s large desk. There are also two file cabinets placed alongside the wall. In addition, there is a rather large flat-screen television. From the two large bay windows, people are able to clearly see the Michigan State Capitol. After graciously allowing time for me to peruse the various framed pictures and artifacts displayed throughout her office, Senator Peoples-Stanford recommended one of the guest seats to me.

Let the Interview Begin

Just prior to my beginning the interview, Senator Peoples-Stanford asked me to tell her why I chose that particular topic. Still somewhat intimidated by the events that occurred in the outer office I humbly attempted to share information with regard to her long-held desire to some day consider a political career as an elected official. I candidly revealed that my decision to research African American women with political affiliations
is intended to contribute to public awareness of events that speak to the experiences of African American women in politics.

I mentioned that I hoped young followers could be motivated and/or encouraged to pursue their political aspirations. I expressed that I believe that as professional servant leaders and no matter what our career choice may be, we have a teaching and/or mentoring responsibility to those hoping to follow in our footsteps. It is part of our calling to inspire others and through the stories of our successes and our experiences we can provide examples of achievable dreams and tips so that others may attain their goals.

The Senator also had a few other questions. She asked where I attended school; when I was expecting to graduate; where I was employed; and in what district I resided. After the array of questions was answered satisfactorily – Andrews University, 2006, United States Army as a federal civilian, 15th District – I was granted permission to begin the research.

Motivations and Political Career Influences

Serving as an elected official for the State of Michigan just happens to be Legislator Christi Peoples-Stanford’s second full-time career. The Senator’s second career began after she had worked 31 years for the Dewitt County Commission. During 7 of those 31 years, she held down a part-time position on the school board. Three of the 7 were served as vice-president and the remaining 4 years as president of the Dewitt School Board. In 1998, she decided it was time to call it quits. She would not seek re-election on the school board and it was time to leave the county administrative job as well. Legislator Peoples-Stanford’s plans were to retire and relax. In 1998, running for political office was not her goal. Senator Peoples-Stanford shared that her political career
was considerably influenced by various events she experienced while serving on the School Board.

She stated,

I tell you that to say my background was not in public office. I really had no intentions of going into public office. This was something that came about as a result of my affiliation with public officials. The way I got into public office was I volunteered to work on the campaigns of persons running for election. . . . Back in 1988, I worked on the C.O.P.E. committee that was able to oust four incumbent board members that had been there for like 20 years. . . . I also did public relations for the four guys hoping to replace the four incumbents. They won, and from time to time these newbies would call me for advice on public relations kinds of subjects. So at one point there was another person on the school board who was appointed to a higher position. She became the Dewitt County Commissioner. So she left and of course the C.O.P.E. members who had been elected asked me if they could appoint me to that position. I had to give it a lot of thought, because I just wanted to retire and enjoy myself. But I did accept, because this was a great opportunity to be a part of a great team and hopefully have a chance to make a difference. (Vol. III, pp. 4-5)

Senator Peoples-Stanford enjoyed her retirement for nearly 2 years. In early 2000 she was recruited by a women’s political action committee, urging her to run for a legislative seat in the district in which she lived. The Political Action Committee chairperson personally called Senator Peoples-Stanford and explained that because of term limits, a number of seats in the House of Representatives would become open doing the up-coming election. She also informed the senator that the Political Action Committee had devised a plan to fill a number of the seats with women (Vol. III, p. 6).

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford admitted that the decision as to whether or not she would be willing to run for a district seat in the Michigan House of Representatives was an extremely difficult decision to make. She could not find the needed intrinsic motivation that could influence the decision to step into the political arena as an elected official. She expressed her indecisiveness and dilemma to the recruiting chairperson, House of Representative Maxine Turnpoint. Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford
commented on her conversations with Representative Turnpoint, “I said, oh Maxine, I don’t know.” I said, “I am just so burned out, serving on the School Board.” I said, “I just don’t know” (Vol. III, p. 7).

In indicating how persistent Representative Turnpoint was in seeking to recruit her to run for political office, Senator Peoples-Stanford continued by recalling the following conversation between herself and Representative Turnpoint, and her rationale for the decision:

Maxine said, “Well we really need a strong person like you. You’ve demonstrated your leadership ability in being able to be elected into leadership with the School Board. You demonstrated strong leadership and we think that you just would be the perfect person to run for a Michigan Legislator.” So I said, “Let me think about that for a while.” Because I had really made my mind that I was going to get away from it all. So I thought about it and I was thinking, now what had been my big frustration in serving in the school board? And my big frustration had been Lumbus. Any trying to get cooperation from Lumbus about school issues. So I said to myself, now Christi, if Lansing had been a real challenge to you while serving on the School Board and you now have a chance to go to Lumbus and make public education a priority in your platform, it’s like the Lord is telling you something. My work is not done. And if I suffered the frustrations while serving on the school board and it was coming from Lumbus, and now I have a chance to go to Lumbus, then I owe it to the citizens and especially the students to go and see if I could go and remove some of those impediments to make sure that our children receive a quality educations and we got treated fairly. So I gave that a lot of thought, and I finally decided now you can’t complain about what Lumbus does to the City of DeVineview if you don’t step out there and when you have a chance do something about it. She told me, “I am going to call you back and see, give you time to think about it.” So when she called me back, I told her, I say, “You know, I’ve given it a lot of thought and I think that this is an omen and I need to do this.” (Vol. III, pp. 7-8)

Senator Peoples-Stanford believed that her previous experiences serving on the School Board were actually of divine order, part of her divine calling. She is convinced that her being approached by the Political Action Committee Chairperson was because of her destiny to continue her work on behalf of the citizens and students of DeVineview. “And it’s all falling into place. It’s all, the timing and everything, is all falling into place.
So I decided to do that. Something was pulling me in that direction . . . to run and come to Lumbus and really put forth my best effort, to give all I got, to see if I can create a climate to support public schools back in the city of DeVineview (Vol. III, p. 9).

The informant was very adamant about crediting her decision of becoming a State of Michigan elected official as a directive from an undeniable higher power – from above. She asserted the notion that “no matter how we as mere human beings try to walk away or turn our backs from what the Father calls us to do, He will bring us right back to His will and purpose for us” (Vol. III, p. 10). The informant expressed her resolve to accept what she termed as her “God-given mission” (Vol. III, p. 11).

The senator is not alone in her belief in the acceptance of a person’s God-given mission. For example, Dorothy Ehrhart-Morrison, Ph.D., asserted in her book No Mountain High Enough – Secrets of Successful African American Women (1997) that spiritual connectedness has played an essential part in the lives and careers of many of the 32 women she interviewed for her book and Ph.D. studies. Sharing several comments of her interviewers she wrote,

A goodly number of the women I interviewed for this book grew up in spiritually oriented households. . . . Many credit their spirituality for the career choice and success. Publisher Alice Kelly saw her relationship with God as a leading, sustaining and the directional resource to her life. . . . God talks and I listen. . . . I am a believer in God. I am a very spiritual person who follows the directions that He has placed out there for me to follow. I do, do think that I am on the path and journey He has planned for me. Some people believe that the voices we hear in our subconscious are just voices. But I listen to my subconscious. It is my God’s voice and I’m tuned to that voice. . . . By following His directions, I’ve been able to do all things. (pp. 191-192)

It becomes clear during the research that Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford’s political career has been influenced and motivated by those she worked for as well as by individuals who have become acquainted with the professional responsive manner in
which she conducts herself. She is a well-admired political leader. A snapshot of her accomplishments and affiliations shows that she is motivated and dedicated to providing political directional support to the City of DeVineview – and its children (Michigan Senate, n.d.).

Career Challenges and Overcoming Political Misconceptions

Jo Freeman, who earned her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago, has researched women in politics for over 25 years. Research of America’s political process has led her to study historical accounts as well as to personally interview countless numbers of political leaders. Her research among other things revealed political misconceptions and myths with regard to the impact on women in politics.

Freeman, in her book *A Room at a Time – How Women Entered Party Politics* (2000), commented on an interview she had with a member of the Democratic National Committee, which she believes summarizes the sentiments about the expected change and role of women in politics. Elements of the interview follow:

I have often talked with Mrs. Emily Newell Blair, the very able and charming resident member of the Democratic National Committee in Washington about the way men dreaded a change in politics when the women came in and yet were disappointed when the change didn’t come. . . . What the men expected I suppose, she said to me, was a terrible old-fashioned house cleaning, the kinds of rearranging their mothers used to perform in the spring. . . . As a result politicians quickly lost their newfound respect for women voters as well as those who sought office. . . . Women were relegated to a minor role in party politics. . . . Historians as well as men were disappointed. . . . Women were seen as incapable of contributing to the democratic process. (p. 106)

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford shared the experiences of numerous other women in the profession of politics (Freeman, 2000) frequently encountering career challenges and political stereotyping. She experienced the political practice known as
congressional career blockage, actions by key political leaders attempting to inhibit others from fully participating in activities that could contribute to political popularity or political support (Freeman, 2000).

From the onset of her seeking political support and running for office she began to encounter opposition. When asked what career challenges as a political candidate she encountered, and how she overcame them, Senator Peoples-Stanford elucidated,

In terms of my running for office, I experienced a lot of challenges. Because even though I had great name recognition as being a spokesperson for the DeVineview Board of Education, you know I was always on radio or in the newspaper and things like that. But when I attempted to run for the Michigan House a big incumbent, Dale Blackburn Senior, decided that he was going to run his son, who had the same name as himself. And people that I thought would support me were afraid to go up against Dale Blackburn Sr. because he was still serving. He was the Chairperson of the Appropriations Committee. He held the most powerful position other than the Speaker of the House. The Speaker of the House is powerful because you are the one who controls and handles the money for the entire state. Dale Blackburn Sr. decided who gets what and where the money goes. Well, these folks in government knew that Dale was in charge of handing out the money. They kept saying to me, I don't want to face that challenge; it's no way I could win. So many of them, some whom I had known for years, were afraid to support me. (Vol. III, p. 16)

She considers her most painful experiences while running for office to be the occasions when she was personally informed by her acquaintances that they would be giving or had given their support to her opponents. In speaking of a happenstance encounter with a newly elected member of the House, Senator Peoples-Stanford reflected,

So I remember running into Wayne Richards, the son of Bert and Candace Richards. Well, both he and his father were serving in the House at the time. Actually, I knew him because I worked with his father, helped him get elected . . . asked him for his support. And he said to me that when my mother was in the House with Dale Blackburn Sr., little Dale and I grew up coming to see our parents. . . . It would be very difficult to support you over Dale Blackburn, Jr. So he opted to support Dale Jr. (Vol. III, p. 17)
Not too long after being refused support by young Legislator Wayne Richards, Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford “ran into his mother” (Vol. III, p. 19). Candace Richards was a member of the State of Michigan House of Representatives before she became a senator in Washington, D.C.

Well before I could say anything to her, before I could ask her for her support she said, “I understand that you are running for the Michigan House”, and I said, “Yes, I am.” Then she said, “You know that Blackburn Sr. is supporting his son, Dale Jr., for that seat.” I said, “Yeah, I do.” So she said, “Why would you go up against an icon like Dale Blackburn Sr. with his strong name recognition?” She said, “You are not going to win. You are just wasting your time and the people’s money.” (Vol. III, p. 19)

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford, having the convictions of a spiritual calling, would not allow others to deter her from her focus:

So I said to her, “Candace, so what are you trying to say? So what is my name recognition? I have strong name recognition also. Are you saying my name is chopped liver?” Even her husband ganged up on me. Her husband who I volunteered with tried to discourage me. I had a lot of people trying to discourage me. One of my friends, who I just knew would help me, refused. I had supported him in his bid for mayor. I supported him even after he became Mayor of DeVineview. But because of revenues sharing being on the table for DeVineview . . . he supported Dale Blackburn, Sr. (Vol. III, pp. 19-20)

There were people she worked with and had built strong close relationships with, yet they sought alliance with her opponent. Continuing to discuss the challenges she faced with regard to campaigning to become an elected member of the House of Representative she stated,

Dale Blackburn Sr. put pressure on Mayor Daniel Ace. He told the Mayor that he expected that you intend to support my son. The Mayor called and said his first priority is the City of DeVineview and he couldn’t afford to have Dale turn his back on the city. So he caved. (Vol. III, p. 20)

The Mayor aligned his political efforts with the political plan that the chairperson of the Appropriation Committee, Dale Blackburn, had launched against Senator Peoples-
Stanford. Dale Blackburn's attempt to prevent Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford from fully participating in activities that could lead to political popularity or career growth had been termed congressional career blockage.

The results of the Mayor giving his support to her opponent proved to have major implications. The Mayor of DeVineview has the backing of an extremely powerful political machine. When the Mayor chose to support Dale Blackburn, Jr., because of the pressure from Dale Blackburn, Sr., members of the Mayor's political machine went along with the Mayor's decision. Rather than come to her personally and let Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford know his decision, the Mayor simply called her.

As the recollection went,

Initially he said he would support me. But he caved... Oh he called and told me. And when he caved that meant that the political machine had to go along with what the Mayor did. The Mayor had two key districts. And that was despite the fact that I lived and worked in District A-7 most of my adult life. They knew me... So I said to Daniel, “You and your cronies can go that route if you want to but just know I'm going to kick his butt” (Vol. III, p. 20). I told him, “You can tell Dale Sr. for me, his baby boy will not win this one, not even with his daddy’s name.” (Vol. III, p. 21)

Senator Christ Peoples-Stanford's response to her close friend and Mayor (Mayor Daniel Ace) was indeed very bold. Her response undoubtedly reflected her intense emotions and the hurt she felt. At the same time, it also attested to or bore proof to the premise that regardless of the situation you may find yourself in, and regardless of who may turn their back on you, with positive belief in one's chances to accept and excel in opportunities set before us, people can be motivated to rise above a given situation and achieve their desired goal.

This non-quitter could have very well been motivated and armed with her long-held belief that she should always strive to finish something once started. "State Senator
Christi Peoples-Stanford has moved through her life with a purpose” (Michigan Senate, n.d.). Without reservations and with the personal fortitude to stay on focus, she continued her efforts to seek supporters of her political campaign.

So I went out and campaigned like I know how to campaign. . . . What was motivating was the fact that although the people in the District I was campaigning for had been represented by Dale Sr. for many years but they really didn’t know him, and they really didn’t know his son. They knew me. I was always out there. They really didn’t get a chance to interact with Dale Sr. or his son. Dale Sr. pretty much operated from his Lumbus office and Dale Blackburn Jr., a kid still attending the local community college, expected his dad to take care of or run his campaign. Actually, that was a break for me. (Vol. III, p. 22)

She spoke of her campaign efforts and the persistence she showed as a turning point in her career:

I was always out there . . . so they knew me better than they knew Dale Sr. and not too many people had heard of junior. Because they never saw them out there really campaigning like I did . . . and I demolished young Blackburn and his daddy. (Vol. III, pp. 22-23)

According to the estimated percentages the informant shared, Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford received more that 50% of the votes and this was in spite of the fact that there were five people in the race for that one particular legislator seat. Dale Jr., the second contender, received only about 35% of the votes.

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford rose beyond the various misconceptions and political career challenges. Her response to the challenges she encountered brings to mind a very motivational parable I often share with others during my public speaking events. The parable is of an old mule that tripped into a well. Her cries and pleas for help were met by her owner’s decision to put her out of her misery by shoveling dirt upon her in an attempt to bury her.
At first she was frightened and saddened beyond belief. Then she decided that she had choices. As shovels of dirt hit her back she chose to shake it off and step up. This she continued in her resolve until she triumphantly stepped beyond the walls of the well. All because she was motivated to rise pass her challenges – Shake It Off And Step Up (author unknown).

**Strength of Family, Friends, and Spiritual Convictions**

Our very being and the experiences of our lives are shaped by the dreams and aspirations of our immediate family and the ancestors who came before us. Family background along with parental attitudes undeniably contribute to an individual’s level of achievement as one grows into adulthood. Friends and our extended chosen family add dimension and caution to our lives. Spiritual convictions hold out hope, faith, and promise, which guide our steps.

Each of us has the right and strength to assess the road which lies ahead, and those over which we have traveled. And if the future road looms ominous or unpromising, and the road back seems uninviting, then we need to gather our resolve and carry only the necessary baggage, step off the road into another direction into a future of promise. (Ehrhart-Morrison, 1997, p. 169)

**The Family – Believers**

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford did not speak about her parents during the interview. What little information that was shared actually was gleened from a brief caption in her biography printed on her web site. It reveals that Christi Peoples-Stanford and parents “moved to DeVineview, Michigan as part of the Great Migration” (Michigan Senate, n.d.). The only other reference of her parents is an aged 8x10 framed photograph
of her parents, placed in the center of her artifacts table, in which her father stands behind her mother, who is seated. They look to be dressed in their Sunday best.

This lack of acknowledging occasions of supportive motivation and encouragement received from one’s parents is rare in the African American culture. Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford’s unwillingness to expound on the encouragement she may have received from her parents could be due in part to uncontrollable circumstances. The senator lost both parents while she was still a very young girl and was ultimately raised by her older brothers and sisters and, at times, extended family members.

The research informant, a single mother at the time she began her quest for political office, had the support of her children. When speaking of her youngest child she shared, “My daughter stepped up and served as a volunteer on my campaign” (Vol. III, p. 28). She beamed as she related that her son “served as my treasurer, more than once. . . . Both he and his wife worked tirelessly. . . . It was a family affair. Family all stepped up and did their part” (Vol. III, p. 29).

She confides that had it not been for the dedicated members in her family helping her she would not have been able to pull off her campaign the way she did. The informant without reservations recognizes the realities of how her campaign was built around family who “volunteered to help me 150% . . . Everyone was working handing out yard signs, handing out materials. They were there for me at the election polls” (Vol. III, pp. 28-29). It is certainly evident that members of Senator Peoples-Stanford’s family served to inspire, support, and motivate her to seek and accomplish her political career goals.
Friends have surrounded Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford and served as supportive volunteers throughout various stages of her political career. This is seen in the informant’s responses to the research questions about individuals who encouraged and supported her. Her response provides insight with regard to the importance she credits her network of friends and volunteers. “I have friends. . . . You know my campaigns were built around volunteers and so these were friends from way-back” (Vol. III, p. 18).

Earlier, in discussing one of her hard-fought political election challenges, Senator Peoples-Stanford told how she was able to receive support from and the endorsement of the Coalition of Organized Unions. One of her long-time friends worked to make sure that her name was placed on the Union’s ballot and that the people knew of her performance history. Being supported by organized labor afforded her tremendous political advantage. Organized labor groups provided the strength of their membership in terms of volunteers, votes, and financial resources.

She explained, “People who were running and are able to get labor’s endorsement, well they get a very powerful tool. . . . They give you money, they will do your mailing for you, they will make telephone calls, they will do a lot of things for you. So this was a very powerful endorsement that I received” (Vol. III, p. 16). Senator Peoples-Stanford maintains that her friends and network of supporters extended beyond Organized Labor’s membership. “But I also had a number of community folks who endorsed me (Vol. III, p. 17). As it turns out, her community activities garnered her considerable support. “Many of the folks in the community organizations like
Neighborhood Associations . . . the Chamber of Commerce supported me because I had worked with them while serving on the School Board” (Vol. III, p. 17).

Friendships, as the informant discovered, are important forms of networking for professional women. She acknowledged her view of friends by stating, “Those friendships that I developed in my lifetime and mainly while serving on the DeVineview School Board proved crucial in the success of my political career and sanity” (Vol. III, p. 18).

Spiritual Convictions – The Wind Beneath Thy Wings

Among the various framed items throughout the Senator’s office is a scripture-based poem known as “Footprints in the Sand.” The poem in essence provides a pictorial illustration and narrative of two individuals walking side-by-side on a sandy beach. From time to time there appears only one set of footprints. In conversation between the two, one of the walkers poses the question to her Heavenly Father – Why were there occasions when only one set of footprints is shown in the sand? In answer to her prayerful question, the Father informs her that on the occasions when just the single set of footprints appeared in the sand, she was being carried over troubled times, her problems, and her challenges.

This poem spoke volumes with regard to the informal yet strong trusting relationship the informant has with her Heavenly Father. It served to reveal that she recognizes that there were times in her career and life in general in which she moved forward because the Father brought her along. It also indicates that Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford sought guidance and understanding from the Father. Verbal statements made throughout the research interview by the informant attested to her strong
convictions and belief in staying steadfast to her heavenly Father’s will. The reason she accepted the opportunity to run for political office became reality because of prayerful conversation with the Lord: “So I said . . . it’s like the Lord is telling me something . . . and I need to do this” (Vol. III, p. 8). Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford credits her political direction and success to the strength of her spiritual foundation acquired over the years.

**Summary of Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford’s Story**

The research documented as the sixth chapter of this multi-level ethnographic research project reflects the motivational factors that influence African American women to serve as Michigan State Congresswomen. This chapter began with a brief overview of the informant’s professional career path, leading up to her election to political office. In this chapter, Christi Peoples-Stanford’s story, the reader is privy to various narrative accounts of certain challenges that directly related to the informant’s decisions to run for political office as well as how she rose above the challenges.

This chapter shared with the reader instances in which both family and friends rallied on behalf of the informant, thereby serving as much-needed resources of support and how they motivated and encouraged her throughout her political journey. This chapter concludes with insights relative to the informant’s spiritual convictions and strong reliance on the Heavenly Father as her guide. I elected to gather and include data taken from other informational sources to lend credence to the things and events discussed and revealed during the 3-hour research interview between the researcher and the informant.
CHAPTER 7

CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cross-Case Analysis

The cross-case analysis used in this qualitative multi-faceted case study is my attempt to develop and link conceptual data categories and themes intended to capture relatedness of research findings. Cross-case analysis is a research enabler that facilitates or contributes to understanding of the particular phenomenon being studied (Rudestam & Newton, 1992). The process devised to identify, define, and sort data into developing themes initially began with my analysis of each independent case study, intended to establish a comprehensive understanding of each separate study. This within-case analysis allowed me to gather materials about the contextual variables that could possibly have a bearing on the overall research project.

The informational themes and categories revealed in the initial within-case analysis were classified and ultimately labeled using color-coded references to depict such relational data elements that are chronological and/or topical in nature. The beneficial learning aspects of coding data in the aforementioned fashion allowed me the ability to retrieve various data segments identified under a common label or combination of labels. Once the comprehensive within-case analysis was completed, I began the actual comparative cross-case analysis.
This comparative analysis proved essential to gaining a general explanation that reflected collectively each of the individual cases even though the cases showed variations in certain data details. This challenging and in-depth phase of the research enabled me to examine messages replicated throughout each of the three case studies. From a discovery standpoint, cross-case analysis procedures refine and organize voluminous case data "in order to convey a holistic understanding of the case" (Merriam, 1998) both in terms of similarities and differences. A descriptive overview of elements discovered in the cross-case analysis is depicted through the summary portion of this chapter.

Summary

This chapter provides a synopsis of existing literature that speaks to motivation and influences of African American women's political experiences. This chapter also includes a reflective analysis and intriguing comparison of various political career experiences revealed in three ethnographic case studies described in chapters 4-6 of this qualitative research project. The research project, which took place during the summer and fall of 2005, has sought to identify and promote insight relative to motivational factors that influence African American women legislators' political career choice. The research subjects are elected political officials serving in the Michigan State Congress. Two of the three research subjects are Michigan Senators. The third legislator is a member of the House of Representatives.

The first of the three case studies is informant Dora Morethansome's story, which details her perspective of political life according to her personal experiences. The second case study is Michigan House of Representative Anna Flagstarr's story, which
emphasizes among other things her steadfast determination to pattern her political activities beyond racial and gender stereotyping. Christi Peoples-Stanford’s story, the third research case study, is a report of various political nuances that depict the political process.

The Setting

The setting of the research interviews required me to travel distances of 30, 90, and 65 miles for the initial, second, and third case studies, respectively. I planned to conduct a minimum of two face-to-face interview sessions with each research subject and expected each to last approximately 30 minutes, which did not materialize. Rather, the planned schedule gave way to each informant have a single interview lasting an average of 2 hours and 30 minutes. The narrative account of the ethnographic case studies is represented in a transcribed confidential manuscript of over 125 pages.

The Informants

Legislator Dora Morethansome has served in various political capacities for over 30 years and currently holds office as a member of the Michigan State Senate. The political career of the second research informant, Anna Flagstarr, as an elected official spans a period greater than 20 years. Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford’s political career as a member of the State of Michigan Congress began in 1998.

Of notable significance, each of the three informants has held or currently holds political office as an elected member of the House of Representatives and as a member of the Michigan State Senate. Their combined political service extends six decades. Their distinguished careers hold out as being significant in that records indicate that African
American women typically suffer politically from being female and Black (Baxter & Lansing, 1981; King, 1975).

Despite the political disadvantages encountered, these informants have managed to move beyond discriminatory career obstacles that have been socially imposed and have excelled politically. Authors Clayton and Stallings (2000) allude to the challenges and stereotyping thrust upon African American women in politics:

As a minority within a minority, Black women face sexual discrimination as well as racial discrimination by voters who expect African American women to represent only a narrow constituency. African American women are often considered or treated as invisible in today's political arenas. Their good deeds seem to fade into the larger groups of either Blacks or women in general. African American Women must struggle to overcome negative image stereotyping that portrays them. (p. 126)

These remarkable women were able to rise beyond the political disadvantages and stereotyping because of the influence and motivation of supporters who willingly contributed immeasurably to their political career choices and successes. Dora Morethansome, a single parent most of her political career, often sought advice and relied on the wisdom and encouragement from her father; “My father had a way of saying things to me that stuck” (Vol. I, p. 20). Informant Morethansome’s adult children played an essential role in her political endeavors. In an expression of the support she has received from her children and other family members, she shared,

They are so proud of me, but they have no problem calling me to let me know what’s right, wrong and things like that. . . . I can’t tell you how many times over the years I have gotten phone calls or had political conversations with them. . . . Believe me they keep me on track. (Vol. I, p. 3)

Informant Anna Flagstarr, who was raised by parents who were politically astute, acknowledged that her career and her older sisters’ careers for the most part were simply an extension of what their mother and father instilled in them. She stated, “I grew up in a
politically active family. . . . So having learned that at an early age, I knew I would somehow always be willing to take a personal stand for equal rights for our people and actually for people in general” (Vol. I, p. 2). During the earlier stages of her political career, she had the encouragement of her husband and sought his advice frequently. Furthermore, praises such as “she is a strong voice for children, cities, environment and public health” echo the trust and confidence her constituents have placed in her leadership abilities (Michigan House of Representatives, n.d.).

Christi Peoples-Stanford had the good fortune to build political alliances in her earlier career prior to becoming an elected official. In addition, she had the loyal and committed support of her daughter, son, and daughter-in-law. In discussing the level of support, the informant mentions “family who volunteered to help me 150% . . . . They were there at the election polls” (Vol. I, pp. 28-29). Informant Christi Peoples-Stanford is a strong advocate of education reform. Her principal political interest relative to education reform is “reflected in her educational affiliations” of which she served in such executive capacities as Vice-President, Treasurer, etc. (Michigan Senate, n.d.).

Their Political Stories: Motivations, Challenges, and Successes

Each of the informants believes her political actions could have positive impact on the political process. These leaders were motivated to serve politically for various reasons. For instance, Legislator Morethansome admitted,

Well, I guess mine is kind of unusual. . . . There was a friend of mine name Rita Nelson, she and her sister were very active in the District. . . . And I guess it was because I had known Rita Nelson and when I was in grade school and now Rita Nelson, we hadn’t seen each other since grade school and when I lived in DeVineview. . . . So she had suggested that I serve, and a number of people asked, so that’s why I served then. (Vol. I, pp. 5-7)
Anna Flagstarr’s path into politics was motivated by discriminatory childhood experiences regarding twin sister being denied medical treatment. She recalled how she had been motivated by her parents: They “taught my two sisters and me that being politically engaged in the work they did in a pressure group was a means of change” (Vol. II, p. 2). However, Anna’s political interest was not only motivated by her childhood experiences. In the late seventies she became concerned with biased teaching practices, practices that deprived grade school students of their rights and privilege of learning various aspects of America’s history (Vol. II, p. 3). Knowledge of the benefits of political service proved to be a motivator for Legislator Anna Flagstarr. In the informant’s own words, “We learned, we believed that a few people working together on a focused matter or an issue could make a real difference in people’s lives” (Vol. II, p. 2).

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford was motivated into a career of politics in part because of what she referred to as “my big frustration in serving on the school board. . . . My frustration had been Lumbus, and trying to get cooperation from Lumbus about school issues. So I said to myself, now Christi . . . you now have a chance to go to Lumbus and make public education a priority” (Vol. III, pp. 7-8). Legislator Peoples-Stanford’s decision to serve politically was also influenced and motivated by the opinions of individuals with whom she had built a lasting alliance, individuals and friends who were aware of her performance history related to her first career.

I tell you this to say my background was not in public office. . . . I did public relations for the four guys hoping to replace the four incumbents. . . . They won, and from time to time these newbies would call me for advice. . . . so at one point there was another person on the School Board who was appointed to a higher position. She became the Dewitt County Commissioner . . . member who had been elected asked me if they could appoint me to that position. . . . I did accept because this was a great opportunity to be a part of a great team and hopefully have a chance to make a difference. (Vol. III, pp. 4-5)
Collectively, the various influences and motivations of the three informants affirm comments made by Trotter and McConnell (1978) in their discussion of motivated human behavior. They make the following points, which seem to summarize the motivated influences and zeal of the three informants:

Social motives influence our behavior by guiding our perceptions. One of the most powerful social goals or motives in the United States is need for achievement, the need to strive for higher standards of performance in school, on the job, in social groups. . . . No matter what type of success a person is interested in . . . the need for achievement can be the most powerful and important motivating force in anyone’s life. (p. 166)

Political service requires stamina as it relates to, among other things, racial and gender struggles. African American women have been regarded as incapable of having or being able to acquire the mental aptitude needed for politics. Politically, they have largely been ignored as viable candidates. Carroll and Stallings (1983) contend that Black women face unique challenges to win elective offices and believe women candidates, in particular African American, have to walk a fine line in their quest for political recognition and/or election.

Similar points are made by Darrell Lusane (1994) about the challenges of political behavior of African American women in congress. Double standards are a major contention in politics. He states, “Black women continue to face double standards in terms of both race and gender. . . . Black women currently serving face a daunting task and challenge” (pp. 3-4).

In continuation of this political imbalance he further comments,

On the state political level, Black women feel the double burden of the obstacles that face both women and Blacks. Women legislators express concern that they must show a broader range of policy interests than men while also catering to women’s
interests. Similarly, Blacks note that they have had to be bolder in their policy interests than Whites while still addressing needs of the Black community. (pp. 3-4)

The informants revealed various challenges they encountered during stages of their political career. Senator Dora Morethansome spoke about the challenging experiences she had when she attended an annual picnic given by one of the mayors in her district. Towards the end of the picnic her public relations manager suggested taking pictures. However the Mayor "was afraid to get close to me... I said my color won't rub off on you" (Vol. I, pp. 16 & 18). Another notable challenge occurred when Senator Morethansome’s district came under the attack of realignment known as gerrymandering. Senator Morethansome contended that the attempt to restructure territorial boundaries was devised by her opponents because “they just knew I wasn’t going to make it... because over half of the District was new (Vol. I, p. 27).

During the early stages of Representative Anna Flagstarr’s political career, she became stigmatized as a politician having concern for only the issues and interests of Black Americans. “False labeling” (Vol. II, p. 11) of this nature and magnitude proved time and time again to be an extreme hindrance to securing political supporters who were willing to volunteer on behalf of her campaign and/or being able to secure financial support. Her struggles are paraphrased in the following comment:

The challenge has always been, can she win? My experience... has been that because I am a Black Minority running in a Majority District, they were very reluctant to participate, even when they would come to me and say, we want to help. Inez’s Political Purse tried to build a bridge and talked about donating $5,000 in support of my campaign. But for some reason, they never did. (Vol. II, p. 6)

At the very start of her political endeavors Christi Peoples-Stanford was faced with challenges. She related the events of conversations she had:
In terms of my running for office I experienced a lot of challenges. Because even though I had great name recognition as being a spokesperson for the DeVineview Board of Education . . . when I attempted to run a big incumbent, Dale Blackburn decided that he was going to run his son. . . . As chairperson of the Appropriations Committee, Dale Blackburn Sr. decided who gets what and where the money goes. Well these folks in government knew that Dale was in charge of handing out the money. They kept saying to me, You don't want to face that challenge, it's no way you could win. (Vol. III, p. 16)

In relaying the events of a most painful and challenging conversation with an acquaintance, she shared,

Well, before I could say anything . . . she said I understand that you are running for the Michigan House, and I said yes I am. Then she said you know that Blackburn Sr. is supporting his son for that seat, and I said yeah I do. So she said Why would you go up against an icon like Dale Blackburn Sr. with his strong name recognition? She flat out said you are not going to win. You are just wasting your time and the people’s money. (Vol. III, p. 19)

The processes and steps taken by the informants enabled them to move beyond and overcome challenges. Their approach reveals insight with regard to why they were able to carry out their political career commitments. Dora Morethansome’s approach and reason for overcoming the challenges she faced was energized by her belief that she was fulfilling her God-given mission. For this reason, Dora said, “I never held resentment” (Vol. I, p. 18). She surmises her reason for her steadfastness and political focus by stating,

I understood why I was here. . . . You know, my thing everyday is to ask God to direct my steps and give me the strength to overcome whatever adversity. . . . I never ask Him to move my mountains. But to give me the strength to go through everyone of my challenges. (Vol. I, p. 20)

Legislator Anna Flagstarr overcame her most formidable challenges by sheer determination and tenacity. However, with regard to the situations where the challenge appeared to require more than personal resolve, she chose to join forces with various
political action committees, thereby garnering needed strength to further her career endeavors.

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford’s unrelenting drive to always complete or attain the goals she sought for herself, regardless of the challenge, sustained her throughout her political career. From the moment she decided to run for office, she characterized her political efforts and milestones as being part of the greater scheme of things. She insisted that she would always overcome the challenges she faced because she has accepted her “God-given mission” (Vol. III, p. 11). The aforementioned challenges highlight the struggles embodied in the informants’ climb to the top. Their career development is characterized by high intelligence, personal commitment to career, persistence, ability, some luck, and self-confidence.

**Conclusions**

This research addressed two questions: (a) What factors have motivated the career choice of African American congresswomen? and (b) Are there common factors that influence African American women toward careers in politics?

The extraordinary careers of the research subjects attest to their personal experiences and motivations, as well as various influences they received from family, friends, and their spiritual relationship with the Heavenly Father. Despite the reality that each informant has endured racial and gender discrimination relative to her ability to effectively serve politically, all three political records are remarkable. The strength and affirmations of these legislators have been motivated and influenced by their sheer desire to make positive political change in the lives of their constituents and in the lives of the citizens of the State of Michigan, in general.
Factors that have motivated the career choice of Senator Dora Morethansome, Representative Anna Flagstarr, and Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford include their belief that they could contribute to positive change relative to the political process. Each of the three informants also elected to serve politically because they felt that public political service allowed them to pursue their God-given calling and reach their career potential. Common factors that influenced the three informants toward a career in politics include the support they received from family, support from friends, and their spiritual convictions.

African American women with the professional goal of becoming elected officials have been faced with amazing career odds. According to Clayton and Stallings (2000), African American women have often been labeled unsuitable for political service. This vicarious socialization in some instances has shaped their career choice and behavior.

Bandura (1956), a noted researcher on the theory of human behavior, sets forth the premise that individuals are vicariously socialized or motivated upon observing the behavior of others. In the instances where vicarious punishment occurs, that sends a signal that various actions are not acceptable or tolerated actions, and behaviors that are reinforced indicates favor and acceptance. Reactionary behaviors may not occur immediately but become evident as situations permit.

Undoubtedly, these congressional leaders' preference to serve politically is significant to the democratic election process. Their career experiences symbolically pose the question of our system of representative governance in terms of whether or not America's political institutions are now open to political influences from a class of
persons that was once regarded and treated as being “of an inferior order and altogether unfit to associate with either socially or politically” (Haynie, 2001, p. 16).

The political experiences highlighted by the three research informants reiterate statements made relative to the theory of attribution. According to Dweck (1986) and Weiner (1980), attribution plays a decisive role in how people make choices and behavior. The informants’ political experiences can be seen as reactionary to events that triggered a particular behavior. Beliefs resulting from cultural practices and/or behavior have some merit and validity about the world though they may not be endorsed scientifically.

Motivation for Senator Dora Morethansome’s political service stems from the need to take a stand on behalf of those who are incapable of taking an informed political position. In acknowledging her passion to help others she revealed that she too was once ignorant of various political aspects of life. Upon gaining insight she became an advocate for “the least of the children” (Vol. I, p. 13), individuals who required political and other forms of nourishments.

Legislator Anna Flagstarr’s childhood and young adulthood experiences urged and influenced her political decisions. Her political career disposition has been wanting to change what she sees as controllable events. A particular experience that still stands emotionally in the forefront of career choice is the bitter experience she had that resulted in the loss of her twin sister who died at a very young age.

Senator Christi Peoples-Stanford’s professional career experiences, which for the most part occurred prior to her actually becoming an elected official, fueled her desire to
seek political change. She had “fought against unfair disadvantage” for the school
district in which she served (Vol. III, p. 8).

The various challenges and political career obstacles these informants
encountered are unlike those of their political counterparts. Historical election patterns
attest to the political double disadvantage that African American women suffer from
being female and Black (Baxter & Lansing, 1981; Carroll, 1994; Carroll & Stallings,
political dilemma, stated,

As a minority within a minority, black women face sexual discrimination as well as
racial discrimination by voters who expect African American women to represent
only a narrow constituency. African American women are often considered or treated
as invisible in today’s political arenas. Their good deeds seem to fade into the larger
groups of either Blacks or women in general. African American women must
struggle to overcome negative image stereotyping that portrays them. (p. 126)

Despite this fact, these African American women legislators rose against great
odds to achieve their highest potential, thus refuting Maslow’s claims in his Need
Hierarchy theory. In addition, according to Attribution theory, these women who did not
initially have natural political ability demonstrated the value of effort to the success of
difficult endeavors.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

This research project is by no means a comprehensive study on motivations and
influences of African American women legislators in that it reflects only three case
studies. This can be viewed as a baseline or starting point for examining the phenomenon
of political cultural experiences in the context of a greater political society and/or culture.
I believe that further research questions will contribute to or enhance collective understanding of political career interest of African American women legislators:

1. Has the growing presence of African American women representatives in state legislatures resulted in a greater African American influence in state policy making? Have African American women legislators had an impact on political process and products, and if so, how?

2. Have African American women legislators become more integrated or incorporated into the legislative process over time?

3. How does gender shape the political experience?

4. Given the fact that this study refuted aspects of both Attribution theory and Maslow's Need Hierarchy theory, further study of these phenomena among African American women legislators is warranted.

Contemplating questions and/or issues as those suggested above could significantly contribute relative to the nature and consequences of the African American women's presence in state legislatures. An analysis of research data from the above recommended inquiries could result in future attempts to develop theories of African American elite behavior, in general, and African American legislators' behavior, in particular.
June 2005

Dear Congresswoman,

I am writing to seek your participation in a qualitative research study. This study is part of the research requirements for the completion of a Ph.D. degree at Andrews University – School of Education. The purpose of the study is to gain better insights in regards to motivational influences and political career choice of African American Michigan State Congresswomen. The study will be conducted during July and August 2005, using interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes per session - there will two (2) interview sessions per participant. Be assured, no hazard or risk are associated with the interviews. Due to the lack of research on this specific topic the significance of your participation in the study will be invaluable and greatly appreciated.

All information gathered from the study will be kept confidential, data will be used for research purpose only and your identity will be protected by use of a pseudonym. Your consent is voluntary, and you may withdraw from participating in the interview at any time without prejudice. If you are willing to participate in this study, please sign and date below. A self-addressed envelope is provided for your use.

Should you have any questions concerning this research study please feel free to contact me at (313) 865-6532 or (Home Email: VisionGOZA@AOL.Com). You may also contact my Dissertation Committee Chair, Dr. Bernard at (269) 471-6702. Any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, your participation in the proposed study, please contact Andrews University’s Institutional Review Board at (269) 471-6088.

I would appreciate if you could return the signed letter within seven (7) calendar days after receiving it. The returned letter will indicate your willingness to participate in the research. Please keep a copy for your records. A summary of the findings will be made available to you upon request.

Thank you for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

Rogenia Goza
Doctoral Candidate

Signature ______________________  Print Name Here _____________________  Date ________________

Please send me a report on the results of this research project.  Yes ___ No ___
Purpose of Interview(s):

The purpose of our interviews is for you to share your views of what you believe motivated your career choice to serve as an elected official in the State of Michigan Congress. The results of the interviews will be held confidential. Your anonymity will be protected, and upon your request will be made available to you.

Initial Interview Schedule of Questions:

1. Please tell me what motivated your decision to enter the political arena?

2. What experiences would you say prepared you for your political career?

3. What career challenges did you encounter, and how did you overcome them?

4. Tell me about your experiences while seeking election.

5. What individuals encouraged and supported your decision to serve in the Michigan State congress?

6. What guidance would you share with individuals seeking a political career?
REFERENCES


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Education:

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1988  Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA)
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1996 – present:  Inventory Logistics Manager
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1995 – 1996:  Product Manager
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Department of the Army
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Professional Memberships:

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- Federally Employed Women
- National Association of Female Executives
- SisterPower Incorporate
- Toastmasters International Incorporate

Honors:

2006 Phi Kappa Phi – Educational Honor Society
2006 Community Service Award – Michigan Senate and House of Representatives
2006 Community Service Recognition Award – Motor City Operation Reachback
2000 Pi Lambda Theta – Educational Honor Society
1992 Toastmaster of the Year
1988 Dean’s List – Academic Honors

Certificates:

1996 Certified Mediator
1995 Advanced Competent Toastmaster (ATM)
1993 Competent Toastmaster (CTM)
1989 Notary Public

Publications:

Managing change through goal setting. NICE Journal of the Center for International Studies (Sao Paulo, Brazil), June 2001, p. 71-76.