REALITIES, RISKS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES:
A CRITICAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY
AND AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATION OF BICULTURALITY
AMONG BLACK PROFESSIONAL WOMEN

A Dissertation
by
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Abstract

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Since entering the mainstream workforce as professionals in the 1970s, many Black women have faced both internal and external pressure to shift their personal appearance to make themselves more acceptable to White colleagues. The scholarship of Ella Bell (1990) paved the way for research on career-oriented Black women, and numerous scholars have subsequently contributed to theory on professional and working class Black women. Still, little substantive research exists on the personal appearance experiences of or pressures confronting Black professional women in higher education.

To begin filling that void, ten Black women academics employed in universities and professional institutions in the southeastern United States and the autoethnographic researcher participated in a qualitative study of personal appearance biculturality (also known as shifting) among Black professional women in the academy. Critical race theory (CRT),

critical race feminism, and autoethnography formed the theoretical framework for the study. This research sought to answer questions under articulated in the primary subject of academic scholarship: How have Black professional women described their experiences with shifting their personal appearance at work in the academy? What are the ways in which personal appearance shifting has manifested in Black professional women in academe? What have been the physical, emotional, and professional effects of personal appearance shifting on these Black women?

CRT's composite counter-story permitted research participants to voice their own realities with this phenomenon, and autoethnography enabled the researcher to disclose her experiences with personal appearance identity shifting as a full participant.

Findings revealed three major organizing themes for this study: Attitudes toward shifting, forms of shifting, and costs of shifting. Participants had two principal attitudes toward shifting their personal appearance at work in academe: They had choices and responsibilities. Their two choices centered on personal taste and convenience. Responsibilities involved professionalism, role modeling, and preservation of cultural practices. Their biculturality took two forms: variable and stable. Variable had to do with hair and dress which were easy to change; stable dealt with skin tone and body image which were more expensive, time consuming, or dangerous to alter. The effects of personal appearance shifting ultimately amounted to costs. These were either negative or positive. The loss of self-esteem or physical damage to the body was negative; gaining self-respect or the respect of students or colleagues was positive. Implications of the study and suggestions for future research are presented.

DEDICATION

To the feminine face of God

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Two pieces of literature have spoken to me throughout my life: Proverbs 29:18

"Where there is no vision the people perish" (American King James Version) and "The Road

Not Taken" by Robert Frost.

> Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
> And sorry I could not travel both
> And be one traveler, long I stood
> And looked down one as far as I could
> To where it bent in the undergrowth;
>
> Then took the other, as just as fair,
> And having perhaps the better claim,
> Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
> Though as for that the passing there
> Had worn them really about the same,
>
> And both that morning equally lay
> In leaves no step had trodden black.
> Oh, I kept the first for another day!
> Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
> I doubted if I should ever come back.
>
> I shall be telling this with a sigh
> Somewhere ages and ages hence:
> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference. (Lathem, 1975, p. 105)

At various times in my life, God has charged me with undertaking the unexpected.

Frequently, my acceptance of those charges has led me to travel less familiar paths in order

to accomplish those goals. In providing this dissertation topic, the Holy Spirit, whom I have

always seen as the feminine face of God, has challenged me to study an issue dear to my

heart and central to the life experiences of almost every Black woman. For that reason I

thank the Holy Spirit for also placing on this road those individuals who were able to share this vision and assist me in bringing it to fruition.

Kelly Clark/Keefe, Elizabeth Beaulieu, Thalia Coleman, and Precious Mudiwa, I deeply appreciate your willingness to serve and walk with me on the road "less traveled by" (Lathem, 1975, p. 105).

Alice Naylor, as the former Director of the Doctoral Program, you saw the road I was to take even before I did, and when I brought this vision to you, you gave me the much needed support and approval I craved. Thank you for letting me know it was OK to travel the road that "wanted wear" (Lathem, 1975, p. 105).

Mama and Daddy, my maternal grandparents, you always expected us to go as far as we could in school and to strive for excellence. No, Daddy, they have still not taught us EVERYTHING in school. Though you did not live to see the realization of your dreams for me, by setting the highest standards for all of your children, even during segregation, you have proven that you truly had vision. My mom; sister, Sandra; and niece Hnicole, you supported my own locking journey and my doctoral research. My niece, Sahsha Rhae James, you inspired me to conduct this study because at three years old you were already dissatisfied with your beautiful natural hair.

My husband Neal, you are the one who has *lived* with me throughout this process. I am grateful for your continued love and support.

My Sunday school class; Tiffany Gray, a beautiful young woman—period—not just "for a dark-skinned girl;" caring colleagues and students; Trish, Steve, and Kathy; April, Vickie, and Arnita; HPS Awards for Excellence; study and pilot study participants, I truly appreciate your help, support, and continued prayers.

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List of Abbreviations

Term	Description
CRT	Critical Race Theory
HBCU	Historically Black colleges and universities
PWI	Predominately White institutions
TWA	Teeny weenie Afro

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Perhaps more than any other group of Americans, Black women are relentlessly

pushed to serve and satisfy others and made to hide their true selves to placate White

colleagues, Black men, and other segments of the community. They shift to

accommodate differences in class as well as gender and ethnicity. From one moment

to the next, they change their outward behavior, attitude or tone, shifting "White,"

then shifting "Black" again, shifting "corporate," shifting "cool." And shifting has

become such an integral part of Black women's behavior that some adopt an alternate

pose or voice as easily as they blink their eyes or draw a breath—without thinking,

and without realizing that the emptiness they feel and the roles they must play may be

directly related. (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 7)

In the preceding excerpt, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) have introduced the

practice of identity shifting in which most Black professional women have regularly

indulged. Like many other Black women scholars, I have had a natural interest in exploring

issues that have profoundly affected women of my race. I have been particularly concerned

with contributing to a detailed understanding of personal appearance biculturality among

Black professional women in academe, an under examined issue in the larger scholarly

literature regarding race, gender, and ethnicity.

Background and Research Questions

Black women became bicultural upon entering white-collar professions in the 1970 (Bell, 1990). Two decades later Ella Bell examined identity shifting among career-oriented Black women in her seminal study of biculturality. Bell's research added to theory on Black women by revealing the necessity of shifting their identity back and forth to fit in at work and at home. Additionally, Bell looked at the costs of identity shifting in terms of role strain, stress, and isolation both on the job and in their communities. As a Black woman myself, I believe identity shifting is still a widespread, but not widely known lived experience among Black women. Nevertheless, as far as mainstream society is concerned, personal appearance shifting has remained one of Black women's best kept "race secrets" (Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Stein, 1999).

Subsequent to1990, identity scholarship has addressed how professional and working class Black women have negotiated their respective workspaces and the intense pressure many have felt to shift aspects of their identity in order to succeed (Banks, 2000; Bell & Nkomo, 1999, 2001; Caldwell, 1991; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Russell, Wilson, & Hall, 1992; Stanley, 2006). Of the numerous changes that Black women have made, personal appearance shifting has to be the most intimate, prevalent, and oppressive form of biculturality. This form of "shifting" has routinely led Black women to change their natural personal appearance to try to look less conspicuously different from their majoritarian peers and to try to avoid negative stereotypes in majoritarian work spaces (Bell & Nkomo, 1999, 2001; Bennett & Dickerson, 2001; Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lake, 2003; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Russell et al., 1992; Turner, 2002). Because very limited scholarship has existed on Black professional women's personal

appearance issues in the academy, these concerns have remained hidden and have not received the same degree of attention as several other critical race and gender issues. To bring them into the open, these questions guided the research:

1. How have Black professional women described their experiences with shifting their personal appearance at work in the academy?

2. What are the ways in which personal appearance shifting has manifested in Black professional women in academe?

3. What have been the physical, emotional, and professional effects of personal appearance shifting on these Black women?

<div align="center">Purpose</div>

The purpose of my qualitative research has been to explore these questions while giving voice to this marginalized group of academics and providing a platform from which we can together name our lived experiences with personal appearance shifting. Adopting an interpretive narrative research design framed conceptually by critical race theory (CRT) and critical race feminism, I have inquired into the narratives of 10 Black women professionals about shifting their personal appearance in the domain of higher education.

As foreshadowed above, my interest in this phenomenon has been grounded in my own experiences with shifting my personal appearance. Throughout my life I have repeatedly changed my appearance to make my looks more acceptable to Whites and then shifted Black again to appear more Afrocentric to Blacks. A primary aim of my research then has been to produce writing that evokes a sense of immediacy with personal appearance shifting among readers such that the personal informs and performs this complex group dynamic. Noted ethnographers Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner's (2006) use of the autoethnographical

approach provokes an immediate response in readers to whatever is occurring in the text. Instead of experiencing an event vicariously, autoethnography invites them "to feel it, taste it, sense it, and live in it" (p. 431). Likewise, using autoethnography to include my own experiences with personal appearance shifting requires me to harness subjective introspection as an avenue for illuminating the larger socio-cultural dimensions of this phenomenon and to enrich other scholars' comprehension of it. As a participant-observer examining my own lived experiences alongside those of my participants, I have endeavored "to inquire into [my] perspectives and interpretations and to shape new questions through re-examining [my] assumptions" (Glesne, 1999, p. 105). In this way I have optimized this important research opportunity by engaging in self-speculation as augmentation to more conventional narrative research, adding to the overall scholarship on Black women and furnishing a more comprehensive conception of the extra lengths to which some Black professional women have habitually gone to be accepted and successful in academe.

Significance of the Study

As a former Pre-k-12 administrator, I know firsthand the value of educating pre-service and in-service educational leaders at all levels and in all positions to be aware of sensitive culture specific issues, such as those related to personal appearance with regard to hair and skin tone bias that have the potential to become controversial in schools, communities, work environments, and individual lives. Such foreknowledge might have prevented the persecution and transfer of Ruth Sherman, the White third grade teacher who offended the parents of her students by reading Carolivia Herron's *Nappy Hair* to her Black and Hispanic students (Lester, 1999). Because what we do not know can harm those we are called to serve by preparing them for the future, it is important to train all educational leaders

to be culturally informed and sensitive to beliefs and practices that differ from those of the dominant culture.

In 2005, 37% of Black women age 18-24 were enrolled in college (Mather & Adams, 2010); however, by fall 2007 Whites still made up the overwhelming majority of full-time faculty in higher education (Allen, 1997; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). "About 80 percent of all faculty were White; 43 percent were White males and 36 percent were White females" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Consequently, Black women, particularly those in predominately White institutions, may spend the entirety of their postsecondary student years with only White professors as professional role models. Although the number of Black professional women in higher education has increased in the last decade from 2.7% in 2003 to 4% in 2007, they still lag far behind the number of Black female students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008, 2009). Unlike previous generations, recent scholarship indicates young Black females now look to women who look like them and share their cultural perspective with respect to body image for cues on comportment, demeanor, and personal appearance (Allen, 1997; Falconer & Neville, 2000; Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Gordon, 2008; Milkie, 1999); therefore, it becomes imperative for institutions of higher learning to employ a proportionate number of highly qualified Black professional women in educational leadership roles. The lived experiences of Anita Allen (1997) may make the most convincing case for the employment of Black female educational leaders in higher education who are willing and able to serve as professional and personal appearance mentors and role models for Black female students:

The Black women teachers of my childhood…taught me demeanor and responsibility…and cared…For the longest time, there were so few professional

women as role models in my life that I did not have a clue as to how an aspiring

female scholar should behave…When I went into philosophy teaching at Carnegie-

Mellon University in the late 1970s, it took me a year to figure out that my students

would be more cooperative if I simply took off the blue jeans and button-down collar

shirts I had learned to wear, imitating White males, and put on a dress…Today as in

the 1970s and 1980s when I was a student, White male college, university and

professional school teachers are often poor role models for Black female students. (p.

185)

Black educational leaders in the present study voiced concern over Black female

students entering college without the background knowledge of appropriate dress and

decorum that their White counter-parts already seemed to possess. According to Louisa, a

study participant who has worked as an educational leader in both secondary and post-

secondary education, the apparent increase in college attendance among Black women from

working class and poor backgrounds is a likely reason for these deficits:

Part of this [perceived deficit] comes from the fact that we were nurtured with the

expectation of going to college, being successful, coming out, being more successful.

We were nurtured that way along the way with that expectation in the beginning. I

fear that a lot of the young people today that are entering college, that are just out of

college, just had the expectation without the nurturing because affordability made it

more possible or monies available made it more possible for a greater population to

go. So with the greater population feeling the ability early to go to colleges and

universities, the nurturing was left out because of the assumption of 'Well, if we can

afford it' or 'If we can get a grant or loan or something,' they can go without the assurances of nurturing that we received.

Influences from the popular media seem to have affected the personal appearance practices of this current population of college students more profoundly and detrimentally than any other factor. To rectify the situation, it will take more than the fashion cards illustrating acceptable dress, monetary fines, or mandatory Saturday morning runs that some universities have established as interventions for violators of dress codes on their campuses (Bartlett, 2009). It will require putting educational leaders from students' cultural backgrounds before them as faculty and administrators so that they can envision themselves dressed professionally and performing these jobs. At many institutions the absence of such educational leaders has failed to fill the gap in Black female students' knowledge that only the presence of Black professional women *and* their willingness to act as role models can address. This research demonstrates the need for employing Black professional women who can and will mentor Black female students with regard to appropriate professional personal appearance practices.

<div align="center">Definition of Key Terms</div>

Primary Definitions

Throughout this document I have used *Black women* to refer to all females whose ancestral roots have lain buried deep within darkest Africa. Initially, I had adopted critical race feminist Cheryl Harris's (1997) use of *Blackwomen* as a single compound word. Like her, I viewed *Blackwomen* as a visual reminder of the manner in which race and gender have joined and intersected in women of our race without either unit becoming superior or subordinate to the other. To our Western minds, this fusion has made Black women different

from all other women or Black men; in no other aspect of our lives has this disparity been more pronounced than in our personal appearance (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). However, after discovering that these sentiments have not necessarily reflected the way indigenous scholars viewed themselves as Black women, I reverted to standard usage in order to be as inclusive and culturally neutral as possible. To explain how Black professional women in the academy have altered their personal appearance for work, I have used the terms *shifting, bicultural,* and *biculturality*. *Bicultural* and *biculturality* have simply meant "two cultures," in this case our Black home culture and our White work culture (Bell, 1990; Dawson, 2006; Denton, 1990; Sadao, 2003). Denoting motion, *shifting* has evoked visual images of the ways we Black women have altered our looks from one conceptual context and theoretical orientation to the other. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) have called shifting the survival strategy Blacks have used to ease the transitions between the two cultures. I have used bicultural, biculturality, and shifting to show how we Black women have masked our natural physical appearance by adopting White facades that have helped us more closely resemble our White colleagues and facilitated our reception in economic and social settings involving Whites (Bell, 1990; Patton, 2006).

Other Key Terms

1. The Academy – post secondary institutions of learning

2. Afro – hairstyle formed by allowing the hair to remain in its natural texture and combing it with a pick, comb, or fingers

3. Box braids – braids that sit on top of the scalp

4. Cornrows – braids that lie flat against the scalp

5. Counter-narrative/Counter-story – depicts the experiences of a marginalized

person or group

6. Cultural – expresses the heritage of a particular group, in this case usually African or Black American

7. Educational Leader – individuals in positions of authority at all levels of the educational system, e.g., teachers/professors, administrators, professional staff interacting with or making decisions about students' learning and behavior in educational settings

8. Extensions/Weave – real or synthetic hair added to one's own hair

9. Fixing Hair – usually implies straightening and possibly curling Black hair

10. Good Hair/Bad Hair – caste system favoring naturally straighter Black hair more closely resembling Whites' as opposed to naturally kinky or nappy hair that looks and feels more African

11. Jheri-curl/Jheri-curl Caps – chemical process used to straighten and curl the hair and the cap used to keep it moist

12. Light Skin/Dark Skin – caste system based on colorism in which light skin is preferred for its closeness to White skin and dark skin is debased for its distance from White skin

13. Locs – cultured or Americanized dreadlocks, neatly groomed and suitable for the professional workplace

14. Master Narrative/Majoritarian Story – story reflecting the beliefs and practices of the dominate race or culture

15. Natural – unprocessed Black hair texture or style

16. Perm/Relaxer – chemicals used to straighten Black hair

17. Pressing/Pressing Comb/Flat Iron – process and instrument used to straighten Black hair thermally

18. The profession – the teacher attorneys in this study use this phrase to denote the practice of law as opposed to the teaching of law

19. Texturizer – relaxer applied to Black hair for half the usual time so it only partially straightens it

20. TWA – teeny weenie Afro

21. Twists – hairstyle formed by twisting individual or double strands of hair

22. Wave Nouveau – permanent-wave hairstyle created using sodium thioglycolate that is incompatible with chemical relaxers (Sivasothy, 2009)

As to the chapters that follow, I begin in Chapter II by reviewing literature relevant to personal appearance identity shifting among Black women. To establish the theoretical framework for my study, Chapter III details my reasons for using critical race theory and critical race feminism for the conceptual framework of my study and discusses my rationale for employing autoethnography and counter-story as methods for the presentation of data. Chapter IV is a conventional rendering and evaluation of my research findings. Chapter V consists of the master-narrative and counter-narrative I construct as a performative, interpretative, and ethical analysis of research data. Using autoethnography and counter-story, I blend the voices and personas of study participants to create composite characters and weave excerpts from participants' narratives with my own voice to construct a dialogue of our experiences with personal appearance identity shifting. The final chapter, Chapter VI, is a brief discussion of how study findings extend existing scholarship, limitations of the study, implications of the study for educational leaders, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction to Conceptual Context and Theoretical Orientation

In an effort to define and deepen the conceptual context and theoretical orientation I have brought to this work, I have reviewed three main areas of scholarship relevant to personal appearance shifting. Cultural studies, particularly those that have explored appearance in academe from a critical race theoretical perspective, has been the first of those areas. My aim has been to understand the Black women's rationale for changing or refusing to change such a personal part of themselves. Specifically, I have been curious to discover whether these changes have been completely voluntary or others' suggestions. If voluntary, I have wondered how they have settled on the exact changes they have wanted and needed to make. As to involuntary changes, I have looked for who has encouraged or required these Black women to alter their natural appearance and the reasons they have given for making these suggestions. Moreover, I have been interested to learn why some Black women have refused to shift their personal appearance and the results of their choices.

Literature that has taken a sociological perspective to examine the specific changes Black professional women have made to their personal appearance for the academic workplace has been the second area. I have paid particular attention to socially-motivated changes of hair texture and hairstyles. Because scholars have treated hair as a minor issue in past research when studying Black professional women, I have consulted

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scholarship on Black professional women in K-12 education and business. In recent years, as more Black women have entered the professional sector, dress and body image have become more bicultural and have gained increasing attention (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

The third and final area of scholarship has taken my questions inside the individual experiences of Black women. Psychological literature that has offered insights into the effects of Black women's choices on their physical, emotional, and professional well-being has become an important source for helping me shape my inquiry toward considering the interactions between the external contexts of education and the subjectivities of Black women. For reasons outlined in the introduction, there has been a scarcity of literature that has looked carefully at the internal landscape of Black women in academe. Consequently, this has been another area in which I have reviewed literature from K-12 education or business when none was found for higher education.

Cultural and Critical Theory

"As an oppressed group, [Black women] are often forced to surrender their cultural identity of blackness" (Bell, 1990, p. 464).

Long before seeking professional employment in academe, Black women had become bicultural in their personal appearance. During American slavery, White owners had placed a higher value on slaves with White physical features (Keith & Herring, 1991). Following emancipation, the dominant culture has hegemonically normalized its own racial characteristics and social practices and reified them as the standard (Fordham, 1993; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Patton, 2006). Chief among these practices has been adherence to White beauty aesthetics (Collins, 1990; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Patton, 2006; Russell et al., 1992). This racialized norming has evolved into Whiteness as property, **"**a type of

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status in which [W]hite racial identity provided the basis for allocating societal benefits both private and public in character" (Harris, 1993, p. 1709). Because light-skinned Blacks have more closely resembled Whites physically and socially, they have generally received better treatment from the dominant society than Blacks with darker skin (Keith & Herring, 1991). Such partiality has spawned the "lily complex," a set of beliefs revering white physical characteristics while denigrating black ones (Freedman, 2002; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Mattox, 2002; Russell et al., 1992). Blacks themselves have internalized these divisive attitudes which have spread and persisted as integral components of Black culture. Because of its prominence and permanence in American life and law, Whiteness as property has become a central tenet of critical race theory (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Blacks have interpreted Whiteness as property in approximate rather than literal terms and have strongly tied personal appearance to respectability and class (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Craig, 1997; Lake, 2003; Mattox, 2002; Russell et al., 1992). This has led to the establishment of an informal yet pervasive caste system based on skin tone and hair texture stratification which has survived to the present day (Hunter, 2002; Russell et al., 1992; Simon, 2000). Colorism, coined in the 1980s, has described the "light skinned, dark skinned" syndrome privileging Blacks to the degree to which their skin tone has resembled Whiteness and disadvantaging them to the extent to which it has epitomized Blackness (Berry, 1988; Russell et al., 1992). Over time White or light skin has generally became synonymous with morality, superiority, competence, intelligence, and industriousness while Black or dark skin has typically stood for criminality, immorality, inferiority, laziness, and ignorance (Freedman, 2002; Lake, 2003; Mattox, 2002). A perusal of past heads of educational and business institutions has attested to the powerful influence of these beliefs within Black

culture. "The Black elites of the early twentieth century were almost exclusively light-skinned" (Mattox, 2002, p. 46). The other element in this discriminatory scheme has been hair texture. Unlike skin tone which as the direct result of miscegenation has evolved into myriad shades of color, Black hair texture has basically consisted of two types: "Good hair" and "bad hair." "Good' hair [was] perceived as hair closest to white people's hair—long, straight, silky, bouncy, manageable, healthy, and shiny; 'bad' hair [was] short, matted, kinky, Brillo pad woolly, coarse, brittle, and *nappy"* (Lester, 1999, p. 175). Except for brief periods in America's history, it has never been politically acceptable—especially within the Black community—"to be Black and proud" if that has meant wearing natural "nappy" hair or emphasizing African features and dark skin (Russell et al., 1992).

Though these exclusionary beliefs and practices regarding personal appearance have always applied to both sexes of the Black race, their application has remained more repressive to Black females than to Black males (Keith & Herring, 1991; Neal & Wilson, 1989; Russell et al., 1992). The absence of a majoritarian male beauty standard may have accounted for this disparity. Black women's African racial characteristics have remained the antithesis of the norm; therefore, those possessing them have been Other by default (Christian, 1985). Moreover, for Black women dark skin and natural hair have proven to be social, economic, and educational handicaps within the Black community and within the dominant society (Keith & Herring, 1991; Russell et al., 1992; Weitz, 2001). To survive and thrive professionally, they have tried to turn their personal appearance into an asset rather than an impediment within their work contexts. Thus, Black women have striven to distance themselves from both the negative stereotypes noted above and those specifically linked to women of their race, such as Mammy, Aunt Jemima, Sapphire, Jezebel, and the welfare

mother (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Collins, 1990; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lake, 2003; West, 1995). Wanting to appear as White as possible, some Black women have focused undue negative attention on their physical traits and adopted a more Eurocentric persona in attitude and personal appearance (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Keith & Herring, 1991; Russell et al., 1992). This has driven them to obsess over their hair, skin tone, and body image and to take extreme and sometimes life-threatening risks in their quest to acquire the coveted property of Whiteness (Harris & Johnson, 2001; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Russell et al., 1992). Even those professionals who have remained within the confines of the Black workspace have by no means been exempt from personal appearance shifting to advance their careers due to the high premium Black culture has placed on Whiteness (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lake, 2003; Mattox, 2002).

The lily complex and Whiteness as property have promoted an unattainable standard of beauty for the majority of Black women because they have not possessed light skin and long, naturally straight hair. Imitating the dominant society, Black culture has imposed its own adaptation of the normalized ideal on all Black women and has proclaimed those possessing these traits the embodiment of respectability in race, class, and gender (Craig, 1997; Lake, 2002). This action could have accounted for Black feminist professor Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) taking the stance that race, class and gender have been "the three systems of oppression that most heavily affect [Black women]" (p. 225). In no other facet of Black women's lives has this oppression been more salient than in attitudes regarding their personal appearance (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Ogunnaike, 1998; Russell et al., 1992). Whether Black women have voluntarily chosen to shift their personal appearance or have done so upon the advice of others has remained unclear. That has been an answer I have

pursued in my own investigation of Black professional women's personal appearance shifting.

Sociological Considerations of Changes to Personal Appearance

Black professional women entering higher education have recognized that others within and outside their community have set standards that have affected their lives in explicit ways. Those Black women who have practiced personal appearance biculturality within their own cultural milieu have logically transported those practices to the academic domain (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Russell et al., 1992). However, as the stakes have increased, so have the risks they have taken to shed their "Other" status and achieve the greatest degree of Whiteness possible.

In contrast to corporate America, the academy has been less overtly prescriptive about establishing dress codes for its professional employees (Gardner, 2005). General scholarship on personal appearance requirements in higher education have proven almost non-existent. Writing as her alter ego, Ms. Mentor, English and Women's Studies professor Emily Toth (1997) has admonished women academics for wearing pants or ethnic styles to interviews at academic conferences. Ronald Lemos (2007), professor of Information Systems, has advocated mandatory business attire for both faculty and administrators attending institutional functions. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) have seemed more concerned with the way others perceived their staffs than predominately White institutions (PWIs). In the early twentieth century Fisk University and Tuskegee Institute had established dress codes that had imposed Eurocentric norms on their Black female faculties (Goldsmith, 2001). Booker T. Washington had reportedly hoped to ensure the middle-class Black women employed there would appear prim rather than exotic or primitive by adhering

to them. Having found no other examples of institutional dress codes during my search, I have concluded that, on the whole, neither PWIs nor the majority of HBCUs have found it necessary to publish mandatory dress codes for their professional employees.

Nevertheless, since setting out to navigate the White workspace, Black professional women have deemed personal appearance shifting fundamental to their economic survival (Bell, 1990; Freedman, 2002; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). As a result of their decisions to shift their appearance for work in academe, few non-Black colleagues may ever have seen these Black women in their unaltered states; therefore, it has been unlikely that they have been cognizant of Black women's unparalleled personal appearance concerns. Most Black women themselves may have had difficulty recalling how they have looked sans Eurocentric enhancements. Critical race feminists have asserted that Black women "are not simply [W]hite women plus some ineffable and secondary characteristic, such as skin tone, added on," yet a noticeable disconnect has remained between their espoused philosophy and the implicit purpose underlying Black women's personal appearance practices (Wing, 1997, p. 3).

By the middle of the 1970s, the brief period in which Black women academics had felt free to embrace their African heritage at work had ended (Russell et al., 1992). Concerned over the perceptions of their colleagues and students toward their natural personal appearance, some, though not all, Black women have returned to processing their hair to mask its true texture and dressing in Eurocentric styles of muted hues to deemphasize their African attributes (Russell et al., 1992; Turner, 2002). Wilson (2004) has studied nine senior-level administrators in higher education, seven of whom have straightened their hair. Two of the nine have possessed more brightly colored wardrobes than the other seven, but none have

dressed in ethnic apparel for work. Of the two Black women professors in Stanley (2006), one has habitually worn suits and a long, straight hairstyle, rather than the more casual sweaters, pants, and Afro of her minority colleague. Though neither Wilson nor Stanley has cited informants' rationales for shifting their personal appearance, other Black women faculty have alleged they have purposely dressed in dark tailored or conservative business suits to command respect, promote recognition of their authority, and increase credibility with students and peers (Bell & Nkomo, 1999; Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Turner, 2002). Regardless of their claims, the ultimate outcome of these changes to their personal appearance has been to make Black professional women less conspicuously different from their White female peers.

The pervasiveness of personal appearance shifting in Black culture may have rendered Black women's decisions to embrace biculturality more palatable, at least in past decades. However, writing about their own or others' bicultural experiences in academe, most scholars have limited their discussions to the more superficial facets of hair preparation and professional attire (Bell & Nkomo, 1999; Caldwell, 1991; Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Sekayi, 1997; Williams, 1991; Wilson, 2004). Among those shifting have been some noted critical race feminist law professors who have ostensibly believed there has been no essential Woman who has represented all other women, yet they, too, have returned to imitating White women's personal appearance (Caldwell, 1991; Harris, 1997; Wing, 1997). One possible motive for this disconnect has lain in a desire to avoid further objectification by advertising the extent to which Black women's unaltered personal appearance has differed from all other women's or the elaborate and exhaustive measures required to approximate the White beauty norm (Collins,1990). Another possible explanation has come from one of the Black physician

informant in Banks (2000) who has stated that most of her friends who have been attorneys and corporate types have had less personal appearance freedom than that enjoyed by her and her medical colleagues "because their rewards are distinctly tied to what those other higher-ups, who are White men, think of them and how they feel about them" (p. 128). Whatever their motivation, unexamined have been procedures through which most of these Black women have effected the changes they have achieved. Nor have they ventured into the more intrusive regions of skin tone and body image. For Black women these have all remained noteworthy issues because they could have entailed considerable temporal, fiscal, emotional, and physical expense that other women either have not borne or have experienced to a lesser degree (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Russell et al., 1992). Other scholarship on biculturality among Black professional women has not only delved into hair straightening, skin lightening, and dressing in neutral-toned, Eurocentric attire, but it has also explored dieting and eating disorders, wearing colored contact lenses, and surgically altering Afrocentric features, recent modifications some Black professional women have been willing to make for the sake of their careers (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Russell et al., 1992). To update existing theory and present an accurate and more comprehensive picture of Woman within the academy, it has been critical to disclose those lived experiences distinct to Black women.

Hair. In recent years, scholars have written most extensively on matters surrounding Black professional women's hair (Banks, 2000; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Caldwell, 1991; Lake, 2003; Russell et al., 1992, Weitz, 2001). However, almost all of that literature has primarily focused on other aspects of their careers while treating their bicultural hair concerns as peripheral issues (Caldwell, 1991; Harris, 1998; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Sekayi,

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1997; Stanley, 2006; Wilson, 2004). Regardless of their reasons, it has appeared that most Black professional women have remained bicultural and reticent both with regards to their hair preparation requirements and to the impact of those requirements on other dimensions of their job performance (Banks, 2000; Stanley, 2006; Wilson, 2004).

However, Black women's hair has been much more complex than it may have initially seemed. Unlike other types of hair, Black women's hair has been political for more than three hundred years (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Ivey, 2006; Russell et al., 1992). Afrocentric styles "represent an assertion of the self that is in direct conflict with the assumptions that underlie the existing social order. Such self-assertions by Blacks create fear and revulsion in Blacks and Whites alike" (Caldwell, 1991, p. 384). Resumption of hair straightening in the post-Civil Rights years has received mixed reactions seldom voiced prior to the 1960s (Banks, 2000; Russell et al., 1992). Supporters of biculturality have insisted hair straightening has been merely an act of personal preference or convenience (Banks, 2000; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Freedman, 2002; Russell et al., 1992). Black professional women who have been mothers of daughters not only have had to groom their own hair daily but also that of their young daughters (Collison, 2002). Chemical hair relaxers and thermal hair straightening devices have aided their transition back to bicultural hair preparation (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Russell et al., 1992). Detractors may have condemned hair straightening as an act of assimilation to White beauty standards or submission to the wishes of elders whose views on the respectability of straightened hair they have considered outmoded or misguided (Bell, 1990; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Russell et al., 1992). Those in the middle may have seen occasional hair straightening simply as an expedient for achieving their goals. Critical race feminist law professor Paulette Caldwell (1991) has reported changing to a bicultural

hairstyle in 1985 before conducting a four-day workshop for 50 prominent Black women

from business and finance. Caldwell has recalled being complimented for her "competence,

unusual insights, and mastery of subject matter, but mostly—especially from those who over

the years have watched me alternate between closely-cropped Afros and short straight

bobs—for the beauty of my long, straight hair" (p. 382-383). Thus, it has not been surprising

to find that in America more than 60% of Black women have continued to use chemical

relaxers and an additional 5% to straighten their hair thermally (Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

Wearing wigs has made true biculturality possible for Black professional women;

wigs have allowed them to wear straight-hair at work then revert to natural or Afrocentric

styles at home. Conversely, wigs have eliminated the need to style their natural hair each day.

One professional Black woman who had owned an entire wardrobe of straight styled wigs for

work had not seen her natural hair for *thirty years* (George, 1998). While still working as the

first Black supermodel, businesswoman Naomi Sims (1982) had helped create a line of

synthetic but natural-looking straight-hair wigs for Black women. These wigs had enabled

her to sport an array of hairstyles quickly without subjecting her own hair to over-relaxing

and other harmful forms of manipulation commonly used by stylists. Sims's company and

numerous others have since offered affordable synthetic and human hair wigs for Black

women who have continued to feel the need or urge to shift the appearance of their hair for

work.

Hair weaves have offered another bicultural alternative to Black professional women

intent on exhibiting Eurocentric hairstyles that have more closely resembled the textures of

their peers (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). Over the years several different methods have evolved by

which Black women have added straight hair to their own (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Taylor,

2008; Young, 1999-2010). The least expensive has involved bonding (gluing) the weave to

their own hair (Taylor, 2008). A second method has required having a professional stylist

cornrow the client's hair and then sew a weft of straight hair onto the cornrows or braid

straight hair into the cornrows so that only the straight hair has shown (Banks, 2000; Byrd &

Tharps, 2001; Kinard, 1997; Taylor, 2008; Young, 1999-2010). Stylists have also affixed

lace front hair wigs to the perimeter of clients own hair with waterproof or regular liquid

adhesive or wig tape for a reportedly natural look that has even allowed wearers to swim,

work out, and style them into ponytails (Norman, 1999-2010). Another supposedly

"invisible" method, and by far the most time consuming and expensive, has involved using

hot wax to fuse about 150 strands of weave, each containing 20-50 hairs, onto approximately

¼ inch sections of the client's own hair (Taylor, 2008). More temporary methods have

allowed wearers to tape or clip the weave to their own hair (Gaiter, 1999-2010; Wilkison,

1999-2010). The longevity and flexibility of these methods have varied (Gaiter, 1999-2010;

Norman, 1999-2010; Taylor, 2008; Wilkison, 1999-2010). Some have lasted from a few days

to a week while others have looked attractive for several months. The most realistic looking

attachments have permitted clients to wash their own hair and the affixed weaves weekly

(Taylor, 2008). Costs have ranged from $15-$1500 and have taken up to five hours or more

to apply (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Prontes, 1999-2009). Lace front wigs of varying quality have

cost between $300 and $3000 (Norman, 1999-2010). Ranging from the serious to the

embarrassing, drawbacks to hair weaving have been traction alopecia (hair loss) that has

resulted from the pressure and pulling associated with constant cornrowing, allergies to glues

or synthetic "hair," inability to remove glue, hair breakage, mildewed cornrows, lumpiness or

perceptible tracks (Kinard, 1997; Sims, 1982; Taylor, 2008).

While the majority of Black professional women in both academe and other arenas have chosen to groom their hair by bicultural methods, a growing number have either daringly worn Afrocentric styles since the 1960s or have recently reverted to wearing their hair in its organic state (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Russell et al., 1992). Many of those in the latter category may have felt pressured to make their decisions out of desperation to preserve the last vestiges of their hair, their health, or both (Breast Cancer Fund, 2005; Kinard, 1997; Taylor, 2008). Russell, Wilson, and Hall (1992) have cited a tendency among Black women professors to leave their hair unprocessed when their numbers at PWIs have increased. Sekayi (1997) has noted that all informants have worn natural hairstyles, including the 62-year-old southern-born Black woman professor, but does not specify whether she has been teaching at a PWI or an HBCU. Wilson (2004) has revealed two of the nine vice presidents she has studied have worn natural styles, a short Afro and dreadlocks. Even the presidents of some of the most prestigious HBCUs have begun wearing their hair natural. This has been especially surprising in view of Black people's conflicted feelings about Afrocentrism (Craig, 1997). Photos of Johnnetta Cole and Julianne Malveaux have featured them in short Afros. Cole and Malveaux have been the fourteenth and fifteenth presidents of Bennett College for Women, respectively, and Cole has been the president emeritus of both Bennett College and Spelman College (The Johnnetta B. Cole Global Diversity & Inclusion Institute Founded at Bennett College for Women, 2004). Thus, though Black women may have disagreed over the advisability of wearing Afrocentric hairstyles in the academic workplace, it may still have been more acceptable to do so at HBCUs than at PWIs where they have constantly faced the specter of the White beauty aesthetic.

Skin tone. Through the centuries both Blacks and Whites have continued to show a preference for light skinned Blacks over dark skinned Blacks (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Hunter, 2002; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lake, 2003; Mattox, 2002). Keith and Herring (1991) and Hunter (2002) have found that skin tone has continued to affect life outcomes for Black women. As a result, dark-skinned Black women have often felt compelled to change their skin tone and the contours of their facial features (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Russell et al., 1992). The application of makeup artfully applied has disguised African features, but it has not been so easy to change dark skin to light skin (Walden, 1981).

Since the nineteenth century, American Black women have employed various substances in the sometimes fruitless quest to lighten their skin (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Rooks, 1996; Russell et al., 1992). When Mother Nature and actively avoiding exposure to the sun have failed to produce skin tones that would have passed the infamous paper bag test established by Black religious and social institutions, Black women have taken more drastic measures (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lake, 2003; Mattox, 2002; Rooks, 1996; Russell et al., 1992). Those individuals whose inner forearms has proven darker than a paper bag have applied topical agents such as acidic floor cleaners, bleach, urine, lemon juice, lye, and commercial skin bleaches containing hydroquinone to their dark skin (Russell et al., 1992). Hydroquinone, a dangerous chemical, has enjoyed widespread use in developing black-and-white photographs and as an antioxidant in food and rubber production (Lake, 2003; Russell et al., 1992; U.S. Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 1987). In the United States, hydroquinone has remained the active ingredient in most commercial skin lighteners, though other countries have banned this proven animal carcinogen (EPA, 1987; Russell et al., 1992). Other violently toxic compounds used in

homemade twentieth century face-bleaching concoctions have included bichloride of

mercury (also called corrosive sublimate) and sugar of lead or lead acetate ("Bichloride of

mercury," 2009; Harris & Johnson, 2001; "Sugar of lead," 2008). Cosmetic companies have

also persisted in their use of lead acetate in progressive hair coloring products like Grecian

Formula and in red lipsticks ("Sugar of lead," 2008). Some Black women have been so

desperate for whiter-looking skin that they have even resorted to ingesting arsenic wafers

(Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Russell et al., 1992). Two more recent surgical innovations have been

chemical peels, which reveal lighter skin by burning off the external layer of skin, and

dermabrasion, which "involves stripping away the uppermost layer of skin with a high-speed

wire or diamond-edged brush" (Russell et al., 1992). Both have reportedly been exceedingly

painful and have resulted in post-surgery deaths. Costs have ranged between $1,640-$3,000

for chemical peels and $1,260-$3,000 for dermabrasion. Because of the limited scope of

available scholarship, I have found no published information on whether Black professional

women in higher education have used any of these more drastic measures while navigating

the workplaces of academe.

Body image. Another aspect of personal appearance that has changed as Black

women have entered the White professional mainstream has been body image (Jones &

Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Those age 30 and under have been particularly susceptible to weight-

related pressures and behaviors, such as too frequent dieting and eating disorders, usually

absent from less diverse work spaces (Hall, 1995; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Patton,

2006). Some scholars have attributed such behaviors to Black women's attempting to avoid

objectification by being identified with the stereotypical images of overweight Black women,

such as Aunt Jemima and Mammy, as they have moved into majority-dominated work

contexts (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Collins, 1990; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lake, 2003; West, 1995). Others have related these behaviors to adoption of the majoritarian beauty aesthetic (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lester & Petrie, 1998). However, because researchers have chosen not to identify specific respondents by career or have not examined these issues with Black professional women, I have been unable to determine the extent to which this situation has existed among Black professional women in higher education (Banks, 2000; Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lester & Petrie, 1998).

Centuries after Black women's arrival in America, their physical characteristics have still retained their political charge (Russell et al., 1992). Blacks as well as Whites have continued to hold deep-seated negative beliefs about dark-skinned Blacks and their African physical features (Keith & Herring, 1991; Mattox, 2002). Some of these beliefs have had a more powerful effect on Black women than Black men; they have impacted their lives socially, educationally, and economically (Keith & Herring, 1991). Consequently, when they have made the choice to enter the academy, Black women have had to realize that successfully negotiating the academic domain may have necessitated making crucial changes to their personal appearance both to gain and retain employment and to try to prevent their students and peers from treating them as "Other" (Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Turner, 2002). Only during the Civil Rights era have Black academics sported Afrocentric hairstyles and dress with abandon at work—or in the Black community (Sekayi, 1997; Russell et al., 1992). This state of affairs has made it imperative for Black women academics to be discerning of institutional nuances and willing to alternate between their bicultural and "ethnic" identities, as needed. Scrutinizing these intimate facets of their biculturality has undoubtedly exposed the extent to which Black women have differed from the rest of their female peers and has

left them vulnerable to objectification by close-minded individuals who have blindly accepted the societal feminine ideal; however, these revelations have been absolutely vital to adding the most authentic depictions of professional women in higher education to existing theory.

Psychological Considerations of Physical and Emotional Change

Differing from the norm in corporate settings has affected one's acceptance in multiple social contexts (Kanter, 1977). Black women in higher education have been especially vulnerable to this circumstance because they have been both Black and women in organizations that have remained more often than not predominately White and male. Isolated because of their "Outsider" status, Black women have frequently learned to negotiate the academic arena without benefit of an astute mentor and with no invitations from majority colleagues to collaborate on research projects (Fries-Britt & Kelly 2005; Gregory, 1999, 2001; Smith, 1982). Most important, deviating from the norm may have prevented Black professional women from gaining entrée into the social world in which their White male colleagues have typically built career-advancing relationships (Smith, 1982). To rectify this situation, Black professional women in academe have made numerous changes to their personal appearance in the areas of dress, hair, skin tone, and body image (Banks, 2000; Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Lake, 2003; Rooks, 1996; Russell et al., 1992; Turner, 2002). However, some of the methods they have employed in effecting these changes have endangered their physical and emotional health and have created additional stress in their professional lives.

The physical effects of biculturality on Black professional women have been varied, and those that have been negative have ranged from aesthetically undesirable to

excruciatingly painful or lethal. Small doses of hydroquinone have effectively lightened skin tone, but in hypersensitive users, this white, crystalline compound has produced blotchy, darkened, and even navy blue skin ("hydroquinone," 2009; Russell et al., 1992). At the other extreme, inorganic arsenic, whether in drinking water or as wafers used to lighten skin tone, has proven to be a deadly poison causing skin and bladder cancer when ingested over extended periods (Warner, Moore, Smith, Kalman, Fanning, & Smith, 1994). As to the two primary methods of hair straightening, both chemical relaxers and thermal hair straighteners have had their particular drawbacks (Carter, 2007). Though thought to be less damaging than chemical relaxers, thermal hair straighteners used daily and at excessive temperatures have resulted in hair breakage or burned skin (Carter, 2007; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Russell et al., 1992). The advantage of chemical hair relaxers may have been their weekly time savings, but over time they have led to temporary or permanent alopecia (hair loss) and perhaps currently unknown side-effects awaiting the verification of future researchers (Carter, 2007; Kinard, 1997; McMichael, 2007; Taylor, 2008). According to L'Oreal, the way Black women style their hair has caused an estimated 60% of them to experience hair breakage and 27 percent to suffer from hair loss or thinning (Carter, 2007). Because hair loss among Black women has exceededs that of all other women, the North American Hair Research Society has joined forces with Proctor and Gamble to begin studying this problem (Carter, 2007). While awaiting results, some doctors have advised Black women against having relaxers while pregnant (Collison, 2002). Recent scholarship has also contained some surprising news on body image in light of the results of past studies on Black women. It has indicated Black women working in majoritarian spaces have begun to internalize negative body image

messages and practice dangerous weight control measures like their White counterparts (Hall, 1995; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, Patton, 2006).

The need to shift their appearance could have added to Black professional women's emotional stress. A large part of the pressure may have involved getting pin-straight hair regardless of the cost in time, money, or health risks (Russell et al., 1992). Chemical straightening has sometimes taken all day in Black hair salons, has been very expensive, and has had known and possibly unknown side effects (Banks, 2000; Byrd & Tharps, 2001; Carter, 2007; Collison, 2002; Kinard, 1997; McMichael, 2007; Walden, 1981). Furthermore, one well-known take-home hair relaxer has reportedly caused dramatically increased incidents of breast cancer in Black women, so that product has now become an unsafe option for Black professional women seeking to save time and money on hair care (Breast Cancer Fund, 2005). Those who have returned to thermal hair straightening have verified that regardless of the method, it has also taken a long time in perpetually crowded Black beauty salons, has lasted only as long as no moisture or humidity has reached the hair, and has been both frightening and painful when done the old-fashioned way with red-hot straightening or pressing combs and melting hairdressing (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). The account below has illustrated classic hair straightening with a hot metal comb and the emotional trauma it has regularly engendered:

> In order to straighten the hair with a hot comb, the hair has to be clean, dry, and tangle-free. Some sort of pressing oil or grease is applied to condition the hair as well as to make it smooth and shiny. On contact with the comb, the grease will often make a sizzling sound, not unlike bacon frying in a cast-iron skillet. No matter how steady the person doing the hot-combing is, there is always the danger of hitting a trouble

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spot like an ear, a forehead or the back of the neck with the red-hot piece of metal.

Jamie White grew up in the eighties, and some of her worst memories revolve around

the hot comb. "I would have to sit for thirty minutes to an hour being scared," she

says. "It's not that my mom burned me often but those few times she burned my ear

really made an impression on me. I would flinch whenever I heard the sizzle of the

grease." (Byrd & Tharps, 2001, p. 140-141)

Whether straightened with the stove-heated pressing comb, the electric hot comb, or the

newer flat irons, hair breakage has resulted from too frequent straightening or use of

excessive temperatures (Carter, 2007; McMichael, 2007; Russell et al., 1992). For some

women such a loss may have been of no real significance because it has grown back in a

short time. For too many Black women, such a loss could have been far from trivial because

most Black hair appears to grow slowly because its torque causes it to break more easily than

naturally straighter hair (Sims, 1982). The loss of their "crowning glory" could have

significantly affected the self-image of Black women who have already borne the emotional

scars of childhood teasing and taunting as a result of having nappy, beady, "so short you can

smell yo' brains" "bad hair" (Russell et al., 1992).

Perhaps the investment of their precious time and money not to mention past traumas

and present health concerns have combined to lead some Black professional women to

chance wearing their hair in Afrocentric styles such as braids, cornrows, Afros, twists, and

dreadlocks in the majoritarian workspace. Grooming their hair in natural styles and treating it

gently has tended to alleviate some of the hair loss problems mentioned above; however, it

may have required courage for some Black women to take such risks (Sims, 1982). When

they have, the difference has seldom gone without notice or comment from their peers and

their students. Looks and comments that may have been innocuous have even left Black and critical race feminists feeling uneasy. Law Professor Paulette Caldwell's (1991) journal has revealed her reluctance to discuss landmark hair discrimination cases with her law students because she has dreaded students' adding her own choice of hairstyle, a braided pageboy, to the class discourse. Furthermore, while temporarily sporting an Afro at the end of an academic year, Caldwell has admitted to dissecting comments and reactions of colleagues she has met on or off campus. In a second narrative law professor Patricia Williams (1991) has reported receiving nasty personal comments about her braided hairstyle on her student evaluations. With their livelihoods at stake, the choice of how to prepare their hair has definitely been no inconsequential decision for either of these Black women academics and undoubtedly has added to their professional stress.

As to how Black women's overall personal appearance has affected them professionally, only Stanley (2006) has aired the feelings of an associate professor who claimed her personal appearance adversely affected the location of her office as well as her reception from colleagues.

> I was one of four women, one of two African Americans. The other women had straight, long hair; I wore my hair in a short natural style...I did not wear a suit, preferring to wear dress pants and a sweater or blouse. I was different. I did not fit the mold. Not fitting the mold meant that peers treated me differently. I wasn't like the others. I was 'Other.' (p. 715)

Whether this professor's assessment of her situations has been accurate or merely a product of her own imagination may have been less important than how it has impacted her life in terms of added psychological stress.

From the previous narratives, it has become clear to me that creating and maintaining a bicultural personal appearance identity could not only have put Black women's physical and emotional health at risk, but it could also have compounded their work-related stress and detracted from their personal security and sense of being valued (Bell, 1990; Carter, 2007; Denton, 1990; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; McMichael, 2007; Patton, 2006; Russell et al., 1992; Turner, 2002). Bell's (1990) comments regarding the effects of biculturality on the first Black professional women to enter the business sector have proven just as fitting today as almost two decades ago. As these marginalized Black women have surrendered their cultural identity through the changes they have made to their personal appearance, they have split off critical parts of their personal identity. This splitting has been "embedded not only in race, but in gender as well" (p. 464).

Conclusion

Searching the literature, I found very little general scholarship on personal appearance expectations or practices in the higher education workplace (Lemos, 2007; Toth, 1997). This was not surprising, for personal appearance shifting appeared to be narrowly conceived as a superficial set of concerns shared only among a small segment of the population: Black women academics. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2009), Black women made up only 2.7 % of all full-time women faculty in higher education in fall 2003. Though these numbers were small, further research may reveal that the roots of personal appearance shifting lie deep within the infrastructure of American ideology, making the dynamic a symptom of significant and enduring oppressive conditions related to racial bias and White privilege. Indeed, in the 1700s racist Whites further dehumanized slaves by referring to their hair as "wool" (Ivey, 2006). Since that time Blacks and other racial and

ethnic groups assessed black beauty as inferior to all others, especially White beauty, and blacks continually tried to approximate the White aesthetic. Today beauty products, many of which Blacks use to shift their personal appearance, constitute a multi-billion dollar business. White mega-businesses, such as L'Oreal bought out larger Black-owned businesses and edged out smaller ones to reap ever increasing profits (Taylor, 2002). Going behind the scenes of economic trends or mere personal taste to consider historical references and connections to domination and colonialist power, it becomes increasingly clear that Black women's hair and other personal appearance choices are more than what meets the eye.

After refining my search to Black professional women's personal appearance practices in higher education, I found existing literature to be so sparse as to make it difficult to analyze as a whole. Prior to the 1990s, research that specifically focused on Black women academics more generally was simply not readily available (Blake-Beard, 2001; Cox & Nkomo, 1990; Hall, 1995; Sadeo, 2003; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Thomas, Mack, Williams, & Perkins, 1999). Most published scholarship on faculty other than White men was too inclusive by focusing on women or Blacks generally, on minorities or faculty of color without consideration for gender, or on women of color as opposed to Black women faculty as a discrete group (Aguirre, 2000; Bell, 1990; Blake-Beard, 2001; Collison, 1999; Menges & Exum, 1983; Smith, 1982; Turner, 2002). Subsuming them under other groups prevented discovering Black women's unique encounters with marginality (Collison, 1999; Craig, 1995). An additional obstruction was that most existing research on Black women professionals focused on workplace occurrences in general rather than identifying what took place in specific venues (Bell, 1990; Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Denton, 1990; Jones & Shorter-

Gooden, 2003). This strategy made it virtually impossible to isolate the experiences of Black women academics participating in those studies.

Another factor leading to the dearth of knowledge on Black women academics was the attitude of senior majority scholars who questioned the legitimacy of race and ethnicity scholarship and dismissed such work as "ghetto scholarship" or heart work that held little interest for Academy members (Bell & Nkomo, 1999). The racist insensitivity of this standpoint was shocking, but it was important to remember that White men, who maintained their majority in higher education, almost certainly had no firsthand knowledge of workplace biculturality (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). White women, the subjects of most research on women, admittedly experienced gender-based shifting in the workplace; nevertheless, their status as the hegemonically defined 'ideal' of beauty and the Western epitome of 'Woman' essentially exempted them from having to make race-based alterations to their personal appearance to blend more seamlessly into majoritarian workspaces (Bell, 1990; Hall, 1995; Harris, 1997; Patton, 2006; Russell, 1992; Wing, 1997). Though Black men and other minorities felt the effects of personal appearance biculturality, they usually experienced them differently or to a lesser degree than their Black women peers (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Stanley, 2006). For instance, despite the fact that other women of color had hair texture, skin color, and physical features that were more similar to those of Whites, they were still subject to ridicule based on their preference for ethnic attire, such as the hijab or the sari (Stanley, 2006). As to Black men, the absence of a recognized standard of male beauty probably accounted for the fact that they had fewer issues involving skin tone, hair texture, or physical features in the academic workspace

(Gewertz, 2006a, 2006b; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Neal & Wilson, 1989; Russell et al., 1992).

Although the close of the twentieth century brought a small explosion of literature on Black women in higher education, specific workplace identity issues were not the primary focus of these inquiries (Collins, 1999; Green & King, 2002; Gregory, 2001; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Johnson & Harvey, 2002; Johnsrud & Sadeo, 1998; Stewart, 2002; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Thomas et al., 1999; Tyler, Blalock, & Clarke, 2000; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005; Wilson, 2001). Instead, most scholars confined their studies to aspects of Black women's careers that they have shared in common with other racial and ethnic minorities and White women. These included tenure, promotion, scholarship, mentoring, teaching, family and community, collegiality, and service (Bell & Nkomo, 1999; Gregory, 2001; Jackson & Harris, 2007; Johnson & Harvey, 2002; Quezada & Louque, 2004; Stanley, 2006; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Thomas et al., 1999; Turner, 2002; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). Only occasionally and tangentially did such scholarship refer to the personal identity experiences of Black women and other people of color in the academy (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Russell et al., 1992; Stanley, 2006; Wilson, 2004).

Unlike the more universal concerns noted above, I believed that personal appearance shifting affected Black professional women in ways that were not readily apparent to other members of the academy. Personal appearance shifting isolated Black women from their peers because it did not affect most of their peers. Furthermore, as a Black woman I knew that for women of my race, personal appearance issues were seldom entirely personal. In fact, they were frequently decidedly political (Okazawa-Rey, Robinson, & Ward, 1986; Russell et al., 1992; Simon, 2000). Though shifting may have been the plight of most Black

women, the predicament of Black professional women in higher education was exceptionally

burdensome and unnecessarily problematic (Bell & Nkomo, 1999; Sadao, 2003). Shifting

often piled additional weight on backs already bowed from striving for tenure and promotion,

trying to do acceptable yet meaningful scholarship, finding and being mentors, and handling

disproportionate teaching loads (Quezada & Louque, 2004; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Stewart,

2002; Thomas & Hollenshead, 2001; Thomas et al., 1999). In contrast to other minorities or

White women, Black women *regularly* faced racial, class, *and* gender threats to their

professional success while simultaneously shifting their personal appearance to make their

physical presence more palatable to White sensibilities (Bell, 1990; Jones & Shorter-Gooden,

2003; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). For that reason, I

considered it imperative to add these scholars' direct accounts on the effects of shifting their

personal appearance in order to gain acceptance in academe. Only by studying Black women

themselves was it possible to begin to understand how altering such an intimate part of their

identity affected them professionally, physically, and emotionally.

>Until now, scholars had not done enough in-depth research to reveal the academic
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>climate or the myriad means by which Black professional women have navigated the
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>higher education domain. With respect to asserting their ethnicity, some Black
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>women have just begun to test the waters; others have continued to shift their
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>personal appearance in dress, hair, skin tone, and body image to make their
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>appearance more compatible with the ideal of White beauty. Whatever their
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>decisions, the costs and personal risks to Black women may have been high and
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>multifaceted. To begin filling these gaps in the knowledge, I invited Black
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>professional women in higher education to voice their lived experiences with personal

appearance shifting, to reveal how their personal appearance biculturality manifested in the academic workspace, and to disclose the professional, physical, and emotional impact these experiences had on them.

In the methodology chapter to follow, I provide details of the critical narrative and autoethnographic study whereby I examined the phenomenon of personal appearance biculturality among Black professional women in academe. I note how I selected study participants, collected and analyzed data, and examined the ethical issues involved in working with the human subjects who participated in this research study.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

For much too long, Black females have lived in the shadow of a White beauty aesthetic that for most of us is the antithesis of our own innate beauty. As I explored my own personal appearance identity while growing and locking my hair for seven years, I sought to influence those of various ages within my sphere of contact and learned to appreciate small victories. My interest in conducting systematic inquiry on the topic of personal appearance shifting was to effect change on a broader scale.

Through my research, I wished to realize these objectives:

1. To assist other Black women in acknowledging the distinctiveness of our natural beauty and, when appropriate, to empower them to display that beauty in its myriad forms without trepidation, even in majoritarian workspaces.

2. To increase my understanding of the widespread practice of personal appearance identity shifting among Black professional women in the educational domain.

3. To add to existing theory on Black females in general and Black professional women in academe in particular with regard to the common practices and experiences surrounding personal appearance identity shifting so that colleges of education could use the acquired knowledge to inform the practice of pre-service and in-service educational leaders.

This chapter discusses how I did this work. After reviewing the title and subject of this research, on June 4, 2009, Appalachian State University 's (ASU) institutional review board (IRB) approved this study.

Qualitative Methodological Approach and Critical Theoretical Framework

Corrine Glesne's (1999) beliefs and commitment to participatory feminist research encapsulate my philosophical stance toward the research that I conducted:

> I perceive much research as grounded in an ethical commitment to a 'greater good,' rather than to the people involved. I readily acknowledge a need for inquiry that does not set out to serve research participants, but I am personally inclined toward research that contributes to the lives of the participants. This position aligns me more closely with philosophies of …feminist and critical research. (Glesne, 1999, p. 3)

Using a qualitative methodological approach, I collected the personal appearance narratives of ten Black professional women and explored the ways they navigated their higher education workspaces. As members of two marginalized groups, women and Blacks, they were prime candidates for the application of critical race theory (CRT) and its derivatives, critical race feminism and critical race methodology. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) extended the application of critical race theory (CRT) to educational research because they felt it essential that education embrace CRT for the following reasons:

1. Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States
2. U. S. society is based on property rights.
3. The intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity. (p. 48)

Racism and whiteness as property were factors influencing the personal appearance decisions of the educational leaders in this investigation. CRT assisted me in remaining sensitized to the complexities of race and property rights inherent in the American female beauty aesthetic as they related to education. Consequently, I found it useful to employ CRT as a tool for shaping my research design decisions and as an analytical framework for conducting narrative inquiry with Black professional women to meet my goal of inviting other Black women to name their own reality within higher education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These narratives and my analysis expanded CRT, providing a much needed corrective to personal appearance identity issues among Black professional women in academe.

To situate participants as "Subjects" rather than "Objects" or "Other," I employed critical race feminism in conjunction with CRT (Wing, 1997). Critical race feminists have stated that there is no essential Woman whose experiences duplicate those of every other woman (Harris, 1997). Furthermore, being Black does not mean Black women's truths are the same as those of Black men or other people of color. In studies employing frameworks other than CRT, the experiences of White women frequently became the standard and the different experiences of Black women were exceptions scholars often relegated to footnotes. Such distinctions positioned the Black women in those studies as Other because their experiences differed from the norm. Joining other critical race feminists, I recognize no essential Black woman scholar whose lived experiences with personal appearance shifting as mirroring those of every other Black professional woman in the academy. Still, by positioning participants in this study as Subjects, I acknowledge the legitimacy of their experiences and place them on par with those of White women's.

Methods, Participant Selection, and Data Collection

     Applying multiple data-gathering techniques enabled me to triangulate my findings and increase the credibility of my research (Glesne, 1999). I wanted to decrease the risk of limitations or systemic bias from the use of a single investigative technique; therefore, I collected data first through the use of a demographic form, a participant survey, and face-to-face interviews. Informed and provoked through my engagement with CRT and critical race feminism, I also employed the unconventional methods of counter-story and autoethnography in analyzing and representing my data. Each of these alternative methods is described below, followed by a discussion of participant selection, the specifics of my data collection techniques, my approach to analysis, and ethical considerations for this study.

Counter-story

     In addition to a conventional findings chapter, Chapter IV, I decided early in the investigative process to develop and present participants' stories using counter-storytelling, a fundamental tenet of CRT and an essential component of critical race methodology (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Matsuda, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b) (See Chapter V, this document). To DeCuir and Dixson (2004),"counter-storytelling is a means of exposing and critiquing normalized dialogues that perpetuate racial stereotypes" (p. 27). Solórzano and Yosso (2002b) "define the counter-story as a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)" (p.32).

     There are three distinct types or formats of counter-storytelling: personal, other, and composite (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). Authors frequently tell their own stories as personal counter-stories. Other counter-stories are often third person narratives relating other people's

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stories. Composite counter-stories offer much more latitude than either personal or other

counter-stories:

> Composite stories and narratives draw on various forms of "data" to recount the
> racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color. Such counter-
> stories may offer both biographical and autobiographical analyses because the authors
> create composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political
> situations to discuss racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of subordination.
> (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 33)

> To tell our stories of biculturality, I used composite counter-storytelling. I
> accomplished

this work by entwining informants' narratives, personalities, and demographic data with my

own experiences and expert data in a creative yet plausible scenario while maintaining the

integrity of individual data strands. Composite counter-storytelling permitted me as the

researcher to use the lenses of both CRT and critical race feminism in accurately portraying

the daily experiences of these marginalized scholars who continued to be measured by the

yardstick of a majoritarian beauty standard.

In education studies counter-storytelling has become a staple of research employing a

CRT framework (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). "The use of counter-stories allows for the

challenging of privileged discourses, the discourses of the majority, therefore, serving as a

means for giving voice to marginalized groups" (p. 27). In other words, majoritarian stories

or master narratives give the majority perspective while counter-stories express a minority

view point.

Solórzano and Yosso (2002b) and Ikemoto (1992) suggest enlarging the scope of

counter-stories beyond the range set by standard majoritarian stories. "Counter-stories need not be created only as a direct response to majoritarian stories" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b, p. 32). By going beyond merely responding to majoritarian beliefs regarding the personal appearance of my participants to include parts of their histories and life experiences, I not only gave them voice to impart other stories and counter-stories but also empowered them to dominate the discourse rather than affording that privilege to the master narrative (Ikemoto, 1992; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b).

In my investigation of personal appearance shifting, the function of critical race methodology, and by default counter-storytelling, was to humanize the qualitative data I collected by permitting participants in my study to voice their own truths in a format that was both realistic and representative of Black professional women and the situations they encountered daily in academe (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). It puzzled me that on the whole Black women academics had published the practices and experiences of other Black women professionals and physical laborers in corporate and service settings, respectively; however, they seldom told their own stories or those of their peers in the academy (Bell & Nkomo, 1999; Caldwell, 1991; Collins, 1990; Collins, 1999; Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005; Goldsmith, 2001; Hall, 1995; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Counter-storytelling aided me in addressing that void.

Autoethnography

For seven years, I studied personal appearance shifting, but personal appearance shifting has been my daily lived experience for over 57 years. To add my own voice to the conversation as a full participant, I employed autoethnography, another form of inquiry that developed as women, Blacks, and other oppressed peoples "insisted that their research

projects should make sense in the context of their own lived experiences" (Bochner, 2005, p. 270).

Defining autoethnography has sometimes proven difficult. Carolyn Ellis (2004) believes autoethnography is a combination of method, research, and writing that links autobiography or personal experiences to the social and the cultural. Sarah Wall (2008) calls autoethnography a qualitative method that broadens sociological understanding as it gives voice to personal experience. For me, it is Stacey Holman Jones's (2005) extended definition of autoethnography that reveals my reasons for employing this genre to tell my story:

> Autoethnography is…a balancing act…a blurred genre…setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation…and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives. (p. 765)

Ellis and Bochner (2006) share Jones's (2005) belief that the reader must get involved in and experience autoethnography by caring, feeling, empathizing, and acting. As an autoethnographic researcher, I willingly make myself as vulnerable to readers as my participants in order to evoke and provoke these responses in them and from them. Caring, feeling, empathizing, and acting are the positive steps I have sought to inspire in Black professional women and in other individuals who directly or indirectly encounter my research. By employing autoethnography, I used my subjectivity as a lens through which to illuminate the cultural, sociological, and psychological dimensions of the highly complex lived experience of shifting among Black women in the academy.

Scholarship debating the legitimacy and practice of autoethnographic research held lessons for me as a researcher. Traditional ethnographers, such as Sara Delamont (2007),

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decry autoethnography as lazy, unethical, devoid of analytic outcomes, and spotlighting the powerful. Renowned autoethnographers Carolyn Ellis (2006) and Norman Denzin (2006) contest Leon Anderson 's (2006) claim to be a practitioner of autoethnography—analytic or otherwise. Having conducted a pilot study of Black paraprofessional women in 2004, I realized that other Black women's perspectives on personal appearance shifting might not necessarily parallel my own. To protect the integrity of my research data, I had to be especially watchful that I did not allow my subjectivity to color my analysis of subjects' narratives or to influence unduly my interpretation of results. Later in this discussion, I address the issue of credibility in greater detail.

Participant Selection

To create initial and subsequent pools of possible participants for this study of personal appearance shifting, I used network or chain sampling (Glesne, 1999). From the first pool of Black professional women, I purposefully selected seven participants who in June 2009 responded affirmatively to an electronically distributed lay summary (See Appendix A), a demographic information form, and a one-page participant survey. Their responses to demographic questions provided basic biographical and employment data. Survey responses extended this information yielding data regarding participants' personal appearance practices and experiences in academe including their self-described physical characteristics; shifting practices; cost of biculturality in time, money, and well-being; and recall of previous experiences.

Using the demographic and survey responses as a starting point, I employed Patton's (1990) maximum variation sampling strategy in an effort to select informants who varied with respect to age, ethnicity, physical characteristics, personal appearance practices, marital

or relationship status, sexual orientation, parental status, academic discipline, tenure status, and type and location of institution. Because hair preparation was a primary focus of this biculturality research, I wanted to include cases from both extremes, i.e., Black professional women wearing their hair in natural styles as well as those wearing thermally or chemically straightened hairstyles while employed in the academy. Though it was unlikely that a small number of informants would encompass all possible manifestations of these sought-after demographic traits, working to have representation of as many variables as possible would increase the likelihood of information-rich cases as well as strengthening the odds of securing discrepant views (Glesne, 1999; Patton, 1990). Pre-interview attrition of two participants and the need for disciplinary diversification resulted in my seeking out and again purposefully selecting five additional informants in March and April 2010. This brought the total to ten. To preserve their anonymity, from this point forward, I have referred to them by their pseudonyms, all but one of which were self-selected: Tori, Felicia, Monique, Mazvita, Morgan, Ellen, Louisa, Star, Anna, and Nia.

Table 1 profiled participants' academic rank, length of higher education experience, degree held, tenure status, institution size and type, and pre-k-12 experience. Participants' disciplines were diverse, representing the arts and sciences, education, and law, and they worked in seven different public or private southeastern United States universities or professional institutions.

Table 1

Participants' Profiles of Institution Type and Work Experience

Alias	Rank/ Job Title	Higher Education Experience	Degree	Tenured	Institution Size	Current/ Previous Institution Types	Pre-K-12 Exp.
Trudi (R)	Teacher/ Former Administrator	N/A	MSA	Yes	1.3K	PWI/ PBI	Yes
Tori (T)	Professor	19	Ph.D.	Yes	41.5K	PWI	No
Felicia (F)	Professor Emerita	36	Ph.D.	Yes	23.3	PWI/ HBCU	No
Monique (M)	Director/ Associate Professor	15.5	Ed.D.	No	6.4K	HBCU/ PWI	Yes
Mazvita (V)	Assistant Professor	3	Ed.D.	No	16.6K	PWI	Yes
Morgan (G)	Associate Dean Associate Professor	28	JD	No	.5K	PWI/ HBCU	No
Ellen (E)	Clinical Assistant Professor	29	Ph.D.	No	23.3K	PWI	Yes
Louisa (L)	Adjunct Faculty/ Former Program Director	12	Ed.D.	No	1.5K	PWI	Yes
Star (S)	Assistant Professor	14	Ph.D.	Yes	16.6K	PWI	No
Anna (A)	Assistant Clinical Professor	4	JD	No	9K	HBCU	No
Nia (N)	Assistant Clinical Professor	3	JD	No	9K	HBCU	No

During planning of this study and later while making informant selections, I had two significant participation criteria: parental status and ethnicity. I deemed parental status as particularly important because Black mothers of especially young Black girls have usually been responsible for their daughters' hair care as well as their own, and the additional cost in time and money could potentially add to participants' stress and detract from resources available for work-related activities. The "kink coefficient" was the term used to describe the additional hours Black mothers must build into their already crowded schedules to groom or arrange for someone else to groom their daughters' hair (Clemetson, 2006). Half of the ten participants I selected were mothers of daughters. For two mothers, that meant grooming the hair of an additional female. The other three mothers faced not only the daily challenge of grooming two additional heads of hair but also the differences in hair texture and care requirements which further complicated this task. Regarding ethnicity, informal conversations and observations of Black professional women of Caribbean extraction in post-secondary and Pre-K-12 education, not to mention the personal appearance practices and beliefs of my Jamaican American in-laws, led me to suspect ethnicity could also have a considerable bearing on workplace identity practices among Black professional women. Consequently, to determine whether research would substantiate my anecdotal supposition, I wanted to include informants born in other countries. Although no one from the West Indies numbered among selected participants, the ten Black women informing this study of personal appearance shifting in the academy were still quite geographically diverse. One informant came from the southern region of Africa; the remaining nine came from the Northeast, Southeast, and Midwest regions of the United States of America.

As to personal demographics, these scholars were almost as diverse a group as I had initially envisioned. Only in sexual orientation were they homogeneous. All ten participants declared themselves to be heterosexual. Four were single, four married, and two divorced. In age they ranged from 34 to 66, with at least two women representing each decade, from 30 to 60.

Data Collection

Figure 1: Methods of Data Collection

Following participants' selection, I emailed those who responded affirmatively to my call for research participants so that they could advise me of the best means of keeping in contact with them. Thus, subsequent communications took the form of short phone calls or additional brief emails. I especially wished to express my gratitude for their willingness to take part in this study and to clarify any concerns they might have regarding the issues to be discussed or the projected number and length of their interviews. Later communications established the locations, dates, and times for our meetings. I tried to keep the lines of communication open to alleviate the chances of further participant attrition. These methods permitted me to begin to establish rapport with each participant; to try to schedule the most convenient and private time, place, and duration for each interview session; and to supplement and confirm preliminary data gleaned from the demographic information form

and one-page survey. In my estimation, shared ownership of the interview process

significantly increased the occurrence of data-rich sessions with each informant.

To collect autoethnographic data, I used methods advised by Philaretou and Allen

(2006): "Self-reflective accounts, derived from personal documents such as diary entries,

interviews with significant others, personal recollections, and correspondence, constitute the

primary data source for Autoethnographic research" (p. 65). Memos and notes made

throughout my pilot study as well as papers written during various doctoral courses and

verbal communications with professional colleagues were all rich veins of such

autoethnographic ore for this study.

Via the United States Postal Service, I relayed IRB informed consent forms and self-

addressed, stamped envelopes to respondents initially selected. Time constraints led me to

hand deliver these forms to the second group of informants. The consent form advised

participants that I had received the prior approval of ASU's IRB to conduct this research,

discussed risks and benefits to their participation in this study, and informed them that they

were free to withdraw at any time.

 Once we established the necessary rapport and managed to accommodate our busy

schedules, the weather, and unforeseen health problems, I began conducting in-depth

interviews in agreed upon settings. The first interview occurred in the first week of August

2009 and the last took place in the second week of April 2010. Interviews consisted of one

session lasting between two to three hours. Eight interviews were strictly one-on-one

sessions, and one was a combined meeting with Anna and Nia. I intentionally scheduled their

interview this way for two reasons: to accommodate Nia's child care pick up time and to test

the intended structure of my counter-story. I planned to construct my counter-story as a

round table discussion among the scholars at which I acted as facilitator. Even so, much of Anna and Nia's interview was still one-on-one as either Anna or Nia had to be out of the room for lengthy stretches of time. To gain the most complete information from all respondents, I asked multiple questions on the same subject at different stages of the interview. This was not to imply that I believed participants would intentionally prevaricate. Rather, as Glesne (1999) states:

> Generally people will talk more willingly about personal or sensitive issues once they know you. In most cases, this means being perceived as someone who is willing to invest the time truly to understand them. Sometimes it simply means giving the person time to learn that you are an all-right sort of person. (p. 99)

Interview questions covered a range of topics targeting what participants did to shift their personal appearance and why. Because the permanence of racism is a central tenet of CRT (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), I framed questions that would tell me whether participants perceived the presence of racism in their workspaces, and if so, to what extent it influenced their personal appearance decisions. For example, the first group of questions focused on the following:

- participants' thoughts and feelings about personal appearance shifting,
- whether they shifted their appearance,
- their reasons for the changes they made,
- whether they felt forced to make these changes,
- the perceptions of colleagues toward their personal appearance.

Other questions sought information related to Whiteness as property (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). These questions focused on these topics:

- hair texture, straightening, and styles;

- skin tone lightening techniques;

- attitudes of colleagues toward participant's body image,

- relationships with majority colleagues.

Being a Black woman myself, over the years I have found that Black people in particular subscribe to this philosophy. In fact, under normal conditions many of the women in this study would probably not consider it culturally correct to share their 'personal business' with a stranger. For instance, participants tended to answer questions related to the alteration of their skin tone in different ways at different times. The more they grew to know me, the more they seemed to recall or were willing to divulge. Though taking preparatory measures did build a genuine, relaxed connection with participants, adding to the likelihood of my receiving more detailed, personal, and thoughtful answers as well as valuable data (Glesne, 1999), it did not always ensure privacy with each informant, even in the individual interviews. In four of the eight individual interviews, there were several interruptions. Fortunately, either the informant or I almost always knew exactly where we had stopped. Meeting with each woman reminded me that regardless of the level of employment, good educators were busy servants who were almost always on call for their students, their colleagues, and their families.

All participants permitted me to audiotape their responses to questions and take manual notes during interviews. Audio taping left me free to maintain a reasonable amount of eye contact with informants and to attend more closely to their responses. In addition to posing follow-up questions as the researcher, I, as a fellow participant, sometimes inserted my autoethnographic voice and shared my own experiences with specific personal

appearance issues as we discussed them. Nevertheless, I kept a watchful eye on my subjectivity. I wanted my informant to feel that we were having a relaxed conversation about *her* personal appearance experiences in the academy and rest assured that I, as the researcher, would faithfully report her story to the academic community whether or not it agreed with my own. As the audio tape unerringly recorded our utterances, my handwritten notes served as a backup measure and clarified questionable or otherwise hard to decipher passages that could surface during transcription (Glesne, 1999). Still, several times during data collection Murphy's Law prevailed. For example, technical difficulties with the recorder required that I handwrite one complete interview. Thankfully the informant had herself experienced a similar situation while conducting her own research, so this unexpected state of affairs neither detracted from the quality of her answers nor from the apparent enjoyment she received from sharing her story. Another participant's eagerness in discussing issues related to hair biculturality led to our beginning the interview with questions I had planned to have her address much later. On a third occasion, I had to ask the respondent to restate her entire answer to the first question because I had forgotten to turn on the recorder before we began talking. In every case, however, these scholars were more than patient and supportive of me as the recorder of their narratives and of the sometimes rocky collection process. Needless to say, I soon learned to prepare for the unexpected from my equipment, my participants, and myself.

Having conducted a pilot study, I recognized the value of strictly adhering to Glesne's (1999) recommendations for improving the interviewing process and ensuring more accurate transcriptions and analysis:

Keep an accurate account of every interviewee that includes…old questions requiring elaboration; questions already covered; where to begin next time; special circumstances that you feel affected the quality of the interview; reminders about anything that might prepare you for subsequent interviews; and identification data that at a glance give characteristics…that have a bearing on your respondent selection. These identification data allow you to monitor the respondents you have seen, so you can be mindful of whom else to see. Review your notes, listen to the tapes, and transcribe as soon after the interview as possible.…If you wait until you have completed all of your interviews before listening to your tapes (or reviewing your notes), then you have waited too long to learn what they can teach you. (pp. 79-80)

Each interview held valuable lessons for conducting the next. From the first I learned to prepare either a typed chart (See Appendix B) or script of my revised questions in the order in which I usually preferred to ask them. The chart enabled me to omit questions that did not apply to some applicants and skip ahead to those that did. The script, containing all of my primary questions and a limited amount of space for the informant's answers, required that I cross out irrelevant questions as I proceeded so that I would not think I had mistakenly skipped them. Following each session, I reflected on changes I needed to make before meeting with the next respondent. In the last meeting with my committee, we narrowed the focus of my questions, but as advised, I held eliminated questions in reserve. During her interview, Tori stated that any comprehensive study of personal appearance among Black women professionals should definitely include questions regarding their professional attire; consequently, I returned those questions to my script. Another valuable tip I had discovered

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by the fourth interview was the importance of gently taking charge of the session from the beginning. As I started her interview, I politely advised Mazvita that following the order of the script as closely as possible would enable us to complete our meeting within the agreed upon time limits and make transcription much easier. Busy women themselves, participants were ever mindful of their time constraints and eager to conclude sessions punctually so that they could move on to whatever was next on their agendas. After transcribing each session, I emailed the transcript to the informant for review and possible revision. Some participants made changes or corrections while others let their narratives stand as written.

Data Analysis

According to Glesne (2006), "data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (p. 147). To organize my data, I created multiple electronic files in which I stored information gleaned from the survey and demographic forms, interviews, and transcripts. I used conventional folders to store handwritten notes taken during and after interviews or following phone calls. To find patterns in the data, I read and reread transcripts. After identifying patterns, I charted the information for each participant. On separate charts I recorded data regarding participants' personal and professional lives, their general thoughts and feelings toward shifting; their dress, hair, skin tone, and body image; and the positive and negative reactions of colleagues and family members toward their personal appearance. At this point, I found it helpful to use my guiding questions to sort extraneous information from that directly related to my research questions. Once I had done this, it was easier to organize the data in another series of e-charts that eventually emerged as themes (See Appendixes B-F). Periodically, I emailed progress reports of my findings to my committee and sent updates to study participants.

Joseph Maxwell (1996) stressed the importance of memos in the development of ideas, understanding a topic, self-critique, and serious reflection. Through this reflective process, I realized that allowing characters to discuss their shifting experiences with their peers could have the same effect that it did in real-life, i.e., we could come to understand more together than I alone could see. Though I had always intended to employ CRT's counter-story as my method for presenting the data, I now realized composite counter-story would permit participants to *take part* in analyzing the data. Not only did the counter-story approach promote our collective and enduring participation in data analysis, but it also offered me the benefit of participants' varied insights into the practice of personal appearance shifting. As educational leaders we were all eager for these findings to shrink the gap in existing knowledge on Black professional women in higher education and in Black culture.

Ethical Issues

 As a researcher I had a responsibility to behave ethically toward research participants throughout and following the investigative process. Glesne (2006) states that "ethics is not something that you can forget once you satisfy the demands of institutional review boards and other gatekeepers of research conduct…Rather, ethical considerations are inseparable from your everyday interactions with research participants and with your data" (p. 129). Furthermore, it was imperative that I remembered to treat participants with respect and never view them as merely the possessors of the data I wanted to collect.

In addition to obtaining informed consent from research participants, I had an ongoing responsibility of confidentiality toward them. This meant safeguarding their identity, their personal data, and the fact of their participation in the study. To meet these requirements, I agreed to store transcripts, recordings, and personal data in a locked file

cabinet destroy them upon completion of the study. The use of pseudonyms not only ensured

anonymity to informants and their institutions, but it also guaranteed that I alone knew

informants' real identities.

Even though I was a full participant in this study, that role did not negate my

responsibility as the researcher to be as objective as possible at every stage of the

investigative process. If anything, it made me even more conscious of the need to be

especially attentive to my personal biases as I collected and analyzed data, formulated

conclusions, and reported findings. To mitigate the risk of bias, I wrote memos to myself that

explored my subjectivity, mining it for its insights about what I was learning rather than

uncritically inserting it in the text. In this way I was able to voice my personal feelings

without tainting my research. Rereading the memos served to remind me that I was

vulnerable to prejudice in particular areas. I found it helpful to remember that sharing the

attributes of race with the other participants did not necessarily mean they would share my

perspective on personal appearance shifting. If there was one truth I learned while conducting

my pilot study, it was that the outcome was unpredictable because I could not accurately

predict what respondents would say or how they would feel about shifting their personal

appearance.

In addition to attending to issues of subjectivity, validity, and efforts to mitigate the

potential ill-effects of researcher bias, my ethical stance throughout this project involved a

strict do-no-harm set of beliefs and practices. While there was no physical danger, this could

not and did not preclude the presence of other risk factors. This research involved the study

of Black professional women's bicultural personal appearance in the higher education

workplace; therefore, emotional, psychological, and professional stressors were assumed to

be an inherent part of the interview and subsequent reflection processes. The intended emancipatory nature of CRT and critical race feminism could not ensure that the sharing of past and present experiences with personal appearance shifting in the academy would be altogether pleasant. While recalling and relating incidents, such as how race remains a factor in the ways their peers and students perceive them or how whiteness remains a negotiable aspect of property in the academy, some participants did express intense feelings and surfaced difficult memories. Ever vigilant about monitoring signs of traumatization or re-traumatization (for which a protocol was in place), I relied upon and continually fostered a detailed sense of rapport with my participants. I have discussed my use of CRT and critical race feminism as an analytical lens for making design decisions. Earlier discussions with participants could later result in changes in philosophy and behavior that could create conflicts at work. A precedent exists whereby Black professional women abandoned their biculturality in favor of natural personal identities only to find they no longer "fit" their organizations. Instead of biculturality, Fortune 500 companies adopted the term "style compliance" (Hewlett & West, 2005). Failing to present a Eurocentric personal style often meant career derailment for Black women high performers who grew tired of personal appearance shifting on the job. Although I have seen no evidence of adverse effects from my study of personal appearance shifting, I would have been remiss had I ignored my reflexive responsibilities or neglected to point out the possibility of risk to participants at the outset.

My final duty to research informants was to represent them and their experiences as accurately as I could in an engaging style that other scholars would be eager to read, all the while protecting their anonymity. To help me do that, I endeavored to incorporate participants' personalities in *composite* characters, either coping their exact words to craft

dialogue or using "closely edited quotations to portray participants' points of view" (Glesne, 2006, p. 196).

In Chapter IV, I present an in-depth discussion of study findings in terms of the themes and sub-themes that I found and the presence or absence of bicultural practices with respect to participants' personal appearance. Chapter V presents the master narrative and the counter-story, an alternative format for analyzing some of the issues I identified from the perspectives of study participants. Chapter VI is my response to research questions, implications and limitations of the current study, as well as suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter I took a conventional approach to the presentation of my research findings. Revisiting the three questions guiding my study of personal appearance shifting, I included a visual representation of the themes and sub-themes I would be discussing in the coming sections. Next, I presented a thematic review of my findings with pertinent data from the study as illustrative support. I concluded this chapter with a summary of those findings.

Review of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore personal appearance shifting among Black professional women in higher education. The following questions guided my research:

1. How have Black professional women described their experiences with shifting their personal appearance at work in the academy?

2. What are the ways in which personal appearance shifting has manifested in Black professional women in academe?

3. What have been the physical, emotional, and professional effects of personal appearance shifting on these Black women?
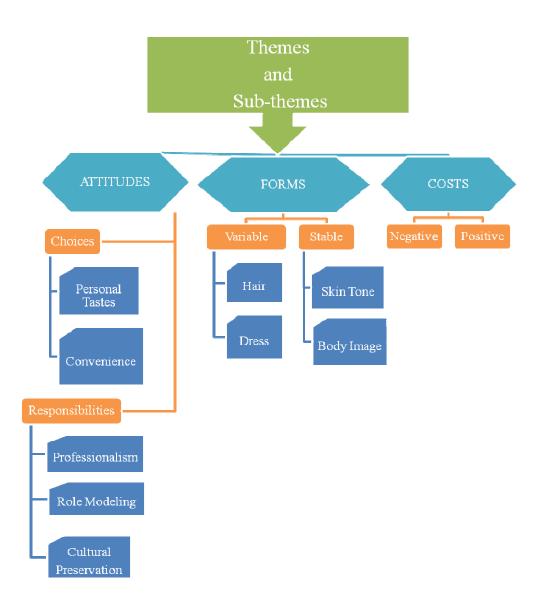
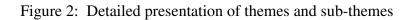Overview of Themes and Sub-themes

Figure 2 (p. 62) presents attitudes toward shifting, forms of shifting, and costs of shifting, three major themes that emerged in this exploration of personal appearance biculturality.

Poring over the data, I realized all the informants had positive attitudes toward the sort of shifting they themselves did—even though they did not always view what they did as biculturality or personal appearance shifting (See Appendix C). Soon, it became clear to me that there were five distinct attitudes functioning as five sub-themes: personal taste, convenience, professionalism, role modeling, and cultural preservation. In Figure 2 (p. 62), I identified these subthemes as being of two types: *choices* or *responsibilities*. Participants' two choices directly enhanced their own quality of life. *Personal taste* allowed them to make their own decisions about how they looked or what form their personal appearance took; *convenience* meant they did what best fit their busy schedules. The three responsibilities pointed toward participants' self-imposed duties to others. *Professionalism* was something most of them felt they owed their employers, colleagues, and students. Moreover, like numerous Black educators before them, they accepted the charge of *role modeling* appropriate personal appearance for their students. Last, they were dedicated to the *preservation of the cultural practices* of their race.

To reach the next step, I considered what forms participants' shifting took. These were variable (See Appendix D) and stable (See Appendix E). Hair and dress were easily changed in numerous ways. Skin tone and body image, though alterable, usually involved dangerous or expensive procedures and time to achieve. For those reasons I deemed them as stable.

The last theme required me to consider the risks of personal appearance shifting. In short, I counted the costs (See Appendix F). Reflecting on how changes enhanced or impaired participants' sense of well-being, I simply settled on positive or negative. Figure 1 provides a snapshot of the various themes and subthemes.

Figure 2: Detailed presentation of themes and sub-themes

Attitudes Toward Shifting

Choices and responsibilities characterized the two major dispositions participants exhibited toward shifting their personal appearance. Personal tastes and convenience were the sub-themes of choice. Professionalism, role modeling, and cultural preservation were the sub-themes of responsibility.

Choices

An attitude of wanting to choose how they would look in the academic workplace was not in the least peculiar for this group of secure and assertive women. As much as possible, they wanted their wardrobes and their hairstyles to reflect their own personal tastes and to be convenient for their demanding lifestyles. Differing from their predecessors or even Black professional women in the current corporate sector, the Black professional women in this study believed academe gave them more freedom to set their own personal appearance standards, even in majoritarian settings. Still, both Tori and Mazvita spoke of the pressure on Black women to be professional in traditional ways in order to gain acceptance and legitimacy. With that in mind, it was somewhat surprising to me that informants placed such a premium on letting their personal tastes so strongly influence how they dressed for the workplace.

Personal taste. No two women, even those within the same subgroups of personal taste or style, regularly shifted their personal appearance in exactly the same manner. Only Louisa and Felicia appeared in a single category because their hair and dress were always bicultural at work and at home. By her own admission, Louisa confessed that she had only 'gone natural' for a couple of years because her hair had fallen out after getting a relaxer over a color treatment. Even then, she colored her wavy hair 'very blond.' For that reason I have

not shown her as cultural in either dress or hair. Felicia stated that her hair had not been straightened since her dad stopped paying for her relaxer when she was in graduate school. Unlike Louisa, Felicia always dressed comfortably and warmly at work to accommodate her health concerns. Though both women were always bicultural in dress, Louisa's hair was always straightened, and Felicia's was always natural. Because the other participants gave no concrete proof that they wore authentically African attire, Mazvita was the only informant I list as wearing cultural apparel. The most flexible participants with respect to hair and dress were Morgan and Mazvita. Morgan shifted her hair preparation and styles "back and forth all the time" by seasonally alternating her natural hair with a chemical relaxer or a texturizer. Mazvita regularly shifted between her African attire and hairstyles and her Eurocentric ones. Both Nia and Anna dressed solely in Eurocentric clothing for courtroom appearances, even if that meant changing what they wore to their clinical classes on campus before leaving for court. Keeping more conservative clothing on hand in their offices permitted Nia and Anna to exercise more personal taste on campus than they were comfortable doing in the courtroom. Anna expressed her feelings regarding the differences in how she dressed for the classroom and for court:

> I wear a suit when I have to wear it…If we have company coming and I know I'm going to be in the midst of that company, then I'll dress the part. Other than that, I'm here too long to be uncomfortable.

As to their hairstyle choices, Nia's hair was always bicultural, while Anna's hair was locked. Ellen and I opted to blend the two cultures in terms of dress and present a style which we characterized as having African 'flavor.' We both had TWAs, but unlike me, Ellen kept her options open for returning to straightened hair at some point. A final group sported bicultural

attire and wove straight hair into their natural hair so that their hair *appeared* straightened.

Thus, we twenty-first century professionals seemed less concerned with having others see us

as respectable than we were with creating our own dress and hairstyles in accordance with

our own personal tastes (Craig, 1997; Goldsmith, 2001).

   Convenience. Participants other *choice* sub-theme, convenience, generally referred to

the ease of managing or maintaining their personal appearance, especially their hair for work.

It is interesting that convenience even seemed to trump professionalism in the traditional

sense when it came to hair maintenance. Perhaps this was true because for many Black

women managing their hair had the potential to be one of the most difficult feats they tackled

each day. Consequently, five participants currently preferred bicultural hairstyles while five

others and I favored cultural hairstyles. Each woman's interpretation reflected what was most

suitable for her lifestyle. Morgan referred to this as "functionality." At some point in life,

every woman in the study had experienced getting her hair straightened first by pressing

comb and later by chemical relaxer. When asked, one of the primary reasons most Black

women, especially those with thick, kinky hair, gave for wearing bicultural hairstyles was

that they made their hair "easier" to manage than wearing natural hairstyles. Morgan, who

shifted between relaxed and natural hair all the time, was a prime example of those who

made that claim. As her thick, natural hair grew longer, her distress over trying to comb it

each day became unmistakable:

   I comb it only because I don't like it when it gets —my hair curls very tightly—and I

   don't like it when it gets too tight...Uncombed? I couldn't take it. I could not...I could

   not do it...could not do it. It would drive me bananas, drive me bananas. As it is right

now, I'm at the, "OK, you need to do something. You need to twist it. You need to do something because it's just too tight."

Morgan's remedy was to straighten her hair either partially with a texturizer, a relaxer left on for half the normal time, or fully with a strong relaxer, one developed for obstinate hair textures like hers. Afterward, she remarked, "It's easy to comb. It's easy to style. It doesn't hurt when I comb it. It's easy. It's just easy...I wouldn't say I'm tender headed; I would just say that I have a low tolerance for pain." Star's bicultural braids afforded her a vast amount of freedom she never had when she relaxed her thick hair. Now, she could swim as often as she liked and wash her hair without worrying about having to have it rebraided for three months. This was particularly good because she lived and worked in a college town that until fairly recently had *no* hairdresser who could do Black hair. Even after getting a hairdresser for Black hair, Star still had to travel 120 miles to have her box braids put in. The following re-enacted dialogue showed what Star faced trying to find a hairdresser where she lived and taught when she used to relax her hair chemically:

"I've been in the office before calling around [to various hairdressers], 'Do you do Black hair?'"

"No."

"Do you do Black hair?"

"No."

"My colleagues are always kind of like, 'Wow, I never really thought that that would be an issue. There's not really a salon [here] that you can go to.'"

Nia's hair was also very thick and even with a relaxer, she usually visited her hairdresser several times a month to keep it looking up to her professional standards. In fact, because she

went so often, Nia had a VIP plan, which saved her money. When she got her braids in summer, she was only able to leave them in for two months because her hair was so thick that it would begin to lock and be impossible to comb when her hairdresser removed them. For Louisa, who had never worn an Afro, convenience meant being able to style her hair in a wrap, an up-do, or a ponytail, as desired. Monique, who had always relaxed her very coarse, kinky hair had the freedom to wear numerous styles:

> I've worn braids…sew-in kinky hair…and… a Wave Nouveau. I just bought several straight wigs. Just about everybody I work with has a wig. One of my wigs has an asymmetrical cut for bad hair days between getting a touch up or having my hair rebraided…But I've never worn my hair natural, even when I begged my mama to let me wear an Afro. I would roll my permed hair on the rods of sponge rollers and it would be very curly.

Seven participants and I preferred the convenience of unprocessed hair. Full professors Tori and Felicia wore only natural hairstyles their entire academic careers. My hair, too, remained unadulterated for decades. Both Anna and Mazvita relaxed their hair before coming to higher education. The current length of Anna's locs said her hair had been natural for longer than she'd been in academe. According to Mazvita, it had been about three years since she last relaxed her hair. Ellen and Morgan were both biculturality part-timers whose hair was natural part of the year and relaxed or texturized the remainder of the time. Under her straight-textured, synthetic box braids, Star had not relaxed her hair for the past year and a half. These participants represented every age group from the 30s through the 60s. I had not expected natural hair to span every decade represented in the study. Furthermore, I was also astonished to discover that someone else besides me thought natural hair was

convenient and easy to manage. Three out of four of those with very thick hair only found natural hair easier to handle during certain seasons, at certain lengths, or in certain styles. Since having her box braids put in, Star's thick, natural hair was not only undetectable but also very low maintenance. Prior to getting braids, Star wore her hair relaxed. For reasons that included but were not confined to convenience, Tori, Mazvita, and I vowed never to straighten our natural hair again. On a daily basis, our TWAs, locs, and cornrows required minimal maintenance with only the TWA needing picking, brushing, or combing, as desired. Only I washed my TWA every day and my locks every other day for work. Mazvita washed her hair weekly, and Star preferred the same schedule unless swimming required her to wash it more often. Mazvita and I performed our own maintenance at home or had relatives do it for us. Felicia, Tori, Ellen, and Anna visited hairdressers for washing, deep conditioning, coloring, cutting, or tightening at least once a month. Star's box braids lasted a quarter of a year before they needed replacing. Thus, the majority of Black professional women in this study found natural hair well-suited to their lifestyles either all or part of the year.

Responsibilities

  Professionalism. Professionalism ranked high on the list of driving forces that directed informants' personal appearance decisions. Mazvita concluded how Black women looked probably played a major part in determining their "acceptancy, legitimacy…and longevity" in academe. Furthermore, both supervisors and administrators were cognizant of their roles as university ambassadors within their communities. Morgan, in particular, cited this reason for dressing biculturally for work but much more Afrocentrically outside work, especially since moving deeper into the South. As symbols of their authority, those employed as administrators, teaching attorneys, or educational supervisors usually wore suits

when venturing outside the university environs. Participants in this study like those in Turner (2002) found wearing a dark suit in the college classroom caused students regardless of race to take them and what they said more seriously. Anna and Nia believed that Black women were obliged to prove themselves professionally to a greater extent than their majority colleagues, what Stanley (2006) called "'overprov[ing]' their presence and worth in the academy" (p. 715). Being appropriately dressed was an essential element of that proof. For Tori this meant dressing better than most of her colleagues. Practicing law professors, Anna and Nia even referred to their suits as their uniforms. Anna considered being 'in uniform' when she approached the court indicative of her respect not only for the court but also for her colleagues. Thus, most professors interpreted professionalism to mean looking as authoritative and knowledgeable in their dress as possible for work on campus and off.

Role modeling. Role modeling was another significant factor for these educators, even though their approaches took disparate forms. In the spirit of 'it takes a village to rear a child,' it has always been a part of our folklore that Black women teachers, feeling a responsibility to fill in the gaps in their Black students' education, took them aside and mentored or tutored them on subjects their majority peers came to school already knowing. Personal appearance was an area in which Black women professors had extended themselves by intention and by example to point their students in the right direction. Nia and Anna, recognizing a need to instruct Black female law students in appropriate dress for the court, formed Sister-to-Sister at their HBCU's law school. Monique advised her future teachers that their 'clubbing' wardrobes should be different from their working wardrobes. Young professionals informed Louisa that she was their role model because of her professional appearance and demeanor. Unlike her peers, Tori's slant on role modeling leaned toward

Afrocentricity instead of biculturality. Sporting her locks with Afrocentric or Eurocentric

attire, Tori wanted young Black women at her PWI "to see [her] as a model of the freedom

that they do have to express themselves how they want...that they aren't slaves to

Eurocentrism—like they think they are...or they think they have to be." Like their

foremothers, these scholars knew for Black students to be competitive, they must teach them

more than academic subjects.

Cultural preservation. Perhaps losing so much of our culture during slavery

influenced Black people to hold tenaciously to the cultural practices we resurrected or

acquired since then. The emergence of the last theme, *the preservation of our cultural*

practices, resulted from Monique's claim that straightened hair was *just a part of our culture*

and forced me to monitor my subjectivity more closely than any other aspect of this study.

Even though I claim a fairly comprehensive knowledge of the practices and basic tenets of

Black culture, hearing Monique's assertion honestly gave me pause. After stopping and

objectively evaluating the truth of her claim, I conceded that hair straightening had, indeed,

become and for the majority of American Blacks remained an indelible badge of

respectability (Craig, 1997; Russell et al., 1992). Processed hair became so prevalent and so

prized that most Black people deemed their hair in its unaltered state, i.e. natural, kinky,

coiled, curled, or *nappy*, the unwelcome intruder. Craig (1997) put it this way:

> African American communities maintained autonomous beliefs, the dominant view
>
> that a beautiful woman had long straight hair, hair that moved, prevailed. Before the
>
> mid-1960s, black women had to have straight or straightened hair to meet minimal
>
> standards of appearance. That expectation meant that black women who did not have
>
> naturally straight hair adhered to a discipline of straightening their hair with a hot

comb and grease every two weeks and did their best to avoid wetting their hair between straightenings. (pp. 399-419)

Furthermore, both Monique and Morgan stated that everyone they knew growing up had straightened hair. Thinking back, I could make the same claim. In fact, when I became the first in my community to adopt the Afro in the late sixties, one of our neighbors reportedly called me a bitch. Such a strong reaction was hardly an isolated case. Reports abound of Black acquaintances and strangers alike exercising their 'rights' to correct the behavior of errant Black women who were disgracing the race by wearing their hair unpressed. Monique claimed her older daughter's series of natural hairdos caused quite a stir among extended family members. To this day Monique herself has never had natural hair, even when the Afro was in its heyday. "I've never worn my hair natural, even when I begged my mama to let me wear an Afro. I would roll my permed hair on the rods of sponge rollers and it would be very curly." As an act of rebellion in response to her mother and aunt's reverence for 'good hair,' Morgan broke ranks with her family and began wearing her hair natural.

My mother and my aunt [were] darker than I am, but they had very straight hair…They would allude to the fact that, 'Oh, you know so and so is just dark, but they have straight hair.' My mother would say, 'But they have *good* hair.'…That's why I think, really, that I was so offended by it. I said, 'Well, if they have *good* hair, what do I have?' 'Oh, well, your hair's OK.' Maybe that's why I always had this rebellion about my hair and doing what I wanted. Because when I went natural, she was not a happy camper...Everybody had straight hair in my family until me."

Thus, it was no insignificant act for eight women in this study to take the bold and

courageous step to defy their own cultural norms and those of the dominant society by wearing their hair in natural styles.

<div style="text-align:center">Forms of Shifting</div>

Black professional women's personal appearance shifting basically took two forms in this investigation: variable and stable. Hair and dress were variable and skin tone and body image are stable.

Variable

A perusal of Appendix D indicates the degree of flexibility these scholars exhibited with regard to their dress and hair. Together they displayed more than ten different types of personal appearance. Over half of these types were strictly bicultural in dress. These would include the Eurocentric suits habitually worn by Louisa, Nia, and Anna; the dresses Nia said she actually preferred; and the casual clothing that met the atypical needs of Felicia and Star. Mazvita accounted for the style that was completely cultural or Afrocentric. On these occasions she experienced the comfort of wearing the African prints that she would like to have worn every day. Another type alternated between bicultural and cultural attire. Tori's desire to demonstrate to young Black women on campus that they need not restrict themselves to Eurocentric fashions fit here. The last style of dress reflected the African 'flavor' that Ellen and I liked to inject into our wardrobes through colors, patterns, or jewelry. Though all participants' professional attire was predominately bicultural, most women liked to add prints, patterns, colors, and jewelry that reflected their cultural heritage.

Participants' cultural heritage was most pronounced in their hairstyles. As with their dress, women from every age group in the study styled their hair in cultural or Afrocentric styles for work in higher education. There were six outright manifestations of Afrocentrism

and four styles that were a multicultural blend of cultural and bicultural textures and styles. The Afrocentric styles formed solely from participants' own natural hair were the teeny weenie Afro (TWA), Afro, locs, cornrows, braids, and bald. When participants relaxed their natural hair and added a straight weave in an Afrocentric style, I considered the hairstyle as multicultural. Nia's braids were this sort of style. Other multicultural styles began by leaving the participant's hair unprocessed and adding straight synthetic hair in an Afrocentric style. Star's box braids and Mazvita's cornrowed extensions were two such styles. The last two multicultural styles were Monique's kinky weave and Mazvita's straight weave. Monique's style added kinky hair to her relaxed hair and Mazvita's added straight hair to her unprocessed hair. There was more variety with respect to hairstyle choices than any other aspect of the study.

Currently, among this group of Black women academics, bicultural hairstyles were far less prevalent than cultural or multicultural ones. Again, Louisa remained the only informant to wear her relaxed hair in Eurocentric hairstyles all the time. Though Monique always relaxed her hair and had an assortment of straight wigs, she occasionally styled her hair Afrocentrically. Nia's usual style was also bicultural and involved styling her relaxed hair in Eurocentric hairstyles; occasionally, however, she added a straight weave to her relaxed hair. Morgan and Ellen exercised their options to shift their natural hair seasonally with relaxers or texturizers. Star had relaxed her hair in years past, but the convenience of her box braids meant she would probably not be returning to straightening her hair any time soon. Consequently, straight hair did not seem nearly as desirable or necessary among this group of women in today's academic culture as it had in the past.

Stable

Skin tone and body image were more stable than hair and dress because shifting them was more difficult and less desirable than changing outfits and hairstyles. The difficulty derived from the inherent physical danger, monetary outlay, and expenditure of time and effort attached to the alteration processes. Even so, participants revealed past experiences with changing these two areas of their personal appearance in addition to future desires to modify related aspects of their looks.

At this stage of their lives, all informants claimed to be satisfied with their skin tone and unwilling to do anything to lighten it. Still, only Star said she loved getting even darker:

I like the color of my skin. Actually, I love it when the sun comes out and I get darker. I was joking with one of my students, but I was being…serious...I was like, 'Yeah, the sun is out and I'm going to get darker.' He's White. He's like, 'You like to get darker?' I'm like, 'Yeah, the darker I am, the more beautiful my skin is.' I think that he was like, 'Oh, that's kind of cool.' But he was just like, 'I could never get that dark.' I was like, 'Too bad for you.'

Still, Black women's skin tone continued to have a significant effect on participants' economic prospects although not necessarily in the expected manner (Hunter, 2002; Keith & Herring, 1991; Mattox, 2002). Some participants felt federal accountability for faculty diversity may have had a greater influence on their employment and retention than their skin tone. Ellen had this to say on the subject:

I think that I'm here for several reasons: because I'm a good fit, because of what I know...But given that we can't get beyond 29% of people of color, I think that my skin color is part of the reason that they've kept me here.

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Mazvita's assessment of the situation went like this:

>These are just conjectures at this point; I don't know. But in my department I am the
>only Black person. I'm sure the university's got interest when they've got their
>diversity statistics they have to still say they have one [Black] person in this
>department. But I also think I contribute to the life of the department. So, I'm here
>because of my bonafide qualifications. I'm here because of my work, and I am
>enjoying my work…I enjoy what I'm doing at the moment. And I'm sure it's a
>mutual benefit between myself and the university—and the college.

When it came to altering their skin tone, participants had had very different past experiences. Felicia, Mazvita, Tori, and Star had never done anything to lighten their skin either intentionally or as a side effect. Felicia had the strongest reaction to my question regarding the practice of skin tone lightening: "Skin lightening is despicable. I don't have any issues with identity. I'm very pleased with my warm brown skin." Even so, it was not surprising that Monique, Anna, and I had all wanted to have lighter skin as children. To remove acne scars, Monique and Morgan had used Nadinola™ while Nia had tried prescription strength hydroquinone, and Anna had had microdermabrasion. Morgan had also applied Nadinola™ to her darkened underarms to even out their skin tone. Elidel still helped Ellen restore her discolored neck to its original color following outbreaks of her skin condition, and Louisa, who was allergic to the sun, was considering microdermabrasion to smooth the texture of her skin. Before I was old enough or worldly enough to know there were products like Nadinola™ and Ambi™, I had unsuccessfully scrubbed my preadolescent skin with Comet™ and Ajax™ to try to lighten it. Most commercial skin lighteners sold in this country still contain the dangerous ingredient hydroquinone that other counties withdrew

from their products because of its link to cancer and skin darkening ("hydroquinone," 2009; Russell et al., 1992). As well as Nia could recall, a small tube of prescription strength hydroquinone was between $70 and $100, and insurance companies refused to cover it because they considered it a cosmetic.

Like most Black women professionals who entered majoritarian work spaces, participants' concern over their body image was evident (Jones & Shorter –Gooden, 2003). Weight was a concern for Tori, Ellen, Nia, Star, and me for reasons of overall health and fitness. In fact, all participants and I had some sort of physical exercise . Appendix E lists these activities for each scholar. The outlay of money was considerably less for those performed at home rather than in a gym or spa, but any additional expenditure of time would be significant to someone with a busy schedule. In body image more than any other category, differences existed by age. Losing weight was a priority in every age group. Other factors seemed to differ according to time of life. For example, the women in their thirties dreamed of having tummy tucks while those of us in our forties and fifties were trying to retain as many of our own teeth as we could and get rid of excess body hair. Those in their sixties were conscious of vanishing eyebrows, sagging triceps, and increasing chin hairs. It would be interesting to discover how these results compared with those of other races at the same ages.

Costs of Shifting

Negative and Positive

Shifting had both negative and positive costs for these Black women. Straightening their hair could have opened doors that would otherwise have remained closed to them with natural hair; however, one of the most widespread negatives was damage to their hair and

scalp. While using chemical relaxers, Monique, Louisa, Star, and Anna experienced dramatic

hair loss, and Nia's and Mazvita's hair became noticeably thinner. Of these six women, only

Star, Anna, and Mazvita stopped relaxing their hair. Ironically, after she switched to

cornrows, excessively tight braiding tore out Star's hair along the front edges. Another

disadvantage was the hair-related stress that accompanied so-called ethnic hairstyles.

Monique reported being anxious over the appropriateness of wearing braids in the

professional arena. Furthermore, I recalled waiting a full year after being employed as an

administrator to begin locking my hair. Morgan, too, vacillated between straightening her

hair and keeping it natural before interviewing for her present position. Another debatable

issue was that some saw buying and maintaining a bicultural work wardrobe as a necessary

expense while others thought it much too costly. According to Mazvita, "Wearing a dark suit

was a big asset for a minority professor." Louisa evidently concurred, for she owned an

entire wardrobe of suits and high heeled shoes for her job in academe. Nia and Anna

considered their suits their courtroom uniforms. Star, however, found the time and money

spent ironing and dry cleaning such attire too dear. Finally, the risk of injury tempered the

benefits of being physically fit. Three springs ago I wrecked my bike, fracturing my nose and

sustaining permanent scaring to the bridge and philtrum. Because of swelling and the need to

leave the wounds uncovered, I also missed a day of work. Other exercise related injuries

resulted in months of physical therapy and the ongoing additional expense of orthopedic

shoes. On a positive note, memories of having an African behind in classical ballet classes

caused Tori to redirect past pain so that it worked to the advantage of young Black women in

academe. Demonstrating how to incorporate cultural styles into professional personal

appearance, Tori voluntarily became a role model for the next generation of Black

professional women. The invasive nature of personal appearance shifting ultimately makes it reasonable to expect there to be both negative and positive effects on those indulging in it.

Summary

If the women in this study were indicative of their peers, then there was no typical Black professional woman in academe. The majority of participants wore natural or cultural hairstyles, and the variety of those styles displayed the freedom they felt to decide what form they would take. Although dress was predominately bicultural for everyone, participants still managed to express their individuality or personal taste. Dress ranged from casual wear to conservative suits whichever was most convenient or functional for the occasion. Several women liked to spice up their bicultural attire by adding a sprinkle of African flavor using bright colors, ethnic jewelry, cultural patterns, or vivid prints.

Besides wearing such an array of natural hairstyles, all participants were currently pleased with their skin tone. A few had used some sort of product or procedure on their skin at some point in their lives to remove the ravages of acne or unevenness; others had even wanted to have lighter skin when they were younger.

Weight was another near universal issue, but all informants did some kind of physical training to try to keep it under control. That training may have had a decided effect on so many of them changing from straight to natural hairstyles. This is an issue for future in-depth studies on Black professional women in higher education.

In terms of cost, though hair loss or thinning was the most prevalent, it was not the only result of personal appearance shifting. Bodily injury from exercise and the price of purchasing and maintaining a professional wardrobe were other negatives. Positives were equally far-reaching. Because their personal appearance had set them up for success,

participants felt confident and empowered. Their willingness to act as role models of appropriate yet inclusive personal style assisted current scholars in passing on these traits to the next generation of Black professional women.

In Chapter V, I use counter-story and autoethnography in particular to relate past and present events in the academy from the perspectives of the majority and the marginalized. The master-narrative speaks of personal appearance from the standpoint of the dominant discourse, and the counter-narrative affords a confidential canvassing of this study's participants' unique experiences with personal appearance biculturality. Chapter VI gives me a chance to compare the questions that guided my research to the data I examined and analyzed. I consider what these findings have to offer educational leaders in the way of informing their practice and also provide a discussion of research that remains to be done for the benefit of the academic community.

CHAPTER V: REALITIES, RISKS, AND

RESPONSIBILITIES: A PERSONAL APPEARANCE

COMPOSITE COUNTER-STORY

Introduction

This chapter blends the thematic analysis presented in the previous chapter with a more interpretive analysis that reaches into relevant scholarly discourse. In this way, the following discussion bridges the findings grounded in the interview data with conceptual descriptions and explanations found in the literature. This chapter accomplishes extending my analysis through the specific use of what is described in CRT as the master narrative and the counter-story approach to reposition findings.

In order to provide a comprehensive picture of life in the academy, theory must include both the master narrative of the dominant group and the counter-narrative of the marginalized others. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) applied critical race theory (CRT) to educational research because of the permanence of racism in America, the preeminence of property rights in American society, and the way in which the convergence of race and property form an analytic tool that assists in understanding inequalities in American schools and in American society. As a tenet of CRT, counter-stories are a means of giving voice to less powerful or powerless groups by allowing them to tell their seldom told stories (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002b). In educational research, counter-stories have become the principal means of unmasking and evaluating normalized dialogues that have led to stereotypes (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). My use of

CRT and counter-story is predicated on my desire to remove the gag from these Black professional women so that they can finally 'have their say' and reveal to the academic community how and why they shift their personal appearance for work in higher education. Counter-stories are an appropriate method for this purpose because they not only challenge the truths touted by mainstream society's master-narratives, but they can also provide insight into what it is like to be a Black professional woman in higher education.

This chapter begins with a master-narrative or majoritarian story. Master-narratives customarily precede counter-stories in the same way that examination comes before cross-examination:

Dominant narratives carry multiple layers of assumptions that serve as filters in discussions of racism, sexism, classism, and so on. In short, majoritarian stories privilege Whites, men, the middle and/or upper class, and heterosexuals by naming these social locations as normative points of reference…[M]ajoritarian stories speak from a standpoint of authority and universality in which the experiences of one group (Whites) are held to be normal, standard, and universal….(Hunn, Guy, & Manglitz, 2006, pp. 244-245)

What follows is a majoritarian story that holds particular relevance for this research project that explores how Black professional women describe their experiences with personal appearance shifting, how it manifests, and how it affects them physically, emotionally and professionally. To identify the specific points to emphasize in the majoritarian story, I analyzed the composite counter-narrative, created by interweaving study participants' individual stories, as well as accounts from prior scholarship containing personal appearance

data. Like all master-narratives, this one presents life in academe from a dominant and privileged perspective and is essentially indifferent to any other point of view.

The composite counter-story follows this majoritarian story and makes up the majority of this chapter. My use of counter-story is intended to function as a more immediate, fleshed out, and less tidy or tamed account of what I understood the participants and my analytic response to them to be saying. Juxtaposing the majoritarian story and the counter-narrative is an intentional and deeply political act of authorial resistance to conventional standards or sanctioned guidelines that privilege certain types of evidence and approaches to representation and that assume, legitimize, and, therefore, privilege researcher-researched distance and presentation of that encounter. This chapter concludes with a discussion of what telling the majoritarian story and then the counter-narrative does to me as the researching storyteller, to my analysis, and to the story I am able to tell. I desire to awaken feelings of in readers of composite characters' accounts about what participants do to shift their personal appearance, their reasons for shifting, and their reactions to shifting. I want readers to feel so much a part of the circle of scholars that they literally have to stop themselves from reaching for the talking stick to join the conversation. Instead, their interest piqued, I hope reading this narrative leads readers to begin supportive dialogues with Black professional women and other scholars within their respective work environments. If this occurs, my doctoral research will indeed have contributed to the greater good of higher education.

The Master-narrative

The academy in America has changed drastically since it began. In 1636, higher education focused on providing privileged White males with instruction to prepare them for careers in Christian ministry or related professions (Gaff, Ratcliffe, & Associates, 1997; Harada, 1994). By the 19th century, hundreds of colleges had sprung up to accommodate the educational needs of "all young men in a democracy, even if it meant the lowering of standards" (Harada, 1994, p. 6). Technical colleges and institutes offered practical courses of study, such as civil engineering, husbandry, mining, and architecture (Harada, 1994). As a result of western expansion and the first land grant, women's colleges included curricular offerings, such as home economics and domestic science, making homemaking equal to men's professions in agriculture and the mechanic arts (Gaff, Ratcliffe, & Associates, 1997; Harada, 1994). The second land grant led to state operated Negro colleges which initially functioned as secondary or trade schools, but by 1916 offered authentic separate but equal college coursework (Gaff, Ratcliffe, & Associates, 1997; Harada, 1994). Universities later included programs in both general education and professional or specialized training, the curricular offerings of land grant institutions and state universities focusing primarily on public service (Harada, 1994). Introduction of electives eventually resulted in the junior college system which became the instrument for educating the masses (Harada, 1994). Military veterans entered higher education as a result of the Serviceman's Readjustment Act and "General education…came to mean breadth rather than depth" (Harada, 1994). The 1960s was the age of "relevance" in which students demanded courses of study pertinent to their own interests and to what was happening on the world scene. Higher education began to address the deficits of disadvantaged students through remediation programs such as Upward

Bound (Gaff, Ratcliffe, & Associates, 1997; Harada, 1994). Civil rights and feminist battles

of the 1960s and 1970s were not only instrumental in changing the curricular emphasis of

higher education but also the race, class, and gender make up of faculties and student bodies

(Gaff, Ratcliffe, & Associates, 1997). By the mid 1970s, coursework included more major

courses in liberal arts, professional, and technical programs and fewer electives (Harada,

1994). The 1970s and 1980s emphasized business and engineering. From the 1960s through

the present day, community colleges have provided vocational programs in semiprofessional

training and support occupations as well as courses for English language learners (Harada,

1994). Curricular modifications introduced new programs of study and brought different

types of students to college classrooms.

Staffing, likewise, underwent significant alterations as more White women and

people of color held positions as faculty and administrators. Over time the feminist

movement has proven to have a greater and more lasting influence in higher education than

the civil rights movement (Gaff, Ratcliffe, & Associates, 1997). This has led to White

women being much more visible in the academy than women of color. "More than one-third

of the faculty is now female, although women of color are only 4 percent of the total faculty"

(Gaff, Ratcliffe, & Associates, 1997, p. 195). According to the National Center for Education

Statistics (2009), in fall 2003 White women numbered 209.3 thousand or 30.7 % of full-time

faculty in higher education; Black women totaled 18.5 thousand or 2.7%. As of 2007 the

number of Black women employed full-time in higher education totaled 4% of all women

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). Although their numbers remain

comparatively small, Black women are making measurable gains with regard to full-time

employment in academe.

For a time women's personal appearance looked decidedly masculine as they sought to conform to the standards privileged White men previously set for themselves:

In the seventies, for example, when women began to enter white-collar occupations that had previously been reserved for men, they typically wore tailored suits with shoulder pads, oxford-cloth shirts, and bow ties—an imitation of the male uniform. Since then, the presence of a greater number of females in corporate positions has made dresses and other tokens of femininity more acceptable. (Russell et al., 1992, p. 55)

Eventually, higher education became available to a more diverse group of people, yet one rule remained the same: White was the norm (Gaff, Ratcliffe, & Associates, 1997). By default, "White women quietly [became] the norm, or pure, essential Woman" (Harris, 1997, p. 14). As such, middle class White women logically became the minority 'voice,' speaking their truths as all women's truths (Wing, 1997). Furthermore, erasing race and class from the equation meant "colorblindness and neutrality allow[ed] for equal opportunity for all" (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29). Consequently, issues of gender naturally overshadowed those of race or class.

This essentialist view of womanhood allowed for few deviations from the norm. Those whose cultural discourse had prepared them for the rules and social practices governing the workspace had to make few if any adjustments (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). To comply with mainstream standards, members of other racial or ethnic groups and social classes would have to change various aspects of their behavior or their persons (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Russell et al., 1992; Thandeka, 1999). Among Black women this frequently meant altering or attempting to alter their personal appearance so that

it more closely resembled White women's (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Russell et al., 1992). Nevertheless, Black professional women's personal appearance shifting would be no different from what others have done to fit in at work. Thus, workplace shifting is colorblind, neutral, and natural because almost everybody does it in one form or another.

Research in the field of social-psychology found strong evidence to suggest that difference in the workplace could work as a liability (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Rosette & Dumas, 2007; Russell et al., 1992; Thandeka, 1999). Coworkers prefer to interact with those "demographically similar to themselves" (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). According to Bell and Nkomo (2001), such a belief suggests Black women need to assimilate in order to gain acceptance. This means becoming racially invisible because White colleagues are more comfortable around Blacks who suppress their racial identity (Bell & Nkomo, 2001). Although this can be difficult for many Black women to achieve, they must try to make their Blackness as subtle as possible. Hair is the easiest physical characteristic to alter, so they should logically direct their attention to their hair and style it as Eurocentrically as possible.

> For most professional women, the choice of hairstyle is restricted to length, color, cut, and style. With the exception of women in the military or other professions with regimented dress codes, grooming choices for White women are primarily based on personal preferences. Also, with the noted exception of choosing to 'go blonde,' the choice of hairstyle for White women is typically free from stereotypes or biases associated with incompetence or other negative characteristics. (Rosette & Dumas, 2007, p. 410)

The same is not true for hairstyles worn by Black women. Even prior to British colonization of Africa, hairstyles held definite meanings with respect to sex, class, and cultural connection (Byrd & Tharps, 2001; White & White, 1995). In American society they have continued to have similar meanings: "straight hair and European hairstyles not only have been considered more feminine but have sent a message about one's standing in the social hierarchy" (Russell et al., 1992, p. 82). For this reason it is common for Black women who are prominent and successful in the dominant society to straighten their hair (Rosette & Dumas, 2007). Thus, to advance in their careers and to make themselves generally more acceptable to their White colleagues, Black women should try to look as much like the norm as they can instead of drawing attention to their racial peculiarities (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Disparate opinions exist on the possibility of such assimilation for Black women. Russell et al. (1992) called the assimilation process deracination, "the extent to which Blacks feel alienated from their African heritage as well as from other Blacks" (p. 72). Their description of this phenomenon includes an account by a Black woman writer who herself grew up lower-class but now openly despises the personal appearance of those who remain at that level:

> Every time…I see a flash of gold teeth, public displays of Jheri-Curl caps, genital-holding, or big, gold door-knocker earrings, I cringe. The hairs literally stand up on the back of my neck. I am fully aware that indulging in such obvious feelings of elitism is regressive and borders on identification with 'the oppressor.' I understand that, historically, politically and culturally, this system is designed for certain people to win and for others to lose. I acknowledge that my education—private schools and

Ivey League colleges—has placed me in a very privileged, winning position. But I

can't help the way I feel. (p. 72)

Based on the reactions of participants in their study, Bell and Nkomo (2001) voiced a

different opinion with regard to the deracination of Black professional women:

White-dominated organizations often make cultural assimilation the price of

acceptability for racial minorities. This, of course, is a condition impossible for the

African American woman to fulfill. They take this as an affront to their identity, but it

is also a threat to their ambition, as maintaining strong racial identity at work is an

important grounding and coping mechanism. Most of the African-American women

we interviewed were not willing to leave that part of themselves, learned from their

family and educational experiences, outside of the corporation. This makes sense,

since armoring—the socialization from family early in life—helped these women

withstand the racism and sexism they encountered in their later years. This armoring

is indeed one of the major reasons why the Black women in the study have been

successful in corporate America despite the challenges they face daily. (p. 150)

Unlike the Black women in Bell and Nkomo (2001), those unwilling to risk losing their

careers evidently feel they have less to gain by holding on to their Black identities than by

trying to look and act as White as they can.

Although Black women have made considerable strides in the worlds of business and

academe, these are still cultures in which "'White is righter'" (Russell et al., 1992, p. 55).

Wise Black professional women will recognize the supremacy of the White female standard

of beauty and seek to imitate it. This means downplaying any semblance of their African

heritage so that they appear as much like their White colleagues as possible.

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The Counter-narrative

Background

  As part of my doctoral dissertation research for Appalachian State University, I interviewed ten Black professional women academics. To protect their anonymity in the following counter-story, I took the data they entrusted to me, and after analyzing it, developed six composite higher education scholars. Wanting to retain part of their individual personas, I asked my husband to draw six names randomly from their ten interview pseudonyms. He chose Felicia, Star, Mazvita, Morgan, Nia, and Louisa.

  Ideally, I would have liked to use a focus group in lieu of individual interviews for data collection. Given the nature of this topic, I felt it would have been invaluable to assemble all parties simultaneously in one location to discuss their personal appearance practices and experiences in academe. My rationale was that Black women in the academy had possibly had few if any other opportunities for discussing their incomparable work related personal appearance issues in a social or professional arena. However, the controversial nature of Black hair texture made me unwilling to risk recreating the riotous scene depicted in Spike Lee's *School Daze* (Blake, Jones, Lee, & Ross, 1988)*"between Black women who process [their hair] and those who do not"* (Russell, et al., 1992, p. 90). Another difficulty would almost certainly have been scheduling a time when all ten very busy professors and I could have met in one locale. Counter-stories are able to overcome such impediments.

  The participants and I have been the primary data sources for this counter-story. Utterances from participant interviews, data from surveys and personal data forms, as well as biographical information about themselves and their colleagues gleaned from conversations,

emails, and phone calls during the course of this investigation became the basis of composite characterizations and dialogue. As scholars both my participants and I were familiar with existing literature on identity shifting and had even discussed numerous pertinent works during our meetings. As Black women we were also cognizant of the prevalence of biculturality in most Black literature. Scholarship such as this enters this counter-story as a palimpsest, where literature that theorizes Black women's experiences has been written over but not completely erased. It is a story written as an equal, immediately relevant analytical player that expands the dialogue and connects it to previous more solidified discourses that have emerged over time. This approach, again, is enacted as a productive resistance to the hegemonic device of keeping the discourse of descriptive data and scholarly interpretation separate, elevating the latter discourse over the other two and assuming that distance and separation produce a more valid set of truths that prove or disprove the women's voices or my analysis of them. The themes of realities, risks, and responsibilities are used to organize the counter-narrative along analytic lines drawing from my systematic coding of the interviews and autoethnographic data.

Realities

"The first thing I want to know from each of you," I declared, "is how you describe your experiences with personal appearance shifting at work in the academy. What thoughts or feelings do you have about personal appearance shifting? Who wants to go first?"

Louisa extended her hand to grasp the talking stick I proffered. "Shifting? I don't perceive it as shifting my appearance. I am who I am whether I'm wearing African attire or three piece suits. Black women no matter where we're working probably feel a lot of pressure to be professional in a traditional sense because we're being judged in all kinds of

ways that men and White women are not being judged. I've always felt myself to be very professional in my dress and my demeanor. I've always felt it to be very important to be poised. But that said, I still think in the academy, there's still more freedom with dress than in some other places. So even though I'm saying I dress professionally—I would say professional/creatively. So, I dress the way I might dress if I were in the advertising industry or in the entertainment industry or something like that. I don't dress the way I would dress if I had a corporate job, but I dress in a way that I am set apart from the students."

"You also have to remember that we grew up at a time when you did switch your appearance for business and for school. You wore certain stuff to play. You wore certain stuff to church. You wore certain stuff for special occasions, and when you go to the work force, you wear certain things. So, I don't perceive it as a shift. That's funny because in education we try to teach our future teachers that what you wear to the club is different from what you wear to class and different from what you wear to go to your field experience." As her words trailed away, Louisa gently laid the stick in the middle of the table.

Mazvita quickly picked it up as she began speaking, "I like to think it's a question of personal taste because, as Louisa said, how you look expresses who you are. Some people— I'd say—are shaped and defined by their looks. So I leave it to people to decide how they want to look in front of people. But I also understand that in higher education there is a high premium attached to how you look. So, how you look may determine perhaps acceptancy and legitimacy. And unfortunately in higher education—I'm sure you know that—the majority of professors are Caucasian, and the *in* culture, the main or the dominant culture, sort of shapes what happens in the playing field or determines the playing field. So when I see Black women perhaps wearing straight hair or expressing themselves in the sense that would be

described as White, perhaps they are speaking in a voice where they are saying, 'We are just like you. We are no different from you because, in fact, we can look like you. We have got the same wattage academically and intellectually just like any one of you.' So perhaps they are making a statement to say, 'We are just like you.' And also think upon the fact that when people come in perhaps wearing their nappy hair or looking perhaps sometimes the way I look," shrugging and smiling sheepishly at the rest of us, "people might question and say, 'She is different.' And perhaps they may not take you seriously, so it's a balancing act that people have to play with. So I don't condemn anybody who decides to wear their hair or appear the way they like because I'm sure they are listening to so many voices, and they are trying to address the challenges in the profession. It's a question of survival. Perhaps how we look in academia as Black women may determine our longevity. So it's a question of trying to balance who we are. That's how I would put it in a nut shell." With that, Mazvita placed the stick in Star's outstretched hand.

Shifting in her seat to be able to see everyone else, Star spoke confidently and clearly, "Well, I have been doing this for several years now, but when I first started, there was a real—I don't know if I'd call it a stigma, but—there definitely was the idea that wearing your hair natural was not professional. You just hear people make comments—not necessarily about me—but somebody might make a comment to me about somebody else like, 'Why is she wearing her hair like that?' or something like that. I think that that is not really such an issue anymore. This happened in a private Midwestern institution. When I got there, I was one of two Black professors. They struggled to keep African American professors there, and I would say the colleague they commented on was wearing the really short kind of twists. I think most people kind of liked it, but you just would hear sometimes, 'Why is she wearing

her hair like that?' I think it was kind of a negative connotation, but it seems more common now for people to wear their hair the way they want to. It just doesn't seem as big an issue."

As Star was concluding, Felicia was waving her hand in an assertive manner to deter anyone else from reaching for the stick she had so obviously claimed.

Without preamble Felicia declared, "I think it's very unfortunate that anyone would think that they would have to change their appearance in order to please someone else. Whenever I shift my personal appearance, it's because I'm responding to a need in me. I feel OK because I make that decision."

I interrupted before Felicia could resume speaking. "Felicia, has anyone at work ever suggested or forced you to make changes to your personal appearance?"

Looking indignant, Felicia rejoined, "No, I don't think they'd dare ask you that in my college. I think that they're exposed to enough variety in Black women. We look different. We dress differently. There's a lot of variety. One woman—I think her hair is naturally straight. She has more of a Caucasian texture than African American, so she has the bouncy, straight hair you typically see in the advertisements when they try to depict Black women. Another Black woman has a very close shaven Afro or natural. When you look at me, mine is a little bit fuller Afro. We all look very different, even in the way we dress. Another woman and I—in terms of the way we dress-- dress more alike, more traditional like. We have women professors here now who dress purely Afrocentrically. We all look and dress differently, and I don't think our students—I don't think that bothers them either. I've looked different from time to time. Yesterday I saw a student—I visited an internship site—that graduated from here seven years ago. It was really odd because she looked at me and said, 'Um, the only thing that hasn't changed about you is that you're still short.' I'm sure I've

gone back and forth, even with regard to my hair color. And that is not based on anything but my need and the way that I want to look." Seeing no one else waiting for the stick, Felicia matter-of-factly laid it in the middle of the table.

I checked the chart where I had recorded who had already spoken. Morgan's name was next on the list. "Morgan, you've not weighed in with your thoughts or feeling about workplace shifting."

Risks

Morgan's eyes darted around the table taking in the expectancy on each of her colleagues' faces. Slowly she retrieved the stick from its resting place. "I love it. *(Tinkling a small chuckle)* Really. I have been in higher education a very long time now, and so I have really had an opportunity to see the shift in levels of comfort and watch women of color feel more comfortable in making their own decisions about how they look, how to dress, and especially being in a law court environment. It's been great."

"Do you shift your own personal appearance for work, Morgan," I asked.

"Yes, I do, and it's more a function of the audience that I am going to be in front of. If I'm at school on a Friday when it's casual Friday, I dress a particular way. If I know that I am going into the community to represent the school at a function, I will dress a particular way. So, it's more related to the functionality of what I'm going to do that day and the audience that I'm going to be appearing in front of."

Not waiting for me to call her name, Nia received the stick and spoke simultaneously, "I think we're in a very interesting position because in terms of higher education I don't see it shifting. I really don't see a shift because of where we are. Locally I think that we are in an environment where we would have what you would probably call a lot of outspoken African

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Americans, very strong women, especially on our doctrinal faculty. I feel that there are myriad personal appearances. You have very Afrocentric looks or very conservative looks, or you have very contemporary looks. To me, I think it's very distinct. When I observe my colleagues, it's distinctive usually, but when I look at the law students, I think it's shifting different—their personal appearance is shifting toward Eurocentric. Even when I was a law student it was pretty consistent, and now that I'm a law professor, it has remained consistent for the most part for those I view in higher education. However, I would say applicable to the profession, I think I see less Afrocentric wear in the profession. If I were to go to court, I don't necessarily see someone in Afrocentric wear."

"Where does your own personal appearance fall, Nia? Do you shift it?" I asked.

"For me I think I am consciously more conservative in appearance. The dress that is required for academia for the profession of law is not necessarily how I would personally choose to dress. It is more conservative: suits, hosiery, heels. I think I'd like to have more personality and self expression in my dress. So, I do shift my own personal appearance for work, not because of my colleagues, but I guess I look more at the students. They need to know that in court, for instance, you don't want to have your appearance call attention away from your client's case. You can easily do that with the more suggestive suits and clothing of that nature. But on campus, in the law school, I would say I shift it. I'm still very comfortable, but I think I wear things that are more my personality as opposed to conforming to what is the professional norm. Normal may be suits. Normal around the law school may be khaki pants and tailored shirts. I mean I might push the envelope on that a little bit. That's just my personality."

"Personal appearance shifting seems to have taken on new dimensions for you ladies," I quipped and proceeded to summarize what they'd all said. "Let me make certain I heard you correctly. Some of you view what you do for work as shifting your personal appearance while others do not. Is that correct?" Apparently this was one point on which all could agree as all six ladies nodded in unison. "Now," I resumed my analysis, "are some of you who consider the personal appearance decisions you make for work as shifting also claiming that your shifting has *shifted* over the years so that you now feel freer to decide for yourselves how you will look at work in the academy?"

Morgan bailed me out of my epistemological fog? "Absolutely!"

"And," I emphasized by holding up my index finger to signal that I had not yet finished, "are those of you in education and law also saying that you feel a responsibility to model a more conservative style of personal appearance than you would normally display if you did not have future teachers and attorneys," I crooked the second and third fingers of each hand to form quotation marks around the word, "'watching' what you do and hopefully emulating your professional personal appearance practices?"

"That's it exactly," Louisa began and then caught herself, "even though I still don't think I shift my appearance."

"But Louisa," I pressed, "is your hair naturally straight or did you have to relax it to get it that way?"

Louisa gave me a look that said, 'you know the answer to that as well as I do' before replying. She began, "Let me put it this way: I don't see my hair as being part of a biculture, but I understand what you're saying because I have a daughter who'll be 37. She started wearing her hair first in a short Afro, then in twists, and then she let it lock as an adult. That

was very hard for the family because that was not a part of our culture. We had not grown up with hair like that. Everybody we knew got their hair pressed."

Trying to clarify what she had said, I restated her remarks, "So you're saying in your home culture pressed or straightened hair was the norm; therefore, your family perceived your daughter's afro, twists, and locked hair styles as deviations from the norm even though in reality they displayed the natural texture of her hair?"

"Exactly," returned Louisa.

"It was the same where I came from," admitted Morgan, "But I shift back and forth all the time, usually seasonally." She paused as if in thought, "I will tell you an interesting thing, though. I was wearing my hair natural when I interviewed for this job, and—but I was still in a more metropolitan city and had been working at an HBCU—and the day before the interview, I really thought seriously about going and getting my hair straightened. It was longer. It was long enough for me to push up in a bun, to pull back, and that's how I had been wearing it, just tying a scarf around it and pulling it up, kind of in a bun. I kept thinking, 'You should go get your hair straightened. No, you shouldn't. I finally said, 'If I were going to work tomorrow, I wouldn't straighten my hair. So I didn't. But it was a decision to do it or not, and I decided, 'You know, they're going to like me whoever I am. If my hair is going to change their opinion of me as a person, then I don't want to be there anyway.'"

I went through that uncertainty right after I completed my masters. I thought, 'OK, I've got to have a job, so I don't have to pay back all this money the state invested in me.' I hadn't started my locs yet. I didn't straighten my hair, but I managed to shape my hair into a professional-looking wavy Afro. After I got a job as an assistant principal, I didn't have time or energy to start my locs until a year later when I needed the sense of personal renewal that

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the locking journey afforded. Working through the process brought me through one of the toughest periods in my life.

Responsibilities

Nia picked up the stick and waited for us to acknowledge her right to the floor. "I want to elaborate on what I was saying earlier about the necessity of modeling acceptable personal appearance and advising students on how to decide what that looks like. I teach at an HBCU. Another Black female professor and I started something called Sister-to-Sister in our clinics to address that very issue. Our Black female law students were dressing inappropriately on campus, so you can only imagine what it would be if they were going to court."

Star reached out and took the stick from Nia. "But most students are lax in how they dress on a college campus."

Taking the stick from Star, I injected my two cents for the first time as a participant. "I know I was. In fact, that was one of my reasons for attending a PWI instead of an HBCU. I had always heard that you really had to dress at an HBCU, and I knew I did not want to have to do that every day. Besides, I couldn't have afforded to do it. At my PWI nobody cared what I wore as long as my nakedness was covered, and I didn't care what my professors wore," I ended passing off the stick to Morgan.

Morgan turned to Nia, "I attended the school you're referring to Nia, and a lot of our professors are still there. I saw them have the range of styles. I saw Afrocentric. I saw conservative. I saw contemporary. I saw all those things and thought that those were options that I had. But when I started in the profession, I realized they were not. The profession is less Afrocentric. But when I was there oddly enough as a student, we dressed in t-shirts and

jeans, sweat pants, or scrubs. I was a clinical student. You dressed up for court or for work, so I got that experience. Did someone tell me? No, no one sat down and told me, but I observed and saw my peers or Black women, or White women, or Black men—and that's how I knew. Actually, if I had to say if anyone told me, it was probably a Black male who probably *TOLD* me what I should and should not wear, which is interesting, now that I think about it. Yeah, Black male," said Morgan nodding thoughtfully. "So, I would say a Black male probably shaped more of my appearance in terms of sitting me down and having the conversation. Anyway, I'm glad the Black female professors there have stepped up to assume that role."

With stick in hand again, Nia was finally able to finish what she had begun. "My colleague and I practically had no other choice."

Once again the facilitator, I asked, "Could the students have been trying to dress like some of the attorneys they've seen on TV?"

A confused expression crossed Mazvita's face, so Nia spelled out what she meant in no uncertain terms and without further delay.

"I'm saying that if they come in a suit, it's going to be a sexier suit. It's going to be a shorter suit. It's going to be cleavage. It's going to be tighter. It's going to be something that calls attention to their bodies. That's the reason we definitely touch on that in our classes and in our program. We kind of have this presentation and one of the things we do with our clinical students is show them how *not* to dress. I try to point out that their dress should be very distinctive between them and their client. They shouldn't come to court and have someone ask, 'Who is the client?' We teach them that their suit is their uniform."

Donning my researcher's hat again, I concluded, "So, Nia, what I hear you saying is that at your HBCU, some of the Black women professors have returned to monitoring what female students wear and advising them on its appropriateness, as well as modeling how their professional personal appearance should look when they go into the courtroom."

As Nia nodded her head in assent, the alarm on my watch sounded to end the first session.

Summary

It was much more difficult for me to compose and tell the majoritarian story than the counter-story. As the teller of the counter-story, I was frequently surprised by the way the story took on a life of its own, especially with regard to the order of composition and the analysis of the data. Though I obviously had to begin the counter-story *somewhere*, after initiating the telling of it, the conversations among the composite characters and me as the researcher or facilitator seemed to determine the direction subsequent action and conversations took. This was also true of the analysis. Conversations between characters just seemed naturally to end in certain conclusions based on the facts presented. Being a conscientious researcher, I tried to be diligent about checking to be sure that these conclusions were not merely insertions by my subjective subconscious of the outcomes I wanted or expected to find. As previously stated, conducting a pilot study cured me of expecting the data to go in any preconceived direction. In fact, at times I seemed to be having difficulty switching from my role as researcher into my role as an active participant in the study, even though I knew that the autoethnographical framework of the study allowed me to do just that. For that reason, much of my role in the counter-story cast me as researcher rather than as participant.

The application of a CRT and critical race feminism framework made it possible for readers to 'meet' participants in this study instead of my having to give a second-hand account of what these Black professional women were like as individuals or the manners in which they articulated their experiences. Had I limited my approach to a more pedestrian presentation of research data, readers would have missed the dynamic, performative nature of our discourse, enacted not only in our research encounters but also in their everyday lives. Utilizing CRT and critical race feminism as theory through which to think my data assisted me in providing a more detailed interpretative analysis. This additional level of analysis helped me glimpse more substantive and subsequent identification of the *realities* of these women's and my own shifting, the psychological and cultural *risks* of enacting this shifting, as well as absorbing and responding to the personal and political *responsibilities* that individually and collectively circulated through every personal appearance choice we made.

CRT and critical race feminism also made it feasible for me to present my findings from a minority perspective while carefully handling participants' truths and sensitive to the underlying tensions and apprehensions accompanying revelations of such an intimate nature. By definition, counter-narratives are the stories of marginalized others. The others in this case were Black professional women in higher education who were still in possession of many of their race secrets about shifting their personal appearance for work in majoritarian spaces.

Composing the master-narrative was troublesome for me because I found it difficult to turn off my Black feminist consciousness and think from what I viewed as a racist, hegemonic, and privileged point of view. Still, the tenets of CRT and critical race feminism informed its content. These tenets included the permanence of racism and Whiteness as

property. Ironically, the dominant philosophy has adherents among Blacks and other people of color. That may have been the reason it was so difficult for Black women to overcome the effects of these beliefs and entirely refrain from shifting their personal appearance.

In the final section, Chapter IV, I briefly chronicle the progression of personal appearance shifting in the workplace and identify three major themes that influence the personal appearance decisions Black women academics in this study make. I explore the limitations of this study and the implications for educational leaders of conducting this and future research on aspects of Black culture that may not initially appear to have an impact on what students and teachers are able to accomplish in schools but that may have hidden connections to how successful both parties are able to be.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

Introduction

I open this chapter by tracing the progression of personal appearance shifting as it applies to professional women but most especially Black women. Next, my discussion of the three questions that guided my study of personal appearance shifting looks at the results of my investigation and elucidates what they have to add to existing theory on Black professional women in higher education. Then, I evaluate how the information gained from my findings can benefit current and future students and educational leaders. Finally, by exploring topics for future investigation, I hope to send the message that there is still much to learn about and from Black people that can assist educational leaders in meeting the needs of all students as well as pointing the way to uncharted regions of study.

When Black women entered white-collar professions in the 1970s (Bell, 1990; Russell et al., 1992), they probably knew they would have to wear many masks in order to be allowed to stay. Like White women who donned masculine attire until they could safely wear dresses and pumps without jeopardizing their career advancement (Russell et al., 1992), Black professional women made compromises to their personal appearance that were not necessarily reflective of their African heritage or their personal tastes.

Somewhere along the way, Black women educational leaders in academe decided it was time their outer appearance more closely reflected their inner being. Russell et al.

(1992) claimed this usually happened when minorities reached a critical mass within their organizations. According to Black professional women in this study, that point has yet to occur in any of the predominately White institutions (PWIs) in which they have worked.

Response to Research Questions

To expand the existing body of knowledge on Black women academics, I conducted this critical narrative and autoethnographic study of their personal appearance experiences and used these questions to guide my research:

1. How have Black professional women described their experiences with shifting their personal appearance at work in the academy?

2. What are the ways in which personal appearance shifting has manifested in Black professional women in academe?

3. What have been the physical, emotional, and professional effects of personal appearance shifting on these Black women?

In answer to the first question, there was no uniform way in which Black professional women in the higher education academy described their experiences with shifting their personal appearance at work. Some recounted incidents mirrored those of the few scholars who reported personal appearance experiences in existing scholarship while others were distinctive. Like Paulette Caldwell (1991), these study participants had both positive and negative experiences with respect to their personal appearance. For example, Felicia's newly colored auburn hair led her White male department chair to blurt out "What have you done to your hair" upon her late arrival at a department meeting, even though he had never made such personal inquiries of White female colleagues. Star related that colleagues questioned her regarding the Afrocentric hairstyle worn by the only other Black woman faculty member

on campus, yet no colleague had ever asked her about her own personal appearance decisions. None of the respondents indicated receiving derisive remarks about her personal appearance on course evaluations from students as Patricia Williams (1991) had done. On the contrary, Mazvita's choice to wear her African prints to class met with a warm reception from colleagues and students alike. This did not mean that everything informants heard from colleagues was favorable. Though they received no negative comments from students, respondents did report both male and female Black colleagues felt free to advise them on issues other faculty members would probably find too intimate to broach with a colleague. Nevertheless, these well-meaning Blacks told informants they were gaining too much weight, should not wear braids or cornrows to work, should comb their natural hair more frequently, and should select clothing more suitable to their body types.

As to the second question, participants' personal appearance shifting manifested more saliently with regard to their hair and dress than their skin tone or body image. In fact, dress was the most pervasive form of biculturality in this study. All ten participants and I dressed Eurocentrically most of the time at work regardless of age group or institution type, PWI or historically Black college or university (HBCU), public or private. Because Blacks have not reached a critical mass at any of the PWIs represented in this study, the predominance of bicultural dress supports the belief of Russell et al. (1992) that Blacks as a whole only began to dress more ethnically after reaching a critical mass. Mazvita's African attire was the exception rather than the rule in the workplace; the other seven of us either occasionally included cultural pieces or sprinkled our bicultural outfits with colors, designs, or accessories that denoted our African heritage. For reasons of personal taste and convenience, Louisa, Felicia, and Star preferred to wear bicultural attire exclusively. Furthermore, most informants

felt they had a responsibility to dress professionally and to act as role models of appropriate professional dress for students and young people beginning their careers.

In terms of hair, Byrd and Tharps (2001) marked the mid1990s as the resurgence of Afrocentricity in hairstyle preference. Regardless of the date, for some Black women, even a few in this study, there was no discernible difference in the way they styled their hair prior to or following the resurgence of natural hair. Looking at Black hair from a historical perspective, their choices were easier to understand. Like the American Black women in my pilot study, the American Black women in my dissertation research had all grown up with straightened hair equaling respectability. Moreover, *all* of the women in both the pilot study and the dissertation research had worn straight hair and bicultural or Eurocentric hairstyles at some point during the formative years of their lives. Therefore, continuing to press or relax their hair was simply perpetuating what these scholars had come to see as their cultural heritage. On the other hand, the majority of Black women in this study wore cultural or Afrocentric hairstyles and textures most, if not all, of the time while working in academic settings. In fact, only Louisa now elected to wear bicultural texture and styles all the time. Nia and Monique, the other two women who always straightened their hair, occasionally chose to give it cultural flair by adding straight braids or kinky weave, respectively. The result was the creation of multicultural hairstyles.

I had not expected Black professional women in higher education to embrace their natural hair texture or Afrocentric hairstyles to this extent. Tori and Anna currently wore locs though one was a teaching attorney. Ellen and Felicia had TWAs while Mazvita had cornrowed extensions and Star box braid extensions. Because Morgan shifted her hair seasonally, she could be at the end of her summer texturizer, switching to a full-fledged

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relaxer, or beginning her latest Afro. Whether they saw their chosen styles as shifting or *just part of their culture*, these proud scholars found a way to bring a part of their Black heritage to work with them each day.

With regard to their skin tone, participants in this study presently seemed very satisfied. Falconer and Neville (2000) found that Black women who were satisfied with their skin tones were generally more satisfied with their overall body image. Several of the present participants admitted using or desiring to use prescribed or over-the-counter skin lighteners or microdermabrasion on scars caused by acne, skin irritations, or skin allergies, as well as darkened underarms; however, *none* at this stage of their lives used or wished to use any products or procedures with the express purpose of lightening their overall skin tone.

Equally interesting were body image concerns. Like me, the other ten women addressed issues of weight control and physical fitness by regularly participating in some form of physical exercise, such as running, walking, biking, swimming, dancing, or using exercise machines. For years the popular saying that 'Black women don't have wash-n-wear hair' meant that most Black women shunned strenuous physical activity for fear of sweating out their 'perms.' In fact, when I began running long distance races in the late eighties, it was possible to count the Black women entrants on one hand and have fingers remaining. Perhaps their current focus on fitness and overall health would account for the unexpected increase in natural and Afrocentric hairstyles even though Blacks have yet to reach a critical mass. Furthermore, participants' commitment to physical fitness and weight control supported Jones and Shorter-Gooden's (2003) claim that Black women became more size conscious after moving into majoritarian workplaces. Not only were participants concerned about their weight, but they were also anxious over the effects of childbearing and aging on their bodies.

Because some of these results differed from the level of body satisfaction Black women had

reported in past research (Falconer and Neville, 2000), these changes pointed to the need for

future studies on Black professional women with respect to body image.

The third and final question referred to the effects or costs of personal appearance

shifting. Among these study participants, physical damage usually pertained to temporary or

permanent hair loss from chemical relaxers or hairstyles, such as cornrows or braids. Most

emotional effects involved negative comments or constructive criticism from family or

colleagues on some intimate aspect of their appearance. Often these came from fellow

Blacks, but occasionally from White males. Professionally, being a personal appearance role

model was a price these forward thinking educational leaders were willing to pay as they

reached back to lend a guiding hand to Black female students and young professionals in

need of advice on appropriate dress and decorum. For Tori this meant letting them see that

looking Black and professional were not mutually exclusive. Like the Black women in Bell

and Nkomo (2001), these Black professional women were not willing to discard their

blackness like yesterday's garbage for the comfort of White colleagues or in order to

succeed. They understood the importance of presenting themselves properly so as not to

promote stereotypes.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

The educational leaders in this study promote attitudes toward personal appearance

shifting that not only add to theory on Black professional women but also address the needs

of 21st century learners: personal taste, convenience, professionalism, role modeling, and

cultural preservation. These attitudes are relevant to educational leadership because in the

past few decades, the student demographic composition of schools at all education levels has

become more diverse in terms of race, class, and gender, yet the educational leaders who serve them have remained predominantly White and in higher education predominantly male (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007-08, 2008, 2010). As a high school teacher, former Pre-k –12 administrator, and graduate student, it is clear to me that 21st century learners at every level need educational leaders who know and understand their cultural beliefs and practices and with whom they can personally identify. This means that school boards, colleges, and universities need to hire and retain teachers/professors, counselors, and administrators who reflect the racial, ethnic, and gender make up of the populations enrolled.

In the meantime, postsecondary institutions, colleges of education, and local education agencies (LEAs) must work with the personnel they currently have enrolled or employed. Equipping non-Black educational leaders for situations they may face when dealing with Black students will involve providing in-service and pre-service training in the distinct cultural beliefs and personal appearance practices of Black females, putting emphasis on skin tone, hair texture, dress, and body image. This suggestion may seem absurd when viewed from a majoritarian perspective, but it will hopefully make sense to those with an awareness of the dynamics of Black culture.

Recent research studies indicate that young Black females look to other Black women as role models instead of the hegemonically assigned White norm of female beauty (Falconer & Neville, 2000; Gordon, 2008; Milkie, 1999). Even so, some Black females may still suffer from stigmas attached to their ample behinds, too dark or too light skin tone, and straight or kinky hair texture. Moreover, many of the adverse incidents regarding personal appearance that occur in educational settings may be intraracial in origin, and it has been my experience that Black females tend to be reticent on the subject of their personal appearance. For that

reason, only by having a thorough understanding of Black culture with respect to female personal appearance will educational leaders know what is really going on in such situations.

Furthermore, until there are enough Black women educational leaders to act as mentors and role models of appropriate or professional personal appearance for Black female students, women of other racial and ethnic groups will need to provide these services. This will entail being sensitive to the ways in which the Black female ideal of beauty as well as issues of personal taste and convenience regarding personal appearance practices by necessity differ from their own. To guard against creating another generation of Black women who hate their natural personal appearance, it will be essential for those mentoring Black female students to respect or encourage suitable choices that perpetuate the students' cultural heritage rather than suggesting they assimilate the practices of the dominant culture. This seemingly minor change in the practice of educational leaders could make a significant difference in the way Black female students feel about their personal appearance and in their personal appearance preparedness for the professional workspace.

<div align="center">Suggestions for Future Research</div>

Numerous suggestions for future study have grown out of this investigation of personal appearance biculturality among Black professional women in academe. The magnitude of sales to Black women by the beauty industry has prompted my first suggestion. Many of these sales are for products that enable them to shift their personal appearance to appear closer to the norm. I propose an in-depth and all-encompassing study of the infrastructure of American society (which would naturally include schools) that perpetuates a racialized norm so that those who differ from that norm become Other. I am interested in knowing whether the effects are present in every aspect of American society, the forms they

take, and who benefits most and least, especially within America's schools. Next, I suggest a longitudinal study of Black students whose mothers have used chemical hair relaxers before and during fetal gestation. I make this suggestion because I have found no existing research but have wondered whether hair loss in the mothers has been the extent of damage from the use of these abrasive products. As an educational leader I have wondered whether these chemicals have residual, adverse effects on students' trying to learn in classrooms years later. Another topic that has surfaced is how teachers' personal appearance affects their classroom management of students. Participants in this study and existing scholarship seem to point to a correlation between the two in higher education. The effects of same sex and same race role modeling by educational leaders on students of different social classes and at different educational levels is another suggestion. A final topic for future exploration involves the effects of physical fitness on hair preparation among Black female students and Black professional women at all educational levels. I am curious to know whether the results differ by age, social class, and professional position.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

This critical narrative and autoethnographic study of personal appearance shifting had numerous limitations. Perhaps the most obvious was that research participants included only Black professional women employed in higher education. Excluded from this study were non-Black professional women, Black professional women in other sectors, all other women, and all men. Thus, at first glance the research findings appeared to apply solely to this population of Black women. By scrutinizing the sample size, the scope of application seemed narrower still. A sample of ten participants could hardly result in findings indicative of the lived experiences of all Black professional women in academe, but qualitative research does

not seek to accomplish such a goal. Data that were too similar meant that the sample size was not large enough to obtain disparate views (Glesne, 1999). Another limiting factor was my reliance on referrals from other scholars to form a pool of prospective participants; this increased the likelihood of attracting a particular 'type' of informant and reduced the odds of their having diverse experiences navigating the academic arena. Having to make my participant selections from those who were willing and able to spare the time from their busy schedules to complete the survey and demographic forms as well as take part in interviews that lasted up to three hours further restricted the types of respondents eligible to participate in this study.

Methods of data collection posed limitations of a different sort. Participants' accounts included memories of past events in their personal histories. Psychological research indicated that memory was a process of reconstructing based on what one was currently experiencing, not a "dredging up" of events that actually occurred (Dawes, 1991). Dawes labeled this phenomenon bias of retrospection. Instead of relying on memories of past occurrences or participants' self-reports of behaviors, Badri and Burchinal (1990) promoted present observations as the most dependable means of discovering what participants actually did. If retrospective bias existed, it could cause some scholars to question the validity of data generated from participants' responses to survey and interview questions, as well as my own autoethnographic recollections of lived experiences with personal appearance shifting. I conceded that these methods had their drawbacks with regards to rendering exact accounts of the lived experiences of Black professional women in academe. However, through these imperfect methods, academic observers could live "in the moment," vicariously "feeling" some of the most significant and possibly painful events endured by Black women who

probably never imagined they would have the opportunity to acquaint the academic domain

with their unparalleled experiences with personal appearance biculturality. In the end, my

subjectivity placed limits on "the story that [I was] able to tell. It [was] the strength on which

[I built]. It made me who I am as a person and as a researcher" (Glesne, 2006, p. 123).

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APPENDIX A

Lay Summary

Dear _____:

I am Trudi Adams-Wiggan, a doctoral student in Appalachian State University's Educational Leadership Program. For my dissertation research, I am studying personal appearance identity shifting among Black professional women in academe.

This invitation requests your participation in this study. As you know, recent years have brought an increase in scholarship on issues Black professional women share in common with Black men and other minorities in higher education, such as tenure and promotion, mentoring, teaching, service, and collegiality. You may even have contributed to this scholarship. Still, little research exists on the personal appearance experiences that are unique to Black women in the academy. The purpose of my research is to give voice to a group of Black women academics and provide a platform from which they can name their lived experiences with personal appearance shifting.

In this study I want to explore why and how Black professional women alter their natural appearance for the academic workspace. I am also interested in discovering what effects these changes have had on participants. Although I know firsthand that exploring such intimate actions and feelings can sometimes be painful, I sincerely hope you will agree to participate in this study. Your identity and the name of your institution will remain confidential.

I know you are a very busy woman, and I want to honor your schedule as well as do justice to this very important issue. I plan to conduct one-on-one, face-to-face interviews for no more than five - six hours total. We can meet for a couple of extended sessions or several smaller sessions, whichever will work best for both of our schedules. (I teach English at Hickory High School in Hickory, NC). During the interview(s) I would like to audiotape the session(s) so I can accurately record your responses. I will destroy all tape recordings at the conclusion of my research.

I would love to have you take part in this important work on Black women academics. If you are willing to be a research participant, please click the yes button to respond to this email and provide an address to which I can mail an SASE for return of the demographic form and one-page survey I will email prospective participants. Please fill out these documents as completely as possible and return them in the enclosed stamped envelope. If you feel you cannot take part in this study, please feel free to pass on this information to any other professional Black woman in higher education.

I appreciate your help in making this study fruitful and look forward to meeting and working with you.

1. What thoughts or feelings do you have regarding the practice of personal appearance shifting among Black professional women in higher education?	
2. Do you do anything to shift your own personal appearance for work in academe? What?	

(Shifters only)	*(Non-shifters* only)
a. Why do you change these aspects of your personal appearance for work?	Why do you not feel you have to change your appearance for work?
b. How do you feel about what you do to change your appearance?	
(1). Are all the changes ones you make because you want to make them?	
(2). Have you ever felt forced to make any of them? When? Why?	

c. How would you feel about your colleagues or students learning what you/some other Black women do to shift your/their appearance for work?	

(Shifters only)	*(Non-shifters* only)
(2). Has your appearance ever not been bicultural at work?	

d. Have you ever had personal appearance issues at work? What did they involve?	

(Shifters only)	*(Non-shifters* only)
(1). Have you done anything to alter your skin tone?	
(2). How did you achieve this? What did you use?	

APPENDIX C

	Personal Appearance	*General*	*Professional*
	Attitudes Toward Shifting: Raw Data		
T	Bicultural/ Afrocentric Same @ home	Black women are judged in all kinds of ways others not	Black women feel pressure to be traditionally professional Academe more freedom w/dress & hair
F	Bicultural Afrocentric clothes not sized for petite body	Whites afraid to address Blacks on those (PA) issues	Thinks people judge her by how she presents verbally and intellectually; makes her presence felt.
M	Bicultural./ Afrocentric Same @ home	Doesn't perceive it as shifting her PA same Afro/Euro…straight hair part of her home culture	Doesn't consider self bicultural; Bicultural b/c practices part of home culture
V	Bicultural & African Same @ home	Personal taste, self expression	PA affects acceptancy, legitimacy, and longevity.
G	Bicultural More Afrocentric at HBCU	Loves shifting... Seen the shift in levels of comfort and watching women of color feel more comfortable in making their own decision about how they look, how to dress	Represents school in community
E	Bicultural w/African 'flavor' Shifts PA only in response to need in her	Thinks it's very unfortunate that anyone would think that they would have to change their appearance in order to please someone else	Doesn't think her University would dare ask them to shift their PA

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		Attitudes Toward Shifting: Raw Data	
	Personal Appearance	*General*	*Professional*
L	Bicultural Does what it takes to look and feel attractive	Doesn't think about it; just who she is. Comfortable in her own skin … head to toe.	Wore suits all the time and high heel shoe. Liked to look nice and feel attractive
S	Bicultural, casual (lab) Convenience, Ease	Sees positive change in attitude over Black hairstyles	Previously there definitely was the idea that wearing your hair natural was not professional
A	Doesn't feel pressed to wear a black suit or a blue suit or a brown suit anymore; Stricter in court than on campus	Assimilates out for respect colleagues and the court; on campus has a problem with having a strict dress code	Would never consider not shifting, just who she is
N	Bicultural but pushes the envelope-no hose or makeup	In academia she's consciously more conservative in appearance because of the profession of law; That's not her personal taste.	Believes in conforming to professional standards; also dresses to set an example for others
R	Bicultural with a strong Afrocentric flavor	Pleased to see more BW feeling comfortable and confident wearing natural hair; appreciate having freedom to choose how we will look	I'm fairly conservative, but would fight for my right to wear my hair natural.

Variable Forms of Shifting: Hair and Dress			
Bicultural	Cultural	Multicultural	Multicultural
Bicultural Dress	Cultural Dress	Bicultural Dress	Occasional Cultural Dress
Straightened Hairstyle	Natural Hairstyle	Natural Hairstyle	Cultural Hairstyle
Louisa (relaxer) Nia (relaxer) Morgan (relaxer/texturizer) Monique (relaxer, wig) Ellen (relaxer) Star (relaxer)	Mazvita (Afro)	Mazvita (Afro) Anna (locs) Morgan (Afro) Tori (locs) Trudi (TWA/locs/ bald/cornrows) Felicia (TWA)* Ellen (TWA)	Tori (locs)
Multicultural	Multicultural	Multicultural	Multicultural
Occasional Cultural Dress	Cultural Dress	Bicultural Dress	Bicultural Dress/
Straightened Hair	Natural Hair + Straight Weave in Bicultural Style	Straight Hair + Straight Weave in Cultural Style	Natural Hair + Straight Weave in Cultural Style
Monique (Relaxer)	Mazvita (Straight Weave)	Nia (Braids)	Star (Box Braids) Mazvita (Cornrow Extensions)
Multicultural	Multicultural	Multicultural	
Bicultural Dress,	Bicultural Dress	Bicultural Dress Culturally 'Flavored'	
Straightened Hair + Straight Weave in Bicultural Style	Straightened Hair + Natural Weave in Cultural Style	Natural Hair	
Nia (Straight Weave)	Monique (Kinky)	Trudi (TWA/Locs/Bald/Cornrows) Anna (Locs) Ellen (TWA)	

APPENDIX E

	Stable Forms of Shifting: Skin Tone and Body Image	
	Skin Tone	Body Image
T	Satisfied, never lightened	Concern, weight, likes African behind Fitness: Moderate unspecified
F	Satisfied, never lightened; lightening despicable	Thought cute, still does Fitness: Health related
M	Satisfied, Nadinola on acne scars Wanted to be lighter- child	Concern, finding makeup to match skin Fitness: Swimming
V	Satisfied, never lightened	Traditionally built, plump; concern, keeping teeth Fitness: Walking
G	Satisfied, Nadinola on acne scars and darkened underarms; loves skin tone	Concern, moles Fitness: Jazz Dancing
E	Satisfied, (pre-diabetic 'rash'); Elidel to return neck skin to natural color	Weight loss would help skin Concern, eyebrow loss Fitness: Health Related
L	Satisfied, allergic to sun; wants microdermabrasion to smooth skin	Concern, sagging skin/aging gracefully Fitness: Walking/Running
S	Satisfied, loves getting darker	Concern, lose weight; get rid of excess body hair Fitness: Swimming
A	Satisfied, had microdermabrasion for acne Wanted to be lighter as child	Concern, wants tummy tuck after childbirth Fitness: Machines
N	Satisfied, prescribed Hydroquinone for acne, not to lighten skin	Concern, would like a tummy tuck; Weight Fitness: Walking/Running
R	Satisfied, bathed in cleaning products as child and avoided sun to try to lighten skin or keep from getting darker	Walked tucked under to de-emphasize bottom Concern, keeping teeth; weight Fitness: Biking and Walking

Costs of Shifting		
Physical	*Emotional*	*Professional*
T African behind caused problems in ballet class; but she liked it.	Didn't care what colleagues thought	Thought for department, it just mattered that she was Black; it didn't matter what she looked like
F Expense of perm sent her to natural hair	Didn't care…ignored them and went right along	Didn't (and doesn't) care about satisfying what anyone else thought was appropriate
M Hair loss from relaxer; used Nadinola on acne when young	Didn't perceive it as shifting her personal appearance; previous anxiety over wearing braids, but none now	Looked a certain way for a certain place: work, church, home; concerned braids not professional at first
V Tired of straightening hair; thinning; would probably wear extensions in a few years, not a wig person; changing skin color = self hatred; Blacks needed to be confident in who they were	Told cornrows not professional in US; African attire & suits were confidence builders; shifting = managing inner feelings about self	Personal appearance was contextual, affected acceptancy, legitimacy, and longevity. Had to measure up to audience; had duty to open students' minds; had something to add to the world view. Critical mass needed to introduce different dress code
G Seasonal need to shift hair between straight and natural; burned (scabs) by relaxer but no hair loss because hair was really strong; knew danger but persisted in shifting	Rebelled against shifting her hair because of mom's remark about 'good hair'	Dressed for functionality Thought about straightening hair when she first came farther south; wouldn't change personal appearance practices for advancement because they would not last
E Did nothing to shift appearance except lightened neck skin from irritation to original color	Felt good about her own shifting because addressing her own needs	Felt shifting requirements would violate university's justice statement on how to treat others

	Costs of Shifting		
	Physical	*Emotional*	*Professional*
L	Hair loss from relaxer/color; considered her younger self a 'looker'	Comfortable in her own skin; loved looking attractive; wanted to age gracefully	Young professionals chose her as their role model; always had positive comments on her personal appearance from colleagues; Whites comfortable asking questions/touching her hair
S	Laser burns from hair removal; braids/casual dress for convenience	Didn't really like to think about appearance or spend time on it daily	Felt trouble she had getting hired and tenure was because she was Black in general; wouldn't make personal appearance changes to advance on job; working hard, being professional, and ethical more important to than her personal appearance
A	Microdermabrasion for acne	Only going to assimilate to a certain point; stickler about dress for court, not campus—rebels; felt responsibility to mentor/model appropriate dress to Black female students who didn't seem to know before entering law school, Sister to Sister	Was on campus too long to be uncomfortable by wearing a suit; only dressed up when she had to; felt knowledge and client rapport were more important to get them to open up
N	Used prescription Hydroquinone for acne	Felt responsibility to mentor/model appropriate dress to Black female students who didn't seem to know-Sister to Sister	Pushed the envelope in terms of strict compliance, but was basically conservative
R	Frustration over not lack of hypoallergenic cosmetics for skin tone and cute shoes in my size; bulimia/crash dieting	I still didn't want to be the largest one in my department. It bothered me.	I thought my skin tone/natural hair affected how people perceived me; I was who I was. Most of the time I forgot it until someone else Black mentioned it.

VITA

Trudi Kincaid Adams-Wiggan was born in Morganton, North Carolina, on September 22, 1953. She attended elementary schools in Drexel, North Carolina, and graduated from Drexel High School in 1971. The following autumn, she entered The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. After two years she transferred to Virginia Commonwealth University. In May 1978 she was awarded a Bachelor of Arts degree in English. In the fall of 1999, she accepted a Principal Fellows scholarship in School Administration at Appalachian State University. The M.S.A. was awarded in May 2001. In August, 2003, Trudi commenced work toward her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at Appalachian State University. The Ed.D. was awarded in December 2010.

Since 1989 Trudi has been employed by Hickory Public Schools where she has taught English or worked as an assistant principal.

Trudi Adams-Wiggan is married to Neal Wiggan. She is the mother of Aaron Adams and Édrien Adams (deceased) and the grandmother of Alexis Adams.