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Virtually all communities carry hierarchies, and most individuals recognize the necessity to participate in these communities. Yet, many individuals assume they have a narrowly defined role in the hierarchy of these communities. The research illustrates that two systems of leadership must coexist in order to more justly serve individuals, organizations, and, as a natural outgrowth, society as a whole. Utilizing photovoice as the community-based participatory methodology, the overall research study engages hierarchical leadership and communal leadership, focusing on the humane collaboration of eleven individuals at a community college in what they perceive to be a communal leadership model for the sake of a more socially just system of leadership. The main question this research engages is “What is communal leadership?” This main question encompasses a number of questions, such as “What does it mean to talk about communal leadership, and what are its characteristics?” “Are there current examples, and how do we recognize them?” “What are the conflicts involved in a practice of communal leadership?” The study concludes that communal leadership, as it coexists with hierarchical leadership, is a more inclusive model that values the input of all parties and shares power while minimizing the domination that too often occurs in current hierarchies.

COEXISTING LEADERSHIP? THE EMERGENCE OF COMMUNAL  
LEADERSHIP AMIDST HIERARCHY

by

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## CHAPTER I

### AN OVERVIEW OF LEADERSHIP

#### Prologue

Leadership: The sheer volume of books, scholarly articles, and seminars alone suggest that the question of leadership is a modern rhetorical “search for the Holy Grail.” And for many, that search becomes a personal one. Young professionals currently advance through a mechanistic system of leadership that is modeled as part of a large machine of production, and I was one of those: on a fast track to success but, unfortunately, absorbed into a system influenced by the “isms” (distinctive theories) of the Western culture—capitalism, materialism, and individualism, to name but a few—which would inhibit the growth of any communal leader. These isms have spawned a cornucopia of leadership guides that range from the practical to the messiah-nistic: *The Top Qualities of a Great Leader*, *Leadership Development*, and *The Top Ten Leadership Commandments*, to name but a few.

Within this system of leadership, I was unable to see past myself, unable to be self-reflexive. Colleagues vying with me for leadership positions represented a dichotomy: one group “bought into” the system as a consequence of need for financial or professional advancement; the other group struggled for a time then capitulated, refusing to be party to a system that offered no opportunity to showcase their own talents, skills, and abilities. For a time, my own focus was merely directed toward the system-

prescribed future, without my being truly present and, as a consequence, I felt myself neglecting my communal responsibilities to humankind. This, in turn, meant that I neglected my responsibilities to myself.

Ironically, as all of this was occurring, I was serving in a leadership role in a youth service agency known for its mission to assist young people in becoming active and productive citizens—and future leaders. It took ten years to work my way up in the youth serving agency to become the Executive Director, and throughout the climb, I was keenly aware of how two factors—gender and youth—worked against me. I worked hard within those ten years to prove myself as a woman worthy of the top leadership position—despite the fact that this organization was known as being “a good ole boy network” where women might slowly work their way into leadership positions but only through recognizing that network established in the early 1900s by accepting that I would be compelled to adopt masculine strategies of leadership for advancement.

It saddens me to admit that I combined reluctantly adopted masculine strategies and my genuine skills for the job with my accidentally being at the right place at exactly the right time: the 1990s—when organizations were keenly aware of the public relations benefit of being able to claim that they were advancing women into leadership roles. This fact begged a question that haunted me: how much of my career advancement was talent and how much of it was gender?

As a young professional, I was hell-bent on gaining the top leadership position, though many felt I was too young and too much a “woman” to attain it. As is so often the case, the beauty of the journey proved greater than the reward. After six years as

Executive Director, I began to realize that I was selling my soul for a leadership system that did not serve humanity: a goal I once saw as the true intent of leaders. Disheartened, worn out, and lost, I had to make a change in life that allowed me to serve people in a different way, one employing a different measure of leadership.

Only after I removed myself from the harried leadership position did I realize just how much of myself I had lost in the process of climbing the ladder of success. How did I get there? Where was I? Was it worth it? An even grimmer question, at least for me, was this: Why does a woman who believes in a communal leadership system find herself buying into a leadership model that requires her to sacrifice the common good in order to join an elite community of leaders who see themselves as separate from the very people they serve and entitled to a position in that elite community?

These are just a few of the questions that I began asking myself. I then realized that my own creativity and sense of humanity had been stifled along the way. With this epiphany came certain harsh truths. Not only did I need to find my true—and lost—self and relocate essential life goals that were misplaced along the way, but I also needed to find my creativity and desire for community that had been misplaced. The mechanistic system of leadership, based on the assembly-line production of the past to which I was accustomed, led me straight up the ladder towards “Jonesing,” depression, and isolation. How could I not see this path of destruction on the horizon, and why, like so many other young professionals, was I on this fast track leading me straight to capitalism, materialism, and individualism hell? In embarking on a new career, I capitulated—but I realize now, I am not alone. There is a diaspora of leaders from that mechanistic system

who would embrace a communal model of leadership and recognize, through their reading and, perhaps, their own consumerism that such communal models exist. They point to Google, Pixar, and SAS as embodiments of that model. However, there is a reason these entities are the exception, not the rule. Achieving such a model is taxing and risky. Thus, my research expectation is to illustrate the complexities of communal leadership within hierarchy by deepening human understanding of the characteristics and tensions of community within existing leadership.

### **Historical and Social Context**

The problem identified throughout this research is of societal acceptance of the notion that structured hierarchy narrowly defines leadership as those who reside on top and prescribe the actions of the masses beneath them. The inherent consequence is that such leaders become disconnected from the voices of the people that perform the real work of the organization—and who might direct the company to better methods of dealing with the challenges and embracing the opportunities to advance the mutual cause of organizational success.

In his book, *Busting Bureaucracy: How to Conquer Your Organization's Worst Enemy*, Kenneth Johnston (1993) notes, "Top managers are dangerously ill-informed and insulated from what is happening on the front lines or in 'the field'" (p. 19). This in turn creates a separation between who can lead and how; this separation ultimately creates a struggle of dominance and power. If a handful of "ill-informed and insulated" leaders make all of the choices for the organization, what is the consequence? The individuals who serve the organization are controlled by those few at the top sacrificing their own

creative strategies for success within the organization in order to serve the dictates of leaders who no longer observe the day-to-day workings of the organization where the real problems and real opportunities for advancing the common cause lie but who hold the positions that the lower-ranking members of the organization covet.

Honoring hierarchal leadership, the current mechanistic system does not encourage people to work together. In his book *Imagine: How Creativity Works* (2012), Jonah Lehrer suggests that “rooted in a failure of innovation, businesses minimize the very interactions that lead to new ideas by erecting walls and establishing hierarchies that keep people from working together; stifling conversations, discouraging dissent, and suffocating social networks” (p. 209). The sole use of hierarchical leadership is an outdated system that does not allow people to flourish together; as a matter of fact, it prohibits people from working together and further isolates and segregates those who can lead from those who cannot. Likewise, as Tina Seelig points out in her book *inGenius: A Crash Course on Creativity* (2011), hierarchical leadership compromises both creativity and communication because, “with infrequent feedback, employees do what is safe and avoid taking creative risks for fear of a negative review at the end of the year. They do what they know will work rather than trying something novel” (p. 120).

### **Hierarchy**

So why do so many subscribe to this hierarchical model? Leadership, as a societal necessity, is a direct outgrowth of some of the oldest human hierarchies. Richard Barker explains this history of leadership in his article “The Nature of Leadership” (2001):

The canon of industrial-era leadership theories is an adaptation of the hierarchical view of the universe adopted by the early Christian Church, and presumes that leadership is all about the person at the top of the hierarchy, this person's exceptional qualities and abilities to manage the structure of the hierarchy, and the activities of this person in relation to goal achievement. (p. 471)

Churches established the pattern wherein a hierarchy is commonly defined as any systems of persons ranked one above another. However, the ranking of persons one above another limits who can lead and thereby limits the possibility of all voices being heard. Institutions that only rely on top-down leadership create a leadership system perpetuating inequality because it is non-inclusive—limiting those who have access to leadership. As noted in their study “The Functions and Dysfunctions of Hierarchy,” Anderson and Brown (2010) point out that “individuals at the top have disproportionate influence over the group's processes, decisions, and ultimately, its outcomes” (p. 12). Furthermore, institutions who rely too heavily on the hierarchical structure challenge work communities from within by asking teams to set aside individual needs and goals for the sake of the institution, thereby muting the voices of team members except for those at the top. The steeper the hierarchy, the less involved team members could actually become. Anderson and Brown's research study further reveals that “groups and organizations with steeper hierarchies tended to have members who were less satisfied, less motivated, and more inclined to leave the group” (p. 10). Concentrated control at the top of hierarchies is a limiting factor in determining who can lead; therefore, the stage is set for perpetuation of that model and a predictable outgrowth.

## **Bureaucracy**

An outcome of utilizing such hierarchies is that bureaucracies are formed.

Bureaucracy is commonly defined as excessive multiplication of and concentration of power in administrators generally situated at the top of a hierarchy. According to Johnston (1993), “Bureaucracy seems to be the organizational form that produces the highest levels of personal satisfaction for those at the top of an organization” (p. 4). This top-heavy control and satisfaction promotes an unequal position of power and generally is characterized by “rigid policies, unresponsiveness to individual situations, unwillingness to admit mistakes and shifting blame to others, lack of innovation, and inaccessibility associated with not caring” (p. 18). In addition, it “describes a set of characteristics or attributes such as ‘red tape’ or ‘inflexibility’ that frustrate people who deal with or who work for organizations they perceive as ‘bureaucratic’” (Johnston, 1993, p. 11), perpetuating systems of power and dominance over those positioned lower within a hierarchy. Communication is then lost. An imbalance in power focused solely at the top means that “information is hoarded or kept secret and used as the basis for power” (Johnson, 1993, p. 19). As a result, “there is political in-fighting, with executives striving for personal advancement and power” (Johnston, 1993, p. 19). Hierarchies laden with bureaucracy create unequal power differentials between leaders and non-leaders. As a result, there is a “cut-and-control” of people and work which dates back to the Industrial Revolution.

## **Mechanistic System of Leadership**

As Burke and Ornstein (1997) point out in their book *The Axemaker's Gift: Technology's Capture and Control of Our Minds and Culture*, “By the end of the nineteenth century, the effects of cut-and-control philosophy had shaped the modern world. Working life was now chopped up and set in orderly sequence, dominated by the need to conform to the machine” (p. 216). The current mechanistic system of leadership based on assembly line production—and often resulting in individuals being viewed as part of a large machine—does not serve humanity well. Burke and Ornstein (1997) note:

As the system matured, it took the usual cut-and-control path. Manipulation of capital and resources fragmented the production process, subdividing each job in scope and level of expertise, deskilling the workers, reducing them to units of production that could be more efficiently used, more easily organized, and less likely to object to or demand changes as long as each man's knowledge was limited to the immediate task at hand. A new kind of life was created: mindless repetition of meaningless tasks set to the speed of a machine. (p. 191)

Conformity of the people, destruction of individuality, and the formation of binaries and dichotomies are the results. Work life was chopped into specific order due to being dominated by new machines and the focus on efficiency and capital gains. “Daily life was now scheduled according to the demands of the factory system and shaped, whether capitalist or socialist communities, by the decomposition of the community into ‘units of productive labor’” (Burke & Ornstein, 1997, p. 223). These changes have impacted the way people lead today. People are still cut and controlled by hierarchy established by the mechanistic system of leadership and the focus on capital gains has continued the same.

## **Capitalism**

With an “insatiable demand of the new industrial economy” (Burke & Ornstein, 1997, p. 218), honoring hierarchal leadership, the predominant current mechanistic system tends to feed consumer needs and capital but does little to encourage people to work together. Burke and Ornstein (1997) further explain how the history of industrialization and the mechanization of leadership influenced capitalism:

Capital was by now also generating major changes in social behavior as wages altered the nature of work and altered the relationship between worker and employer. Time and effort were increasingly measured not in the old sense, as elements in the expression of mutual responsibilities between employer and employee, but in terms of cash. (p. 191)

Thus, stifled people who have sacrificed their creative impulse and who have been subsumed by the machines that they operate lose their intent of serving humanity, for the sake of capital. Their only avenue out of their role as a cog in the machine is to subscribe to a leadership model that offers the chance for advancement. The opportunity to build a sense of community is sacrificed to organization’s goals of bigger, better, more profitable. Barker (2001) explains, “The aim of industrial leadership is to serve institutional needs” (p. 474) with much of the focus on capital gains and competition to reach the top, further highlighting the scarce positions at the top.

## **Scarcity & Competition**

In current hierarchical leadership—exclusive top-down leadership—with so few positions on top, the social concern for others is inhibited. In a culture built on scarcity,

even leadership is a scarce entity. In “Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy,” Renato Rosaldo (1994) explains the ethic of pie as it relates to scarcity:

The ethic of pie derives from institutional pressure to divide and conquer, and watch the spectacle of people fighting over crumbs. In this ethic, the image of limited goods makes resources appear finite so that, if the other person has more, then you have less. Translated into the realm of self-esteem, the ethic says that you can increase your self-esteem by capturing some from somebody else. If the other loses, you win; if the other grows shorter, you appear taller. (p. 410)

Scarcity is but one example of the production of unjust social systems at work in dominant hierarchical leadership—with competition for scarce leadership positions being yet another.

The competition for leadership and assessment of such leadership perpetuates a superior/inferior binary and systems of exclusion while objectifying others. In her book, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, Margaret Wheatley (2002) posits, “Those who act superior can’t help but treat others as objects to accomplish their causes and plans” (p. 141). The system of leadership based on capitalism and driven by market forces inhibits leaders’ abilities to lead in a creative and communal way with genuine concern for humanity at the forefront. Similarly, as Sam Chaltain (2010) points out in his book *American Schools: The Art of Creating a Democratic Learning Community*, “When we as leaders do not trust, believe in, or have opportunities to recognize the true worth and potential of the fellow human beings we are supposed to serve, we manage each other as we would manage inanimate things” (p. 6). The current leadership system confines leaders to inhumane perspectives of leadership,

limiting the opportunity to appreciate and understand the creativity and interconnectivity of people, experiences, and systems of power at work.

### **Power & Domination**

The hierarchal leadership system perpetuates injustices in which all perspectives are not heard and, over time the non-leaders cease to offer any perspective because they see such offerings as moot points to the organization's decision-makers. "They are treated as though they can't be trusted. They are treated as though they don't have good judgment. They are treated as though they won't work hard unless pushed. Their work environment includes large amounts of unhealthy stress" (Johnston, 1993, p. 19). An unfortunate consequence is a growing number of organizational members who feel like the "neglected child"—the person who faces unheard ideas and pleas, whose needs are ignored, and who retreats into a sense of personal isolation that is the death of creativity, ambition, and hope. The unacknowledged consequence to the organization is lost opportunities for new ideas, innovations, and profits.

So, how do the needs of the individual in the organization become subsumed in the organizational leadership model? Barker (2001) explains these sublimated needs:

The pursuit of institutional needs proceeds under the presumption that the satisfied institution ultimately will meet individual wants and needs. Conventional experience of leadership is thought to be consistent with the degree to which a given individual experiences the satisfaction of needs. But the study of leadership tends to overlook the effect of the potential dichotomy between individual needs and institutional needs. In fact, the dichotomy itself is seen as a 'leadership challenge'. One goal for industrial leaders is to persuade 'followers' to replace their desire to pursue individual needs with the desire to pursue institutional needs. Further, institutional 'leaders' have slowly but surely facilitated a deterioration of an individual's ability to meet his or her own needs independent of institutions. (p. 474)

As Barker notes, a mechanistic system of leadership serves the needs of the institution and only the few at the top over the needs of the collective, compromises the idea of working together communally, and limits those positions at the top. Johnston (1993) notes that “senior managers become so insulated from the realities of the front line that they may use stereotypical thinking and out-of-date experience in making decisions” (p. 19). As a result, “decisions are made based on the perceived desires of superiors, rather than concern for mission achievement” (p. 19).

The division of the leaders in a hierarchical system from the non-leaders perpetuates systems of power and domination because all voices are not heard, which is detrimental to those situated lower in the hierarchy. Thus, if leadership is interpreted as “decision-making,” then a “non-leader” is accepting of any decision handed down—even if that individual, who is familiar with the area in which the decision can have impact, knows that the decision might prove to have disastrous consequences to the organization. In “The Essential Tension Between Leadership and Power: When Leaders Sacrifice Group Goals for the Sake of Self-Interest,” Jon Maner and Nicole Mead (2010) state, “hierarchically arranged groups are characterized by asymmetric control over resources, such that leaders (compared to followers) enjoy relatively greater control over the distribution and use of valued group resources” (pp. 482–483), which in turn lends to an imbalance in power and domination as a result of a steep leadership model.

Maner and Mead (2010) explain the impact of steeper hierarchies as they pertain to power and dominance and offer an alternative model of shared power:

[As] group size has grown exponentially in modern societies, leaders' power often extends beyond the domains of their specialized knowledge, and decision-making hierarchies tend to be steeper than those to which the human mind is accustomed. This shift in modern societies toward steeper and more global hierarchy may prompt dominance-oriented leaders to take advantage of their power. To help quell this tendency, organizations might benefit from distributing power across numerous individuals or teams, each tasked with specific goals needed to further the group's overall interests. (pp. 494–495)

Social injustice emerges when such leaders use their power to personal advantage.

Dominance-oriented leadership brings harmful consequences, including some consequences that target specific organization members. In her book, *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*, Riane Eisler (2008) contends that there are four shared factors in the current leadership model that prove harmful:

These four core components—a social structure of rigid top-down rankings, a high level of abuse and violence, a male-superior/female-inferior model of our species, and beliefs that justify domination and violence as inevitable and moral—shape all social and economic institutions of the domination system. (p. 97)

These components alone explain why hierarchical forms of leadership challenge social justice and why leadership as a means of enacting social justice is important.

In their publication, “Disrupting Gender, Revising Leadership,” Debra Meyerson, Robin Ely, and Laura Wernick (2007) found similar elements that reveal “the tight connection between the way work is defined and executed, on one hand, and how organizations construct gender and leadership, on the other” (p. 454). If leadership is redefined to support socially just systems, then leaders

enact social justice. On the other hand, if a stricter and steeper system of hierarchy is adhered to, then there exists an imbalance in power and domination perpetuated by patriarchal ideas of leadership historically defined within the existing culture.

To define the mechanistic system of leadership as patriarchal means that men have predominantly been positioned at the top of hierarchies. Because the current system of leadership was developed in the nineteenth century around industrialism, women among others were and still, to an extent, are often excluded from leadership positions. Meyerson et al. (2007) identify factors that contribute to exclusion in organizations:

When any group, such as women, has trouble entering an organization or moving through its ranks, the organization has an opportunity to examine how its cultural and operational conditions, its basic assumptions, norms, and work practices, as well as its values and incentives, may be inhibiting more than simply the advancement of a particular group of people: they may also be inhibiting the organization's own effectiveness. (p. 455)

In some instances, a dominant leadership model limits those who can obtain positions within organizations by perpetuating social injustice because some may view cultural change as too great of an undertaking.

Unfortunately, domination breeds adherence to the current model. As bell hooks explains in her 2003 book, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, "In a culture of domination almost everyone engages in behaviors that contradict their beliefs and values" (p. 29). Culturally, from the historical perspective that is based on domination, people needed to be told what to do and, as the necessity to navigate steeper hierarchies with so

few people on top became the norm, it was assumed that non-leaders were not capable of knowing what to do on their own.

The historically entrenched leadership culture influences both the habits and the actions of leaders. In their article, “A Discursive Approach to Understanding Women Leaders in Working Life,” Anna-Maija Lämsä and Teppo Sintonen (2001) attest that “the important issue in the concept of culture is that it contains ideas, beliefs, and symbolic conceptions about the essence and course of action of those belonging to that culture” (p. 259). This might explain why leaders living in a patriarchal society might impose a business or organizational leadership model in which the head of the organization requires all major decisions to pass through his or her hands and why people in non-leadership roles rarely challenge decisions made by those designated leaders.

The question becomes this: Why do so many workers accept the leadership norm? Maner and Mead (2010) suggest that “the relationship between leaders and followers reflects a social contract wherein followers trust leaders to make decisions that benefit the group and leaders agree to pursue actions that are in the group’s best interest” (p. 482). However, in a predominantly hierarchical leadership system—one limiting who can lead based on capitalistic measures and personal gain—the decisions of the leaders are based on the systems in place and may not be beneficial to all people influenced by the leadership. This might be blind trust in a flawed leadership system. As Maner and Mead (2010) note:

Indeed, although leaders are responsible for promoting the welfare of their groups, leaders may also be motivated to enhance their personal capacity for power and domination. Consequently, although groups often need leaders to

achieve important goals, providing leaders with power can make followers susceptible to exploitation. (p. 482)

The dominant culture dictates how individuals act and decidedly imparts decisions on those within that specific culture, thereby resisting any change to the status quo. However, such change is necessary in order to break from tradition. “When we stop thinking and evaluating along the lines of hierarchy and can value rightly all members of a community we are breaking a culture of domination” (hooks, 2003, p. 37).

Hierarchy is essential in any organization. The problem is that the mechanistic system is so pervasive in modern society that it has become the leadership juggernaut wherein each successful Fortune 500 company subscribes to the model. This, in turn, suggests to the unsuspecting masses that such a system is the *only* avenue to success. Yet such a system is rife with problems. “The dominant context we now hold is one of deficiencies, interests, and entitlement” (Block, 2009, p. 32). In order to suggest a new system of leadership—one based on care, inclusiveness, and interconnectivity—there needs to be a shift from hierarchy to community.

### **Research Questions**

To establish my research questions, I determined to use questions which would allow me to explore communal leadership as an alternative to narrowly structured hierarchies—those familiar structures in which the few privileged find themselves at the top and who prescribe the actions of those beneath them. If communal leadership—a more inclusive model that values the input of all parties and minimizes the “leveling” that occurs in the current hierarchies—represents a viable alternative to such leveled

hierarchies, then it is essential for this research to both define and characterize it if it is to become a socially just, caring, community of peers rather than an inhibiting occupational realm.

The main question this research engages is “what is communal leadership?” This main question encompasses a number of questions such as,

- What does it mean to talk about communal leadership and what are its characteristics?
- Are there current examples, and how do we recognize them?
- What are the conflicts involved in a practice of communal leadership?

I will address these questions through review of the literature which profiles scholars’ work in the areas of leadership, community, transformation, ethics, and care in order to propose a theoretical model of communal leadership which might guide organizations in establishing a more inclusive leadership model.

Furthermore, I will conduct one empirical study of an extant organization employing 11 individuals who currently perceive themselves to be working within a communal leadership model. This study employs photovoice methodology in a community-based participatory study to provide the group a narrative forum through which to establish evidence that they do, indeed, incorporate communal leadership. This photovoice methodology will also plumb their experience for any research evidence that helps others in defining characteristics of communal leadership. This might provide a framework for communal leadership. Thus, Chapter I has introduced the research topic,

provided the questions that direct the research effort, and established the need for a new leadership approach.

Chapter II provides an important review of literature surrounding leadership, community, and transformation. It introduces the idea of communal leadership by establishing the conceptual framework for the research study. Furthermore, Chapter II introduces the theoretical framework of transformation, sharing, and ethical leadership, which provide parameters in which to create community. Detailed within the chapter is an investigation into theories that complement what might be called communal leadership: connected knowing, caring economics, ethics of care, love ethics, and social connection model of shared responsibility. Each of these leadership theories highlights necessary elements for existing communal and leadership systems, a discussion which leads to Chapter III and a community-based participatory research study utilizing photovoice methodology which attempts to illustrate the characteristics of communal leadership.

Chapter III profiles the study of communal leadership applied with the Business and Administrative Services Department at a community college. Through observations of and discussion forums with the above staff team, the research study explores the components of communal leadership within this specific context. The study investigates how people think of communal leadership and examines the tensions borne of the clash of ideologies and culture. The research explores the challenges, as documented in the study between what people say is communal leadership and the actual characteristics identified to describe it. Thus, a refined definition of communal leadership will be based

on the culmination of research as well as the photovoice research study established in partnership with the eleven participants at the community college.

Utilizing the findings from the observations, photovoice, and discussion forums with the staff team, this research attempts to define and identify the characteristics of communal leadership. In addition, chapter three highlights the tensions between communities/departments within institutions and between communal and hierarchal leadership which leads to chapter four and a discussion of the implications for greater society and provides guidelines for cultivating communal leadership.

In the final chapter, I attempt to answer the question: What are the implications for greater society? The observations of and narratives from the ethnographic study of the staff team should provide an answer and can be then used to address these additional questions. Assuming communal leadership exists, how does it change notions of responsibility concerning leadership overall? How does communal leadership change notions of responsibility in the self as that “sense of self” pertains to belonging to a community? Also, when communal leadership exists, is more clearly defined, and is characterized through working models, how can communal leadership then be promoted as an alternative to narrowly structured hierarchies? The study postulates that this alternative to the hierarchal models provides greater avenues to social justice and a more humane approach to organizational success through collaboration and human connection by promoting communal leadership.

The research points to an exploration of the organizational realities and experience of individuals related to communal leadership, acknowledging that, through

exploration of communal leadership, varying outcomes may emerge. The research study will reveal that employing photovoice methodology produces a research study that is designed, not to be all inclusive of identified outcomes, but to provide an exploration of communal leadership as a way to define it and to establish its unique aspects to those found in the current hierarchical model. Any curiosity related to such tensions is fulfilled through the community-based participatory research using photovoice methodology. When eleven professionals can be found to represent a hierarchy utilizing perceived communal leadership through the photovoice narratives capturing participant characteristics, tensions, and individual identities, a micro-analysis of communal leadership emerges to provide the most revealing, enriching, and important aspects of the study. Ultimately, this team claiming to manifest communal leadership within their work place provides the key measure of characteristics, tensions, and social implications of communal leadership.

The overall framework for the research postulates that people are inherently good and are motivated to build community for the sake of social justice or equality for all. However, community is not always used in the service of the good—for the benefit of others or in shared decision-making or equality. It can be used to dominate, exploit, and mislead or to promote selfish interests. Community also does not ensure positive outcomes for all. Sharing common interests, as one part of the definition, does not mean that there is not conflict in the building of community. On the other hand, this research emphasizes the need for equality and uses theories which focus on ethics, shared decision making, and love.

Building community for the sake of social justice requires a spiritual transformation for individuals to focus on equality and positive impact for all individuals involved in the building of community. The building of community is individualistic and motivated by the specific interests, goals, and motivations of individuals involved. From a social justice perspective these motivations involve more than the self, yet require an understanding of individual motivations and how these may impact others within a specific community. The building of community is more than the manipulating of environments in order to increase profit. It requires an intrinsic change in the self which then extends institutionally.

This research utilizes a more positive humane lens in the focus of building community, but recognizes both the challenges and negative aspects of community. The building of community is individualistically motivated by a more fluid construction of community and leadership. The notion of communal leadership contests and deconstructs the social injustice in traditional hierarchical forms of leadership, which posits power and domination over others inhibiting the building of community for the sake of equality for all.

The overall research study of this dissertation engages a shift from hierarchical leadership to the importance of the collaboration of individuals for the sake of a more socially just system of leadership. Thus, a need to define and characterize this type of leadership is established. This research study is important because its aim is to both define what communal leadership is and to identify the characteristics in order to

encourage a social change in leadership. In doing so, the research is offering an alternative to hierarchical leadership—one which is more inclusive and socially just.

### **Conclusion**

The dominant hierarchical system of leadership does not encourage collaboration and a focus on social justice for greater humanity. As noted, to consider any type of leadership alternative is to consider the many influences upon individuals in an existing leadership culture. Leaders act and are acted upon by systems based on the culture within which they are influenced. Communal leadership introduces a more socially just approach within which a broader, communal scope of leaders can arise.

Research in community as an avenue to leadership engages a shift from the importance of “position” in a hierarchical leadership to the importance of “people” working in collaboration for the common good in a more inclusive and socially just system of leadership. As the research identifies this need for a more socially just model, one fact will become clear: a single definition or list of the characteristics of communal leadership has never been directly or fully identified but failure to do so leaves society with a structured model that continues to impede both organizational and personal success. Thus, Richard Barker’s (2001) contention resonates more clearly:

Those who act out leadership do so armed with an array of concepts about what work is, what justice is, what success is, what cooperation is, what goals are, what responsibility is, and so forth. If someone were to act out leadership with different concepts, such as a different cultural definition of success or responsibility, then a different construct of leadership could be expected to govern the assessment of action. (p. 475)

This research is the beginning of that new construct: a communal leadership model.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **EXPLORATION OF COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP**

With literature and research related to communal leadership as its foci, chapter two introduces the idea of communal leadership as established in a conceptual framework for the research study. I will suggest in this chapter that communal leadership can be defined as a shared leadership engaging a group that is unselfishly concerned for or devoted to the welfare of others. A discussion of the shift in leadership launches this chapter, which then introduces the theoretical framework for the creation of community, spiritual transformation, ethics of care and love, interconnectedness, and social change, all of which provide parameters in which to envision communal leadership. The chapter attends to theorists who can speak to these elements in that framework. Each of these theories of community highlights essential elements for existing and emerging communal leadership systems.

This narrative addresses the five elements that create communal leadership. These include: creation of community, spiritual transformation, ethics of care and love, interconnectedness, and social change. The section concerning the creation of community addresses the impact of ideologies and culture in community. Spiritual transformation includes inquiry into the transformation necessary for communal leadership. The ethics of care and love includes a discussion of ethical leadership, caring economics, ethics of care, and love ethics as they each pertain to communal leadership.

The section on interconnectedness draws on the theories of connected knowing, shared leadership, and social connection theory. Finally, the section on social change engages a discussion of what kinds of change are necessary in order for communal leadership to emerge and exist as a socially just model of leadership. This is my concept of communal leadership, drawn from the academic research of a number of scholars in order to flesh out what this integration of concepts means.

### **Shift in Leadership**

The foci of this research study are the requisites and motivations for shifting leadership from a predominantly hierarchical to a more communal model. Employing research on leadership and community, the study recognizes the need to identify characteristics of communal leadership and to define what it means to engage others in the rhetoric of communal leadership by utilizing both a review of literature concerning leadership theories and community and a community-based participatory research study with a group who claims to manifest communal leadership in their work culture.

Extant research identifies those leadership theories that detail elements of community which highlight the need to focus leadership efforts more communally without specifically elaborating on what communal leadership is or without isolating specific characteristics. This research study, however, focuses on both defining communal leadership and identifying those characteristics, since the ultimate challenge is convincing the larger society of the unique benefits—individual, societal, and spiritual—to be gained through the transformative experience of communal leadership.

Leadership is not a unique concept in history. As a matter of fact, as Jon Maner and Nicole Mead (2010) point out in their study, “The Essential Tension between Leader and Power: When Leaders Sacrifice Group Goals for the Sake of Self-Interest,” there is a need for leaders:

Throughout human history, groups have demonstrated a need for leaders. In times of war, famine, and other crises, leaders have helped guide groups toward desirable outcomes. Leaders can play a critical role in fostering group well-being and are ideally positioned to help groups manage their problems and achieve their goals. (p. 482)

This analysis recognizes this truth but also focuses on an inherent shortfall in the historical application of leadership—especially as it applied to the greed that was so much a part of the early leadership models. In her book, *The Real Wealth of Nations: Creating a Caring Economics*, Riane Eisler (2008) states,

However, capitalism emphasized individual acquisitiveness and greed (the profit motive), relied on ranking (the class structure), continued traditions of violence (colonial conquests and wars), and failed to recognize the economic importance of the ‘women’s work’ of caring and caregiving. (p. 142)

Thus, leadership, to an overwhelming degree, became a self-perpetuating patriarchal structure.

The root element of the word *leadership* is the word *lead*. A common definition of lead is to guide by going before or with; to influence. Thus, the leader is the person who guides or influences a designated group. In his book, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*, Otto Scharmer (2009) posits, “when I use the word ‘leader’ I refer to all people who engage in creating change or shaping their future, regardless of their

formal positions in institutional structures” (p. 5). Therefore, in building on these two definitions, leadership is defined through the position or function of that leader—the ability to lead, act or instance of leading, guidance, or direction. The definition of leader focuses on the influence one has in relation to others. In his article, “Leaders and Leadership,” Mark Gerzon (2003) explains, “Thus a leader is defined not primarily in terms of qualities they [sic] possess, but by the nature of their [sic] impact on others” (p. 4). This notion of “leadership impact” does not suggest a relational role for that leader. In their article, “The Female Leadership Advantage: An Evaluation of the Evidence,” Alice Eagly and Linda Carli (2003) offer perspectives on “the changing context of female leadership” and conclude that “these contemporary approaches to leadership not only recommend a reduction in hierarchy but also place the leader more in the role of coach or teacher than previous models of leadership” (p. 809). Furthermore, leaders are influenced by the context within which they develop, thereby establishing the premise that leadership development is a dynamic process but a less dynamic one if only one model of leadership dominates people’s ideologies.

In his article, “The Nature of Leadership,” Richard Barker (2001) explains leadership as a dynamic process, noting that “leadership must be understood as a process of unfolding . . . What we experience as leadership is a process that organizes discontinuous cycles of energy exchanges that extend through the social milieu” (p. 490). The referenced energy exchanges take place between and among people in diverse settings on a consistent basis. Moreover, Barker (2001) identifies a few key ideas to establish a broad definition of leadership as a process:

First, leadership is a process that is not specifically a function of the person in charge. Leadership is a function of individual wills and of individual needs, and the result of the dynamics of collective will organized to meet those various needs. Second, leadership is a process of adaptation and of evolution; it is a process of dynamic exchange and the interchanges of value. Leadership is deviation from convention. Third, leadership is a process of energy, not structure. (p. 491)

It can be assumed then that everyone (albeit to varying degrees) has the skills of leadership, and the development of these skills encompasses an understanding, borne over time and experience, of the process of exchanges that differentiate between contexts.

Leadership is a dynamic process which engages individuals both purposefully based on position and, perhaps serendipitously, based on the context of exchanges. It is ever-changing depending on the context and people within which it acts and is acted upon. Of course, such leadership can create a dichotomy which leaders must address between stability of purpose and the dynamics of new organizational advancements. “The essential nature of leadership can be determined through patterns of value, both stable and dynamic” (Barker, 2001, p. 473). Furthermore, leaders are ever-changing depending, too, on the context, as well as other factors of influence which all contribute to the flux state that *is* the nature of leadership. This is to be expected since “dynamic value in social processes is created by spontaneously varying combinations of individual values” (Barker, 2001, p. 490). In effect, referencing leadership in this way allows for a description that is more collaborative and communal, organizing and meeting the needs of the collective based on varying values.

There are numerous factors that influence both the development of a leader and the leadership praxis exhibited by those leaders, not to mention the ever-changing

processes of leadership. To define leadership in any one way, as is the desire of this research of communal leadership, is to consider many of the factors that influence leaders and the changes that occur as a result: leadership environment, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, lived experiences, and relationships with others (to name but a few).

Defining leadership as a dynamic process is the first step toward understanding communal leadership. In “A Qualitative Study of Leadership Characteristics Among Women Who Catalyze Positive Community Change,” Sara Folta, Rebecca Sequin, Jennifer Ackerman, and Miriam Nelson (2012) note, “When leaders are an integral part of their communities, they bring a deep understanding of what is most needed and feasible within their own specific contexts” (p. 9). Yet, what too often happens in the current hierarchical leadership model is the leader’s gradual and exponential disconnect from community due to advancement through the layers of that hierarchy. In separating from the day-to-day dynamics of the organization, the leader loses the relational connections that allow an interchange of ideas which makes the individuals in the organization feel that their voices are being heard, and their needs are being met.

It is important to note that some of the problems associated with the current leadership models cannot be assigned to the leaders. Clearly, individuals recognize that they participate in communities, virtually all of which carry hierarchies. Yet, these same people too quickly subscribe to the assumption that they have a narrowly defined role in that hierarchy, and too many assume no leadership role because they see their position as a fixed point on an organizational chart that narrows to a few privileged leaders at the top. “The assumption that the leader is the source of leadership also implies that the

leader is defined by position in a hierarchy” (Barker, 2001, p. 478). This belief in delineated positions that create gaps or disconnects creates a world in which non-leaders in the organization might perceive that real opportunities for individual impact and, as a result, a sense of social justice within the organization and improved existence for all are lost.

This notion is not a new one. In her article, “Community is a Process” published in the early 1900s, as an American social worker, management consultant, and pioneer in the fields of organization theory and behavior, Mary Parker Follett (1919) offered an analysis of a management structure that ignored the failure of organizational leadership to recognize social obligation in leadership.

To sum up this point of hierarchy [sic]. There is no above and below. We cannot schematize men as space objects. The study of community as process will bring us, I believe, not to the over-individual mind, but to the inter-individual mind, an entirely different conception. (p. 583).

Alice Eagly and Linda Carli (2007), in their book *Through the Labyrinth: The Truth about how Women Become Leaders*, make two essential points concerning a sense of community in leadership. Point one is that “in large organizations, many having a global reach, leadership does not come merely from one or a few individuals located at the tops of hierarchies but from people who are spread throughout the organization” (p. 127). To this point, leadership is not top-down; instead, it is horizontal and circular, perhaps even bottom-up since communal leaders emerge from anywhere and everywhere. Their second point highlights that “research on groups can reveal how social interactions enable people to attain leadership. Who emerges as a group leader depends on members’

behaviors and their beliefs about what type of person would make a good leader” (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 24). Leadership happens communally when individuals are working together towards common goals, and leaders emerge from within a community depending on individual expertise and specific needs of the group at any given time; thus, emergent leadership can be driven by situations faced by the community, and not merely by a hierarchical structure.

Communal leadership suggests that not only are leaders an integral part of their community, but also that they lead in new ways that bring people together. This willingness to defy conventional leadership patterns is essential. In her book, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks (2003) states, “Through the cultivation of awareness, through the decolonization of our minds, we have the tools to break with the dominator model of human social engagement and the will to imagine new and different ways that people might come together” (p. 35).

This research clearly posits that communal leadership is “altruistic.” In other words, leadership from this perspective is unselfishly concerned for or devoted to the welfare of others. Such leadership is collaborative and communal. More often than not, community is defined as a group of people having common interests. Interconnectedness with others, organization, and collaboration and collective action are just a few dimensions of community. In the beginning of his report, “Collaboration and Community,” Scott London (1995) simplifies collaboration, “As its Latin roots *com* and *laborare* suggest, collaboration reduced to its simplest definition means ‘to work together’” (p. 2). Thus, social cohesion emerges as a requisite for emerging leaders. In

their article, “Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice towards Female Leaders,” Alice Eagly and Steven Karau (2002) offer an additional perspective.

Another possibility is that, because interpersonal cohesion and social concerns become more important in groups that must maintain themselves over time, leaders’ roles in such groups incorporate more interpersonal skill and are less incongruent with the female gender role. (p. 585)

Social cohesion fosters a sense of well-being that, in turn, enhances the likelihood of achieving the goals of the organization, and a natural outgrowth of that cohesion is a sense of fairness. People come together, in collaboration with others, to help one another for the greater good of the whole, and this engagement in community is considered socially just. In her book, *Responsibility for Justice*, Iris Marion Young (2011) postulates that any such leadership model conceived “for the promotion of justice requires collective action, and that requires organization” (p. 69). John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas Naylor (2005) write in their book, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic*: “We take action when we’ve made a commitment to others” (p. 209). Coming together with others for discourse related to individual and collective concerns and individual ideas begins to establish a foundation of community and communal leadership.

Community intrinsically fulfills a basic human need: security. According to Zygmunt Bauman (2001) in his book, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, an important part of a community is the comfort found in shared experience. “Knowing that one is not alone and that one’s own personal cravings are shared by others has a reassuring effect” (p. 63). Community members’ getting to know one another—and sharing in one another’s experiences—is primary to building and sustaining community.

Paradoxically, community does not fail to recognize the importance of individuality. According to Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule (1997), in *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, “In a community, unlike a hierarchy, people get to know each other. They do not act as representatives of positions or as occupants of roles but as individuals with particular styles of thinking” (p. 221). Respect for individuality, collaboration, and a commitment to the collective are necessary components of community. It is ironic that most individuals who migrate through public education recognize this community/self dichotomy, since development of both elements is part of that experience. Sam Chaltain (2010) notes in his book, *American Schools: The Art of Creating a Democratic Learning Community*, that “One of the great paradoxes of human beings is that we feel two pressing needs at the same time—the freedom that comes from defining ourselves as individuals, and the security that comes from feeling connected to one another” (p. 90). In other words, community does not exclude the individual. It is inclusive and respects the individual while encouraging sharing and participation with others. Before we consider how the idea of communal leadership draws on various scholars and thinkers whose works further define and characterize the need for community within systems of leadership, it is first important to understand the requisites for the creation of community.

### **Creation of Community**

The possibility for the formation and/or emergence of communities exists everywhere. As bell hooks (2000) points out in her book, *All about Love: New Visions*, “Children are born into a world surrounded by the possibility of communities” (p. 130).

Any scholarly consideration of leadership which is communal must first identify the importance of creating community within the leadership setting. Creation is defined simply as an act of creating. If community is defined as a group of people of shared and/or common interests, then the creation of a community is an act of blending or assembling a group of people of common interests.

In his book, *Our Appointment with Life: Discourse on Living Happily in the Present Moment*, Thich Nhat Hanh (1990) suggests the essential nature of this possibility. “To be in touch with a community, to learn from its members, and to take refuge in community is very important” (p. 25). That sense of refuge is borne of identifiable factors. In their study, “Toxic Versus Cooperative Behaviors at Work: The Role of Organizational Culture and Leadership in Creating Community-Centered Organizations,” Jacqueline Gilbert, Norma Carr-Ruffino, John Ivancevich, and Robert Konopaske (2012) define community “as a place where one is (a) surrounded by mutually supportive persons, (b) in an environment comprised of policies that are egalitarian and fair, and (c) supported by colleagues who are engaged in the process of self-development” (p. 31). Thus, a receptive environment, fair practices, and collegial support begin to emerge as a tripartite of communal leadership.

That said, it is important to note that members of a community bring with them the enhancements that foster a sense of community. As Peter Block (2009) notes in his book *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, “Communities are built from the assets and gifts of their citizens, not from the citizens’ needs or deficiencies” (p. 14). Thus, the participant fulfills individual needs in joining a community *and* fulfills the needs of the

community with his or her unique contributions. Follett (1919) suggests that “community is a *creative* process. It is creative because it is a process of integrating” (p. 576). She goes on to state that “the creative power of the individual appears not when one ‘wish’ dominates others, but when all ‘wishes’ unite in a working whole” (p. 576). This dovetails with Block’s assertions, since this creativity is the merger of the assets and gifts of individuals who embarked on quest to achieve a common goal.

Many characteristics used to describe community require not only the assets and gifts of the members within the community, but also responsibility and action on the participant’s part. hooks (2000) contends that “within a loving community we sustain ties by being compassionate and forgiving” (p. 138). For many, this idea could be a challenge since an inherent need for “performing with humility or a selfless self seems to be,” according to Scharmer (2009), a “precondition for the collective field to advance to a higher level” (p. 76). This concept points to the need for humanity in community membership. In order for community to be successful, individuals within the specific community must come together in humility and love and be compassionate and forgiving.

Leaders who imagine a new communal system of leadership must investigate current ideologies and culture within the social environment. In her article, “Feminist Leadership for Social Transformation: Clearing the Conceptual Cloud,” Srilatha Batliwala (2010) contends, “Organizations – whether formal or informal – are microcosms of the social environment from which they emerge” (p. 21). All facets of society are impacted by cultural influences and ideologies. In their book, *Communicating Gender Diversity: A Critical Approach*, DeFrancisco and Palczewski (2007) suggest,

“Culture is composed of conceptions of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religions, time, social roles, worldviews, land, and even the material possessions or artifacts acquired by a group of people” (pp. 22–23).

Hierarchy in organizations and systems of leadership are not exceptions to this because they are both defined and refined by culture and ideology.

Culture is defined as the beliefs and behaviors characteristic of a particular group, or, as C. P. Gause (2008) posits in his book, *Integration Matters: Navigating Identity, Culture, and Resistance*, “Culture is historically transmitted systems of symbols and patterns embodied with meaning” (p. 32). The impact of culture on any group of considerable size is often assumed and accepted as an eventuality. According to DeFrancisco and Palczweski (2007),

Together, the primary function of culture is to create shared meanings, shared views of the world, and a group identity. Through these characteristics, cultures also serve to help reduce uncertainty and chaos largely by socializing their members to behave in prescribed ways. (p. 23)

However, it is important to consider the impact of a socially constructed culture on any form of leadership within said culture. Gause (2008) goes on to explain, “Culture is socially constructed and lived experiences translated from the meaning making of individuals, that is, how individuals view themselves daily as participants in the world around them and how they ‘make sense’ of those daily interactions” (p. 32).

Oftentimes, individuals are not aware of how a hierarchical leadership culture influences beliefs and behavior, especially as those factors impact personal perspective on leadership and the individual’s role in the organizational structure. As Anna-Maija

Lämsä and Teppo Sintonen (2001) suggest in their article, “A Discursive Approach to Understanding Women Leaders in Working Life,” because “ideologies are particular ways of representing and constructing society and culture, which reproduce unequal power relations and relations of domination” (p. 260), then the repetition of power and domination perpetuates injustice in a culture establishing norms and habits of leaders.

Batliwala (2010) makes note of the roles that principles and values then play:

Regardless, they are critical to our discussion because leadership does not occur in a moral and social vacuum – it is always informed by values, whether these are explicit or not; and values are not held only by progressive leaders, since even autocrats, warlords, terrorists and dictators create a moral justification for their tyranny and violence. Thus, leadership embraces the values and principles that are consonant with its mission and purpose, or which have framed or catalyzed that purpose. (p. 24)

When leaders do not recognize the culture and ideologies surrounding hierarchy in leadership, then those same leaders enter a cycle of repetitious behavior, oftentimes iterating cultural norms which inhibit others and perpetuate unjust social systems of power and domination. Bauman (2001) posits, “If realities are not questioned and are assumed to allow no alternative, one can render them liveable [sic] only by replicating their pattern in one’s own fashion of life” (p. 133). Ideologies create habits that seem the norm and seem acceptable because they go unquestioned—as in hierarchical leadership systems—thereby inadvertently repeating patterns of power and domination.

Ideologies and culture not only influence leaders, but they also influence the social structure of organizations. Eagly and Carli (2007) theorize, “Each organization has its own social structure—regular and predictable patterns of behavior—and its own

culture—shared beliefs, values, symbols, and goals. Leadership is an important part of this social structure and culture” (p. 137). Furthermore, as Barker (2001) points out, “social systems are not static systems, and are not likely to remain stable for long periods of time” (p. 485)—hence the need to not only study the culture and ideologies of a department who claim to manifest communal leadership, but also to consider leadership as a dynamic process.

Understanding these leadership dynamics further encourages a need to shift the focus from a dominant hierarchy where only a few can lead to more collaborative, communal leadership with more of a focus on social justice—equality for all. As hooks (2003) suggests, “To build community requires vigilant awareness of the work we must continually do to undermine all the socialization that leads us to behave in ways that perpetuate domination” (p. 36). This “vigilant awareness” which is necessary to challenge the socialization of ideologies and culture surrounding hierarchical leadership requires transformation, and some would argue that such transformation must challenge the status quo. Baltiwala (2010) describes one example of such a transformation in leadership away from hierarchy to what she calls “feminist leadership” and provides the following description:

- At the highest level, therefore, the goal of feminist leadership is two-fold:
1. To challenge visible, hidden and invisible power wherever it operates, and especially where it constructs and reinforces women’s subordination in both gross and subtle ways, or furthers discrimination against women; and
  2. To construct alternative models of power that amplify the visible form to the maximum extent possible, and gradually eliminate invisible and hidden power. In other words, ***feminist leadership will strive to make the practice of power visible, democratic, legitimate and accountable, at all levels, and in both private and public realms.*** (p. 18)

Thus, earlier discussion of the refuge to be found in community may be elusive without a more forceful transformational approach.

Theories of community and leadership from various scholars interconnect to form the characteristics which *are* communal leadership. Each of the following theories denotes the elements of communal leadership. Theories posture important ideas and concepts which, as a theoretical amalgam, can be used to define and characterize communal leadership. Formulating such a definition allows for the possibility of transformation of the community-driven leadership model to allow organizations the opportunity to consider such a model as their own.

### **Spiritual Transformation**

What separates a work group from a community is often the connectedness a person feels in his or her role in an organization. In organizations which maximize individual potential and—in the process reap the highest organizational rewards, the individual feels a sense of spiritual enrichment—through shared vision, purpose, and goals. To understand the spiritual transformation necessary in the creation of a community, it is important to investigate what is meant by “spiritual.” In common parlance, “spiritual” is defined as individual connection in interests, attitude, and outlook to some larger group or purpose. This three-element kinship is at the framework of any organization’s goals, yet the current hierarchy separates individuals in such a way as to promote leaders who lose contact with the organization’s members, thereby separating the leaders from awareness of interests, attitudes, and outlooks.

“Transformation” is defined as change in form, appearance, nature, or character. For the sake of this research, a spiritual transformation is a change in interest, attitude and outlook, and meaning making systems. In their book, *Handbook of Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, Raymond Paloutzian and Crystal Park (2005) posit, “A spiritual transformation constitutes a change in the meaning system that a person holds as [the] basis for self-definition, the interpretation of life, and overarching purposes and ultimate concerns” (p. 334). Basically, a spiritual transformation requires a person to let go of old ways of thinking and create new systems within which to operate. In his book *Spirit Matters*, Michael Lerner (2000) postulates, “The spirituality we need must enable us to integrate mind and feeling as we work toward social transformation” (p. 188). This social transformation from steep hierarchical leadership to more communal leadership encompasses both the transformation of leadership systems and the community of people involved within the systems.

To understand a spiritual transformation is to imagine a world different from the one most Americans have lived in based on materialism, capitalism, and consumerism. In his book, *Losing Heart: The Moral and Spiritual Miseducation of America’s Children* H. Svi Shapiro (2006) explains:

All of this emphasis on things and possessions takes us away from what it might mean to encounter life in an authentic way. We come to believe that the path to lives that are joyful and nourishing to our souls runs through the marketplace of things, where we can exchange our life energies and intelligence for the fetish of inanimate possessions. (p. 36)

Spiritual transformation requires individuals to move away from market forces and move toward relational, loving, communities. This requires a shift from what is known in the current leadership culture to imagining a culture more focused on the well-being of all people within the community. Furthermore, Lerner (2000) suggests, “The fundamental change we need is simply this: we need a new bottom line, a new way of calculating what is productive and efficient” (p. 195). Looking out for number one in a market economy creates a community based on capitalism, and it limits the ability for individuals to be compassionate, loving, and empathetic.

Theoretically, a spiritual transformation is required in human relationships that are necessary in the creation of community. Block (2009) argues that such change begins at the individual level. “Transformation can be thought of as a fundamental shift in context, whether the shift is about my own life, my institution, or our community” (p. 31). Other scholars echo this notion. In his book, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, Nhat Hanh (1992) points out, “To create a good community, we first have to transform ourselves into a good element of the community. After that, we can go to another person and help him or her become an element of the community” (p. 87). Furthermore, community-building requires individually initiated communication. “Communal transformation . . . occurs when people get connected to those who were previously strangers, and when we invite people into conversations that ask them to act as creators or owners of community” (Block, 2009, p. 60). It is through this integration of a sense of ownership and a transformation of spirit that recognizes the

need for the individual to become a “good element of the community” that communal leadership becomes possible.

Communal leadership recognizes the constant possibility of transformation. If the organization and the individuals within the organization are to remain fair and forward thinking, they must commit to timely change through fair and creative collaboration. As transformation is understood as a change in form, appearance, nature, or character, “transformation hinges on changing the structure of how we engage each other” (Block, 2009, p. 25). In their article, “The Female Leadership Advantage: An Evaluation of the Evidence,” Eagly and Carli (2003) define transformational leadership as “leadership that is *transformational* in the sense that it is future oriented rather than present oriented and that strengthens organizations by inspiring followers’ commitment and creativity” (p. 815). However, the dimension of “time” is not the only determinant in commitment to community and an emerging communal leadership model; there is an ethical dimension as well. According to Gause (2008), transformative leadership is “a leadership that speaks of the moral and spiritual dimensions of decision making founded on the principles of social justice” (p. 141). The theory of transformational leadership is important in this research because it emphasizes the posturing of leadership, transforming the organization to meet new goals and needs within a community that embraces the obligation to exercise social justice throughout community.

Transformational leaders are forward thinking and promote change which, out of necessity, involves structure and goals that still allow for innovation. Eagly and Carli (2003) postulate:

Transformational leaders state future goals, develop plans to achieve those goals, and innovate, even when their organization is generally successful. By mentoring and empowering followers, such leaders help followers to develop their potential and thus to contribute more effectively to their organization. (p. 815)

This speaks to the “coaching and teaching” roles in leadership which Eagly and Carli (2003) see as a necessary divergence from previous leadership models. In addition, “Transformational leaders create the climate whereby we feel both free and secure to make the choices that are meaningful to us and to the group” (Chaltain, 2010, p. 60). In the article, “The Leadership Styles of Women and Men” Alice Eagly and Mary Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) explain the connection between transformational and leadership by emphasizing that, “transformational leadership has communal aspects, especially the theme of *individualized consideration*, whereby leaders focus on the mentoring and development of their subordinates and pay attention to their individual needs” (p. 787).

The promotion of change and freedom to make choices are but two characteristics of transformational leadership that extend to communal leadership. There are many others. As an example, Batliwala (2010) suggests that:

***transformative feminist leadership*** will use the analysis of gender and social discrimination in a particular society, community, or setting as its starting point, and will attempt to transform the structures of institutions it engages towards a more gender and socially equitable architecture in both formal and informal terms. (p. 27)

Thus, transformation in leadership, especially as it concerns social equality, can be forwarded by a particular group.

Transformational leaders are collaborative and empowering. In their study, “Gender and Leadership? Leadership and Gender? A Journey through the Landscape of Theories,” Steven Appelbaum, Lynda Audet, and Joanne Miller (2003) speak to these characteristics that indicate that women employ a transformational leadership style by invoking a familiar image:

The analogy of a wheel with a hub depicts the organizational structure of a leader positioned at the center, with the subordinates connected to her and to each other at the rim. This conveys a collaborative team approach that empowers both employees and clients. (p. 48)

This theory encompasses elements of communal leadership because of its penchant towards collaboration in change; thus, the analogous transformation of place invoked by the wheel cannot be achieved without all elements of the device working together to achieve that transformation of place. “Sustainable transformation is constructed in those places where citizens choose to come together to produce a desired future” (Block, 2009, p. 14). The “wheel and hub analogy” identifies the necessity for the pieces of the whole to work together for the sake of the community identifying the need for individuals to connect to others outside of their personal spheres—using the leader as the connective element through which they communicate and to which they are connected. Thus, transformation occurs through such connections.

Block (2009) expands on this transformative element in identifying two conditions under which such transformation occurs. “The transformation we seek occurs when these two conditions are created: when we produce deeper relatedness across boundaries and when we create new conversations that focus on the gifts and capacities

of others” (p. 61). Thus, the communal leader is the avenue through which those conversations can be sustained. It is in providing this conversational avenue that the leader’s personal ethics become perhaps the essential characteristic that can foster new leaders while promoting a consistency of purpose that sustains all members of the organization. In their article, “Ethical Leadership: A Review and Future Directions,” Michael Brown and Linda Treviño (2006) note,

Transformational leadership and ethical leadership overlap in their focus on personal characteristics. Ethical and transformational leaders care about others, act consistently with their moral principles (i.e. integrity), consider the ethical consequences of their decisions, and are ethical role models for others. (p. 599)

However, the term “ethics” has larger ramifications in the leadership model. These extend to caring for the members of the organization to the extent that a love ethic is applied.

### **Ethics of Care and Love**

Ethical leadership is also a theory used throughout this research to address ideas of communal leadership. Brown and Treviño (2006) state that “ethical leaders are characterized as honest, caring, and principled individuals who make fair and balanced decisions” (p. 597). This echoes the Gause discussion of the moral dimension in leadership. In addition, Brown and Treviño’s (2006) research suggests that “ethical leaders also frequently communicate with their followers about ethics, set clear ethical standards . . . practice what they preach and are proactive role models for ethical conduct” (p. 597). This ethical conduct provides others with a sense of stability that can be lacking in the absence of caring and love. Maner and Mead (2010) note that

“instability within the hierarchy can signal threats to a leader’s power. Consequently, instability may cause leaders to see other group members as possible competitors and to engage in actions that protect their power” (p. 484). Such actions can encourage leaders to forsake ethics in the interest of maintaining control.

Considering the above example, within a stable hierarchy, leaders can employ a more socially just, ethical approach to leadership allowing for integrity, caring, kindness, and a genuine well-being for others. Seeing communal leadership as a more ethical alternative to steeper hierarchical leadership allows for leaders to work with others in a more ethical way characterized by honesty and caring for others.

Eisler (2008) introduces the concept of caring economics:

The *partnership system* supports mutually respectful and caring relations. There are still hierarchies, as there must be to get things done. But in these hierarchies, which I call *hierarchies of actualization* rather than *hierarchies of domination*, accountability and respect flow both ways rather than just from the bottom up, and social and economic structures are set up so that there is input from all levels. Leaders and managers facilitate, inspire, and empower rather than control and disempower. (p. 31)

Eisler uses this theory to characterize a community “where human needs and capacities are nurtured rather than exploited, our natural habitat is conserved rather than destroyed, and our great potential of caring and creativity is supported rather than inhibited” (2008, p. 14).

Complimentary to Eisler’s (2008) primary foundational element is “the second foundation for a caring economic system: shifting cultural beliefs and social institutions so that they value, rather than devalue, caring and caregiving” (p. 44). Caring for others

provides the primary goal of the caring economic system, and while “caring” is more often ascribed to females than males, a communal leadership model might nurture the caring impulse in male leadership.

Interactive leadership styles utilized by women have been beneficial in moving both genders towards a solution in so far as this style involves four factors: encouraging participation; sharing power and information; enhancing self-worth of others and finally, energizing others. (Applebaum et al., 2003, p. 45)

With the late twentieth-century push toward more women in leadership roles, their adoption of male leadership traits in order to “fit in” with the current leadership hierarchy may give way to a new leadership model that adopts the best of both genders. “In other words, effective leadership is not the exclusive domain of either gender and both can learn from the other” (Applebaum et al., 2003, p. 49). Some individuals who fear change might reject such a notion. “Nevertheless, it is probable that stereotypically feminine qualities of cooperation, mentoring, and collaboration are important to leadership as well, certainly in some contexts and perhaps increasingly in contemporary organizations” (Eagly & Carli, 2003, p. 808). The benefits of adopting these qualities move organizations closer to the community-based leadership structure. In her article, “Women and Leadership: A Development Paradox?” Dana Heller Levitt (2010) notes, “Feminist principles of leadership . . . encourage men and women to more fully explore their potential and how they are facilitating change in individuals, organizations, systems, and societies” (pp. 73–74).

In her book, *Joining the Resistance*, Carol Gilligan (2011) provides another theory used to characterize community: the ethic of care, which is “grounded in voice and

relationship, as an ethic of resistance both to injustice and to self-silencing. It is a human ethic, integral to the practice of democracy and to the functioning of a global society” (p. 175). She points out that “we know that humans can be selfish and cruel, competitive over resources and mates. The revolutionary insight is that by nature we are cooperative, relational beings, and our capacity for mutual understanding is linked to the survival of our species” (Gilligan, 2011, p. 56). Throughout human history, the “competitive” characteristic associated with males stands in stark contrast to many of the female characteristics that might create a more communal leadership model. As Eagly and Karau (2002) note:

Communal characteristics which are ascribed more strongly to women, describe primarily a concern with the welfare of other people—for example, affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturant, and gentle. In contrast, agentic characteristics, which are ascribed more strongly to men, describe primarily an assertive, controlling, and confident tendency—for example, aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident, and prone to act as a leader. (p. 574)

This agentic profile, with its masculine associative behaviors, stands in sharp relief to the communal with its feminine associative elements suggesting a higher degree of caring.

These theories of community provide examples of how caring and collaboration combine to improve systems of leadership which, in turn, invoke social justice and the emergence of what has been called “caring work” which can produce equal or greater benefits for the organization. In her article “Hierarchies, Jobs, and Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations,” Joan Acker (1990) states:

Such a transformation would be radical in practice because it would probably require the end of organizations as they exist today, along with a redefinition of work and work relations. The rhythm and timing of work would be adapted to the rhythms of life outside of work. Caring work would be just as important and well rewarded as any other . . . Hierarchy would be abolished, and workers would run things themselves . . . Perhaps there would be some communal or collective form of organization where work and intimate relations are closely related. (p. 91)

These intimate relations to which Ackers refers are the essence of Eagly and Carli, who ascribed to the leader a mentor role in allowing members of a community to envision a leadership role.

Although the concept invokes challenges due to the wide variation in individual meanings applied to the term, love is yet another essential factor in the creation of community and connected to the ethical dimension of communal leadership. Love is commonly defined as a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person. Some experts argue that the creation of a community cannot exist in the absence of a love ethic through which individuals practice love for oneself and for greater humanity. As hooks (2000) suggests:

The underlying values of a culture and its ethics shape and inform the way we speak and act. A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well. To bring a love ethic to every dimension of our lives, our society would need to embrace change. (p. 87)

This change requires focus on others to offer concern for their wellbeing and to love others in partnership with the self in order to create community together. Nhat Hanh (1992) explains, "If love is in our heart, every thought, word, and deed can bring about a

miracle. Because understanding is the very foundation of love, words and actions that emerge from our love are always helpful” (p. 85).

To love others as to love the self requires a spiritual transformation from individualism to communion. It requires love, connection, and compassion with others for the sake of unity beyond market forces. Nhat Hanh (1992) proposes, “The essence of love and compassion is understanding, the ability to recognize the physical, material, and psychological suffering of others, to put ourselves ‘inside the skin’ of the other” (p. 81). Love and compassion are the basic premises for the spiritual transformation required in the creation of a community that calls people to transcend the self in communion with others for a larger purpose and a higher good.

A love ethic is not an ethereal concept; it is a practice within the community that puts people above whatever form of profit the organization intends to reap through its efforts. “Living by a love ethic we learn to value loyalty and a commitment to sustained bonds over material advancement. While careers and making money remain important agendas, they never take precedence over valuing and nurturing human life and well-being” (hooks, 2000, p. 88). Though hooks (2000) presents love ethics as an element of human nature, it is difficult to embrace in practice because “many of us are not ready to accept and embrace our true selves, particularly when living with integrity alienates us from our familiar worlds” (p. 187).

To ignore the ethics of love is to ignore the empathic elements that can foster communal leadership. In “Cultural Citizenship and Educational Democracy,” Renato

Rosaldo (1994) further explains the mutual benefits borne of the ethics of love and the negative consequences of failing to employ it:

The ethic of love says we are all in the same boat. It recognizes our shared fate and the fundamental interdependence among members of a group or institution. If people think of themselves as connected, the other's well-being enhances yours. If they thrive, you thrive; if they suffer, you suffer. (p. 410)

As a theory that supports the creation of community, the ethics of love complement the ethics of care as these theories coincide to reimagine what a different system of leadership could look like—all the while acknowledging the importance of connections between people.

### **Interconnectedness**

None of the previously identified elements operates as a single path toward communal leadership. Therefore, it is logical that the possibility for communal leadership would require interconnectedness of the organizational and human elements through which communal leadership emerges. By its very nature, the concept of community implies human interconnection. The principle that all people are interconnected—or as Nhat Hanh (1987) calls it in his book, *Being Peace*, “dependent co-arising”—helps to further characterize the creation of community. Nhat Hanh presents the concept in a very personal way and reinforces the notion that recognizing interconnectedness is certain to benefit the self:

My well-being, my happiness depends very much on you, and your well-being, your happiness, depends on me. I am responsible for you, and you are responsible for me. Anything I do wrong, you will suffer; anything you do

wrong, I have to suffer. Therefore, in order to take care of you, I have to take care of myself. (p. 42)

The contention is a simple one: no matter how big the world seems, all individuals are connected as one humankind existing within communities. “Whenever we think in terms of both/and we are better situated to do the work of community building” (hooks, 2003, p. 37). What one does impacts the all, and recognizing this interconnection is a part of the spiritual transformation necessary to create a community with others.

Consequently, the creation of a community requires both an understanding of the self and recognition of an individual’s connections with others. This “weaving and strengthening the fabric of community is a collective effort and starts from a shift in our mindset about our connectedness” (Block, 2009, p. 10). Recognizing the importance of loving connections and compassion for others requires a psychological change, moving a person from operating with an individualistic mindset to recognizing the necessity of working in partnership with others. This impulse to belong is not alien to the human spirit. As Lerner (2006) postulates in his book, *The Left Hand of God: Healing America’s Political and Spiritual Crisis*, “in each of us there is a deep yearning for loving connection and mutual recognition, a yearning for a world of meaning and higher purpose, a yearning for a morally and spiritually coherent life and a community within which to live such a life” (p. 7).

In addition, Lerner (2006) suggests that “Americans hunger for a framework of meaning and purpose to their lives that transcends their own individual success and connects them to a community based on transcendent and enduring values” (p. 43).

Sating this hunger to connect has intrinsic rewards that echo Henry David Thoreau's urging his 19th-century peers to "Simplify, simplify." As hooks (2000) posits:

When we value the delaying of gratification and take responsibility for our actions, we simplify our emotional universe. Living simply makes loving simple. The choice to live simply necessarily enhances our capacity to love. It is the way we learn to practice compassion, daily affirming our connection to a world community. (p. 125)

To live simply, beyond the self, for the sake of others, is an idea that extends the idea of compassion for others required of people in the creation of a community and in this effort to delay gratification and to accept responsibility in order to achieve this connection to a larger community.

In community, individuals engage in a collaborative investigation of the human experience in order to identify the goals and objectives of the community, to share ideas, to challenge assumptions, to inspire a more creative approach to addressing problems and challenges, and to share a common vision of the community's future. Through this investigation, the individuals can arrive at a state of "connected knowing." Belenky et al. (1997) explain that connected knowing is a theory used to characterize community:

Members of connected-knowing groups engage in collaborative explorations . . . Connected knowers see personality as adding to the perception, and so the personality of each member of the group enriches the group's understanding. Each individual must stretch her [or his] own vision in order to share another's vision. Through mutual stretching and sharing the group achieves a vision richer than any individual could achieve alone. (p. 119)

This theory focuses on collaboration and individual responsibility. Each individual has a responsibility for change, but this change needs to be implemented in collaboration with

others—working with collective visions, personalities, and change agents to stretch visions and arrive at mutual understanding. It is through this understanding of others—their visions, their personalities, and their reluctance to or desire for change—that one can achieve a sense of connected knowing that is essential to community in which the perspectives of others impact leaders in their decision making.

Another theory integrated throughout this research allows a better understanding of the component elements of communal leadership: shared leadership. A circular process, shared leadership allows all individuals to partake in the leadership process. In their article, “Shared Leadership Theory,” Craig Pearce, Jay Conger, and Edwin Locke (2007) define shared leadership as “the view of leadership as a role performed by an individual with the view of leadership as a social process. Shared leadership theory is an explicit attempt at integrating these two important perspectives” (p. 286). As opposed to hierarchical leadership, shared leadership does not move in a top-down fashion. Instead, the focus is on shared responsibility and hearing all voices. Pearce et al. go on to explain that “top-down decision making does not necessarily ensure a shared sense of purpose or better goal alignment” (p. 286). On the other hand, bottom-up, horizontal, or circular communication ensures shared leadership by encouraging participation *in* and *from* all directions. If social justice depends on the nurturing of basic human characteristics, then communities built on shared leadership would foster certain human dynamics that have long been recognized as individual behaviors that nurture human success but which have long been absent from the prevailing hierarchical leadership structure.

Ultimately, connectivity emerges as a requisite element in community. Young (2011) offers a social connection theory of shared responsibility that involves a break with traditional thought, a more vibrant public discourse, a more open analysis of the harmful elements of current practices, and an open forum for expressing discontent:

Social change requires first taking special efforts to make a break in the processes, by engaging in public discussions that reflect on their workings, publicizing the harms that come to persons who are disadvantaged by them, and criticizing powerful agents who encourage the injustices or at least allow them to happen. (p. 150)

At the forefront of this discussion is the need for the community to take responsibility for injustice and to combat future injustice through admission of culpability when situations warrant that behavior. As Young (2011) contends, “no one who participates in processes that produce structural injustice is exempt from responsibility to join with others to change those structures” (p. 153).

### **Problematizing Change**

To suggest such a shift in leadership systems—one from steeper hierarchies to one which is more communal—is to invoke a change of ideologies and culture embedded in the fabric of society. “But to change, people have to become conscious that there are alternatives. And to learn alternatives to dominator beliefs, institutions, and behaviors, people must be exposed to the possibility of partnership-oriented ones” (Eisler, 2008, p. 193). This sort of change in community is necessary in collaboration with others. Young (2011) suggests a collective approach involving awareness and foresight:

Changing structural processes that produce injustice must be a collective social project. Such collective action is difficult. It requires organization, the will to cooperate on the part of many diverse actors, significant knowledge of how the actions of individuals and the rules and purposes of institutions conspire to produce injustice, and the ability to foresee the likely consequences of proposed remedies. (p. 153)

The social connection theory of shared responsibility, as a theory of community, focuses on identifying injustice, taking responsibility for injustice, and collaborating with others for the sake of responsible change.

However, more often than not, as Lämsä and Sintonen (2001) note, change is challenging, especially on a cultural level because “culture consists of habitualized ways of thinking and patterns of ideas, which at the same time restrain and open up challenges for change” (p. 259). Three primary elements foster this reluctance to change. As Deborah Cameron (2007) states in her book, *The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do Men and Women Really Speak Different Languages?*, “Culture change is hard: it causes anxiety, conflict, and, in some quarters, resistance” (p. 172). Therefore, beliefs and behaviors embedded within a culture are difficult to change and influence the way leaders will act in that particular culture, especially as leaders are traditionally primed in a culture of hierarchy and capitalism. However, as Lerner (2000) suggests, “Most people have a real need for meaning and purpose in their lives, a meaning and purpose that could transcend that selfishness and materialism of the competitive marketplace and root them in something with transcendent significance” (p. 75).

What needs to change in order for communal leadership to exist? Eisler (2008) explains: “The elements that give social and economic structures their particular

character are the beliefs, habits, norms, laws, rules, and even language, of a particular culture” (p. 116). Creating a new community with new beliefs, habits, norms, laws, rules and language requires a spiritual transformation in human relationships from capitalistic cultural norms to more communal cultural norms. Eisler (2008) draws on the lessons of Gandhi in explaining the need to break from the habitual elements that impede change. “As Gandhi said, ‘we shouldn’t mistake what is habitual for what is normal. We were not born with unhealthy habits. We had to learn them. We can unlearn them, and help others do the same’” (p. 213). Thus, communal leadership recognizes the human capacity to change, not through individual actions, but instead through a collective, inclusive approach.

Changing leadership culture to a more communal model inherently makes it more inclusive, which in turn makes it more socially just. In her book *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*, Margaret Wheatley (2002) states that “When a community of people discovers that they share a concern, change begins” (p. 22). Moreover, belief systems change, which then requires individuals to change, and that individual transformation results in a change in human relationships to form partnerships. Furthermore, in order to build community in leadership, a new system and language need to be available to individuals—one that challenges the self-serving, capitalistic systems currently employed in the Western culture.

Change is not easy—a reality that hooks (2000) reinforces: “There is no change that does not bring with it a feeling of challenge and loss” (pp. 181–182). However, the communal nature of the alternate leadership model addresses those challenges

collectively and recognizes that individual sacrifice can actually result in greater gains. These include shared purpose, mutual respect, openness to alternate perspectives, recognition of the importance of partnership-oriented thinking, and interconnectedness. What emerges in such a community is a set of human behaviors that serve the larger good. As Gilbert et al. (2012) note, “In community-centered organizations, managers and leaders will be responsible for modeling thoughtfulness, selflessness, compassion, and generosity in the evaluative and communicative aspects of interpersonal interaction” (p. 36). These aspects of interpersonal interactions serve as motivations for individuals to embrace the idea of social change in current leadership systems.

When humans embrace shifts in the attitudes and behaviors that characterize a society, those humans are engaged in social change. As a way to invoke social change, all of the above theories—transformational leadership, shared leadership, ethical leadership, connected knowing, caring economics and love ethics, and social connection theory—establish a basis for better understanding and employing communal leadership, thereby challenging and usurping the current hierarchical systems of leadership. As this research has revealed, “Social change does not proceed easily or without struggle and conflict” (Eagly & Carli, 2007, p. 198). Individuals and groups engaged in social change must recognize the requisite element of individual and collective gain which are outgrowths of such change. “Social cohesion and cooperation depend, moreover, on people acting as much as they can in ways that make positive contributions to the social fabric and trying not to burden others” (Young, 2011, p. 27). The idea of changing culture is cumbersome and cannot happen without cohesion amongst people to change

socially unjust systems. It is not easy to imagine such change; yet, in order to have socially just communities with socially just leadership, such change is essential.

“Before any of us will be willing to change anything, we must first believe the changes will be meaningful to us” (Chaltain, 2010, p. 55). Connection and commitment to others, collaboration, responsibility, care, and love are some of the characteristics found in theories of community that might inspire organizational members to challenge hierarchical leadership. However, the entire system of leadership development and implementation needs to change in order to accommodate more socially just systems of leadership. As Chaltain (2010) connotes, “Before we are willing to change anything about our work or our behavior, we must first understand why the change is necessary and what it will require of us” (p. 71). That change first requires some degree of acceptance of a “lost norm.”

Changing leadership which serves a smaller group well and the larger group not so well seems extremely challenging, yet that is exactly why the system needs to be changed. The research suggests that more people are better served by and have the opportunity to participate in communal leadership than is the case in top-down hierarchical systems of leadership. Identifying characteristics of communal leadership as more equitable in service to many is just the start to changing entire existing leadership systems. “Only if we are so concerned can we hope to make structural changes that undermine current injustices” (Young, 2011, p. 73). Socially just leadership requires taking responsibility for the past and resolving to change so that unjust patterns of the past are not repeated.

Communal leadership must recognize individual well-being, which is defined as being a good condition of existence; characterized by health, happiness, and prosperity. Communal leadership may preclude threats to people's basic well-being by recognizing potential injustices and coming together with others to restructure systems that are advantageous for all people and not just a few at the top. As Young (2011) suggests:

A theory of personal responsibility in relation to justice ought to ask not only in what ways individuals are responsible for their own circumstances but also in what ways we should understand ourselves responsible for the background conditions of others' lives that are produced by structured institutional relations. (pp. 39–40)

In recognizing individual responsibility for the conditions of others, the individual begins to understand a benefit to communal leadership.

Analysis of the literature on the subject suggests that communal leadership enhances the capacity of human gain through a more inclusive social leadership approach. Ironically, a true understanding of communal leadership as it currently exists becomes possible in recognizing its role in organizational structures that are "closest to home": grassroots efforts to promote change. In their article, "Coming Together for Action: The Challenge of Contemporary Grassroots Community Organizing," Marc Pilisuk, JoAnn McAllister, and Jack Rothman (1997) state that "capacity building is often accomplished through practice in overcoming obstacles and by experiencing success in tasks similar to the small gains sought in social action" (p. 3). In acknowledging these incremental gains, the leadership within the organization witnesses the role that individual effort plays in such organizational advancements. The communal leader also

recognizes the importance of maintaining interconnectedness in order to foster future benefits.

This grassroots evidence of social justice as an outgrowth of communal effort leads this researcher to the decision to use a small-scale photovoice ethnographic study as a core element in this research effort. Through an analysis of a micro-model of communal leadership, the ethnographic element in the research could lead to a set of criteria to be applied on a macro-scale—one through which larger organizations might be inspired to embark upon a shift in their own leadership structures toward a communal model.

### **Conclusion**

The review of literature related to community and communal leadership has made one fact clear: The process of transformation regarding leadership and community is complex and difficult. At the onset of this research, communal leadership is characterized by concern and care for others, which requires leaders to challenge and change unjust social systems within the organization for the betterment of the whole. This leadership model also requires a sense of voice and agency to empower those who feel unheard or unnoticed to share in the organization's leadership. Therefore, defining and characterizing communal leadership for the sake of social justice—the equality of all people—is an important focus of this research.

Leading communally entails attention to the goals of others and coming together on those goals to find success collectively. Scharmer (2009) believes that “the primary job of leadership . . . is to enhance the individual and systemic capacity to see, to deeply

attend to the reality that people face and enact. Thus, the leader's real work is to help people discover the power of seeing and seeing together" (p. 136). In doing so, the vision of the group is the vision of the leader and vice versa. As Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, and Betty Sue Flowers (2004) point out in their book *Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future*, "when people in leadership positions begin to serve a vision infused with a larger purpose, their work shifts naturally from producing results to encouraging the growth of people who produce results" (p. 141). Thus, as an outcome of shared vision, the communal leader recognizes and rewards individual growth and recognizes that organizational goals are communal and achieved collectively.

Viewing leadership in such a communal way necessitates focusing on others and not just the self. In her book, *Leadership and the New Science: Learning about Organization from an Orderly Universe*, Margaret Wheatley (1992) explains, "More and more, there is an openness to inter-and intra-organizational exchanges, to decreasing layers of hierarchy, to smart machines, and to the flow of information among all levels. Learning organizations are taking hold. Consciousness is growing" (p. 117). As a part of communal leadership, the flow of communication extends well beyond the leaders to include participation by all involved.

Finally, communal leadership is about individuals coming together in leadership. It entails recognizing and respecting relationships and ultimately upholding and protecting the parameters of the community while fostering a belief that those parameters can be expanded to serve the larger good—both within the organization and into the larger network of humans that the organization serves. "Leadership is *always* dependent

on the context, but the context is established by the *relationships* we value. We cannot hope to influence any situation without respect for the complex network of people who contribute to our organizations” (Wheatley, 1992, pp. 144–145).

Based on initial research, a communal leadership model proposes that all individuals included within any community are leaders. Given this assumption, each individual’s voice is heard and respected. Most importantly, in working within communal leadership, leaders engage in the creation of a more socially just system of leadership that is beneficial for all.

A case for communal leadership has been established through an explanation of the shift in leadership and an exploration of leadership and community. However, to test any theories from the research as they relate to community, the research must identify a community as a focus for research. Gaining an understanding of how ideologies and culture within a group claiming to manifest communal leadership establishes the foundation for the research study.

This empirical study of a community takes place at a community college where the office of Business and Administrative Services claims to manifest communal leadership. Research into the characteristics of this claimed cultural and ideological foundation along with the study of theories of leadership provides the basis for the community-based participatory research. The creation of a community is an act of blending or assembling a group of people having common interests, and this group professes a belief that they are representative of this blended model. In *Our Appointment with Life: A Discourse on Living Happily in the Present Moment*, Nhat Hanh (1990)

suggests, “to be in touch with a community, to learn from its members, and to take refuge in community is very important” (p. 25), and the eleven individuals in this team feel they work together in an integrated model that recognizes individual importance to other members of their team and describe the leadership culture within their department as communal. Thus, this group can provide a forum through which to witness, assess, and record the dynamics that might be identified as the core components of communal leadership.

In an analysis of a macro communal leadership model, this research can test the validity of a nearly century-old claim. As Follett (1919) suggests, the coming together of individuals in the process of community encourages the strengths of the collective:

But it seems to me that the greatest contribution a citizen can make to the state is to learn creative thinking, that is, to learn how to join his [or her] thought with that of others so that the issue shall be productive. If each of us exhausts his [or her] responsibility by bringing his [or her] own little piece of pretty colored glass, that would make a mere kaleidoscope of community. (p. 581)

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **A STUDY OF COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP**

A core element in this research, this chapter focuses on the study of communal leadership which engages the Business and Administrative Services Department at a community college—an 11-member department that directs the fiscal integrity of a largely rural college that operates on a heavily audited \$21 million dollar annual budget. This analysis explores the components of communal leadership within this specific context, investigating how people think of communal leadership, examines the tensions of communal leadership, and delineates the actual characteristics identified to describe it.

In this endeavor, I base the idea of communal leadership on the culmination of research as well as a photovoice research study established in partnership with the eleven team members at the Community College. Utilizing the findings from the photovoice research study, I will identify the characteristics of communal leadership as they apply to this group. In addition, this chapter highlights the themes that emerged from the research study and isolates the tensions between and among communities/departments and between communal and hierarchal leadership in the department in which all members maintain that they do, in fact, incorporate a communal leadership structure.

The purpose of the study is to identify characteristics of communal leadership. For the sake of this research, communal leadership is defined as leadership that is shared in a group and unselfishly concerned for or devoted to the welfare of others. This

qualitative study used community-based, participatory research methodology, specifically photovoice. Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is an ethnographic methodology used to invoke action and change in a particular community while the research party is collaborating with members of the specific community.

I adapted photovoice in this research study to a two-phase ethnographic methodology involving (a) assembled collages of images intended to represent what “community” means to the individual participant, and (b) photo dialogue wherein participants took and assembled photos that then involved participants in a communal dialogue about perceived communal leadership within the department.

In using photovoice this way, participants are asked to not only create collages, but also to take pictures of their everyday activities within their community, to select and narrate particular photos, and then assemble those pictures in a collective representation for use when they come together with other participants within the study. During these sessions, they identify and discuss themes within their collective collages and photos, then suggest and encourage change for the sake of their community. This methodology was chosen because it allowed me to examine the self-described behaviors and practices of a staff team, their experiences as leaders, and their perceptions of communal leadership. My goal was to identify the characteristics of communal leadership, as well as identify tensions that exist when teams of people work together communally within existing hierarchies. I therefore identified a team of participants based on their proclaimed communal leadership work environment at a community college.

### **The Community College**

According to their website, the Community College in which this study takes place is accredited by the Southern Association and Schools Commission on Colleges to award associate degrees, diplomas and certificates. Both curriculum (college credit) and continuing education (non-credit) classes and programs are offered for individuals with varied educational needs and backgrounds using both traditional (classroom) settings and non-traditional instructional methods. Courses are taught day and evening throughout the year both on and off the main campus. According to the Dean of Planning and Research, the College has seventy-two academic departments and non-instructional units that complete outcomes assessment and program reviews. It has five hundred and forty-two fulltime and part time faculty and staff members, serving approximately 4,000 fulltime students annually.

The College claims commitment to five core values: integrity, helpfulness, excellence, respect, and opportunity. These values are intended to guide and direct the Community College, and its individual members, as it seeks:

- To welcome students of all ability levels and to provide programs that prepare them for employment or for transfer;
- To provide training for local businesses and to contribute constructively to the economic well-being of the region;
- To contribute to the cultural and artistic richness of the community, and to the educational needs of our retired population;
- To create a campus environment that celebrates its faculty and staff, and contributes to their personal and professional development.

These core values are important to the study of communal leadership because they set up an expectation for a “communal” atmosphere throughout the campus. Moreover, these

core values should establish communal leadership as a norm within each department, among them the Business and Administrative Services Department which maintains to utilize communal leadership as described by one of its team members that explained how they work communally with others, “The Business Office has many different jobs, but when put all together, we are all working towards that one goal of helping our Students to better their position in life, to inspire them to reach for the stars” (Team Member 1, March 1, 2013).

To begin the study, I consulted with the Associate Vice President for Instruction at the Community College regarding teams on campus that he felt worked communally. He suggested 5 staff teams, but noted the department of Business and Administrative Services as the one team who, over the preceding twelve months, was in leadership transition and might provide the best opportunity for the study. Thus, I contacted the Associate Vice President for Business and Administrative Services to ask if she would consider participating in a study about communal leadership with her team. After an initial meeting to review the specifics of the study and after receiving the approval of the Executive Vice President who has direct authority over that department, I sent an email questionnaire to the entire staff team of the department of Business and Administrative Services. The two questions were: (a) Do you feel you work communally together with other members of your team? and (b) Do you describe the leadership environment within your department as communal? All 11 members of the staff team responded with “Yes” to both questions, so the Associate Vice President of the Business and Administrative Services Department and I agreed to move forward with the study. Once the Associate

Vice President for Business and Administrative Services signed the letter of agreement, we set up a schedule to implement the study.

### **Group Dynamic**

The research group dynamics at the start of the study included ten women and one man. One woman transferred into a new department during the study. Only one woman is African American, while the other members of the team are Caucasian. Two team members are in their sixties, five team members are in their fifties, two are in their forties, and two are in their thirties. Four team members have a master's degree or the equivalent in higher education, two team members have their bachelor's degree, three team members have associate's degrees, and two have high school education.

Furthermore, three members of the staff team have been employed by the college for less than five years, including the Associate Vice President of the department. Two members of the staff team have been employees with the college for approximately five years, four members between ten and twenty years, and two for twenty or more years. Throughout the research, team members are cited with randomly assigned numbers. In no way are these numbers intended to identify specifically with members; the numbers are used to maintain team member confidentiality.

In the first meeting with the staff team I introduced myself as the researcher, offered a profile of the research focus, explained their role as participants, and asked for those interested in participating to give consent. All team members voluntarily consented in writing to participating in the research study. I followed up with a request to be invited

to observe any of their meetings and/or departmental events. They all agreed with the request for open access.

During the course of the research study, I observed four departmental meetings, two staff meetings, a systems office meeting, and the program review. I also conducted two group observations of individuals within the staff team, individual face-to-face interviews with nine out of the eleven team members, and three email surveys with follow up correspondence with six of the eleven team members. Furthermore, I spent approximately 15 hours in informal observation with the staff team during department visits that I made throughout the course of the study. It is important to note that the initial analysis of the findings from these engagements reflects the fact that much of the research was directed by the functions of the department under study and not as a controlled function of the study itself. Critical issues related to communal leadership became evident in these meetings and group observations, among these participant naiveté as to their own leadership role or ability, the familial sense of compassion and rivalry that exist in a community leadership model, the tensions that emerge when necessity dictates that two or more communities work in tandem, and the natural tendency to cede control to a designated leader.

I also conducted two specific photovoice activities with the entire team. First, was an initial one-hour collage activity asking participants to define what community means to them. Due to the time constraints, it was expedient to precut thousands of pictures to serve as subject catalysts which reflect varied aspects of human existence from sports and fitness, nature, fashion, business, and travel magazines. Participants

were then asked to select from the precut pictures and construct their definition of community in order to present to the other team members.

The photovoice study also included a photo dialogue session in which team members were asked to take pictures of communal leadership at work around them, specifically to define, characterize, and then identify tensions surrounding it. They were then asked to narrate their own photos that addressed the prompt to capture members of the department working communally with others, yet what emerged was the recognition that this groups perception of communal leadership was tempered with less overt recognition of the perception of superior roles within the community and the inherent risk involved in daring to assume a leadership posture. It is important to note that concerns related to subject/verb and pronoun agreement within the context of quoted comments from the participants have been left unaddressed, since the preservation of tone and sincerity are better served as the comments appeared in spoken and written ways.

During the photovoice photo dialogue narrative with participants, a team member of the Business and Administrative Services provided a statement reflecting on the roles and responsibilities of the department team within the study.

You know we're kind of our own unit; you know we're our own department. And our department is such though that we have to service every other department on campus. We have a lot of people that look to us for help, a lot of people that we help process a lot of information for. The business accounting office is always probably a support function, so I think as part of this process as I've been in meetings and been trying to work with people who are trying to get something accomplished it's interesting how people interact with the business department; some people see you as a necessary evil; some people want to partner with you and work with you, and so what I've tried to do is really step up above the department and think "ok, what are they trying to achieve and how can we best

help them to get there without sacrificing every bit of integrity we have.” (Team Member 9, March 7, 2013)

In response to an email survey in which one question asked team members to “explain specifically how you work communally together with other members of your team,” a team member offered the description below of the overall work within the department:

As a team, my supervisor, the controller and myself meet with the Vice Presidents regarding the budget for each upcoming fiscal year. As payroll is over 90% of the budget for [the Community College], it is imperative that I provide them with accurate information regarding salaries and benefits. Communication between all is essential in providing the accurate information. We also work together as a department for registration to insure the students are served in a timely manner and with professionalism. Our department meets annually for a program review, to review and discuss our goals for the current and future year. We come together as a team to discuss implementing new or more effective ways to operate the Business Office. (Team Member 4, February, 25, 2013)

These early reflections provided the study with a baseline assessment of personal perceptions related to the communal aspect of the department.

Five predominant themes emerged from the research study: self as leader or experts in specific areas, family and care, necessity of hierarchy, tensions and boundaries, and community within the work environment. As defining communal leadership and identifying the characteristics were an important research focus, I specifically asked for team-member feedback around these two subjects; however, I do not identify these as any of the main themes that naturally emerged throughout the research project. Furthermore, the section below provides a brief overview of the characteristics of communal leadership as evidenced in the study.

### **Characteristics**

I sent out an email survey of questions and inquiries as a follow up to further research and to the informal side discussions that I had shared with the team members. Within the survey, I asked the following questions or solicited responses to items and met individually with six members of the staff team to follow up regarding their responses to the email survey:

1. What are the characteristics that you feel describe you in your job?
2. Describe your leadership in the department.
3. In your opinion, out of the 11 people in your department, please tell me the number that you believe are leaders and explain why you selected the number you did.
4. In your opinion, does the gender make up of your department impact the types of leadership utilized within the department? Why or why not?
5. Give me a specific example of how you've used your leadership within the department and/or around campus in the last 4 weeks.
6. Explain how you know you were being a leader in that specific situation.
7. What specific tensions exist in the department specific to leadership?
8. Give me a specific example of a time when you've witnessed tensions surrounding leadership within the department.
9. Explain why you selected that specific example.
10. What did you learn specific to communal leadership throughout this research study?
11. What did you learn about the department and/or colleagues throughout this research study?
12. What did you learn about yourself throughout this research study?
13. What else do you want me to know?

I felt that the responses for question four overwhelmingly characterized leadership as either “masculine” or “feminine.” The range of responses to question number four in the email survey included:

I feel that women are more in tune with life on an everyday basis, whether it is needing to understand the working or personal trials of their life. (Team Member 1, April 19, 2013)

Women are naturally nurturers and we demonstrate that each day in how we support each other . . . not only business ‘stuff’ but also on a personal level. (Team Member 8, April 17, 2013)

Because our department is primarily comprised of women, I believe the manner in which we are ‘led’ is impacted somewhat. We care about each other and that is reflected in the way situations are presented and handled. (Team Member 7, April 17, 2013)

No, I don’t think the gender make up impacts the type of leadership utilized. I think the supervisor of our department is our main source of leadership, and it is how that individual leads that will impact others within the department in their leadership roles.

If she is a positive leader, most likely we will all be positive leaders also. (Team Member 4, April 12, 2013)

No, I lead the same regardless of gender. (Team Member 9, April 12, 2013)

I do not believe gender plays a role in [leadership] as much as personality types. I believe we have a good mix of personality types, and we respect the fact that we are not all ‘wired’ the same. I believe each of our positions is paired with the person whose personality matches the types of interaction the position requires. (Team Member 5, April 17, 2013)

According to these responses, several of the team members felt that gender could have an impact on the leadership within their department. On the other hand, a few felt that the gender of the leader does not impact the leadership. Because characterizing communal leadership is a main goal of this research, I decide to send one last email inquiry to the team members asking them to list three leadership characteristics specific to men and three leadership characteristics specific to women.

One interesting response came in the follow up email that asked the team members to give three characteristics specific to men and three specific to women. The team member listed three characteristics for both men and women: responsive, empathetic, and fair, and stated, “Characteristics of a leader don’t change at all based on gender to me. I have had good supervisors and bad supervisors of both genders” (Team Member 7, April 23, 2013). All of the other team members responded by providing characteristics that they felt were either specific to men or women.

It seems that the perceived gender of the leader does impact the leadership for the majority of these team members. One of the first email surveys (February 2013) that I presented to the staff team asked them to identify the characteristics that they think describe their community-centered department team. These are listed in Table 1 along with their responses (April 2013) to the leadership characteristics they perceive as describing both men and women. In reviewing the list of characteristics, it seems that, more often than not, the team members identified the leadership in their department with the leadership characteristics they had used to describe women. To a certain extent this finding is expected because within their departmental structure, the overall leader is a woman and ten out of the eleven team members are women.

The leadership characteristics were not the only important findings throughout the research study. The themes that emerged from the collage, photo dialogue session, email surveys, and personal communication provide insight into the way team members view communal leadership throughout their department, as well as throughout the campus.

Table 1. Responses from Email Survey

<b>Characteristics to describe community-centered team (February 2013)</b>	<b>Leadership characteristics to describe men (April 2013)</b>	<b>Leadership characteristics to describe women (April 2013)</b>
Communicators, knowledgeable, helpfulness, loyal, dependable, and professional	Authoritative, dependent, competitive	Communicator, organized, attention to detail
Beliefs, values, ethics, dedicated, character, knowledge and skills, supportive of others, participates in meetings	Aggressive, competitive, objective	Emotional, nurturing, judgmental
Caring, accurate, responsive, dedicated	Responsive, empathetic, fair	Responsive, empathetic, fair
Team oriented, care, respect	Direct, controlling, independent	Empathetic, communal, social intuition
Empathy, sense of humor	Egotistical, direct, sense of entitlement	Empathetic, persuasive, flexible
Helpful, respectful, mindful, accommodating, caring	Stern in their requests, task oriented, stubborn (sometimes), confidence	Assertive, empathetic, team-building leadership (inclusive)
A sense of humor, enthusiasm, vision, belief in others	Self-important, not understand women's needs, confident	Understanding, compassion, can identify with you
Open-minded, respectful, independent	Concise, decisive, planning	Communication, availability, planning

### Themes

Conducting research over the course of four months with ten of eleven total team members and utilizing several mechanisms of communication allowed for a great amount of information to be exchanged between and among team members and myself as the researcher. Over the course of several weeks investigating the research, five overarching themes arose: *self as leader* or experts in specific areas, *family and care*, *necessity of hierarchy*, *tensions and boundaries*, and *community within the work environment*. The

themes continuously surfaced in the email surveys, personal reflections, and in dialogue sessions.

### **Self as Leader/Experts in Area**

The first emerging research theme was that of the role of the self as leader and/or the necessity for team members to be experts in their own areas. A team member reflected as a consequence of participation in the study she learned:

That you don't have to have a title to be leader . . . I guess I would compare us to a Chess game. With the types of jobs we do, I would call us the pawns. We are there working to protect the over-all game, plus the President, VPs, Deans and on down the line of people who are in the Leadership role. So, while we are protecting the game, we have to use our knowledge to lead others in keeping the game safe and fair and that all the players are being accountable in their moves. So, even though we are not titled as a Leader, we are still put in the position of leading others on the rules of the game. (Team Member 1, April 23, 2013)

In order for many of the team members to process the idea of communal leadership, they had to know where they fit into the idea. Many of them processed this sense of self as leader throughout the collage, photo dialogue, and email surveys.

Identified throughout the research study, people often put themselves into narrowly defined roles within a hierarchy, oftentimes leading them to believe they do not play a role in the leadership function of their department. This was the case for a few of the team members. The first theme I noticed was the idea that team members needed to consider themselves leaders before recognizing the role they played in communal leadership throughout their department. For some team members, this was the first time

they had considered themselves to be a leader. In recognizing her own leadership, one team member reflected:

I had never considered myself in a communal leadership role until we started this research process. I learned that each of us has a leadership part in our Community College in our specific areas . . . I had never considered myself as a leader, but this research made me look at myself differently and realized I do show leadership in my field of expertise. (Team Member 1, April 12, 2013)

Another member shared a reflection of viewing herself as a leader during the photo dialogue session as she narrated a photo of herself working with a faculty member regarding retirement paperwork:

It put me in a position, I felt like, that I was being the leader . . . using the response of what they [the faculty member] needed to do. Not so much of being a leader over a group, but still giving them [the faculty member] leadership on the direction that they needed to go or the help in getting their job or what they needed done. And so, I just did not think of myself as being in a leadership role . . . I think that's what I found out about myself in my job that I do more leading than what I thought I did. (Team Member 4, March 7, 2013)

It was evident throughout the research that leaders emerged from within the community based on their individual expertise and the specific needs of those they were serving, which would be a primary characteristic for communal leadership.

Furthermore, five team members assigned themselves as a leader even though their title may not describe a formal leadership position. One team member explained by stating, “. . . you do not have to have a fancy title to be a leader” (Team Member 8, April 17, 2013). Another team member reflected, “That maybe I am more of a leader than I thought” (Team Member 1, April 19, 2013). And a third team member echoes both of

the above sentiments by agreeing, “I’ve learned that I can be a leader without a big title . . . because I’ve always considered leaders having titles” (Team Member 3, April 23, 2013).

Being in a supervisory role, whether formal or informal, created the sense of leadership for one team member. The photo in Figure 1, presented by a team member during the photo dialogue session, was described by team members as “serious, guiding, informal because of the side-by-side position, personal and professional, imparting of knowledge, offering a level of support, and intimate.” It showcased both a team member engaging as a leader with another team member and her sharing her level of expertise while acting in a supervisory role in the absence of the assigned supervisor.



Figure 1. Photo 1 presented by a team member during the photo dialogue session.

The narrator explained that she was suddenly called upon to educate a colleague on an important responsibility of her new position by directing her through a software function with which she was unfamiliar:

I bring it up, show her what we have to do, and then print out screen shots for her to take back to have in the future for everything she had to do for this. So I certainly looked at this as I took on a leadership role by taking upon myself to show her when she's really not in our department and it really wasn't my responsibility, but I felt like to have everything to go right, go smoothly, and on time it was my place to take that role to show her instead of making her wait until [her supervisor] came back. (Team Member 4, March 7, 2013)

This photo allowed the team member to realize a leadership role, which she did not associate with herself in the past. The dialogue surrounding this particular photo, allowed for other team members to process characteristics they felt were important to working communally with others.

Another part of this theme is that team members not only came to recognize their own leadership, but also viewed other team members as experts in their own area, which made everyone have some sort of leadership role throughout the department. One team member gave this overall reflection in the photo dialogue session:

I think when you think of leadership you generally think of one person who's leading, but when you try to put that with community that's kind of help me see that this is, we are, like one department which is sort of our community. But that each person has their own specialty, their own area where you're going to them for help your working with them their quote unquote the expert so at that time their being the leader their helping you, they're kind of guiding you so each person, depending what you're working on, has some sort of leadership role. (Team Member 6, March 7, 2013)

Another member of the team reflected on the importance of everyone working together toward both personal and team goals:

Communal leadership means working as a team to accomplish a common goal. This includes everyone understanding what is needed of them and also communicating with others as their needs change or are modified. In communal leadership everyone's strengths are highlighted and used accordingly. Everyone is respectful of each other as we understand that each of us has our specific tasks/ goals to help the community (team) achieve its goal(s) but also understand that we are linked by a common thread. (Team Member 5, February 27, 2013)

The designated leader of this department seems to acknowledge the importance of this inclusive understanding borne of open and frequent communication. I observed a staff meeting lasting approximately an hour and a half in which the team shared food and celebrated a team member's promotion to another department. The picture in Figure 2 was provided by a team member during the photo dialogue session.



Figure 2. Photo 2 provided by a team member during the photo dialogue session.

Her written narration submitted with the photo stated that:

This picture is of the staff meeting for the Business Office. We meet regularly and receive updates from our supervisor regarding [the Community College] and how things may affect our job duties. We each share details regarding our specific jobs. At this meeting, we recognized [a team member] regarding her promotion to the HR Department. (Team Member 4, March 7, 2013)

The meeting took place in the college board room, and everyone sat around the board table. One team member commented on the importance of meeting in the board room:

There is something I want to add. This is the board room here. I have never been to a place where the board room was actually available for everyone's use, ever. That was usually in most places kept separate. Only the Vice Presidents and the Board of Directors tend to hang in those facilities in many schools and any other places I have been . . . I think that sets a tone, as well. (Team Member 10, March 7, 2013)

The assumption here is that because the team members are able to request the board room for staff meetings, then they are operating in a system of community that is cultivated and perhaps passed down on a larger scale throughout the campus.

This meeting still ran in a somewhat hierarchical fashion with the Associate Vice President controlling the unwritten agenda and leading the discussion. On the other hand, everyone in the department offered individual updates and thanked other team members for their help. The atmosphere was jovial and friendly while they shared not only their work updates, but also food and a celebration for a team member moving to another department. A team member describes the leadership in staff meetings in a reflection this way:

It has really been good; it's like it gives us an idea of what everybody is sort of going through with their job. She sort of goes around and talks to each staff member and speaks up on what we are doing, we got on our plate, and everything. It really gets your appreciation more of the other employees. You don't really know their job but it makes you respect them more when you start to hear different things that you think gosh, they have a load this month too. It's not just me doing all the work. I think it's good to get to have these regular staff meetings. (Team Member 4, March 7, 2013)

This reflection provides an example of the self as leader and exemplifies the importance of appreciating the expertise that team members have for others in their individual areas. What is missing is the decision-making component to leadership and the collaborative approaches to problem-solving, which are expected in a more communally led department. Throughout informal individual observations, I was able to capture collaboration and problem-solving amongst smaller groups of team members. I did not observe this on a larger scale during any of the observations of the three monthly staff meetings I attended.

One caveat of communal leadership, as mentioned by a team member, is that “it is a team process—everyone needs to want to ‘play’ to make it work” (Team Member 9, April 12, 2013). That said, the research provided little evidence that everyone wanted “to play to make it work.” As a matter of fact, the rearrangement of the people within the department, which created tensions, provides one example of not everyone “wanting to play.” Discussion of this perception is addressed in a later thematic section: tensions and boundaries.

Another team member presented the opposite by stating, “I learned that communal leadership is an inherent part of all of our jobs—it just goes with the

territory! We work well together and will do what it takes to get the job done” (Team Member 7, April 17, 2013). While one member of the team felt people have to be willing to participate communally, another felt this happened naturally within the job because members of the team worked well together. These opposing viewpoints claim that communal leadership is either a choice or it is inherent part of all jobs. Adequate evidence is not provided to support either of these claims.

What can be agreed upon, based on a number of the responses, is that team members’ strengths and weaknesses are important to the communal leadership within the entire team. One member stated, “I feel that everyone in an organization has a voice in communal leadership and they are not afraid, but encouraged to express their knowledge, views, and opinions” (Team Member 10, March 1, 2013).

In the collage phase of the photovoice study, we spent an hour together creating and explaining collages. The prompt given to the team was “This is what community means to me.” It is important to note that this prompt in no way limited responses to the department as the defined community. Each team member was asked to create a collage using pictures pre-cut from magazines. There were hundreds of pictures to select from, and team members were given 15 to 20 minutes to cut and paste their collage addressing the prompt of what community means to them. After creating their collage, team members were asked to present their collages to the other team members. In addition, one collage in particular highlighted these reflections. The collage shown in Figure 3 was described in the following ways:

“Show off your strength.” We all have strengths and sometimes it’s hard to show your strengths off whether it’s at home or wherever, so I think you need to be put in a place where you can shine.

“Best of both worlds.” If it’s a community and you have a bunch of people working together, it seems like you get a better answer; two heads are better than one.

“24 Picture.” 24/7 thing to be part of a team and make things work. (Team Member 9, February 5, 2013)



Figure 3. “What community means to me” collage 1.

Finally, a team member sums up this point of strengths and weaknesses by stating:

For me communal leadership means knowing what makes you happy and acting on those things. We all have strengths and weaknesses, and it’s nice when we realize that we can be different but flexible enough to enjoy things with others . . .

a healthy relationship is being able to spend time together and also have time for yourself. (Team Member 8, February 27, 2013)

Knowing the self and others within communal leadership was important to the team members throughout the research study. The identification of who they are as leaders within their community was evident. Also, it seemed important for the team members to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their fellow team members in order to work more communally. Knowing themselves and one another in this way allowed them to reflect on their department as a family who cares for one another.

### **Family/Care**

The second emerging research theme was the characterizing of communal leadership as a family that cares for, has fun with, guides, respects and comforts one another. One member reflected, “We work as a team, and we play as a team. We show care and respect for each team member’s duties to ensure that our department is friendly and delivering excellent service” (Team Member 2, February 5, 2013).

Typically when team members described community within their department, they did so with examples of spending time with family, especially surrounding food. An aforementioned staff meeting included the manner in which the community celebrates the accomplishments of their members, a truly caring activity. The Associate Vice President opened the meeting by acknowledging the transitioning team member and asking people to eat. For about fifteen minutes, people got food and laughed and shared together. The Associate Vice President called the meeting to order and did not sit at the head of the table, but interspersed between team members. She began by thanking the members for

their help and gave her update first. She was conversational and joking throughout her update. Again, as in the other meetings, team members were asked to go around the room and share updates regarding their specific job duties. Each member thanked the others who had helped with the latest projects. One member had a question, and another offered to help her. When one member of the team expressed being overwhelmed, the Associate Vice President thanked her for her hard work and apologized. Another member of the team expressed some concerns with an issue. The “supervising” team member made a comment and joked while two others joined in on the joke. Another member shared her update while everyone joined in on another joke. Five more members shared their updates and joked. Throughout the staff meeting(s), team members exemplified what one member expresses in the following statement:

The Business Office always pulls together as a team to ‘make it happen.’ If a team member is experiencing a heavier workload than usual or needs personal time, one or more of us will do anything we can to help with the task or just listen if that is what is needed. (Team Member 8, February 27, 2013)

It is obvious in this reflection and throughout the observation of the staff meeting(s) that the team members care for one another. Their focus is established around the common goals of the team and helping one another meet those goals as they impact their personal responsibilities.

Following that meeting, I got an email correspondence from the Assistant Vice President and was updated on some group activities that the team had participated in together which provided evidence that communal practices are perceived as the department norm. They had a department lunch off campus and a surprise department

dinner to celebrate a team member's birthday whose office was converted to a "winter wonderland" to celebrate her birthday. These activities seemed communal in nature, yet lack the leadership component to the study. However, a team member observed this as communal leadership in noting, "By having outings, we promote a friendly atmosphere among the co-workers. I must say that in order for this leadership style to thrive it requires a supervisor that encourages and embraces the idea" (Team Member 10, March, 1, 2013). The "idea" presented can be identified as an element of care that is expressed for the team members throughout the department.

Family and care, appreciating differences, sharing common goals, and impacting change were a few themes that emerged from the photovoice collage activity. This activity reinforced the notion of family connectedness that these individuals feel in their roles within and outside the Community College. While reflecting on the overall research study, one member supports these findings by stating that "we basically strive for the same goals, our needs, and how we can be productive in our community and make a difference." (Team Member 2, April 16). This point emphasized the community the team builds around the departmental goals and emphasized the connections team members made with their roles in their own families as well as within the team. This first session involving the collage activity led to a more significant level of group understanding of the photovoice methodology and to a discussion of the next photovoice session of taking pictures with a new prompt and sharing by narrating the pictures.

It seemed that team members could not associate communal leadership without the comparison with family and focus on caring. The social interconnection of the team

members promoted a sense of well-being that allowed them to operate as a family unit. Primary to sustaining their community was this idea of knowing one another, sharing in one another's experiences, and caring for one another—characteristics long associated with family. Throughout the collage activity, nine out of the ten team members who participated cited family, friends, fun, food, and/or relationships as characteristics to describe community. Six out of the ten team participants created collages that were individualistic based on their interests and their immediate circle of family and friends.

The collage in Figure 4 takes the sense of community into the realm of caring, with the dialogue recognizing the need for acceptance, recognizing the needs to share strengths in order to address weaknesses, and encouraging humane purpose:

“Be the voice for those who have no voice.” That means we are here to help each other, we have different strengths and different weaknesses so we are to share our strengths and also share what our weaknesses are so that those with those strengths can help us

“We are born this way.” Accepting people for who they are

“Your windows of opportunity.” Helping folks to achieve their dreams.

“How to get sh\*t done in life.” So that helping each other in a community to better ourselves in order to better our community

“Hey, it's ok . . .” It's ok that we falter; it's ok that we're different. Again, be respectful and mindful that everyone's not the same

“It's that beautiful feeling of healing.” So when we work together and help each other achieve our goals and be there for one another, taking care of our family and friends, taking care of our elders, our youth, then we can heal. (Team Member 5, February 5, 2013)

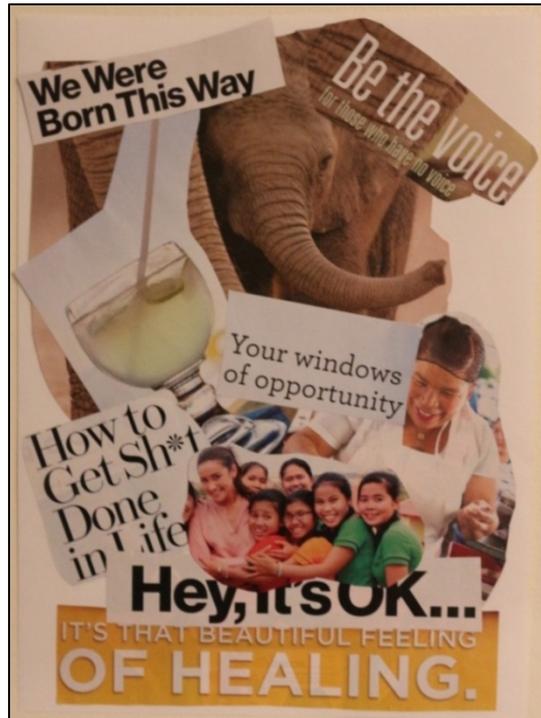


Figure 4. “What community means to me” collage 2.

During the photo dialogue session, one team member described what communal leadership meant to her by stating, “What communal leadership means to me are human experiences. Communal leadership is feeling good about yourself and others. Human activity that comes from the heart” (Team Member 3, February 26, 2013). The humane characteristics were the most evident in another team member’s reflection of the overwhelming care and concern she received in an important time of her life. In addition, she created the big picture of the trickle down of family within community by reflecting:

... and I found that out when my husband passed away. I knew my department would be there for me and would come and support me, but when I had the President show up and people from Continuing Ed, people from the English Department, and from the Computer Program and different ones showed up at his funeral it really gave me a feeling that [the Community College] was a family,

you know, that you're cared about throughout the college, not just within your department. To me, that is the whole school as a community. (Team Member 4, March 7, 2013)

Another team member explained how the department members work with others with passion and care:

I work communally together by being passionate and care about my coworkers. When someone needs help, the others will step up to the plate. Communally is contributing what I can do. I like to consider new ideas and suggestions from others. Communication is important. (Team Member 3, February 26, 2013)

Care and communication were just two of the characteristics used throughout the research study to describe communal leadership. When asked to define what community meant to them, team members made comparisons to their idea of family. One suggested, "To me, it's like family. I mean it's like that: even though, we are not blood related, but we are in a sense because we care about each other. We are concerned about each other" (Team Member 1, March 7, 2013).

This was further evidenced when death once again impacted a member of this community. We had to change the date for the photovoice dialogue session from March 5th to March 7th because one of the team member's father passed away, and the entire department attended the funeral. This reflects the theme of family and care that emerged throughout the research study. A team member speaks to this directly in a reflection during the photo dialogue session:

I think a prime example of that is that we have a co-worker now that has lost her father and we were all there. We were all there to support her and to me that is

what family does. So to me our group is family. (Team Member 1, March 7, 2013)

Clearly, the community feels a heightening of the sense of family and care in times of great loss to one or more community members.

Another suggested that this sense of family and care in communal leadership starts at the top:

You know that probably comes from the top, too, you know because the President, he kind of creates that atmosphere which is why I kind wanted to come here, too. I wanted to be part of a family in the community. (Team Member 9, March 7, 2013)

Yet the idea that the sense of family and care starts at the top, similar to the overwhelming way leadership is described indicates that there is hierarchy, even in the proclaimed communal leadership setting. On the other hand, just a leadership seemed to be passed down, so too was the idea of community throughout the college, indicating again another form of hierarchy.

### **Hierarchy**

The third emerging research theme was that of hierarchy. Many team members believe that, even in the midst of communal leadership, a hierarchy still exists and to a large extent, is necessary for the department to make decisions and be successful. For example, one team member reflected:

I believe that a better decision is reached when it is arrived at communally. Two heads are better than one . . . Different viewpoints and experiences add to the thought process in a decision or a project. Having said that, I also believe that often it is up to the 'head' person to ultimately make the call . . . The head can

approach things differently—they can solicit input from various people and then make the call or they can just make the call on their own. I would imagine that the type of decision may call for a different approach for some leaders. (Team Member 9, March 19, 2013)

The study reveals hierarchy as an aspect of communal leadership through its involvement in other functionary elements within the department. For example, in early spring, I observed the Business Officer's conference call with the state-level system office. There were three members of the team present, as well as the Executive Vice President, who is the direct line of authority for the department. This conference call with the system office was held in the Executive Vice President's office.

The Executive Vice President sat behind his desk as the members of the team sat to his right side. I sat back off the front right corner of his desk and the Associate Vice President of the Department, who came in late, sat directly in front of his desk. During the call, the Executive Vice President tidied his desk, answered emails, reviewed a magazine article, and occasionally nodded at the phone and the team members. The team members took notes and followed along with the agenda.

The engagement of team members throughout the call was limited to a few eye rolls, shrugs, and smirks. Once the call was over, the team members discussed their individual and collective plans of action related to the contents of the call as prompted by the Executive Vice President and the Associate Vice President. This seemed hierarchical as the meeting was set up with the Executive Vice President behind the desk and the team members surrounding the desk. Furthermore, there was little interaction between team members throughout the conference call, which indicated that perhaps the team members

are only communal within their own department. In addition, being in the presence of the Executive Vice President invoked an element of authority which indicated that perhaps team members subscribe more readily to the hierarchy within which they operate. As one of the team members reflected during the study, “Hierarchical leadership is most often the norm and necessary in some cases. Someone has to make final calls on some decisions and sometimes people do want to be responsible for making that call” (Team Member 10, March 1, 3013). This perspective was clearly supported in this encounter.

This is further evidenced in the annual program review meeting for the office of Business and Administrative Services that I attended in which most department members attended. The Executive Vice President and his assistant and all but two of the team members were present. The tables were set up like a horseshoe, with the main focus being on the back middle tables and the screen in the opening of the horseshoe. The Associate Vice President was at the top right of the horseshoe and was controlling the slide presentation. The team members were seated at the surrounding tables, and the Executive Vice President and his assistant were the only people sitting at the back facing the screen.

The Associate Vice President controlled the agenda and asked team members to explain sections. I noticed that whenever the Executive Vice President questioned anyone, they looked to the Associate Vice President and she stepped in to clarify points. She included everyone in the agenda line items as they pertained to her own and the others’ departmental responsibilities. She did not say “I” one time in the hour and a half meeting. She only used the language of “we.” This is an example of the communal

leadership that many members feel describe their department. One member stated that “communal leadership specially means that we work together as a team in our department to reach the same goals and expectations that we are responsible for here at the Community College” (Team Member 2, February 27, 2013). On the other hand, the set up of the meeting overall provides a significant example of hierarchy, from the positioning of the Executive Vice President, to the question and answer protocol in which team members relied on their Assistant Vice President to effectively communicate their points of discussion. Overall, the meeting lacked the elements of collaboration, connection, and the decision-making that one might expect to see in a program review highlighting the needs for the upcoming year.

Team members were open about the need for hierarchy even though they described themselves as a family, one of the earlier referenced themes. The interesting point to this was that the team described patriarchy without naming it as such, which provides a contradiction to the idea of communal leadership. They seemed to acknowledge that even within a family there exists a hierarchy, and one team member gave an example of this by stating:

You know, remember when we were talking earlier about what our thoughts were, and I said that I thought that we were like a family. I think that the President gives us that feeling and part of that feeling is that we have to know what we're doing. Now, when I was hired here, the door was not open. And so it's kind of like he's the father figure, and you have a way, you know, to his office. I think because he's got an open door there, and I think that's what's true in the kind of atmosphere that we have here on campus; because he's open. (Team Member 1, March 7, 2013)

Accountability and respect were two characteristics used to describe the President and his role as the top leader within their hierarchy overall. Describing leadership in such a way, with a “father figure” reflects a level of patriarchy in leadership within this hierarchy where the “father” is the person of authority. For some team members, this was acceptable because he was described as providing an “open” atmosphere. For others, it was his job to be this way because as one team member noted:

You got to have somebody, or the good and the bad comes back. Somebody that has to say the no’s and the yes’s at the same time but having been in some meetings with him [the President], he respects your knowledge, he respects what you have to say, and he gives you opportunity to speak. I don’t feel as if he would not listen to you without, you know, he will always listen to what you have to say prior to making any judgment on it. He seems to respect everyone’s knowledge, I guess, at least that’s the way I see it, you know, from every level, but somebody’s got to be. (Team Member 10, March 7, 2013)

The language in the quote itself, “he gives you opportunity to speak” indicates an oppressive and/or authoritative characteristic evident within the hierarchy. Furthermore, responsibility—whether prescribed by a certain title or position in a hierarchy or by the fear and respect of a that position in the hierarchy—influenced the way the team member viewed the President’s leadership as she shared this scenerio:

I was in the car with him [the President] one time and he was trying to figure out something or other and he said ‘This needs to be done this way. It’s not going to make so and so happy but that’s what I get paid for.’ And it was just like that. I cannot always make everybody happy, but sometimes you got to have somebody who says this has to be this way and this has to be that way because they won’t make that decision communally. They won’t; the communal decision can’t always be made. There are not enough people always willing to give up their desires to do what’s best for the community. Does that make sense? So, therefore, somebody has to say, “Well, I’m going to make this decision that I feel

is the best. This is what we are doing.” It’s kind of like being a parent. (Team Member 10, March 7, 2013)

The unspoken interpreted message within the above quotes indicates the nature in which a team member viewed the President’s leadership. This speaks to the acceptance of a hierarchical and perhaps autocratic form of leadership which is embedded in the social culture of the college. Team members may not be aware of the impact these underpinnings of hierarchy and/or authority have on them or their team as a whole. One reason may be as a result of the fact that many of them view the “communal” structure of the college as a family structure and the family structure of hierarchy and patriarchy is overwhelmingly accepted with the culture overall.

A contradiction exists here between the trickle down of both hierarchical leadership and communal leadership. On one hand, the hierarchy exists and is accepted because the President, as his position is defined, is expected to make certain decisions for the college. On the other hand, the President also creates and/or encourages a sense of community and a sense of belonging for the college. An example is evident in one team member’s comment: “It gives you more respect for the hierarchy when the President treats you as an equal” (Team Member 4, March 7, 2013).

These reflections allude to the power dynamic present at the college. In addition, I question if there is such a thing as being treated equally when there is a fear and/or a level of respect that has to be given to a person because of the authoritative position he or she holds. Perhaps this is part of that necessity of hierarchy to which these community

members clearly endorsed during the study. One team member spoke of this necessity of hierarchy in decision making by offering this personal realization:

That our leadership is less communal than I imagined and that although I like communal leadership I also dislike indecisive situations, but realize I don't know what the best balance is in our college. 'Is communal synonymous with indecisive to you?' No, but at times when decisions need to be made someone has to pull it off together, especially when things are detrimental to people, a decision has to be made. Sometimes community won't do what needs to be done so someone has to have the authority to step up and make a decision. (Team Member 10, April 17, 2013)

Team members recognize the need for hierarchy within leadership and expressed appreciation for the respect that is reciprocated between them and individuals within the hierarchy, especially when making decisions. Finding the balance between hierarchy and community seemed an important point for the team member. She recognized that the immediate department may be more communal, but that the college overall was much more a hierarchy. The team member reflected:

I learned that some people are more creative than I realize and that, although there is a communal quality to our environment, there is also an autocratic style as well. Our immediate department is not as much of a hierarchy, but with respect and with someone as leader. The Community College is a hierarchy and this is sometimes not popular and sometimes not helpful. (Team Member 10, April 17, 2013)

Certainly, the position of the person at the top of the hierarchy impacts the way people view leadership, and boundaries are set by certain positions within the Community College. Some viewed the President as communal and that he established that atmosphere throughout the campus. While others may acknowledge this, they also

recognize the limitations of being communal while navigating within a predominant system of hierarchy. As one team member stated:

He [the President] fosters this level of informality but, you know when you can be informal and you know when you should not be informal. I mean there's just the respect. I mean you know who the President is and what he can allow and not allow. I mean, you know, we're not dummies. I know I can pick on him about baseball and the next minute he could turn around and tell me if I have a contract or not. That comes with a level of fear. Fear is not the word. It is respect. (Team Member 7, March 7, 2013).

It is evident that, for many of the team members, a hierarchical structure is necessary, and some of the team members even preferred it. On the other hand, there are tensions and boundaries while working in a more communal setting within a hierarchy, resulting in yet another theme in communal leadership that was evident in the research study.

### **Tensions/Boundaries**

The fourth emerging research theme was that of the tensions and/or boundaries in communal leadership. Several team members felt that working closely within a department can create tensions, and these can be exacerbated by change. After attending the program review, I analyzed more closely the group's organizational structure. I requested the newest organizational chart for the department, one that reflected some changes in roles throughout the department. The team was switched around to accommodate the perceived supervisory strengths and weaknesses of the team members. A team member recalled how she used her leadership in this particular situation and how the restructuring caused tension within the department:

I had to come up with a plan to restructure the department mainly based on impending budget funding declines and utilizing the strengths of those on staff. I solicited input from those impacted within the department, got approval from the EVP and President, and communicated with the entire department. It was a tough situation, but I felt I was leading the department as well as leading the college and providing an example for the other departments. The restructuring caused tension. It was the largest change in roles made since I have been here. (Team Member 9, April 12, 2013)

A shift in the atmosphere and perhaps attitudes within the department were noticeable at approximately the time of this change. The “tensions” the above team member refers to were evident throughout the department. The situation lacks the collaboration and connectivity presupposed as evidence to communal leadership because the important decision-making occurred within the top of the hierarchy. Some might argue that this is the responsibility of that team member in a supervisory role, but the situation still challenges the underpinnings of communal leadership maintained by the team members.

Furthermore, some team members felt that both gender and personality impact communal leadership by creating unspoken and/or unaddressed tensions. One team member reflected:

Possibly, within the department, there are persons that are offended more easily than others due to their gender in my opinion and it impacts the leadership. Others are less sensitive, but it plays a role . . . some women are more easily hurt by being told to do things in a different way or being told what to do . . . some get their feelings hurt or get upset by the way they are approached. Perhaps I have gender biases, or this is maturity versus gender. (Team Member 10, April, 17, 2013)

Although some team members claimed that gender did not impact leadership, some team members reflected differently. One team member revealed the challenge of being a woman in a leadership role when she stated:

Women have to do a balancing act. They also are held to a higher standard in the work place—expected to combine leadership with compassion. People don't listen or take directions from women as comfortably as from men. I've experienced this situation several times. It makes me feel like I'm not important. (Team Member 3, April 19, 2013)

Gender clearly impacted some of the women in their leadership roles. The same team member reflected about their predominantly female office (one man and ten women) by stating that “when a group of women are working so close, tensions will arise . . . Drama! Women competing with each other. Mood swings! Complaints!” (Team Member 3, April 23, 2013). Evidenced in the above comment, perceived gender and personality differences throughout the department create tensions. On the other hand, in the following engagement, a team member describes the perceived similarities of a few members of the department as more positive, but the overall result can also be interpreted as creating tensions within the department.

An important component of the study was ongoing engagement—either in a collective environment or in personal interchanges with individual staff members. For instance, I had an opportunity to speak to one of the team members (paraphrased below) one on one for about thirty to forty-five minutes the week between observing meetings. This was informal because she invited me to her office unplanned, and I did not prepare specific interview questions. We sat in her office and shared in conversation. She stated

that she believes this department is communal because the team members are like-minded people (politics, religion, and family) working together. They help one another. She also stressed that longevity makes them work together well and that they are all “on the same page.” Many of them have worked together ten to fifteen years and some longer.

Like-mindedness and longevity seemed to be key factors to her idea of communal leadership, although these two components created points of interest to me because I perceive that not everyone has been employed in the department for a long period of time, and I believe that not everyone shares in the same politics, religions, and/or idea of family. She explained that her life work is right here and that she’s become “part of the bricks and mortar” and that most team members want good things to happen for this place and themselves. She took a moment to share a bit about herself personally: that she has only worked three jobs, that she feels she could describe herself as sheltered and naïve, and that her parents have been together fifty-seven years. Finally, she gave me the breakdown of each team member, their roles in the department, and how long they have been there (Team Member 1, January 17, 2013).

Overall, the correspondence inadvertently suggests a dominance and/or power structure embedded into the social culture within the department. Recognizing that all the members of the team are Caucasian with the exception of one and that all of the members of the team are women with the exception of one indicates that underlying the community are barriers that may in fact impede the communal leadership thought to be so teeming within the department. In addition, as mentioned above, there are perhaps both spoken and unspoken privileges that come with longevity therefore; some team members

may experience more privilege than others do to the length of time they have been a member of the department.

Even though all the team members responded that they feel their department operates within the parameters of communal leadership, tensions arose for team members as they navigated between their maintained communal department and the overall hierarchy within the college. One team member explained the tension this way: “I find some of the leaders think that their job is more important than others. To me, everyone has an important job” (Team Member 3, April 19, 2013). Furthermore, as another team member expressed, “Leadership equals sticking your neck out which can get heads cut off; some won’t stick their neck out . . . some just want people to tell them what to do, which is not leadership” (Team Member 10, April 30, 2013).

As it was noted, the team members within this department feel they are communal, while working within a hierarchy. Tensions arise when others within the hierarchy challenge team members. One team member reflected on the tensions she experienced:

The tensions I experience from leadership is when multiple people (upper leadership, staff and faculty) all require immediate information and I may be already working on a specific deadline. Sometimes this causes tensions just because of how to prioritize the requests . . . Sometimes the President and Vice Presidents schedule a budget meeting in a short time span, and everything has to be dropped and rushed to prepare their requested information. Lack of communication from upper management brings more tensions when they do not express exactly what they are needing. Although I must state that since [our current supervisor] has become our supervisor, everything seems to just flow so much better without tensions. I personally feel communication is probably the main reason everything is smoother with her in our lead position. (Team Member 4, April 12, 2013)

As the team member noted, the position of others within the hierarchy and a lack of communication impacted the way people worked together and the tensions that arose.

In addition, tensions surrounding knowing boundaries were important to team members. As team members investigated what it meant to be communal, most team members agreed that because they work more closely together, it was easier to share and push boundaries with their fellow team members within the department. On the other hand, working in a larger community setting, such as the college, team members felt that bad days, not feeling communal, and a lack of respect can create challenges within the boundaries for those outside their department. One team member gave a scenario:

I have to admit, one day I was not having a good day, and we had this thing going on over in the lounge area with food, and I'm sitting there having lunch with everybody else. I had three different people come to me wanting to talk about work and actually give me paper work, and after the third one I said, 'Really, I am at lunch now; I really appreciate it if you would just hold on to that and come see me in my office.' You know, and I tried to be nice, but I think, you know, I do get a lunch like everybody else. I undoubtedly, really had a bad day because I tend not to do that. I tend to just stop whatever I'm doing, and I help and keep on doing my job, but for some reason that day I was having a hard time . . . (Team Member 1, March 7, 2013)

The same team member reflected on a time when she did not feel like helping another outside of the immediate department, especially as it seemed this person could have done the job himself or herself she explained, “. . . but I was busy that day, and I was on a deadline, and I thought, ‘you’re going that way; why are you asking me.’ And, so I do have my moments every now and then that I don’t feel very communal” (Team Member 1, March 7, 2013).

It seemed that team members were processing what it meant to be communal or to describe their department as such, when there were times it seemed less than. On the other hand, it was interesting for the team members to recognize that they are a community and that others may not understand the boundaries as they come into contact with their department. For example, one team member stated, “. . . it’s just the boundaries and those outside of our community don’t always know what our boundaries are” (Team Member 8, March 7, 2013). In addition, some team members felt that within the bigger community of the college, others do not respect them inside or outside that community as a whole. A member shared this reflection:

When you’re working in a community, and you feel like that part of the community doesn’t respect what you’re doing and what you’ve got to get done, a lot of the times the things that they’re asking you to do are things that they could get their self. Or if they just read a little bit further down the page, they would know what they need to do . . . (Team Member 1, March 7, 2013)

Clearly, tensions and boundaries exist within communal leadership. When team members are having a bad day or feeling disrespected they still see the need to serve a community: “That’s what you do! You smile and go on with it! But every now and then I think you’re allowed to have that bad day” (Team Member 1, March 7, 2013).

Working with people from outside the department can also test boundaries. One team member reflected on this very subject during the photo dialogue session:

It’s like working in a community with some of the same people having established boundaries that we all know but they’re fluid boundaries, so some times within our community we may push those boundaries a little too far . . . But also, those outside of our community that come in contact within our community, they don’t know what boundaries are concrete or what boundaries are our ‘soft

boundaries . . .’ Working communally, of course we want to be as helpful as possible, so the first ten times that person interrupts so much, she [a colleague] helps them, so the eleventh time, they don’t know that’s a soft or a hard boundary. So the eleventh time and they’re getting their head bitten off so to speak . . . it’s just the boundaries and those outside of our community don’t always know what our boundaries are. (Team Member 5, March 7, 2013)

Clearly, working through the tensions and boundaries of communal leadership within a larger community setting, such as the college, proves to be an interesting process, which indicates that there are communities within communities and not everyone is working towards the same goal.

### **Community within but not Outside**

The fifth theme to emerge—and the one to provide the greatest evidence of a divide between perception and practice—was that of the recognition of the need for community within but not outside—the notion that the sense of community is clearly developed within the department but then not practiced outside the department itself in the department’s role in a larger academic community. One team member reflected, “Our group works well together; once we get out of the group, things change” (Team Member 9, March 7, 2013). In short, team members expressed that they felt a sense of community within their direct department, but felt that this was compromised when they worked with others outside their immediate department.

This fact became self-evident when I had the opportunity to conduct the first photovoice activity with the entire staff team. In the collage stage of the photovoice study, the department members clearly expressed a self-perception of community which might foster a sense of communal leadership; however, as became evident in the photo

dialogue phase of the photovoice study, the department members revealed a willingness to embrace the sense of community in various aspects of their personal lives but had some difficulty in extending that same impulse to the other communities within the larger community college which they all served.

Two examples of the collages are below. One team member balanced their reflections between themselves and their inside and outside communities (work and social) and one focused solely on the work community. The examples shown below are paired with the individual dialogues used to explain their collages.

The narrative for the collage presented by this team member (see Figure 5) suggests a recognition of the need for people to rally around one goal for the community—despite the fact that the members of the community have clearly unique characteristics:

Different animals as part of a community and what they are doing is working together to round up this gold fish and trap him in and one goal up there. Bunch of different people at work who have different backgrounds but everyone works together with one goal. (Team Member 6, February 5, 2013)

Another team member explained the collage in Figure 6 by recognizing that community means accepting the inevitability of change through communication with others and recognizing that community means shared joy and play:

“Start with rewriting the rules.” Just because it’s always been done that way as a community, maybe we should think beyond the box and maybe try to think about, as a community of workers, how we could do things differently. Doesn’t have to be the same all the time.

“Stay playful, share the joy, join in.” Because if you got something to say and you don’t say it in your community, then it’s not going to impact the change, so you think everyone needs to be a part of it. (Team Member 10, February 5, 2013)



Figure 5. “What community means to me” collage 3.



Figure 6. “What community means to me” collage 4.

Essential to communal leadership is the security, receptive environment, and fair practices that foster a sense of community and/or a sense of belonging for those within the community. While engaging communal leadership, not only are leaders an integral part of their community, but they also lead in ways to bring people together.

However, the research revealed that it was easier for the team to recognize how they work and bring one another together within their own departmental community than it was for them to extend their community to a larger domain. The team processed another finding that the other departments create their own community and perhaps in the midst of a larger hierarchy, the teams were not communal together. “Don’t you think, too, that each of them are their own community . . . they fight among themselves to protect their own and so to me you have your communities and their trying to protect their own community within a large community” (Team Member 9, March 7, 2013). In other words, when the community is forced to engage with other communities—even when those other communities are engaged in a shared purpose—the community within may reject and/or were rejected by, to some degree, outside communities.

This was evident in two photos a team member narrated for the photo dialogue session that was integral to the photovoice study and which showed members of the study community engaged in a meeting involving at least three other work communities within the larger community college. The team member reflected on the two photos in Figure 7 and Figure 8 by stating:

It is interesting, again, because we came together to discuss an issue that all four departments have their own preconceived ideas and notions about what needed to happen. It was just interesting the setup where people came in and sat on

different sides. So, we will go back and forth! I think these are like that . . . It is good to get together face-to-face and have some discussions because things done over email and over electronic media sometimes does not portray everything that needs to be said or needs to be done. I do not know that we had any satisfactory resolution out of this meeting. I do not think we felt any better going out than we did coming in, which is sad. I would hope that normally we would feel better after we have had a meeting. Quite honestly, I do not think we did. We kind of addressed something, maybe, a week later. I think, now, we are okay with it. I do not know. It was different. It did not feel like a very clean one. There are lots of things in here that show that it is not very communal; even though, we have a congregation of people. (Team Member 9, March 7, 2013)

It looks like to me that by pushing the desk together we are already at that mind-set that we are not going to lean on this. We are just going to dance around it . . . There is obviously tension. You have a lot of people from different departments that are represented and then clearly people's agendas were different. People were expecting something. I think you can kind of see that! (Team Member 9, March 7, 2013)



Figure 7. Photo 1 of members of the study community engaged in a meeting.



Figure 8. Photo 2 of members of the study community engaged in a meeting.

These two photos in particular showed the team members that—even though they are a community—other departments create a community too. The reflection of the narrating team member indicated the tensions that exist even when a department operates communally. In a photo which looked, at first glance, to portray members within a working community working together, it was not in fact accurate when this divergent perspective emerged in reflection on the event.

Although there are several variables that influence the highlighted communities, team members recognized that each community on campus functions according to their needs and wants, as they fit into the hierarchy. This noticing is an important step in recognizing predictable patterns of familiar, or hierarchical leadership, which influences

communal leadership, or in this case, the lack of. In order for a “communal transformation” in leadership to exist for this department, the team members would need to get better connected with others outside their immediate department.

### **Conclusion**

The research findings beg the question: Does communal leadership even exist at all. For some members, who would characterize their group as caring, showing concern for others and being helpful, I suggest that there are characteristics of communal leadership evident in the department—the necessary elements identified in chapter two as; shifting leadership, creation of community, spiritual transformation, ethics of care and love, and interconnectedness. For others who describe leadership as necessary and who express some level of fear, I suggest that there are more characteristics of hierarchy—narrow, top-down leadership--than there are of communal leadership.

The purpose of the research study, incorporating photovoice as a community-based participatory research methodology, was designed to identify characteristics and tensions of communal leadership with a team who maintained that they engage in communal leadership in the Business and Administrative Services Department at a community college. Throughout the research study incorporating individual and group observations, face-to-face interviews, email surveys and two photovoice activities, the team members identified characteristics they used to define communal leadership; as a consequence of this study of their experiences, five overarching themes emerged: self as leader/experts in area, family/care, hierarchy, tensions/boundaries, and community within but not outside.

Why is there such a lack of human awareness of the capacity for self as leader? It was a surprise for five members of the team to recognize themselves as leaders. Many of them had not thought of their job as being in a leadership role or function until completing the research study. Some team members expected communal leadership to be inherent to all, while others viewed it as a choice. One of the team members stated, “I think communal leadership may come more naturally for some than for others” (Team Member 9, March 19, 2013).

Furthermore, just as some team members were surprised to describe themselves in a leadership role even though their official job title does not formally indicate that leadership role; at least one other team member felt that leadership was perhaps too risky for some. “There are several people that may want more of a leadership role, but may not want the responsibility, [and] that is sometimes hard to admit to yourself . . . with leadership comes responsibility . . . fear of responsibility or fear of discipline if they mess up” (Team Member 10, April 17, 2013). It was evident that not all members of the team viewed leadership in the same way or wanted to commit to one form of leadership over another.

Why, too, do so many individuals in a community lack a belief in the family/care that should be integral in a leadership model? The first observation was a staff meeting that took place in a classroom on campus lasting approximately one hour. I noticed that the Associate Vice President of the Department sat at the front of the room with all the members of the team facing her. She opened the meeting by prompting team members to give an update of what was going on in their specific areas. The atmosphere was serious

and positive. There was good eye contact with each member, they nodded and acknowledged one another as they were presenting their updates, they consistently asked for clarification, and each person started his or her update by specifically thanking the others for their assistance. In addition, throughout the photo dialogue session, the majority of the team members used “family and caring” as a way to describe what community means to them. Within family and caring for one another, it is evident there is an established hierarchy. This was obviously true for the department as a whole as well as it was throughout the college.

Why do members of a community feel the need for a defined hierarchy—despite their obvious need for shared ownership in leading that community? The promotion of communal leadership seemed evident throughout the staff meeting, as one team member later offered in her reflections, “I feel we truly try to promote communal leadership with our department meetings where we share our current projects. We also provide input regarding plans that vary from job duties to best practices for our responsibilities” (Team Member 10, March 1, 2013). Yet, team members seemed to expect the existence of hierarchy and therefore accepted it as part of their job. The Associate Vice President led the discussion and prompted each speaker, which indicates the working of hierarchy within the department. Thus, the Associate Vice President plays an integral part of the department, as shown in the narration above. However, she recognized the community in maintaining relational connections with the team members, allowing for voices to be heard and seemingly valuing their input. It is not surprising, then, that in the photovoice

dialogue, team members expressed the need for respect within the hierarchy and stated that this idea has been passed down from the top leadership within the college.

The research reveals another question: Are tensions and boundaries in a community the result of social factors or community members vying for the leadership role? Team members acknowledge that—as is the case in any family and/or community—tensions arise. Some of these tensions as expressed by team members were gender related because the department is predominantly women working together and that women may not be respected as leaders and that perhaps an element of “drama” is introduced with so many women. Some tensions were created by the idea of needing to be communal in the first place, and members felt they needed to be comfortable having a bad day. Communication—or lack thereof—created tensions; especially as it was impacted by particular people in particular positions within the hierarchy.

Do social boundaries foster or prevent emerging communal leadership? When multiple communities must work as one—when communities work within but not outside—are they testing boundaries, exacerbating tensions, and threatening the communal leadership model? In the study, a new set of tensions were introduced from external sources. Within the department, there are fluid boundaries because most of the team members had worked together for several years. On the other hand, those boundaries were challenged by people outside of the department. Such challenges to boundaries are perhaps most important to this research; team members recognized the boundaries of their communal leadership, but they also recognized others’ boundaries within the college community. Team members readily identified their communal

leadership, and they seemed to create a familiarity within their limited departmental community. On the other hand, some college departments have their own communities, with their own goals and agendas, and this was an important theme to emerge for the staff team. The realization was that perhaps there are other departments on campus utilizing communal leadership in their own right, but when forced to work together, does one community want to impose a new hierarchy to allow that community to emerge as the leader?

That said, perhaps it is only a matter of characterizing their own staff teams as family and exhibiting genuine care for one another that endorses their claim to a communal leadership structure. And they must recognize that perhaps other teams navigate tensions and boundaries. As one team member explained:

I believe an environment that encourages it [communal leadership] is necessary for a productive and meaningful workplace. If the environment does not exist, I think it stifles creativity and desire. There is a direct connection between “creativity” and “leadership . . .” because people need to have the ability to figure things out on their own . . . you can’t say this is how we do it and this is how it has to be done . . . there is a creative nature too, a freedom to working in a way that suits you best as long as it doesn’t hurt others. (Team Member 10, April 17, 2013)

So perhaps there are many departments on campus utilizing communal leadership. One team member concludes with certainty: “I think we maintain that we work communally in the Business Office, and I think that is the majority of the folks’ dispositions. They are very fun!! And like to socialize—even when they work!” (Team Member 9, March 19, 2013).

Throughout the research study, the team members found themselves in a bit of a conundrum. The team members of the Business and Administrative Services Department realized they were navigating between two systems of leadership. As expected, the overarching system of hierarchy is overwhelmingly accepted, not only within the department, but throughout the campus. With that system of hierarchy, some unspoken truths of patriarchy and authority exist. On the other hand, engaging communal leadership while in their direct department was easy to accept, yet navigating that while at the same time navigating the hierarchy proved to be more challenging.

This chapter presented the study of communal leadership as conducted in conjunction with the staff team of the Business and Administrative Services at a community college. The final chapter will provide concluding remarks to the research study overall including the limitations of the study. Based on the culmination of research, it will answer the following questions: What are the implications for greater society? How does communal leadership change notions of responsibility concerning leadership overall? How does communal leadership change notions of responsibility in the self as that “sense of self” pertains to belonging to a community? Also, when communal leadership exists, is more clearly defined, and is characterized through working models, how can communal leadership then be promoted as an alternative to narrowly structured hierarchies?

For some, the research might suggest that communal leadership does not exist at all. For others, the photovoice study and subsequent analysis might offer a glimpse of a flawed-but-working model of communal leadership—one that exhibits clear evidence of

hooks's love ethics, Young's social connection theory of shared responsibility, and Eisler's caring economics. This practical application of theory also points to the spiritual transformation, ethics of care and love, and interconnectedness that drive a communal leadership model while exposing the reluctance to allow that interconnectedness to extend to outside communities with whom the initial community might need to work. This finding points to the very nature of problematizing change.

Although the study postulates that this alternative to the hierarchal models provides greater avenues to social justice and a more humane approach to organizational success through collaboration and human connection by promoting communal leadership, further research efforts are necessary to create a working model of communal leadership. Enough evidence exists to support the views of one of the study participants, who offered these closing remarks to this part of the study:

I think you know a lot of times you just go about doing your job the way you've always done it, and you don't really step back and take much time to think about it from a different level. So it was kind of interesting to get up in the airplane and look down on everything and take a different view of things to see what works and maybe what can be tweaked a little bit in the way you interact or the way you approach things. So that was helpful. (Team Member 9, March 7, 2013)

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR GREATER SOCIETY**

The final chapter provides conclusions to the research study overall and, more specifically, the essential questions of (a) How does communal leadership change notions of responsibility concerning leadership overall?, and (b) How does communal leadership change notions of responsibility in the self as that “sense of self” pertains to belonging to a community? Also, when communal leadership exists, is more clearly defined, and is characterized through working models, how can communal leadership then be promoted as an alternative to narrowly structured hierarchies? What are the implications for greater society? The research provides one answer to the overarching question related to the implications for greater society.

The study concludes that communal leadership is, as evidenced through this research, a more inclusive model that values the input of all parties and minimizes power and domination that occurs in current hierarchies. The research also reveals that communal leadership, as presently embraced by some organizations, represents a complimentary system to narrowly defined hierarchies, not a stand-alone leadership model. Therefore, as hierarchy and communal leadership sometimes do coexist, communal leadership should provide greater avenues to social justice and a more humane approach to organizational leadership through collaboration and human connection.

The overall research study engaged a parallel exploration between hierarchical leadership and communal leadership, focusing on the humane collaboration of eleven individuals in The Department of Business and Administrative Services at a community college in what they perceived to be a communal leadership model for the sake of a more socially just system of leadership. This research study's aim was to both define what communal leadership is and to identify its characteristics in order to encourage a social change in leadership. In doing so, the research offers empirical evidence of a complimentary system of leadership to hierarchical leadership—one which is assumed to be more inclusive and socially just. The research illustrates that these two systems of leadership must coexist in order to more justly serve individuals, organizations and, as a natural outgrowth, society as a whole.

### **Navigating Hierarchy**

Virtually all communities carry hierarchies, and most individuals recognize the necessity to participate in these communities. Yet, many individuals assume they have a narrowly defined role in the hierarchy of these communities. For such individuals, navigating hierarchies often times proves to be a socially unjust journey; as a consequence, such individuals may abdicate any impulse to embracing a leadership role because they see their position as a fixed point on a lower realm of an organizational chart that progressively narrows to a few privileged leaders at the top.

This study validates the inescapable truth that hierarchy is a necessary system of leadership within the current structure of culture in modern society. Unfortunately, a pervasive system of oligarchical leadership is often assumed to be the only avenue to

success. The social acceptance of these narrow hierarchies that overwhelmingly define the leadership system constrains individual belief as to who can lead from those who cannot. Consequently, a disconnect occurs in hierarchical leadership between those on top and those between and below whose voices are silenced.

The idea of patriarchal leadership identified within these narrow hierarchies creates dissension between and among people, work teams, departments, and divisions within the organization(s), thereby inhibiting the building of community. A contradiction exists because team members within this research study accepted and expected communal leadership departmentally, but not so much in accordance with other departments. It goes to show that the culture and ideologies surrounding hierarchical leadership predominantly go unchallenged. The widely accepted reliance on this outdated system of hierarchical leadership does not build a sense of belonging for people within the organizational community as a whole. Instead, with so few positions on top, it isolates and segregates people and creates an overwhelming sense of competition or, worse still, personal loss. The research provides evidence of interconnecting two forms of leadership within hierarchy and, though less frequently, within community. When this occurs, the resultant form of communal leadership is one based on care, interconnectivity, and inclusiveness.

### **Changing Notions of Responsibility**

In addressing how communal leadership changes notions of responsibility concerning overall perception of leadership, this research posits that communal leadership is a necessary and complimentary component to the current hierarchical

leadership. The photovoice ethnography, a community-based participatory model, provided ample evidence of positive outgrowth in a workplace organization that clearly engages empathic behaviors—support, mindfulness, understanding, caring, helpfulness—while concurrently working toward institutional goals. In short, working communally with others increases the social concern for others. It offers a more humane perspective of leadership whereby the voices of the individuals within a hierarchy are considered.

The research study provides evidence of trust built around individual strengths and weaknesses. In a department claiming to utilize communal leadership, it was evident that team members knew their individual roles and led, when appropriate, according to the roles they played. This showed that responsibility in leadership is shared amongst team members. One team member explained this by characterizing the team as respectful, understanding of each person's specific tasks/goals, and helpful to one another. The study also showed that the level of communal leadership can be influenced by the type of person assigned to the hierarchical leadership position. Thus, the Associate Vice President's encouragement and genuine concern for the team during challenging work cycles had a leveling effect in the hierarchy and offered a sense of inclusion without regards to organizational structure, designated leadership, or hierarchy.

Furthermore, the study reveals that working with others in leadership—building community—increases the opportunity to appreciate and understand the creativity and interconnectivity of people, experiences, and systems of power at work. However, this coexistence of leadership systems is not as easy to achieve as it might seem. For instance, when the Business Office team was called to the Executive Vice President's

office for the system-wide conference call, the lack of engagement by members who had positions lower in the hierarchy was evidence of immediate ceding of control to the dominant, non-communal hierarchy. In ceding control, community members showed no evidence of creative impulse or collective decision-making.

### **Power**

This notion of ceded control reflects a power differential in hierarchical leadership. Overall, it can be assumed that those with less power struggle against those who have dominant power since a position of dominant power carries with it inherent privileges denied to those with lower positions in the organization. These privileges go beyond financial recompense; they include access to exclusive domains—offices, recreational “perks,” and memberships in closed societies. One natural consequence is that those who covet similar privileges vie for those positions at the expense of community. An alarming note in the struggle for power is that it seemed throughout the study that team members were too easily satisfied in giving up their struggle for power—and to a great extent not even recognizing the struggle for power—to those administratively who had more power just because of the titles those administrators held and/or a natural willingness to yield to a patriarchal figure. Perhaps, the team overall did not feel they needed to struggle for power because of the acceptance of the role they played within the narrowly identified hierarchy they navigated on a consistent basis and/or the fact that their yielding to power did not require them to sacrifice their personal belief system or integrity in that acceding attitude. The staff team accepted limited power which indicated an acceptance of domination.

Evidenced throughout the research study, the staff team experienced a sense of community, but only in their direct department. When asked to do so, they yielded all control and decision making to administrators, further accepting a narrowly defined role in a hierarchy. In accepting this, they accepted too the ideologies and values passed down by administrators, again surrendering control—in effect, the staff team relinquished their power to administrators. In a truly communal environment, that power would be shared as the administration of the institution would relinquish some of its power to the teams which reside within the middle and bottom tiers of the hierarchy because their unique perspectives better enabled them to make decisions that would benefit the community as a whole.

Yet, as leadership is shared, even in service to those who occupy the top tier of a hierarchy, so too can power be shared. The coexistence of hierarchy and communal leadership allows for a shift to a shared sense of power—or a power in numbers borne of collective effort and shared responsibility. Rather than an individual's having power over another, an individual shares power with others and has power within the hierarchy to share in decision-making. Therefore, power shifts from the few at the top of narrow hierarchies to others within. Power is **not** designated *over* others but *with* others. Individuals own their power over themselves as opposed to having supervisors of authority figures exercising power over them. Just as leadership shifts from residing only with the authority at the top in a narrow hierarchy to a shared sense of leadership so too does power shift from the few at the top to a more shared sense of power.

To consider power as shared is also to share that access to the privileges, material benefits and interests, the posturing of values, beliefs, and ideas, decision-making and overall creativity that determine the direction and consequential success or failure of an institution. When those occupying the higher tiers of a hierarchy have greater access to the above features, then they have power over others within the hierarchy. The redistribution of power may seem daunting because it means that some who have power must be willing to have less and some who have limited power will have more. The challenge is even more daunting when considering who decides who gets to establish the beliefs and values, who gets to partake in the decision-making, and who gets to benefit from the privilege, material and interests that are an outcome of the restructuring of power, especially in institutions so laden with narrow hierarchies. Finally, it is important to recognize that changing the self is not enough because structural change is needed in institutions laden with power differentials. The change in power starts with the self and then is extended to the institution.

Communal leadership changes notions of responsibility concerning leadership by encouraging a form of social justice in which all perspectives are heard and all voices considered as organizational decision makers. For example, a team member expressed encouragement for everyone to express their knowledge, views and opinions, and most importantly, not be afraid to use their voice. It also broadens decision making, allowing for inclusive leadership. That said, the research reveals that it is errant to assume that communal leadership eliminates or limits domination and a steep hierarchy with so few people at the top. While the focus of communal leadership is that of making connections

with people and sharing decision-making, situations sometimes dictate a return to the hierarchical model—further emphasizing this co-existent leadership approach.

Communal leadership also changes notions of responsibility by establishing a balance between hierarchy and communal leadership. It requires a leader's connection with the community even within the advancement through the layers of the hierarchy. This was evident with the team members of the Business and Administrative Department at the Community College as they used their relational networks to stay linked within the hierarchy of their individual department. The Associate Vice President encouraged the relational connections that allowed an interchange of ideas which made the individuals in the department feel that their voices were heard and their needs were met. On the other hand, as was evident throughout the research study, it was more difficult for the department team as a whole to utilize communal leadership outside the department or in the presence of the Executive Vice President to whom the Associate Vice President reports and who engaged the group in the conference call noted earlier. For example, a photo selected for the dialogue session highlighted four departments coming together for institutional decision making, and, as explained by a team member, the interchange was not communal overall. As evidenced in the photo and the team member's reflection, just because a group of people come together to make a connected decision does not mean the engagement between and among departments is communal. Furthermore, this photo and the subsequent dialogue showcased the ability for the team to work communally with one another in their immediate department, yet the findings indicate it more challenging to do so when engaging members of other departments. Therefore, the responsibility of

leadership overall is expanded beyond the individual and beyond the individual department to those departments outside.

This research reinforces the belief that members of a community feel the need for a defined hierarchy despite their obvious need for shared ownership in leading that community because hierarchy is, to many members, so embedded in our modern culture that it is hard for those members to imagine leadership any other way. As one team member described in the study, The Community College is like a chess game wherein each member of this particular team is a pawn working to protect both the **game** and the **people**—the dominant chess pieces (the rooks, queen, or king)—in higher tiers of the hierarchy. This defined role in the hierarchy still allows an opportunity for leadership even if it is in service to administrators because team members have a defined role to keep “the game safe and fair” while all “players are being accountable in their moves.”

Almost every system in our culture is set up this way—family, school, and business; certain individuals command and demand a higher position. It is the nature of patriarchal hierarchy to assume that most people need to be told what to do or to have an authority figure making decisions for the collective. As a result, to a great extent, people are not granted, either by the self or others, to lead or share leadership. Sharing leadership requires responsibility and, as this study reveals, some people may want leadership responsibility while others may not. Furthermore, one team member reinforced this belief in saying that leadership is not for everyone, and some people may not want “to stick their neck out” while others may opt for leadership, accepting the tensions and boundaries that come with it as necessary.

### **Tensions and Boundaries**

These tensions and boundaries in a community are the result of both social factors and community members vying for the leadership role. Some members of a community perceive very real and unbreachable boundaries, while others do not. Consequently, tensions emerge.

As this research analysis revealed, some team members felt that gender, personality types or styles, and individual strengths and weaknesses all influenced leadership or an individual's impulse to assume a leadership role. Clearly, some individuals view gender as a social boundary. For example, one team member felt that the overwhelming presence of women in the department created a social boundary to communal leadership, which might explain the limited engagement in the research study of the only male member of the department who left one study session and one meeting early and had limited contact with the researcher throughout the study overall.

It becomes evident that such social boundaries can both foster and prevent emerging communal leadership. The research revealed that unquestioned acceptance of hierarchy is another social boundary that prevents emerging communal leadership. The history of hierarchy as the prevalent leadership system utilized within modern culture is identified first by patriarchy in the family and extends to the limitations of leadership isolated historically to men on top.

On the other hand, social engagement can foster communal leadership when that social engagement models this same primary social structure: the family. The sharing component in the family social structure becomes a modeled idea of community and care

for others. One example provided throughout the research was when one team member's father passed and all other members attended the services. This was also evident in the reflection of a team member who lost her husband, and individuals from various departments within The Community College visited her in this time of loss. As a result, extending social boundaries in such a caring way fosters emerging communal leadership.

Utilizing hierarchy alone, especially when multiple communities must work as one, tests boundaries, exacerbate tensions, and threatens the communal leadership model. However, utilizing elements of communal leadership, such as recognition of social obligation to others and elements of family and caring, with a more flexible, inclusive hierarchical system of leadership can not only limit these tensions and boundaries, but also result in an integrated model that takes the best elements of communal leadership within a recognized hierarchical system. Social cohesion promotes a sense of well being that enhances the likelihood of achieving the goals of the organization, while promoting equality for all. When leadership is not narrowed to hierarchies, but is shared with all, the tensions and boundaries that typically exist can be decreased which improves the relationships within and outside organizational departments.

The foundation of communal leadership entails the coming together with others for discourse related to individual and collective concerns. It is necessary to change the leadership culture to be more inclusive of shared responsibility. If individuals and department teams embrace notions of shared leadership and exhibit genuine care and concern for others, then the impact of the culture can be assumed and accepted as more socially just, thereby eliminating some of the tensions caused within narrowed

hierarchies. This was highlighted in a collage created by a team member in which different animals were used to represent a part of a community working together. The team member reflected on the different backgrounds of different people working together to achieve one goal. The awareness of how hierarchy influences leadership culture also builds awareness around alternatives to these hierarchies, again limiting the tensions and boundaries surrounding leadership within organizations overall.

### **An Assumption of Communal Leadership**

As an alternative to the cycle of repetitious behavior, in which leaders oftentimes hinder others and perpetuate unjust social systems of power and domination by repeating cultural norms, communal leadership is assumed to be more humane. Embracing communal leadership changes cultural expectations to be more inclusive in order for leaders to share responsibility and care and concern for others. For example, during each of the observations of the staff meetings, the program review, and the conference call with the Vice President, the Associate Vice President engaged her team members encouraging each to update the team and share their perspectives of the department and their individual responsibilities for that time. Every member was encouraged to share with the team as a whole and to assist one another if possible. As the traditional hierarchical leadership system inadvertently repeats patterns of power and domination, these ideologies create habits that seem the norm and seem acceptable because they go unquestioned. Communal leadership questions unjust ideologies which perpetuate these patterns of power and domination. Understanding these leadership systems further encourages a need for hierarchy and communal leadership to coexist, shifting the focus

from a dominant hierarchy where only a few can lead to more collaborative, focus on social justice—equality for all.

### **Revisiting Theory**

The theory of connected knowing focuses on collaboration and individual responsibility. Each individual is responsible for change, and this change requires collaborative implementation through which all parties feel valued. Navigating multiple communities can create tensions, yet should not necessarily pose a threat to communal leadership. Unfortunately, one team member highlighted the challenge of navigating multiple communities by reflecting on the department being viewed as either a “necessary evil” or “partner” depending on the goals of others and as a result resolved to consider others’ goals and how the team member’s department can best assist with those goals, all the while maintaining their own integrity. *Only* through the understanding of others—their visions, their personalities, and their reluctance to or desire for change—can people achieve a sense of connected knowing that is essential to community in which the perspectives of others impact leaders in their decision making.

Shared leadership theory, a circular process, allows all individuals to partake in the leadership process because it does not follow patterns of narrow hierarchy. Utilizing this theory, the focus is on bottom-up, horizontal, or circular communication, thereby ensuring a sense of shared leadership by encouraging participation. The research study provides evidence that, only through ongoing, circular communication, do community members remain aware of those moments when their own call to leadership emerges. For instance, within the research study, one team member reflected that the team comes

together to meet goals, sharing workloads when one member is overloaded or needs personal time. Communal leadership encourages social change and the notion that leadership is shared and able to connect people to one another in caring and loving ways.

Social connection theory of shared responsibility challenges individuals to see current hierarchical leadership as socially unjust to a great extent making individuals responsible for collective systems shared with others. It transforms the nature of leadership, consequently making it more inclusive and allowing for the recognition and sharing of individual strengths and weaknesses for collective betterment. One team member's collage revealed this seemingly self-evident truth that is too often lost in hierarchical structuring: it is necessary to share strengths and to appreciate the unavoidable dyad of multiple people working together and being part of a team. Connected knowing, shared leadership, and social connection theory of shared responsibility extends responsibility beyond the self, in unification with others, for the coalescing in leadership from narrow hierarchies to more communal which shares responsibility for changing dominator beliefs, institutions, and behaviors.

### **Transformation**

In order to challenge the socialization of ideologies and culture surrounding hierarchical leadership, transformation is necessary. To question hierarchy as the dominant system of leadership requires a collective commitment to challenge power and domination. Transformation requires a change in the nature of leadership and within individuals looking to engage communal leadership. No longer can individuals and/or individual departments focus their leadership efforts within "the self" and within the

immediate departments alone. For example, when one team member transferred to a new department, another team member saw a leadership vacuum and stepped forward to mentor her colleague as to responsibilities pertaining to her new position—even though it was not the caring team member’s responsibility nor did she feel bound by the hierarchical structures of either department. Such moments attest to the fact that boundaries of leadership need to be expanded beyond the self. In order for true transformation to take place, the team would need to engage others more inclusively, outside the direct community.

Communal leadership recognizes the constant possibility of transformation. If the organization and the individuals within the organization are to be forward thinking, they must commit to change through creative collaboration. The theory of transformational leadership emphasizes the need to transform the organization to meet individual and collective goals and needs, within a community. Transformation occurs when the pieces of the whole work together for the equality of all. This interconnectivity identifies the need for individuals to connect to others outside their personal spheres and their departments if they are to maximize the potentials to be drawn from a shared leadership model.

Transforming leadership from hierarchy to community challenges individuals to engage in a collaborative investigation of the human experience in order to identify the goals and objectives of the community, to share ideas, to creatively challenge and address assumptions and problems, and to achieve a common vision of the community’s future. Working collectively with others and transformation are important when teams have to

work outside their individual departments. As noted throughout the research study, transformation may prove to be a bigger challenge because not all teams or individuals within those teams want to work with others and/or share in collective decision-making.

### **Sense of Self and Belonging**

The research also reveals how communal leadership changes notions of responsibility in the self as that “sense of self” pertains to belonging to a community. Paradoxically, communal leadership changes notions of responsibility in the self by allowing more selves to emerge as a leader. Communal leadership does not fail to recognize the importance of individuality. A team member reiterated this point in reflection to a collage by expressing a need for balance between her/his sense of self and her/his obligations to the collective, acknowledging that the varied images in the collage depicted illustrated the necessity to be different while recognizing obligation to share with others.

On the other hand, the photovoice collages, pictures, and shared dialogue reveal that communal leadership asks individuals to share leadership, not only within their direct department, but also with departments outside their own. Team members are not asked to set aside individual needs and goals for the sake of the institution, thereby muting the voices of team members except for those at the top, but are asked to share these needs and goals with others and to allow others the same opportunity.

Communal leadership challenges conformity, destruction of individuality, and the formation of dichotomies when organizations dare to question old hierarchies and utilize communal leadership because more members are able to exhibit leadership and share it

with others. The strengths are embraced and weaknesses addressed as team members engage in a shared leadership model; the result is shared decision-making based on the team's collective labors. Individuals utilizing communal leadership do not sacrifice their creative impulse or lose their individual commitment to serving humanity for the sake of competition. Instead, the opportunity to build a sense of belonging is emphasized through the sense of self shared by the team.

Leadership that has been limited by hierarchy creates a lack of human awareness of the capacity for self as leader. When so few people can occupy a top-tiered leadership position because of narrowed hierarchies, then the awareness and willingness to be viewed and/or to view the self as leader is compromised. Throughout the study, two team members explained that they had never considered themselves to be leaders while five others described themselves as leaders even though their position title did not define them in specific leadership positions. Thus, the study reveals that communal leadership requires individual recognition of leadership potential. Very few people recognize an alternative to the historical system of hierarchy which is embedded in the modern culture. Communal leadership can be described by individuals working together towards common goals. Leaders emerge depending on individual expertise and the specific needs of the group. A basic truth emerges in communal leadership: members of a community bring with them strengths and weaknesses that can foster both an ability to lead and a sense of community built around leadership. Thus, a community member fulfills both individual needs and the needs of a community with his or her unique contributions.

The obligation to acknowledge that capacity requires a shift in individual perception. A spiritual transformation is necessary for individuals to build awareness of the capacity of self as leader. Traditional hierarchies box individuals into established positions which can diminish the strengths and exaggerate weaknesses of those individuals. In order to recognize and build a sense of belonging within community requires a sort of transformation, from the inside out. It requires a change from competition, scarcity, and market forces to more caring, loving, and ethical leadership. This change is a challenge in current society because the unwavering culture of narrow hierarchies is overwhelming and convinces individuals that few can occupy leadership positions within hierarchies.

In the study, this kind of transformation took place with the staff team due to an awareness of a leadership alternative. Many team members expressed recognition of their role of leadership when presented with an enhanced awareness that they sometimes forsake adherence to narrowed roles in the hierarchy by engaging a more communal model in moments of challenge and change. Recognizing their own strengths and weaknesses and naming an alternative to hierarchical leadership allowed them to emerge as a leader at times most appropriate to their strengths as leaders. Viewing leadership as communal and recognizing the role of the individuals in this alternate system of leadership makes communal leadership possible. There is a great need for this – in order for communal leadership to be sustained in our culture, then groups should come together to provide a desired future, which means they have to communicate and be clear in their

intent to come together in the first place. Furthermore, they have to be willing to work with and acknowledge the community of others.

The transformation of leadership and individuals within the systems of leadership is only possible when, as Block stated, we can “produce deeper relatedness across boundaries,” which the team recognized as a flaw in their idea of communal leadership. Again, the photo dialogue generated a sense of recognition of this point when four different departmental teams came together to try to resolve a challenge. This photo and accompanying dialogue provided evidence that groups of people can congregate with what seems to be one goal and yet not engage communally in leadership because adequate dialogue is not shared nor is decision-making. The images of that meeting emphasize departmentalized seating choices that erected furniture boundaries that paralleled individual departmental goals, not shared purpose. If the staff team is to change the nature of leadership, then they would need to push boundaries to be more inclusive of others’ capacities and gifts, in doing so creating a sense of belonging.

Creating a sense of belonging includes ethics of care and love for the self and others. Recognizing the possibilities for utilizing all strengths and weaknesses within a group is a key component in the self as leader in expanding leadership beyond the confines of the existing hierarchy. Valuing the expertise of the self and others, and creating a need for others, creates a sense of belonging. Examples of this are showcased throughout the theme of family/care. Several team members expressed care and respect for one another, the need to share common goals and needs, and as one member specifically stated, “human activity that comes from the heart.” Also, acknowledging the

connections with others and working beyond known and comfortable boundaries creates a sense of belonging in community. To understand the self and identify connections with others are both required in the creation of the sense of belonging within a community. Ultimately, a sense of belonging within community is established when members seek and share love, care, ethics, and transformation within leadership and hierarchy.

### **The Promotion of Communal Leadership**

It is when communal leadership exists, is more clearly defined, and is characterized through working models, that the opportunity of promoting communal leadership as an alternative to narrowly structured hierarchies becomes possible. The research study reveals that communal leadership can be promoted as an alternative to narrowly structured hierarchies in several ways. First, accepted notions of leadership have to be redefined to be more inclusive in order to embrace a multitude of leaders with a multitude of strengths and weaknesses. Next, leaders need to be recognized and rewarded throughout the hierarchy and not just those in privileged positions on top. Members must restructure boundaries so that competition, communication, and leadership are shared both within and outside of established boundaries. The dialogue revealed that team members recognized fluid boundaries within their work community, but that fluidity was lost when engaging another department. Finally, communal leadership can be promoted as an alternative to narrowly structured hierarchies by shifting positions and/or boundaries in hierarchy to collaboration with people sharing common goals.

Care within society overall is too seldom embraced or appreciated, in part because the hierarchical leadership that pervades society sees limited benefit in humanitarian intent. Care, love, and ethics in leadership require a change in culture to value these characteristics which are essential in communal leadership. A co-existence in culture between hierarchy and communal leadership is necessary in order for leadership to be more inclusive and socially just in order to ensure that everyone's voice is heard and everyone's strengths are used in leadership. This change is hard to imagine because hierarchy is ingrained in the fabric of our current leadership culture. More importantly, some people don't want to sacrifice their position within the hierarchy for the sake of a more inclusive approach to working with others.

Unfortunately, steep hierarchies narrowly define leadership and sometimes negatively influence the communities within the current system. When forced to work together, communities want to impose a new hierarchy as they engage in unconscious negotiations to see which community emerges as the leader. In contrast, communal leadership can be described as organizing and meeting the needs of the collective based on varying personal and group values. The leader has influence in relation to others. Thus, amenable environment, just practices, and reciprocal support begin to emerge as a multilateral convergence of communal leadership.

Addressing challenges collectively requires individual and group sacrifices which result in gains of a communal nature, acting as a complimentary element to steeper hierarchy. A community emerges when a set of human behaviors serve the larger good. These human behaviors include: mutual purpose, reciprocated respect, openness to

different perspectives, appreciation of the importance of partnership-oriented thinking, and interconnectedness.

If individuals were to embrace the shift in attitudes and behaviors concerning leadership that so overwhelmingly characterize society, then social change would occur. Learning and engaging characteristics that define communal leadership, when enacted, are a way to embolden social change engaging communal leadership that challenges and seizes the current hierarchical systems of leadership.

### **Characteristics of Communal Leadership**

The research analysis of leadership characteristics reflects the responses of the team members in the study and suggests that leadership can be “gendered”—but only in a limited sense. The leadership characteristics identified by the staff team within the study characterized communal leadership one way and to a great extent describe “gendered” leadership within a hierarchy differently. Yet no profound “gendered gap” related to an individual’s ability to approach leadership in a communal way is evident, despite the fact that ten of the eleven team members were women. Most importantly, the data suggests that, to a great extent, neither women nor men engage communal leadership overall.

The analysis of characteristics are important because, in order to talk about the co-existence of hierarchy with communal leadership, there needs to be a way to describe what is meant when talking about a shift in leadership. Characterizing communal leadership allows for team members to identify what it takes to be more communal. The research study concluded that there is no conclusive list of characteristics to describe communal leadership. Yet the characteristics provide a snap shot of what it takes to work

communally with others. More importantly, three characteristics—empathy, fairness, and responsiveness—emerged as the commonly accepted characteristics of communal leadership, each of which has direct corollary to the ethics of care that theorists view as essential to the communal leadership model.

It can be concluded that in order for hierarchy and communal leadership to coexist, there needs to be a shift in the way leadership is engaged. Clearly the descriptors of communal leadership provide a starting point for leadership to be considered differently, especially as it can and, at least to a certain extent, does coexist with hierarchy.

### **Education**

As this research has established, humans view hierarchy as a necessity, yet communal leadership can provide a more humane approach to leadership. However, how do we provide a framework to educate others to the possibility of communal leadership, especially as institutions are laden with domination and power instilled by narrow hierarchies? This research may be proof that the framework already exists in higher education, but as economics and an infusion of a corporate model on academic systems impact all corners of society, even academia in its impulse to research and explore all avenues of intellectual development is being reigned in to appease those who argue that education is solely an avenue to occupational readiness. Thus, the pursuit of knowledge becomes, instead, the pursuit of knowledge designed to develop the next generation of patriarchal leaders, not a communal leadership norm for society. In its freest form, academics is connected with the ideal of freedom in the pursuit of knowledge. At the

highest rungs of American education, the voices of many are shared and listened to, while power and domination are minimal as the rigid leadership models that exist in elementary school—with the stern taskmaster controlling wayward minds—increasingly gives way to greater freedom of choice for students in choosing academic pathways—and instructors who are a more benevolent match for the students' individual temperaments. By the time, students migrate through high school and undergraduate programs, those who pursue graduate degrees increasingly find a communal leadership model wherein professor-led seminars often allow the students greater power in shaping the tone and direction of their research and educational efforts. Thus, the key to educating others as to the possibilities of communal leadership might already be found in master- and doctoral-level programs that abound in the U.S. Not only is there a shift in sharing leadership, there is also a responsibility for the sharing of power and an elimination of domination over others. Yet even that model is threatened when economic and accrediting bodies impose the hierarchal leadership model on the academic domain. Thus, the very people who could propagate the communal leadership model are stifled in that quest.

Even though some students are privileged to embark on higher education in a more autonomous setting, those who cannot or do not have limited power over communal decision-making. Furthermore, as institutions are influenced more readily by corporate interests and ideologies, the communal and/or creative decision-making, as the most important component of communal leadership, is prohibited. In addition, it creates a power differential in which those lower within the hierarchy sacrifice their interests, material benefits, and their overall access to power. Creating domination, and further

establishing a system of haves and have nots, results in a reluctance to engage communally with others for fear of losing the control over others for the sake of higher tiered hierarchical benefits and interests, usually representative of material gains and further power and control over others.

Communal leadership entails the active engagement of ongoing critical thinking in education and in that engagement; the possibility of forming an educational model for teaching communal leadership can be achieved. Critical thought can be taken for granted in narrow hierarchies because decisions are often times made for individuals located below the higher tiers in a hierarchy—meaning voices silenced. If critical thinking is limited, then creativity and collective decision making is stifled. Educating individuals in the means for engaging communal leadership allows the collective voices to be considered and engages individuals at all levels within a hierarchy.

That said, a paradigm shift is necessary in order to train individuals and institutions overall for communal leadership. The main goal would be to encourage people to share decision-making and creative endeavors with others. Recognition for the interconnectedness of individuals is necessary in order to train individuals for this kind of leadership. To a great extent, this presupposes a challenge to the ideologies and culture established by the current leadership system in which only a few can lead and those few dominate and have power over others. Institutions, and their governing bodies as a whole, would need to shift paradigms from scarcity and competition, capitalism, bureaucracy, and ultimately power and domination to a more inclusive leadership model.

In terms of the psychological shift this will entail, individuals would have to be responsible for the authority they hold over themselves as opposed to someone else being in a position of authority over them. Asking individuals to hold this sort of responsibility requires a commitment to authority that some people may not want to commit to. Just as engaging communal leadership requires individuals to share leadership; it also requires individuals to engage in a position of authority, even over oneself, that may not be in line with the desires of that individual.

Furthermore, governing institutions and those individuals who hold governing positions would need to be willing to relinquish control and share power with others. Psychologically, this could be a challenge because the predominant leadership culture, one historically designed to dominate and control others, constitutes a need for one to strive to be in authority over others, especially as elements of privilege designate this position. Generally, if one is privileged to rule over others, it seems difficult to imagine the relinquishing of power and authority to those that occupy lower tiers in a hierarchy, especially as privileges—material and otherwise—influence the decision-making.

As the research reveals, spiritual transformation is a core element in communal leadership. To speak of the spiritual transformation required in individuals who choose to engage communal leadership requires a change in attitude towards leadership. The meaning making system established in education would transition from hierarchy to community in much the same way that students in American public education emerge from the rigid, highly structured learning models of youth to the more communal models in undergraduate and graduate education. However, individuals would need to be more

open minded to sharing leadership with others. The traditional system of education, with the teacher at the top of the classroom tier of hierarchy, the principal at the top of the tier in the school, and an administration at the top tier of the system overall would need to be structured less as a hierarchy and more communally to encourage the sharing of decision-making, but the model for that shift, in part, already exists in the higher reaches of academia. Furthermore, a spiritual change –willingness for individuals to care and love one another—would need to exist in order for communal leadership to exist. These kinds of changes require individuals to be open to a change in attitude, outlook and meaning making systems which have prepared them for the systems of hierarchy so prevalent in society. Because so few scale the educational ladder to its highest rungs, their familiarity with such a model does not currently exist. Yet, this research reveals that Descarte’s famous aphorism—“I think; therefore, I am”—has relevance here. Because we can conceive of a communal leadership model based on evidence-based research such as the photovoice study that is a cornerstone of this research, communal leadership does exist. It is left to those who can educate others as to its existence to help it thrive.

### **Conclusion**

The research revealed some contradictions related to accessibility of a communal leadership model, the role the individual plays in that model, and the ability of a communal leadership structure to exist in exclusion of elements of the more hierarchical model. As evidenced throughout the research, communal leadership exists with the acceptance of hierarchy. There is also an acceptance of the culture and ideology of

leadership stemming from the mechanistic system of leadership and at the same time a longing for care, shared decision-making, and interconnectivity between team members.

Communal leadership is viewed by some team members as inherent while others view it as a conscious decision. The research is not conclusive to either of these opinions. In fact, the research shows that these two perceptions exist simultaneously. Some team members described themselves as inherently communal and therefore viewed their leadership as such; others expressed the belief that communal leadership emerges from a conscious decision to engage communal leadership. Perhaps this is why team members felt they were more communal with others in their own department and were more challenged to be communal with others outside their direct department. Furthermore, some individuals chose not to engage leadership at all, which was evidenced by the change in supervisory roles made within the department during the research study.

Another contradiction within the research study is the evident recognition that a hierarchical model limits creativity, stifles communication, and limits evidence of caring, yet the ongoing acceptance of this patriarchal model, even though it challenges notions of social justice and communal leadership because it limits leadership to a few at the top, and especially as a position more often than not occupied by a man. Perhaps this only came up because the top leadership at the college is a man, yet the leadership of the immediate department and ten out of eleven team members within the department are women. Thus, this acceptance suggests a need for hierarchy, while utilizing the more humanist elements of communal leadership at the same time. The challenge is that both

hierarchy and the acceptance of patriarchy coexist with the evidence of or the longing to be engaged in a communal leadership realm.

Not only do the acceptance of hierarchy and patriarchy challenge community, but there are other challenges to community noted throughout the research. Sharing the same goals and or striving for similar goals seemed to be a motivator to be communal. However, evidence suggests that the lack of communication around the sharing of goals challenged the sense of community in decision-making. When several teams were to come together for the sake of a shared goal and/or decision making, that engagement proved to be less than communal because teams were not aware of or were suspicious of one another's goals.

Moreover, established boundaries challenge the ability of even willing participants to employ a communal model. This was evident within the department where clear evidence of communal leadership emerged, but was lacking when untested or unknown boundaries outside department challenged the notion of building a more global sense of community in leadership in department engagement with other organizational departments. Thus, recognition of boundaries—and the level of rigidity of those boundaries—is important in the development of communal leadership. It is necessary for teams to communicate and share their boundaries with one another in order to better serve other communities. The research team within the study recognized their boundaries within their own department and at the same time recognized that other teams have these boundaries.

There are limitations of being communal while navigating within a predominant system of hierarchy. Motives and goals of others influenced how groups share goals and decision-making. Also, the steepness of the hierarchy limits the individual's ability to be communal because an individual's or a team's position within the hierarchy limited their ability to work with others. Perceived competition for authority—either based on the maintenance of position within the hierarchy or on recognition gained by the higher tier leadership within the hierarchy—limits the emergence of communal leadership.

Another challenge to building a sense of community necessary in the emergence of communal leadership is the endorsement of hierarchy even as power and domination exist. The overall department team within the study described themselves as being communal while at the same time acknowledging that the college overall is a hierarchy and engages in communal leadership in social engagement but not necessarily in ceding decision-making to individuals who are not at the pinnacle of the organizational chart. This is a challenge to the building of a sense community in decision-making because the members must navigate their community and a more rigid hierarchy at the same time.

If communal leadership is to coexist with hierarchy, it needs to be fostered by individuals within the community—especially those in extant leadership roles. As one member of the staff team noted, the supervisor has to support communal leadership in order for it to work. Furthermore, individuals—regardless of position on an organizational chart—have to recognize and/or to want to be leaders in order for communal leadership to work. Again, another team member suggested that not all team

members want a leadership role within the department. This could challenge the notion of shared concern and care, decision-making, and leadership overall.

A balance needs to exist between hierarchy and community in leadership. As one team member noted within the study, “sometimes community won’t do what needs to be done so someone has to have the authority to step up and make a decision.” Again, there are some individuals within a team who are content without a leadership role. On the other hand, there are individuals who strive for leadership but are thwarted in that effort by narrowly defined roles. Finally, as hierarchy is accepted, if the top-tier leader respects or treats team members as equals, communal leadership needs to be encouraged as an alternative to steep hierarchy.

Shared decision-making and goals, interconnectivity, and inclusion are necessary in the engagement of communal leadership and the potential for educating even reluctant participants in a communal leadership model does exist. In order for communal leadership to coexist with hierarchy, in order for it to be embraced, encouraged, and engaged, the need for understanding as to its parameters is paramount. To lead communally is to share with, care for, appreciate, and love for one another. As one proponent of a more communal world—a world inhabited by communities of caring—notes: “A proper community, we should remember also, is a commonwealth: a place, a resource, an economy. It answers the needs, practical as well as social and spiritual, of its members—among them the need to need one another” (Berry, 2002, p. 63).

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Qualitative Study**

Motivated by my specific leadership experiences, I determined to conduct an ethnographic study to explore whether an alternative leadership system to narrow hierarchies exists. The qualitative method provided me with an opportunity to observe, interview, and “hang around” a team of eleven people in the Business and Administrative Services Department at a Community College who contend that they utilize communal leadership. Specifically, this research study analyzed the perceived communal leadership of the department to better understand the effects of community and hierarchy on their leadership culture and the evidence which supports their belief that they engage a communal leadership model.

The main question this research engages is “What is communal leadership?” This main question encompasses a number of questions, such as “What does it mean to talk about communal leadership and what are its characteristics?” “Are there current examples and how do we recognize them?” “What are the conflicts involved in a practice of communal leadership?”

A general definition of culture isolates the behaviors and beliefs characteristic of a particular social or ethnic group as the definitive elements. So this cultural study entailed the study of those particular behaviors and beliefs within a particular social and/or ethnic group around the concepts of community and leadership. Social forces shape this. In her

research, Margaret Finders suggests that “our understanding of what it means to be part of a family, part of a community, part of a classroom, is socially defined” (1992, p. 60). A basic premise of this research is that, to a great extent, behavior and beliefs of leadership within a department of eleven team members are socially defined and influenced by the culture and environment within the community college they navigate.

The study of this leadership culture, based on the above premise, entailed a qualitative approach using observation and interviews of the eleven individuals navigating their everyday community. In her book, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*, Glesne (2011) defines qualitative research as “a type of research that focuses on qualities such as words or observations that are difficult to quantify and that lend themselves to interpretation or deconstruction” (p. 283). Qualitative research requires a level of self-exploration from both the researcher and the participants in constructing a better understanding of the culture within which they traverse. “In the process of looking at real lives lived with all the richness and messiness, compassion and contradiction that life involves, we can begin to recover our own buried assumptions” (Finders, 1992, p. 60). This qualitative research allowed for an exploration of the leadership and community conventions which both researcher and participants use to circumnavigate their worlds within a community college.

### **Ethnography**

This research study incorporated two main methods: (1) ethnography by way of observations of an existing communal leadership culture and (2) community-based

participatory research (CBPR) specifically utilizing photovoice to co-create narratives with professionals in an existing movement of leadership.

First, a definition and interpretation of ethnography is essential to consider.

“*Ethno* means people or culture; *graphy* means writing or describing. *Ethnography* then means writing about or describing people and culture, and firsthand observation and participation in a setting or situation” (Ellis, 2004, p. 26). “While living and working in a local community, an ethnographer participates in everyday life, observing and recording events and stories” (Finders, 1992, p. 60). In accordance with Finders’ research, this research study was multi-faceted. If, as research suggests, “Ethnographic fieldwork includes everything you do to gather information in a setting, especially hanging around, making conversation, and asking questions, but also formal interviewing and other information gathering” (Ellis, 2004, p. 26), this study parallels those practices.

Throughout this research project, ethnography allowed for the opportunity to learn about and share in a team’s work environment, specific to the topic of communal leadership from their unique perspectives.

### **Gaining Access**

Situating oneself and gaining access to a community as a researcher can be one of the biggest challenges. This process can take considerable time and energy. Engaging the gatekeepers of information within a community, establishing trust and rapport with potential participants within a community, and identifying/understanding the specific role of the researcher are all potential hurdles for ethnographers. First and foremost, “gaining

access to data requires that researchers establish roles and relationships that participants find acceptable” (Harrington, 2003, p. 616).

In order to identify a team of people to participate in the study and to gain access, I consulted with the Associate Vice President for Instruction at the Community College regarding teams on campus that he felt worked, at least in some practices, communally. He suggested five staff teams, but noted the department of Business and Administrative Services as the one team who, over the preceding twelve months, was in leadership transition and might provide the best opportunity for the study since early indications of a new leadership member suggested a more communal attitude to completing necessary tasks. Thus, I contacted the Associate Vice President for Business and Administrative Services to ask if she would consider participating in a study about communal leadership with her team.

After an initial meeting to review the specifics of the study and after receiving the approval of the Executive Vice President who has direct authority over that department, I sent an email questionnaire to the entire staff team of the department of Business and Administrative Services. The two questions were: (a) Do you feel you work communally together with other members of your team? and (b) Do you describe the leadership environment within your department as communal? All eleven members of the staff team responded with “Yes” to both questions, so the Associate Vice President of the Business and Administrative Services Department and I agreed to move forward with the study. Once the Associate Vice President for Business and Administrative Services signed the letter of agreement, we set up a schedule to implement the study.

It quickly became evident that practicing honesty about the objectives of the particular research study and giving the participants enough information to understand their role in the research can help to establish the necessary trust and rapport for the researcher to gain access to the community within which he or she wishes to study. Gaining access to communities entails committing as both an observer and, most importantly, a participant within the community of study. Moreover, gaining access to communities takes time for the researcher to establish his or her role as researcher, to build rapport and trust with community members, and to establish the role of participants throughout the study.

In the first meeting with the staff team, I introduced myself as the researcher, offered a profile of the research focus, explained their role as participants, and asked for those interested in participating to give consent. All team members voluntarily consented in writing to participating in the research study. I followed up with a request to be invited to observe any of their meetings and/or departmental events. They all agreed with the request for open access.

### **Doing Ethnography**

Ethnographers utilize many methods to study specific cultures, and said methods are selected based on the overall research goal and on the decision as to the best way for a researcher to meet those goals. The studies listed below provide examples of specific methods used by researchers to obtain participant stories. The purpose of Weinberg's ethnography, *Leadership Development for Community Action: An Ethnographic Inquiry*, is "to understand the very personal process by which people begin to act and self-identify

as leaders” (2005, introduction). She uses targeted interviews with individuals “selected to ensure racial and ethnic as well as geographic diversity” (2005, introduction). This study echoed that practice.

In the study *Piecing Together the Fragments: An Ethnography of Leadership for Social Change in North Central Philadelphia 2004-2005*, Hufford and Miller explain, “We relied on participant-observation and interviews for this study” (2005, p. 9).

Grounding their methodology in the theory and related procedures of participatory action research allowed Morgan et al. (2010) to engage “participants in documenting and critically reflecting upon their everyday lives” (p. 33). In order to ground methodology, researchers incorporate structured surveys, qualitative interviews, observations, field notes, participant feedback, and group interviews—and such methods were all used in studies as means for capturing participants’ stories.

After intensive review of literature pertaining to community and leadership, I identified the team of eleven who maintained to engage communal leadership within their everyday work environment. During the course of the research study, I observed four departmental meetings, two staff meetings, a systems office meeting, and the program review. I also conducted two group observations of individuals within the staff team, individual face-to-face interviews with nine out of the eleven team members, and three email surveys with follow up correspondence with six of the eleven team members. Furthermore, I spent approximately 15 hours in informal observation with the staff team during department visits that I made throughout the course of the study.

I also conducted two specific photovoice activities with the entire team: an initial collage assignment asking participants to define what community means to them and a photo dialogue session in which team members were asked to take pictures of communal leadership at work around them, specifically to define, characterize, and then identify tensions surrounding it. They were then asked to narrate their own photos that addressed the prompt to capture members of the department working communally with others, yet what emerged was the recognition that this group's perception of communal leadership was tempered with less overt recognition of the perception of superior roles within the community and the inherent risk involved in daring to assume a leadership posture.

### **Data Analysis**

Themes are identified throughout the research and generally used to identify actions for change. Berg (2004) suggests:

In most studies, analysis involves creating categories or themes and then sorting answers to questions or statements from the fieldwork into these categories. The data are sorted into piles that share some broader characteristic (the theme or category name). After accomplishing this, you can then write a summary that captures the essence of each broader categorical characteristic. (p. 200)

Themes are identified as means for change within the particular community.

Participants' experiences and perspectives as revealed through photos, narratives, interviews, and observations are analyzed and coded for themes. These themes become the building blocks for action that constitute change for a community.

It is important to note that the initial analysis of the findings from the engagements throughout the research study reflects the fact that much of the research was

directed by the functions of the department under study and not as a controlled function of the study itself. Five predominant themes emerged from the research study: self as leader or experts in specific areas, family and care, necessity of hierarchy, tensions and boundaries, and community within the work environment. As defining communal leadership and identifying the characteristics were important research foci, I specifically asked for team-member feedback around these two subjects; however, I do not identify these as any of the main themes that naturally emerged throughout the research project.

Critical issues related to communal leadership became evident in these meetings and group observations—among these were the participants’ collective naiveté as to their own leadership role or ability, the familial sense of compassion and rivalry that exist in a community leadership model, the tensions that emerge when necessity dictates that two or more communities work in tandem, and the natural tendency to cede control to a designated leader.

### **Community-Based Participatory Research**

Using community-based participatory research as a methodology to study communities assumes that the partnership between community members/participants involved in the specific culture being studied and the researcher. Each community member navigates many communities within any one community. For example, as one community member studies her or his particular leadership community, that member is participating in many more communities at the same time. Finders postulates, “Borders intersect and overlap. No one is ever completely from one community. We are all active members in many communities that come already equipped with tacit rituals and rules:

ways of talking, acting, valuing, being in the world” (1992, p. 61). The observation of specific cultural norms within one community calls for participants to investigate other communities which influence the participation in the one. As the studies illustrate above, one method of research, successful in capturing specific idiosyncrasies of specific cultures, is photovoice. “When working with communities, photovoice methodology enables the researcher and community members to become co-learners, bridging cultural differences and equitably sharing expertise based on personal experience and professional knowledge” (Hergenrather, Rhodes, & Bardhoshi, 2009, p. 697).

The purpose of the study is to identify characteristics of communal leadership. For the sake of this research, communal leadership is defined as leadership that is shared in a group and unselfishly concerned for or devoted to the welfare of others. This qualitative study used community-based participatory research (CBPR) methodology, specifically photovoice. Community-based participatory research is an ethnographic methodology used to invoke action and change in a particular community while collaborating with members of the specific community. “One of the operative principles of action research is to inform and empower people to work collectively to produce some beneficial change” (Berg, 2004, p. 201).

The key to CBPR is the collaboration between the researcher and the community members for the sake of identifying change to better the overall community. “(CBPR) is a process to increase the value of research and knowledge for researchers and community members, to impact community well-being” (Hergenrather et al., 2009, p. 687). The research exemplified a practice of communal leadership, which is to say that even though

the initial research was collected by the researcher and then expanded to include participants, it is a communally collected body of knowledge within a community of leadership for the sake of growing together within a movement of communal leadership. “Based on a partnership between the researcher and community members/participants, community-based action research is a strategy to ensure that system or institutional change . . . is planned, contextually congruent, and proactive (not reactive)” (Averill, 2006, p. 3).

Utilizing community-based participatory research allowed for a more thorough investigation of current leadership culture, thereby encouraging positive social change. “In its present use, action research is one of the few research approaches that embraces principles of participation, reflection, empowerment, and emancipation of people and groups interested in improving their social situation or condition” (Berg, 2004, pp. 195–196). It is a collaborative approach which involves participants to undertake the gathering of information concerning current leadership and to analyze this information in hopes of changing current leadership culture. As Berg notes, it is an all-encompassing process which “focuses on methods and techniques of investigation that take into account the study population’s history, culture, interactive activities, and emotional lives” (2004, p. 197).

Furthermore, there are steps to completing community-based participatory research. “The basic action research procedural routine involves four stages: (1) identifying the research question(s), (2) gathering the information to answer the question(s), (3) analyzing and interpreting the information, and (4) sharing the results

with participants” (Berg, 2004, p. 197). Such a methodology provides structure to the research. “The fundamental idea behind these methods is to involve participants in the research process, securing their active role in identifying research priorities and empirically grounding the researcher’s conclusions in situations and contexts relevant to participants’ expressed concerns” (Averill, 2006, p. 3). The overall goal of this type of research is to improve the understanding and/or change the overall culture in which the participants traverse on a daily basis. “Thus, the goal... is to emancipate individuals and provide the environment in which they can generate new, freer possibilities for society. This process requires mutual respect, trust, and cooperation, and recognition of participants as experts” (Morgan et al., 2010, p. 32).

Engaging community-based participatory research to study leadership culture activates a goal for change. “As its name implies, action research is concerned with activity and change. It is undertaken for the sake of investigating practice, usually in concert with those working on the front lines, and improving that practice based on what is discovered” (Hatch, 2002, p. 31). This required a partnership between the team members involved in the leadership study and the researcher.

### **Photovoice**

The specific methodology for this research study of a leadership community was photovoice. As defined by Wang, Wu, Zhan, and Carovano (1998), “photovoice is a participatory action research strategy by which people create and discuss photographs as a means of catalyzing personal and community change” (p. 74). Furthermore, Wang and Burris (1997), the creators of photovoice methodology, explain:

Photovoice is a process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. It entrusts cameras to the hands of people to enable them to act as recorders, and potential catalysts for change, in their own communities. It uses the immediacy of the visual image to furnish evidence and to promote effective, participator means of sharing expertise and knowledge. (p. 369)

According to Wang and Pies, the photovoice concept is based on “the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and community-based approaches to documentary photography” (2004, p. 95). Wang and Burris (1997)

explain:

Photovoice has three main goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers,[community leaders and/or people who can be mobilized to make change]. In line with these goals, people can use photovoice as a tool for participatory research. Photovoice is highly flexible and can be adapted to specific participatory goals, different groups and communities . . . (p. 370)

The visual image is a critical factor in this case. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) contend that “with the proper tools, anyone can gradually perceive his or her personal and social reality as well as contradictions in it, become conscious of those personal perceptions, and deal critically with them” (p. 561). They go on to say that “Freire noted specifically that the visual image was one tool for enabling people to think critically about their community” (p. 561). Furthermore, “embedded in a Freirian context of problem-posing education, the images produced and the issues discussed and framed by people may stimulate social action” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 373).

The overall outcome of photovoice is to promote community action. The photovoice process necessitates a collaborative effort between the participants and the researcher to study the current community, analyze the outcomes, and encourage action for the betterment of the community. In her study, *Youth Participation in Photovoice as a Strategy for Community Change*, Wang (2006) “identifies a nine-step strategy to mobilize community action through the use of photovoice” (p. 149). These steps include these actions:

- (1) select and recruit a target audience of policy makers or community leaders, (2) recruit a group of photovoice participants, (3) introduce the photovoice methodology to participants, and facilitate a group discussion about cameras, power, and ethics (4) obtain informed consent, (5) pose initial theme/s for taking pictures, (6) distribute cameras to participants and review how to use the camera, (7) provide time for participants to take pictures, (8) meet to discuss photographs and identify themes, and (9) plan with participants a format to share photographs and stories with policy makers or community leaders. (pp. 149–152)

Photovoice is an ethnographic methodology that encourages collaboration between participants within a community and the researcher. Ultimately, the goal is for participants to take pictures of their everyday activities within their community, to select and narrate particular photos, to come together with other participants within the study to identify and discuss themes within their collective photos, then to suggest and encourage change for the sake of their community. In the qualitative review, *Photovoice as Community-Based Participatory Research*, Hergenrather et al. (2009) state, “The findings identified photovoice as a method for community members and researchers to provide equity in sharing ideas, encouraging collaborative learning, enhancing respect for community member knowledge, and facilitating change” (p. 695). Partnership in change

is the overarching goal for research incorporating photovoice methodology as community-based participatory research.

I adapted photovoice in this research study to a two-phase ethnographic methodology involving 1) assembled collages of images intended to represent what “community” means to the individual participant and 2) photo dialogue wherein participants took and assembled photos that then involved participants in a communal dialogue about perceived communal leadership within the department.

In using photovoice in this way, participants were asked to not only create collages, but also to take pictures of their everyday activities within their community, to select and narrate particular photos, then assemble those pictures in a collective representation for use when they came together with other participants within the study. During these sessions, they identified and discussed themes within their collective collages and photos, then suggested and encouraged change for the sake of their community. This methodology was chosen because it allowed me to examine the self-described behaviors and practices of a staff team, their experiences as leaders, and their perceptions of communal leadership. My goal was to identify the characteristics of communal leadership, as well as identify tensions that exist when teams of people work together communally within existing hierarchies.

### **Conclusion**

It was important to explore people’s experiences with leadership for the sake of engaging a movement of communal leadership. As Wang, Cash, and Powers (2000) suggest, “Participants may find photovoice an ideal methodology for creatively

documenting their environment and its resources. In doing so, they demonstrate their own ingenuity and imagination” (p. 88). The goal was to use participant photos to search the stories of professionals and their experiences with leadership and community and to present these findings in an honest and professional manner. The goal of the overall research project was to illuminate “stories borne of personal experience that don’t end with just retelling the personal experience, but instead are designed—through conscious, stylistic deployments of language—to connect readers to larger patterns of lived experience and cultural meaning” (Goodall, 2000, pp. 41–42). In that aim, the research connected the study participants—at least to some degree—to these larger realizations.