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# From Bonding to Bridging: Using the Immunity to Change (ITC) Process to Build Social Capital and Create Change

Froswa' Booker-Drew

*Antioch University - PhD Program in Leadership and Change*

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FROM BONDING TO BRIDGING: USING THE IMMUNITY TO CHANGE (ITC) PROCESS  
TO BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CREATE CHANGE

FROSWA' BOOKER-DREW

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Ph.D. in Leadership and Change Program  
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in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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This is to certify that the Dissertation entitled:

FROM BONDING TO BRIDGING: USING THE IMMUNITY TO CHANGE (ITC) PROCESS  
TO BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CREATE CHANGE

prepared by

Froswa' Booker-Drew

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in  
Leadership and Change.

Approved by:

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Jon Wergin, Ph.D., Chair date

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Laurien Alexandre, Ph. D., Committee Member date

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Richard McGuigan, Ph. D., Committee Member date

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Judith Jordan, Ph. D., External Reader date

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## **Abstract**

A group of diverse women from various ethnic, religious, socio-economic and generations were brought together over the course of four months to determine if the Immunity to Change (ITC) process (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) would create bridging social capital as well as individual change. The group sessions included a process of assigned readings, discussions, and completion of ITC maps allowing women to reveal their identities and journeys through the sharing of their personal narratives. As a result, many experienced perception transformation regarding issues of gender, leadership, race, and class. The dissertation explores topics of power and privilege, relational leadership, and relational cultural theory in women. The electronic version of this Dissertation is at OhioLink ETD Center, [www.ohiolink.edu/etd](http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd)

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **The Research Question**

In my personal and professional life, I often hear conversations that allude to the belief that women irrespective of race, class, and faith cannot work together. Because of my interest in social capital and relationships, I am intrigued by the way women connect with one another. In the current state of research on women, there are limited studies that look at groupings of diverse women and the way they build relationships with those who are different. These observations, conversations and the theoretical knowledge of scholars on several of the topics I am interested in exploring have resulted in a number of questions that I would like to research: How do diverse women build relationships with one another inside and outside of the workplace? Are the social networks of diverse women hindering their ability to build bridging social capital? What are the challenges for women creating individual change? What role does relational leadership play in the interactions of diverse female leaders?

### **Researcher's Stance**

This work is important to me because of my role in community development as a woman and as a person of color. Working in diverse communities, I find that women are often in silos, only collaborating with those who have similar backgrounds. After my trip to India in 2008, I became increasingly interested in the work of women in creating change. I recognize that for women of color, intersectionality is a serious component and that diversity goes beyond just race to also include class, education, socio-economic status, and other variables. Intersectionality is defined as “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations” (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). The concept of intersectionality was coined in the early 1990s by legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (1991), whose research explores the

categories of race, gender, class, ability, and sexual orientation that often shape the employment, political, and structural experiences that women of color encounter, especially African American women. These layers can possibly impact their ability to build both bonding and bridging social capital. The circumstances that women of color deal with impact their worldview and the way they form relationships with those who are similar and different (bonding and bridging social capital). In my research, social capital is more than a transaction—it is about the creation of relationships that contribute to the well-being of women through the sharing of stories, ultimately helping women develop both personally and professionally.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Despite the perception that women are more relational than men, men are more relational in the workplace (Van Emmerik, 2006). Because women often have limited networks in the workplace and other sectors of their experiences, these factors affect women's access to the same employment, political, or economic opportunities as men, a circumstance that is further explored in the literature review. For women to build networks, it is important that they acknowledge the role of social structures limiting their social capital. In Moore's (1990) research, variables such as education, income, and employment were associated with the size of one's network. The composition of one's network was determined by the status of their employment as well. Full-time employment limited women's networks of family members. Ties to non-relatives were higher for those in professional positions or highly educated.

Men's experiences in the workplace are noticeably different from those of women. For instance, "White men are more likely to mobilize ties deemed to affect positive employment outcomes and experience labor market advantages because of their greater access to influential ties" (S. S. Smith, 2000, p. 529). Forret and Dougherty (2004) have completed extensive research

on the topic of networking and gender, acknowledging the fact that “Women have historically lacked access to important organizational contacts” (p. 419). They go on to explain that this limited access has challenged women’s ability to build social capital and ultimately move into positions of authority. In their research they found that in the workplace “men engaged in more socializing behavior than women” (p. 421). Although women are not socializing as much at work as men according to the aforementioned research, women realize that having a diverse network, as well as having mentors to support them, is important to their careers (Peterson, 2012).

There is still an impact for women in their homes and communities as they build social capital and relationships. Women provide more emotional aid than men. Women will support one another especially around childcare even if the women are not close (Wellman & Wortley, 1990). As mothers, parenting expands one’s social network with family and friends because of support. Parents are engaged in community activities more because of their children. Children can serve as connectors for their parents but can also decrease one’s ability to connect with higher status individuals if they are not already in the network. Women are restricted more than men in social capital often due to their responsibilities as the primary caregiver. This is especially the case for those who are single women with children (Song, 2012).

Marital status also plays a part in the establishment of social networks, as Ravanera and Rajulton (2010) observed:

Married mothers stand out as different from women in all other categories in that their friends are most similar to them in terms of income, education, and age. Lone mothers, and never married and divorced or separated women not living with children have friends that are more ethnically diverse. Lone mothers do not have as extensive a network—informal or through organizations—to fall back on as mothers in intact families have. (p. 63)

For women of color, the challenges are compounded. Because people of color are not in the majority of occupying positions of leadership in organizations, “the assumption follows that

People of Color ‘lack’ the social and cultural capital required for social mobility” (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). The author further elaborated that the issue at stake is the definition of knowledge and who determines its value. For women in communities of color, their “knowing” has often been excluded or only included in the stories of their own communities. It is important for all of these stories collectively to be shared for the purpose of building new relationships, learning, and creating change. Yosso (2005), paraphrasing the work of Marago, stated, “Without an emotional, heartfelt grappling with the source of our own oppression, without naming the enemy within ourselves and outside of us, no authentic, non-hierarchical connection among oppressed groups can take place” (pp. 52-53). Until women began to share their stories and explore the intersections of gender, race, class, religion, and culture, we are unable to build bridges to one another to heal and change stories on an individual, collective, and organizational level.

The concept of intersectionality forces a focus on the role of power and privilege in relationships. Privilege creates access. Until we are able to recognize that some individuals are afforded opportunities because of their social status, as a society we will not be in a position to identify and address those barriers that make upward mobility available for all.

These differences not only impact relationships on an individual and community level but are a part of the workplace. As women assume more leadership positions, the world becomes more global, and conflicts arise because of the increased interactions that produce misunderstandings, it is imperative to examine the challenges that keep women from building relationships with those who are different. When we work, we bring all of our experiences, backgrounds, and worldviews to the job and if we fail to recognize this, we are limiting the organization’s possibilities and potential as well as that of those we employ.

Change is often desired but also feared. Change, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, is defined as making something different. Just as organizations go through “operational, strategic, cultural and political changes” (Lorenzi & Riley, 2000, p. 120), individuals also experience change. In many situations that we are attempting to change, we adopt a technical solution for an adaptive problem. Typically, we are accustomed to solving problems with a solution that draws upon the information we have at hand. The problem is that some challenges require that we change in the way we think or in our belief system. “Adaptive change is distressing for the people going through it. They need to take on new roles, new relationships, new values, new behaviors, and new approaches to work” (Heifetz & Laurie, 1997, p. 124). We seek an easy fix, not recognizing that if it were truly so easy, change would have occurred already. “Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people’s priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties” (Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009, p. 20). Heifetz (1994) distinguished adaptive and technical problems with three types of scenarios:

- Type 1—An individual has a problem and can go to someone to fix the problem. For instance, if my mouse on my computer stops working, I can take it to a professional in the computer service industry to either repair or replace it.
- Type 2—The solution is not definable although the problem is well identified. An example, an organization is losing funding. It is clear that funding is disappearing but there could be several challenges that could contribute to this issue—poor marketing materials, donor base is tapped into repeatedly, or even a challenging economy.
- Type 3—Both the problem and the solution are multi-faceted and present a number of variables. Issues such as poverty and other social ills often fall into this category. There are no easy answers and problems often stem from other issues.



Understanding these scenarios assists with having a better understanding of the changes that people experience and levels of complexity that are involved in change on an individual, organizational, collective or even systemic level. Distinguishing between first and second order level change helps explain the depth of change. First order level change is taken in steps that do not impact the system whereas second level change is viewed as “deep change.” Based on the initial work of Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974), the theory has expanded to include another definition called “middle order change.” Coined by Golembiewski, Billingsley, and Yeager (1976), the term reflects that a decision that creates some change greater than the first order but its impact is limited.

External influences can impact a person’s perception of their ability to create change in their circumstances. Rotter’s (1966) work on Locus of Control states that individuals have two beliefs—that either there are forces outside of themselves that impact their outcomes (external locus of control) or that one’s hard work can control their outcomes (internal locus of control); locus of control can affect the way women, especially women of color, experience change in the workplace or within society at large. According to Ng, Sorenson, and Eby (2006), internal locus of control contributes to emotional well-being, motivation, and behavior toward identifying situations in which they can exert personal control. They also typically have more social support and integration in the workplace. Individuals with external locus of control orientation tend to deal with “role overload, role conflict, role ambiguity, and work-family conflict” (p. 1062). Holvino (2010) stated that in order for relational changes to occur in individuals or within society, there has to be an understanding of the differences that women of color experience in terms of the categories listed below. Women of color have a different consciousness and a different way of knowing. Women of color must exist in several worlds—one of their

community and the mainstream society. It is not either/or but a dual consciousness to understanding the norms, rules, and expectations of the groups they encounter. W. E. B. DuBois coined the phrase, “Double Consciousness” in the book *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) and stated, “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world” (p. 3). Although DuBois was observing the experience of African Americans in the early 20th century, his observation continues to apply to the life journeys of those who are people of color as they wrestle with inequities because of their differences.

Women of color have typically worked due to their social and financial status (Holvino, 2010). The ability to stay home and rear children was uncommon. Serving in low-wage jobs, they were often rearing the children of more wealthy counterparts in the past. Today, even with the changes in laws forbidding discrimination, women in general and particularly those of color face challenges in receiving equitable pay. Women of color are often the head of households with 61% of African American mothers in 2012 listed as single (Wang, Parker, & Taylor, 2013). According to the Center for American Progress (2013),

The wages of working women and particularly the wages of women of color continue to lag behind the pay of their male counterparts. Moreover, for women of color there is a double pay gap. As a group, women of color earn less than their white female peers—a reality that means they need to work longer to earn the same pay as white women and then even longer to match the earnings of white men. The gender- and race-based wage gap affects families of color with long-term consequences that hinder wealth accumulation. Women currently make up about half of all workers in the U.S. labor force and among mothers in the labor force the majority are either breadwinners or share that responsibility with a partner. In 2010, 13.1 percent of women in the workforce were black, 4.7 percent were Asian, and 12.8 percent were Latina. What’s more, these women of color are increasingly the breadwinners in their families—53.3 percent of black households and 40.1 percent of Latino households. (p. 1)

The out-group status of African American women and other women of color often limits their ability to have opportunities for “career enhancing work” and as a result fewer opportunities

become available for advancement. Lack of access to social networks can impact the ability for career mobility due to gender and race (Combs, 2003).

As Holvino (2010) so aptly stated, “Men are not the enemy and family is not necessarily the problem” (p. 252). In communities of color, men also face the challenges of racism, classism, and even sexism. As a result, women in these communities typically connect to those men and their struggles. Men are not often seen as the oppressor and those structures and political systems are viewed as the problem. Families serve as a source of support. The idea of the nuclear family is often not the reality as extended family members and even close friends are considered a part of the family circle. European and Western cultures are very individualistic with a tendency to focus on the needs of self and personal achievement (Rothwell, 2010). This is different in most communities of color and is a balancing act for those who are from cultures that are collective but reside in a larger system that is individualistic.

In her landmark work “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” McIntosh (1988) offered a list of the opportunities that are afforded white men and women because of their life experiences. Ranging from social situations, employment, housing, and accommodations, her list highlights the advantages that some are provided because of skin color. Despite the commonalities in gender, it is important to note that white women and women of color have differences in those situations not only limited to race but class as well. Current statistics show the differences that persist, even in compensation:

Lifetime earnings are even lower for women of color because they face higher levels of unemployment and poverty rates. In March 2013 unemployment rates of black and Latina women were significantly higher than their white counterparts at 12.2 percent and 9.3 percent respectively compared to white women at 6.1 percent. According to the National Women’s Law Center, poverty rates among women, particularly women of color, remain historically high and unchanged in the last year. The poverty rate among women was 14.6 percent in 2011—the highest in the last 18 years. For black and Latina women that same

year, the poverty rate was 25.9 percent and 23.9 percent, respectively. (Center for American Progress, 2013, p. 1)

To create change, dialogue must occur to reach understanding. It is imperative to bring women of various life experiences, ethnicities, and socio-economic statuses together to evaluate the barriers that keep women who are different from connecting. In sharing the journeys and stories of one another, there is an opportunity for women to become educated about those differences as well as their similarities, bridge social capital, make changes in their social networks, and share resources that create collaborations. Heifeitz and Laurie (1997) stated, “solutions to adaptive challenges reside...in the collective intelligence” (p. 126). Bringing together a diverse group of women using the Immunity to Change (ITC) model (Kegan & Lahey, 2009) serves as a tool to tap into the collective intelligence of the women to do the following:

- a. Expand the definition of social capital to address ways to understand and develop marginalized women not represented in current research discourse. This work will expand the perception of social capital for groups whose stories are not in the literature.
- b. Determine the ways in which bridging social capital is created between diverse women.
- c. Examine the role of the ITC process of helping diverse women identify barriers to change individually and with other women.
- d. Explore the role of relational leadership theories (i.e., Relational Cultural Theory) in the way women leaders build networks with others.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Existing research, reviewed in Chapter II, evaluates social capital/networks, race, and gender in a number of contexts. Several of the studies are conducted in countries other than the United States, and there is a need for more studies on diverse women as a group and social

capital. Understanding how women with different social experiences connect is imperative in order to build stronger workplace environments and create more cohesion in communities with consistently changing demographics.

One of the challenges to the current research is the very term social capital, which denotes transaction, implying that relationships are only beneficial if they provide some gain to employment or financial success. In the article, “Social Capital as Dehumanizing Terminology” by Taormina, Kuok, and Wei (2012), the authors asserted that social networking is actually a better term because it has a history that is definable and can be measured much more easily. As a result of the research of S. S. Smith and Kulynych (2002), the term “social capacity” is probably most appropriate in evaluating mutually beneficial relationships between individuals and in a society. They stated, “the term *social capital* has consequences for... the unspoken assumptions, connotations, and taken-for-granted beliefs about capitalism” (p. 175).

Relationships are more than financial gain but can create stability and cohesiveness. This suggests that the goal is not to increase the number of business cards one has but to create high quality connections that result in transformed lives and communities. After speaking with Dr. Pedro Noguera, Peter L. Agnew Professor of Education at New York University, I was reminded that social capital is about resources and ultimately about bridging these resources between communities, especially for those that lack the connections to those resources.

Bolman and Deal (2003) examined four frames that leaders should use to evaluate situations: political, symbolic, human relations, and structural. I believe these frames must be taken into account as social capital and networks are explored. Structural and political challenges keep individuals who are diverse from connecting. Institutional oppression is defined as

a system of invisible barriers limiting people based on their membership in unfavored social identity groups. The barriers are only invisible to those 'seemingly' unaffected by it. The practice of institutionalized oppression is based on the belief in inherent superiority or inferiority. Institutionalized oppression is a matter of result regardless of intent. (Cheney, LaFrance, & Quinteros, 2006, p. 1)

Those individuals who are in the out-groups have limited access to building networks with those who are often in positions of power because of the barriers that race, class, and gender often create for the marginalized. In Damaske's (2009) article, "Brown Suits Need Not Apply," corporations that are only seeking students from predominately white colleges for employees reflect a greater issue in network building, namely that marginalized students are further limited by not having access to networks due to perception. If organizations do not see the impact of power and privilege on the function of cultural contexts and systems, it will be challenging to create opportunities for bridging social capital and establishing strong ties between diverse individuals. Networks that are diverse help people reach other social realms and avoid redundant information (Renzulli, Aldrich, & Moody, 2000).

Understanding the role of marginalization is critical to fully measuring social capital. It is essential to use this information to enlighten and share its impact on certain individuals and communities that are often unable to obtain the gains of those in positions of power. There is often a lack of a historical context tied to the research on social capital to demonstrate why individuals who lack power and privilege are often disconnected and polarized from social networks and circles of influence that can impact their financial and upward mobility.

Although much of the research focuses on either gender or race exclusively, there seems to be limited research on mixed groups and their social networks. Does gender or race play more of a role in an ethnically diverse group or are there other dynamics? Evaluating the role of social networks in an ethnically diverse group of women should offer a glimpse into the implications

for bonding social capital. The issue of social capital and capacity and the role of women reside not only in organizations but also in communities.

According to Warren, Thompson, and Saegert (2001), our public life can be transformed in a positive direction by learning from women in the community-building movement:

The strategies and approaches women have developed are diverse...they emphasize relationship building, holistic approaches that integrate public and private spheres, and efforts to strengthen families and communities. Such approaches can help us find a greater sense of common purpose with which to temper the clash of interests that dominates in the political realm. (p. 21)

One of the challenges in this work around women and social capital/networks are certain sweeping generalizations such as the assumption that women have limited social capital in the business realm but more in their personal and community relationships, especially concerning those who are marginalized. Women who are poor do have social networks through social service agencies, their houses of worship, and childcare networks. To avoid social isolation, women in low-income communities typically become involved as “community caretakers” (Warr, 2006, p. 516). Women can connect beyond the traditional networks of familial relationships. The challenge is the lack of available research studying women who are marginalized but have made diverse networks work for them and ultimately use these networks to help others and transform the lives of those they encounter. “In sum, social networks differ in terms of the resources they yield and their constraint or facilitation of individual’s opportunities” (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003, p. 112). Although this is not my focus, future research must begin to focus on how women can begin to build relationships with men to build their social capacity from a perspective that goes beyond establishing legitimacy or sponsorship from a man. One prerequisite of system thinking is to pay attention to all variables at work. The challenge for social integration is the creation of opportunities for diverse individuals to connect. Without

these opportunities to dialogue, social structures will not change, and our identities in the way we connect to others will also suffer. We will not see our greatness until we are able to recognize it both in others who are like us and in those who are different. The expectation that individuals do not bring their life circumstances to the workplace is illogical and detrimental. It is when we bring all of who we are that we can be our reflected best selves. According to Roberts, Dutton, Spreitzer, Heaphy, and Quinn (2005),

Reflected Best Self is based on past experiences and guides the processing of personally relevant information generated in the social world... [and] is based on qualities and characteristics that the person currently has, as opposed to those a person wishes or hopes to possess. (pp.717-718)

When people are unable to share themselves because of oppressive structures that benefit one group over another, we all lose the sharing of experiences that could result in a significant gain or positive change in behavior, knowledge, or skills. Dialogue is a step for creating change.

Meaningful dialogue in this sense requires a critical deconstruction of ideological constraints operating on the existing consensus on interests and needs. This is particularly essential for race dialogue. Race dialogue is not only a struggle over competing interests; it is also, and perhaps more fundamentally, a struggle over competing realities. Certainties, convictions, and assumptions are essential to understanding dialogue, if for no other reason than the fact that they are rarely reflected on, problematized or questioned. When there are major differences in perspective, however, communicative action becomes difficult and problematic, requiring interpretation, discourse, reflection and mutual critique in order to create a shared social world. Dialogue then asks for three things:

- (1) a critical and reflective understanding of one's own world;
- (2) an empathetic grasping of the world of the other; and
- (3) the shared building of a joint world, based on an undistorted social Consensus. (Kersten, 2000, pp.238-239)

It is important to note the work of Mary Belenky (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), which focused on the ways in which women understand knowledge and authority. This taxonomy is helpful in understanding the way women might also connect to one another. Called “ways of knowing,” the categories are as follows:



- Silence—Women in this phase do not feel as if they have a voice. They “see themselves as remarkably powerless and dependent on others for survival” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 28).
- Received Knowledge—Women listen to the thoughts of others but are afraid to share their perspective. They find their thoughts similar to those around them and relationships are extremely important in this phase. They “listen to others for direction as well as for information” (p. 40). They receive information but they are not the creators of the information.
- Subjective Knowledge—Women look within themselves for answers. They see their experiences as valuable and have their constructed perspective becomes emergent.
- Procedural Knowledge—Women begin to question in this phase and accept various ways of seeing and understanding the world. They “engage in conscious, deliberate, systematic, analysis” (p. 93).
- Constructed Knowledge—Women “integrate knowledge...they felt...personally important with knowledge they had learned from others” (p. 134) In this stage, women are constantly reevaluating, reviewing, and revising what they have experienced and learned, constructing a new way of knowing and understanding.

There is some similarity in the work of Belenky and the mindsets that are mentioned in Kegan and Lahey’s *Immunity to Change* (2009), which I further explain in Chapter II. The categories mentioned by Belenky are important to recognize because these stages of knowing for women are critical in the way they develop voice and ultimately connect to one another. In sharing knowledge through dialogue, new knowledge can be created together.

In order to create change, we have to become aware of the challenges to change. Barriers such as structural oppression, exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness (Young, 2009) exist not only in systems but also as individuals in the sense that our own thinking and prejudices keep us from connecting. Most people, if given the option to live in a world free of conflict, would easily choose that option. Despite our desires, we remain unable to solve these problems that threaten the very fabric of our communities.

In the work of Argyris and Schön (1974), the authors demonstrate that each person reacts to various circumstances as a result of a mental map in their mind that serves as a guide to their thoughts and actions. We may actually believe that we will respond to a situation with a particular response (espoused theory), but in actuality, we may do something else based on the mental maps (theory in use) in our minds (Pearn, Mulrooney, & Payne (1998). People want to change but the mental maps that are operating often prevent us from doing so. Technical solutions will not remedy this challenge. The adaptive solution of changing our way of thinking will address the mental maps that are a compilation of experiences and thoughts designed to protect us.

The immunity to change process is an opportunity to examine the coat of self-protection our minds have created and although well-intended, the layers must be peeled back to see what is really going on. Just as our body creates antibodies to protect us from foreign objects, our minds protect us from dealing with the uncertainty that change can bring. At one point, it was adaptive and becomes maladaptive as it is a part of our immunity to change. In the book, *Immunity to Change* (2009), Kegan and Lahey provide a road map on ways in which individuals can become aware of their own immunity to creating change. The process includes identifying the area of desired improvement, a list of behaviors that go against the completion of the goal, competing

commitments (underlying commitments that a person has which demonstrates how the goal is being avoided), and big assumptions (the perceived pain that would be felt if the change actually occurred). The “immunity map helps us all to see not just how things are at the moment, but why they are this way, and what will actually need to change in order to bring about any significant new results” (Kegan & Lahey, 2009, pp. 674-676). The immunity to change process starts with identifying an improvement goal. The improvement goal is something that the individual feels is important to change, something that requires more than a technical solution; otherwise, it could be solved. Instead, this is something that requires a change in a person’s way of thinking. The second step in the process is to determine what is being done or not done toward the goal. A worry box is created that allows individuals to analyze the emotions that are apparent if the goal is achieved.

Even as they hold a sincere commitment to change, many people are unwittingly applying productive energy toward a hidden *competing commitment*. The resulting dynamic equilibrium stalls the effort in what looks like resistance but is in fact a kind of personal immunity to change. (Kegan & Lahey, 2001, p. 85)

After identifying the competing commitment, the big assumption is then examined. Big assumptions are the preventers of change. It is the internal dynamic that keeps us from moving forward with our improvement goals.

In conducting the process previously, I have discovered the facilitator of an ITC process must be willing to listen. It is not about you or your perceptions. It is about being present. The facilitator must be comfortable with the space and silence that sometimes appears without warning. The mood might change from something very light hearted to a much deeper conversation. The facilitator must be very comfortable with asking open-ended questions to get the participant to share. You must be willing to dig deeper when necessary. The facilitator must

also be aware of human behavior. The goal is not to be an expert in every situation but to know when to dig deeper because we have exhausted everything on the surface.

My study will thus contribute a new body of research on this topic. Using this process will help women identify the challenges that keep them from connecting and begin a dialogue on how they can make changes individually and collectively. It will be worthwhile to determine the competing commitments that keep women from connecting and their big assumptions as to why this does not occur more often. Ultimately, the increase of social capital for women helps the status of women (Caiazza & Putnam, 2005).

### **Research Design**

Action research is a method that will allow women to share, discuss, and plan, thus allowing all voices to be heard and each woman to be present. Action research challenges how we see the world and the process encourages the researcher to put on a pair of glasses that might not be her own but can offer a different view. It forces one to evaluate positionality as well as the role of power and privilege in communities. The researcher cannot negate the power and privilege she or he brings to the experience. This, too, must be noted. The collaborative process of action research is open between the researcher and the participants. It levels the playing field—the participants and/or community that was once researched are now contributing to the research—and thus the hierarchical approach ceases to exist in this context. The participants bring their experiences, backgrounds, and ways of knowing to the process. Action Research creates the opportunity for reflection by the participants in their ability to analyze the findings as well as decide how they will interpret and implement their discoveries. “The reflective process is directly linked to action, influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships” (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006, p. 854).

## **Dissertation Structure by Chapter**

The dissertation has five sections. The four chapters following this one include:

- Chapter II—Literature Review: 1) research on social capital and women; 2) research on diverse women and relational leadership theories; 3) The role of race and gender in social capital; and 4) Kegan and Lahey’s work on immunity to change.
- Chapter III—Methodology. Participant recruitment and design of research group sessions.
- Chapter IV—Findings and Discussion. Outcomes from the research group sessions.
- Chapter V—Implications for Leadership and Change. Significance and limitations of the dissertation research, suggestions for future research, challenges and possibilities for bridging social capital in women and the role of the ITC process in creating personal change.

## Chapter II: Literature Review

A vast number of definitions explain social capital. Social capital is a resource “made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital” (Bourdieu, 2008, p.281). Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1993) gave the following definition: “Social capital includes trust, norms, and networks of a social organization, and enables improvements to the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (p. 167).

Bourdieu (1986) stated that:

the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected. (p. 51)

According to Lin’s (1999a) *Building a Network Theory of Social Capital*, “social capital can be defined as resources embedded in a social structure which are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions...social capital contains three elements intersecting structure and action: the structural (embeddedness), opportunity (accessibility) and action-oriented (use) aspects” (p. 33). Organizations have social capital just as individuals do. Activated by individuals, social capital is at work in associations and institutions. Just as organizations have culture, they are also framed by the relationships that exist both internally and externally that can either propel the organization’s success or, to the contrary, a lack of relationships can create a decline in sales, productivity, and growth. Social capital exists in the opportunity to connect with others who can offer information or influence.

The definitions of social capital are numerous but all imply the involvement of individuals and/or networks that invest in a relationship that generally creates some type of benefit in the form of knowledge, association, or financial reward. Depending upon the need or

focus, various types of capital are used in our day-to-day interactions to succeed. The challenge is that if individuals do not understand how to build the most basic relationships in order to excel both personally and professionally, they are at a disadvantage, especially in a society dependent on human interaction, whether such interaction is face-to-face or technological. As a result, the need for understanding the impact of social capital is critical in order to have strong business, and to accumulate financial, organizational, cultural, and human capital. Social capital allows us to initiate and generate transactions relationally, empowering individuals to broker for advancement and the growth/well-being of their organization.

### **History of Social Capital**

The concept of social capital is not new and has been referenced since the early 1900s, first appearing in the writings of L. J. Hanifan (1916), a social reformer and state supervisor of rural schools in West Virginia. In 1916, Hanifan had an article published in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* titled “Rural School Community Center,” in which he stated that when neighbors come together they “satisfy their own social needs” and improve “living conditions in the whole community” (p. 130). Hanifan went on to say that these interactions between neighbors ultimately improve “community well-being” (p. 131).

In 1972, Bourdieu (1986) discussed social capital as connected with three dimensions of capital, each with its own relationship to class: economic, cultural, and social. Bourdieu’s concept of social capital emphasized conflicts and the power function in which social relations increase the ability to advance individuals’ interests (Siisiäinen, 2000).

Loury (2005), an economist, used the term social capital in his 1976 dissertation and said in a 2005 lecture,

My first observation is that all human development is socially situated and mediated, i.e., the development of human beings occurs inside social institutions. It takes place between

people in the context of human interactions. These institutions of human association are the places where growth and development occur. (p. 5)

Loury articulated that social capital “encompasses networks of social affiliation among individuals that promote the acquisition of traits and skills valued in the marketplace” (Feinberg & Price, 2004, p. 2).

Coleman (1988) evaluated the impact of social structures on social capital, finding that individuals who have a large number of contacts generally have resources available as needed. He refers to these contacts as “obligations.” Coleman further stated that “social relationships constitute a form of social capital that provides information that facilitates action” (p. S104). According to Lin (1999a), “information, influence, social credential, and reinforcement are all reasons why social capital works or controls” (p. 31). The reality is that most people in our society do not have access to variables like these that can help to change their condition.

In the 1990s, the World Bank (2011) contributed to the existing research on social capital through a research program that elaborated on the concept stating that social capital has five components centered largely on social capital in the context of community development. These include the following:

- Groups and Networks
- Trust and Solidarity
- Collective Action and Cooperation
- Social Cohesion and Inclusion
- Information and Communication

Scholars and practitioners such as Loury, Coleman, and Bourdieu have been instrumental in bringing the concept of social capital to the academic realm, thus contributing significantly to the idea that social capital can be a part of organizational development and even community life.



As can be seen in the treatment of the construct over time, social capital has a number of definitions.

Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone* (2000), examines social capital in a current context. Putnam (2000) recognized that Americans are overwhelmed by their professional and personal responsibilities, which have kept many of us from connecting. He elaborated that the challenge America faces is a lack of relationship-building, which is creating a decline in “civic virtue” (p. 19). Putnam analyzed nearly 500,000 interviews with individuals to determine why social capital has been on the decline in this country. In 2000, he contended that lack of social capital results in the decline of civic involvement and engagement and is detrimental to the functioning of democracy in the United States. Social capital allows individuals to build relationships and access to information and resources, thus keeping people engaged and connected. Putnam built on the theories of some of his predecessors to demonstrate that social capital is vital for societal sustainability.

Social capital is critical to community-building. Onyx, Edwards, and Bullen’s (2007) study of seven communities isolated the following areas to determine if they contributed to social capital:

- A. Community connections
- B. Proactivity/social agency
- C. Trust and safety
- D. Neighborhood connections
- E. Family and friends
- F. Tolerance of diversity

### G. Value of life

### H. Work connections

They discovered that there are several paths for individuals to gain social capital, trust, and social agency (the ability to take initiative and make things happen) and these variables are the most important factors leading to positive results. These connections can result in the other areas mentioned being achieved as well. Social capital can also be “associated with good health, good educational outcomes, lower crime, a stronger community” (Onyx et al., 2007, p. 4).

### **The Dark Side of Social Capital**

For many who do not have access to social networks to advance their opportunities through education and employment, social capital is limited or non-existent. According to Putnam (2000), there is a dark side to social capital. Putnam noted that, “Social inequities may be embedded in social capital. Norms and networks are discriminatory or the networks socially segregated” (p. 358). He further stated that how community is defined determines “who is inside and thus benefits from social capital and who is outside and does not” (p. 358).

Dasgupta and Serageldin (2000) further explored the disadvantages of social capital:

There is a dark side to social capital...gangs and mafia use social capital as the foundation for their organizational structure. Cartels also develop social capital in their effort to keep control over an industry so as to reap more profits than would otherwise be the case. An authoritarian system of government based on military command and use of instruments of force destroys other forms of social capital while building its own. (p. 176)

Social capital has an ability to liberate while at the same time it can be used to help those with privilege and power to continue benefiting from the exclusion of others.

Depending upon the need or focus, various types of capital are used in our day-to-day interactions to succeed. The challenge is that if individuals do not understand how to build the

most basic relationships in order to excel both personally and professionally, they are at a disadvantage, especially in a society dependent on human interaction.

Sociologist James Coleman (1988) stated that social capital is not one thing but is contingent upon a variety of components, two of which include “social structures and the actions of actors in the structure...it exists in the relations among persons” (p. 100). Social capital allows an individual to initiate and generate transactions relationally for advancement and growth in one’s personal and professional life. Networks offer information and resources that are often critical. From a positive perspective, social capital can assist an individual in obtaining contacts for job opportunities. Yet a negative side of this might be, for example, utilizing a connection to the right person to obtain illegal information that can be used for one’s benefit.

As this last example implies, social capital is often used for profit in this society. There is a multitude of networking events in cities across the United States designed to connect individuals with others who can help them in their business ventures. These events are often very homogenized and are not inclusive, serving to exclude individuals from different socio-economic classes, backgrounds, and races. Without access to information and connections, it can be difficult to compete economically. A lack of information via relationships can also limit the potential for organizations to benefit from unique and diverse perspectives. According to Charles Tilly (as cited in Moen, Dempster-McClain, & Walker, 1999), “durable inequality among categories arises because people who hold power in reward- and punishment-allocating organizations solve pressing organizational problems with the distinctions involved, and multiple parties—not all of them powerful—then acquire stakes in those solutions” ( p. 16). These networks can either hold opportunities or prevent others who are different from advancement. “Large, significant inequalities in advantages among human beings correspond mainly to

categorical differences such as black/white, male/female, citizen/foreigner, or Muslim/Jew rather than to individual differences in attributes, propensities or performances” (Tilly, 1998, p. 7).

### **Bonding and Bridging Social Capital: Understanding Marginalization in Social Capital**

Most people find that it is easy to connect to those who are like them, an essential human process known as bonding that occurs not only among individuals, but also connects groups.

Terrion (2006) reported that bonding involves connecting to those who are familiar through such channels as like backgrounds, education levels, and socio-economic status. Everyone desires to belong and feel a sense of purpose.

Mathie and Cunningham (2002) stated that “bonding social capital is evident in the close knit relations of friends and families who can be depended on for basic survival in times of stress” (p. 10). The example of the residents of New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina illuminates the power of bonding. It was not uncommon for individuals who lost everything in the storm to move into the homes of relatives.

In contrast to bonding, bridging is connecting with those who are different (Terrion, 2006) to develop relationships outside of the familiar network. Bridging is important because information can be received from this type of relationship that can benefit both the heterogeneous and homogeneous communities. The challenge with bridging occurs when social segregation limits the transfer of information to different networks.

Tilly (1998) and many others reference the role of bonding and bridging in social networks, recognizing that issues such as gender, race, class, and poverty can create additional challenges. According to Blokland-Potters and Savage (2008),

Bridging social capital can simultaneously create bonding social capital as it defines those “insiders” in comparison to “outsiders” with whom bridges are made. Bridging and bonding social capital become two aspects of one and the same process. Weak ties do not guarantee bridges, and strong ties do not guarantee bonding. (p. 13)

Uphoff (2010) stated that it is important to recognize the impact of structural social capital and cognitive social capital on society. Structural social capital refers to the components that make up society, namely,

the roles, rules, precedents, and procedures as well as a wide variety of networks that contribute to cooperation. Cognitive social capital is the way in which individuals see themselves and their roles in society. These are ideas that are based on the cultural norms, values, attitudes and beliefs that contribute to cooperative behavior. (p. 218)

Quite often people tend to stick together because of the comfort of being with individuals who are from similar backgrounds and who understand the challenges faced by discrimination, racism, and classism. It is also a way to avoid the pain and rejection that sometimes exists from being different. As a result, opportunities for interaction with those who are different is limited if almost non-existent when people segregate themselves.

DiPrete, Gelman, McCormick, Teitler, and Zheng (2011) explained that social isolation is a rarity but social divisions exist due to religious, political, economic, and cultural differences. Social isolation does not allow for the building of social capital because individuals are not connecting or bridging. People tend to stay with the familiar, creating a social identity based on their group or affiliation that often further marginalizes those who are not in positions of power. Challenges like the economy and political differences in the United States and media that often distort the truth create social divisions and keep individuals from connecting with one another.

Marginalization of individuals within communities can create individual and social barriers that ultimately impede growth and opportunities for all involved. Kilpatrick and Falk (2003) shared that if communities do not have the external relationships that can assist with providing support then it becomes difficult to implement change. Two groups are then isolated. Those who could become allies are ultimately isolated from being a resource and the community

that needs help cannot rally supporters. In these instances, ethnocentrism can occur, creating an “us-versus-them” mentality. Zacharakis and Flora (2005) examined another downside to social capital, using the term “cultural reproduction” to refer to instances in which, for example, instead of bringing new individuals to serve on boards, provide guidance, or serve in executive leadership positions, the same leadership structure is perpetuated, thus creating a “good ol’ boys network.” Social capital can turn into cronyism or even nepotism, which can eliminate the opportunity for diversity beyond ethnicity but includes class, sexual orientation, gender, and even perspectives of thought.

Such patterns further point to the fact that in our society, we tend to neglect to consider the impact of privilege. Privilege affects one’s ability to navigate in the world. For instance, wealth allows an individual access to resources and opportunities that are not available to others. Take the example of country clubs, an environment that offers extraordinary access to the opportunities of privilege. In addition to being invited to join or having a family legacy of membership, these clubs exclude individuals who might not have the relationships or the ability to pay the fees that are required for annual membership.

Privilege is not only having access to opportunities but also the ability to have relationships that can reinforce and support this form of power. In Johnson’s book, *Privilege, Power and Difference* (2001), the diversity wheel is used as a reference to show the many differences that individuals have in society, but it is the social construction of these differences that creates distinctions resulting in those who are marginalized and those who are not. Those who count themselves among the privileged are often unable to understand the benefits they have as a result of being in the “in-group,” which can result in various negative characteristics being associated with one’s race (McIntosh, 1988). According to law professor Stephanie Wildman in

the article, “The Persistence of White Privilege” (2005), the term “privilege” remains problematic, since privilege can connote a reward for an earned achievement, as she stated, “White privilege is not earned” (p. 245). Wildman goes on to state that the distribution of products and services, labor, language, and even laws reinforces the role of privilege.

Having social networks can make a difference in one’s ability to go to college, get employment or even avoid severe jail sentencing. The justice system demonstrates the inequities that exist between those who have social capital and those who do not. Understanding these challenges provides clarity on the obstacles that often exist in creating bridging social capital. According to *Jail Inmates at Midyear 2010, Statistical Tables* (Minton, 2011):

- Black non-Hispanic males, with an incarceration rate of 4,749 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents, were incarcerated at a rate more than 6 times higher than white non-Hispanic males (708 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents) and 2.6 times higher than Hispanic males (1,822 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents)
- One in every 300 black females was incarcerated compared to about 1 in every 1,099 white females and 1 in every 704 Hispanic females.

African Americans make up only 13% and Hispanics 16% of the total population in the United States (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). Yet, these groups are incarcerated at a higher rate. Author Michelle Alexander (2010) of the book *The New Jim Crow* stated,

There are more African Americans under correctional control today—in prison or jail, on probation or parole—than were enslaved in 1850, a decade before the Civil War began. As of 2004, more African American men were disenfranchised (due to felon disenfranchisement laws) than in 1870, the year the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified prohibiting laws that explicitly deny the right to vote on the basis of race. (p. 1)

Employment is another area where the lack of access to social networks can result in the inability to climb the corporate ladder or even have the understanding of where the ladder might

be located. The challenge for most people of color can be explained, in my opinion, through the concept of sponsored mobility and contest mobility. Although many would like to believe that the concept of contest mobility is very prevalent in our society—that opportunities are available for all and exist freely—this is not often the case. In Freada Klein’s book, *Giving Notice: Why the Best and Brightest Are Leaving the Workplace and How You Can Help Them Stay* (2007), the author evaluates the myth of meritocracy which is the belief that if an individual works hard, they can get whatever they want. The book through case studies of actual corporate employees demonstrated that no matter how much education and experience an individual might have, there are embedded biases within organizations that can prevent growth and opportunities.

According to the Online Dictionary of Social Sciences (Sponsored Mobility, n.d.),

Sponsored Mobility contrasted with contest mobility, to refer to a method of identifying people at an early age for social advancement and sponsoring, or supporting, them as they prepare for their rise to the top and then guaranteeing them a comfortable position. Similarly, those not so identified are not supported or given opportunity and thus are destined for positions at the bottom of the class structure. (p. 1)

Without an education, it is very difficult to obtain gainful employment. Those with college degrees are often paid more than those who do or do not have high school diplomas. A college education can potentially offer opportunities for career stability and growth but without access to good schools and teachers during K-12 grades, the possibilities become limited.

Privilege is also apparent in income and wealth. “Young whites can often rely on gifts and bequests from family members for transformative assets that help build wealth ... One in four white families receives a bequest upon the death of a relative compared with only one in twenty black families” (Lipsitz, 2006). “The median wealth of white households is 20 times that of black households and 18 times that of Hispanic households, according to a Pew Research Center



analysis of newly available government data from 2009” (Taylor, Kochhar, Fry, Velasco, & Motel, 2011). The study continues to demonstrate the gaps:

- African American households had just \$5,677 in wealth (assets minus debts) in 2009 compared to white households with \$113,149.
- White homeowners property declined from \$115,364 in 2005 to \$95,000 in 2009. The drop for African American homeowners was more significant—from \$76,910 in 2005 to \$59,000 in 2009.

According to Taylor et al. (2011), African Americans, non-citizens, and Hispanics have the greatest poverty rates and the income of African Americans has decreased.

Social capital can either keep an individual in a position of power or a lack thereof can limit opportunities and exposure. Bourdieu (1986) felt that those in power continued to recognize those who were in the same social class, stating, “Thus, for the privileged class, it would be better to have a closed network so that the resources can be preserved and reproduced” (p. 34).

Due to this lack of access to social networks, individuals develop an identity based on their ability to “fit” into groups or make the determination that they are valued due to the ranking society gives to various individuals, communities, or socio-economic groups. Belonging to a group can denote status, especially if the group is viewed as important. For most individuals, the desire is to belong and to seek leaders that reaffirm their worth and purpose. In social identity theory, the term “prototypical leadership” is used to define leaders who follow group norms (Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003). The belief is that the leader has the same needs as the followers and as a result, the leader is motivated by the same ideas and issues that motivate his/her followers. These leaders are often charismatic and their characteristics are viewed as positive.

For individuals that are a part of the “in-group” or “out group,” they develop a social identity around their concept of how they fit, how they see themselves, and how others see them. The way an individual views self can either positively or negatively influence their ability to build relationships effectively with those who are a part of the group or outside of the group. It is even more challenging to build relationships with individuals of the “out-group” if your primary group is viewed as less than and not of value. Examples like these illustrate the ways in which social identities create social categories that can define one’s ability to build social capital.

As mentioned above, however, bridging is offered as an alternative way for individuals to increase access to networks of social capital by developing an identity based on their ability to “fit” into groups. These types of connections often result in a perception that they are valued due to the ranking society gives to various individuals, communities, or socio-economic groups. Belonging to a group can denote even more status if the group is viewed as important.

Bowles and Sethi (2006) examined the role of social segregation and how it can impact the ability for social capital to thrive, noting that a lack of social capital for a marginalized group can have extensive consequences, among them a lack of financial resources. According to Lin’s (1999) social resources theory, “access to and use of social resources (resources embedded in social networks) can lead to better socioeconomic statuses” (p. 35).

Balkundi and Kilduff (2005) suggested that brokerage across social divides (sometimes necessary to create linking ties) may engender distrust rather than gains. In a desire to create social inclusion, quite often groups neglect the process of allowing trust to serve as the building block of a relationship. Without trust and authenticity, social capital cannot flourish. The challenge for individuals who are marginalized is to understand how to obtain access to these networks. Kennan, Hazleton, Janoske, and Short (2008) explained access as “the ability to send

and receive messages as well as the ability to gain entry to networks. Referral indicates the degree to which individuals can access networks through their associations with others” (p. 3). Furthermore, marginalized communities tend to connect with one another and do not often connect beyond their immediate communities. Mathie and Cunningham (2002) pointed out that “the challenge is to provide opportunities for the poor—who tend to depend on bonding social capital—to access and increase their stock of bridging social capital and access institutions independently” (p. 10).

These challenges increase marginalization, especially in the workplace. People of color are often afraid to share their contacts to hiring managers for fear of a bad referral and being further marginalized. Concern for stability and the risk of jeopardizing one’s position are at the root of this caution, which can serve to limit the opportunities for individuals from these diverse networks to obtain employment (Kmec & Trimble, 2009). This further perpetuates racial and class divides, making bonding social capital more difficult to achieve.

The complexity is not just a race issue but creates challenges for women of color based on complexion. Access to social capital for women of color is also subject to racist perceptions of skin color that equate lighter skin with beauty in both African American and Latino communities. Historically, individuals with fairer complexions have been treated more favorably, a phenomenon that often created a color caste systems. As Hunter (2002) observed, “Those who are defined as beautiful are only defined as beautiful in relation to other women who are viewed as ugly” (p. 179).

As the above examples indicate, in order for equality to be fully realized in society, individuals and organizations must bridge social capital. Bridging offers the potential to overcome some of the pitfalls, or “dark sides,” of social capital outlined above. In a reference to

the work of Mathie and Cunningham (2002) wrote that “the full potential of social capital as a community economic engine and as a social and economic equalizer can be realized when bridging social capital links people of different family, ethnic, class, or gender affiliations” (p. 11).

### **Social Network Theory and Social Capital**

Social network theory is more than mathematical formulas to describe relationships. Several recurring terms in the literature are important to understand to define this concept. Social structures are comprised of relationships. Organizations, society, even personal relationships are made up of individuals who are actors. Each relationship has ties that are either weak or strong that connect the relationship and typically provide some type of support, whether it is financial, emotional, or behavioral (Visser & Mirabile, 2004). Relationships are evident in our personal lives as parent/child, siblings, or intimate relationships as well as in our professional lives between employers and employees. In each of these relationships, various dynamics have an effect on interpersonal interactions such as power, attitudes, and behaviors.

Understanding the role of networks and how they function in society is important. Social Network Analysis evaluates relationships and begins to examine the relationships between individuals, groups, and/or organizations. According to Dekker (2001),

The first goal of Social Network Analysis is to visualise communication and other relationships between people and/or groups by means of diagrams. The second goal is to study the factors which influence relationships and to study the correlations between relationships. The third goal is to draw out implications of the relational data, including bottlenecks where multiple information flows funnel through one person or section (slowing down work processes) and situations where information flows does not match formal group structure. The fourth and most important goal of Social Network Analysis is to make recommendations to improve communication and workflow in an organization. (p. 1)

Lin (1999a) suggested that social networks and relations are rooted in social capital. According to Lin, the establishment of social networks can provide individuals access to four elements—“information, influence, social credentials and reinforcement” (p. 31). For instance, the black church has been critical in the African American community as an institution that provides a gathering place, especially during the era of segregation. In this community, essential information regarding jobs and educational opportunities was shared. For example, individuals with the right information could influence a prospective employer on behalf of their church member in the network. This social network reflected the “individual’s accessibility to resources through... social relations” (Lin, 1999a, p. 39), reaffirming their social capital, which would then provide social credentials to the individual for opening the door for their colleague in a manner that in turn reinforced the individual’s clout and identity in the community.

Social capital and social networks are an even greater necessity for women to improve their ability to gain senior roles leadership and positions in government, corporate entities, and on boards of directors. According to *Forbes* (Rosener, 2011), “In the Fortune 500, women hold only 15.7% of board seats... 72% [of board seats are occupied by] white men and 17% women of any color” (p. 1). In addition to the critical need to have an education, the use of networks for access to information and support is an effective tool for overcoming the inequities that exist for women professionally (for example, lower wages and subordinate promotions).

The recent documentary *Miss Representation* (2011) examined the role of women in leadership. According to the film’s website,

While women have made great strides in leadership over the past few decades, the United States is still 90th in the world for women in national legislatures, women hold only 3% of clout positions in mainstream media. The lack of leadership positions held by women in Congress, as CEOs of major Corporations or as members of Corporate Boards in this country is very low considering that women are almost 51% of the population. Only 28.8% of firms in this country are owned by women. (Newsom, 2011, p. 1)

Networks, whether formal or informal, are extremely important for women to overcome these social inequities while at the same time offering support to each other. Wellman, a sociologist and professor at the University of Toronto, has conducted research focused on social networks. Wellman and Wortley (1990) researched community, kinship, social network, and social support analysts in their study on East York, a community in Toronto, Canada, and concluded, “Most relationships provide specialized support. The kinds of support provided are related more to characteristics of the relationship than to characteristics of the network members themselves. Strong ties provide emotional aid, small services, and companionship” (p. 558). Social capital provides more than just the ability to know someone, further offering support to those who are a part of the group. These relationships provide not only expertise or experience but also create an opportunity for psychological support.

Understanding the variety of networks that exist, whether internal or external, equips individuals to have “expert power knowledge of and access to those few powerful others whose words and deeds control resource flows and business opportunities” (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2005, p.423). For women, who are often limited to opportunities by the glass ceiling, networks dominated by men are often difficult to access. Social capital is thus even more critical for the success of women and to the success of the country. As Caiazza and Putnam (2002) pointed out,

Women fare better where civic engagement is greater, and they fare worse where people are isolated and disconnected from their communities. Engaging more women in civic and political participation may be a crucial tool for advancing their status more generally—and improving women’s status may be important to improving the overall civic health of the country. (p. 6)

For women, social capital is not only built through organizational structures but also exists in individual networks. Individual social capital is acquired in two areas: social support and social leverage. Social support is achieved through close relationships that assist with life

needs such as childcare and emotional support, whereas social leverage allows an individual to “change their opportunity structure” (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003, p. 113). These relationships are critical for a woman’s personal and professional journey.

According to Briggs (2002), diverse networks can produce ties that are strong and reach beyond race, socio-economic status, and color:

Urbanites are generally less trusting than counterparts living in more socially homogeneous suburbs and rural towns. But partly through wider exposure, city dwellers are also more likely to have diverse social ties and, through those ties, to extend trust to and engage in rich exchanges with particular members of out-groups. (p. 21)

For a poor woman or a woman of color, opportunities for these connections seldom exist if they are not presented, especially if one resides in an area that might be segregated based on race or class. It is even more difficult to pursue these relationships if the demands from family require additional responsibilities such as extensive household duties or childcare. In addition, in-group pressures and expectations can create serious obstacles (e.g., comments such as “no one like you can do that”) to upward mobility. Gender stereotyped perceptions that women do not have the ability to take on more challenging opportunities can also hinder a woman’s chances of establishing new networks. These limitations affect women in the workplace, in politics, and in other arenas of life due to a general lack of access to influential and diverse networks necessary to building their social capital.

### **Impact of Technology on Social Capital**

The advent of social media has created an opportunity for individuals to use technology to connect online for socializing and the sharing of information. Technology has not only been used to report news immediately but has been a tool to create social and political movements. This is evident after the revolutions that have occurred in Egypt, Libya, and other countries around the globe due to the use of Facebook and Twitter. Bossone (2011) analyzed the impact of

technology in Egypt and reported an eye-witness account that demonstrates the impact of social media in creating a movement, especially among young people.

Social media create opportunities to build social capital, and the Internet's effect on social capital can be conceptualized from three broad approaches. Mignone and Henley (2009) examined the role of the Internet in transforming social capital through the usage of sites such as Facebook and MySpace, concluding that it has changed the way people interact. Instead of joining clubs and associations, many youth are using a computer to connect. The authors also stated that the Internet can weaken social capital because people are no longer spending time together face to face but instead they are in front of a computer. This limits personal interaction.

Social networking sites provide opportunities for dialogue for individuals and within groups. Technology has been feared as another way to isolate individuals, but the opposite is occurring. Ito et al. (2008) reported their results from the Digital Youth Project, a three-year ethnographic study of how young people use new media funded by the MacArthur Foundation. Children use social networking sites, online games, video sharing sites and mobile phones to connect with peers in new ways. The needs served by these activities are as old as time, since most kids use online networks to extend friendships from school, religious organizations, and sports teams. Ito et al. called the children's behaviors "friendship-driven" practices because children essentially hang out online just as they do at school, at the mall, at home, or on the street. Hanging out may seem a waste of time to adults, but clearly the exercise builds community bonds and engages young people in a culture. Ito et al. concluded that youth pick up the basic social and technological skills that they need to fully participate in society. They build a shared understanding of how to present themselves through online media and how to manage relationships through the online world.



Technology actually offers individuals the opportunity for engagement. Social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, and others offer individuals an opportunity to share information and connect. Kennan et al. (2008) clarified as follows:

The Internet, for example, can be seen as a technology that produces social capital because members of social networks can take advantage of the information distributed in online networks to become more effective and linked actors. New technologies can, therefore, be a mechanism for bringing people together for creation and maintenance of social capital. (p. 4)

Technology creates opportunities for individuals to build relationships with others on an international scale allowing individuals to connect with those around the world who are like-minded and share similar interests and concerns. Social media provide an international voice, especially on political issues to create impact. This can have a particular influence if the information posted on a blog is picked up by traditional media. On the other hand, there is the ability to hide under a persona that is not your own making it easy to fabricate and disseminate incorrect information, which has far-reaching implications. The distraction of new media reduces in-person contact and communication, which is evident with individuals who use their phone consistently instead of interacting face to face. The challenge social media pose is the deconstruction of language such as the shortening of words through the use of acronyms on text messages. Although technology has great opportunities for connection, areas of concern exist regarding building relationships and the implications for communication. It is also interesting to note the role of technology for women and building relationships. In a recent study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2012, 1 in 4 women use Pinterest, making up 80% of the population on the site. Although this study will not focus on this topic, there are implications for future research on women and the role technology plays in building and maintaining relationships.

## **Social Capital: Dynamics for Race and Gender**

Although much of my work has been focused on social capital, its dark side, and impact on marginalized communities, much of the literature I read further evaluated social capital on women and people of color. One of the challenges in leadership includes the dynamic of race, gender, and class. In most organizations, the goal is to assimilate others and this limited view of others is often reflected in our views about social capital and networks. “Instead, women...and minorities are expected to assimilate into a pre-defined and dominate corporate culture” (Parks, Knouse, Crepeau, McDonald, & Kupchick, 2008, p. 2).

Social capital has been viewed primarily from a lens that addresses a male, Anglo, resourced perspective. Putnam is responsible for a significant body of work on social capital in recent years that does not often take into account the challenges of diverse populations and how they build social capital. Sullivan (1997) disagreed with Putnam, stating that social capital does exist in urban communities and although it might not look the same, young people in cities such as Boston, Atlanta, and New York City have been mobilized around social issues such as HIV/AIDS and even recreational activities. Sullivan referenced R. C. Smith (1996), author of *We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era*, who stated that the civil rights mainstream community has isolated its base of the poor and youth to court policy changes and legislative action without bringing them to the table, a phenomenon that has had substantial costs for accomplishing change. The costs have included a male-centered leadership model that is also sexist, exclusive, and dictatorial, alienating young people and the poor from having a voice. Young people and the poor have been dismissed—the belief being that social capital does not exist in this population. Ignoring their networks and how they build relationships has limited the understanding of social capital outside of male dominated associations. Young people, the

poor, and women typically do not have access to these established networks and even those who are share a similar racial background can participate in their own oppression. “Black America is stuck on the great messianic, charismatic male leadership paradigm, and this nostalgia has significantly warped the community’s perception and understanding of its potential social capital” (Sullivan, 1997, p. 241).

For women, who often have opportunities limited by the glass ceiling, networks dominated by men are often difficult to access. Burt’s “The Gender of Social Capital” (1998) revealed that promotions come earlier to women with more hierarchical networks (or they borrow the social capital of others). Burt’s research raises the issue that women can fall behind, especially in corporations when they build their own social capital. The issue is not gender as much as legitimacy—those who are viewed as insiders and outsiders. Men in higher positions have more legitimacy. Burt’s research affirms the challenge that women have in leadership. Building social networks is critical to one’s success but structural challenges as well as the limited number of women in leadership roles can serve as barriers for women as they aspire to move up in an organization. Building relationships with both men and women, especially in corporate environments, is essential. Although my research will not focus on issues of legitimacy, it is important to note that this is a challenge that women face in building relationships and assuming leadership roles.

In evaluating women of color, the historical and social challenges must be considered. These challenges are not just based on gender but structural oppression that is deeply interwoven in the systems and social structures. According to Young (1990),

Oppression also refers to systemic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant. Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people’s choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective

consequences of following those rules....In this extended structural sense oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms—in short, the normal processes of everyday life. (p. 56)

Structural oppression for women is a part of their daily lives. From the glass ceiling to even the glass cliff, women face situations that can prevent them from having the social upward mobility opportunities that are more often available to men. In Ashby, Ryan, and Haslam's (2006) article, "Legal Work and the Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Preferentially Selected to Lead Problematic Cases," the authors state that the glass cliff is different from the glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is a term that involves the structural limitations that keep women from achieving positions of power. The definition of the glass cliff is

that they (women) are more likely than males to be appointed to leadership positions in problematic organizational circumstances. Thus, women end up in leadership roles that are more risky and precarious than those of their male counterparts, and are more likely to attract unfair. (p. 778)

According to Lorber (1994) gender is an institution that is a part of our daily lives. The challenge in this concept is that women of color not only face issues of gender discrimination and inequity but also issues of race and class often are included. The framework of intersectionality (McCall, 2005) offers a different perspective, as McCall noted that women of color often have these "other" life experiences such as race, class, and sexual orientation that are at work in their experience. These variables can increase their susceptibility to encountering structural and institutional barriers that create challenges for access and availability to opportunities.

Women of color have additional obstacles to contend with, including skin color. Access to social capital for women of color is also subject to racist perceptions of skin color that equate lighter skin with beauty in both African American and Latino communities. Historically, individuals with fairer complexions have been treated more favorably, a phenomenon that often

created a color caste systems. According to Ella Louise Bell (1990), African American women typically live a “bicultural life experience”—navigating relationships between a professional world comprised of whites and their community.

Patricia Parker, author of *Race, Gender and Leadership* (2004), discussed the fact that two competing models of leadership exist solely focusing on the leadership of white males and white females. “One is based on the notion of masculine instrumentality and the other is based on the notion of feminine collaboration” (xi). P. S. Parker explored the changes in the workplace due to globalization and the need to understand that “Identities and relationships are not fixed but must be negotiated” (p. 5). “New approaches such as creative collaboration, teamwork and coalition building and maintenance within and among organizations” must be explored in our changing, diverse world (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p. 2). P. S. Parker stated that “meaning centered approaches” and “multifaceted feminist frameworks that advance new approaches to leadership and new sources of leadership knowledge” (p. xiii) are critical. She called for the exploration of the diversity among women experiences that allow for both a masculine and feminine duality. “People of both sexes and of different gender identities, ethnicities, races, classes, sexual orientations and so on are interacting in ways that help them find meaning and connection in a social world that is increasingly fragmented and disconnected” (p. 21).

Joyce Fletcher’s work (2004) echoes P. S. Parker’s sentiments. “Gender and power dynamics may complicate the story of leadership that both followers and leaders tell, exerting pressure to reconstruct the story to maintain the status quo association of leadership with individual action, masculinity, and static, hierarchical notions of power and control” (p. 653). If we do not examine how to address these dynamics we will continue to perpetuate models that do not take into account sexism, power structures, and stereotypes of what is considered feminine or

masculine. Gender does matter and to create a gender neutral society is damaging and problematic.

There is a Chinese proverb that states, “Wherever you go, there you are.” People bring to their interactions their backgrounds, influences, behaviors, and thoughts. Wilber (1997) described a “four quadrant model of consciousness and its development (the four quadrants being intentional, behavioural, cultural, and social)” (p. 71). Wilber’s work allows one to further comprehend the multi-faceted system that exists within individuals, their immediate connections, and to the world around them. It is increasingly important that leaders are aware of the systems that are in place that impact relationships as referenced by Wilber’s work. Wilber discusses an Integral Operating System, similar to an Information Operating System in technology, that serves as a platform for how we live and see the world. AQAL—All Quadrants, All Levels, evaluates four views of the way individuals create their world: Stage 1 is the body or a focus on self; Stage 2 goes from egocentric to ethnocentric and evaluates relationships with others including developing emotional attachments to others. Stage 3 is when “identity expands once again, this time from an identity with ‘us’ to an identity with ‘all of us’ (the move from ethnocentric to worldcentric)” (p. 7) and includes having emotions for those who are different, beyond one’s immediate circle. It is interesting to read Carol Gilligan’s work (1982) to note that she believes these stages exist for women but in a different voice or a different logic. This is very significant for social capital because this model demonstrates a pathway for individuals to build relationships beyond the typical bonding relationships to actually building linkages to those who are different as they grow and develop through these different stages as referenced by the All Quadrants All Levels (Wilber, 1997).

In order to properly address the role of diversity in social networks, a culture of inclusion has to operate in tandem. “Following an inclusionary approach, differences are recognized, valued and engaged...different voices are understood as being legitimate” (Maak & Pless, 2009, p. 130). This culture of inclusion recognizes “the principle of recognition.” People desire to matter, to be heard, and to be of value.

### **Emotional Capital: The Role of Emotions in Relationships**

Emotional recognition is the most basic form of affirmation and the most fundamental. It serves as the foundation of how we see ourselves and how we connect to others (Maak & Pless, 2009). The sociology of emotion is a fascinating way of examining emotions through relationships as it indicates that emotions have a social component. We live in a culture of emotion (Hochschild, 1998). Our ideas and experiences are connected to our influences and the way we see and experience the world. These experiences invoke emotional responses. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), we all make meaning of various situations. Kegan (1982) stated, “Meaning is the primary human emotion” (p. 18). “Your brain is designed to make meaning out of what you see, and will look for patterns out of whatever information you take in through your senses” (p. 34). These patterns or structures represent the aforementioned mindsets. When addressing various cultures, similar words might have a different meaning. “Each culture has its own unique emotional dictionary” (Hochschild, 1998, p. 7). Over time, these feelings serve as a foundation and a point of reference whether pleasant or uncomfortable. Emotions are a part of a social context. Relationships are now substituted through technology to create a form of connection. People are using their emotional connections as a form of capital—deciding where they invest to protect themselves not often analyzing the collateral damage that occurs to those around them. In examining relationships, it is critical to evaluate the role of emotions in

relationships, the context of the relationship, and the meanings associated with feelings in the relationship. It is important to note that history and socialization play a significant role on the way we view the world and if women or people of color are socialized to exhibit or forego certain emotions (i.e., strength versus weakness) this, too, must be taken into account when considering the social context.

The concept of emotional well-being in leadership development is a part of the positive organizational behavior movement that focuses “on positive constructs such as hope, resiliency, efficacy, optimism, happiness, and well-being” (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009, p. 423). In Deshmukh-Ranadive’s book, *Measuring Empowerment* (2005), emotional well-being is critical to one’s success in self-empowerment and collective empowerment. Subjective well-being is “people’s positive evaluations of their lives including pleasant emotions, fulfillment and life satisfaction” (p. 126). “Social relationships are important to happiness probably even necessary for it. Relationships are necessary for happiness but not sufficient by themselves” (pp.129-130). Very happy people have high-quality relationships.

It is important to note that women occupy various spaces in their lives that can impact their relationships, reactions, and behaviors. Often these spaces have power connotations attached and must be recognized. Deshmukh-Ranadive (2005) noted that women deal with several spaces daily creating meaning for their roles in society. Physical space is based on access to property within the home or outside of the home including her body. Although we often see this as a developing world phenomenon, in the United States there is still the ongoing battle of access to birth control and abortions.

Economic space deals with a woman’s ability to provide for herself and her family. Researchers Kelso, Cahn, and Miller (2012) of George Washington University referenced The



Institute for Women's Policy Research's finding that "women earn far less than what men earn when measured over many years instead of over one year...the report that women workers in their prime earning years earned 62% less than men, or only \$0.38 for every dollar men earned" (p. 20). Many women work in helping professions that pay less, have disruptions in work due to childcare and family obligations, or must choose opportunities that are complementary to the needs of their children, especially if they do not have family support or a spouse to assist.

Sociocultural space is based on a woman's religion, race, class, or marital status. In some cultures, if a woman is single, she does not have the same rights as a woman who is married. For a poor woman or a woman of color, socio-cultural space can impede one's ability to build connections with those in a different social-economic status, especially if one resides in an area that might be segregated based on race or class. It is even more difficult to pursue these relationships if the demands from family require additional responsibilities such as extensive household duties or childcare.

Political space is both private and public—a woman's rights in and outside of the home. Gender stereotyped perceptions that women do not have the ability to take on more challenging opportunities can also hinder a woman's chances of mobilizing networks to create change.

Although more women were elected to congressional positions in the United States in the last election, a gender gap still exists, and it is even more dismal in other parts of the world. These limitations affect women in the workplace, in politics, and in other arenas of life and are a small number of the variables that contribute to the challenges women face as they build social capital.

Lastly, mental space is critical to recognize. It is in this space that a woman's confidence, self-esteem, and meaning making lie. If women can have exposure to possibilities

that were previously deemed as remote, their mental space can expand due to the increase in feelings of self-worth and ability. When women mobilize and have support to address these various spaces, they can create change collectively. For many women, mobilizing can be dangerous in some cultures due to responsibilities of work and home. Women may lack the time and resources to connect because of limitations of financial and social resources such as childcare. All of these spaces can impact one's self-perception and emotional recognition. If negative power dynamics diminish a woman's value and worth, it is probable to assume that relationships with others are not authentic or transformative. Imagine what happens when a woman flourishes positively in these spaces and the possibilities that can occur for others who are in relationship with her. She can follow in an authentic way but also lead others to self-reflection and realization on a path to transformation.

### **The Role of Leadership and Relationships**

Social capital is indeed a part of leadership "helping people understand how to relate to others, coordinate their efforts, build commitments, and develop extended social networks" (Day, 2001, p 586). Several leadership styles mentioned in the literature see the roles of relationships as paramount. Relational Leadership Theory (RLT) is defined as "an overarching framework for the study of leadership as a social influence process through which emergent coordination (e.g., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new approaches, values, attitudes, behaviors, ideologies) are constructed and produced" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 668). This approach recognizes two dynamics in relational leadership: the role of individuals and their relationships (entity perspective) as well as understanding the perspective of individuals in making meaning in relationships and the historical/social constructs that exists (relational perspective). This is an ongoing process of creating and relating to others. Relational leadership is a social process.

A number of leadership styles in the literature address the role of relationships. Without going into great detail on any of the approaches, it is important to note that women are more participative and democratic in their leadership style, score higher in areas such as teamwork, empowerment, and care more for others than men (Hopkins, O'Neil, Passarelli, & Bilimoria, 2008). These differences in leadership approaches for women demonstrate that relationships are important to women. Scores higher in teamwork and care express the value and importance of relationships in order to achieve these outcomes. With this in mind, I think it is important in my work to have clarity about these various styles to understand more about the way in which women connect and the leadership styles that are most complementary to their personal and professional existence. In addition to relational leadership, authentic, shared, and connective leadership are also forms of leadership that involve a focus on relationships with others on teams or within organizations.

- Authentic leadership—In authentic leadership, there is a term entitled “relational transparency” as a component of this leadership style. Relational transparency refers to presenting one’s authentic self through openly sharing information and feelings as appropriate for situations (i.e., avoiding inappropriate displays of emotions) (Avolio et al., 2009). Authentic leadership allows the leader to be open and honest, creating an environment with followers that creates trust and relationship building. One of the components of this leadership style is authentic relational orientation—“leaders strive for open and truthful relationships” (Spitzmuller, & Ilies, 2010, p. 5). In doing this, leaders create an environment for followers to be themselves.
- Shared leadership—Shared leadership, when “viewed as a property of the whole system, as opposed to solely the property of individuals, effectiveness in leadership

becomes more a product of those connections or relationships among the parts than the result of any one part of that system” (O’Connor & Quinn, 2004, p. 432). Leaders and followers in this model share leadership opportunities.

- Connective leadership—For many women, relationships are critical to their personal and professional journey. These connections provide women safety in caring for and relating to others. Connective leadership is an opportunity to allow women to tap into their relational abilities. Connective leadership is leadership that “proceed(s) from a premise of connections and a recognition of networks of relationships that bind society in a web of mutual responsibilities” (Lipman-Bluman, 1992, p. 2). Lipman-Bluman defines three types of achieving styles, two of which are more attributed to the characteristics of women: direct, instrumental, and relational. Direct styles are typically what we are accustomed to and are often associated with prototypical male leadership styles—individualistic, competitive, controlling, and aggressive. Instrumental styles are focused on the self and using networks to achieve goals by empowering others to make things happen. Relational leadership is defined as collaborative, nurturing, and helpful. According to Lipman-Bluman, when women use a power and controlling leadership style trying to “imitate their male colleagues...[this] threatens to undermine their connective leadership advantage” (p. 6). Women like men have their own networks but these networks are often more informal and inclusive based on professional and similar interests. These networks are driven more by connections to one another than by power or status. “Social Instrumental” is a leadership behavior characterized by one’s ability to use networks

to achieve goals and when combined with “entrusting instrumental” behavior, one is willing to ensure that the visions and goals of others are also met.

Portman and Garrett’s (2005) article “Beloved Women: Nurturing the Sacred Fire of Leadership from an American Indian Perspective” focuses on Relational Cultural Theory developed by Jean Baker Miller:

The primary foundation of relational-cultural theory is that development occurs in growth-fostering relationships within specific cultural contexts.... Individuals who lack connection may experience feelings of loneliness in difficult circumstances, an inhabitation to respond in relationships, a sense of confusion in relationships, decreased self-knowledge or knowledge of others, low self-worth and intentional isolation. (p. 287)

Native American women have a very different cultural experience related to gender roles and relationships and yet they are often forced to adopt a worldview that is different from their own. When individuals are not able to bring the fullness of who they are to any situation, those involved miss out on the opportunity for growth and for connection. Those who are not able to freely express their way of life are also deprived and unable to contribute a unique perspective. Understanding differences such as the role of collectivism for women of color is more important than the needs of the individual which is often the view in organizations. “American Indian women are extensions of their tribal nation—socially, emotionally, historically, and politically” (p. 287). Whatever impacts the individual, impacts the tribe. As social capital is examined, it is imperative to acknowledge views of collectivism, collaboration, compassion, and courage, recognizing that the meaning is viewed through a different lens for diverse women.

Understanding leadership models for women and especially diverse women is important in the recognition of these differences that can serve to enhance and influence organizational growth and development. The examination of these modules can serve as the framework in not only how these women interact with one another but also how organizations can create

environments for women that build on their leadership strengths. In recognizing these characteristics, organizational culture is impacted by producing more cohesive working climates and, ultimately, greater effectiveness.

### **Immunity to Change Process and Relationship to Social Capital**

Just as our body creates antibodies to protect us from foreign objects, our minds protect us from dealing with the uncertainty that change can bring. In the book *Immunity to Change*, authors Kegan and Lahey (2009) provide a road map of ways in which individuals can become aware of their own immunity to creating change. The process includes identifying the area of desired improvement, competing commitments (those things that keep the immunity in place), and big assumptions (the perceived pain that would be felt if the change actually occurred). The “immunity map helps us all to see not just how things are at the moment, but why they are this way, and what will actually need to change in order to bring about any significant new results” (pp. 674-676). The goal of my project was to allow the women to create their own immunity maps and in the process to discuss the challenges they have on an individual level and the barriers women might have in coming together. In sharing their results, the women actually deepened their relationship with one another due to building trust and discovering similarities to one another despite of their differences. I will elaborate in Chapter IV on the ITC model as a process that assisted in accomplishing my research purpose.

Building social capital can be more challenging for women and communities of color. Diversity programs have been designed to provide a legal remedy for the exclusion of marginalized groups. This is a technical solution and does not deal with the changes in thinking, beliefs, and values that must be addressed in the way people view themselves and their relationships to others who are different. As the world and the various environments we are

immersed become more complex and we encounter cultural and social differences, there will be less of a need for technical skills and more of a need for adaptive solutions. Social capital is not contingent upon a checklist that will help one foster mutually beneficial relationships. Social capital, especially among diverse populations will require trust and the willingness to examine one's identity and be open to learning from those who are different. This is an adaptive solution requiring a change in behavior and mindsets. "Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties" (Heifetz et al, 2009, p. 20).

Adaptive leadership, according to Heifetz et al. (2009), "builds a culture that values diverse views" (p. 16). These complexities will require an understanding of the connections and emotions of people individually and collectively. In a world that focuses on the differences of others and yet does not embrace those differences, society fails to take into account the diversity of women and people of color. Our inability to have a shared language that allows us to create meaning together influences the way we connect to one another. "Being receives much of its power from connectedness" (Portman & Garrett, 2005, p. 289).

In our society, we often apply technical solutions to address obstacles. The challenge occurs when those obstacles require behavioral changes. Issues of race, gender, and class are not solved by technical solutions. Otherwise, as a society, after all of this time, these challenges might have been resolved, further evidence that the challenge requires a different approach. The goal is not to solve for these issues but to create a space to acknowledge the individual and social barriers that keep these issues from being addressed. Many of these issues are a result of stereotypes, perceptions, and a lack of understanding. In completing the ITC process, the women started a dialogue about these issues and created a platform as a result of the process to make individual changes. Researcher Sofia Kjellström (2009) conducted the process with a group of

university students and recognized that although the process is helpful, the facilitator must be aware of several possibilities for participants. She noted that some are not able to develop a strong improvement goal. Others might be overwhelmed by the emotional responses that the process may elicit. The facilitator must be aware of the “qualitatively different ways of learning, making meaning, and processing knowledge, but we must also take as a starting point people’s different levels of comprehension and construct different circumstances and experiences better tailored to these differences” (p. 130).

Although the works of Kjellström (2009), Reams (2009), Zeitler (2010), and Markus (2013) are recent examples of using the process with groups, there has been no research published to date on the role of immunity to change used to build social capital among diverse women.

## **Conclusion**

Access to social capital tends to be more available to those who are highly educated, male, and white. It is evident that individuals with high social capital and high capacity social networks have access to resources and information that can provide career and social opportunities. Social capital not only benefits individuals positively, but also contributes significantly to the well-being and success of organizations and communities. Bridging social capital is a useful tool for creating acceptance and allowing interactions among diverse individuals for the purpose of sharing information and collaborating. Without deliberate opportunities for dialogue and interaction, trust, which is the basis of social capital, will not be established. As Bourdieu (1986) asserted, social capital is more than just the number of people one is connected to— it is the sum of human, financial, and cultural capital one has in their



network. An individual can know a lot of people but if their relationships do not provide access to resources or the ability to mobilize those resources, then this is just a database of names.

The research reviewed here evaluates social capital/networks, race, and gender in a number of contexts. Several of the studies are conducted in countries other than the United States, and there is a need for more studies on diverse women as a group and social capital. The Canadian-based study, “Social Capital of Women Measured” concluded that women who are married and highly educated tend to have friends that are homogenous (Ravanera & Rajulton, 2010). Women who have diverse networks are typically less educated, single, or divorced. Much of the research does not take into account highly educated women of color whose circles are probably more diverse regardless of marital status as a result of being in environments in which they are the minority.

Understanding the role of marginalization is critical in fully measuring social capital. It is essential to use this information to determine impact on certain individuals and communities that are often unable to obtain the gains of those in positions of power. There is a lack of a historical context tied to the research on social capital to demonstrate why individuals who lack power and privilege are often disconnected from social networks and circles of influence that can impact their financial and upward mobility.

Although much of the research focuses on either gender or race exclusively, there is limited research on mixed groups and their social networks. Does gender or race play more of a role in an ethnically diverse group or are there other dynamics? Evaluating the role of social networks in an ethnically diverse group of women can offer a glimpse into the implications for bonding and bridging social capital for women in both personal and professional contexts.

### Chapter III: Research Design and Methodology

Go to the People, Live with them, Love them, Learn from them, Work with them, Start with what they have, Build on what they know, and, in the end, when the work is done, the people will rejoice and they will say, 'We have done it ourselves.'

-Lao Tzu—China 700 B.C.

#### Research Questions

Several research questions were addressed in this study, including: How does the definition of social capital address ways to develop and understand marginalized women not represented in current research discourse? What is the perception of social capital for groups whose stories are not in the literature? How is bridging social capital created among diverse women? What is the role of the ITC process in helping diverse women identify barriers to change individually and with other women? How does the role of relational leadership theories (i.e., Relational Cultural Theory) impact the way women leaders build networks with others?

#### Research Design

Action Research has several phases: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting.

(Southard, 2006) It is also collaborative in nature.

All actors involved in the research are equal participants and must be involved in every stage of the research...The kind of involvement required is collaborative involvement. It requires a special kind of communication which has been described as 'symmetrical communication'...which allows all participants to be partners of communication in equal terms...Action research allows the researcher to obtain data that can be used to inform and make a difference. (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996, p. 4)

Action research is

about personal and social change in the interests of social equality, recognition of diversity, and appreciation of the problematic of social living...then the change must be undertaken by the individual themselves, always already in relation with others, and the process begins first in their own thinking and then transforms into their involvement in their social, political, cultural and environmental worlds. (McNiff, 2013, p. 14)

Diversity is a critical component of the research. Diversity in this research means age, racial, class, religion, and profession differences. The women ranged from community leaders and mid managers to executive leadership. A final group of 14 diverse women who self-selected to participate (ethnic, racial, religion, age, class) were brought together and trained on the Immunity to Change process for four months. The group also included generational diversity to include women ranging in age from 22-56. The women participated in a training session on change and the ITC process and discussed implications for why women do not work together. The group met once in January, twice in February, twice in March, and once in April 2014. Women were recruited from my personal database. Thirty-five women were emailed a letter to participate (see Appendix A). The women followed up together as a group one month upon the completion of the initial meeting to continue discussing and reflecting on their individual changes from the ITC process and their interactions since the group's conclusion in April. The meetings were 2.5-3 hours in length for each session, filled with the women sharing their personal discoveries with the group regarding the ITC process and relationship building.

### **Group Sessions Content**

During Session 1, based on the theme “What is Immunity to Change? /Individual Immunity Map Completed,” participants completed an advertisement about themselves as an introduction to the group. Consent forms were discussed and signed. The purpose of the group was also shared. The group discussed the article, “Why People Don’t Change” by Kegan and Lahey (2001). A PowerPoint presentation about change was discussed, which introduced concepts such as the definition of change and adaptive and technical solutions, three mindsets as referenced by Kegan and Lahey. Participants were then walked through each column of the Immunity Map.

During Session 2, “Views Women Have of One Another—Discussion/Immunity Map” on the barriers women have with one another, participants discussed the article “Women's Inhumanity to Other Women in the Workplace?” (Christakis, 2012). Participants introduced themselves since new attendees were present. A review of the previous session occurred and a discussion took place about each participant’s completed Immunity Map. The article was discussed and the women shared their beliefs on why women do not get along. Participants completed another Immunity Map regarding their views on why women do not work together.

Session 3, “Social Capital and the Role of our Networks,” focused on the assigned reading, “What Is Social Capital, and Why Should You Care About It?” (Baker, 2000). Participants reintroduced themselves and discussed the article on social capital. The discussion included topics about race, gender, and class as a part of social capital and why people who are different often do not connect.

Session 4, “Barriers to Women Creating Change in Community,” focused on the assigned reading “The Real Reasons Women Are Not Advancing in Corporate America” (Caprino, 2013). Participants revisited conversations regarding their Immunity Maps and discussed the article. The discussion focused on the challenges women face in their professional environments and the role of mentors, vulnerability, and confession in their lives in order to connect to other women.

During Session 5, “Relational Leadership—How does being relational impact leadership for women?” our discussion focused on the assigned reading, “What do We Mean by Relationships?” (Miller, 1986). Participants shared their “a-ha” moments about social capital and their revelations about their Immunity Maps. They then discussed female leaders that have made an impact (positive or negative) as well as the role of relational leadership in their professional lives and began to discuss ideas about plans for continuation after the research was completed.

Session 6 focused on “Action Planning: Final Group Plans to Decide Individual and Collective Plans.” In this final session, participants revisited their Immunity Maps and discussed their progress, revelations, and continued growth. Participants also discussed their desire to continue meeting and established a Facebook page that night to keep in touch with one another. Finally, they made plans to have a retreat in May to continue their established relationships.

### **Research Objectives**

My research objectives include:

- a. To determine the role of the ITC process in creating social capital between women. I am curious if the sharing of their personal struggles might create a bond between the women.
- b. To examine if bridging social capital takes place between this diverse group of women.
- c. To evaluate the ITC process’ effectiveness in creating personal awareness of barriers that prevent desired progress and, ultimately, if individual change occurs in the participants in their way of thinking and/or behavior.

The sessions were designed to create opportunities for discussion, interaction, and reflection.

The readings were provided to create discussion topics that the women could respond to and that offered insight. Each reading was deliberately chosen to ensure that discussions around social capital, relational leadership, the roles and perceptions of women, and the ITC were intentionally included. This guided format was necessary so that the conversations would have some focus in order to validate or invalidate my theory of the effectiveness of the ITC process to build bridging social capital and create personal change individually.

The conversations were typically two and a half to three hours long. These conversations allowed me the opportunity to learn more about the women and their thoughts around the topics. Each conversation was recorded, transcribed, and reviewed to determine themes related to the ITC, relational leadership, social capital, and thoughts about women in their personal and professional lives. In addition, participants completed an end-of-session reflection. These forms allowed participants to share details about their level of engagement and connection to one another, discoveries about themselves from the interactions, and other transformative moments.

### **Research Procedure**

The design of the research questions was based on the lack of literature on bridging social capital, the ITC, and relational leadership in women. Data were collected through the interviews and end-of-session reflection forms. I recorded and transcribed the dialogue sessions, and reviewed the transcripts for common themes. The participants were also involved in analyzing and reflecting on the data from the conversations and their ITC maps in their daily social interactions at each session. Participants will be involved in the defense of the dissertation to continue to learn about the results of the study and have already started action planning, which is detailed in Chapter IV. My goal is to continue providing groups for diverse women on-line and in person to use the ITC process to create bridging social capital.

With action research as the framework, the creation of the topics and the readings allowed the discussions to be somewhat directed while leaving room for spontaneity and reflection. Action research was complementary for the conversations to serve as data on the present thinking (experiences and thoughts on the reading materials) and future possibilities for the participants from the awareness gained as a result of involvement.

The point of reflecting on and discussing such different future scenarios is obviously not to predict which will come true, but rather to generate dialogue that shapes future action

by influencing participants' first-person perspectives, their second-person relationships with other key players...and the new sense of third-person mission that evolves.  
(Chandler & Torbert, 2003, p. 139)

Table 3.1

*Description of Participants in Research Group*

<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Role/Occupation</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Marital Status and parental status</b>	<b>Area</b>
Anglo	Late 40s	Universalist	Entrepreneur	Masters	Married/no children	Suburb
Anglo	Early to mid 50s	Christian identified	Unemployed at start of group—higher education	Masters	Divorced/no children	Suburb
Anglo	Early 50s	Christian	Professional-Nonprofit	Bachelor	Recently divorced/no children	Suburb
Asian-Pakistani	Mid 40s	Muslim	Professional-Nonprofit	Bachelor	Married/children under 18 at home	Suburb
African-Ethiopian	Early 20s	Christian	Corporate-Part Time	Bachelor	Single/no children; lives at home with parents	Suburb
Bahamian (dropped after first session)	Mid 30s	Christian	Professional-Nonprofit	Completing Masters	Single/no children	Suburb
Hispanic	Mid 50s	Christian identified	Entrepreneur	Bachelor	Divorced/Mother of adult child	City
African American	Mid 20s	Christian	Professional-Nonprofit	Bachelor	Single/no children	City
African American	Late 50s	Christian	Professional-Nonprofit	Bachelor	Married; Adult children/grandchildren	Suburb
African American	Mid 30s	Christian	Student	Completing Masters	Married; Children under 18 home	Suburb
African American	Late 50s	Christian	Professional-Higher Education	Bachelor	Divorced; Adult children living	Inner city

African American	Late 50s	Christian	Professional-Higher Education	Bachelor	Divorced; Adult children living at home/grandchild	Inner city
African American	Mid 40s	Christian	Administrative-Nonprofit	No degree	Married/Adult Child	Suburb
African American	Late 40s	Christian identified	Professional-Corporate	Completing Bachelor's	Never married; adult child/one under 18	Suburb
African American	Early 40s	Christian	Unemployed at start of group	Associate degree	Never married; adult child/child	City

Thirty-five women were emailed requests to participate. Although I have a large network, I wanted to make sure the group was small and intimate. Often in large groups, it can be difficult to build rapport because of the size and personality dynamics that may exist. Some of the participants were very quiet and in large group settings it is easy for some to become intimidated and not share. I tried to make sure that this was a place for women to feel as if they could trust, share, and feel safe. Many of the women I reached out to are very busy and this also created a restraint for scheduling. I knew with the limited time that we had together, I needed to create the space for women to feel comfortable in sharing especially with strangers. Of the 35, only 15 committed to participate. One dropped after the first session due to previous commitments leaving the group at 14. I wanted to ensure that the group was small and intimate. With too many participants, the opportunity for bonding and bridging could be more challenging in building trust with the limited time frame of the sessions.

The women constructed both an individual Immunity Map addressing personal challenges and an Immunity Map to examine barriers that keep women from working together as a whole in the general population. Based on those discussions, women discussed how their personal, professional, and social networks enhance or impede the changes they want in their lives. Over the course of six sessions, the women came together for 2.5-3 hours to discuss listed



topics and their progress on creating individual change. Action research is a method that encourages the women to share, discuss, and plan allowing all voices to be heard and each woman to be present in the process of transformation.

Several methodologies could have been considered but action research recognizes the limited views of those who are often studied in research but not included as collaborators in the process. According to the article, "Why Action Research," (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood, & McGuire, 2003), participatory action research has a tradition in multiple disciplines:

Action research challenges the claims of a positivistic view of knowledge which holds that in order to be credible, research must remain objective and value-free. Instead, we embrace the notion of knowledge as socially constructed and, recognizing that all research is embedded within a system of values and promotes some model of human interaction, we commit ourselves to a form of research which challenges unjust and undemocratic economic, social and political systems and practice. (p. 11)

In working with diverse populations, it is imperative to take into account the psychological, cultural, social, and structural barriers that impact a person's worldview, behaviors, and interactions. Typically, research is conducted without taking into account the historical context, backgrounds of the individuals or the systems in place that impede the progress of marginalized populations. Froyum (2010) evaluated emotional capital in a group of African American teens at an afterschool program. Through her interactions with the youth she explored how emotions are a part of the socialization of children, passed from adults. Emotions are based in a social context and race and class often play a significant role in how young women express or suppress their emotions. The challenge with this article is that the positionality of the author is not addressed. While taking into account the racism, classism, and sexism the adult leaders face into perspective, she views the young women through her own eyes, and does not take into account the historical context, which would offer more clarity about why these young women behave the way they do. As a result of slavery African Americans have often used

authority and fear as a way to protect their children from adverse consequences. Many of the models of discipline (some outdated) are still used to maintain order and keep young people out of perceived trouble with teachers and the criminal justice system. Without allowing these views to be examined, research is one-sided and does not fully provide a full picture of communities.

Froyum's (2010) research on emotional capital with African American girls serves as a reminder of the importance of being aware of the impact of racism, sexism, and classism on those being researched. The author did not take into consideration the worldview of the girls and the adult youth workers, when the cultural context was necessary as a background to understand the behaviors and attitudes of those studied. It is important to understand the lens of participants, especially those from minority backgrounds.

What works in one context cannot be easily applied to others. For researchers, the following frameworks are critical. Hopson and Bledsoe (2009) created a particular model of culturally responsive evaluation:

- Decolonizing/indigenous positions, epistemologies, and frameworks
- Awareness of critical theories and epistemologies of race, ethnicity, culture
- Understanding social agenda and advocacy theories, models and approaches in evaluation

In order to conduct a culturally responsive evaluation, relationships must be established with all involved, including developing an awareness of participants about the role of race, culture, and socio-economic status on those who are a part of the research process. It is very easy for an evaluator to become ethnocentric. By understanding the dynamics of race and culture, evaluations are more inclusive of the differences that exist.

So often in research, the role of gender is also not taken into account. Although I am not conducting an evaluation in this study, it is important to note that many frameworks can serve as a reference in evaluating the role of gender when researching women. Sanz (2010) references several options in *Module 1: Evaluation and Equity; Unit. Human Rights and Gender Equality in Evaluations*. for addressing gender in research: The Gender Analytical Framework ensures that issues such as time, socio-cultural factors, power, and resources are examined first when measuring the role of women. The Gender and Development Approach analyzes the role differences between men and women. Globally, women face a host of inequities in their homes and within their communities that keep them at a disadvantage, including a lack of access to educational opportunities, discrimination, and even religious doctrine that dictate their abilities to have the same rights as men. While some differences exist for American women, they continue to face economic and political challenges, including a gap in pay comparable to male counterparts in similar roles. As mentioned in Chapter I, when working with diverse women the various lenses women bring to the conversation must be considered.

In order to understand the challenges of a diverse population, a Human Rights Based Approach takes into account the inequities that exist. Mertens' work in 2007 provides a clear example:

The intersection of mixed methods and social justice has implications for the role of the researcher and choices of specific paradigmatic perspectives. The transformative paradigm with its associated philosophical assumptions provides a framework for addressing inequality and injustice in society using culturally competent, mixed methods strategies. The recognition that realities are constructed and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, and racial/ethnic values indicates that power and privilege are important determinants of which reality will be privileged in a research context. (p. 212)

Interventions with marginalized populations must consider the following implications (Sanz, 2010):

- Gender Inequalities
  - The Subject is Treated with Respect and as an Equal
  - Ethical Considerations
  - Political considerations of Evaluation (the power dynamics)
  - Experience and Women's Way of Knowing (not dismissing the role of intuition)
  - The Evaluation Design and Methods (using a mixed method or participatory action research to ensure all voices are included)
  - Use of knowledge (that will be utilized to empower women and create change).
- (pp.138-139)

The goal is to ensure that participation is fair for all and empowers everyone involved. The process should not further marginalize populations but offer an opportunity for expression and design in a process that they have full ownership of and a stake in the outcome.

It is important to note that our values can affect the process or even the outcome of research. An individual's values can appear in the design and implementation of research, and these are reflected in the questions that are asked to an individual or group. Results can be shaped for the researcher's interests or the end user such as policy makers or funders and not necessarily for those who are involved and affected in communities. Because of this, it is critical for the researcher be aware of the power dynamics, roles, attitudes, and behaviors of all stakeholders. Researchers must be aware and intentional to ensure that their own beliefs as well as those of stakeholders are considered.

Below are the steps to conducting a Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework by Frierson, Hood, Hughes, and Thomas (2010). I have revised these for the purpose of conducting culturally responsive research in a community. These are the same steps for action research:

- Step 1: Prepare for research.
- Step 2: Engage stakeholders.
- Step 3: Identify the purpose of the research.
- Step 4: Frame the right questions.
- Step 5: Design the research with the participants and their context in mind.
- Step 6: Select and adapt instrumentation.
- Step 7: Collect the data.
- Step 8: Analyze the data with participants.
- Step 9: Disseminate and use the results.

Participants completed reflection surveys at the end of each session (see Appendix C).

Women were recruited from the Texas Muslim Women's Foundation, National Council of Jewish Women, and other organizations and networks in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. The project sought to include the following ethnic, race, and/or religious distribution of African Americans, Latinas, Anglos, and immigrant women, as well as Christians, Muslims, and non-Christians who were solicited to participate to provide a unique lens. Participants noted their availability to commit to attend group meetings twice a month, engage in discussions, and read proposed articles. There were several who had scheduling issues and missed 1-2 meetings. One individual due to graduate work was not able to return after the first meeting. Participants completed consent forms (see Appendix B) and received details about meeting location as well as the first reading assignment, the *Harvard Business Review* article, "The Real Reason People Won't Change," by Kegan and Lahey (2001).

## Data Analysis

It is important to note that action research is a cycle comprised of action, reflection, and meaning making resulting in action by the group. It is an iterative, spiral process as a result of the experiences of the group that can change the course of the study. The goal of the group was to determine through the completion of the immunity to change maps that personal challenges were identified and addressed by each participant. The immunity to change map was one of the tools used by the women and a part of the assessment process. Each woman decided upon an improvement goal that they wanted to achieve in their lives. Participants were encouraged to ask family, friends, and co-workers of an area in their lives that needed improvement. The tool allowed the women to look at the behaviors that prevent them from accomplishing their desired goal. They were encouraged to then look at the emotions that arise from their pursuit of achieving the goal which is listed as the worry box. Based on those answers, participants then completed the sentence, I am committed to (list improvement goal) but I am also committed to (the competing commitment found in the behaviors they continue to do that prevent them from achieving the goal). Participants then focused on their big assumptions—the belief that if they truly accomplished their goal, what is the underlying belief of the worst thing that could happen if they were successful. Women shared in discussions about the impact of the immunity to change process in their daily lives, the recognition of opportunities to exchange social capital, and the role of the immunity to change process in creating bridging social capital. Chapter IV offers details on the discoveries from the process. As mentioned previously, participants completed a reflection survey at the end of each meeting (see Appendix C) to note their perceptions and insights from the session. The end-of-session reflection forms were emailed to women at the end of each meeting. These forms allowed women to discuss their level of

engagement—when they were most engaged or least engaged in the conversation. The form also asked about whether they self-disclosed personal information or shared anything that was personal during the session. Participants were further asked to share if the information shared/learned during the session would be used to inform their personal and/or professional lives. Participants were then asked if the information shared impacted their self-perception or how they relate to others. Data were collected from these documents as well.

The conversations at each gathering were recorded and transcribed. The transcribed recorded audio notes of each session were used to evaluate themes from each conversation regarding the impact of the ITC, relational leadership, women's roles and perceptions, and social capital.

Immunity Maps were completed by participants and discussed to determine barriers to personal change and insights from each person. The final meeting of the group was designed to allow the group to decide what they will do with the findings and how they plan to proceed individually and/or collectively to make changes based on the data collected and shared in the sessions. Data collected from the surveys and the conversations at each meeting were reviewed, compiled, and discussed with the group throughout the process. This created an opportunity for the group to make meaning of the data in each session. During the group meetings, the women were asked to share and reflect on their thoughts about their interactions, the building of social capital and the impact of the ITC process in their growth and development between sessions. In the meetings, they would share their observations, changes made, and thoughts about themselves related to our previous group discussion.

### **Human Participants and Ethics Precautions**

There is always the possibility of risks in human research. Several of the women recruited have professional relationships with me. Some had personal relationships with other participants but many did not know one another. The nature of the discussions around women, race, and class did bring up past memories or present experiences that were painful to several of the women. It was imperative prior to conducting the research to be aware of this possibility and create precautions to address these issues. Conversations involving personal aspects of one's life were discussed and revealed extremely sensitive and confidential issues such as conditions of divorce and abuse. Professional guidance and referrals were available if necessary to participants through the assistance of Dr. Constance Lacy, Clinical Social Worker at the University of North Texas at Dallas. Dr. Lacy's services were not utilized.

### **Limitations of the Study**

It is important to note that this study is limited due to the group characteristics, process, and nature of facilitation. The women who were recruited are in a particular place in terms of their established social networks and also have some knowledge of the value of diversity. Everyone has expressed a commitment to diversity, yet, as Chapter IV indicates, painful past experiences can impact the implementation of the desire to expand one's network. It is important to note that because of roles and positions, there are individual and community relationships that can keep participants from expressing this belief fully. I think that if I had a group of people who were not sensitive to diversity, this process might have been more complicated, which is more of a delimitation than a limitation in the study.



## Chapter IV: Findings and Summary

### Overview

The ITC process developed by Kegan and Lahey (2009) was utilized in this research on two levels: to address the challenges that keep diverse women from coming together, and to create individual, personal change. The intent of this study was to use discoveries from this process to inform how women can work together, build inclusive networks, and create lessons for leaders to identify challenges and create an environment that supports diversity and change. Participants completed surveys at each meeting to reflect on their learning and progress from the ITC as well, which was instrumental in the exchange and development of social capital in the sessions with the participants.

The results will be presented with an overview of each session and topics of discussion. Excerpts from the transcripts were selected to illustrate the role of the ITC process, the perceptions women had of one another, relational leadership, and the role of social capital as it relates to gender, race, age or class. Initially, I wanted to present the research in categories that built the case for the reoccurring topics of social capital, diversity, the ITC, relational cultural theory and relational leadership. Yet, I felt that it would be difficult to follow the growth in the women and the changes that occurred over the course of the meetings. The dialogue is important to understand the exchanges that took place among the women and how this exchange was significant in their perceptions and views of women and of one another. If the dialogue is segmented into categories, I believe the reader misses the generative flow of the conversation from session to session.

Dialogue is critical to change. “Dialogue is an activity directed toward discovery and new understanding. Dialogue represents a continuous, developmental communicative

interchange through which we stand to gain a fuller comprehension of the world, ourselves and one another” (Burbules, 1993, p. 8). Bringing women together to share their stories allows individuals to gain a better understanding of one another and their journey. In the stories, we can often relate and see our similarities more than our differences,

Once one embarks in a dialogical exchange, various degrees of convergent or divergent understandings might result: (a) agreement and consensus (b) not agreement but a common understanding (c) not a common understanding but an understanding of differences (d) little understanding but a respect across differences (e) irreconcilable and incommensurable difference. (Burbules & Rice, 1992, p. 409)

The findings will demonstrate the dialogical exchanges that occurred and the results, which ranged from a-d above.

The power of sharing stories, especially around the ITC process, allows for self-reflection. “Transformation occurs by critical self-reflection of the assumptions that supported the meaning scheme or perspective in use” (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 112). There are several types of self-reflection that can move a person to action and, ultimately, a new way of making meaning. This is outlined in the work of Mezirow (as cited in Kitchenham, 2008), as follows:

- Narrative critical self-reflection—“reflection of assumptions to oneself” (Kitchenham, 2008, p. 117)
- Systemic critical self-reflection—“going beyond the action critical reflection of assumptions to self-reflect on the taken-for-granted cultural influences, which might be organizational” (p. 117)
- Therapeutic critical self-reflection—“examining one’s problematic feelings and their related consequences” (p. 117)

- Epistemic critical self-reflection—“investigating not only the assumptions but also the causes, the nature, and the consequences of one’s frame of reference to surmise why one is predisposed to learn in a certain manner” (p. 117)

Philosopher Jurgen Habermas (2000) made the correlation that “language, reason, and action are inherently intermeshed” (p. ix). As participants in the process we gain an understanding, and act, through the process of dialogue. Habermas (1989) stated that three types of discourse exist—aesthetic, therapeutic, and explicative. Based on the definitions of therapeutic and explicative, the conversations of the research group fall into these categories. Therapeutic is “both willing and able to free [oneself] from illusions, and indeed from illusions that are based not on errors (about facts) but on self-deceptions” (p. 21). The ITC process allows participants to uncover hidden assumptions about their thinking and behavior that were shared with group members and often allowed others to see a reflection of their own challenges. Explicative discourse is about making meaning and gaining an understanding about what was discussed. As the women shared about issues such as race, topics were raised that provided those unfamiliar with the experience an opportunity to better understand the position, feelings, and behaviors of those affected.

### **Rationale for Chapter Format**

One of the issues in deciding the format of this chapter was either keeping the conversational flow or placing the quotes into topical categories. One of the challenges of the spoken word is that people do not speak in a linear way. The choppiness of the conversation reveals the emergent themes in the group and the relationship building as well as turning points in the group dynamics. I believe the conversational flow of the following sections in this chapter gives validity to the study because participants were given true freedom to share and be

authentic, and thus the limitations of the group were removed. The conversational flow of the section also further demonstrates the role of action research, as the participants co-created the process of learning and discovery.

### **Session 1**

Eleven women attended this first session. The group session started with the purpose of the group and an introduction of participants creating an advertisement to be written to complete strangers to describe themselves. Attendees self-selected to read their descriptions and many focused on the desire for relationships, career advancement, and interests. Participants had been emailed the first reading by Kegan and Lahey (2001) on “Why People Won’t Change.” Many of the members of the group stated that although the reading focused on professional environments, they could see how it was applicable to their personal lives. Participants even began to share examples from the reading that existed in their own lives and explained the role of competing commitments in their workplaces. The conversation focused on commonalities in unemployment, parent/child challenges, and work roles. I shared a presentation to the participants that explored concepts around change, adaptive and technical solutions and the Immunity to Change process. Throughout the presentation, participants shared their life experiences as they made meaning of the content and attempted to make correlations to their own stories.

As participants introduced themselves, the common theme for several of the women was the struggle of adjusting to being unemployed. One of the participants, a white female in her early 50s, divorced with no children, had held several high-level prominent positions within education and had been unemployed for more than 5 months.

Immediately when it happened, “oh my god.” I can’t believe it. You read it on the news, hear it in the newspaper, there’s no jobs, well, in Dallas, Texas, there are jobs, and there

[are] some good jobs. So I found the whole time I'm defending being unemployed, well, "it's okay," I mean, it's really not, but, "it's okay." Uh huh, and I resent that, I resent it very much.

Another participant, an African American female in her early 40s who is a grandmother, shared her challenges with unemployment which also revealed a tension that existed with her mother, feeling that her mother was waiting on her to fail during this period of her life. The African American female had more of a support system of friends and family during her 18 months of unemployment with savings but very little support from her mother.

So I'm like okay, my prayer was that if I ever lost my job, just let me sustain for 6 months, and I'll find something else, 6 months has turned into 18 months... I'm just trying to figure out, when we realize, some things just aren't in our hands, we just have to kind of have to have faith in something good is going to happen. Now I'm at the point where I need a job, and I send this resume out....and I'm not getting any hits.

The obstacle for the women was that their identity was being challenged. From having positions of influence and consistency, they were now in a place of change that was unfamiliar and the response of others to their identity in this undefined place was also problematic. For many of the women, I noticed that the various roles they held defined who they are not only to others but how they felt about themselves. When these roles were changed or no longer existed, the way they related to others became more difficult. Another participant in her mid-50s who was divorced and a grandmother, shared her story of the changes that happen when things are different in a person's life. These changes in our roles can impact relationships as well as our identities. Roles play a significant part in a person's life—mother, wife, employee, friend—and when those roles change, not only does the individual's identity changes but the way others might react to those changes can occur in a positive or negative way. It was also very interesting to note that after the two women shared their common journeys others began to see themselves in their stories and felt comfortable in sharing and offering support:

You don't have a job and everybody is looking at you in a different way, that doesn't mean they are going to help you through the process, the flip side of this is that when you do get a job, the people who had actually been supportive, it may have been something that was pumping them up. I was a single mother with 4 kids, I got married and my relationships changed. Well you know you were my girl, yeah, but you're married now, and they never came out and said that, but I lost friends because of it. So you know the people who you think are your cheerleaders, their perception of your relationship is different, so your change impacts other people in ways that you just don't see coming. And one of the things that impacts us most about change is that we just don't know what we don't know. We have no way of judging or preparing for what we don't know is coming and that's part of the reason it's so scary.

Life changes are an important part of defining who we are, how we see ourselves and how we perceive others in relation to our lives. Narrative identity is the telling of stories about one's life to make meaning and,

the stories we construct to make sense of our lives are fundamentally about our struggle to reconcile who we imagine we were, are, and might be in our heads and our bodies with who we were, are in the social context of family, community, the workplace, ethnicity, religion, gender, social class, and culture writ large. The self comes to terms with society through narrative identity. (McAdams, 1999, pp. 478-479)

The unemployed Anglo female participant had a series of traumatic events that affected her life and shaped her identity, which also impacted the way she connected to others. She was diagnosed with cancer in her 20s. The way she dealt with the attention and pity from others was to recreate her story by telling others she was attacked by sharks or in a knife fight when they saw the zipper on her arm. She stated that she became "the puppeteer now." Her story illustrates that there is power in our stories and how others connect to us in those stories. A narrative that was very serious with life threatening consequences became something that not only calmed others but helped her in overcoming melanoma. We make meaning of our stories and others connect by our interpretation of those life events we share.

The group discussion included a conversation about the lack of change especially in education that exists in our society and delved into perspectives regarding race and class.

Because many of the women were also members of different racial/ethnic groups, the issues they face are filtered through the lens of race and class because it is a part of one's identity and daily experiences. The topic of the CNN video of a toddler who was labeled a thug because of the cursing exchange between the child and adults became a part of the conversation (Nottingham, Smith, Karimi, Wian & Hannah, 2014). Participants shared their frustration with the current educational climate and how they grew up in a time that teachers were respected and that parents and the community partnered in the lives of young people. It is important to note that the Dallas Independent School District has had a number of issues in the media which has divided the community among racial and class lines. This local school district (and others in suburban districts) have struggled with a growing increase in students of color and a higher rate of low income students. Budget cuts, governance issues, test scores, and teacher cuts are consistent in the media. These issues do not exist solely in the D/FW metroplex but offer a better understanding of the perspective of the women. Depending upon the age of the women, their experiences and reflections about education revealed the differences that age and environment can have on one's opinion.

A participant who chose not to share during the group later wrote in her reflection, "During the education discussion, many spoke on the negatives of education but being raised by my grandmother, education or school was an outlet from my life at home (mom was a crack addict, dad incarcerated). Education was like my savior that kept me sane from the craziness."

One of the participants grew up in the Bahamas and had a different educational and cultural experience. Growing up in the Bahamas, teachers were respected, dress codes were strict and enforced, and not completing work was not an option, which was very different than what she noticed in the U.S. Teachers were as valuable as judges and doctors in the Bahamas:

I remember one time I was at the grocery store after school with my parents, and I just had my shirt out, it's hot, you're on an island, you're at the store, and my principal walks into the store and she's like what's this, and I had to tuck my shirt in. We were taught they we were always representing our families, and that we were always representing the school. We valued teachers.

In this moment, participants who were African American were confronted with the differences that exist culturally with those who might look the same but have a very different life experience. I think it was also interesting for non-African American participants to note those cultural differences that exist within communities with similar backgrounds. I believe the comments gave those with American backgrounds a very different perspective on the cultural differences not only in the U.S. but globally. For many, this was the first time they had the experience of listening to others who were different in such a close and personal way. In these moments, many commented about their lack of understanding about those differences and yet, found it interesting that there were similarities. The exchange of cultural information was extremely important in building understanding and an appreciation of those who were different. Another participant, who grew up in Pakistan and immigrated to the United States as an adult some years ago offered another perspective on the differences in the worldview that affects our identity due to exposure. For those who had an international perspective, their lens on the world is much bigger than many of the individuals from the U.S. that they encountered. U.S. Citizens often see North America as the only major country without a real appreciation for the rest of the world :

So let me give you an example: so my university, school, college was all in Pakistan, so the competition whether it's sports or academics. Okay, so if you made it through your school, next step is city, next step is country, state, then world. And world meant everywhere, Asia, Africa. And so I come here and world here means North America, see the difference, that's the difference.... Because for me the world is everything—the world. But here it is maybe just the state or maybe just all the U.S.



Issues such as race and class affect one's worldview (Holvino, 2010). I noticed in the group that despite the commonality of being African American for many of the women, they had different experiences that go beyond cultural similarities. There is often a misnomer in the larger society about the sameness of African Americans. Those of African descent from the Caribbean have a very different cultural experience as noted in the previous comment and those in the U.S. also have very different experiences because of location, education and other variables. It is also true for class issues that are compounded when race, gender, age, and religion may be involved. Participants believed that there is a sense of entitlement that exists. One person referred to her experience as a community college professor and that the issue is not just a challenge for those who are in the lower socio-economic classes of people in society but is evident in those who have wealth. She commented that students with resources believed they deserve an "A."

At the core of most the challenges the participants raised was the issue of power and privilege. For many of the women, this dynamic was not often addressed but was at the core of the dynamics that were mentioned in schools, in communities and even in relationships. One participant, an Anglo female in her late 40s, commented on the discussion that began to discuss the role of change and power:

You're saying this corporate structure holds the power. But if you look around the world, there are places where there is just terrible poverty. But the families are happy, they have their needs met, they are totally content.

This comment caused some increased dialogue in the group. The white female who made the comment was an entrepreneur, married to an engineer with no children, and was not aware of her privilege. Her comments demonstrate a lack of understanding or awareness that often happen as attempts to bridge social capital occur due to our own lens and experiences. For social capital to truly flourish, power and privilege has to be addressed and the impact it has on

relationships. The participant from the Bahamas responded and shared that the lens we all have are very different and often cloud our ability to understand the challenges that others face. She informed the group that growing up in the Bahamas, she saw people in positions of power that looked like her, which was never an oddity as it might be in the United States. Her experience in the United States has helped her to understand that many African Americans are still experiencing “firsts,” which was not the case in the Bahamas with a black prime minister and others in leadership roles. The barriers of race did not exist there. Being in the U.S. has given her a perspective to understand that those opportunities for others might not have existed because of structural barriers and racism. She notes that the way a person makes meaning of their environment is critical and one must be aware that our experiences formulate our thinking. This not only is evident for the Anglo female who shared her thoughts but also for many African Americans who have not had the same role models the Bahamian participant had a child:

Society wants to look at that group and say they are totally content because it makes society feel better about where they fall in the situation. I don't think there's any person who is living in poverty who can look around and say I'm happy. It's easier to say I don't have a role in that, I have nothing to do with that. But that's not everybody's reality.... it would be unimaginable to say I just walked away from a job. I mean there's no 401K, there's no family that can help, there's no network, there's no faith to believe that thoughts can attract whatever. I think that's the challenge that we face, I think we underestimate what that lens looks like.

A Latina female in her early 50s and divorced made the following comment about the impact of race in her profession:

What you want to achieve can't happen because, let me give you an example of it, you're not going to find very many Latin women who have been in my industry for over 30 years. Because, if you do the math, if I'm walking in a showroom, they stop me at the door. But I crossed it, and said I'm in here to look for fabrics, I'm in here to look for furniture. And even the same showrooms that stopped me at the door 30 years ago, I can just go in and buy \$30,000 of furniture. And that is from saying I can do this. But it took time to change.

Another female, an administrative assistant in her early 40s who is married, also commented about race as an opportunity for “teachable moments”:

I went to an all-white Catholic girls’ school in the country. And so I didn’t realize until Facebook showed up in my life that even then I was creating teachable moments that classmates were saying, you know how much you taught me back then. You taught me about faith, you taught me about what it means to be an African American that I never understood. And so, I think it’s our responsibility...we know better we do better. I am a proponent. It is our responsibility to start teachable moments.

Group conversations such as this one offers an opportunity for personal and collective reflection by group members. These “teachable moments” were a consistent part of all of the sessions. As the women shared their stories, they were in fact, teaching others and becoming more aware of the stories they tell about themselves. For some, it was confirmation about their beliefs. For others, it was an opportunity to begin to make meaning of what they believed about themselves based on the conversations and responses of others to them.

As we continued, the presentation introduced women to the concepts of adaptive and technical thinking as well as the three mindsets as referenced by Keagan and Lahey (2009). Participants reflected on change in their personal and professional lives as well as in the community and society at large. As the conversation continued through the presentation, participants were introduced to the Immunity Map and walked through each category. For many, this activity was challenging to think about what they wanted to improve. They were asked if they interviewed close relatives or friends, what would they think about what needed improvement in their lives? Many participants needed more time and as a result, wanted to take the map home to complete. The map was compared to a form of self-reflection; one of the participants commented:

This self-reflection and making changes within yourself, in my religion, in being a Muslim, this is the word for jihad. This is the word, self-reflection, because that is the most hardest word that you can do.

It's true with the Buddhist and the yoga traditions, it all goes, kind of like it all starts. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. The biggest battle that all of us fight is (within) us.

I think the comment about the jihad was surprising not only to me but also to the rest of the group members. We all had a perception of what Jihad meant, and to have this explained was eye-opening. I think so many of our ideas about different groups are not just from media but due to a lack of exposure. Having these opportunities to connect can change the way we see others and ultimately, changes our thinking about ourselves because you can see the similarities that exist.

The group decided on the next meeting's location and the topic of the next meeting was shared. End-of-session reflection forms were distributed and participants completed. At the close of the meeting, one woman provided another participant her card to assist in her job search. Another woman was offered a personal coaching session with a participant because of the interpersonal challenges she faces with her mom. In the first session, bridging social capital had begun across racial, class, and generational lines. I also noticed that the women were becoming more comfortable in self-disclosing. They stayed for almost 45 minutes after the close of the session talking and connecting.

**End of session reflections.** Each person commented that she felt engaged but some commented that there were times in the conversation that they disconnected, "when I heard an opinion that was very different than my own. I am consciously working on staying connected." Participants stated that they felt connected when they were able "to connect our discussion to my upbringing and cultural background." Another stated, "A critical moment which will set a basis/foundation for this group was when it was pointed out that various ones have things in common. Those things would not have been identified without dialogue." "The definition of

change was critical for me. Most of the conversation stimulated me to self-reflect and self-evaluate.”

The Immunity Map was also effective. “The immunity map has already made a huge impact on how I view my personal resistance to change.” “My self-reflection affects my ability to actually change. It made me aware of how much my negative self-talk still happens. I really have to find out how to stop this!” I think it is important to note the value of the dialogue combined with the ITC map. Both of these were instrumental in not only creating an opportunity for members to bond with each other but this process also initiated self-reflection which demonstrates the impact of the two when used in unison.

Relationships were also mentioned. “I am more cognizant of my internal dialogue and how it affects my perception about my relationships with others; including the ‘big assumptions’ that are holding me back.” Another comment from an Anglo female in her early 50s indicated that the sessions increased her knowledge: “The conversation on privilege expanded my scope of awareness...listening to a participant coming into her own power—very powerful.” A Latina participant felt the sharing was important in framing her self-perception because she realized “how much people of diverse professions and personal backgrounds have in common.” Another participant, in her mid-20s, stated that she was the most engaged, “when I could personally identify with what a fellow member was talking about around the topic of breaking cycles of ‘putting cultures in a box.’”

Many of the challenges we face in our society are due to a lack of understanding and different perceptions. This conversation demonstrated the value of sharing in order to build trust and ultimately, social capital. I also believe that this was an opportunity to explore not only how others make meaning from their experiences but to reveal the need for adaptive thinking to

address difficult issues such as race and class. There is not a technical solution to deal with these issues and through conversations, we become confronted with our thinking and often become reflective, which for many of the participants, was the start of individual behavioral changes. If we don't share our experiences, stereotypes and perceptions continue until people are able to tell their stories of pain and possibilities. Because people typically connect to individuals that are just like them, they miss out on the insight that conversations like this can offer to understand another person's perspective.

## **Session 2**

This session was held at the home of one of the participants and included some individuals who were unable to attend the first meeting. The session was designed for participants to complete the ITC process and discuss the articles the participants were assigned to read. We went through the components of the Immunity Map as I explained what each meant. As we discussed the worry box and competing commitments, many of the participants expressed anxiety:

It makes feel embarrassed that when I really start digging like pulling back the layers to see what I'm really afraid of and where I think I'm doing myself a favor when I look at this part...the competing commitment... It's like I'm not doing myself a favor....what you used in the past as protection you try to use it now but it's really hurting you, so it's embarrassing to see that.

I don't want to look at it anymore. You kind of peek in, but not too much.

As I observed the women, they all had seemed to have revelations when they completed the competing commitment and big assumption sections. They were so unaware of their own self-defeating behaviors and the process illuminated that for them. I stressed that the goal was not to create a list of things to do to fix things but more importantly to give them more of an awareness of their challenges in creating change. I also shared my map of losing weight and my

realization of my barriers that were rooted in a lack of self-love. It was also interesting to see that many of the struggles the women shared may not have been their own personal issue but they could identify and offer support. For all of them, this process was enlightening and helped them to not only self-reflect but to think about the impact of these behaviors on their progress and life goals. One participant was afraid of obtaining a coach to help her grow but felt she needed this type of mentoring and could not understand why she had delayed making this happen.

there's part of me that I need to protect... So I think part of it is a protective measure.... I'm not sure I want them to know how weak I am.... Because people keep telling me I'm strong... And in trying to protect and keep my weaknesses covered because I don't want to focus on those, I don't want to focus on strengths and mitigate those weaknesses. When people realize, some people realize your weaknesses, you either are [taken advantage of] or you are rejected and I don't want to deal with any one of those.

Another participant wanted to work on how her self-esteem:

I am afraid... my fear is that others might see the real me... [others will say] she's really just smoke and mirrors.

For another participant, the improvement goal was to connect with others despite the anxiety of building new relationships.

I found out that my worry was that I was having feelings of inadequacies and anxiety., and I think my competing commitments was the fact that I don't want to feel invisible anymore and I sometimes I do when I'm around certain people when you're talking about being hurt and stuff like that.

Several women reached out to family members as their personal committee to get insight on what needed to be changed. Interestingly, one reached out to her college age daughter to get insight who felt that her mother's schedule was an issue. Another reached out to her family and decided to go in a different direction from what they suggested. The participant agreed and felt that her limited time impacted her ability to be more successful.

One participant's family wanted her to change her schedule to return to taking care of them by cooking more and being more attentive. She realized that this was not something that she wanted to do. She was in the process of completing graduate work and felt that her children were old enough to do more. She recognized that much of her attentiveness to others was based in her need for acceptance and stated that going through this process brought up some emotional feelings for her to consider regarding the need for approval.

The issue of time management came up for two women in the group. One did not see it as a problem and used it to her advantage to find positions that allowed her flexibility and more control. It did not create problems for her in the same way it did for another participant which caused her problems especially in her relationships. The dialogue between the two women was compelling. They actually supported one another and the one who had a better grasp on the problem shared her techniques and encouraged the one who was overwhelmed by her inability to change this in her life. She wanted so desperately to be on time and could not figure out why this was so difficult.

Being on time my whole life it has caused me issues. But when you get down to what it's about, it's control. It's freedom from stress. It's seriously how old am I, it's weird, that's exactly how I felt.

As a group, we discussed the definition of the Big Assumption. Participants were told that the big assumption is the belief of the worst thing possibly happening if they achieved their goal and that it is this assumption that sustains the immunity. For the individual who wanted a mentor to help them achieve success: "The bigger issue for me is that they'll try to take credit for my success." For the individual who wanted to be on time: "My big assumption is that I would be bored. I'm serious. Let's not kid around, if everything is on time, and I'm healthy and disciplined. I'm bored, anyway. I'm all about obligation, no fun, no freedom and no adventure."



I think it's about fear and I wrote, can't keep up, wouldn't be able to keep up, and I feel like it's a competition. It's so much easier if you don't believe in yourself than other people, like they leave you alone. I think I've used my career as really a kind of shield so I really don't have get to know people. They don't really have to get to know me because they just get to know what I do when I'm at work...I over-identify with my work.

As an observer of the process, I realized that if the guidelines did not require the women to think of issues that were difficult to address, the results might have been different. For most of us, it is easy do what is comfortable. The ITC process is designed to assist in tackling issues that we know are problems. We want different outcomes but we don't understand why we continue to do the things that prevent us from making it happen. Being in a group to witness the challenges of others helped those who are involved to see their commonalities more than the differences that exist. In building social capital, people connect because of commonalities and in spite of their differences, this process allowed them to share issues that were common to most women. For many of the women, they struggled with issues grounded in how they see themselves or how they believe others see them. This process was also the beginning of women building trust, a key component to social capital. The women felt safe to share and were willing to be vulnerable because of others being open. In sharing their personal thoughts and experiences, they connected to those similarities of self-concept, work, motherhood, and relationships.

The articles were helpful in generating conversation and getting feedback from the women. This was an area that the women praised along with the structure of the group. The freedom to speak openly in a safe space was a consistent comment of participants. The articles for this session generated conversation about women's perceptions of one another and the role of competition for women. Statements included women feeling as if they are in competition with one another and the fear that they might be less valued if another woman was hired on the team. Sometimes the fear is the threat of loss of position and recognition. Many felt that the

environment created at the workplace or even by the media contributed to the competitive nature that women have with one another. The role of religion was mentioned in also contributing to the competitiveness women face with one another. One participant commented that sometimes even being friendly with a pastor could be considered as crossing the line with the wife. The role of polygamy and monogamy in women being competitive toward one another was addressed especially in light of women outnumbering men. Could this possibly add to the competition that women face in vying for marriage? Even in polygamist societies, there has been competition for women to feel more loved by the husband, as a participant referenced in a Biblical story. Because many of the women are religious, this served as a consistent filter in many of the topics discussed. It is interesting to note that many women began to feel that religion may be responsible for contributing to the divide that exists between women and the relationships women have with men. This view was held by women who were Christian, Muslim, and non-religious.

Many of the participants explained that the women leadership positions they encountered in their work experiences caused a variety of emotions and memories. Some were experiencing leaders who were very controlling. Others found the emotional interactions with female bosses distracting. As the women pondered their pasts, they realized that their experiences shaped their views of women in leadership. A participant who was raised by her father stated that she was more comfortable with leaders who did not exhibit much emotion, recognizing that she was reared without it. Others felt that relational leadership did not create extra ‘fluff’ in the workplace. It actually was an opportunity for leaders to recognize the gifts and talents of their teams and being authentic in their understanding of self in order to better relate to their staff.

And I’ve had mostly female bosses through my very long career and I’ve had the hell on wheels one right down to the very fluffy one and they’ve all been amazing. They

mentored me and helped me with my career and taught me different aspects. And I've had some male bosses too and for the most part, they've been difficult. Because they don't relate and then the hardest female managers for me have been the ones that kind of do the male management stuff. I have one right now who it's hard core, it's hard ass. There's no room for individuals and I'm doing fine but I have a couple of colleagues that really if they would get mentored and coached a little bit, they'd perform really well. She's not going to hear about it, she doesn't want to be relational. And she's cutting off her nose to spite her face. I don't know, are males or females better? There are things I really like about men, as far as it's cut and dry and the business acumen, but I really think they miss out on maybe rising to certain level of performance by not being relational, but if that's all you do you miss out on performance...

I have worked under men and women and I couldn't say that I like one more than the other, but one thing that I do like is the one who would be most authentic in what they do and I find that out and feel my through and discern that by observing and really working with that person and getting to know that person and being true to who I am as well. It doesn't matter whether it's male or female for me.

Relational leaders were perceived as those with potential to motivate and develop their teams.

They created environments that allowed authenticity to flourish and were interested in the cultivation of their team's gifts and talents. There are other characteristics that contribute to the success of a relational leader but it was interesting to hear the group share their thoughts about the differences and similarities they've experienced with both male and female leaders. The group agreed that it is unfair to believe that men are not relational or that all women are relational. Even within different cultural groups and our backgrounds, we all have experiences and expectations that contribute to our view of leaders regardless of gender. These views also impact leaders and the way they interact with their employees.

**End of session reflections.** Once again, group members remained this time for over an hour talking with one another. I think this continues to show the relational growth in the group. In each session, the women are revealing more about their backgrounds and issues they face with the members of the group. The ITC process, I believe, was instrumental in creating a space for

women to share their struggles. The comments below are end of session reflections from group members about their experience at this session:

after the group when I recognized part of my immunity to change regarding my weight loss could be the fact that I was molested as a child. Doing the immunity map on why women don't work well together [was a critical moment]. There's a lot of underlying trust issues that seem to be the culprit at large with women especially in the workplace. That women do ultimately fear losing what their male counterparts fear losing—power, control, image, jobs. The significance of the immunity map is powerful to me. It really is a lifelong tool I can use to really get to the essence of what is causing me to struggle with meeting the goals I've set for myself and moving toward debunking those “big assumptions” and actually accomplish them. (African American female, early 40s)

I felt most engaged during the interaction with the personal immunity maps. The more we talked about our experiences and shared our “issue,” the more I understood the process. I was very nervous to share my issue with the group but after doing so, I felt much more open and comfortable. Sharing information about my parents' past was a critical moment for me because I felt that it would change how others in the group would feel about me. (African American female, mid 30s)

I told (spouse, name withheld) about the discussions at dinner. I told him I feel like I'm from another planet. At least we are from the same one—which is funny because he and I are not alike. He agrees women aren't any more or less difficult to work with than men. We tend to look at traits and situations rather than lump people as a whole making generalizations. We are a lot more happy than people who create a we vs. them mentality, so I don't think I want to look for an enemy. I was saddened to hear (name withheld) still view life from the victim lens. I see her so confident, that I forget her past. I need to be more cognizant of people and where they are in their story and their healing. I am struggling with this group as a whole. Energetically there is so much fear and victimization mentality, it's tough to sit with. There are a few bright spots, besides the old buds, (names withheld). I know you tell me it's easy for me to see the bright side and options coming from a place of privilege. But (name withheld) also is open to the possibilities and as she described, she did not come from a place of privilege. (Anglo female, late 40s)

Lots of revelations some big stuff stuff that I haven't thought about in years—how I'm always comparing myself to others—it's about deep-seated insecurities and is sad sad sad. (Anglo female, 50s)

I believe when I had my “a-ha” moment during the assumption discussion. I'm experiencing a new appreciation/connection to women of different

ethnicities/backgrounds/professions—which I seldom related too before. (Latina female, mid-50s)

For one of the women, I think the conversation was difficult. She felt as if many of the women were victims and she could not understand why they continued to live in the past around the pain they experienced. She pointed to others who seemed to deal well with their pain and felt as if those who could not deal with their pain were “toxic.” I think it reveals a greater challenge that we have in society. It is the “pull yourself up by your bootstrap mentality”—others should be able to get over their issues because I/we have. It fails to take into account that some people cannot pull themselves up by their bootstraps because they don’t have boots. Facilitators who conduct this process must always be aware of the dynamics of power and privilege. Offline, the individual sent several emails sharing her frustration. Through multiple threads, by the end of the group, the person admitted that she learned that she needed to be more patient with others and realize that everyone doesn’t go through the same process and does not have the same life experiences that will result in the same conclusions. That indeed was a breakthrough! The comments demonstrate that for many, the process was eye-opening and enlightening about themselves and about others in the group.

It was obvious the ITC process served multiple purposes as a tool to help women better understanding barriers that were impacting their ability to make personal changes as they desired. The ITC process in the group environment allowed women to listen to the experiences of other participants realizing that they struggle with many of the same issues. In one of the final comments, a participant was able to correlate being molested to her ongoing ordeal with weight loss as a result of this process. So often, we are unaware of the underlying issues and this tool serves as an X-ray to illuminate those things we are unaware of or are afraid to face. The process is powerful and with support, can create bonds between individuals that offer comfort,

encouragement and inspiration. In a group environment, participants did not feel as if they were alone to conquer what they were previously unable to address.

### **Session 3**

This meeting was held at the home of another member. The group began with introductions once again since a new member arrived, a 20-something immigrant female whose family is from Ethiopia. The unemployed Anglo female teaches part time at a local college to make ends meet and started teaching on Sundays so she was not present but resumed participation in the fourth meeting. This was actually one of the challenges in the process was the consistency of group membership. Even though there were strict guidelines about the number of meetings one could miss, I had to be flexible recognizing that many of these women were busy with their professional and personal lives. This week the participants had a conversation regarding the article on social capital. The conversation began with the idea of managing one's social network and the ethics of adding or deleting individuals if they do not serve a purpose for a person's career.

Now I get it. I kind of thought of it initially as exploiting your network, which I'm still realizing that I have, but now I'm learning how to manage it, which I'm glad that this awareness has made it properly at the same time.

It kind of reminded me how when you're going to church...your life is seasons, you have other people coming through your life for reasons, then you have lifelong people. It kind of put me in that mindset. When you think of it as adding and deleting people it does sound kind of cold, but then when you think of it on that level I said "well I guess people do kind of come in and out of your life for different reasons and seasons.

One of the participants raised the issue of individualism and the role it plays in social networks. How does a person not consider others and solely concentrate on their own pursuits especially if one is relational? Is it possible to remain individualistic and build a social network? Although the issue was not raised by the group, I wondered about the role of individualism for

those who lived in communities that are more collective and the impact on their ability to build social capital with those who are very individualistic in their orientation. For most of the women, the dialogue was instrumental in making meaning of ideas and connecting those ideas to the personal beliefs and daily actions. The idea of managing one's network was a new concept. Conversations around LinkedIn and other social networks became a topic and how many women are very selective with those that they choose to have access to their circles online. Those who were over 30 were more selective stating that they had to be for the most part connected to someone they knew or were involved in a company/organization of interest. For younger members, they felt accepting/friending anyone new was their way of building social capital. The comments shared by participants demonstrated that social capital is viewed differently by those of varying generations. As others try to gain access to social networks in order to build their own, they are typically freer with those they connect with online. Older populations feel the need to protect their social capital as much as possible and connect with those who are linked to those they already know. The reading on social capital reinforced the work on their Immunity Maps and the correlation to some of their relational issues. As the women continued to discuss, conversations about the way men and women build relationships became a topic especially related to the rearing of boys and girls in the home. Most of the women felt that conditioning was responsible in the way that women and men build relationships. It was interesting to listen to those who had painful relationships with their parents and how this affected their view of women. Some of the women had very difficult relationships with their mothers and they were intentional to be more open or positive with their daughters so they would not recreate the distrust. From the conversations, it was a common theme that our parental relationships can have an impact on the way we connect to others—positive or negative. A mother of two shared

that she was trying to raise her children differently than the gender stereotypes she felt that society prescribed for her son and daughter. She is trying to raise a strong daughter who is not rooted in her emotions and a son who can be sensitive to his feelings. She commented that “women take on the bulk of the load” because of the focus on empowerment of others. She wanted to raise her children in a way that was unique to her own upbringing. I noticed that this is case for many women who remarked that the goal was to raise strong daughters. It was interesting to notice her comments equated being relational to that of weakness and strong to the ability to put emotions aside. For many African American mothers, this was a dominant theme to raise strong daughters and yet, in doing so, is the concept of strength misinterpreted to create women who have been told to ignore their feelings and focus on being a strong from a definition that is already problematic and centered in a power over approach?

It was agreed that women build relationships differently. Women do not always share their “top relationships” with other women, not always because of a lack of trust but at times, for protection. The view is that men assume that they have one another’s back initially and are devastated when they are proven to be wrong. Women do not make that assumption initially which can create barriers for women to build social capital. If women assume that they must protect their networks, it will be even more difficult for homogenous networks to diversify because of perceptions and stereotypes:

Some of it may be, I want to make sure who you are so you don’t hurt her [the female friend I will introduce you to]. ‘Cause there’s some people, who, you know, I want to protect her, I want to protect you, and I’ve got some suspicions that you might not be on the up and up, and I’m not going to hurt you like that. I think we have different strengths so we deal with things differently, but I noticed that when [name removed] and I were in counseling for the divorce, and there were some things I had tried to tell my pastor and he didn’t hear that and when he finally saw that, he was livid, he felt so betrayed that this man had he felt like he had broken his trust by being what I said he was, as opposed to what he thought he was. So, whatever that boy did, he was really betrayed, he really felt



stupid that he didn't know. I already told him what was going on, he looked at me and said "it's probably your hormones." But when you saw it. So men immediately trust each other until they prove they can't be trusted.

Even though the previous comment was a generalization, it does raise the question about the way in which men and women differ in building social capital. It is also interesting to note in the comment that women often feel dismissed about their feelings from men. If women believe that they have to conduct themselves in a way that is perceived as being more masculine, they are often dismissed by other women. If they chose to display characteristics that are thought of as more feminine, they are dismissed by men. Stereotypes impact these views and the more opportunities individuals have to share their stories, the greater the opportunity can exist to eliminate the way we make meaning of gender roles and of other generalizations we make about others. The trust issue for women was significant in the conversation. Many felt that women are conditioned from an early age not to trust one another either from their family members or from experiences beginning at school. Men appear to have a bond and protect each other in a way that women do not according to some of the participants:

We can't trust women. The trust issues are at the house. You can't trust so and so, you can't trust so and so to be in your house when you're gone. It comes from parenting.

I think it also comes from experiences as well. We're at the high school and you learn that okay you can't trust her, you can't trust her, you know the gossiping. Sometimes our building social capital comes from the experiences of the past.

Most of the time it starts off at zero with people and you have to build your trust up and prove yourself, but, you know, it should be where we give everybody that opportunity but I think because of experience, it makes it hard to do that. But you know another piece, you know how you raise your girls you're so protective, you don't want them in the bathroom so you're standing there protecting them. We don't treat our boys as much that way. Cause they go outside. I see a lot of people who are like you can go outside, and you can do this, whereas as with a girl, they don't trust. And could that be some of why we act the way that we do because you're creating this environment for your daughters to always be protected.

If girls are raised to be protected, how does this affect the way they connect with others? Is it possible that in being protected that girls are then protective of their relationships and outsiders in a way that boys are not? Does the freedom for boys allow them to enjoy relationships in a different way than girls? Although this was not addressed in the group discussion, I do believe it is a conversation that could contribute to better understanding the ways in which women build social capital.

Participants attributed the differences in social capital between men and women to the lack of belonging to the “group.” Women do not belong or are limited in decision-making positions of authority in organizations. When women are in those positions, there are doubts and questions.

So, where they [men] would trust a stranger with their top contact, if I’m a woman in the profession, first of all what are you doing here, and second of all it’s really going to waste your time if... you won’t be here, so I don’t necessarily need to share my social capital with you?

Well, in my experience has been that sometimes men don’t see you as a threat so they don’t mind sharing the relationships with you because they don’t see you as an equal, you’re just somebody that, I like you and I see your potential but you’re not ever going to be on the same level so I’m not going to worry about it.

That’s true, that’s very true. There’s a preacher that I know, Saturday was the first time that he ever mentioned my ministry.

The cliché, perception is reality, has some meaning in this context. Depending on the situation, women feel that in the workplace, men often do not see them as equal. This is either expressed in relationship building as women are non-existent or less than. In either scenario, women often have fewer opportunities in the workplace to build social capital as expressed in the conversation. Sometimes, there is even the belief that women did something inappropriate to move up the ladder. Most of the women do not question when a woman is smart or qualified,

but when a woman's ability or credentials are questionable, doubts arise. The women had varying opinions:

To me it's the not so smart women that are moving up, it's not the smart ones, cause you know how they got there, it's that one that it's like, really?

Women in general, whether they are smart or not, most of the time we are playing on men's fears, so if we move up and we move up quickly, somebody somewhere did something [is the opinion].

I think sometimes that does happen, but if I see someone moving up and doing things like that I don't necessarily go there on that thought because sometimes people really have an ability to work well with someone, to be in a position where they feel less threatened, to be in a relationship, to know how to move and, you know, favoring, networking, knowing who, you never know any of that so I just don't jump to that conclusion, that it's something negative, from my standpoint. But I do know that that does happen.

Viewpoints are varying by women on when a woman assumes a leadership position who is perceived as not being qualified. It would be interesting to have discovered the women's views on men who are perceived as less qualified in roles and if the criteria for women are the same. Sexual stereotyping of women by men and women more than likely limits the possibility men for being accused of moving up in the organization due to an illicit encounter.

The role of media is critical in how women perceive themselves and related to one another. Two very popular shows, *Scandal* and *Being Mary Jane*, were discussed by the women. Women in the group felt that media had a huge influence on our ability or inability to connect to one another and that the effect on younger women was significant in the rise in female aggression, for example, in videos on YouTube such as the Sharkeisha video that went viral of a high school aged young woman brutally attacking another female (<http://www.thehollywoodgossip.com/videos/sharkeisha/>).

The media plays a full influence in how we see the world period, because if you don't experience the real world, you're going to see it through the media's eyes, whether it's racial, diversity, economic, or gender, and the scary part about that is, they saw that *Scandal* was such a big hit that they duplicated it, and took it to another level, they went far, far even further and just made it even more graphic and scandalous and just not a

good thing. And unfortunately the media brings those divisions and makes people have those different perceptions that may or may not be true.

Since we're talking about the media, we haven't mentioned the Real Housewives of anywhere. And, yeah, most of them are housewives. The Bad Girls Club... and the reason that those..., first of all I hate both of them, but my daughters watch this, and they're in their early 20s, and neither one of them have a lot of female friends. Now you know the kind of female friendships that I have, we're in close relationships, we're not in competition about men, money. When I am in a place where I am about to go off I will call one of them they will let me cuss and throw things and do whatever I need to do, and then they will say, now what did you pray about. But they will let me get it all out so that I can move forward. These children are watching these shows where these women are making alliances and, well you know she was sleeping with my ex-boyfriend's cousin's sister's brother-in-law. What!? And so, you know, and they're sharing this stuff on national TV.

I don't care what [show] they watch, and the reason I say that is because is what you behold you become. So whether they're watching it for entertainment or not, they are watching this foolishness.

I gotta be honest, I watch the Atlanta [Real Housewives of] people to make me feel good. That was my ulterior motive, I promise you.

I watch both of them. I started watching Being Mary Jane, but me and my friends watch Scandal all the time, and I'm like I love you Kerry Washington. And here's the thing as I hear what you're saying that there's an aspect of exploitation, and the women writers, were strong, who is writing this, but I think my question is what is now the perception of exploitation now in our generation? And on top of that they are trying to stereotype that women can engage in power and be successful and can choose to engage in these things.

Because those episodes [Scandal] to me brought a sting, because it was more like rape, and I was like, did anybody even see that? It pushed me away. So, I was just like, okay, no one else sees that, but they're seeing that she is this man's mistress, but the wife knows about it. And the flip side to that, the wife was being abused too. The father has misused the wife, the wife has misused the husband, the wife and the husband has misused the mistress.

as far as the next generation and bonding and social capital networking among women for our girls, my girls are 20, 30, too. I'm glad, they have a lot of women relationships, but there comes this I can't trust you and I don't want to trust you that's perceived before it's engaged. And that's not all the media, no.

They're normalizing what was once considered explicit.

The issue is, we watch it. As much as people complain, the general public likes that, you know when I look at Being Mary Jane or Kerry Washington's role I see these

multifaceted women who have very serious woundness. And the vulnerability and I think even if it wasn't the affair it speaks to how all of us can be very successful and have all of this going on and then there is this darkness. How do you wrestle with those worlds? I see both of them, that's what always comes to my mind is that you can generally be a good person and yet see some of the stuff that's going on, there's a vulnerability.

I included the large number of quotes because it is interesting to see the various perspectives the women had regarding *Scandal*. For some, the show portrayed the strength and weaknesses of a multifaceted woman. For others, it depicts the worst view of women—lives filled with corruption and depravity. In evaluating the comments, generational differences were obvious in this dialogue. Several women in their 20s to mid-40s enjoyed the show. This was not the case for many of the women in their 50s. Many of the younger women or mothers of young women stated that they (or their daughters) did not have a number of close female friends compared to some of the older women. As women get older, the perceptions and trust issues change which may raise the question about the number of strong ties older women compared to those who are younger. Without generalizing, I do believe that it would be interesting to recognize the differences various generations have in building social capital. Is it possible that the role of media might contribute to these differences depending on the age of the woman? As the women continued to dialogue about the issue of media, they also recognized the role we play in media: “We are part of the problem.” Despite the influence of media, women are often viewers of this content that can either uplift or create distrust, unhealthy relationships and a lack of bonding in women in both their personal and professional lives.

Considering that most of the women are involved in some type of religious tradition (i.e., Muslim, Universalist, Baptist, Non-Denominational, non-church attending but have some belief system), several agreed that the interactions of women and views of women have also been molded in their faith communities. Religious attendance is a strong variable in social capital.

According to the Barna Group's research in 2011, "the percentage of women attending church during a typical week has decreased by 11 percentage points to 44 percent" (Barna, Kinnaman, Stone, & Jenkin, 2011, p. 1). "Women used to put men to shame in terms of their orthodoxy of belief and the breadth and consistency of their religious behavior" (p. 1). If houses of worship were previously a place for building connections especially for women, that has changed over the last two decades.

church folk tend to try to make you feel guilty about your personal relationship and understanding with God. God knows your struggle.

But it's sad because of how people use relationships to manipulate each other, and to use God kind of in the background. To you know, manipulate, I know God better than you do, or I have some sort of relationship to God that you don't and so I'm going to manipulate you into doing what I want, and me and him are the gang and we're going to beat you up. It's very interesting to watch how that happens in all faith communities.

Most of our church relationships and relationships are not love motivated. I think we get better, and other people are better, when we give or work with doing that, but so much that happens in faith communities is not love motivated, it's manipulated, it's to beat you up to make me feel like I'm the better person... and you're not. And so it manipulates us in relationship to one another, but I think it also manipulates us in our relationship to God.

I think the interesting part about that scripture is that it's been taught to us backwards. We don't know how to love ourselves. Our negative image, and we've been taught especially as women, you put other people in front of you, when it clearly says love your neighbor as yourself. And sometimes I think we have problems in our relationships because we don't love ourselves.

For many of the women in the dialogue group, religion has served as a place of comfort.

It is a place to build relationship with a higher power and with others. Based on the comments of the women, it is also a place that often has relational challenges in the way people connect to God and to others. It is interesting to note that there was a lack of female leadership in the many of the religious practices represented. Although some are ministers, they are not leaders of a congregation. Even though it was not discussed, I wonder how this lack of seeing female leaders

in religious institutions affects the way women connect to one another as well as their beliefs about other women and themselves. Based on one of the previous quotes, there can be conflict especially for one's self-concept. The quote illuminated that women wear many roles—more often available to others than caring for themselves—which can be rooted in rearing, social roles and even religious doctrine. Women are often caretakers of their spouses, family members and their children. The desire to be helpful and nurturing stems from conditioning by our parents and other women in our lives. In these relationships we often develop a perspective about our roles and value. Expectations are then developed that affect the way we relate to other women.

[It] bothers me because we've been socialized that we need to take care of everyone else.

We are being wired not to say what's on our mind.

Absolutely, sometimes we're not authentic with ourselves about what we feel because it's something we're taught we're not supposed to feel, and so, we can't deal with that.

Well, it's being taught to be a lady. I remember being at home and my mom said and I would get in trouble because you're supposed to have your feet crossed and your hands like this, and some emotions, you know, you were not supposed to get caught being angry. You would see some of the little girls who were doing that and they would get in trouble. You're not supposed to be loud, you're conditioned to hold all that stuff in.

Is it possible that our inability to connect with our own emotions makes it difficult to emotionally connect to others? The power of groups such as this one allowed women to share their feelings and as they witnessed others deal with their pain or pleasure, connections were established. They were able to identify with one another despite the differences they all brought to the table. As I noted earlier, the rise of female aggression especially in young girls could be attributed to this suppression of feelings and the rejection of what is considered "lady-like." As gender roles become more fluid in their definitions for younger populations, this definitely can cause one to examine their belief system and question what is appropriate for behavior. For

older generations, I noticed in the group that this is indeed a time of self-reflection or rejection of ideas (old or new) that have been taught/presented about appropriate female behavior.

In some relationships, women felt that there can be confusion in the role of caretaker and enabler. There is a feeling of connecting to others when we are helping them and at some point, the relationship becomes taxing and causes women to further disconnect because boundaries are not in place. Building relationships is necessary but if not examined, the relationship can become one-sided and not mutually beneficial, which is a principle of Relational Cultural Theory (Comstock et al., 2008) that emphasizes growth fostering relationships. In session 5, the women talk more about the components of this theory and its role in their relationships.

For most people, it is easier to develop bonding social capital. In our roles as mothers, wives/partners, and friends, our social circles can be limited to individuals who think like we do, live in our communities, or attend our houses of worship. This not only limits our ability to gain new information, but we miss out on opportunities to stretch and grow from the different experiences bonding social capital can offer in connecting to someone who is different. The demands of our roles often keep women from building relationships with those who are different. The workplace can serve as an opportunity for some to meet others but the challenge is to extend those relationships beyond our focus our assigned duties. The pull of life responsibilities for many women can serve as a limiting factor for new and diverse friendships. For others, these diverse relationships are life-giving. One participant shared a story about an older lady she judged because of her appearance and ultimately, this person became an asset to her and the organization. In focusing solely on her looks, she comments that she would have missed an amazing opportunity to connect to someone different:

I value experiences and relationships and so for me, I think that you miss opportunities when you prejudge situations before you get to know. I have met so many people who are



so different, so many different levels, and if I had judged them right there I never would have had that precious peace that they brought. I had just went by how she looked and just by how she looked...you can miss so much... So for me, I look for opportunities to bridge and to seek out, where the jewels are, or where the gem is, or how we might use a relationship for whatever I might be involved with.

So bridging shouldn't be as difficult, but we have so many learned behaviors from growing up that it makes it harder unfortunately. Then you have people like me who have a hard time reaching out, if you come to me, we just chat all day, but I do have a harder time reaching out myself, so I will try to get over that.

I used to have on my emails, we can do more together. And I really did believe that, especially when I was working in an environment where everybody was self-protected, and I was trying to bridge. And just saying that was starting to get into the inner circles. This reminded people to do more together, because we really can. I really believe we can do more together.

Let me share a funny story, because I have a big group of friends who are from India. And, each time they would sit together and I would be there at lunch or at dinner and they would talk so many bad things about my country [Pakistan], and then they would be like oh, okay, she is sitting there, you are one of us. And then, at my work, normally after a while they stopped talking to me in Arabic. They don't see me as a different person. It's so funny because I have seen that in so many different groups.

The other biggest thing I learned from my trip to New York was that the reason we don't have peace, is that everybody is concentrating on how we are different rather than how we are the same.

One of the participants commented that as she became a part of a group, they no longer viewed her as an outsider and she felt accepted. I believe the same is true for the value of these group experiences. In bringing people together and as they build trust in their conversations, the belief of "us versus them" becomes less dominant. In these conversations, social capital is built because they are able to focus on their commonalities when they share their experiences. Even when there were stories that were very different from their own, as trust was established they also became more empathetic and were able to appreciate those differences.

The participants not only reflected on their current experiences with one another but reminisced about past events and how relationship building can contribute to creating change in

individuals, within communities and in society at large. These conversations created a chance for me to witness personal change and in some of the women, transformation in the way they saw themselves and others.

The role of social media is also a significant factor in the way that women connect to each other. Despite the increase in the number of individuals on social networking sites such as Facebook, a recent study demonstrated that people are more depressed and feeling less satisfied (Kross et al., 2013). Social media also presents a fear—our relationships are being used for profit. Sites such as Spokeo and Pipl create profiles based on our media presence, relationships online, and virtual footprint. Many women asked if these sites actually build social capital or give the appearance of relationship building. In my opinion, I believe that these sites can offer a loose form of social capital. If relationships are never cultivated, then a person has a list of acquaintances. The challenge of social media is that a person can create a persona that is not accurate and misleading. I have made some amazing connections on social media but I ultimately had to leave that space and meet someone in person. There are those who have never met in person and the use of Skype and other video conferencing was comparable to meeting in person. As this level of technology becomes more available in our day to day lives, the effect it will have on our relationships will continue to be an area that must be examined. Based on the conversations in the group, it appears that there are generational implications. Many of the older participants use social media less regularly than those who were younger in the group. Older participants preferred face-to face meetings and phone calls more than the use of texting and Facebook.

Several of the women stated that they do not “friend” people they do not know unless they are in a friend’s network. The endorsing feature of LinkedIn has also caused concern.

People who do not know your work or have not known you can endorse you, which can provide a false sense to others about a relationship that is really non-existent. Social media allows us to connect with people of our past and re-engage with classmates. It can also serve as a place that provides credibility depending upon who we align with in our social networking circles.

Because you rely on your social media relationships, versus the people you touch. Because 9 times out of 10 we cannot say a word to each other and have no connection but as soon as “hey, how’s your day going” so you bond with the people that you may not have seen since high school.

Yeah, because they say hey, and there’s some people who, they don’t respond.

Some of what goes on with social media with these types of connections is that there’s some shared history even if you don’t remember what it is. They feel like there’s a bond, but there isn’t.

I give you an example of an acquaintance of mine, she lives on Facebook, you know she’s going to the restroom to do Facebook. So, when I met her, for her it is a huge social capital and that’s how she relates. And people, she has more than 1500 contacts, and I wonder why. So, she comes up to me and says I have this invitation on Facebook, and she say to me, frankly [name withheld], and I’m saying it out of love, you’re a loser on Facebook. Because I don’t put my heart out and I don’t say where I’m going.

It depends on what you use it for, I connect with the artistic community, and the preacher community, and the nonprofit community on Facebook, and some of my friends are from back home, but we let each other know about events, and causes, and that sort of thing, so, um, I guess I really think you have to have a balance, because if I meet you in person and connect then we’re more likely to follow each other on Facebook than some random person.. I think if you manage the connections along with the real world...it can be a valuable source of social capital.

I’m so young, who I’m connected to gives me some credibility, who I know. I think that it can kind of confuse people how you interact through social media and how you interact in real life, because it’s different. I had a guy that I met professionally, and he added me on LinkedIn and I was okay with that, we met for coffee, we were talking business. And then he added me on Facebook and then he asked to go on a second coffee meeting, and I was confused because LinkedIn is professional, but Facebook is personal, so I did not want to add him, but I did go to the second coffee.

But look at how they’re using your social capital for their profits. It’s very interesting how that’s being used and we don’t even see. I think it’s pretty crazy that people have all these apps on one phone, and all that information is linking in and connecting.

One of the challenges I have with the concept of social capital is that relationships can become equated with profits. For example, many of the social media sites are using the contact information for the sole purpose of marketing to an audience and sharing their information with other marketing venues. Social media will continue to play a significant role in the way people connect to one another and is a platform for the creation of social capital. Social media has made it easier to connect with people from around the globe and access information within minutes and yet, it has can serve as a place for individuals to develop false personas creating conflict in relationships. There have been a number of bullying incidents of young women because of social media resulting in injury and even death.

The impact of race and class has a profound effect on how those who are marginalized build social capital. It not only affects those who are in the out-group but those within the in-group have a disadvantage because they have a lack of understanding of skin color being a barrier in building relationships within those communities or with others who are different. For many who are a part of diverse backgrounds, race and ethnicity can be a core piece of one's identity. Our identities can be compounded when we do not participate in cultural norms as expected. Rejection can be experienced by the hands of those who are a part of the in-group or even by those individuals who are within our own racial identity grouping. For diverse women, these issues can complicate the way they connect to those who share the same cultural identity or even with those who are different. In the United States, we often do not think about the impact of cultural identity with those who are not born in the United States or are the children of newly arrived immigrants. The desire to remain true to the culture as well as acculturate or even assimilate can be a constant pull and can impact social capital.

I can just speak from my own story because I was part of what I call an assimilation experiment gone horribly wrong in the fifth grade. It created some things in me that I'm

still dealing with. So there's this desire in me to bridge, I know it's in me, it's why I have that Korean affinity. Korean and Indian, I just love those cultures, but I don't have any friends who are Korean or Indian, because I learned very early that when you mix, you get hurt. And you get damaged, in a bad way, and so you don't trust. And I know what God put in me, and that is the desire to love regardless, but because of that experience so long ago I've seen it play out and...that's how it looks to me in that context.

I think it's easier to bond because you feel understood. And I think that's really important. You know when you have friends it doesn't matter what their race is it's more like, oh she gets me, so I think we have this desire to be known. So when you have different cultures that me being understood is when we get lost in this conversation, so I'm not going to be friends with somebody who is white because they can't understand me, or I'm not going to be friends with somebody who is 2nd-generation from Africa because they won't be known. And that plays into social media. But the downside is, you don't really know who you are. Through those bridges you bring out those things that you didn't know. College for me was that experience, you think one way, but then you meet different people and they start bringing different characteristics of me, things I enjoy, things I did not enjoy, because I was bridging. But it was really hard.

You don't lose yourself by embracing other people, you don't. And I think at one time I started struggling with that because daughter came up to me, she was in middle school, and she was fighting with me and she said just because you cannot associate with people who don't go to the mosque, so I cannot associate.... We are not Americans and we cannot associate with white people. Who am I why did you do that to me? She was in such a bad place. And I thought that just because I will not confine myself to one specific group, I will be more open, more diverse and it just blew up in my face. So I still struggle with these kinds of issues, where is this next generation going and what are their fears because we have a different fear than them.

My pediatrician, who I'm not going to go [to], because he was actually telling my son so do you have Muslim friends, he said, hmm, I don't know, I have all kinds. He said, no, you should have more Muslim friends. He said it right in front of me. I was so mad. He dare not say these things. So the people who are more conservative, I cannot relate to them, and they cannot relate. So even in my community I am a leftist or an outsider, which again is a struggle for my children.

You can be ostracized for that too, but on the flip side, so I grew up in the other side of Dallas and my parents came here about 20 years ago, and so, church and whether you're orthodox or Muslim or Christian isn't really important because that's where you do a lot of your socializing, so the church that I grew up in is like 98% Ethiopian, but it's a really weird place being like my generation because our parents were okay and comfortable with connecting with other Ethiopians, but we're not, the culture and the people around us, so we're having a hard time, those of us in our 20s, because that 's not what I want to do and how I want to be... because our parents are so involved with the Ethiopian community, so when you're just concerned with your own circle, you're not relevant outside of that. It's a very interesting place of my Ethiopianness shouldn't be based on do

I only have Ethiopian friends. My Ethiopianness is I'm proud of who I am and where I come from and who my parents are...

It's so sad because you know what, when we go to our country they are also enamored with learning English, Grey's Anatomy is the new soap. So when we go back the kids will only talk in English, they will talk in American English, and these children having been taught to use their own language, when these kids go there, what, we have been told only to speak Hindi or Urdu and they will watch a movie more faster than a kid would watch it here. So, when they go back there is another contradiction. There is a term very commonly used among South Asians, ABCD Americans—all born confused or [American Born Confused Desi]—and when they say [that] they mean South Asians. So all these kids are confused.

Hearing all that I see how confused African Americans are. Because we have become so lost that we don't even have our culture defined because we didn't integrate [it] over here so all that history is all confused and there's a lot going on there, and then because of the black African American culture, with an African root that you don't know the history, generations and generations don't know the history. It's like, my mother really didn't know it and they nearly didn't know it.

Our history is confused because we don't know that the Africans that were brought here were not stolen from one particular tribe, they were stolen from several tribes. Mixed in, and they were all waiting on the same beach together, and dropped on different islands.

Typically, when race is discussed in the United States, there is a conversation that continues between African Americans and Anglos that has a historical background and although that conversation did come up, the perspective was interesting in this context. For many in the group, listening to the dialogue of the Ethiopian and Indian participant opened another door for self-reflection. The dynamics of race for non-Americans is not one that is heard often or even addressed. I don't think we often discuss the similarities that other people of color face in this country around race or even color. For so many groups that are non-Anglo, there is the conflict to be accepted by the dominant society and yet, remain viewed as a part of their racial/cultural group which often the two groups do not connect. For those who do this, it is the balancing of both interests that can be rewarding and yet challenging in building social capital in both groups.

Conversations about race, especially for African Americans, include a discussion about the role of color. Colorism is the practice of discrimination based on favoring the lighter skin complexion of a person compared to an individual that is darker. Colorism is not only an American phenomenon but is also in other parts of the world such as India. Skin color has been a dividing factor within the African American community. Recently, a rapper stated that darker skinned women should not wear red lipstick, which resulted in many women of darker complexions defying stereotypes about the color (Wilson, 2013). Colorism creates a divide, and influences relationships and the exchange of social capital. One of the Anglo participants asked who does this more: Is it African Americans to one another or is it Anglos? The group responded that it is painful when African Americans perpetuate the belief that lighter skin is better than darker skin. This issue stems back to slavery with lighter skinned blacks having more privileges than those who were darker (Coard, Breland, & Raskin, 2001).

But the root of that is the ones that were light you knew that they had a relationship with the master, they had a better life and an opportunity of a better life because they were light-skinned, and privilege, and the privilege associated with that. Then all that played out generation after generation with some people not knowing that whole history as to why they were even feeling that way. But it had to do with the privilege associated with being a different color. And so you're a different color because you know that was the masters, they might have gotten beat, but they might have gotten something better, they got privilege.

But, to answer your question, we do it too. Because 9 times out of 10 there are not white people in our neighborhoods to do this to us. We don't really experience it until we get in the work force. Like for me, I was raised in an African American area it was the projects, I didn't know because my momma didn't talk about that, when I went to Skyline, it was diverse, when I went to Spence Middle School, I didn't even know what an Ethiopian was. And so, I've always had a diverse background, but then went I went to UTA (University of Texas at Arlington) then you need to be an HBCU (Historically Black College and University), you need to be with your people. Well, who was my people? I was with everybody. We do that to each other, and she's using the paper sack situation, I experienced that in '87, I went down to PV [Prairie View University, a historically black college] to earn 3 hrs credit and they were exposing us to Greek organizations and they actually pulled out the paper sack. So I was like, I didn't know what that was. ...they put it [paper sack] up to my face and told me I couldn't be in the AKA." [Alpha Kappa Alpha

Sorority, the first established African American Sorority in the United States]. (The paper bag principle can be verified in the interviews conducted by Kerr (2006) in the book, *The paper bag principle: Class, colorism, and rumor and the case of Black Washington, D.C.*)

What I'm saying [is that] the psychological residue, privilege, better, prettier, all of that that says light is better.

Because you've got to understand, I'm the darkest one in my family. My mother always told us she was French, Cherokee, and I forget the other one but it was another white one, and she had hair down to here and it was curly and she had cinnamon freckles. And my sister looked like that cause her dad looked like that. But my father was a real black man, so I came out looking like this, so I was raised to understand that my butt was too high, my nose was too flat, and my hair was too nappy. No, no, that's what my momma taught me. She didn't say it like that but you know, "baby do this so your nose won't be so wide."

Color continues to play a role in the way African American women and other women of color connect to one another and those who are different. Growing up in Louisiana, I remember as a child the affect color had on my belief systems about myself. My friends did not want to play outside because they were afraid of getting darker or I would hear comments about friends, "She's pretty for a dark girl." The damage is also a reality in other parts of the world. When I visited India, one of the women I spent time with was a Dalit. She had a dark complexion and Keren shared with me that she was told she would never get married because she was too dark for a man to want her. To grow up with these beliefs in Louisiana or in India, without self-reflection, dialogue and support can hinder one's ability to have a positive self-concept. It can also create a system of ranking others based on who is perceived as better because of color.

The perception around power, privilege, and color created a lot of different feelings in the women that ranged from the ability to make changes individually to the need for community and societal conversations about the damage of colorism. Beauty is a topic that is also sensitive to women of all ethnic groups. Daily, we make meaning about beauty based on our culture, experiences, relationships, and our upbringing. These meanings also impact the way we build



social capital. If we feel as if we are valued less, the ability to build relationships with individuals who are different can be intimidating and can sometimes reinforce our perceptions. Challenges such as structural oppression (fewer people of varying shades of color in positive roles in films or television) might limit one's ability to see and identify with others who are similar in media to see their likeness revered. An Anglo female asked a powerful question to the group after this intense dialogue: "I just want to know who holds the key to the bondage?"

We hold our own key.

I think it's held by a whole bunch of people.

I think it's experience.

I think people remind you of history.

We hold our own key. We have to take responsibility to consciously take a stand, decide where we are and how we're going to live that out.

An African American female shared her pain with distinctions in color made by her mother and her lighter complexion sister:

When my father looked at my daughter when she was maybe 3 and told her she was funny looking, I said daddy, you did it to me you're not going to do it to her. I said the world is going to beat her down enough, that people who love her have to lift her up. And teach her to value herself. And he never did it again, but I had to take a stand and say, no, it stops here. Because in my family I had to be smart, because in my mother's mind, I was too black to be beautiful, and so I didn't get it. My sister could be talented and beautiful, because they were the same color, but I had to be smart. And she would say, baby beauty is only skin deep don't worry about it. And she wasn't trying to hurt me, she was preparing me for the world that she thought I was going into. So, you know, and I still struggle sometimes with identity because of that kind of stuff, because that's what was ingrained, So how do you form an identity as a woman and not believe that you are beautiful.

This phenomenon of color is not limited to only African Americans in the United States but this is a challenge in many parts of the world such as Southeast Asia and Africa:

I had a Vietnamese friend in college...and 10% of international students are at our school so we had a lot of Southeast Asians. And she wouldn't get a tan, and I said why not,

because, you know, Americans, white Americans want a tan, they go and get a suntan. They are looking to get darker and (name withheld) is looking to stay lighter and she said in my country whenever you were darker it was because you were working in the fields, so you were in the lower class. My mom tells me this story how her cousin had a baby with an Italian man at the time they had occupied the land and her father looked at the baby, loved the baby, and then something clicked and it reminded him of the Italians that he went to war with, so the lightness in the Ethiopian community, after the war it represented that you were mixed with Italian blood, which was the enemy, so that lightness wasn't embraced. So I think it's neither light or dark, I think it's just what does it represent in that culture. You could be lighter and be an enemy, you could be lighter and you could be a worker, So I think that's a very important point that Vietnamese people could feel that lightness is better, but when you zoom out in the context of history, lightness and darkness start to mean different things. [It] Has a different connotation rather than just light or just dark.

It's the same case with South Asians. It is British ruled for 400 years, so white skin represents power, smart, white girls get married sooner, they get married to rich families, so, same thing.

A participant shared that the same struggle exists in the Latino/Hispanic community.

Those who are darker are often treated as less than those who are lighter in complexion:

[Hispanics] They are treated like on the lower end and she's a lighter colored Hispanic girl, but her father was dark, he was a field worker, and her children are dark and they are treated like that when they go to Mexico.

It was so interesting to watch the responses of the women in the group as they heard these stories around color and the effect it had on the women's lives and their communities. It was in this discussion that trust was definitely established and they began to bridge their social capital. I believe the more often we can have these conversations, the more equipped we will be with understanding the reality that others deal with daily. The opportunity to have this dialogue was extremely informative and therapeutic to the participants. They realized that by creating space to see their similarities, they could also create the space to be open to the differences even when they might disagree with one another.

I think at some point for us to move forward and be able to operate effectively and even morally with social capital we're going to have to agree to disagree, we're not going to agree on anything, but we have to honor each other's position enough to agree to disagree

which is not the same as tolerating someone else's position. You only tolerate people who you discount. And when we discount folk, and we miss a really, we miss a lot. And so we have to honor each other's differences to agree to disagree without trying to kill each other behind it.

That's why it's good to learn and talk and have conversations because then you're broader, that's why travel and knowing different people gives you a different perspective, you know. And you understand better, and when you have understanding then I think interaction, bridging is easier.

I think we have to make a decision to honor somebody else's experience. I may never be able to understand it. It may just you know, some stuff I've heard just boggles my mind. What happened, are you serious, and you lived through? So I may never be able to understand it but I can honor you as an individual enough to say, well, you know I don't agree with you that's your experience and I'm not trying to take that away from you. This is my experience and I hope you will honor mine.

Even in the moment of closure, one of the participants connected her relational challenge in the conversation to her Immunity Map. She was faced with a new way of thinking that challenged her current behavior: "That cognitive dissonance, that's me, it's in my face right now. So I'm going through making some changes, and it's because of immunity to change that I'm aware of that, so there's a whole range of things that I'm stepping up to here." This process not only empowered women to see their immunities to creating change in their lives but it also helped them to build bridging social capital as a result of the depth of the conversations and interactions within the group sessions.

**End of session reflections.** The race conversation for all of the participants was compelling. I don't think we have enough spaces to do this with diverse individuals that are safe and people can share who they are and what they think. The dialogues are becoming more and more filled with self-disclosure which demonstrates the level of connecting that is taking place among the participants. The conversations around social capital and social media were also of interest in giving the women an opportunity to think about how they build relationships in person

and online. It also helped the women to think about a number of issues around race, gender, and age differences that sometimes keep us from building social capital.

I was really fascinated by the conversation about color of the skin and kept on wondering the universal similarities, and wondered that no matter what race you belong to, lighter skin is always a sign of privilege. I was especially impressed with the young lady of twenty-some, how much depth she carried, her perspective and grasp on life and today's social structure took me by surprise. I was really proud of her. Women are extremely resourceful and powerful. How we choose to use these strengths is up to us. My family and friends always told me that I am a very soft and mild natured person and it will do me more harm than good, but after forty some years later I realize that it is my only strength, it has led me to have friends in all four corners of the world, it has taught me never to judge anyone by color or religion, I've seen beauty in most unexpected of people and places. I feel sorry for people who limit themselves by the most superficial things. These sessions always make me think a lot about my actions towards other people. Each time I come back with more and more surety that women HAVE to be each other's keepers. We have to empower each other by patience, love and non-judgmental attitude. (40 something, immigrant female)

It is very insightful because I know that my generation is so focused on relationships and communication through social media and I do not want to fall under that category. It makes me question if I value people more based on their Facebook status or LinkedIn endorsements. I also became more self-aware of the stereotypes of black people and how I do not want to have biases against black people. I think that within the black culture people are targeted for being "so dark" and being "so light". The idea is that darker people receive more criticism. In my experience I have received negative comments for my complexion that are hurtful and demeaning as well. Being called yellow, pale or white by other black people has been a direct attack for something that I cannot help just like in the case of people with a darker complexion. Everyone has to work through those biases especially the black community. I often think about how difficult it must be for people who come to America and receive backlash for it or who have a hard time adjusting. The conversation has come up in another environment and I appreciate the knowledge I gained from those who spoke in this group. (African American female, mid 20s)

Our discussion on cognitive dissonance described what I go through both personally and professionally since I tend to struggle with the idea of who I believe I am versus the person I present to the world. [I am] certainly looking at relationships differently. Becoming more aware of how I build them—learning to both bond and bridge with

others to help me stretch myself and expand my network. (African American female, early 40s)

Actually, I felt more captivated by the conversations this night. I was so in awe that I was speechless most of the time. [I was most engaged] during the conversation about how race, class, gender builds social capital. As everyone expressed their experiences and concerns regarding skin color, I could not help but to dwell on the changing cultural dynamics of my own family. During the conversation on skin color, other ladies expressed their past negative experiences. To be honest, I don't recall negative experiences outside of my home. I had more negative experiences from others regarding my hair beginning around age 10. Growing up with my grandmother, I did not have the latest hairstyles. I have always felt content with my skin color and am told often that my skin is beautiful. However, when growing up, my siblings, cousins, and I expressed negative comments to one another regarding our skin color (although we are all dark-skinned). We often called one another "choco-black" or "black monkey" whenever we would fight or score on one another. Even today, we still tease one another with those same phrases but we take it as love. With younger generations of my family being part Latino, comments are made like "Black Mexicans" and we don't take it as hate words. But outside of that, I did not get negative pushback regarding my skin color. Maybe it is because I didn't dwell on it or just didn't pay close enough attention. Or maybe I became resilient to outside negativity regarding skin color due to my household and familial experiences. (African American female, 30 something)

[Participant] brought up a good point about the generational norms and expectations—will make me ask more questions of the younger folks to really get where they are coming from. Enjoyed the conversation on race, very enlightening and hopeful. I'm very saddened by what you all endured growing up. I'm very sorry. I feel sad that by virtue of my color I am part of your pain. My grandparents were immigrants, so they related at a different level. They saw life as a universal struggle, and when faced with that cognitive dissonance, they showed up with open arms, instead of running backwards. I'm grateful that I was raised with love and openness. (Anglo female, late 40s)

It is obvious in the previous comments that there was an enormous amount of self-reflection that took place in the women as a result of this session. They reflected not only on their own pain but the pain of others which moved many to think about their actions. I am convinced that in order to change relationships in this society, these conversations are critical so that people have a better understanding of the journey of others. They can not only see the vast

number of similarities they share but they are also able to have a better respect for why the differences exist.

#### **Session 4**

Due to an ice storm, session 5 was held online using WebEx to connect the group virtually instead of face to face. Surprisingly, the use of the technology did not inhibit the conversation and proved that if connections and trust are built, the use of technology can be a tool in building connection. One of the most impactful parts of the conversation was the younger second generation immigrant female's reflection on the impact of confession on her life and how confession has made her more vulnerable and yet, open to the possibilities. We all need space to be vulnerable and this resonated with all of the women. Many referenced in the reflections and comments during the session one of the women's discussion of her change in the midst of domestic violence, the immigrant female's faith journey and comfort where she is with her life and body.

The group began with the women discussing their a-ha's around the ITC process and social capital. One of the women who was struggling with leaving her home credited the ITC process in helping her make a change:

I was telling a lady at work about the group and about the process. [I was] really interested and she invited me to this place.... Now any other [day], I probably would've found a reason to try to back out [I was] just trying to come out of my comfort zone and stepping forth and trying to be more vocal than the person I see myself as. And so I went, and like I said, there were about five other ladies there and I had an enjoyable time.

Another one of the ladies recognized the role of social capital in her everyday interactions:

I went home and I evaluated my life and I was like what quality, healthy relationships do I have and I was surprised by like how many people I know and interact with all the time but quality, healthy relationships were so much lower the number than the people I see all the time just because I guess there are so many things that play into that. So that was a huge a-ha moment for me and it was cool to see that social capital a part of your everyday life.

The conversations throughout the meeting became more revealing, demonstrating again that the women felt safe to share experiences that impacted their lives. One of the ladies had a friend whose daughter committed suicide. She wanted help from the group on how to help her friend. Many of the women shared their experiences and offered their assistance to help in any way that they could. This demonstrates their empathy and caring for not only the situation but their desire to help one another. Trust had been developed in the group—a key component of social capital.

The group began to discuss the articles, “Barriers to Women Creating Change in Community,” and “The Real Reasons Women Are Not Advancing in Corporate America” and there were varying opinions on the differences between men and women in the workplace. Their comments explore the challenges of power and differences in leadership:

I think honestly there are differences. But I think as long as the job gets done, I don't think people really care...men are men and women are women and they each have their own different styles.

I think women tend to have different priorities than men. And so, it's not necessarily about domination, even as a female minister, even watching women in higher education, men tend to be more, for the most part, not all of them, men tend to be more aggressive and want women to undercut, where women, in my experience, are more concerned about making sure people are empowered and understood. Men just want the bottom line.

Well, you know, in my industry, it's actually mostly dominated by women. But what's interesting is, even though there are men in my industry, men tend to get the better jobs and projects. ...I have a client she makes decisions but she tells me all the time, you know, he signs the check so even though he says he's not involved, he still is involved.

We were in a corporate meeting three weeks ago and the vice president of my division came in... She cried. And I was like, that was so manipulative, right. So, I was placing, you know, male corporate behaviors, instead of looking at that as, she's strong enough to stand up here and be passionate about something. I thought it was manipulative. I did that. And then, a couple of weeks ago I was at a church event with Pastors from [country withheld] and they felt the fact that I was introducing myself to the men in the room was aggressive.

It was interesting that the comments were not just from those in corporations but also from nonprofits and faith-based organizations. All of these comments reveal the role of power and even when women might be in leadership, there are still perceptions that men are often still in control. The challenge of dealing with difficult leaders is not limited to one industry. I also found that the challenge was not always men who were oppressive in their leadership styles but many of the women were also characterized this way. I think many felt as if women should be supportive to one another and found that at times, they could be more difficult than male bosses. In essence, bad leadership was not gender based.

The group discussed how women typically undervalue the skills, gifts, and talents that they bring to organizations and businesses. Many of the women agreed that it is common to minimize their accomplishments. There is a fear and some felt it was conditioning from society that by celebrating their abilities it is viewed as boasting. Many were taught that boasting is acceptable when others do it for you but it is socially frowned on when a woman promotes her accomplishments.

For many of the women, whether married or single, the juggling of careers, children, significant others, or school can create a tension that many men may not deal with. Trying to balance work with child rearing is difficult and can limit job opportunities and social mobility. Even with spouses, some of the women shared that they still carried a significant load at work and at home. Participants discussed differences in countries such as Canada and France view the parenting role as equal, often different than the approach in the United States. In both of the aforementioned countries, maternity leave for both parents is up to a year. The United States does not have those opportunities in place. Motherhood is difficult and it is especially hard for single mothers who do not have the support often in the workplace. Mothers who work hourly



jobs have issues with taking off from work to pick up sick children or attend programs at their children's schools. Without child support (which might not be enough), women make sacrifices to provide financially for their children in order to make ends meet:

From the single mother's perspective, the bills still have to be paid even if I'm the only one paying them, and the meetings still have to go on for the parent-teacher conferences because I know that if the teachers don't see a parent then my children are going to be treated different. So somehow I have to find a balance because I don't have the luxury of somebody to cook while I'm doing this and somebody to pick up cleaning while I'm doing that, so I don't know, I think that couples have to come to an understanding what the balance have to be because, if I'm the only parent in the household which I was for a long time even when I was married—don't nobody say nothing about that—I had to do all of that. I think men feel supported in a way that women don't necessarily feel supported so they have the freedom to decide that I'm going to be primarily invested in my career.

For women, juggling several roles is challenging, especially for single mothers, which makes it more difficult to find people in the workplace in leadership who understand the sacrifices women make for their homes as wives and mothers. There is an ongoing conversation in many "mommy blogs" about the role of stay-at-home mothers compared to those who work outside of the home. Both groups of mothers are often criticized by one another for either sacrificing their children or not contributing their gifts to the workplace. Several of the group members felt that women are their own worst enemy. They offered multiple examples from their experiences that reveal that women have different expectations for one another than they do for men. Although this was not seen by all as exclusively an issue for all women, it was noted to occur. The point was raised that the creation of trust could be the solution to many of the relational problems that exist between women. The lack of trusting others might not be about the other person as much as it could be a security issue for the person with the trust issues. Our initial encounters with others can bring feelings of mistrust because of stereotypes and past experiences. Envy plays a role in many relationships creating a lack of trust and competition.

sometimes when women get in those powerful positions are not as sympathetic to the needs of women. It could be because they don't want to be perceived as being weak.

I have seen it up close and personal where a female associate [role withheld] hired women she knew she could bully, and then watched them slowly crash and burn. And part of her role was supposed to be helping promote gender equity through them. What was amazing to me was to watch her do that.

I've seen that too. Women hiring other women they that know they will be able to control. I've seen people that are very smart but they're not hired just because of they would take over.... And I've seen this being very, very common, and I'm talking about women hiring women, not men.

I'm not proud of it but I've recognized it [envy], thanks to this group, but I have felt like I compare myself to other people.

I think unfortunately, some women see that there's so little out there to have. I have to have it all myself and there isn't enough to share or go around.

it has taken me quite a number of years to be comfortable with my own skin and take the competitive edge out of me.

Women in leadership struggle with the perceptions and stereotypes others have about their skills and ability to lead effectively. There are those women who buy into those perceptions and feel that in order to be successful they must operate in a dominating and controlling demeanor. Each situation is different and requires a systems thinking lens to examine is the role of gender the issue or does the culture of the organization permit and accept this behavior in any of its leaders. Even though there are individual responsibilities, the system has to also be examined to discover why this behavior is allowed in organizations.

The question was raised if bullying as a child contributes to a person's lack of trust issues. As I shared my own personal experiences with being bullied, one of things I shared was exploring how we make meaning of our experiences. Our experiences can continue to keep us in a place of isolation and rejection or they can be used to better help us understand ourselves and

those around us. One participant shared her journey as a survivor of domestic violence and when she got “sick and tired of being sick and tired”:

At some point I had to say, I cannot spend the rest of my life being afraid that this knucklehead is going to come back to do something to me, and when I stood up to him and realized that I lived through it and I went to court and I realized that I lived through that. Okay, so maybe I'm stronger than I think I am. Let me reevaluate this. Let me figure out what's in me so that I don't have to put myself in the positions to be a victim again. When you get tired of being tired... When you get tired of being afraid... There were a couple of things that moved me out of the place of staying with that abusive husband. One of them was I didn't want my children to go through this...[I thought] he going to hurt my child one more time, and I'm going to kill that nigger, and my children are not going to have no parents. I'm going to kill him and called the people and say, come get him, I did it. And that was the point when I said, you know what I've got to get up out of here, because if he hurts my child one more time it's going to be over with. And at that point I stopped being afraid because I was mad. Everybody has their personal point that they get to where you say okay this isn't working.

The issue of domestic violence is universal and goes beyond race, culture, and religion. Sadly, a number of women had experienced physical, spiritual, mental, or emotional abuse by a spouse, lover, pastor/person in authority, or friend. The Muslim female participant shared the struggles women face in her community around this issue. Often women are the aggressors with mother-in-laws abusing their daughter-in-laws. The emotional abuse she felt was even greater than the physical abuse which is still a problem faced and often, unaddressed. One of the women commented that it is a process of ending victimization, “You are always growing and are always changing.” It was noted that the abuse is not ever the fault of the person being abused but it is important to recognize one's needs instead of seeking someone else to fulfill them at the expense of your health and safety. One participant shared that her story of domestic violence has allowed her to be a resource to others in a way that professionals cannot because she understands what a person goes through because she's lived it. Her healing through the telling of her story has allowed her to help others.

I must say that I was surprised that with the session being conducted totally online through webcams that I did not expect the conversation to flow as freely as it did. From topics of domestic violence to self-awareness, the group obviously felt safe and free to elaborate on ideas presented by others and make meaning of their own experiences. One of the participants stated that there were those in the group she felt a connection to but did not know how to further the relationship for fear that the person might not see her in the same way. She was curious to know how others “came into their own”—or had self-awareness/understanding because she felt in having that understanding, she could better connect to others. It was inspiring to watch the group offer support and encouragement instead of being critical:

There's that old saying wisdom comes with age so it's everything that you learned in your life as you go in different paths of your life you learned from those things good or bad that's when you become more positive or negative, hopefully it's more positive. And I don't think there's a set age where you're supposed to know all of this, or you do know it or you don't know it. It's just faith, it's things that happen to you in life that brings you to those crossroads before you want to go positive or negative and just being part of this group, you're positive. You're already heading in the right direction so I was in those crossroads a few years ago myself. I can be really negative, I had things happen in my life that caused me to be really negative and not be a happy person, but I chose not to be.

It was also intriguing to watch how the participants continued to weave the Immunity Map throughout the group process. This demonstrated to me the affect this process had on the women self-reflecting in our conversations:

I don't want to call it an awakening but the whole thing it's a process. I love that immunity map, it is dipping the tiniest part of your toe in and try to test it out a little bit. I'm not the same person that I was a year ago, I'm definitely the same person I was ten years ago. And honestly, I was in a situation of domestic violence, I was raised in a household with a violent father and it's all part of what made me be me, and I really don't know that there's much I would change. I mean it's horrible. It's not any kind of sugar coating or anything good about it, except it's made me this person that I am, I mean I'm not super-strength but I'm stronger than some. I wanted to say something though about a comment made earlier, I think that it's real important that we take risks, and I think that when we take risks, those who are envious or jealous are the first to point out our failures, and I absolutely think there will be failures and risks.

For many of the women, crisis was instrumental in creating them to be the women that they have become. Without those defining moments, they did not believe they would have gained the insight and wisdom they now have. In retelling their story and listening to the stories of others, they were able to see how their journeys prepared them for the challenges they now face and how their connections to others affected them. I think it also helped others to further examine the stories that they tell about themselves and the way they have made meaning of their experiences. Throughout the sessions, the role of mentors or trusted friends was key. Having someone they could talk to without judgment was critical for their growth and development. Support systems are critical for not only telling the story but serve to create the space for reflection about the narrative we tell about ourselves.

I saw the value of the group and the sharing of their stories but it was helpful to hear from the women how this experience was transformative for them. One of the members of the group, a twenty something, made the following comment which captivated the group and further demonstrated the value of bringing diverse women together based on a recent experience she had around the power of confession:

confession is such an important part of our lives and it's something that we don't do often anymore...confessions are important. You have to create an opportunity for people to confess one to another. Like [name removed] was like the perfect example of a specific confession. It did something to your heart and it did something to the people's heart but with that said, it is our responsibility to make sure that we are finding those avenues to confess. With this group we have that...if you really want to grow, if we really want to have a lifestyle of confession this is how we will grow.

Using the Immunity to Change process and map really created the space for the women to confess and share their stories. It was in the confession that they received support, evaluated their mindsets and started the process of individual change and transformation. In their quest for individual change, I believe that they actually assisted others by their confessions and sharing

which in some way, impacted the group as a whole. I realized through this process that collective change will occur when individuals are willing to take the steps to create the change within self. I watched a group of women begin to change internally and the affect was felt on the group.

**End of session reflections.** As mentioned previously, it was interesting to host a group using online technology. I believe that there can be opportunities to bring people together using this format but I think having the face to face foundation is critical. This session was filled with a lot of questions from the women to each other and although it started with the focus on the workplace, I think due to the space that action research provides, allowed the women to feel free to move the conversation in a direction that they wanted. Comments from the end of session reflection form are as follows:

Primarily in looking at and discussing my own company's reality of women advancing in the corporate world. Though our company does have some women at a senior level it seems that most of those positions when announced seem to be mostly men. So I find it interesting that doesn't seem to be followed as much as it is promoted. Our discussion on life's triggers that help bring you into your own. For some that's children, for others it's a career change. But the whole conversation of whatever it is that makes you finally cross into a more enlightened you was a great exchange. The overall consensus is that we have this safe outlet to share our most intimate thoughts and concerns with one another. One thing is that it has made me more aware of what I need to start thinking about or doing to be more of a change maker in my circle of influence. (African American female, early 40s)

[I was most engaged] When we were discussing trust issues and what first article about environment women face in corporate America. The critical moment in the group for me was that crisis brings about most of our changes, that we all need mentors at various times of our lives, that age doesn't necessarily mean you have it all together and you've learned everything you need to, and that trust and envy are two mindsets women struggle with most. That I struggle with the same things as others, that I have actually learned quite a bit over the span of my life and career, but that I have a long way to go. That I need to watch my negativity and the perceptions I have of other women when they act like women. (Anglo female, early 50s)

I was enthralled by (name withheld) telling her story. She exposed her vulnerability and at the same time demonstrated her power. Beautiful! A critical moment for me was

(names withheld) going back and forth, calling for ownership of choices. I would not have seen that coming after the earlier session. That is true empowerment when you can own your choices. (Name withheld) opening up was significant. You could hear the fear in her voice, but she stepped up and shared anyways. The importance of mentors [will inform my personal and professional life.] I have been blessed to be surrounded by amazing people my whole life. I have been hermitting myself lately. I must get back out there. (Anglo female, late 40s)

## Session 5

Session 5 was held at an office location in North Dallas. Two participants were not in attendance at this meeting and one was late due to previous commitments. Participants reviewed their Immunity Maps and also discussed the Jean Baker Miller (1986) article on relationships.

The group reflected on their best female leaders and the characteristics of those leaders. These leaders ranged from mothers, teachers, to supervisors. These leaders provided encouragement, support, coaching, and led by example. They were authentic and exhibited integrity. Many of the traits are complementary to relational leadership which, for several group members, was responsible for their ability to thrive and grow.

The good leaders who impacted my life are those who were not afraid for others to shine. They know how to put a good team together and they orchestrate. They lead by empowering and have discernment of different talents, skills and gifts. Good leaders usually do that. I've had some great leaders in my life. I am almost spoiled I do believe I try to give all of that back out. You can't give what you don't have. That's my highlight for a leader.

For me, the best one I've had is when she's not there at all, she can take a vacation and rest because she knows the job is going to get done. She's impacted all of us, given us all the tools we need. She can go off and come back and know we've taken care of everything. To me, the best leaders are the ones who don't feel that they need to be over you to lead, micromanage. That's the best leadership I've been under.

My high school track coach was probably the first strong female leader. 13 years of being a district champ. She was a wonderfully simple country Texas girl. There was always this common goal was to win but if you couldn't win to always do your best. She'd give us the update tools to do your best. She knew when to kick you in the behind and when to give you a hug.

Let me read a quote someone read to me: A leader is best when people barely know he exists. When his work is done, the team says we did it ourselves. It is not about themselves. It is a larger than life image that they have and they bring in people together through trust, thru constructive criticism—whatever that person needs—coaching and they bring that whole thing whatever it takes to fill in the puzzle pieces.

The characteristics of great leaders were those who did not micromanage, trusted their teams, knew when to offer support and when they needed to apply tough love. Great leaders are also those who connected with their staff and can bring out the best because they recognized the gifts and talents of each individual. Some experiences of leadership, despite their negative impact, became a positive asset to the participants. One member of the group shared an experience as a teen that transformed her life and continues to impact her and family members. Another discussed how an experience with a new supervisor was devastating and yet, formative.

My positive came from a negative from a woman. I was a senior in high school and we had that vocational program where we worked a half day in an office and then when to school. I went to interview with an attorney, she's national, a well-known attorney. She was very known for being a leader. I walked in her office, sat there and we were talking and she asked me about my Spanish. I grew up in the 50s and 60s in Dallas and there was no bilingual education...you spoke English or nothing. I cannot carry a conversation or read in Spanish. So when I told her that she told me that I would never get anywhere in life because I didn't speak Spanish and I that I should speak my language and to me, English was my language. That stayed with me forever. I went home and told me parents. Needless to say I didn't get the job. My mom was really upset that this woman told me this and said I shouldn't listen to someone like that and I could be whatever I want. My siblings were there and all knew and when she recently passed away, my brother came to me and I said I knew what he was thinking. I said God bless her and I moved on and from her negativity of what she told me at 17 made me who I am today. I am a positive person and that never held me back. When someone is negative to you turn it around and make it a positive.

When I graduated from college, I volunteered to work at a nonprofit. I had great connections there and I was so excited, I was going to change the world. I was really happy and thought life was great. Shortly after, I was offered a job and another woman had been hired who was going to be my boss and she was awful and I met her once. She was confident to tell me what I was, what I was not going to do...blew my mind...of all the male leadership, people had been coaching and giving advice and welcoming. And to have this woman, I asked how. It broke me. I am thankful for it now. It stretched me. I went through seven months of not working and it was God helping me figure out my life. Being 22 and trying to find my way and not really having a lot of direction or social



capital, a leader goes the way and shows the way and that means so much to me because I don't know the way and to have someone willing to take me on the journey is important. Those things that I think forever shaped me. I want to be the person 10, 15 years from now to show others the way. It sucks to feel so broken and I want to do it for others. I'm so thankful for this group. I wish others had this opportunity and I'm grateful that you all are showing me the way.

The negative experiences that the women had shaped their own leadership and relational skills. I think the final comment in the previous section demonstrates the value of mentoring. There is a great benefit in women receiving guidance from other women both personally and professionally. Groups such as this offer an opportunity for informal group mentoring. Groups like this one can help women form stronger identities about themselves and other women especially if they have had negative experiences in the past. Many of the women had negative experiences with their mothers that shaped not only their leadership or ideas about leadership but also their self-image.

I don't know where to start. My mother has served as both a negative as well as a positive. In the end, it was a very extraordinarily positive influence. My mother had a substance abuse issue from the time I was six years old and it just recently ended about five years ago so that's a really long time. I didn't know what to think. I would wish that she would come home and get me. She just never came around. I was about eight years and I realized then what the problem was. I was making a lot of noise and she was in the other room asleep. I know I was making a lot of noise. I was doing cheers and watching cartoons. She actually came out with a gun and literally put it right to my head. She said if you don't shut up the blank up, I'm going to kill you. The first thing I was thinking was where did you get the gun from? Where was this coming from? At that moment, I knew it was real. I then realized what my grandmother was saying. I knew it was serious. My grandmother wanted me to live with her but I wanted to stay with my mother. I carried that load for so many years, it was my fault, what did I do wrong, maybe I was a burden to her and she couldn't handle it. These days, now we are much closer, she clean and doing well and I see that so much happened to her and she wasn't herself and couldn't be the mom she needed to be. I got married at 20 and had my daughter at 22 and I came to this point that I know what I didn't want to be...like my mother. I wanted to be this perfect mother ...I didn't want them to know about her because was embarrassed and she didn't come around. I didn't want to be like her. She served as a great influence at 22. After talking to her now, she's sane and she came out 26-27 years later clean. I tell her God must have plan for her. She just got her first apartment for four years. At first I didn't believe it. She's been very consistent. I did things backward, got married, had kids and went back to college later. I feel like it happened for a reason and molded me

into the woman I am today. I took a negative situation and then turned it into something positive. I thank God for it.

This participant was not one who shared consistently like many others. She was quiet and an engaged listener. She even remarked that she didn't share this story often which was a turning point for her as well as for those who were participants. By sharing something so personal, she became vulnerable and I witnessed that it brought the group to a more intimate space. Many participants commented later that they could not believe "someone who had it together" or "looked like her" had gone through such a trial. I think the sharing of this story revealed to the group that we all have stories and that is dangerous to make judgments about others based on looks or education. I think this moment of sharing reveals the level of trust that was established by the women. As the sessions have continued, the depth of trust and connection has deepened.

The article on relationships (Miller, 1986) was difficult for some of the group. The concept of empathy was challenging, especially when it was difficult to empathize with others when participants were totally opposed to decisions or lifestyles of others. The difficulty existed when values created beliefs of right and wrong which can contribute to the breakdown in communication and experiencing a mutual understanding. Group members shared their experiences and stated that instead of focusing on loaded terms such as "right" or "wrong," that empathy comes in through understanding the pain, the feelings, or perspectives of another person to find commonality. It was noted that there is a difference in agreement and empathy. As one participant explained, "It is not agreeing... it is not condoning it...it is acknowledging the feeling." Another remarked:

We have to be open when we are trying to connect with people, in our own minds and our own experiences. We have to go with our experiences. And not what others have told us. We can't do that to people and when impose on them our beliefs on other people.

One of the participants shared about her new employment opportunity and how the group helped her to believe in herself to pursue the job. She shared more about the lack of empathy she received from one of her friends during the time of her lay-off and realized through the group process that this person was not someone she needed in her circle. She said it was the group that helped her to reach out beyond her normal circle and include new friends that were supportive and encouraging. She shared a story about being friended on Facebook by one of the members of the group and how this was a step for her to move beyond her homogenous group of friends. I think that being in the group provided a space for women to share their feelings and develop empathy which I believe helps them in building relationships with others beyond the group.

**End of session reflections.** The personal sharing continues to be effective in creating not just bonding but bridging social capital in the women. Many of the women continued to remain at the facility talking and sharing even for more than 45 minutes after the group ended. All of the women stated on their end of session reflection form that they were engaged especially during the personal sharing of women sharing their issues with domestic abuse and struggles with self-love. One shared, “the conversation became intriguing when everyone gave personal experiences.” It was obvious that personal story sharing helped the women to build trust and connect to one another on a deeper level. For many of the women, the discussions gave them opportunities to self-reflect on their own life stories. Some noticed that they have been fortunate to have great people in their lives. Others saw that they did have trust issues which previously prevented them from connecting. Some noticed their need to be more empathetic in their language and in body language. One woman commented that she was challenged in always wanting to fix others’ problems and not take the time to truly listen. Being in this group has helped her think about her behavior.

Sharing information about the incident with my mother was a critical moment for me because it was the first time I told the story to a group of people. In fact, I have resolved the issues of that childhood moment and it is my first time sharing it in over 10 years. It helps me to realize that other professional women are just like me. I could relate some part of myself with everyone's comments. Overall, I would say that the impact this group provides for me is trust. Trust to open up and collaborate with other women. It seems as though there will be some kind of sisterhood to birth from this group. (30 something African American female)

(Name withheld) was talking about her mom putting the gun to her head-OMG! I have always been impressed with the way she carries herself, her faith, but WOW! Talk about making choices. I have even greater respect for her. I am grateful for all the great relationships I have been fortunate enough to have. I probably need to practice empathy more. (Anglo female, late 40s)

Yes, I can learn how to have empathy for those I do not agree with. This impacts me because I can still find a way to contact with others who view things differently from me. I can take positive and negative things of how to be leader from my boss. She has exhibited some behaviors that show me how I do not want to be. (African American female, mid 20s)

The conversations about the gun and empathy created a space for self-reflection in the participants and those who shared. The story about the mother with the gun was an example of empathy at work in a group. Instead of judging this participant because of her past and feeling sorry for her, the group saw her strength because they were able to hear and learn more about what made her the woman she is today. I think it also helped them to think about their own milestones that were instrumental in their formation. It is apparent that the women began to share more revealing stories about themselves resulting in deeper relationships.

## **Session 6**

Session 6 was held at a local radio station's event room. The goal of this last session was for the group to discuss their Immunity Maps and action plan next steps for their individual and collective work. Two participants were not able to attend due to previous commitments. Shorter

than most sessions, participants focused on next steps and how to proceed since this was the last group meeting. Participants also shared their progress on their Immunity Maps. The session ended in a group dinner across the street and group picture with plans to meet over the summer. An event in May was scheduled but cancelled due to space being overbooked at a Center in Fort Worth. The group also established a Facebook page to keep in touch.

One group member continued to struggle with one participant whose personal and professional challenges felt “catastrophizing and victimizing” because of their severe wounding and identity in the loss of their job. Although the group member never shared her feelings with this particular person, it is interesting to note that these feelings continued throughout the course of the six sessions and she did not feel comfortable enough in sharing her thoughts with the person. I think this demonstrates that often in groups people may bond but there is the strong possibility that individuals do not share their true feelings with others. Many times we tolerate people because of their differences because we feel that it is the right thing to do. Sadly, the participant had no idea that she caused this reaction in the other person. In reading Klein’s book, *Giving Notice* (2007), women and people of color are often tolerated by organizations and these individuals leave to find other jobs without telling the real reasons why they moved on. I think this vicious cycle is also displayed in our daily interactions. Trust is the key to relationships and in this scenario, it is possible that the individual did not feel she could trust, felt invested in, or thought it was worthwhile to share her feelings with the person she felt her experience was “catastrophizing and victimizing.” I also believe that she was unable to hear the other woman’s story because she had a perception about people rising above their challenges and when this person was unable to demonstrate that, she was unable to empathize and understand her story because of her lens. I do believe that this is a tension that exists in relationships—the inability or

even unwillingness to understand. Our own personal experiences and how we address situations becomes our foundation and we expect others to do the same. This is misleading for many because as mentioned previously, not everyone has access to the same tools in order to have the same results. This is important to note as a facilitator that this could happen in a group. Participants can become confrontational to those they do not agree with, not say anything because they feel it is polite, or disengage because they do not like the person.

It was obvious the ITC map was insightful to participants. The next section of quotes is an opportunity for the reader to see not only the diversity in barriers these women faced but the enlightenment they shared as a result of this process. It will give a sense of how many of them began to overcome their barriers or for others, the process offered a sense of awareness that they previously did not have. One person shared that her ITC map was about her inability to connect to others. She stated that the ITC map helped her to recognize the barriers that kept her from building relationships and remaining withdrawn from others outside of work. She stated that as a result of the group, she now has a life coach and has taken small steps to begin to meet new people and go out more.

It's definitely been impactful. I've been able to see some stuff putting it on paper...been able to go through the work of trying to figure things out why am I like this and [name withheld] has been helping me go through some of this. All of my life I've felt stuck in certain places and then I move forward in and this has really helped me to see why and I making strides toward moving from being emotionally constipated. It feels good to have some movement now. Still nowhere near I want to be. The fact that I've asked for help to do something is different for me. I didn't realize that was a requirement for moving forward is one step. It has helped me look at my feelings of inadequacy and coming to an understanding of that.

Self-worth and value were reoccurring issues for some of the group members. The ITC process helped in becoming more aware of self-worth and identity issues. One has started to take more strides to develop her skills and strengths than focusing so much on her title. The

process has also helped her to refine her focus on relationships that exist—working closer with those who support her and moving away from those who are not life giving. Another group member was concerned about expanding her business and wondered if she could do it.

My ITC was about believing in myself. When I started digging into this, I have a core group of friends who have been very supportive. My mojo is gone. One was a friend I worked with at [name withheld] and we were laid off at the same time. It forced me to dig deeper and some of those people who I thought were supporters were not.

It made me look at the reasons behind why I didn't want to move into a new office. Since meeting, I have moved into the office. I feel like I have to prove myself and I'm not as good as everybody else.

There were some who stated that the process did not initiate immediate change in their lives but gave them an awareness of the pitfalls of self-sabotage:

So I am still late everywhere. That was the one thing I wanted to change but it has infiltrated my thinking. Why am I self-sabotaging. So it started to be an outlier but it has infiltrating my thinking.

Another individual shared that her ITC map helped to realize her issues with self-value and boundaries with her mother. Her mother has been emotionally abusive and she has sought her mother's approval for years. This process helped her to realize what this was doing to her self-worth and led her to start creating boundaries with her mother and also taking steps to protect her son from the feelings she has experienced when he visits. She has started a process of forgiving herself and forgiving her mother. During her tenure with the group, she got a job and is being considered for another position in the organization! She, too, has received a life coach as a result of the group to help her continue on her journey of forgiveness.

My Immunity Map pointed out two things that I ended up hearing verbally: trusting myself and forgiveness when I first talked with [name withheld] that night. I'm working on both. I'm appreciating more and I'm starting to forgive my mom. I'm forgiving her and staying away from her. I have been trying to prove who I am and I've just accepted

that she is that way and I'm trying to protect my kids so that they don't emotionally wrap themselves around her.

Another participant commented that the Immunity Map was helpful in finally seeking out a mentor/coach to help them move forward.

I was concerned about why I was never following through to be mentored. There have been unofficial mentoring relationships but the whole process of getting mentor. I am actively pursuing someone. I'm being more courageous and I'm going after some things.

For two group members, over commitment was an issue and the Immunity Map was helpful in identifying this challenge.

My ITC map was about overcommitting myself. I over extend myself and all along I didn't realize that was the core problem I had. It took the immunity map to help me to do it all. As a woman, I thought I was to do it all. The map made my cognizant of it. Lately, the ITC map has brought the issue to my attention and be honest and transparent and upfront with people that if I can't do something. I don't have to give a reason. It has made me be better, more honest and upfront and I've gotten more accomplished. I've been able to delegate more.

My Immunity Map started off as time management and it has changed. I've become aware of other issues such as procrastination and goals that I keep saying I'm going to get to and why...It is procrastination. I've become more aware of who I am and how I feel about things and who I should let in and out of my life. I need to be more selective. My philosophy in the last ten years, don't go backward but forward and now it means so much more. I have self-awareness now.

The Immunity Map process uncovered other issues such as self-sabotage in seeking opportunities because of fear or comfort.

I think I realized I sabotage my best opportunities. Honestly, it comes down to fear of success. It is easy to be fearful of failure. I find it intimidating to do some things I want to do. I have not finished applications [for graduate school] that I have started on. I can take on 10 new assignments for others and not do it for myself. It is very interesting, I'm not sure why. I'm not sure if I can do it. I'm really great at talking and things that don't have much weight, I don't have a problem.



One of the really cool things about the immunity map was it talks about the tests, so you have this assumption that no one wants to listen but it had me test it and talk to someone. I love smart people and I seek out smart people because I'm an info junkie so at the networking event, I observed myself as I was interacting with other people and ya'll it took everything in me not to pat myself on the back. I was really proud of myself. I put on my Facebook status that I am warming up to this networking thing. I tested it...here is an attorney talking to me...she's asking me questions about myself. It has dispelled the lie and what's been fed to me. I wrote a short devotional about psalms 23 and he prepares a table for me in the presence in my enemies. This immunity map put me in front of a table of my internal enemies. God showed me that I need to face the enemies of you are not good enough, etc. I am going to teach you through this process to shut them down. I still backslide because it is comfortable but more often than not I'm speaking, and engaging and finding the value of people in relationships. I feel like I'm blossoming. I'm a social capitalist immunity to change evangelist. I was at a meeting before this and I was rattling off what I've learned.

The session ended with next steps and participants sharing about the impact of the group experience. Participants wanted to continue group meetings monthly, have the meetings filmed to document the process and change and bring the women together for an overnight retreat. A day retreat is in the process of being planned to continue discussions. They also would like the group to open up to include new members. As they have shared their experience with others, many of their friends have remarked about the value of such a group in their lives. Some even downloaded the map and shared it with their friends. One commented that the multi-generational experience would be helpful as a way for younger women to receive the mentoring and wisdom from the older women in the group. Connecting with other women was very important and helped with not only bonding social capital but with creating bridging social capital.

I've gotten really open. I was really closed. It was so easy for me to reach out and it's been back and forth and it's building. I've been talking about it with my friends—the other ones. I feel like I'm blossoming. I feel like I'm a different person. I'm transforming. I feel like we are butterflies.

It's made me rich. Not in a monetary way.

There are 17,000 other conversations I want to continue to have with the group. Thank you for making it convenient. The group brings me to a level of conversation that I don't have. The paper bag conversation was one that you wouldn't have so quickly.

I'm impacted even though all of our stories are different they are very much the same. We don't recognize how similar they are. To talk with folks from different family backgrounds, ethnicities, countries and all of that and to find that we share more than we differ is encouraging.

So what the group has done for me is provided empowerment. And relational skills and knowing that you are all just like me—you are where I want to be at some point. I am reading this book called *Successful Women Think Differently*. One point she makes is that a successful woman has a sense of purpose and vision and an unsuccessful woman in contrast puts women on a pedestal as if there is some secret success formula that they have access to that they don't. I've done that. Just being with this group, it's given me confidence that I can do this.

The women wanted to continue to the conversations. They had several questions about some of the previous revelations and felt that without this forum, they might not have been privy to these new discoveries. These revelations provided clarity and explanations for so many things that did not make sense or they were unaware of.

**End of session reflections.** Despite the internal conflict that one individual had with another, their final comment shows growth. In her struggle with the individual, she had her own individual barrier that she was able to overcome. In her desire for others to be patient with her growth, she realized that she had to do the same for others. I think these two final quotes summarize the outcome of the group.

Listening to (names withheld) share their successes, and (name withheld) sharing her struggle. Liked the energy of the group supporting them. Just the power of giving someone space to explore, tools, and love—the transformation that can occur. It's ok to grow and change. Just like I want the freedom to do that, I need to remember others get the same freedom.

Overall, the six sessions were not only transformative for the group but I was also affected by their stories and interactions as a facilitator. I saw myself in many of their stories. I struggled with some of the issues that they shared and I found in the conversations myself becoming mesmerized by their strength, their pain, and their love. These women were more than survivors—several have overcome abuse and poverty and others had struggles with their self-esteem and confidence. To hear their stories inspired me and encouraged me to find more opportunities to bring women together to share their stories using the ITC process and create more opportunities for bridging social capital. It is my desire to help women eliminate those personal barriers to creating the change they want in their lives and create support systems that can offer new ideas and perspectives to help them excel. This research has served as an amazing foundation to do that.

### **Summary**

The group accomplished several things over the course of meeting for several months. Women created a safe space to share that resulted in bonding and bridging social capital. Throughout the dialogue, in each session, self-disclosure occurred about something very personal and these revelations continued throughout the meetings. I believe that this level of conversation occurred because the women began to trust one another and trust is critical in the building of social capital. In the conversations or end of session reflections, many of the women commented that they enjoyed and needed this space to share in their lives. They also stated that this group helped them to connect to others that they otherwise would not have had known.

The Immunity to Change process not only revealed issues that impeded personal, individual change but also was instrumental in building social capital in the women. Initially, there was the plan to conduct a group ITC map to evaluate what would be the barriers in working

together collectively. The group decided that they only wanted to focus on individual issues since they thought it was the first step in creating change. Although we did discuss collectively some of the challenges for women in working together as a group as a part of the ITC, participants also created their own individual maps. In order for diverse networks to be developed, immunities to change must be addressed. Their reflections and thoughts helped others to recognize similarities regardless of differences that they face as women. It was obvious in the sharing that the women would give support, offer suggestions or provide confirmation of dealing with the same or similar struggle. This could have happened but I believe the ITC process was instrumental in raising these issues. The women did not have to share their findings but once again, I believe that as they built trust, they became more comfortable in sharing their struggles because of the supportive environment that occurred. The issues that they listed on the maps were not necessarily deeply personal but the competing commitments and big assumptions were. It was not until sessions 2-4 that those areas were addressed in the group. I think that if this occurred in the first session, without knowing one another, they may have been apprehensive to share or created improvement goals that were not so difficult. I also believe allowing them to take the maps home after discussing them gave them an opportunity to think about it even though we spent time revisiting the categories in session 2.

Relational leadership is impactful for women and the gender of the leader does not matter. Characteristics such as empathy, listening, care, and encouragement are important for individual and team growth. Many of the conversations on leadership revealed that women desired leaders who were open, fair, and cultivated a relationship with them. It was painful to listen to the number of women who had mean, aggressive, sabotaging supervisors and how they flourished under those who were kind, protective of the team from external influences that could

create division, and sought to develop their gifts and talents. Gender is indeed an issue in the workplace but the issue is really about leadership. Leadership programs are often short-term and organizations must focus on the long-term development of the leader and the follower. Both must be cultivated.

There is power in the narrative. Women sharing their stories can create bonding and bridging social capital. Dialogue is essential in creating change among individuals. Participants as a result of this process experienced narrative, systemic, therapeutic, and epistemic self-reflection because of the conversations especially around the ITC process. It was interesting to listen to the stories of the women and watch the facial expressions when women would self-disclose something very personal. It was as if in that moment they had become connected. Even though they may not have had the experience themselves, for that moment, they placed themselves in the shoes of the other person. I remember when one participant shared the story about her mother placing the gun to her head. The entire group was mesmerized. There was no judgment. I think all of us placed ourselves in her position at that time and experienced fear and confusion as if we were the 8-year-old girl she described. There is power in stories. Our identities are always evolving. I noticed that when the women began to change their narrative, they began to change the stories they told about themselves. Their stories became more positive and whereas there were more victimization stories in the beginning, the stories became more about how they were able to overcome with each session. This process has even made me become more aware of the stories that I tell about myself because I find that the expression I heard as a young adult is true: A thought becomes an action, which can become a behavior. Telling our stories is an opportunity to not change who we are but become more aware of our strengths and of our blind spots. When our stories are shared in community, we are able to hear

of similarities and see that our journeys are not in isolation—there are others who travel the same road as well.

In Chapter V, I provide a detailed description of recommendations and opportunities available for further research based on my findings.

## Chapter V: Implications for Leadership and Change

I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship. (B. Brown, 2010, p. 1)

### Overview of Research

My research allowed me to work with a diverse group of women for several months using the ITC process and readings to learn more about barriers to personal change, the perceptions women have of one another, relational leadership, and bridging social capital. During the research, there were three significant discoveries: The ITC method not only identifies the underlying causes of barriers to personal change but also can create bridging social capital in diverse women in a group setting. Bridging social capital is defined as “ties that cross various social divides—e.g., those based on religion, class, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status” (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p. 232). After conducting the research, I do believe that bridging social capital is possible. Several of the women who are of different ethnic and racial backgrounds are still connecting after the completion of the group and have established relationships. I also observed that the interactions within the group suggest that bridging social capital is possible. I am aware that this might not be the case in every situation. Issues such as power and privilege can impact the ability for bridging social capital to exist if these topics are not examined and acknowledged. The research also confirmed the role of the narrative in building social capital. As women shared their stories, they were able to connect and build relationships despite their racial, ethnic, religious, and professional differences. The stories that the women told about themselves also revealed the way they made meaning about their relationships and experiences. The perceptions women have of one another are reinforced by

their upbringing, media, and experiences which can further serve as a filter as they lead others or are led by women. This research was cyclical—not only did the participants have an opportunity in every session to share and learn from the conversations—but so did I. As much as the process affected them, I was also transformed as a result. This process allowed me to become more aware of my own narrative. I have become more aware of my story and the way I make meaning of my experiences. The experience has also made me more intentional in the way I connect to women, realizing that everyone has a story and in those moments of listening, I might see my own reflection. The ITC process made me more aware of my own barriers in creating the change I want to see in my life, and having a group of women who are walking the same journey allowed all of us to have the support and encouragement we needed from one another to grow and achieve our goals.

### **Women’s Perceptions of One Another: Media Influences and Conditioning**

One of the conversations the women had was around the perception of women in television and social media. “According to communications theories, repeated exposure to media content leads viewers to begin to accept media portrayals as representations of reality” (Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008, p. 460). For several of the women, there was a difference of opinion regarding shows such as *Scandal* and *Being Mary Jane* which some felt portrayed African American women as mistresses only. Others felt the shows provided an opportunity to view the complexities that smart, accomplished women face. Mass Media has an impact on ideas such as body image but also sexuality. For young people, especially young women, daily consumption of these images can affect their view of themselves and of others. “In the United States, young people spend 6 to 7 hours each day on average with some form of media” (J. D. Brown, 2002, p. 42).



For African American and Latina women, images they can identify with range from a variety of shows on mainstream media such as *Bad Girls Club*, *Housewives of Atlanta*, *Basketball Wives* of Miami and Los Angeles, and *Love and Hip* of Atlanta and New York which display women who fight, belittle one another through gossip and call one another “bitches”; this has become a staple of reality television. In the book, *African Americans on Television: Race-ing for Ratings* (Leonard & Guerrero, 2013), television has portrayed African Americans often unfavorably. In the group discussion, the women agreed that many of their views about women came from television, what they had been taught, and from experiences. The challenge for other women of color is also detrimental because those images and voices are often invisible. Asians are often unseen and less understood (Chew, 1994).

Organizations such as Miss Representation have brought more attention to the damage of media not only on women and girls but also on boys and men in their interactions. Although this organization has done some examination of the negativity the media has on women of color, more is needed. These damaging portrayals and stereotypes are unhealthy and challenge the way we build relationships. Media is a powerful tool and more research and conversations are needed to evaluate its role on cross cultural experiences.

### **Women in Leadership**

This research was critical on many levels: participants experienced individual changes as well as changes in their personal and professional relationships that might ultimately impact their organizational lives and community leadership in the future. Hopkins et al. (2008) stated that women’s leadership development must focus on “two levels of learning simultaneously—the individual level and the organizational level” (p. 351). Completing the ITC on a personal level that has an impact on their professional lives will accomplish these two levels of learning in an

environment of support of female leaders. The sharing of their stories was helpful in building trust and connections because of the ability to identify or understand the other's perspective. "By sharing information about themselves and creating informal opportunities for interactions, common interests can be discussed, creating positive connections among individuals" (McCallum & O'Connell, 2009, p. 164).

There are several implications for leadership for women. Statistics reveal that women are seeking and obtaining higher educational opportunities and yet this increase is not often the case for women represented in leadership roles, "women remain, on average, less than 20% of positional leaders across 14 sectors in the United States" (Lennon, 2013, p. 6).

Women's gains in educational attainment have significantly outpaced those of men over the last 40 years. Today, younger women are more likely to graduate from college than are men and are more likely to hold a graduate school degree. Higher percentages of women than men have at least a high school education, and higher percentages of women than men participate in adult education. (p. 19)

Corporations and organizations must become more willing to provide opportunities to women to serve in leadership. In order to have unique perspectives and a new way of thinking introduced into the way we conduct business, women are essential to this process.

During the research group, many of the women discussed their challenges with women in leadership. They struggled with female leaders who followed a paradigm that was "power-over" instead of "power with" as suggested in relational cultural theory (Kelso et al., 2012). For many of the women in the research group, they witnessed women leaders who were competitive. They felt that women in leadership had to portray a stereotype that would avoid labels as being "soft," "weak," or "feminine" in their style, which did not allow them to move up the ladder of success. In the study, "The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership: Damned if You Do,

Doomed if You Don't" (Sabattini, 2007), the perceptions of women in leadership were based on interviews of working women. The predicaments in the study include:

Predicament 1: Extreme Perceptions: Too Soft, Too Tough, and Never Just Right

Predicament 2: The High Competence Threshold

Predicament 3: Competent but Disliked

If women are too tough, they are being masculine. If they are too nice, then they are too soft/feminine. In either situation, they are never able to compete. The group discussion revealed that these perceptions are not held by men alone but that women also struggle in their measurement of one another and yet, balancing the perceptions that others might have of their leadership. Women have to outperform men and not yield the same rewards that men receive in salary. A female leader cannot be competent and liked. Several women struggled with female leaders who felt the need to overexert authority to prove that they were competent and that these leaders affected their perceptions of female leaders. "Female leaders' choices are constrained by threats from two directions: Conforming to their gender role can produce a failure to meet the requirements of their leader role, and conforming to their leader role can produce a failure to meet the requirements of their gender role" (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

Issues such as the aforementioned are compounded for women of color because of stereotypes that exist for racial groups. Many women in the group, especially those of color, felt that not only did they have to better because of their gender but had to also outperform because of the perceptions that existed because of their race. These perceptions were not only limited to how Anglos might perceive them but also because of self-imposed stereotypes that exist, especially within the African American community, regarding colorism.

Books such as Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013) continue the discussion of the role of women in leadership in corporations, which is necessary. Yet, more research is needed to evaluate the challenges women of color face in being included and promoted to senior leadership roles. Spelman College is one of many initiatives offering a leadership conference to address this issue and to begin a pipeline for women of color in leadership. If only women of color are in attendance at these events or are the ones who are vocal and those who are in positions to make hiring decisions are not present, the possibility for change is limited.

In the book, *Giving Notice: Why the Best and Brightest are Leaving the Workplace and How You Can Help Them Stay* (Klein, 2007), many companies do not realize the challenges that people of color and women face in the workplace. Opportunities to engage individuals at the organizational level will be critical through storytelling. Just as individuals have stories, it will be imperative for organizations to be open and honest about the stories they tell about the value they place on women in leadership and women of color in leadership. These stories can be in the history and track record of the organization and their commitment to change this discourse through their actions. It is more than hiring women and women of color to serve in leadership but creating safe spaces for women to bring their experience, knowledge, and stories to the workspace without fear so that they can grow with the organization. It is important to note that diversity efforts are important but true change happens when these issues are addressed not through technical solutions but realized as adaptive challenges that require a change in thinking. Meaning making about race, gender, and leadership must be revisited and include the voices of those who can bring a perspective that challenges the social construction of these concepts in the workplace. Klein demonstrates that this is not just a human and ethical matter but can also cost

organizations millions of dollars if they continue to remain a revolving door of not capitalizing and capturing this talent. One of the participants in the research group stated that her place of employment had created an exclusive group of leaders that were considered superstars by the company to be trained and supported. She stated that the problem for many employees on her team was that they were unaware of the selection process and only one female was included to serve on this team that represented thousands of employees. Situations like this continue to demonstrate that this organization (like many) has a limited pipeline of developing women (and women of color) into the pipeline of leadership.

### **Relational Leadership and the Role of Relational Cultural Theory in Leadership**

Relationships are imperative for leaders to accomplish team or organizational goals. “Leadership is always dependent on the context, but the context is established by the relationships we value” (Wheatley, 1992, p. 144). Relational leadership is based on five components: Process, Inclusion, Empowerment, Purpose, and Ethics. To be effective, relational leaders need “to be knowledgeable (knowing), to be aware of self and others (being) and to act (doing)” (Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 2009, p. 77). Relational leadership encompasses an opportunity for leaders and their followers to make meaning of their interactions and knowledge by seeing leadership as more than a list of technical dos and don’ts but an adaptive process that requires a change in thinking based on the self-awareness and knowledge gained from the interactions with others.

In addition to a process that is adaptive in nature, relational leadership is inclusive. It includes “framing and re-framing” (Komives et al., 2009, p. 78) based on the information gained from the relationship. Relational leaders understand the value of stories and gaining information

from the stories that not only reach the desired goals but create a mutually beneficial relationship.

Relational leadership is complementary to Relational Cultural Theory (Kelso et al., 2012), which is also inclusive, but based in the experiences of women. Relational Cultural Theory evolved from the work of Jean Baker Miller and others who noticed that the issues and perspectives of their female clients were not being addressed in therapy and in literature. Relational Cultural Theory states that “people grow through action in relation to one another,” and people seek for “connection with others throughout the lifespan” (Walker & Rosen, 2004, p. 4).

Relational leadership is empowering, also a component of Relational Cultural Theory. It is not focused on “power over” but rather “power with” in relationships (Jordan, Hartling, & Walker, 2004, p. 35). If a person uses their power in a relationship to dominate, it is about control. This does not create space for “supported vulnerability, mutual empathetic involvement...and creating meaning in more relational awareness” (p. 32). Relational leadership is also concerned with growth. In relational cultural theory, growth fostering relationships are a critical component. These relationships are built on mutually beneficial connections which were evident in the conversations of the research group participants. Participants demonstrated that the creation of a safe space allowing for transparency developed support. They were able to create meaning of the stories about themselves and about the others in the group because of the connections that were established.

Relationships can be transformative and not all relationships must be transactional in their purpose. In many communities, there are networking events that exist for the purpose of individuals exchanging business cards to evaluate if a job opportunity or business deal exists.

These relationships are about transaction and making something happen for the sake of employment or money. There are opportunities for individuals to share their stories that allow the listener to self-reflect and discover new information that enhances their life experience. For the person that shares, it is an opportunity to build a deeper connection with another person that can highlight similarities and provide clarity around their differences. Decision making takes into account the impact it on all involved which requires a systems thinking lens. Systems thinkers understand multiple variables that exist in the workplace and how those factors are interrelated. As a relational leader, the outcome is as important as the process. Relational leaders are reflective, knowing their own stories and the stories of those they impact and collaborate with in the work. Relational leadership is not solely for individual outcomes but recognizes the group as a community which has to have buy-in and be a part of the process.

Relational leadership is not a gender based leadership style and offers a number of opportunities for organizations to invest in their employees who would ultimately affect the morale, productivity, and profit of an organization. Relational Cultural Theory has been used primarily to inform the work of therapists but more research should be conducted to evaluate the tenets of RCT in organizations and as a part of the training of leaders on better connecting to their employees. The Jean Baker Miller Institute has done a wonderful job of providing training and research on the topic and they have also included the work of Dr. Amy Banks in the role of neuroscience in relationship building. For many of the women in my research group, this theory was new to the group but widely accepted. RCT's integration into leadership theories and practical application outside of therapy is necessary in order to include a new perspective for conducting leadership in the workplace that includes the voices and views of women.

The role of relational cultural theory in building relationships is essential. Having mutually beneficial and empathic relationships can create high quality connections. After attending the Jean Baker Miller Institute in June 2013, I became convinced that this is a tool that is helpful beyond counseling circles. Much of the research has been focused on social work and psychology but RCT has a place in leadership. As more scholars such as Harriet Schwartz (former Antioch University PhD graduate and professor at Carlow University) incorporate RCT into leadership studies, I believe that this can serve as a foundation for how individuals connect to one another. I have used some of the principles of RCT with my team at World Vision, US Programs, as I build relationships with them and build a community engagement strategy.

The concept of the separate self is significant in Relational Cultural Theory. In our society, we are conditioned from our childhood to create distance from our parents so that we can become independent instead of interdependent. We yearn for connections and yet, we are afraid of being vulnerable and not accepted. For women, “we grow through and toward connection rather than separation and that their sense of meaning and well-being is anchored in relationships throughout the life span” (Jordan, 2001, p. 95). Many of the women in the research group repeatedly stated that they wanted to keep the group going because they did not have these opportunities to connect with other women and felt it fulfilled a need in their lives. The women in the group experienced growth fostering relationships as a result of the conversations and experienced the “Five Good Things”:

1. Each person feels a greater sense of zest (vitality, energy)
2. Each person feels more able to act and does act in the world
3. Each person has a more accurate picture of her/himself and the other person(s)
4. Each person feels a greater sense of worth



5. Each person feels more connected to other persons and exhibits a greater motivation to connect with other people beyond those in one's primary relationships. (Miller, 1988, pp. 2-3)

Several of the participants commented in their reflections on the effect the conversations had on their self-awareness and connections to one another as a result of the ITC process. "I thought it was great awareness when a woman shared that she was raised by her dad; and that impacts how she interacts, particularly among other women in the workplace. I totally related to her. I love self-psychoanalyzing myself! I have always embraced digging deeper to know thyself because that affects how you interact with others" (African American female, mid 50s).

As a result of these interactions, individuals expanded the way that they made meaning about themselves and others that allowed them "to develop a larger and more complex repertoire and can contribute to, and grow from, more complex relationships" (Miller, 1988, p. 2).

### **Power of the Story: Narrative Identity in Creating Social Capital**

The power of the story is impactful on creating change both collectively and within an individual. Authors Stephens, Silbert, and Hasson (2010) have demonstrated that the sharing of stories even has an impact on brain activity for both the speaker and the listener. Since stories involve the act of listening and sharing, they found that "the speaker's activity is spatially and temporally coupled with the listener's activity. This coupling vanishes when participants fail to communicate...the greater the anticipatory speaker-listener coupling, the greater the understanding" (p. 14425). The sharing of stories can impact the way we connect to one another on a neuroscience level, creating another opportunity for transformation in relationships. It is in this space of sharing that we build connections that can create change on an individual level even in our thinking. "Human connections create neuronal connections" (Siegel, 1999, p. 85). The

power of diverse women sharing their stories has the ability to change a person's way of thinking about self and about the relationships one has to others. In the end of session reflections, one of the women commented that the sharing of the stories helped her in making meaning of her own experiences by allowing her "to connect our discussion to my upbringing and cultural background." Another stated, "A critical moment which will set a basis/foundation for this group was when it was pointed out that various ones have things in common. Those things would not have been identified without dialogue." Lastly, another person stated "I am more cognizant of my internal dialogue and how it affects my perception about my relationships with others; including the 'big assumptions' that are holding me back."

In sharing one's life story, several themes are typically present: redemption, contamination, agency, communion, exploratory narrative processing, coherent positive resolution, and meaning making (McAdams, 1999). Redemptive stories that shared negative situations (domestic abuse) that were turned into a positive (obtaining an education) were a constant theme in the conversations. Some stories revealed doing the right thing (working hard) resulted in often disastrous consequences (unemployment, bad relationships with parents). There were numerous examples of agency in which women overcame obstacles (backlash from religious leadership, moving into a new job/role) and experienced empowerment (increased self-awareness or a deeper commitment to spiritual walk/journey) that resulted in a personal change. The ITC process allowed many of the women to experience agency in the narratives they shared and actually changed their way of thinking about themselves. Exploratory narrative processing occurred on multiple occasions with several of the participants: one commented that as she completed the ITC map, she realized that some of her actions might be a result of being molested—something she did not correlate previously. As she thought about her life story, she

began to experience a deeper understanding about her thinking and behavior which was transformative for her. Throughout the process, each of the participants began to make meaning from the stories of others and how those stories related to their own as well as a better understanding of how the new information they gained informed their own stories.

Somers' (1994) article reminds that identity is a social construction. It is important as others share their life stories that we are reminded that our identities are often defined in relation to others. As the discussion on power and privilege occurred in session 1, one of the women in the group was very uncomfortable because she felt that some of the women were acting as if they were victims. In examining her own story, she began to realize that she did not have the same barriers or challenges that others might experience which contributed to her perspective. She did not have the challenges that race and class create for some and her ideas around victimization are based in this lack of understanding of those experiences.

In sharing stories, I noticed that people began to see more commonalities than differences. In dealing with the personal struggles, they were able to identify with emotions such as pain, pleasure, joy, and disappointment. The way people make meaning of their stories can determine the well-being of an individual (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008) and I believe that this more than likely impacts the way individuals connect to others. If the stories that are repeated are narratives of distrust, disconnection and pain, our relationships reflect this and limit our ability to grow. "A central tenet of the relational cultural model is that people grow through action in relationship to others" (Walker & Rosen, 2004, p. 4). The research group demonstrates that the growth that the women experienced was directly related to the conversations that resulted in connections being established. These mutually beneficial relationships create self-awareness and growth.

In our society, technology allows for individuals to disconnect and create identities that are not always authentic. People pull into their garages never seeing or speaking to their neighbors. The number of group activities of the past such as bowling leagues and dinner parties according to Robert Putnam, author of *Bowling Alone* (2000), have declined. As a result, people are disconnected from one another and do not have the opportunities as easily to build relationships due to the busy lives and schedules that many of us lead. Our communities can be segregated and our jobs might limit us from connecting to those that are different. The recent onslaught of violence such as the deaths of Trayvon Martin and Jordan Davis were based in fear. When people do not have the opportunities to connect to others and understand how they make meaning of their experiences, disconnection occurs. In the research group, the women, despite their differences, saw several commonalities in their life experiences through sharing which connected them to one another—they recognized that they were not alone.

Disconnection from others is viewed as one of the primary sources of human suffering. Similarly, disconnection from oneself, from the natural flow of one's responses, needs, and yearnings creates distress, inauthenticity, and ultimately a sense of isolation in the world. (Jordan, 1995, p. 1)

### **Bridging Social Capital in Women: Race, Class, Education, Religion, and Age**

Since my first year at Antioch University, I have been intrigued with social capital. Initially, I was interested in organizations and how they built partnerships but as my reading and research continued, I noticed that the literature was very limited with research on groups of women such as African Americans and Latinos and practically void of addressing what happens when diverse women are brought together whose differences, such as race, class, age, education and religion, are numerous. I believe that when women share their stories several things happen: similarities are revealed, an understanding of their differences and worldview are exposed, and as a result, they are able to make meaning of the interactions that either challenge or confirm

their way of thinking. In order to increase the sharing of information and social mobility, opportunities must exist for people who are different to come together to share information.

The research group was extremely powerful in creating opportunities for information sharing. Several ladies were able to benefit from a life coach who was in the group; she offered her services, which assisted them in moving forward with their ITC map and making changes to their resume. Members shared job information with those who were unemployed or seeking new opportunities. By connecting to those who were different, the members of the group were able to receive information that they might not otherwise obtain if they remained in their homogenous circles. One of the conversations enlightened the group members about how some low-income individuals find ways to take care of themselves by avoiding barriers that keep them from obtaining housing or cars. Participants shared how apartments or car dealerships can verify employment through the use of friends or fake pay stubs and that the interest rates for low-income individuals are often much higher at non-standard dealerships. It is through these conversations that social mobility can occur when individuals can open doors to other contacts that they might not have access to in their current professional or personal circles.

Race continues to play a role in the challenges for social mobility and bridging social capital. America continues to struggle with issues of race even in what is considered as a post racial society. The role of race is historical in the United States with beginnings in early colonial society because of slavery. According to the pamphlet written in 1975 by Theodore William Allen (Allen, Perry, & State University of New York at Stony Brook, 2006), *Class Struggle and the Origin of Racial Slavery: The Invention of the White Race*, “the ‘white race’ must be understood, not simply as a social construct (rather than a genetic phenomenon), but as a ruling class social control formation” (p. iv). The history of the United States is an example of a

government designed for those in positions of power whose privilege provided various benefits not available to those who were not of White Anglo Saxon descent, land owners or highly educated. Laws were created to not only enforce their social class but to ensure that those social circles were not infiltrated by others. Even after slavery, discrepancies existed in the form of Jim Crow laws. These laws were in existence from 1876 to 1965 that prevented African Americans from enjoying the same opportunities and rights as Anglos in all areas of their lives such as transportation, housing, education, employment and voting. For example, in an 1892 article in the *New York Times*, a Louisiana Jim Crow law was upheld instructing that railroad cars were to be segregated for African Americans (New York Times, 1892). In addition to Jim Crow laws that impacted the lives of African Americans, women were also deprived of the opportunity to vote. As a result, a government was created that did not involve the majority of the population: women, Africans/African Americans, or Native Americans. America is still framed by those early principles and although there has been significant change through legislation to provide more opportunities for diverse populations, there is still inequity in providing access to social capital that exist for those who are not in positions of power.

There has been research on generational differences that highlights the differences and potential conflicts among the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. According to Gursoy, Maier, and Chi (2008), boomers were born between 1946 and 1964 and “Boomers, for the most part, grew up in two-parent households, safe schools, job security and post-war prosperity. They represent about two-thirds of all US workers” (p. 450). Generation X (1965-1980) grew up “in two-career families with rising divorce rates, downsizing, the dawning of the high-tech age and the information age” (p. 450). Millennials (1981-2000) are “the youngest workers, they represent the most technologically adept. They are fast learners and tend to be

impatient” (p. 450). With three generations in the workplace, literature does exist about generational differences but there is limited information on diverse generational communication with the issues of race, class, and education as compounded challenges. The research group demonstrated that there is a need for women of different generations to spend time learning from one another. The younger women repeatedly commented that they needed the wisdom and guidance from the older women in the group and wished that their friends were privy to these conversations. For the older women, it was helpful for them to understand the difficulties that younger women face, complicated by the challenges of technology and oversaturation of media.

Another area that was significant in the research findings was the role of religion. Although many of the women were Christian with varying levels of involvement and identification, one of the conversations demonstrated that the value of stories can create even a better understanding of faith differences. In several of the conversations, the Muslim female shared scriptures from The Koran and others commented on the similarity to scriptures in the Bible. In addition, participants realized, based on a scripture read by the Muslim female, that Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are based in the story of Ishmael and Issac. For many of the women, they had a lack of such exposure, which can lead to misinformation and stereotyping. The group allowed women of varying levels of faith to learn from one another disrupting their initial beliefs about those who might be different.

Religious diversity is more apparent than ever before in organizations and communities around the United States. This difference can be divisive if there are no opportunities for interfaith dialogues to occur that focus on the commonalities we all share:

The immigrants of the last three decades, however, have expanded the diversity of our religious life dramatically, exponentially. Buddhists have come from Thailand, Vietnam,

Cambodia, China, and Korea; Hindus from India, East Africa, and Trinidad; Muslims from Indonesia, Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Middle East, and Nigeria; Sikhs and Jains from India; and Zoroastrians from both India and Iran. Immigrants from Haiti and Cuba have brought Afro-Caribbean traditions, blending both African and Catholic symbols and images. New Jewish immigrants have come from Russia and the Ukraine, and the internal diversity of American Judaism is greater than ever before. The face of American Christianity has also changed with large Latino, Filipino, and Vietnamese Catholic communities; Chinese, Haitian, and Brazilian Pentecostal communities; Korean Presbyterians, Indian Mar Thomas, and Egyptian Copts. In every city in the land church signboards display the meeting times of Korean or Latino congregations that nest within the walls of old urban Protestant and Catholic churches (Eck, 2001, p. 2).

I was fortunate to attend the United Nations in June 2013 to be a part of a conversation to bring religious leaders of Judaism, Islam and Christianity together to discuss peace. Sadly, one of the conversations erupted in verbal missiles being launched by the religious male leadership. If they had taken the time to talk about their common interests in and for peace instead of focusing on the divisions that separate them, they would have noted that they all want the best for their children and for their communities. Even in religious circles, there is a need for more women to be involved in the conversations but also in leadership roles. Spirituality is a component for the lives of many women and creating more space for women to share their spiritual beliefs that typically focus on generosity, kindness and love can be the impetus for creating change and solidarity.

**ITC Process in Creating Social Capital and Personal Growth: Observations on the Process, Facilitation, and Trust**



In my observation of the women over the course of the six sessions, the ITC process allowed the women to become vulnerable and reveal those challenges that prevent them from reaching their goals. In sharing those experiences collectively, it built trust among the women and even created accountability. I believe this allowed the women to connect to one another on a deeper level. As mentioned previously, many of the women began to help each other with employment, life coaching, and even conversations outside of the group to continue the relationships. “Analyses of human relations suggest that ‘trust’ is an integral feature... most generally defined as a belief by a person in the integrity of another individual...trust frees people to share feelings and dreams” (Larzelere & Huston, 1980, p. 595). The group sharing of their Immunity Maps created a sense of trust. One of the women commented that her initial reaction upon meeting the women in the group was that she felt that she did not belong. As she listened to the women share their Immunity Maps, she realized that they had some of the same challenges, inhibitions, and insecurities that she wrestled with in her own life. Although the women were not required to share, all of them revealed their challenges and received support and affirmation from the group. I believe despite their many differences, the Immunity Maps allowed them to be vulnerable, feel safe and realize that many of their struggles were universal. The goals of the women were not the same and yet, the self-defeating behaviors/thinking that were exhibited were problematic for all. As a result of the process, all of the women commented on their increased self-awareness because of the discovery of the competing commitments and big assumptions. Several women began to introduce the process to their friends and co-workers because of its impact on their lives. In the group’s discussion on issues women face in working together, we collectively created an ITC map even though each person had their own individual maps regarding their thoughts. Initially, the goal was to create a group ITC map to evaluate

barriers for the women creating change together. The group did not want to focus on collective projects but thought their individual work was imperative to any group or community change project and decided not to move in this direction.

The role of the facilitator is critical in the ITC process. I know all of these women on varying levels of interaction. Some I had just met. Others I had known for years either personally or professionally. Some women knew others. Some had never met. A facilitator must take these factors into account and recognize the subtle personality differences and even power dynamics that could exist because of titles and positions of authority some participants. There were participants who were quiet and did not speak much but were highly engaged. A facilitator must be comfortable with interpersonal diversity in a group. There were others who used the space to vent and it was important to allow them to share as well as know when to redirect. Professionally, I conduct multiple trainings over the course of the year for my job and as a consultant. My experience and comfort level in doing this I believe contributes to the process. Since my research is about social capital, I love connecting to others and building relationships because the storytelling of others compels and intrigues me. My job requires me to network consistently across the country and as a result, this informs my facilitation skills in creating a space for participants to feel safe. I do this by sharing my own vulnerability. I did not start this process by stating that I was an expert: I shared my own ITC maps and struggles. I also made the group conversational more than laden with academic terms that might intimidate. Some of the readings were a bit complex and some of the participants commented on their inability to understand, which has informed me as a facilitator in the future on what I should use as reading materials. I also believe the small group size contributed to providing a sense of

intimacy for the women. Had the group been larger, the chemistry could have been different with so many competing to have a chance to share and others possibly shutting down.

The ITC process has not been used to measure social capital in women but I believe this is a tool that can not only help in personal transformation but can create relationships. I have witnessed what it has done for the women in the group. One participant whose only outings included work a few days a week (she works remotely) and the movies occasionally has started to attend more social events because of the revelation of her competing commitment. Staying home provided a feeling of safety and a hiding place when she really desired to make friends.

It has been refreshing that upon the completion of the research, these women are still connecting on Facebook and have made plans for an overnight outing. The ITC process was instrumental in creating the bridging social capital for a diverse group of women who otherwise might not have connected without the personal sharing and conversations that resulted from the Immunity to Change process. The women were planning to meet in May to continue their conversations even after the completion of the group but the meeting was cancelled due to facility challenges. Plans are underway to bring the women together in the next few months. I believe that in addition to the establishment of this new network, several of the women have commented that it has made them more open to building relationships with others who are different. I believe the ITC process was critical as a tool in this process. It served as a discussion point and allowed the women to not only deal with their challenges on a personal level but created an opportunity for the women to bond around those challenges. This process created a sense of community amongst participants. The sharing was personal, private and powerful due to the revelations the ITC map provided. I do believe if we did not have the consistent conversations with the readings and revisiting their ITC maps throughout the process,

the outcome could have been much different. One meeting of the ITC would not have created the bonding or bridging social capital. The readings provided guided conversations that allowed the members of the group to delve into topics that might not have occurred in the first few sessions. I believe these two components contributed to the women sharing their stories and finding commonalities in the readings and conversations that occurred. I am sure that there are other tools that are available to create bonding in women. Many of the women complained that they did not have opportunities to connect with women and hear of their experiences. Putnam (2000) discusses the decline of dinner parties and bowling leagues. I believe this process is a great way to connect women to one another and create a support system that many women, especially in urban areas, do not have. Many of the women enjoyed the combination of the self-improvement aspect along with new information and dialogue as challenging and felt that is a missing aspect in their lives due to their busy schedules or limited interactions that provide the aforementioned. The diverse make-up of the group was viewed as valuable. The ITC process can be a tool to deal with some of the tension that exists with race, class, gender, religion, and age. The process is a dynamic way to get women to focus on their individual challenges in an environment with others that can provide support, reflection, and assistance. There are many curricula and workbooks available for women support groups that are often cumbersome and do not allow for the dialogue and introspection because they are often so detailed and planned. The process can accomplish multiple outcomes for women's support groups allowing transparency. Because the completion of the map does not offer solutions to the areas of improvement, in a group setting, women are able to listen to input from others and receive insight from a variety of perspectives. The ITC process is another unique way for researchers to use this tool in creating bonding and bridging opportunities for women.

The ITC process is complementary to the theories of the Positive Psychology of Personal Transformation and Personal Construct Theory. Personal Construct Theory (PCT) was coined by George Kelly (1955) in the 1950s. PCT is a combination of the scientific process of discovery and meaning making, viewing “individuals as agents who devise and revise conceptual templates...called personal constructs that enable them to interpret, anticipate and respond to phenomena they encounter in the world. Individuals construct meaning from experiences, and refine meanings across time” (Reynolds, 2013, p. 75). Through the ITC process and conversations in the dialogue group, participants are making meaning and refining their definitions of self and others as a result of this process. Kelly’s (1955) theory emphasizes that in relationships, we make meaning based on our understanding: “To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person” (p. 562). Through dialogue, our views can be changed because of our interactions. Meaning making is not only for the individual but is also shared in the relationship. Called the sociality corollary which is one of many components to PCT, meaning making is viewed through the process of relationships. “We don’t have to share the same outlook but we must be able to understand theirs. Such understanding can be mutual...commonality is not a requisite condition for sociality” (Reynolds, 2013 , p. 80). For many in the group, they did not share the same outlook but they were able to listen, offer understanding, and in some cases, experience sympathy or empathy for group members.

The theory of positive psychology of personal transformation is rooted in positive psychology. Psychologists Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) elaborated on the view that psychology is focused more on human suffering than the exploration of human fulfillment. positive psychology explores

well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic. (p. 5)

The ITC process and group sessions focused on the well-being of individuals— involvement in the process is designed to initiate change. The goal is not to see the barrier as a problem but as an improvement goal. The ITC process does not focus on what is lacking but provides individuals completing the ITC map an opportunity to think differently about their personal barriers. Instead of viewing these challenges as problems, an individual is able to gain an understanding and awareness. Through group sharing, individuals experience the opportunity to focus on the positive growth instead of what is perceived as a failure. Positive Psychology examines “actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Each individual has the opportunity to examine past actions and gain a new perspective on how those previous decisions impacted one’s ability to thrive. The process initiates revelations—as small tests are implemented to challenge the big assumption, an individual can begin to make the necessary changes for success. As participants share their emotions in the group, they also “build their enduring personal resources, ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources” (Fredrickson, 2001, p. 218). The group sharing along with the ITC can be instrumental in building an individual’s repertoire of new knowledge, skills and behaviors that can be transformative in the way they build relationships and connect to others.

The article “Beyond the Peter Principle: Managing Successful Transitions” (C. Parker & Lewis, 1981) has been used for change management in organizations to evaluate the life cycle of

transitions in for individuals. It is important to note that individuals in the research group experienced some of the same components as referenced in this article as they made meaning of the ITC process. The transition curve includes stages such as “incompetence, acceptance of reality, testing, searching for meaning, and integration” (C. Parker & Lewis, 1981, p. 18). Some felt incompetence—they knew they needed to make a change but did not understand why they could not. Through the conversations, several discussed past events that were difficult to let go of, which have been noted in Chapter IV. The ITC process requires small tests and many were implementing ideas to test their big assumptions. As a result of the ITC and the group sessions, participants were able to make meaning of the experience and internalize what was discussed in the group. For many, they were able “to incorporate new meanings into new behaviors” (p. 19).

The combination of the ITC process along with the group conversations was critical in changing the perspectives of the women who were involved. Each individual brings a lens or perspective to a situation that is comprised of our experiences, beliefs, and assumptions that have been developed throughout our life (Dirkx, 1998). As we encounter new experiences and making meaning of those experiences, our perspectives broaden and even change. Perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1981) permits “one to revise specific assumptions about oneself and others until the very structure of assumption becomes transformed” (p. 66). It is through reflection that we are able to change and transform our thinking, which occurred in the completion of the ITC maps and the conversations which are evidenced in the dialogue and end of session reports.

### **Significance of the Research**

There has been limited research on diverse women and social capital. Quite often, the research solely focuses on professional women, a particular ethnic group or socio-economic class

of women when addressing social capital. There is also limited research on diverse women bridging social capital that encompasses generational, religious, and class differences. This research is also important because there are no studies to date that have used the ITC process as a tool to build social capital.

Much of the literature in leadership and network theory is through a business lens that often has profit and production as the outcome. The term social capital has to be re-evaluated. Relationships cannot solely be about profit and the exploitation of others. As leaders, it is important to note that relationships are critical in bringing individuals together to share perspectives, information, and resources. If the network is limited and does not take into account diversity and the life experiences of others, we miss out on truly becoming a society that positively impacts and transforms the lives of all.

The reality is that America's "manifest destiny" legacy creates an individualistic view and blames others without taking into account the historical, social, and cultural implications that may limit one's ability to build networks that can create economic and social viability. Leaders must be aware of these dynamics, creating opportunities for dialogue and mentoring in order to provide a level playing field. The myth of meritocracy is such a part of the American belief system and work ethic and as responsible leaders, environments that allow silos and isolation of others who are different not only diminishes the individual's ability to perform successfully but impacts the organization's opportunity to excel.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Social capital is typically a term that denotes a transactional relationship. It has been imperative to include in my work the dark side of social capital. I did not assume that all of the women would build relationships but many did. There are a limited number of tools to measure



if social capital is exchanged. The World Bank has a community-based form but I have not actually found a tool for individual social capital. The women designed a plan to continue to meet but it is not a plan to create any social or community level change. Although the group is designed to have a diverse group of women, it did not have representation of every group or leaders from every profession. The group was heavily African American but there was significant diversity within that subset. There were differences in education, background, and socio-economic status. Various ethnic groups might have different responses from those who participated and this has to be taken into account. This is a short-term project and will not evaluate the long-term impact of the individual or of the collective as a result of their ITC process.

### **Remaining Questions and Recommendations for Practice**

This study presents several opportunities for future research around women, the ITC process, and social capital. There are a number of questions that the work generated for me:

1. Would this work in an environment of women who did not have an appreciation or a value for diversity? How would the outcomes differ?
2. How would changes in the group make-up change the dynamic of the group? If more Anglos were in the group or more individuals from other countries were participants, would bridging social capital exist?
3. Although the use of the ITC process was impactful, what would have happened if women were in a group to discuss their barriers to change without the ITC? Would those conversations result in the same clarity in their self-defeating behavior?

4. Since many of the women were from an urban area, would a smaller city or rural area that is more homogenous be as open to the introduction of a variety of different characteristics in the group participants such as race, class, age, and religion?
5. The women had had various interactions with me prior to the study. Some had met me once and others had known me for years. How would this process work in a group with an inexperienced facilitator or with those who were not a part of my network?

For practitioners, there are several opportunities to implement the ITC beyond the typical use of identifying individual or organizational changes needed. Using the ITC to bring diverse women together to share their stories is one way of creating bridging social capital. Creating opportunities to meet over the course of several weeks allows the group to get to know one another. A one-time session does not trust or create social capital. It is also essential to allow the group to come up with rules for engagement. Although that was not done in this setting, with groups who may not have prior experience with the facilitator or other group members, ground rules on how they communicate is necessary as well as a conversation on the role of confidentiality. I did discuss confidentiality with the participants as a part of sharing an overview of the research. If the space is not created for safety, the personal, revealing dialogue will be limited. It is also important that the times of the group are shared in advance. Members of the group commented that this was helpful and they could plan around meeting instead of sitting for long periods of time trying to coordinate calendars. It is also critical to set a beginning and end to each meeting with introduction/overviews at each session. Meetings should also close with a review of the next session's content. Reading assignments are important to generate

opportunities for discussion in the group. Readings should be sent out at least a week prior to the meeting date so participants have an opportunity to share. Readings that correlate to topics such as women's workplace or home issues allow women to self-identify in the reading and share their own personal outlook.

There is a need to continue research on bridging social capital and the power of the story in connecting women. The ITC process is a great tool for bringing people together to share but in order for it to be effective, there has to be trust. I know that each of these women had a rapport and trust with me which made a huge difference. Although most of them did not know one another, I think the belief in me and my work made a significant difference in the process. I am in the process of re-creating a similar group experience with women might not be as familiar with me and my work to see if this process can work. The women really appreciated having the group which brought a level of accountability and the opportunity to see that despite their differences, they really had a lot in common. With all of the challenges we face in so many communities with conflict, violence, and a lack of understanding of those who are different, the ITC process can be helpful in building bridges and bringing people together to learn from one another but also understand the barriers that keep them from creating positive change collectively. I recently spoke with an assistant principal at a local school who shared that so many students are not empathetic and that as a part of her character education class, she is now teaching children what this means. So many of the children do not understand why they need to care and understand the stories of others. I believe because there are limited opportunities for the availability of these intentional spaces to tell stories, people are becoming more self-absorbed. The ITC can be a process that builds community and connections through understanding one

another's struggles and finding common ground to realize that despite our differences, we have more in common than we believe.

I have always struggled with the term social capital because the term "capital" denotes transaction and does not take into account issues of oppression and marginalization that impact those affected and their ability to engage in those circles of power and prestige. It is interesting because social capital focuses on external relationships and networks in the United States. In many communities of color, the family and community are important to engage and are not separate from the network. It is also interesting to note in international communities like the Maori of New Zealand, the view of building social capital is based in the family. There is not a division in social capital and culture for the Maori. Social relationships are viewed as familial ones. The culture dictates their views of connecting to others (Spellerberg, 2001, p. 12).

Social capacity is a term that resonates with me.

Social capacity is the aggregate of voluntary relationships between individuals, groups and/or organisations that create an ability to act positively for mutual benefit and a larger common purpose. It features trust, co-operative behaviour, inclusiveness and openness, and is driven by a sense of equity and justice. ( S. S. Smith & Kulynych, 2002, p. 175)

My desire is to use my research to build relationships among diverse individuals to create individual change that results in collective possibilities. The term "networking" is even problematic because of the implication that it is only the collection of business cards and meeting someone to help you build your career and business. For social mobility, these relationships can be important and cannot be discounted. I am interested in more than the distribution of business cards, but rather the power of the narrative that creates change. I seek to do something greater that creates social change in women—one group at a time—by helping them identify those individual barriers that may hinder their ability to create change in their lives and, ultimately, collaborate with other women to create large scale change.

## Epilogue

As the women learned a lot about themselves and about one another, I also discovered a great deal about myself. I am spending more time exploring my own story. I realized through this process my issue with trust and wrote an article about it that allowed me to revisit my past. When I was a kid, I was bullied. There were a group of girls who every day made me their target. I wasn't much of a fighter and so I ran away. I remember staying home for a week from school because their torment made me physically ill. This experience created a serious distrust in me for girls that then as an adult for women. This experience became a filter, a lens of some sort of how I processed relationships especially with women.

As an adult I realized that I was attracting people into my life who were not trustworthy. I had female friends but only a few (less than 3) were allowed to be a part of my world on many levels. I was afraid that if I were transparent, they would not only reject me but hurt me again. So the same way I ran away from the bullies, I also ran away from confronting these relationships in my life. This was reenacted in a variety of situations. I had bosses who were extremely insecure—they were mean to me in order to feel better about themselves. I found myself preferring to work with men because I did not want to deal with those issues of my past that caused me pain. It wasn't only women who were not trustworthy but I also attracted men who took advantage of my ideas and desire to help. In the end, I recognized that I was involved in my own sabotage. I recognized that in addition to the trust issue, I wasn't dealing with it either.

My problem wasn't that women were not trustworthy or that men were any better in embodying trust as a character trait—it was that I did not trust myself and my decisions and this manifested in my relationships. I could not make decisions and I always needed someone to give

feedback or affirm what I thought. As I began to trust myself, my relationships also changed. I began to attract into my world more women that I could trust and experience authenticity in our relationship. I did not see the correlation for years but as I've gotten older, I am a firm believer that self-reflection is important in the process of growth. It is easy to stay in a place of being stuck, blaming others for our inability to reach our goals not realizing that at times, we have a hand in our own defeat. As I realized my contribution, I could no longer make others responsible for the lack of depth in my relationships. I believe being a part of this process with the group allowed me to revisit my past, witness my growth, and examine the areas that I need to improve in. The ITC map is something I continue to use for myself and with others. It helps me explore the story I keep telling about my situation and why I am not making the progress I'd like to achieve.

**Appendix**

## **Appendix A**

### **Email to Women**

Dear Friends,

I am in the process of completing my PhD in Leadership and Change at Antioch University. My research is entitled from Bonding to Bridging: Using the ITC Process to Build Social Capital and Create Change. I am interested in bringing a small group of women together for over the course of three months, twice a month to meet and share regarding the challenges and barriers for diverse women to connect. Many of you have been involved in previous research or discussions about my interest in this topic and have expressed interest to be a part of this group.

Involvement requires reading of articles, discussion during meetings, completing reflection surveys and attending all meetings in person on the following dates:

Sunday, January 12, 3-5:30 pm

Sunday, February 9, 3:00-5:30 pm

Sunday, February 23, 3:00-5:30 pm

Sunday, March 2, 3:00-5:30 pm

Sunday, March 30, 3:00-5:30 pm

Sunday, April 6, 3:00-5:30

If you are interested in participating, please send an email to me by Monday, January 6, confirming your availability to attend all sessions and interest. Forms will follow to be completed and brought to first meeting as well as the address of the first meeting.

I appreciate your support and assistance!

**Froswa' Booker-Drew**



## Appendix B

<i>Informed Consent Form</i>
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### **From Bonding to Bridging: Using the ITC Process to Build Social Capital and Create Change**

*This informed consent form is for participants who are invited to participate in research entitled, **From Bonding to Bridging: Using the ITC Process to Build Social Capital and Create Change.***

**Froswa' Booker-Drew, will serve as the Principal Investigator for this project under the guidance of Dr. Jon Wergin, Chair and Professor and Dr. Carolyn Kenny, Chair of the Institutional Research Board at Antioch University.**

**This Informed Consent Form has two parts:**

- **Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)**
- **Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)**

**You will be given a copy of the full Informed Consent Form**

#### **Part I: Information Sheet**

##### **Introduction**

I am currently a PhD candidate at Antioch University in the PhD in Leadership and Change Program. I am interested in understanding the relationships of diverse women and the barriers that keep women from working together to create change.

##### **Purpose of the research**

I am interested in evaluating how diverse women build relationships. Women generally connect to women who are like them and very seldom have the opportunities to build relationships with those outside of their social circle. The goal of this research is to bring a diverse group of women together to share experiences and insights to help one another both personally and professionally. The research will examine the barriers to women working together to create change. Ultimately this exchange of information will be reviewed to determine if bridging social capital is possible.

##### **Type of Research Intervention**

This research will involve your participation in a group discussion that will take about two hours twice a month.

**Participant Selection:**

You are being invited to take part in this research because your personal and/or professional experience can contribute much to our understanding of the exchange of social capital in diverse women.

**Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. It is your choice whether to participate or not. There is no compensation for this study.

**Procedures**

This group will consist of twelve to fifteen women who will meet twice a month for two and a half hours in January, February and March to discuss reading assignments, topics and complete immunity maps to discover barriers to change individually and collectively.

Session 1: What is Immunity to Change? /Individual Immunity Map Completed

Session 2: Views Women Have of One Another—Discussion/Immunity Map on the Barriers

Women Have with one another; Article to be discussed: Why Are Women Biased Against Other Women? <http://ideas.time.com/2012/10/04/womens-inhumanity-to-women/>

Session 3: Social Capital and the Role of our Networks—Discussion; Assigned Reading: What Is Social Capital, and Why Should You Care About It?

Session 4: Barriers to Women Creating Change in Community/Immunity Map; Assigned

Reading: The Real Reasons Women Are Not Advancing in Corporate America

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-caprino/the-real-reasons-women-ar\\_b\\_2931677.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kathy-caprino/the-real-reasons-women-ar_b_2931677.html)

Session 5: Relational Leadership—How does being relational impact leadership for women?

Discussion; Assigned Reading: The paradox of postheroic leadership: An essay on gender, power, and transformational change

Session 6: Action Planning: Final Group plans to decide individual and collective plans

You do not have to share any knowledge that you are not comfortable sharing. Meetings will take place at office location to be decided upon. Only the participants and I will be present during this discussion. The entire discussion will be summarized in notes but no-one will be identified by name in the notes. Conversations will be recorded with the permission of the group. All information including surveys will be stored in a personal home office and destroyed after six months from the last meeting. All information is confidential, and no one else except the principal investigator will have access to the notes or surveys.

**Duration**

The research takes place from January to March 2014 twice a month for two hours to two and a half hours in a private location which will be disclosed to participants prior to the first meeting.

Surveys will be distributed upon the completion of each session and action planning decided upon by the group will be completed at the last session.

**Risks**

You might share some very personal and confidential information. You do not have to answer any question or take part in the discussion or survey if you don't wish to do so, and that is also fine. You do not have to give any reason for not responding to any question, or for refusing to take part in the survey.

**Benefits**

Your participation might result in the establishment of new relationships or contacts. Your participation will help inform my research regarding social capital in diverse women.

**Reimbursements**

You will not be provided any incentive to take part in the research. There is no compensation for participation. Travel and mileage is not reimbursable.

**Confidentiality**

I will not share personal information about you to anyone. The information that I collect from this research project will be kept private. You will only be identified by age and race and possibly religion, in the research. I will ask you and others in the group not to talk to people outside the group about what was said in the group. I will, in other words, ask each of you to keep what was said in the group confidential. You should know, however, that I cannot stop or prevent participants who were in the group from sharing things that should be confidential.

**Sharing the Results**

Each participant will receive a summary of the results. Participants can receive a copy of the entire report.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

You do not have to take part in this research if you do not wish to do so. I will give you an opportunity at the end of this project to review your remarks and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if I did not understand you correctly.

**Who to Contact**

If you have any questions, you can ask them now or later. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact me at or by phone at or **Dr. Carolyn Kenny, Chair, Institutional Review Board at [ckenny@antioch.edu](mailto:ckenny@antioch.edu)**.

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Antioch Institutional Review Board which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find about more about the IRB, contact Dr. Kenny at [ckenny@antioch.edu](mailto:ckenny@antioch.edu).

**Part II: Certificate of Consent**

I have been invited to participate in research about social capital in diverse women.

**I have read the foregoing information or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study**

**Print Name of Participant**

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**Signature of Participant**

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**Date**

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**Day/month/year**

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## Appendix C

### End of Session Reflection Opportunity

Your thoughts are critical. Your self expression and disclosure is not only needed but appreciated. The information is confidential and I will be the only person to see your responses. Please be honest and share your feelings, insights and a-ha moments.

Age range:

18-29

30-44

45-59

60 and above

Race (How would you describe your ethnic background?):

Did you feel engaged?

At what time in the session do you recall being the most engaged?

When did you feel the least engaged in the session? Why?

Did you self-disclose something that was important to you?

Was there a critical moment in this group for you and what was it?

Did someone share something that was significant to you?

Will anything discussed in the group inform either your personal and professional life?

How will it impact your perception of yourself? Your relationships with others?

Is there anything else you'd like to say about today's session or are there any other comments you'd like to share?

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