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African American female school leaders have a great responsibility and complex task before them. Not only are they charged with managing and improving schools, leading and empowering staff, and ensuring that the students under their care find academic success, they must also do this while managing their identity and navigating through various gender and race related social constructions. School leaders have multiple selves such as the identities they use when dealing with parents, district personnel, colleagues, students, etc. Effectively managing these selves is imperative to their successfulness as a school leader.

This study examines how African American female principals construct and craft their leadership identities. Using the theoretical framework of critical race theory and black feminist thought, it discusses in depth the challenges Black females face based on their race and gender. This study also details their need to prove themselves and to change perceptions related to the stereotypes that plague women of color. It provides insight about how these women navigate and shift their identities in order to find and maintain success in their work spaces.

This study recognizes that African American women are doubly marginalized; however, it appreciates their efforts to succeed despite the hurdles they face. The stories and voices of these women are seldom heard in the context of educational leadership and this study attempts to fill that void. Six women were selected and interviewed for this

qualitative study which sought to answer the following questions: How do African American female principals construct and navigate their leadership identities? How do Black female administrators describe their experiences with identity navigation and shifting in terms of personality, behavior, and physical appearance? How do they use identity navigation and shifting to "fit" their work spaces? Also, this study uses autoethnographic data obtained from the author's own interview data, a daily log of events, excerpts from a reflective journal, relevant emails, and memories coupled with interview data from the six administrators to create a composite portrait illustrating a week in the life of a Black female school principal.

In order to follow the tenets of critical race theory, the author's and the participants' authentic voice was honored through the use of powerful narratives and a composite counter-story. Themes that emerged related to the need for African American women to prove themselves professionally and to portray an image and identity that dispelled myths and negative perceptions related to their gender and/or race. Shifting strategies that are used such as changing communication styles, appearance, and behaviors are discussed. Concluding thoughts, implications for future research, and recommendations for educational practitioners are also presented.

CRAFTING ONE'S BRAND TO FIT: AN EXPLORATION OF BLACK FEMALE PRINCIPALS' CONSTRUCTION AND NAVIGATION OF THEIR LEADERSHIP IDENTITIES

by

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Approved by

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Ernestine Walden. I know you are looking down from Heaven and smiling upon me. I love you, Queen Tine.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Kimberly Curtis Robertson, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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have in store for me next. Thank you, Jesus, for giving me the ability to do great work. I will not let you down as you have placed a gift inside of me.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale of Study

When the music changes so does the dance. —African Proverb

The epigraph above speaks volumes about school administrators who deal with shifting their identities in order to "fit" their workspaces. School principals must change, alter, and/or manipulate their identities in order to better serve differing populations of stakeholders. African American female school leaders have a great responsibility and task. Not only are they charged with managing and improving schools, leading and empowering staff, and ensuring that the students under their care find academic success by leaving schools future ready, they must also do this while managing their identity and navigating through various gender and race related social constructions.

As a whole, principals play a significant role in education as the educational profession is one that directly impacts the success of our nation. Chen (2010) stated, "Every nation is only as good as its educational system" (p. 2). If this statement is accurate, the future of the United States depends on the quality of the schooling provided by educational institutions. Significant new pressures from public accountability systems have been created and placed on principals that are linked directly to the academic performance of schools (West, Peck, & Reitzug, 2010). Therefore, school leaders are

"missioned" to ensure quality service and those that hire school administrators have the vital task of placing the right people in the right leadership positions. The process of hiring principals and determining the right fit is one that must be carefully considered and is also one that tends to be driven by politics (Tooms, Lugg, & Bogotch, 2010). Therefore, the task of many principals is determining how to become a good fit, maintaining that fit, and navigating successfully in the educational arena.

Much research has been done that reveals leadership as being the key determinant in school effectiveness, school culture, and school image (Barth, 1990; Bell, 2001; Edmonds, 1979; Fullan, 1992; Goodlad, 1984; Sergiovanni, 1992). School leaders are positioned to be the people most responsible for the success of schools. In my experience, I have seen the successfulness of schools being correlated to the leadership of the principal. If a school is successful, that success is correlated with the abilities of that administrator. If a school fails, that failure is attributed to the lack of leadership of that principal (Haberman, 1999). Therefore, great care is given in selecting the right administrator to lead schools. District personnel and school board members look to pools of candidates in search of the person that will be the axiomatic "best fit" (Tooms et al., 2010). This individual is one the hiring team believes will be the leader they are looking for based on their preconceived beliefs and ideals about what a leader is and should be. The question then becomes who defines what a leader is and how they should be. This is a politically charged question. Many aspiring leaders soon begin to realize the politics of the position when they begin seeking employment. While district leaders are looking for the right fit for schools, school administrators must learn how to construct and navigate

their identities to be the right fit. I will explore the concept of fit further in the Researcher Perspective section of this study.

While a significant amount of this research discusses the challenges faced by administrators as they deal with the political components associated with the principalship, this study narrows its focus on the experiences of African American female administrators. I want to take this approach because there needs to be an understanding that school leaders who are Black and female should learn how to "fit" into their assigned roles. This dynamic must first be understood before one can comprehend the added challenges of "fitting" that are associated with race and gender.

African American female leaders face challenges that differ from their Caucasian female and male counterparts. As a researcher and participant experiencing the phenomenon of being female and Black, I understand firsthand the complexities associated with navigating successfully in workspaces that have been traditionally and historically geared to the dominant culture (Harris, 2004; hooks, 1989). Therefore, I recognize that there is a silent voice in current research and through this study I allow the voices of Black female principals to be heard.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore how African American female principals formulate their own professional identity. I examine how these educational leaders shift their leadership identity to fit their respective roles and to meet the needs of their stakeholders. Also, I explore how these individuals navigate their identities in their workspaces based on their gender and race. It is imperative female leaders of color know

how to manage their professional identities in order to maximize their potential for success. It is my hope that this research can give voice to Black female administrators and allow them to share their story. Their stories may benefit aspiring Black women entering leadership positions by revealing how to effectively navigate in their own work spaces. Other women may take refuge in their stories and realize that they may share similar experiences thus increasing camaraderie amongst professional women of color and letting them know that they are not alone in their struggles.

Guiding Research Question

In my pursuit to understand how African American female administrators construct and navigate their leadership identity, I chose to use a qualitative method of inquiry. My primary research question was: How do African American female principals construct and navigate their leadership identities based on their gender and race? It is important to understand how Black female leadership identity is developed based on their gender and race. Therefore, the following secondary questions provided me deeper insight and allowed the stories of these women to unfold:

- How do Black female administrators describe their experiences with identity navigation and shifting in terms of personality, behavior, and physical appearance?
- How do principals use identity navigation and shifting to “fit” their work spaces?

Statement of the Problem

In the age of accountability and with the pressures placed on the educational system to ensure the success of all students, those that lead schools are under constant scrutiny. School leaders are under the watchful eyes of district leaders, parents, community organizations, and even their own staff members (Dunford, 2007; Sergiovanni & Carver, 1980). Those choosing to enter the field of school administration make a conscious choice to enter a demanding profession in which their own lives can be of interest to the communities they serve. It has been my experience that principals' appearance, speech, body language, and interactions with students, parents, teachers, and community members are critiqued, analyzed, and discussed. Even their personal lives can be the subject of various conversations and could play a part in how there are perceived by those they serve. School principals are expected to be role models of the predefined image the people and organizations they serve have already constructed in their minds (Tooms et al., 2010). Therefore, many principals may find themselves trying to portray this predefined image in order to fit. Circumstances such as these cause principals to begin making shifts.

Pressures such as those discussed above are especially intense for Black women as they deal with additional challenges that are associated with race and gender. In my experience, African American women believe they must work harder to earn the respect that those belonging to the dominant culture receive automatically. They may believe they have to prove themselves based on social constructionism. Social constructionism can be viewed as a large umbrella that encompasses the social parameters of tolerance,

roles, identities, and responsibilities. Tooms et al. (2010) state that the umbrella is co-created through discourse by individuals, groups of individuals and the links between them. Therefore, these principals recognize that society has created and subscribed to certain beliefs regarding different groups of people. These societal beliefs affect the roles, responsibilities, and identities of the individuals. The effect can have a positive or negative based on the group being defined. Unfortunately, minorities are generally viewed negatively because of social constructionism.

Research shows that principals are selected for positions based on constructed values of leadership that have little to do with skill set but those that are most desirable in terms of gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, and age (Anderson, 1990; Ortiz, 1982; Tooms et al., 2010). Therefore, principals seek to emulate what they believe the organization wants. By doing so, they shift their identities. According to Lugg (2003), the social construction of what a leader is can be based on skill sets as well as visceral perceptions of what a leader looks and acts like. In turn, Black females can find themselves engaging in some form of metamorphosis to look and act like the leader others expect them to be.

It has been my experience that some principals struggle with determining what type of leader they plan to be and trying to display a particular image. They may have a view of what a successful principal looks like and how that person should behave. Developing one's identity as a leader is critical because school principals are in the public eye. According to Brubaker and Coble (2005), "A leader's behavior, whether perceived to be positive or negative, sets examples for those in the organization who are watching. People are observing everything you do" (p. 175). Because of the watchful eyes of the

public, it is important that Black females be skillful in developing and navigating their professional identity as they face certain obstacles that White female and male leaders may not.

Many principals have fine-tuned and learned to navigate their leadership identities. Many stages of trial and error have helped them learn such techniques while other principals may still be learning how to effectively people manage, address supporters and non-supporters, and be politically savvy. Regardless of how they develop their identity, principals definitely spend time working towards inventing and branding themselves and balancing and navigating the multiple identities they possess. African American female principals must also balance and navigate their identities as they take on a form of biculturality (Adams-Wiggan, 2010). Biculturality deals with one's ability to take on two cultures such as one's Black home culture and one's White work culture (Dawson, 2006; Sadao, 2003). African American female leaders must learn to shift between the two in an effort to ensure and sustain their success as a school leader in workspaces like these that are historically geared to White males.

Definition of Key Terms

Biculturality—Biculturality is the process of Black women facilitating their reception in economic and social settings involving Whites marked by them altering/shifting their natural physical appearance (Adams-Wiggan, 2010).

Black Feminist Thought (BFT)—BFT was born out of the "continuing marginalization maintained in and by the feminist movement" (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). According to Harris (2007), Black feminist thought captures the intersection of race and

gender and recognizes the oppressive nature of gender construction and of race as a social construct. It gives voice to the "self-defined collective Black women's standpoint about black womanhood" (Collins, 1996, p. 9).

Critical Race Theory (CRT)—Critical race theory operates through the notion that racism is a systemic condition that is pervasive, permanent, and must be challenged (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). In education, critical race theory is a set of basic perspectives, insights, methods, and pedagogy that seek to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions inside and outside of the classroom (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Class—Class describes differential distributions in income, wealth, and social mobility (Ortner, 2003; Rosenblum & Travis, 2003). Traditionally, many researchers use objective indicators of socioeconomic status such as the "material conditions of life that an individual enjoys" to measure social class (Oakes & Rossi, 2003). These conditions include financial resources, access to educational opportunities and participation in social institutions. According to Rosenblum and Travis (2003), class status is a more accurate reflection of economic and social factors than of individual merit. Class can be interpreted in different ways based on the research being used as it is often interlinked with race, gender, and other social constructs.

Dual Consciousness—Dual Consciousness is a concept used to describe how one can be empowered and disempowered synchronously (Simien, 2004). Fanon (1967), describes Blacks as having dual consciousness because they have an original self that is hidden from society and even oneself. The second self reflects the cultural and

institutional norms of the dominant group which is usually at the expense of equity and self-actualization. Durham-Fowler (2012) suggests that the

> original consciousness is intimately aligned with pursuing equal status for the authentic self within the world. It recognizes the difference between gaining status and equity by twisting the authentic self into a version that is compatible with societal norms, and gaining that equity as an authentic human being. (p. 1)

Fit—Fit is a definitive post structuralist framework that explains the convergence of politics and identity (Tooms & English, 2010). For the sake of this study, fit considers how the union of identity theory, hegemony, and social construction affects identity politics in terms of the organization and the individual.

Hegemony—Hegemony was introduced by the Italian Marxist, Gramsci. Cultural hegemony is a concept that describes the phenomena surrounding how some groups maintain power over others (Mastroianni, 2002). Hegemony influences subordinate groups to accept, adopt, and internalize the dominant group's definition of what is normal (Kumashiro, 2001). According to Tooms et al. (2010), "Those who are subjected to hegemony are rarely aware of it because messages of what is normal permeate every pore of society through symbols, language, and other cultural structures influenced by the dominant group" (p. 110). Society is so entrenched in hegemony most people hardly recognize it and accept it as the norm.

Home Codes—Home codes are complex behavioral codes that exist within one's own community. They are rules of comportment within the Black culture that are not only defined by race but are also defined by class and gender (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

Identity—Identity is defined as the way a person sees and understands his or herself. Identity is the "way individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and culture" (Deng, 1995, p. 1).

Identity Theory—In identity theory, the core of the identity is a categorization of oneself as the occupant of a role incorporating the meanings and expectations associated with the role (Burke & Tully, 1977; Thoits, 1986).

Identity Navigation—Identity navigation is the process of one purposely maneuvering and shifting parts of their identity based on their setting and other social constructs.

Intersectionality—Intersectionality is a tool of analysis that states systems of race, class and gender, and other oppressive social and political constructs form mutually constructing features that shape Black women's experiences (Collins, 2000b).

Leadership Identity Navigation—Leadership identity navigation is the process of leaders having multiple identities to work with an increasingly differentiated clientele and to move within and across multiple groups within his/her spheres of work and influence (Lumby & English, 2009).

Professional Identity—Professional identity is defined as the identity one takes on in their work spaces. It is also one that overlaps with one's personal identity as the nature of some leader roles are fluid and cannot be separated. Ibarra (1999) describes it as one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences.

Shifting Identity—Shifting Identity is the process in which one alters aspects of their identity to conform, assimilate, and transition from one conceptual context and

theoretical orient to another (Adams-Wiggan, 2010). Shifting one's identity is a way of navigating through different barriers and/or challenges to fit into a certain situation, to prove oneself, and/or to dispel myths and stereotypes.

Social Constructivism—Social constructivism is how we explain, model, and understand who we are as it differs in different settings and under different circumstances (Crenshaw, 1996; Morkos, 2003). People change and shift their identities based on their audience.

Work Spaces—Work spaces are the actual locations and/or settings in which school administrators function. They are akin to professional social settings and encompass all settings related to one's career such as the actual school building, off campus offices, meeting spaces, and any social events/settings.

Crafting My Brand to Fit: The Researcher's Perspective

"I think you will be a great fit!" was one of the comments I heard when I received my first position as an elementary school principal in the summer of 2012. The comment was not one that resonated with me or one that I felt I had to analyze because it is a very popular phrase that many principals hear when they receive their school appointments. Through this research, I have learned that there is a lot of meaning behind this phraseology. According to Tooms and English (2010, p. 222), "fit" is a postmodern construct that is best described as a political game played by administrators and the communities they serve (Hernandez, 2007; Tooms, 2006; Tooms et al., 2010). Being and becoming the right fit and understanding how to continue "fitting" is a task that many principals take on consciously or in some cases subconsciously. It is a necessary

requisite as school leaders must understand the rules communities that govern schools use that dictate how a principal should and should not be (Tooms & English, 2010). While history tells us that majoritarian society does not view Black women as the typical face of school leaders, this alone illustrates the reasoning behind Black women making the shift and trying to fit.

I have always struggled with my personal and professional identity. While I did not struggle with knowing who I was, I worried about how others saw me and how I wanted to be seen. As a child, I was fair skinned with long wavy hair. I was constantly teased and told that I was White or that I wanted to be White. I was a bright student that carried the label of being academically gifted. Like many other African American students who were smart, I was considered a nerd and was told that I was "acting White." While this separated many of us from our Black peers, it was the beginning of me learning to shift at an early age. I learned to shift my identities when I was around different groups of peers. When I was around the popular Black students, I *played the dozens*, rapped the lyrics to the hottest songs or free styled, and engaged in other activities to increase my cultural capital. I was aware of my "home codes" and the importance of abiding by them to gain acceptance amongst my Black peers. When I was around my White peers, I conformed and showed them that their interests were similar to mine. I spoke of pop or country music artists that we both shared an interest in as well as vacation spots I had in common with them. I even spoke of what we were covering in our advanced learner classes. I found numerous ways to fit in for I had learned how to play the game.

In a sense, I assimilated. I believe I was quite successful in being bicultural when I needed to be. I knew how to shift identities when I was around differing peer groups. Also, I knew early that in the classroom, I had to be bicultural in an effort to not be labeled by the stereotypes that plagued some of my African American peers. I worked hard to keep myself from obtaining the stigmas that were attached to some of my Black friends. I had to prove that even though I was Black, I was just as smart and talented as my Caucasian class mates. What made this task harder was that I grew up in a small town with a history of prejudice and racism evidenced through the recent removal of their Ku Klux Klan recruitment billboard. I grew up in a community that did not have high expectations for African American students. The Black students to "make it" or find success were the ones that were the athletes who were "adopted" by White community members and received assistance getting into college. In my small town, knowing how to shift helped you overcome the barriers and helped you beat the odds. In retrospect, I have been shifting my identity my whole life.

In order to illustrate my current efforts to rebrand myself, I will share an example of how I shift my personal appearance. I have always looked young for my age. Constantly, I deal with teachers and parents telling me, "You look so young; I thought you were a student." As a Black female school leader, being told that someone had mistaken me for a student was not easily received. In an effort to look older and more mature, I cut my hair and began wearing glasses. At times, I even resort to wearing my hair in an old fashioned bun to appear older when I attend certain events. In my opinion, youthfulness is not always seen as a positive attribute in leadership positions and is often

correlated with lack of maturity and in-experience. Therefore, while some rejoice in being told they look young, I, on the other hand feel insulted. Changing my appearance to give the impression that I was older is my way of navigating and shifting my identity; it was my survival technique and a step towards professional advancement.

During my graduate studies, I learned the many challenges females face because of their gender (Anderson & Collins, 2003, Collins, 1998; hooks, 1981; McIntosh, 1990). Males dominate the workforce in terms of being seated in most executive type roles. They are viewed as leaders and many women believe they must emulate masculine characteristics in order to gain the respect that men are granted as an unearned asset (Harris, 2004; McIntosh, 1990). In my role as a school leader, I have seen male leaders assert themselves to get things done; they got results without creating dissension amongst staff. However, I have witnessed female leaders use the same assertiveness and found them to be criticized for being too direct. These females who show assertiveness are displaying characteristics outside of their gendered role. Females are generally viewed as nurturers and are seen as the weaker sex and many doubt their ability to lead (Peters, 2003). This may be because of the stereotypes that society has subscribed to, based on hegemony. Therefore, as a female school administrator I must learn to navigate in a system that appears to be geared for and more accepting of male traits and characteristics. I recall meeting with a successful, veteran male principal who offered me this one piece of advice: “You need to break bad on your staff one good time; if you do this, they will respect you and work hard for you and you will have no problems. You ‘gotta rough them up.”

I am sure many leaders get advice when they begin their roles. While not all advice mirrors that shared in the aforementioned paragraph, it is advice that provokes one to possibly change or shift who they are based on what they have been told or what they have seen. In my case, this male principal was extremely successful, and I am sure many aspire to be a leader of his stature. However, I knew that as a female, being aggressive with staff members does not produce the same outcomes that it may for a male (Cora, 2008). Such behavior is out of the norm for females and is frowned upon. This double standard is one that will be addressed in the review of literature.

As an African American woman who understands that I am doubly marginalized because of my positionality as a female and a person of color, I have learned how to navigate my identity in various social spaces (Fields, 2009). I have seen my colleagues successfully and some unsuccessfully shift their identities to conform to the roles they needed to serve. For example, an African American female may lead a predominately Black school differently than how one would lead a predominately Caucasian school. I have witnessed African American female leaders relaxing their hair to a more accepting, European look versus "going natural" and wearing a small afro because of her leadership role in a largely Caucasian school. Today's school leaders must be skilled in such navigations of their identity in an effort to fit the leadership archetype of the populations they serve. To do this, I believe is a deliberate act, maybe even an art. It is definitely not happenstance.

Summary

African American female principals have a great charge similar to all principals. Not only must they improve schools and ensure that the students under their care matriculate through their school receiving optimal instruction, they must do so while navigating various gender and race related barriers. They must utilize a special skill set that other leaders whom are demographically different do not use and quite possibly are unaware. In an effort to secure and sustain leadership roles, Black women must be aware of the challenges that face them and ways to successfully navigate in the political world of public education. This study recognizes that African American women are doubly marginalized; however, it appreciates their efforts to succeed despite the hurdles they face. The goal of this research is to explore how these women constructed and navigated their identities to bypass the obstacles they encountered in their workspaces. They had a story that needed to be told.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Aside from constructing and developing one's personal identity, many people take on a professional identity for the workplace. Those who tend to have careers that require them to work with the public or, more importantly, be seen as role models to others must take time to develop their identities. Lawyers, for example, may focus on having an aggressive professional identity in which they avoid appearing timid or weak. Musicians may wish to take on the identity of the girl next door, a gangster rapper, or a sexual vixen, in order to increase record sales (Gause, 2008). Some teachers may choose to take on the professional identity of a gentle nurturer in order to win the hearts of his or her students while another may want to be seen as a dominating force not to be reckoned with in an effort to maintain order in the classroom. Various positions and roles require people to alter or adjust their image and identity in some manner.

Professional identity is defined as one's professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences (Slay & Smith, 2011). Successful professional identity construction has been associated with career success. Therefore, in order to be successful, many individuals need to work towards acquiring and maintaining a successful identity in their respective fields. In educational leadership, school leaders must effectively construct and manage their professional identity. Leaders must adjust

their “fit” and at times shift their identities based on their workspaces. African American females must also be crafty as their shift is a major one. It involves them shifting in efforts to bypass racial stereotypes and surpass limits placed on the competency level of women based on gender. This research will explore how African American female principals construct and shift their identities. In an effort to understand this phenomenon several concepts must be investigated and explained. Therefore, this review of literature focuses on:

- Identity theory and identity development in school leaders
- Identity navigation and the concept of fit
- Gender and race related barriers
- Intersectionality
- The application of Black Feminist Theory & Critical Race Theory and why they are needed in this study
- The role of identity shifting

Defining Identity in the Field of Educational Leadership

First, in an effort to introduce this concept of leadership identity construction and navigation, I will define and explore identity. Most people would define identity simply as, “Who I am.” While this may seem like an acceptable answer to most, it only scratches the surface. In my opinion, one’s identity is made up of multiple facets and is ever-changing. To understand this concept, I will discuss identity theory.

Identity theory is best understood by looking through a psychological and sociological lens. When exploring identity theory and looking at the work of Tooms et

al. (2010), they state that sociologists and psychologists recognize three distinct usages of the term identity. As they cited, it can be used in reference to a culture shared by people. It can also be defined by a common culture that connects participants. Lastly, identity is considered to be the parts of a self that are composed of meanings attached to the roles people play in society (hooks, 1991; Laing, 1966). This research will use the latter definition and explanation of identity stated above. The term *leadership identity* will be used to relate to the roles administrators play in the educational arena. Researchers such as Butler (1997), Jung and Hect (2004), Lakoff (2004), and Stryker and Burke (2000) have found that how we explain, model, and understand who we are differs with different circumstances. To understand this concept, imagine a school leader in the scenario of being outside of the workplace such as at a restaurant. This school administrator may choose to refrain from ordering a beer if he or she is in a restaurant within their school district for fear of being seen by members of the school community. He or she may do so in an effort to maintain a particular identity and image. Even though many adults see no harm in having a beer at a restaurant, doing so for a school principal can affect their leadership identity. Tooms et al. (2010) state, "People assume that because principals may fulfill their expectations of leadership they will also fit with their expectations of other aspects and contexts of identity" (p. 109). Because people are confident about their assumptions that leaders fit their expectations regarding identity and role, they believe he or she meets others as well. They may believe that the school leader is a "good" conservative church goer, but be shocked to see the principal out at a bar having a beer.

Judgments regarding the principal's identity could then form about his or her abilities as a leader based on one's constructs of what is acceptable.

Identity construction is a process and transformation that leaders undertake. Principals have to determine how they will lead and how to distinguish themselves from others and stand out as a leader. As cited in Lumby and English (2009),

> Bauman (2004) suggests that the primary goal in identity construction is the creation of deep and impassable trenches between the categories attached to self and those of others. Preparation for school leadership may therefore comprise the construction of a mental moat which distinguishes the leader from others. This takes place alongside the simultaneous creation of multiple other selves or identities, the purpose of which is to distinguish oneself from others, and by means of comparison, to judge oneself at least equal. (pp. 13–14)

School leaders have multiple selves such as the identities they use when dealing with parents, district personnel, colleagues, students, etc. Effectively managing these selves is imperative to their successfulness as a school leader. A leader choosing to address district level personnel informally as if they were communicating with a colleague could offend someone higher up on the career ladder. This *faux pas* and mismanagement of self could be to his or her detriment. That is why learning to shift is important as one must be aware of what identity can exist in what environment. A White principal may be able to address his White supervisor on a first name basis because of their established home codes or because of their membership in the "good ol' boys club." However, someone who is considered an outsider may not be welcomed to do so.

School leaders are considered professionals similar to senior level management in corporations. Those considered professionals abide by an unwritten set of characteristics

and are expected to carry on particular behaviors associated with the term, “professional.” Cuban (1985) stated that:

> Images are powerful. They shape behavior. Advertising, politics, and television document the potency of the pictures we have in our heads. The principalship is no exception. Embedded in the origins and history of the post, images of what a principal should be have competed for attention from each generation of would-be administrators. (p. 107)

Therefore, principals must understand the importance of the image they create and that it can be a reflection of their identity; their awareness is critical. Again, the public is watching.

Because of the value placed on image and identity, principals may toy with their leadership identity and behaviors to determine what is most suitable for their environment. For example, to maintain the proper fit, a principal that wishes to maintain an autocratic identity may find it inappropriate to dress outside of the predetermined leadership standard of wearing business attire. To project his strong identity as a chieftain, he may believe that a leader should never dress down. In contrast, a principal who chooses to wear jeans and sneakers on “causal Fridays” along with staff may enter into conflict in regards to the professional identity they wish to maintain. He or she may dress down in an effort to maintain an image that shows staff members that they are down to earth and are approachable. This action may reveal to their staff that they are likeminded and convey a team message that shows they work alongside of their staff. However, other principals may purposely remain in business attire on causal Fridays to maintain a division from staff to show they are in control and are professional at all

times. The message that may be conveyed here is that this leader prefers a separatist identity, one that connotes power. It may be them asserting themselves to show they want to be taken seriously or even to prove themselves to their subordinates. This message is conveyed easily and simply through their choice of attire. As simple as it may sound, their dress reveals much about their leadership style.

Navigating the Role of a School Leader

School principals must learn how to successfully navigate between differing work spaces and within various roles. School leaders must be aware of who they are and how they want to be seen by the public. They must have a firm grasp on their inner values. According to Gupton (2010),

> Navigating successfully in the turbulent seas of today's school leadership requires that principals have a compass—an inner strength, derived from having examined carefully who they are, what they believe and value, and why they are in the business of education. Such self-assessment and reflection enable leaders to understand and thus better manage their emotions and the intense stress so often related to educational leadership positions. (p. 2)

Principals must know what they value and hold true to who they are so that they do not lose themselves completely when they make shifts. Aspiring principals enter the profession quickly realizing that positions and even hiring processes are very political. Some even realize that they have to shift their identities just to become a likely candidate for a position.

Literature notes that parameters are set through lengthy interaction as to how a principal is to be and not to be in terms of role and identity. As cited in Tooms et al. (2010), national and international research suggests that school leaders seek to

understand, obey, and perpetuate these rules because they are necessary currency to obtain support and job security (Anderson, 1990; Benham & Heck, 1998; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Hernandez, 2007; Oplatka, 2006). School leaders tend to shift their identities to fit their position and even to successfully maintain it.

In Tooms et al.'s (2010) research on fit, they discussed how in many Anglo-centric cultures the school leaders were historically essentialized as White, Protestant heterosexual males. They stated that in educational leadership, persons who were not members of that dominant culture became the "other," and are deemed as people that do not "fit." Their research on fit dealt mainly with hiring practices and how the term fit was used to determine which administrative candidate was suitable for various positions. Screening practices and decisions are influenced by factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity (Hernandez, 2007). While many people assume that their ethnicity and gender may prevent them from getting certain jobs, there may be some validity to their beliefs. As cited in Mullen (2011), "Some aspiring and practicing leaders realize that race and gender are social constructs that can promote or marginalize individuals and groups, thus granting or barring privilege" (p. 14). As hiring committees use the terms *race* and *gender* under the aegis of fit, those seeking employment as a school principal may find themselves in screenings trying to shift their identity in order to become a better fit. They may even market themselves as being the best fit.

While this research is not focused on hiring practices, those that are hired are so because of their fit or perceived fit. The concern then becomes maintaining the identity that is perceived as the best fit for the position they secured. The leader must reproduce

the community's norms, because in actuality, the community has determined that that individual represents what they believe a school leader should look like and also how a school leader should behave (Tooms et al., 2010). When looking at school leaders today, those that do not "fit" must determine ways to make themselves fit and reduce the stigmas that come with being considered the "other." These others in educational leadership could be leaders that are women and/or leaders of color. However, other people who can be considered "the others" are anyone outside of the White male demographic. This can be anyone on the cusps of society that can be marginalized in any way. People of other nationalities or ethnic groups, those who are linguistically different, those who are not heterosexual, those who are physically or emotionally disabled, those who can be discriminated against because of age and those coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds can all be considered the other. However, for the sake of this research I will only focus on African American women.

Dancing the Dance, Playing the Game

The process of fitting is equivalent to shifting. To explain the ways in which societal institutions such as schools affect individuals' interpretation and understanding of reality, Foucault (1975) used the word, game. Therefore, shifting is a form of navigation that is similar to playing a game. Institutions like schools depend on how the dominant group in a school community chooses to frame what is appropriate and normal in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, and even professional identities of employees. Being that school administrators are governed by the school board; they must learn from that community what is considered normal behavior for school principals (Tooms et al.,

2010). Minority principals must also take into account the biases and prejudices that may exist in the community and use this to determine how they will navigate and shift their identities.

School administrators must understand that constructing and navigating their identity involves them rebranding themselves. As cited in Tooms et al. (2010), principals must "reconfigure or even strip parts of the gears of his or her identity and presentation of self to gain and maintain the social capital necessary to lead" (p. 116). School leaders must be skilled in blending multiple aspects of themselves into their social selves. These social selves shift informally based on context, situation, and overall desire. School principals must sometimes present themselves in a certain context to different audiences. Some may struggle trying to determine if they are being genuine by shifting their identity, yet they are simply choosing among the aspects of their identity that they recognize as their own (Kroeger, 2003). This navigation is a way of being politically savvy and professional. Many school leaders have learned that they must downplay and/or cover different parts of their identity in order to project a particular professional image. Hernandez (2007) spoke to how a female Latino principal chose to wear darker conservative clothing and pearl jewelry to conceal her Latino identity when she attended district meetings. This identity shifting is a common practice amongst administrators because they constantly must read the spoken and unspoken rules of their community regarding identity. They must work to "fit" their communities' preconceived descriptors of a leader. Some principals can shift their identities by simply changing a hairstyle while others must constantly edit their speech and behavior. Leadership identity and the

ability to perpetuate notions of fit assist not only securing one's job but also helps to shape one's school (Anderson, 1990; Blount & Tallerico, 2004).

The research on fit discusses how individuals, societies, and whole communities construct the definition of being a school leader. Interlaced in their definitions are biases and a margin of tolerance regarding many aspects of a person's identity (Tooms et al., 2010). One's personal life and professional life overlaps and at times extend beyond the school building and school hours. This overlap can be especially challenging for African American women as who they are at work can differ from who they are in their home lives. For example, one could be very proud of their African American heritage and in their home chose to talk using a certain dialect and dress afrocentrically. However, they may choose to resist these behaviors in the work place. Therefore, one's gender and race can be a factor for determining how one chooses to fit.

I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar: Effects of Gender on Female Principals' Leadership Identity

The presence of women in the workforce has continued to increase over the past century. Women constitute the majority of the workforce in the educational field, while men are more likely to hold administrative level positions (Coleman, 2005; Harris, 2004; Smith, 2008). Historically, men have been thought to possess the qualities needed to manage schools (Harris, 2004). Many individuals still believe males to be better suited for leadership roles even to the point of training women to lead in a way that embodies masculine characteristics. As cited in Skinner (2012), researchers such as DeRue, Ashford, and Cotton (2009) and Ibarra, Snook, and Ramo (2008) suggest an identity

based approach to the development of female leaders and even provide insight into how to assist women to develop and finesse a leadership identity that helps them find success. According to Hackney (1998) and Smulyan (2000), women who must solve every problem and feel a need to mother or rescue are often perceived as soft, weak, indecisive, and incompetent. Women who display professionalism and intensity are viewed as cold, distant and perfectionist (Smith, 2008). Women who want to succeed in educational leadership are often advised to act like men (Shakeshaft, 1998). Therefore, many women attempt to take on male attributes and weave them into their leadership style.

To further illustrate the complexities associated with female leaders who behave in a manner that is inconsistent with their gendered role, Schmuck (1998) stated that women who have attained positions that are generally held by males have realized, consciously and unconsciously, that there are social roles and expectations governing the role of females from the culture. They seem to have to change themselves for these positions. Schmuck stated,

> They must become abnormal women; they must transcend the social expectations of femaleness in order to aspire to the socially prescribed role of leader. And because they do not fit the expectations of the attributes of leaders, they are also abnormal administrators. Their position as administrators makes them insiders to the organization, but their abnormal status as women make them outsiders in their organizations. (p. 356)

These women have worked hard and persevered to obtain their status as a professional leader, but are now set apart from others. They are now tainted because they are different and do not fit society's gender norm.

Circumstances such as these leave women muddled since being a leader and being female creates contradictions. If women display politeness or passivity they "lose credibility as leaders," yet if they act in an aggressive, competitive manner, they "may have to deny their identity" (Harris, 2004, p. 365). The adult male role is generally defined by traits such as dominance achievement, autonomy, and aggression. Females host traits such as emotionalism, passivity, timidity, deference, and self-abasement (Cullen & Luna, 1993). It is evident here that the connotation surrounding feminine attributes is a negative one in terms of leadership.

Many female administrators have felt the need to shift their identities in order to "compartmentalize certain features of themselves as a partner or parent" when adopting a leadership persona (Lyman, Ashby, & Tripses, 2005, p. 22). In a study on gender by Smulyan (2000), three female principals were studied and it was noted that gendered expectations were seen as a factor undermining their effectiveness in their leadership role. When they exhibited warmth or chose not to make unilateral decisions, they were characterized as not being true leaders or real administrators. When they showed directness and personal distance, they were labeled cold and unfeminine.

As cited in Smith (2008), several studies suggested that males were intellectually superior to women. Women were not thought to possess the qualities considered necessary for effective leadership. Women tended to focus on the needs of the individuals within the organization while men focused on the most efficient means to complete tasks. These types of male behaviors were considered rational, logical, and unemotional (Smith, 2008). It has been my experience that most leadership positions

seek leaders who are efficient at managing versus ones who are more nurturing and caring thereby they subconsciously promote male attributes over female ones.

With regard to employment, women and minorities tend to be overlooked for administrative positions because they are a deviation from the status quo and not because they lack competence (Valverde, 2003). According to Gupton and Slick (2004), the decision to hire women is "often made within a social context that women are inferior in status, are objects of negative stereotypes, and though a majority of the population, are considered minority because they lack access to power" (p. 29). It has been my experience that many women enter the administrative field cognizant that this is the belief held by many, yet they are steadfast in their pursuit to prove themselves. Here lies the plight of Black female leaders, not only are they considered inferior because of their gender, they are also impacted because of their race.

Hear Me Roar Louder: The Double Jeopardy of Being a Black Female Leader

African American principals have had a long legacy of leading Black schools prior to integration. Black administrators were pillars in the Black community and lauded as authority on educational, social and economic issues (Tillman, 2004a). African American administrators maintained the respect of the communities they served and were viewed as a prominent figure in "saving" the community by helping to ensure equitable educational opportunities for the youth.

After the Brown v. Board of Education period of schooling, the unintended consequence of the ruling was the firing of many Black teachers and principals as integrated schools called for White principals to remain employed as African American

leaders were terminated or demoted (Tillman, 2004b). While integration was supposed to be a positive move, it ended the historical legacy of Black school leaders. In more recent years, Black principals have begun to climb the ranks and become leaders of many schools; however, the Black women serving in educational leadership positions still continues to be small in comparison to White males, White females, and Black males (Brown, 2011; Hackney, 1998; Johnson, 2010; Moore, 2009; Smith, 2008).

While the population of female school administrators of color is small, the body of research that exists on them is also sparse. Much of the research that exists is embedded in other studies. According to Tillman (2004b), there are limited studies on Black female school administrators that discuss their lives, leadership styles, and accomplishments. The specific experiences of these women are generally not found as they are categorized as the experiences of minorities and women. Reed (2012) concurred with the notion that research is limited to the small number of Black female leaders but also noted that there are a small number of scholars researching this area. She also stated that the findings from the research are generally categorized in teacher leadership versus administration.

The research that does exist suggests that African American women are politically charged and use their role as a form of activism to ensure their students are afforded equitable opportunities. According to Reed (2012), African American female principals have redefined political activism through their role as school leaders as they have struggled through various racial and gender related barriers. They have become motivated to help ensure they contribute to a culture of students that can navigate similar

obstacles. Many of these women whom are of the Civil Rights era were raised with a common belief about the importance of academic achievement. They believed that a quality education not only benefitted the student but the African American community as a whole.

While all principals are missioned to ensure student achievement, their means to that end vary. African American female principals' leadership styles may differ from their male colleagues as well as their Caucasian colleagues. Some of these differences in leadership could be attributed to their gender and some to their race. Reed (2012) noted that women have been seen as change agents who are more democratic and whose scope of influence is larger than the school premises. She even felt that women dispersed their "power for the overall good of the school versus having power for power's sake" (p. 42).

The research also suggests that African American female leaders possessed a sensitivity and consciousness of the challenges that faced students of color (Gooden, 2005; Reed & Evans, 2008). Because of this awareness, they tend to display maternal-like qualities in their leadership style that are important to the students and Black community (Reed & Evans, 2008). As cited in Reed and Evans (2008), "In addition to racialized role expectations, they also experience gendered role expectations, inkling the notions of caring, concern and 'othermothering' (Case, 1997; Loder, 2005a)" (p. 488).

African American women could be viewed as 'racial insiders' because they can easily recognize and address the needs of children of color; they could also be viewed as 'outsiders' because of their gender and leadership abilities (Reed & Evans, 2008). Black female administrators "may confront racism and sexism from their White and African

American constituents, as well as complex and intersecting racialized and gendered role expectations above and beyond those expected of other administrators" (Reed & Evans, 2008, p. 488). Because of these role expectations and more so role limits, African American women continue to struggle for equitable opportunities in the field of school administration.

Slavery has been abolished for over 150 years, and it has been over 80 years since women won the right to vote. According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004), still, today, in the 21st century—Black women are constantly made susceptible to both racial and gender discrimination, and sometimes left wondering which bias is most potent in disadvantaging them. African American women have a story that is seldom told. In the African American Women's Voices Project, Jones and Shorter-Gooden conducted the most comprehensive study to date on Black women's perceptions and experiences of racism and sexism. Their work involved them listening closely to how Black women made sense of their lives and to the women's words and voices they used to evoke their experiences. The work of Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) revealed that 97% of African American women surveyed stated that they are aware of negative stereotypes and 80% confirmed that they had been personally affected by persistent racist and sexist assumptions. Therefore, not only do women of color deal with issues related to gender, they are also plagued by issues related to their race.

When looking at the field of education, Black teachers learned to survive, and even manage racism through the process of negotiating and re-defining their professional identities. They had to manage tensions between their identities as teachers and their

identities as Black people without denying aspects of themselves and their experience (Osler, 1997). Even though our discussion is on school administrators, people of various occupations deal with issues related to identity and have become skilled in navigating those social spaces. However, African American women have double challenges as school leaders. Mullen (2011) discussed the paradoxes associated with education. She stated that there were contradictions to the culture of power in public education because they have been "penetrated to the point of being fundamentally changed while continuing to violate principles of fairness, equity, and representation" (p. 3). She noted that while the gender and racial glass ceiling is deteriorating, it was still intact. Mullen posits that this phenomenon is evidenced by the difficulty women and people of color have in advancing professionally and on competitive levels of power and influence.

Black women still contend with this glass ceiling. Gyant (1996) concludes that there is "a ceiling that exists for most African Americans . . . black skin is still equated by many with a lowering of standards, and nothing much will change that. I don't care how good Blacks become . . . it wouldn't help us" (p. 18). Feminist research geared to the lack of presence of Black women in the superintendency pointed out that the difference in the ceiling depends on who is trying to surpass it. Alston (1999) stated that the ceiling is made of glass if White women are trying to go through it, but it is made of concrete for women of color. Hemmons (1996) also stated that wherever a Black woman goes there are ceilings made of steel, wood, or glass, which are "inflexible, intractable, and impenetrable" (p. 7). Clearly, the literature speaks to the difficulties African American women have in breaking through the proverbial glass ceiling; however, the focus for

many women of color is how to shift and navigate around the ceiling. This will be expanded upon in the Navigating and Recalculating section of this review of literature.

African American women not only experience gender bias that stems from the false premise that males are better suited to hold leadership positions, but are also confronted by racial bias (Coleman, 2005; Valverde, 2003). This racial bias is historically embedded in the power structures of organizations. As cited in Smith (2008), African American women find themselves in a position of double jeopardy since either their gender or race may evoke negative responses from employers. According to Johnson (2010), Black women in leadership positions are more so viewed as a doer or a hands-on worker. Her ideas, instructions, and feedback are met with hostility from subordinates. She is patronized, and she is blatantly ignored (Bigsby & Hutchinson, 2001).

I am Roaring: Does Anyone Hear Me?

The Intersectionality of Race, Gender, and Class

While this study does not specifically discuss the implications of class in relation to the barriers faced by African American women, it is imperative to mention class because of intersectionality. When discussing issues related to the disenfranchisement and marginalization of certain groups, we must explore the social constructs related to gender, race, and class as these are all systems of oppression. Gender, race, and class do not work independently of one another as they all play a role in creating unequal circumstances for marginalized groups. This intersectionality of gender, race and class set Black women's perspectives apart from other groups by placing their experiences at

the crossroads of multiple oppressions and shifts the investigation from a singular exploration of race, gender or class to one in which the goal is to determine the links among these systems (Collins, 2000b).

As stated above, class, gender, and race work in concert as social constructions that affect the experiences of people. In this case, they create inequitable situations for Black women. Class continues to be a separator for women of color that can taint certain situations and interactions. It is another divisor that can contribute to their marginal status.

Class is another descriptor that can disenfranchise people of color. While the world tends to be separated by the haves and the "have nots," many African Americans tend to host the role of the have nots in many situations. African American women who grew up in middle to upper class households had more opportunities and access to resources than those who were of a lower socioeconomic status (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004; McDonald, 1997). This can be attributed to a strategic assimilation framework (Lacy, 2004). The middle to upper class households of many professional Black women molded them to be able to function amongst the majoritarian population. Strategic assimilation asserts that Black parents who are middle class are able to function in both Black and White worlds. They seek to foster this ability in their children (Hardaway & McLoyd, 2008). Although these parents "participate in the political, educational, and economic mainstream," they are "reluctant to relinquish ties to the Black world where they maintain and nurture racial identity" (Lacy, 2004, p. 913). These middle class parents encouraged their children to utilize the White world for its economic

opportunity and the Black world for social purposes (Lacy, 2004). Therefore, middle to upper class parents taught their children how to shift at an early age. They also learned how to revert to and maintain their home codes when needed. Many professional level Black women grew up with this background knowledge and it helped them learn to navigate in today's society. They knew how to shift.

Shifting is similar to code switching which is a form of changing patterns of behaving and speaking depending on the realm in which one is functioning at the time; it may be one means of navigating educational and employment settings dominated by Whites (Cross, Smith, & Payne, 2002; Lacy, 2004; Neckerman, Carter, & Lee, 1999). Other work suggests that emphasizing different aspects of identity may also help in the transition between Black and White environments. Lacy (2004) observed that middle class Blacks sometimes distinguish themselves from other Blacks by emphasizing their class status and minimizing their racial identity in interactions with Whites. Therefore, professional Black women who are middle class have used shifting in their interactions with Caucasian Americans. However, they have also used shifting in their interactions with other Blacks who may not have been of the same social class (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004; Neckerman et al., 1999).

African Americans who occupied a lower socio-economic status may have been motivated by their circumstances to persevere to fulfill their educational and career aspirations. This could have served as the motivation they needed to become principals and even take on the challenges of high poverty and low performing schools. In my

opinion, many Black female school leaders feel purposed to help students of poverty as someone helped them in their lives. It is their way of giving back.

As evidenced above, the marginality experienced by African American women as a result of their gender and race can be increased by class. For example, in the realm of higher education, Adair and Dahlbert (2003) showed that one's social class was a factor that made tenure and promotion difficult to obtain. Also, there are a number of scholars, such as Tokarczyk and Fay (1993) and Adair and Dahlberg (2003) who have articulated the struggles experienced by women from working-class backgrounds. As cited in Wright (2008), Tokarczyk and Fay (1993), in *Working-class Women in the Academy* provide insight into some of their experiences:

> Women academics from the working class clearly felt torn; they wanted to maintain their ties to their families, but wanted to fit into the academy as well. Often, they feared they fit into neither world. They were frequently uncomfortable with the language they used; afraid their voices would slip into dialect or working-class patterns. And they were angry at being ignored or at being expected to be middle class professionals, socially and economically. (p. 3)

Again, while class is not a major focus in this work and is one of the limitations of this study as it was not addressed, it is important to understand that class plays a significant role in the experiences of African American women. In the aforementioned excerpt from Tokarczyk and Fay (1993), one is able to see how class affects a woman. Now, let us imagine it being exacerbated by including the social constructs of race and gender.

Black Feminist Theory/Black Feminist Thought

While African American women and Caucasian women share some of the same struggles in terms of gender, a differentiation must be made. Not only do women of color deal with issues of gender inequality, they must also deal with other issues in which they are specifically affected. Upon reflection of the Feminist Movement, there was a deliberate and conscious exclusion of Black and other non-White women; therefore, the challenges and concerns of Black women could only be voiced through Black feminism (hooks, 1981, p. 147). Black feminist consciousness was introduced in 1892 by Anna Julia Cooper (Simien, 2004) who, in her early work, asserted that women of African descent were confronted by a race problem and a woman question. Other Black feminists such as Ida B. Wells-Barnett, bell hooks, and Patricia Williams have also made major contributions to the Black Feminist Movement, and provided insight related to ideas of "dual consciousness" and the concept of being an "outsider" (Simien, 2004, p. 422). Dual consciousness is a concept used to describe how one can be empowered and dis-empowered at the same time. For example, in this study, I will discuss how Black female principals are empowered because of their esteemed position as a school leader, yet they are still dis-empowered by the White institutions in which they are in employed.

Because this study explores issues related to Black women, I found it imperative to use Black feminist theory because it informs qualitative analyses of Black attitudes toward gender equality and feminist priorities. Also, it "puts the perspectives and experiences of African-American women at the center rather than in their historically marginal position" (Simien, 2004, p. 420). According to Collins (2000a), "As long as

Black women's subordination within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation persists, Black feminism as an activist response to that oppression will remain needed" (p. 395). Black feminism incites one to question society. It questions normative blind spots that essentialized gender and silenced race, ethnicity, and class (Villaverde, 2008). It is important that this research explores those blind spots and unveils them. They indeed exist, and Black women have to find ways to navigate them. While the masses do not recognize such spots, those that have been disenfranchised by them are aware of their existence. Brown (2011) stated that:

> Black feminism is made up of five components: (1) It addresses oppression due to race and gender that is based upon the dual identity of being African American and female; (2) it recognizes this dual identity presents challenges, needs, and concerns unlike those faced by African American men and White women; (3) it maintains that African American women struggle for equal rights and freedom; (4) it recognizes that there is nothing in the U.S. Constitution that speaks against the many "isms" faced by African American women; and (5) Black feminism asserts that due to the challenges of being marginalized in society, many African American women have formed a view of the world that is unique to them as African American women. (p. 52)

As I unpack the aforementioned components, it is commonsensical to employ Black feminist thought as the stories women of color have to share are quite different from Caucasian women and Black men. Black women struggle with the dual identity of being female and Black and take on the double burdens associated with both positionalities. Their needs, concerns, and challenges are unique as they vie for equal respect and recognition for efforts and achievements. Indeed, they have formed a view of the world that pushes them to prove their worth. They have long struggled to be appreciated and to be seen differently than the stereotypical caricatures of highly sexed

beings, welfare queens, maids, and/or mammies (Adams-Wiggan, 2010; Simien, 2004). Many African American women work to dispel such myths and stereotypes as they are aware that many people may view them in this way.

Black feminist thought recognizes that women's experiences resemble others; however, the responsibility for defining one's own reality lies with those who actually live that reality, who have those experiences (Collins, 2000c,). It is the women of color that can verbalize their experiences and make meaning of those experiences. Their experiences are unique and different from everyone else in society. Black feminist thought recognizes that reality. It focuses on the everyday experiences of African American women and the interconnectedness of race and gender in their lives. Many of these experiences are not shared or included in mainstream literature relating to women in educational leadership (Smith, 2008). The reality of Black women is "defined by the complexity and contradiction, by an acknowledgement that racism is a constant that must not become an excuse for giving in or giving up" (Gostnell, 1996, p. 71). Therefore, Black women must find a way to adapt, and this is where shifting and navigating becomes useful.

African American female leaders must learn to navigate their workspaces based on their gender as well as their race while at the same time staying true to themselves and their culture. This task is challenging and conflicting. However, it is necessary to help them be successful in this hegemonic society (hooks, 1994; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Razack, 2008). This unique view is developed by ongoing struggles of living on the edge of a society that continues to struggle with accepting Black women as viable, capable,

and positive contributors to society. Black women must take on yet another daunting task and that is to change how they are viewed by society at large.

While looking at school leadership through the lens of feminist theory, I felt it was necessary to also explore it under the Black feminist lens and use critical race theory. In an effort to give voice to African American women because of the differences in their social positions, I know their experiences would be different than those of Caucasian females. According to Smith (2008), asking questions from a white woman's view highlights the unwanted outcomes of such practices. Not only does it perpetuate the intellectual and cultural exclusion by creating the appearance of acceptance in women's studies using an ethnic additive model, it fails to "acknowledge that White women retain White privilege; women of color do not hold such privilege, thereby making African American women's experiences similar in some ways to women in general but deviant from the White female norm" (p. 344). Therefore, it is befitting to honor the voice of Black women in an effort to understand their experiences in dealing with identity.

The plight of African American women in school leadership positions was examined using the lens of Black feminist thought because of its distinct acknowledgement of the effects of race, gender, and class on the lives of women of color. One of the main purposes of Black feminist thought is to provide voice to Black women who are excluded from, stereotyped, and misrepresented in top positions in educational leadership (Collins, 2000c). bell hooks (1989) noted that "even when Black women are able to advance professionally and acquire a degree of economic self-sufficiency, it is in the social realm that racist and gendered stereotypes are continually used as ways of

defining Black women's identity and behavior" (p. 194). Again, this is where the concept of dual consciousness becomes evident. Even though these women have advanced professionally, they are still marginalized because of their race and gender.

Because of the stereotypes that plague African American women, they often feel pressured to give up their cultural identities in an effort to advance professionally (Adams-Wiggan, 2010; Ricks, 2011). African-American women must learn to use strategies to navigate the barriers they face (Collins, 2000c; Loder, 2005a). According to Smith (2008), they are pushed to serve one category and must therefore hide their true selves to placate others. This shifting occurs to accommodate differences in class as well as gender and ethnicity (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Biculturality is their way of navigating the system. It is how they function concurrently in two cultures without compromising themselves, their culture or their inner self in the process (Smith, 2008). In my opinion these tools are vital; they must know how and when to use them to advance professionally.

Women of color are faced with many challenges because they are double minorities. As cited in Smith (2008), women of color not only experience gender bias stemming from the falsehoods that men are better suited to hold leadership positions (Bell & Chase, 1993; Coleman, 2005) but are also confronted by racial bias (Valverde, 2003) historically embedded in the power structures of organizations. Black feminist consciousness recognizes that African American women are status deprived because they deal with discrimination on the basis of race and gender and occupy the lower stratum of the social hierarchy (Simien, 2004). African American women face the barrier of a

"quadruple jeopardy by being Black, female, educated, and isolated, it is a daily source of stress for the African American female" (Grimes, 2005, p. 3). Indeed, it is a barrier that must be faced and addressed.

Critical Race Theory

This research will benefit greatly from the application of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical perspective. Critical race theory's usage is very popular in the field of research, especially dealing with issues of power, privilege, and oppression. Many researchers use it as a foundation for their work and even as their methodology. Originally utilized in the legal profession, CRT scholarship has transitioned into the field of education. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) extended the use of critical race theory to educational research. They based their research of social inequity and school inequity on three propositions: Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States. American society is based on property rights, and the intersection of race and property creates an analytic tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity. Critical race theory functions through the notion that racism is a systemic condition that is pervasive, permanent, and must be challenged (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Critical race theory operates on six unifying themes.

1. Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.
2. Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness, and meritocracy.
3. Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on contextual/historical analysis of the law . . . Critical race theorists . . . adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage.
4. Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin analyzing law and society.

5. Critical race theory is interdisciplinary
6. Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression. (Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993, p. 6)

When thinking about race in the contexts of critical race theory, Carter Woodson told how the same educational process that inspires and stimulates the oppressor and makes him believe he is everything and has accomplished everything worthwhile is the same system that crushes the Negro and makes him feel that his race will never amount or measure up to the same standards of the oppressor (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Because of this system, society has subscribed to this belief and assume that African Americans are limited in ability and will never measure up to that of other people. Therefore, African Americans need to be able to share their voice. Critical race theory subscribes to this belief and understands the importance of the lived experiences of minority people.

Critical race theorists use parables, chronicles, stories, counterstories, poetry, fiction and revisionist histories to give voice to the oppressed. Critical race theory in this research will provide a venue to give voice to marginalized groups (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Delgado suggested at least three reasons for naming one's own reality. These reasons are because much of reality is socially constructed, stories provide members of outgroups a vehicle for psychic self-preservation, and the exchange of stories from teller to listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and dysconscious conviction of viewing the world in one way. Naming

one's reality is important because marginalized groups self-condemn because they internalize the stereotypic images that certain elements of society has constructed in order to maintain their power. As mentioned above, they may feel limited and unable to measure up to the majority population. Understanding their reality will aid in helping others understand their plight. The concept of voice will be used during this research and be explored deeply in the methodology chapter in the discussion on critical race methodology.

My research employs the CRT lens as this theoretical perspective has a direct impact on how school administrators develop and navigate their identities based on race. According to Ladson-Billings, "racism does not simply lie within the individual but can be hidden in the educational institution itself. It is enmeshed in the fabric of our social order and appears normal and natural to people in this culture" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical race theory is used for this research as there is a gap in existing literature that addresses the experiences of women of color in relation to the principalship. One who subscribes to critical race theory understands that those who are marginalized have stories that have been omitted from mainstream society. According to Stanley (2007), there are key tenets that influence the perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of critical race theory in education, they are:

> Critical race theory (a) challenges the experiences of Whites as the normative standard; (b) posits that there are master narratives that support racism found at all levels of society and reflect White norms and experiences; (c) espouses that sharing the narratives of racism provides people of color with a "unique voice"; (d) advocates the use of storytelling as an act of opposition, activism, and education to counter master narratives; (e) acknowledges that White privilege and norms are often difficult and invisible to Whites; (f) purports that understanding

> objective truth and merit means challenging concepts that are socially constructed to reflect and benefit Whites; (g) communicates that our socially constructed racial, gender, sexual, and other identities have intersectionality and cannot be essentialized; (h) explains that differences in communication styles, perceptions of success, and performance mask roots of racism, sexism, power, and White privilege that plague our society; and (i) says that providing any deconstruction or intervention should take into account how it will and can affect people of color. (p. 17)

This study addresses several tenets of CRT as it embraces the sharing of the stories of the Black female principals because it recognizes the value of their "unique voice." It also advocates the use of storytelling as an act of opposition, activism, and education to counter master narratives. This will be evident through the composite counter narrative and composite portrait shared in Chapter IV and V. Lastly, it acknowledges that White privilege and norms are often invisible to Whites. Therefore, this study seeks to bring about awareness to greater society that women of color are doubly challenged and do not maintain the benefits of privilege that others have.

Navigating and Recalculating: Personal Appearance Shifting to Fit

A global positioning system (GPS) quickly alerts a driver of a new route to take once they have found difficulty reaching their destination. The system recalculates and gives them an alternate route of travel. Like a GPS, African American women recalculate, navigate, and even shift their personal appearance to reach their goals or even fit their work space. According to Rosette and Dumas (2007), personal appearance shifting has remained one of Black women's best kept race secrets. Adams-Wiggan (2010) stated that personal appearance shifting is the most intimate, prevalent, and oppressive form of biculturality. This type of shifting has caused women of color 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.

In her dissertation titled *Realities, Risks, and Responsibilities: A Critical Narrative Inquiry and Autoethnographic Exploration of Biculturality among Black Professional Women,* Adams-Wiggan (2010) explored personal appearance shifting of Black women in academia. She discussed how Black women altered their hair textures and styles and even skin complexions in an effort to fit the mainstream White beauty aesthetic. She stated that "Blacks have interpreted Whiteness as property in approximate rather than literal terms and have strongly tied personal appearance to respectability and class" (p. 13). Her work discussed how White or light skin became synonymous with superiority, competence, intelligence, and industriousness while dark skin has been synonymous with criminality, immorality, inferiority, laziness, and ignorance. Stigmas similar to these have plagued African American women nearly all of their lives. Therefore, when these women seek to climb the corporate ladder, they do so bearing these stereotypes in mind. The work of Adams-Wiggan went on to discuss the lengths Black women take to change their hair and skin and the various processes they have used to alter their appearance. It was eye-opening when she discussed how historically educational institutions and businesses sought Black elites who made these alterations to appear more Eurocentric. While my work does not delve deeply into the physical alterations African American women make in attempts to be more successful, I felt it was

important to share the great lengths that are taken by Black women to fit in mainstream professional societies as many individuals are not aware of them.

Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) explored the concept of shifting, its benefits and its drawbacks. They stated:

> Black women in our country have had to perfect what we call "shifting," a sort of subterfuge that African Americans have long practiced to ensure their survival in our society. 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 the Black women's behavior that some adopt an alternate pose or voice as easily as they blink their eyes or draw breath—without thinking, and without realizing that the emptiness they feel and the roles they must play may be directly related. (pp. 6–7)

Shifting is the lengths Black women take to prove their worth. They shift to dispel myths and overcome stereotypes. According to the Jones and Shorter-Gooden study, Black women point to five central sets of myths and stereotypes. These myths include Black women feeling inferior to other people, Black women being unshakable and physically and emotionally invulnerable to challenging circumstances, Black women being unfeminine, Black women being especially prone to criminal behavior, and Black women being sexually promiscuous and irresponsible (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Because of these myths, African American women work hard to separate themselves from these stereotypes. This is a form of stereotype threat. According to Moore (2009), stereotype threat is defined as a negative stereotype that is used to explain an individual's behavior. In other words, stereotype threat occurs when a negative stereotype about a group one

belongs to is used as a “plausible interpretation” for their behavior (Steele, 1997, p. 616). For example, if an African American female is not performing well in her role, White people who hold stereotypical views of Black women may attribute her poor performance to the stereotype that Black women are lazy and incompetent (Moore, 2009). Therefore, Black women have to manage people's impressions of them and avoid stereotype threat by working hard to prove the stereotype is invalid.

According to Moore (2009), Black women school administrators engaged in patterns of thought and behavior that encouraged and emphasized professionalism. But no matter the age, years of experience, school context, or school level, Black women leaders in the study perceived that they had to prove they were professionals. Similar to Black women in other professions, the women in her study used strategies such as (a) working harder than White colleagues, and (b) minding their dress, language and professional boundaries. These patterns of thinking and behaving challenge stereotypical controlling images of Black women and also declared their leadership, ability and right to “sit at the table” as equals.

Similar to the literature that I encountered, Black women worked hard to disprove various stereotypes such as the myth of being inferior. Black women work diligently to show that they are as smart, reliable, and competent as their non-Black friends and colleagues. They may work tirelessly to obtain educational degrees or career advancement to show that they are well-educated. Many Black women find themselves slipping their credentials into conversations with those that are White in an effort to show them that they have merit. African American women do this shift to “confront,

transcend, and hopefully defeat the ugly myths and stereotypes that so many in society continue to hold about them" (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004, pp. 67–68). They do this in an effort to prove themselves and separate themselves from the negative stereotypes and images that others may have of them.

Why Do We Shift?

Much of the scholarship on biculturality and physical appearance shifting among African American professional women has explored hair straightening, skin lightening, dressing in neutral-toned, Eurocentric attire, dieting and eating disorders, wearing colored contact lenses, and surgically altering Afrocentric features. These are all alterations that professional Black women have been willing to make for the sake of their careers (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). These changes to personal appearance are the ways in which some women of color have attempted to shift.

Based on the interviews and surveys of the Jones and Shorter-Gooden research project, six shifting strategies were identified. These techniques are used to cope with bigotry and can incorporate cognitive and behavioral components. African American women shift to:

1. Battle the myths. Black women shift to battle myths and stereotypes in an effort to disprove and transcend society's misconceptions about them.
2. Scan, survey, and scrutinize the environment. African American women constantly monitor how they are being perceived at every turn.

3. Wall off the impact of discrimination. Black women downplay or ignore the role of sexism and racism in their lives in an effort to surpass the suffering they would otherwise experience.
4. Seek spiritual and emotional support through religious communities, friends and family members. Black women seek to find a higher purpose and build emotional connections in their lives to rise above gender and race related issues.
5. Retreat to the Black community and abiding by home codes. African American women may seek refuge by returning to the Black community but also may be faced with pressure to abide by a different set of cultural conventions and codes.
6. Fighting back. Black women may directly challenge and work to overturn racism and sexism (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

Shifting to battle the myths. As discussed earlier, Black women shift in an effort to disprove stereotypes and battle myths. They work to show and prove to their non-Black colleagues that they are educated and that they have a right to be in the positions they are in. Many women find themselves changing the way they talk, the way they walk, their outward appearance, etc. in an effort to prove themselves. They take great care in using proper English versus the slang they may use when around their family and friends. In efforts to garner credibility and respect from non-Blacks, women will even boast about international travels or plans for higher education. The struggle for

these women is that they are working hard to show others that the stereotypes are not all true, they are working on behalf of an entire race.

Scanning, surveying, and scrutinizing. African American women use this method of shifting by constantly being cognizant of their surroundings. They are keen in assessing biases and prejudices and work to determine the best way to respond. These women are extremely watchful of their own behavior and what is happening around them. They tend to question various actions, behaviors, and responses looking for the true meaning and any underlying assumptions. The women use this scrutiny to determine their best courses of action and their responses.

According to Audre Lorde (1984), observation is a tool often used by Black women to ascertain knowledge of dominant groups. Black women have learned how to be watchers to survive gender, race and class oppression; as such, they become familiar with the language and behaviors of a dominant group and use this knowledge to plan their survival strategies (Wright, 2008). These strategies are their shifting techniques.

bell hooks (1990) recalls the importance of being a watcher while growing up in a small segregated town in Kentucky:

> Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and center and an ongoing private acknowledgement that we were a necessary, vital part of that whole. This sense of wholeness, impressed upon our consciousness by the structure of our daily lives, provided us with an oppositional world-view a mode of seeing unknown to most of our oppressors that sustained us, aided us in our struggle to transcend poverty and despair strengthened our sense of self and our solidarity. (p. 147)

This watching that is described by hooks illustrates the prevalence of shifting strategy usage amongst Black women. As indicated throughout this study, African American women have long used techniques such as these to navigate gender and racial barriers to find and sustain success.

Blocking the pain. This shifting strategy deals with the suppression of negative feelings associated with experiencing bias. Black women use this coping strategy to disengage emotionally from the situation. They do this so that their feelings of self-worth are not dependent on how they are being seen or treated by others.

Seeking spiritual and emotional support. Many African American women seek spirituality and religious faith and rely on the love and affirmation of relatives and friends as a way to shift when they deal with race and gender based biases. "Seeking spiritual and emotional support can be a way of shifting away from the feelings connected to bias and prejudice, exploring alternative problem-solving strategies, and garnering a new perspective" (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004, p. 81). This spiritual shift helps African American women because it gives them a sense of purpose and helps them move forward despite circumstances.

Returning to the Black community and abiding by the home codes. African American women shift by returning to their Black communities, or *their roots*. Returning home allows them the comfort of being themselves without having to *put on heirs*. They are able to abide by the home codes in which they may be most familiar. However, some Black women find that returning to their Black community comes with its own challenges. For example, internalized oppression can occur. This happens when the

victimized group becomes a partner in discrimination (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). A Black career woman returning to the Black community may be met with resistance as some individuals may say she is acting White. Or, they may say that she is trying too hard to be Black when she makes attempts to fit in. Some African American women may find themselves having to remain mute about their aspirations when they are around less-educated relatives to keep others from thinking that she believes she is better than them (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Black women must be careful not to mismanage the home codes. Many Black women use the shifts as survival mechanisms. These women are those that are especially cognizant of and attuned to the barriers that face them and those that seek a higher purpose for their lives such as to improve their economic foot print and meet their professional agenda.

Shifting of One's Outward Appearance

When I learned that the school board had approved me to begin my first principalship, I thought about the type of leader I wanted to be. I imagined the behaviors I would exhibit and the philosophies I would subscribe to. Then, I considered what I needed to do to display my abilities and worth as a new leader. Strangely, this prompted me to go shopping to improve my wardrobe. As trivial as that may sound, my actions were aligned to me crafting my new identity and sustaining my fit. Immediately, I felt that I needed a new wardrobe complete with business suits and high heeled shoes. I thought about other principals and their attire and what type of leader they were based on their wardrobe alone. I also thought about my colleagues who only wear suits because they want to appear to be "all about business." I thought about another principal who

refused to wear jeans on casual Fridays because she wanted to be set apart from staff at all times. I knew that people are judged by what they wear. Many Black women in higher education have alleged they have purposely dressed in dark tailored or conservative business suits to command respect, promote recognition of their authority, and increase credibility amongst students and peers (Fries-Britt & Kelly, 2005). While many may not view wardrobe choices as an identity altering concept, it indeed is.

When thinking about the wardrobe of those in positions of power, the term power dressing comes to mind. According to Cantor and Bernay (1992), corporate women used to dress more like men in order to vie with the masculine model of leadership. These authors discussed how the "severe blue suit, white blouse, and floppy necktie of the 'dress for success' crowd" were the presumed penchant for masculine traits. Research conducted by Forsythe (1987) reported that clothing can effect perceptions of masculine and feminine managerial traits. Business suits are seen as formal, showing power and viewed as a male attribute whereas female styles such as dresses and skirts are viewed as feminine and seen as submissive (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). It has been my experience that women who want to be seen as an authority figure focus on their wardrobe choices, and I believe power dressing is a key strategy in identity shifting.

Dress styles and even colors play subtle roles in the how people are viewed in the workplace. For example, hospitals use white to convey purity, police organizations use dark colors to convey power, and UPS workers use brown to convey trust (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). Dress style may elicit attributions in regards to status and power as some styles symbolize higher status than others. In a study by Rollman (1977), a professor

dressed in a casual style of dress was rated as having less status as the same professor dressed formally (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). While a male may not understand the importance of wardrobe as he already receives the positive attributes and privileges associated with his wardrobe choices, a female has to "shift" her outfit choices to have access to the same level of respect he receives automatically and naturally.

Shifting One's Voice

Another area in which African American women may shift is how they use language. The Jones and Shorter-Gooden study revealed that 58% of women stated that they have:

> changed the way they acted to fit in or be accepted by White people, and 79 % of those individuals stated that they changed their way of speaking, toned down their mannerisms, or talked about things they felt White people were interested . . . Shifting one's style of expression and the content of one's message emerged as the predominant way in which Black women accommodate to the social and behavioral codes of White middle-class America. (2004, p. 96)

Black women use their speech as a way to counteract myths and stereotypes. "The pitch of her voice (whether it is deemed too loud or just right), the rhythm of her speech (undulating like a blues or popping in a crisp staccato), and the vocabulary she uses (calling a coworker "trifling" as opposed to "irresponsible") can mean the difference between acceptance or rejection" (2004, p. 96). A woman who is passionate about a topic may speak quickly and loudly yet be perceived as aggressive and volatile. For Black women, there lies a double standard. Jones and Shorter-Gooden stated that if she is opinionated about a topic, she is considered difficult. If she explodes with laughter, she is considered unrefined. Black vernacular is looked at negatively; however, when

Whites use the latest Black vernacular, they are viewed as urbane, cosmopolitan, and cool (2004). Therefore, African American women must be mindful to watch their speech in certain settings because of the negative implications that come with using certain language.

Summary

As one can deduce from the various shifts African American women make in an effort to dispel and disprove stereotypes and myths, women who are in leadership roles have more than likely utilized some form of shifting. With the African American Women's Voices Project being the largest study to date on racism and sexism, I am sure their experiences reflect those of many other Black women in mainstream society. Women who are principals are in the public eye. They are being watched by students, parents, the community, and district personnel. They are constantly entering different arenas that involve them shifting their identities. This research will explore the shifts they make and their strategies for navigating in their workspaces.

In the upcoming methodology chapter, I provide details of the phenomenological study whereby I explore identity construction and shifting in six African American female principals. I discuss how I selected study participants, collected and analyzed data, and examined the ethical issues pertaining to conducting research with the participants.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In an effort to explore the identity construction and navigation of African American female principals, I chose to conduct a qualitative study. Qualitative methods should be used to focus on specific situations or people in order to highlight words versus numbers. It should also be used to help make meaning of participants lived experiences, understand the context of those experiences, and to generate theories to better understand the experiences (Maxwell, 1996). Creswell (2007) states that "qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 37). This research does begin with assumptions and uses a theoretical lens to explore the phenomena of identity construction and navigation. According to Myers (2000), the aim of qualitative research is to give a perspective of a situation or experience and provide well-written research reports that reflect the researcher's ability to illustrate the corresponding phenomenon. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) define qualitative research as

> a multi-method focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Accordingly, qualitative research deploys a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand. (p. 2)

Qualitative research is often criticized for being unscientific, exploratory, and subjective. Critics argue that there is no way to verify the truth of the participant's statements since the research lacks rigor (Smith, 2008). Proponents state that the differences in qualitative and quantitative studies lie only in the methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In order to be rigorous, systematic research designs, data collection, and data analysis must be used, and the researcher must maintain meticulous records and document all processes to ensure the integrity of the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

This study intends to fill a gap in the existing research which fails to cover the construction and navigation of the professional identities of African American female school administrators. According to Lumby and English (2009),

> In the context of educational leadership, while there are explorations and critiques of what it may mean to be a female or male leader, or to be a Black leader, rarely has the much more complex mutuality of multiple identities construction and the significance to leadership or its preparation been researched. (pp. 12–13)

The aim of this research was to explore identity construction in the context of being a Black female leader as their voices have been silenced and omitted from educational literature as majoritarian stories are generally told.

The remainder of this chapter describes the methodology that was used in the study. The research setting, participant selection and data collection process is described. Lastly, this chapter concludes with a discussion related to subjectivity and trustworthiness.

Research Questions

As I began to examine how African American female principals construct and navigate their leadership identities, it was important to understand how their leadership identity was developed based on their gender and race. Therefore, the following secondary questions provided me deeper insight into their stories:

- How do Black female administrators describe their experiences with identity navigation and shifting in terms of personality, behavior, and physical appearance?
- How do they use identity navigation and shifting to "fit" their work spaces?

In exploring these questions, I was able to gain a greater understanding of how Black female leaders constructed their professional identities and navigated them in various contexts. My goal was to expand current research to explore the intricacies of identity shifting and the techniques employed to circumvent various work space barriers.

Qualitative Methodological Research Approach

This study examined how African American female principals constructed, navigated, and shifted their leadership identities. While there were many approaches that facilitate qualitative research, I opted to use interpretive phenomenology for many reasons. This approach is exploratory in nature and uses the researcher as the data collection instrument. It emphasizes the importance of taking a self-conscious approach to research (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Founded by mathematician Edmund Husserl, phenomenological studies "describe the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). Being that

phenomenologists focus on individuals experiencing a common phenomenon, I believe this approach will help tell the stories of Black female principals who deal with leadership identity construction and navigation. This particular study gleans relevant data and gives a voice to principals as they navigate their identities based on race and gender barriers.

Phenomenological inquiry helps people understand a phenomenon in greater detail and helps to formulate meaning to all those experiencing it. It is a study of conscious experience from the subjective of the first person's viewpoint (Creswell, 2007). There are two main types of phenomenological research. Husserlian phenomenology deals with the meaning human beings make of their experience. Interpretive phenomenology deals with the researcher anticipating the meaning others make of objects or experiences (Van der Mescht, 2004). According to Van der Mescht (2004), "the constructivist element has significant implications, chief of which is the fact that the others' embeddednesss in cultural, political, and historical contexts is an integral component of the enquiry" (p. 2). Thus my inquiry viewed the phenomenon through the participants' eyes relative to their experiences in the context of culture and gender.

Through the use of an interpretive phenomenology, I focused on understanding the meaning of the phenomenon that is veiled to direct investigation, examination, and description (Holloway, 2005). This provided me with a deeper and richer understanding of the principals' experiences. I highlight the interpretation of the phenomenon Black female principals' experience when learning to develop and shift their leadership identities. This phenomenon must be considered in terms of various participant groups,

their backgrounds, and everyday experiences (Maggs-Rapport, 2000). Laverty (2003) discussed the importance of gaining access to the lived experiences of people and sharing their life worlds by meeting and talking to them, listening to their narratives, and observing their use of tools and the environment.

Phenomenology seeks to understand a person's or persons' perspectives as he, she, or they experience and understand an event, relationship, program, emotion, etc. (Leedy, 1997, p. 161). Again, interpretive phenomenology deals with understanding the world by focusing on the lived experiences of the participants. In some cases, the researcher has some form of significant interest in the study. Being that I am a Black female principal, I was interested in the experiences of other African American females in regards to the ways in which they had constructed their identity and used shifting to navigate the various work spaces they encountered.

Research Setting and Participant Selection

This phenomenological study took place within Stanton County. Stanton County Schools is a large diverse school district centrally located in a mid-Atlantic state. It educates over 70,000 students who speak over 120 languages and represent 100 countries. The administrators chosen to participate were selected from this district and represented various backgrounds and school settings.

Because this study is phenomenological in nature, I employed purposeful sampling. According to Creswell (2007), researchers need to purposefully seek out persons who have experienced the phenomena being studied. There is logic and power associated with purposeful sampling as it leads to selecting information rich cases for in-

depth study. The information rich cases are those cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 1990). Because my work focuses on Black women in the principalship, I consciously sought out that particular population.

Upon gaining approval from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and from the Stanton County Schools' Office of Research in December 2012, I sent correspondence to the district's female principals seeking those that met the demographic requirements and that were interested in participating in the study. In turn, I chose a sample size of six individuals representing various ages, backgrounds, and school settings (see Table 1). I chose a small sample because according to Patton (1990), "in depth information from a small number of people can be very valuable, especially if the cases are information rich" (p. 244). This method granted me a greater opportunity to focus on their individual stories.

I identified participants whose backgrounds spanned the following criteria: (a) served an elementary setting, (b) served a secondary setting, (c) served a predominately African American school, (d) served a predominately Caucasian school, and (d) represented a different age group. The women in the study ranged in age from 33 to 59 years old and their years of experience as principals ranged from 1 to 15 years.

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Name	Gender/Race	Age Range	Years of Experience	Current Setting
Hailey Fields	Female/African American	51	15	Elementary-Predominately White
Melissa Johnson	Female/African American	36	2	Elementary-Predominately Black and Hispanic
Rochelle Kent	Female/African American	33	1	Elementary-Predominately Black
Ernestine Evans	Female/African American	59	13	Secondary-Predominately Black
Sheila Smith	Female/African American	38	5	Elementary-Predominately Black
Porsha James	Female/African American	42	6	Secondary-Predominately White

Critical Race Methodology

In an effort to tell the stories of African American female principals, I used critical race methodology. Being that my research used critical race theory and black feminist thought as its theoretical framework, using critical race methodology seemed most appropriate. According to Solórzano and Yosso, "Critical race methodology in education offers a way to understand the experiences of people of color along the

educational pipeline" (2002, p. 36). I believe that critical race methodology is also useful in dealing with the experiences of those in educational leadership positions. It has been my experience that some people believe that when people of color become successful and obtain leadership type positions they have in some way beaten the odds. However, career advancement and educational attainment does not remove the marginalized status from African American women. Again, this is where dual consciousness affects them. Using critical race methodology still allows the focus to be on their experiences and allows them the opportunity to tell their story. As stated by Solórzano and Yosso (2002), "Such a methodology generates knowledge by looking to those who have been epistemologically marginalized, silenced, and disempowered" (p. 36). Therefore, this critical race methodology is befitting because of the nature of this study.

By granting principals the opportunity to discuss their leadership identity development, they are able to share their stories and tell how their prior experiences shaped who they were as a leader. By employing critical race methodology, it confirms that as researchers we must look to experiences with and responses to racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism, in and out of schools as valid, suitable, and essential data forms (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). It is quite possible that the experiences leaders have endured have shaped how they lead and how they will respond to others. Their experiences with racism, sexism, ageism, and classism have informed their identity and have enabled them to navigate and shift within their leadership roles.

As discussed in Chapter II, critical race theorists discuss the importance of naming one's own reality or voice. As cited in Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), Delgado

talks about the importance of this as “truths only exist for this person in this predicament at this time in history.” Social reality is developed through the formulation and exchange of stories about individual situations and experiences. In order to help bring awareness to and eradicate racism, naming one’s reality helps to show the oppressor what oppression is in different contexts. Stories by the marginalized can catalyze the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). These stories can prompt action and change or at least create and allow for understanding.

I use critical race methodology by focusing on the stories of those on the margins of society and not utilizing majoritarian storytelling (Adams-Wiggan, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). While much of our society subscribes to master narratives, also referred to as monovocals and standard stories, I used counter-narratives as a way to give voice to female Black principals. Counter-stories are tools for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the master stories of racial privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). According to Solórzano and Yosso, there are three different types of counter-storytelling: personal, other people’s stories, and composite. I chose to use personal and composite narratives because they allow the researcher the flexibility to draw on various forms of data to recount the racialized, sexualized, and classed experiences of people of color. Counter-stories propose biographical and autobiographical analyses because the author can create composite characters and place them in social, historical, and political situations to discuss matters such as race, sex, class, and other forms of subordination (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Employing this methodology granted me the opportunity to humanize the qualitative data while applying the lenses of critical race theory.

The experiences of study participants were also viewed through the lens of black feminist thought because it considers the influence of race and gender on their leadership experiences. Using this lens allowed knowledge to be constructed that helps to weaken their marginalized status and helps them emerge from the race and gender related stereotypes that binds them (Smith, 2008).

According to Collins (2000c), there are four basic assumptions of black feminist thought that I use to guide my methodology. These assumptions lay the foundation for giving voice to the study participants because they use their experiences at the center of the analysis.

1. The researcher must value the concrete explanations of the informant's experience of marginalization. Concrete experiences are the knowledge and the intuitive understanding of one's world and the words used to interpret the world.
2. The use of dialogue as a means of data collection: dialogue is the basis for asserting knowledge claims.
3. The ethic of care includes talking with the heart that promotes connection and builds trust through emotions and empathy.
4. The researcher must demonstrate the ethic of personal accountability by taking responsibility for ensuring that the informant's interpretation is understood by all. The researcher must acknowledge and respect other ways of knowing. (Smith, 2008, pp. 64–65)

In keeping with these four assumptions, I valued the explanations of the participants' experiences because I was familiar with and have shared in some of their same experiences. My means of data collection was the interviews and the dialogue that took place during the interview sessions. The ethic of care was used as relationship building was evident in the interviews because the administrators were able to open up and speak freely. Lastly, I held myself highly accountable for ensuring that the study participants'

experiences were shared accurately and interpreted correctly. This process was ensured through use of member checking as I allowed study participants to review their transcriptions as well as all interpretative vignettes shared in this study.

Subjectivity and its Influence on the Research

Subjectivity is defined as the part of one's "self" that can influence and affect observational research. Peshkin (1988) argues that highly effective investigators begin their research with full awareness of their subjectivity and accounts for how it can affect their study. He says that researchers must focus their subjectivity and be observant to how it can impact their work. According to Peshkin (1988),

> When researchers observe themselves in the focused way that I propose, they learn about the particular subset of personal qualities that contact with their research phenomenon has released. These qualities have the capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement. (p. 17)

Therefore, I am aware that I bring certain biases into this study as I am one that represents this demographic group and one who also experiences this phenomenon.

In order to account for my own subjectivity, I was cognizant of what I brought into the study. Knowing and being conscious of my own biases, assumptions and positions was imperative. By doing this, I was being transparent and recognizing that these qualities could affect my research. While I conducted interviews and interpreted data, my own subjectivity could affect it because what is "real" and observable is being filtered through a lens made of my own perceptions. As Peshkin (1988) argued, while being aware of your own subjectivity does not make one a saint, it does allow one to

conduct their research in a more effective manner. Being aware of one's own subjectivities does not mean their opinions, beliefs, and perceptions are all just and pure. It only means that they recognize that they may have biases that could influence the research and their awareness and prevention of that influence helps them better interpret the research findings. Therefore, when I began this study, I knew that I had to make sure my personal assumptions did not cloud by judgment and affect the interview process, or interpretation of data. Having knowledge of my subjectivity in the forefront and being transparent about it in the dialogue of my research helped my research be more authentic. When it came to my autoethnographic data, I served as both the participant and observer. I took care to make certain that I acknowledged what I personally brought into the study and its impact on my analysis and interpretation of data. I worked to ensure I was aware of how my perceptions and biases could impact the data.

Ensuring Trustworthiness to Verify Data

Many researchers seek validity in their work. However, validity is a term associated with quantitative studies. This research is qualitative and is best described by using the term verification. Maxwell (2005) uses verification to imply that the methods used have rigor and preserve the participant's valid experiences.

Credibility and transferability deal with the study's believability. These two standards help to determine the validity of qualitative work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study participants' views of the credibility and accuracy of the transcription data were established through the member checks.

In an effort to ensure trustworthiness, I utilized member checking, writing descriptively, and participant debriefing. Cross referencing the themes that emerged from the data with that of the literature review, my autoethnographic data, and data obtained through other participants proved to be an effective way of ensuring trustworthiness. According to Ary et al. (2002), when interviews, related documents, and recollections of other participants produce the same description of an event, evidence of credibility exists. This increases the trustworthiness of findings.

Also, acknowledging my own researcher biases in a manner that allowed me to be open and honest about my feelings and interpretations was critical. This deals with confirmability and dependability. Confirmabiltity is the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest, and dependability indicates that the findings are consistent and could be repeated (Smith, 2008). I do believe that if this study was replicated with this same demographic group the results would be similar.

Using Ethical Considerations to Maintain Participant Privacy

Being that my research can be considered sensitive in nature, ensuring trust to my participants was of utmost importance. Ethical considerations are inseparable from one's everyday interactions with participants and with one's data (Johnson, 2010). According to Glesne (1999), "Researchers must consciously consider and protect the rights of the participant to privacy" (p. 122). In order to gain their trust and provide privacy, I utilized various safeguards. First, I sought to ensure that the study participants' interviews, transcriptions, and conversations were strictly confidential. I used pseudonyms to protect

their identity as well as the school district in which they served. Names and other characteristics that could identify them or the school district were altered or omitted to maintain confidentiality.

Second, in an effort to maintain security of the interview's audio, I used a digital code to lock the audio recordings. Transcriptions of the audio were also saved in a password protected file on my personal computer. Hard copies of the transcriptions were kept locked in my home office. All of the study participants were informed that their data would be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

Data Collection Methods and Processes

After getting approval from The University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Institutional Review Board and the Stanton County School District, selected participants were provided with the Informed Consent form. Any questions that they had related to the research were answered prior to the beginning of the actual interviewing session.

In regards to data collection, Hale (n.d.) states that once a phenomenon is selected, the researcher engages in much the same process as used in an ethnographic study. The data collection process deals with multiple subjects who are purposefully selected. Hale states that researchers rely on semi-structured in-depth interviews and work closely with respondents to gather data. Methods of data collection for phenomenological studies include narratives, images, observations, diaries, biographies, fieldwork, and interviews (Berndtsson, Claesson, Friberg, & Ohlen, 2007). Interviews with the six principals were my chosen method of obtaining data for this study that would inform my narrative vignettes and composite counter story. I utilized document analysis

to collect autoethnographic data. Journal entries, emails, memories, and headnotes were used to inform my autoethnography. Also, I was interviewed by one of my dissertation committee members who was well versed in autoethnographies to assist in data collection. The autoethnographic data gathered through these processes were used in conjunction with the interview data from the six principals to create a composite portrait.

Interviews and the Interview Process

For the sake of this study, I chose to interview Black female principals in order to, ". . . get close to them, to hear them talk and observe them in their day-to-day life" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 35). According to Creswell (2007), the interview process is a tool that allows the researcher to understand the phenomenon being studied without observing it directly. Interviews "elicit and collect stories that serve as windows to the informant's world" (Dodge, Ospina, & Foldy, 2005, p. 291). It was imperative that the interviews allowed me to fully engage the participants and gather a true and authentic account of their experiences.

Being that I am a principal who is also female and African American, I was able to build a relationship with many of the participants. Therefore, they were able to have an open and honest dialogue regarding their experiences. As cited in Adams-Wiggan (2010), Glesne (1999) revealed that people will generally 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.

The interviews were one-on-one and utilized open ended questioning techniques. The interview questions inquired about aspects of participant's personal and professional

identities. The initial interview sessions were audio recorded and lasted about 60 minutes each. I met with the participants at their work sites in private, secluded spaces. In some cases, we did not use their office as the conversations needed more privacy than their office allowed.

I used a condensed version of Seidman's (1991) model of in-depth phenomenological interviewing. His model suggests allowing the interview to establish the context of the participant's experiences, reconstruct details of the experiences, and encourage the participants to reflect on the meaning of those experiences (Johnson, 2010). I used probing questions to allow the study participants to reflect and expand upon their responses. At the end of the interview, they were given an opportunity to revisit and/or expand upon the topic. I believed interviewing was a valuable data collection method. According to Seidman:

> Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experiences affects the way they carry out the experience . . . Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action. (1998, p. 4)

While conducting the interviews, I was able to determine and gauge if participants were comfortable answering questions. I was able to decipher if they wanted to expand in their responses and if they simply needed a gentle nudge or approval to open up and speak candidly. I was able to push them to make meaning of their experiences or at least feel comfortable in stating their perceptions and opinions.

While the initial interview was about 60 minutes with each of the six participants, I followed up with each participant through several phone calls, meetings, and emails, totaling 18 contact hours for the entire study. Contact with participants included the member checking process as well as continued in-depth dialogue about additional experiences in which they *forgot* to share. In some instances, respondents invited me to lunch where informal conversation took place and added to the number of contact hours.

Interview Questions

In order to better understand how Black female principals construct and navigate their identities to fit their work spaces, interview questions that speak directly to their personal experiences were utilized. Also, the question reflected the review of literature and theoretical considerations of Black feminist theory which shed light on how the participants saw their race and gender as an influence to their identity. While participants found it easy to discuss their leadership style, understanding one's process of shifting required specific probing questions. Questions that prompted them to describe certain experiences and situations were particularly helpful in gaining meaningful data points. The interview questions gave respondents a venue to share their voice. Collins (2000c) noted that black feminist theory reflects an effort for African American women to reject the controlling images created by racism and sexism and replace them with constructed knowledge that combats such contradictions. These questions prompted them to discuss such images and to reveal how they confronted those contradictions. The interview questions used are listed below.

1. How do you define/articulate your leadership identity?

2. When you first began the principalship did you feel you had to change any aspects of your identity, how so?
3. What do you do to shift your personal appearance for this position?
4. Describe your identity when you are among colleagues?
5. Describe your identity when you are around district-level personnel?
6. Describe your identity around students and their parents?
7. In what ways has your gender benefited and hindered your identity as a principal?
8. How have you used identity shifting to navigate through gender related challenges as a principal?
9. In what ways has your race/ethnicity benefited and/or hindered your identity as a principal?
10. How have you used identity shifting to navigate through race related challenges as a principal?
11. Have you seen identity shifting amongst colleagues and if so, how was it displayed?
12. If you were repositioned as an administrator at a school that was racially different from your own background, how would you shift your identity to "fit"?
13. As a principal, do you believe you are adept at effectively navigating work spaces?

Autoethnographic Data

Autoethnographies provide a narrative account of phenomena that illustrate significant events, interactions, and stories in a unique form compared to other formats of qualitative research (Ellis, 2007; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). While this study uses interview data and a composite counter story, I felt it was appropriate to tell my story through use of an autoethnography. According to Sparkes (2000), autoethnography is most often described as a personal experience narrative of the author/researcher, which extends sociological understanding. The story of shifting needed to be told and because it was a phenomenon that I experienced, I wanted to tell the story from my perspective and compare my personal counter story to that of the master narrative.

In order to include my own voice within my research as I am a woman of color who deals with gender and race related challenges as a principal, I collected autoethnographic data. The data derived from an analysis of documents. The analysis of documents is a research method commonly used as it identifies specific characteristics of written or visual materials (Ary et al., 2002). The documents included a daily log of events, excerpts from a reflective journal, relevant emails, and memories. Also, an interview conducted by one of my dissertation committee members helped to inform my analysis.

In regards to memories being used as a source of data, the importance of memory in the process of ethnography has been acknowledged. According to Coffey (1999), during ethnographic work, memories are collected about the experiences of being there and of the social actors in the field. As cited in Wall (2008), Coffey states that,

"Ethnography is an act of memory" because the actual fieldwork and the resulting texts cannot be divided from the memories that form them (1999, p. 127). He even explained that when interview transcripts and field notes (or, in the case of autoethnography, diaries and journals) exist, these become combined with headnotes, which are memories of the field. As cited in Wall (2008), headnotes include the impressions, scenes, and experiences of the field that are far too numerous to record and provide the sense of the whole that the ethnographer alone carries around in his or her head.

The interview conducted by one of my committee members was based upon her reading of my draft dissertation and questions were composed by her to propel my writing of the autoethnography. The committee member had utilized autoethnography as a methodological approach and was familiar with the process and proved to offer valuable information in its formation (Mullen, 1997). Therefore, the interview session provided rich data that helped inform my autoethnography. The interview questions that drove the dialogue between myself and the interviewer are listed below.

1. Do you feel you "made shifts" for your dissertation defense? If so, how?
2. How has your gender and race benefitted and hindered your role as a school leader?
3. What type of shifting strategies do you use with different stakeholders for example, with colleagues, supervisors, students, and parents?
4. Describe how you shift in regards to your professional wear.
5. Do you believe you had to make these shifts and why?
6. Do you believe that other individuals engage in shifting? If so, who and why?

7. One of your committee members discussed Oakley's Day in the Life, can you tell me about that work?
8. What was its impact on your research?
9. How does Oakley's Day in the Life chapter involve the concept of shifting?

The questions posed by the interviewer helped to inform my autoethnography as I was able to analyze the data and identify certain themes. These themes were also present during the collection of data over the period of one week in which I kept notes regarding the instances of shifting I utilized due to the gender, race, and age related obstacles I encountered.

When thinking about autoethnographies and subjectivity and acknowledgement of self, there can be some challenges. While the data are considered authentic, as it is the experience of the person undergoing the event, one must take care not to generalize the information and state that everyone has the same experiences. One of the key components of an autoethnography is the interpretation. As Fox (2008) states, "Experience is always already an interpretation and in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always political" (as cited in Oakley, 2011, p. 52). While I interpret my experiences through my writing, readers still have the task of finding and gaining meaning with regard to their interpretation of my story.

My goal is to engage readers and prompt them to start the dialogue surrounding this topic. Even though this topic does not apply to everyone as everyone does not face these same struggles, it does enlighten individuals and help them understand the obstacles

faced by women and women of color. Ellis (2004) reports that "autoethnographic research seeks generalizability not just from the respondents but also from the readers" (p. 195) and "intends to open up rather than close down conversation" (p. 22). Again, it is my hope that this research will elicit dialogue and meaningful conversation in which individuals can understand the measures some Black women take to find success despite the obstacles they face. The conversation that this study arouses can be what is needed to call individuals to action in the spirit of social justice to advocate for changes in policy that ensures minorities are given equitable opportunities.

While there is much debate about the credibility of autoethnographic data, it is an authentic means of data collection. It provides researchers with a window through which the external world is understood (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang, 2010). Ngunjiri et al. (2010) also state that although the blurred distinction between the researcher-participant relationship has become the source of criticism challenging the scientific credibility of the methodology (Anderson, 2006; Holt, 2003; Salzman, 2002; Sparkes, 2002), access to sensitive issues and inner-most thoughts makes this research method a powerful and unique tool for individual and social understanding (Ellis, 2009). This methodology granted me the opportunity to have a deeper analysis of my personal data and compare it to that of the composite character from the Oakley (2011) research.

In order to protect the anonymity of my teachers, staff, parents, and students, I decided to use composite portraiture as a way to share my data yet handle concerns related to confidentiality. Therefore, I combined the findings of my autoethnography with the experiences of the six principals I interviewed to create a composite character

named Shana Thurman. Interview data, autoethnographic data, and document analysis allowed commonalities to be identified which led to the construction of Shana's experiences. This allowed for structural corroboration amongst all data sources (Oakley, 2011).

Summary

In summary, I explored the construction and navigation of Black female principals' leadership identities. I used the previously described methods in an effort to address the gap in the current research by giving voice to African American females to understand the measures they take to shift their identities to fit their workspaces and meet the needs of their stakeholders. With knowledge gleaned from the review of literature and the application of critical race theory and black feminism, I have come to learn that women of color are faced with many challenges that males and White women do not face. While African American women share some of the same experiences with gender bias as Caucasian women, their stories are still unique.

In order to hear their stories, I employed interpretive phenomenology as my methodology. I interviewed six African American female school administrators to gather qualitative data. I collected authoethnographic data as another method in which I was interviewed by a member of my dissertation committee, and engaged in document analysis. I used composite portraiture as a means to present the data obtained from myself and all the women involved in the study. This was done in an effort to provide anonymity.

It is my hope that this research can shed light on the identity navigation process and the shifting that occurs as Black women attempt to fit their workspaces. I believe this process is a critical one for ensuring the successfulness of Black women as school leaders. It is imperative that Black women recognize the music being played and are ready to dance the dance.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ORGANIZATION AND ANALYSIS

This study was qualitative in nature because the data needed in order to accurately tell the stories of Black female leaders had to be rich and descriptive. Therefore, data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, field notes taken from the interview sessions, and completed transcriptions of the interviews. As researcher, I followed my interview protocol with each participant and asked clarifying questions as well as prompted interviewees to expand on their responses when needed.

Interviews were conducted over a time span of two weeks in late December 2012 and early January 2013. Once I conducted all of my interviews, I transferred the audio data to the Dictapad application. This application allows speech files to be slowed down to help better transcribe audio. This program was helpful because it allowed me to transcribe interviews efficiently and in a timely manner. I began organizing my data once I completed my transcriptions and I created brief vignettes based on each interview. Participants were able to review the transcriptions and vignettes to ensure the accuracy of the interpretations. This member checking method was used to verify and validate the information and to ensure that the authentic voice of each participant was heard (Smith, 2008).

The data obtained for the autoethnographic portion of this study derived from conversations with my dissertation committee that prompted inclusion of myself within

my work. Therefore, I began utilizing data collection methods such as reflective journaling, interviews, memories, and anecdotal notes from documents to inform the autoethnography. In an effort to protect the identity of study participants, their schools, and students, I used composite portraiture. Inspired by Oakley (2011) who explored a day in the life of a female school administrators; I collected data for a week and analyzed it based on my shifting experiences over that time frame. To further strengthen that work, I compared the experiences of the composite portrait with that of Oakley's to provide a comparison between a master and counter narrative.

Data Organization

In an effort to organize my data, I reviewed various methods to determine the one that was most suitable. Creswell (2007) discussed multiple strategies for data collection from many leading researchers. Organizing the data collected can be one of the most significant and cumbersome tasks involved in research. My data were organized and managed through a filing system keeping each interview and all data relating to it separate until the coding process began.

When obtaining my data to complete the autoethnographic portion of this study, data were kept separate from the interviews with the participants as this data dealt with journal entries, email records, and interview notes. This information was later organized into themes related to those discovered during the first phase of analysis. Themes emerged from the document analysis and interview notes that were consistent with the themes from the interviews with the study participants.

Data Analysis Methods and Processes

When a researcher begins collecting data, the analysis begins. "Data analysis involves organizing what you have seen, heard, and read so that you can make sense of what you have learned" (Glesne, 1999, p. 130). According to Patton (2002), the mere act of collecting data generates ideas, themes, and patterns that emerged from the process of collecting the interviews. By doing so, I was able to begin developing preliminary themes prior to analyzing my transcription data. Once I developed these preliminary themes, I created brief vignettes of each study participant detailing our encounter and the information shared. I allowed each study participant the opportunity to member check the transcription as well as my narrative interpretation. Member checking is a vital component of qualitative research as it helps to ensure the accuracy of the participant's narrative contribution to the study. Carlson (2010) suggests that data be continuously examined so that the final product is trustworthy. Therefore, I continued to revisit and review the data to determine if additional themes emerged.

As cited in Creswell (2007), data collection is not off-the-shelf; rather, it is custom built, revised, and "choreographed" (p. 150). When it comes to the analyzing of data, researchers tend to locate "meaningful units" which are small bits of text that are independently able to convey meaning. Phenomenologists search for themes and patterns, not categories by logically linking these "meaningful units" (Hale, n.d.).

I began coding using the method stated above and underlining and highlighting relevant words and phrases that linked to a theme. I then assigned them to coding categories. This shows the category of relevant information into which each code closely

identifies (Gorden, 1992). The categories linked back to some of the original themes that emerged during the interviewing process. Coding assisted me in recognizing commonalities that could be used in the final analysis. Meanings emerged that dealt closely with this topic and that allowed me to better organize and discuss my findings. After discovering the themes, the data also exposed and articulated why these ladies shifted their identity. This opened up a new perspective and was one that was discovered in the literature. This new finding caused me to expand my research by introducing a new theme related to why women engaged in shifting practices.

In an effort to help illustrate the challenges African American females encounter and understand the shifting they use to navigate such challenges, I have situated their vignettes to be shared prior to the discussion of the common themes. I think it is important to hear their voices and understand their plight. The findings of this research will follow the narratives.

Their Stories, Their Identity Shifts

In an effort to hear the stories and understand the experiences of African American female principals and how they shift their identities in their workspaces, I interviewed six women whose career settings represented various backgrounds. I teased out some information from the interviews and created brief vignettes that described them as individuals as well as some of their experiences. The vignettes were member checked for accuracy and approval and are shared below.

About Hailey Fields

Hailey was a 51-year-old African American woman who is currently serving as a principal on the elementary level. She has been a principal for over 15 years serving in all elementary settings. She has served as principal of a predominately Caucasian rural elementary school as well as a predominately African American Title I school. Currently she serves as principal at an elementary school that is 85% White and 10% African American and Hispanic.

When I met with Hailey she was wearing a red skirt suit with gold jewelry. Our interview was conducted at an off-site district office. It was on-time and lasted for 45 minutes. Hailey was eager to get started as the informed consent form had piqued her interest. I was also eager to interview her based on her diverse leadership background.

Hailey describes her leadership style as collaborative and participative. She believes in involving as many of her leaders in the school in her decision making. She works hard to involve the community and to get as many opinions and views as possible to ensure that she understands the community's thoughts and their vision for the school.

Shifting identities. Originally, Hailey did not believe she has had to shift her identity. She did admit to having to let her true identity be visible for many of the parents, students, and community members she encountered. At her first school which was predominately African American and Title I, she found herself having to be transparent to the school community and her staff. For example, some staff members who had negative things to say about students and even maintained low expectations of them because of their low socioeconomic background had to be told by Hailey that she,

too, came from a background similar to that of the students. Therefore, she did not want them judging the students in such a manner as their background was not indicative of their future.

Also, Hailey spoke of times when it seemed as though the parents viewed her as a threat and as someone who could not relate to their plight. She felt that at times the parent sitting on the others side of the table looked at her as someone who sat high and did not look low. She felt they thought she looked at them as if they were nobody and that was not the case. She stated that one African American mom told her, "You are a Black slave, you are just like them, you are not here for us." Hailey found herself having to somewhat prove her Blackness by letting her families know she grew up in similar conditions and could relate. She truly wanted to help the students find success. Therefore, she knew people had their own perceptions of her and she wanted to change that.

Early in our interview, Hailey was not aware of her shifting practices. However, as the dialogue continued she recalled instances of shifting. She stated that she used identity shifting based upon her audience. She believed that if she was in a setting where she needed to be seen as a highly intelligent African American woman, she would be sure to clearly articulate and use the same lingo or terms as the others in an effort to show she was just as important and empowered. She stated, "If I am in a White population . . . I will speak White. If I am in a Black audience, audience we tend to really understand who we are and are very comfortable in who we are."

Shifting communication. In regards to communication, Hailey definitely shifts her communication style. She talked about playing the part when she is in environments with the elite, district level staff, or the White community, or the less fortunate. She stated:

> If I need to speak very distinctly, because I am I the presence of the elite, I do that or if I am in the company of my community where we are in a meeting and they use slang, and if that is what they know then that professional hat comes off . . . I become a part of who they are so that's playing the part. I know how to cross the lines and have crossed the lines and always will depending on the need.

Shifting appearance. When I talked with Hailey about her professional identity in terms of appearance, she talked about the importance of looking professional. She talked about how even though she grew up in a single parent home her mother ensured that she always made herself presentable. It was one of their values embedded from childhood stating that when one left the house they always had their hair done and were clean. She knows she has to look the part. She revealed, "When I am in the atmosphere of professionals, I present myself, professionally. When I am not, I can let my hair down a bit but there are certain things because of my upbringing, I just can't do because of those high expectations that were instilled in me as a child."

Benefits and drawbacks of gender and race. Hailey believed her race benefitted her in her positions because she was able to relate to the students and communities she served. She stated that she knew what her students truly needed based on the environments they came from. In regards to her gender, she could not really determine how being a female has benefited her. She stated, "I honestly feel females

work much harder than males in our profession. We spend a lot more time reflecting on what we do, I feel. I think we spend more time researching the needs of our schools and I think we spend less time taking care of our personal families outside the school." She felt that her gender has taught her that she needs to understand and get to know her White male counterparts to understand their level of thinking so she could play the game.

Recognizing shifting in others. Hailey felt like she had definitely seen identity shifting amongst her colleagues and referenced seeing this change related to district level meeting attire. Hailey believed that more people wore suits on meeting days because people wanted to look the part. She stated that she knew of male colleagues who only wore ties to church and to work. She also noted how some colleagues that are considered somewhat Afrocentric would make shifts on district level meeting days. Hailey revealed, "They will take that natural hair and pin it up a certain way, instead of having an afro . . . or they would make sure their hair was straight." She stated while some colleagues chose not to make shifts and remained firm in who they were, the majority of colleagues she dealt with made shifts when they know they needed to.

Shifting to serve a different clientele. Being that Hailey has served schools that were demographically different than herself, we explored how she would shift if she worked at a very affluent school. She believed she would have to change her communication style with relation to how she welcomed feedback. She has heard that when working in affluent settings, many parents seek to control the school. She is accustomed to welcoming feedback and ultimately making many of the decisions as long as they were of the best interest of the students. She stated:

> I would have to learn how to get to know them to understand their goals and what is important to them. I would have to keep them close by my side so that I can help them realize we are really here for the same reason. But, this is the way we are going to make it happen. It's not necessarily their way or my way but it's the way we come together. They are not in charge of the school no matter how many dollars they put into the school.

Hailey recognizes the pressures and politics related to serving affluent parents, however, she felt she would still maintain a stance of being the woman in charge and who makes the ultimate and final decisions of the school.

About Rochelle Kent

Rochelle was a 33-year-old African American female who is currently serving as a principal at an elementary school. She is a first year principal at a predominately African American Title I school. Prior to her experiences as a principal she served in a diverse secondary school which contained highly affluent students as well as students receiving free or reduced lunch. She was exposed to the two extremes in regards to clientele within the school. Therefore, she learned to shift by balancing and working with both populations.

When Rochelle was interviewed at her home, she had just got in from work. She was dressed wearing dress pants and a sweater. She wore a pearl necklace and pearl earrings. She wore glasses with her hair pulled up in a bun. I felt this interview would be quite interesting because as she undid her bun and stated, "This is my principal look."

Rochelle described her leadership identity as transformational. She stated that she tried to empower all staff members by letting them be a part of her decision making practices. She felt that she subscribed to a team concept because she definitely did not

want to be seen as authoritarian or one who acted as a dictator. She stated, "I have seen some principals act as the *head honcho* and it was received very negatively. It pushed people away and did not make for a good work place." She stated that she did not want to be seen that way. She stated, "Black women who are leaders tend to be stereotyped that way."

Shifting identities. When asked about if she had to shift her identity in her new role, Rochelle stated that she did make some changes. She said that since she took on her leadership roles she has found herself shifting around different types of people. She shifted around parents, community members, and staff members. She admitted to still getting nervous when she was around her supervisors, district level staff, and the superintendent. Rochelle stated, "I feel like I have to bring my A-game around those that are higher up, I have to let them know that I know my stuff."

Shifting communication. In regards to communication, Rochelle felt like she has not had to shift her communication style as much. She talked about how she has shifted her communication style so much it is on autopilot based on the people she is around. She stated that when she is around Caucasians she has to open up more and somehow prove that she is like them. She stated, "It is sad but sometimes I work into the conversation interests that we may share to show them that I am like them. I want them to walk away saying she is Black and she is actually alright." Rochelle stated that she does this to disband any stereotypes in their head that they may have about African American women.

She stated that when she is around Blacks that may not be as educated, she does not flaunt what she knows for fear of making them uncomfortable and making herself appear to be acting white or a "sell out." She stated, "I know I should be proud of my accomplishments but it's just something about wanting acceptance and wanting others to know you are like them." Therefore, when she communicates she changes her methods based on her audience.

Shifting appearance. Out of all the people I interviewed, it appeared that Rochelle was most self-conscious of her appearance. She felt that she looked young and needed to do certain things to appear older. For example, she talked about wearing glasses and wearing her hair in a bun in order to look more mature. She felt as though she was not taken seriously when she appeared younger. She stated that she has always been told by parents and staff members that she looked young like one of the students, and it did not sit well with her. Therefore, she felt it was necessary to look older in her leadership position in order to reassure others that she was mature, educated, and extremely capable of running a school.

Rochelle stated that she bought several suits for her new role, but said she was not the suit type of person. She prefers dress slacks, dress shirts, and sweaters. She stated, "I do believe I look more professional when I wear my suits, I don't wear them every day. I save them for special occasions, like when I need to put on airs." Rochelle also talked about dress in regards to her choosing to dress casually on Fridays. She stated, "Many of my colleagues refrain from wearing jeans to work. It is a power thing. While I understand their reasoning, I like wearing jeans on Friday; I like my staff to know I am

just like them. I don't want to be set apart at all times; I want them to understand we lead together."

Benefits and drawbacks of gender and race. Rochelle believed that gender did hinder women in leadership positions. She stated, "I think men can do and get away with a lot more than women. Males are able to command respect and authority by just being a man. People naturally see them as leaders whereas women who are strong are viewed negatively." She stated that she had noticed in meetings that when the female leaders spoke, she saw more people looking at their smartphones and carrying on side conversations than when the men spoke. She stated, "It just seems as though women are not taken as seriously."

Rochelle felt that race was more of a hindrance than gender. She said that as a Black woman she felt she always had to provide or show her credentials to be taken seriously amongst people who were White. She stated, "You can be in a room with the same credentials as everyone in there but if you are Black and female, you still feel like the lowest person on the totem pole."

Recognizing shifting in others. Rochelle stated that she has definitely seen identity shifting amongst her colleagues and provided some examples. She discussed how one of her colleagues wore her hair natural and/or braided when working in a predominately African American setting; however she relaxed it straight once she was given a new position at a predominately White, affluent school. Rochelle stated, "I would have done the same thing. From what I understand, she did not want to appear too Black. In cases like that, to do so would be career suicide." She said, "There is nothing

wrong with that, I think it is kind of like playing politics in a sense, but as Black women this is something we have to do."

Shifting to serve a different clientele. Rochelle believed that she would definitely have to make shifts if she was repositioned in a different setting. She felt that her race and age would require her to make shifts rather than her gender. She believed that in an affluent school, they would doubt her abilities and constantly critique her leadership. She felt that shifting would be a requirement for being successful in that type of position. "Because of the perception that those that are young are not as experienced, I would definitely have to carry myself in a way that made me look more mature," she stated, "I would probably have to go from dressing business casual to wearing suits every day." She felt that being in an affluent population of mostly Caucasian parents would cause her to let them know she had the credentials needed to serve their children effectively.

About Ernestine Evans

Ernestine was a 59-year-old African American female serving as a principal on the secondary level. She has been a principal for over 13 years serving in both secondary and elementary settings. In the course of her administrative career, she has worked in school settings that were predominately Caucasian, some who were predominately African American, elementary schools that had diverse student populations and a school that was geared to serving one gender.

I met with Ernestine in her office space to conduct our interview. She was professionally dressed wearing a pants suit accessorized by a matching necklace and

earrings set. I could tell upon meeting her that her professional image was very important to her. This was later articulated and evidenced through our interview and will be discussed through the course of this narrative.

Ernestine stated that her leadership style embeds aspects of servant leadership and transformational leadership. She believes that her goal is to help the school community and her clients (students). She wishes to be a resource and communicator to them. She wants to help them navigate to the next areas of their lives so that they can become productive citizens.

To illustrate her leadership style, Ernestine prides herself on being a good communicator. She maintains an open door policy and ensures that her school community knows that she is always willing to listen to ideas, concerns, and the suggestions of others. The community knows that she is willing to listen even if their viewpoints are different.

Shifting communication. When we discussed communication and the shifting involved, Ernestine told how when she has worked with other African Americans, she found it easy to speak with them because she understood them. She was aware of and understood the struggles they endured and this made it easier for her to establish relationships with them. When she spoke with White parents, she found she had to listen more deeply. She felt that at times, there was an underlying message that she had to identify. She said, “I think I had to shift the way I communicated via listening and questioning to find out how I could help them and what they expected of me.”

Ernestine felt that when she was among her colleagues she could have a different demeanor, but she still needed to remain professional and conscious of what she said and how she said it. She stated that her openness depended on how well she knew the colleagues. Around some colleagues, certain aspects of one's identity may remain guarded. Again, it depends on the level of trust that it shared amongst the group.

Shifting appearance. When Ernestine and I discussed changing one's personal appearance, she felt that she never really changed. She indicated:

> I always felt that I had to be cleaned, well groomed, and dressed in a professional manner. I have never felt that as a principal that I should go to school in jeans and sneakers and shorts . . . you need to have on dress slacks, sometimes I wear suits . . . I am always coordinated . . . I'm from the old school where you have pants with creases in them. You know people laugh at that but I think that is looking more polished, so pretty much my pants are going to be creased, pressed, color coordinated and most of the time, I have on a jacket or a skirt suit. I always wear jewelry to accent what I am wearing.

Because of Ernestine's current position, she spends much of her time working with young women to model for them the proper way to behave and act in mainstream society. She spoke about how she taught them about respecting one another and how to behave in certain situations. In some ways, one can say that Ernestine was grooming them to understand the home codes and to recognize the opportune times to shift themselves.

Benefits and drawbacks of gender and race. Ernestine believed that her gender and race has benefitted her in her previous positions. She felt that she was the right fit for the positions in which she was hired. She stated:

> I think my identity as a female has been beneficial because females tend to listen more, care more, and be more nurturing and attentive to the needs of others . . .

> sometimes, a male administrator really doesn't care about a lot of different things that I will take time to listen to and see what I can do to help . . . I think being a female has afforded me the skill and natural ability to be a better communicator and to be more of a servant leader.

Ernestine did not believe her gender or race had hindered her in any way. She felt that in all cases her gender and race benefitted her in regards to her being the best fit for the schools in which she was placed.

Recognizing shifting in others. Ernestine admitted that she had witnessed her colleagues shifting. She saw people who would be themselves in certain settings and those who tried to maintain their identity but have not had success doing so. In contrast, she has seen some people change who they were to keep the peace. She stated:

> I have seen some people who know how to shift and navigate the waters instead of making rough currents. They try to keep things calm and they take on certain positions to try to keep everyone happy. It may not really be their personality but they take on this role for the season they are in and the position they are in.

When asked if she had to note which gender she saw this occurring with she stated she saw women being more of the pacifier.

Shifting to serve a different clientele. Ernestine and I had a conversation about how people shift if they were repositioned as an administrator at a school that was demographically different from themselves. She stated that she would not shift her appearance as she carries herself professionally at all times. She stated she would only shift things in her environment such as having pictures up that portrayed the image of school community rather than having pictures that focused on her identity and that of her

family. She did note that she would enhance her communication style by being more formal when communicating with stake holders.

Overall, Ernestine believed that in this point of her life she is a seasoned educator. She stated, “I am older and I have gone through all of that and here I am and it’s not about how I am looking, it’s about me the person . . . people know that I am committed to helping children learn and be successful in life. The other things are superficial; people always say you can’t judge a book by its cover.”

In conclusion, she stated that in her opinion she has been put in schools were her gender and identity was a benefit because of the population and communities of students she served. She explained**,** “I do think that if a person is put in a situation where the community does not embrace them, they will have a more difficult time with their gender and identity, as far as navigating the waters and moving the school forward.”

About Melissa Johnson

Melissa was a 36-year-old African American female principal. She has served for almost two years. Her current position is a diverse elementary school with a balanced population of African American and Caucasian students. She has a large population of English as Second Language (ESL) learners. She has also worked as an assistant principal at a high school prior to beginning her career as an elementary leader.

I met with Melissa at her worksite in a private conference room. She was very welcoming and warm. She was wearing dress slacks and a sweater. Melissa is very outgoing and outspoken. She moves quickly, talks directly, and is very task driven and

business oriented. She was an eager participant in my study and was excited about being of assistance.

Melissa described her leadership style as hands-on and very transparent. She does not believe in top-down management but subscribes to a bottom up style that pushes her to be reflective and encourages staff dialogue and joint decision making. While her staff members have told her that during her first year she was not nice, warm or fuzzy, she admits to being very direct and work driven in the beginning. She felt like she needed to set the stage and help them understand her level of expectations.

Shifting identities. Melissa admits that when she first began her role as a school leader, she had to change certain aspects of her identity. She considered herself an "emotional being" and felt that she wore her emotions on her sleeve. She claimed that she held certain aspects of her personality back. She also discussed how because of her age, she felt she had to change part of her identity. She stated:

> I do understand with my age sometimes you can be perceived differently and [staff] don't take you as serious. I had to learn to not be my fun, jovial, over the top self from the very beginning but to make sure I understood the staff and built relationships first before I was able to be completely transparent.

When it comes to shifting her identity, Melissa has noted that she has had to learn how to shift because of politics. In her opinion, the job of school administrators is very political. "Learning how to play the game has been a shift for me," she stated.

Shifting appearances. As stated in the aforementioned text, Melissa felt her age definitely affected how others perceived her. She felt that often young women had a more difficult time with people hearing and understanding the purpose. She stated:

> They don't know what your true work ethic is and if you deserve to be where you are. It's not that you have to show how smart you are but you have to let them understand that I am not here because of who I know, I am here because I am a hard worker and believe in educating the kids . . . people's perceptions are often their realities, but that is because they are judging a book by its cover. Once they get to open the pages of the book, then they see more depth.

Shifting communication. Melissa admits that when she is around colleagues she tends to be more relaxed and open in regards to her identity. She characterizes herself as jovial, talkative, and very straightforward. However, around district personnel she says she tends to be more subdued. She believes her true self does eventually come out. She definitely remains respectful of those of authority even if she disagrees with what is being said. She has learned that she cannot comment on everything she hears because people watch your reactions and critique your responses. Melissa is an individual that likes to be involved and to share. But, she has learned that in certain settings and in this particular role, she has to step back and observe.

When it comes to dealing with parents, she felt that because of the socio-economic status of her school, she was able to communicate with them all consistently without shifting too far away from her true identity. With her African American parents she noticed that they seemed to be more comfortable and casual in their conversations because they could identify with her as a fellow African American. Melissa stated that regardless of how they perceive her, she is still very direct and goes by the book when it comes to policy and procedure. When dealing with her Caucasian parents, she noticed that they spoke from a different angle and most conversations were about what they knew and who they knew. She is quick to tell them, "You can contact whomever you could

like to contact, but our policies still say A, B, C, and D and I am going to treat your child like I treat any other child in this building." She also noticed that Hispanic parents were more receptive in conversations and more willing to listen to her. Melissa stated, "I think it depends on the level, the ethnicity of the group of parents and how they deal with me; which sometimes will change my conversation."

Shifting appearance. Melissa did not believe she made many shifts to her personal appearance because she tends to be a modest dresser and believes in professional dress. She felt that she was molded into dressing professionally because of prior work experiences. She felt that professional attire consisting of slacks and blouses were appropriate. While she stated she does not wear a suit jacket every day and did not own many, she definitely takes great pride in her appearance.

Benefits and drawbacks of gender and race. Melissa was not sure if her gender has hindered or benefitted her role. She did state that since females tend to be more emotional, it works out well in the elementary setting as she tends to be more hands-on in regards to her interactions with students. Stating that she loves giving out "hugs and high fives," she was not certain if that is something many male administrators practice. She did believe that females tend to have to prove themselves. Overall she felt that her work ethic has been her benefit and not her gender.

In the beginning of her principalship she felt that staff were excited to have a female administrator and thought that she was going to be warm and fuzzy. Melissa is very direct. She definitely did not allow her staff to be fooled by her gender and assume

that she would be a pushover. She talked about being direct when she first started and how she needed to set the stage. She explained,

> Please don't perceive me just being a female that you can come in here and cry and this can make it all better or you can come in here and do whatever, and I would be like I understand. No, I do understand; we all have families, we all have lives, I have two kids and husband myself. However, I do have a job and my boss expects me to do certain things . . . you are expected to do certain things as well, and you can either do them or you might want to do something different or work somewhere different, these are my expectations.

In regards to race being a hindrance or benefit, Melissa did not see her race being a factor. She believed that because she has never worked with an affluent population and have only served Title I and low performing schools, she never had to deal with parents who were upper echelon or felt empowered to always speak. She definitely did not see it as an issue in her current elementary setting.

Recognizing the shift in others. Melissa has witnessed identity shifting in her colleagues. She seemed to notice a change in people based on the positions they were in. In her opinion, people shifted because of where they want to go: "I think often people already have a vision of what's next and they are working towards that vision and that tends to skew how they behave in different environments." She has seen this shift in their conversations, how they interact with others, who they do and do not interact with, as well as their body language.

Shifting to serve a different clientele. Melissa believed she would have to shift aspects of her identity if she was principal of a school that was demographically different than herself. She stated, "I would have to shift the way I handle things because in some

communities you have to be more willing and able to listen and decipher what they need from you and then go ahead and act. That would be a shift for me because I have never been in that type of environment . . ." She stated that when working with different populations there is a concern with how to handle challenges. One does have to worry about parents who are quick to call their lawyers or the media. So, people definitely have to be careful regarding the words they choose. Melissa stated that it would be an area of growth for her but she would use the assistance and advice of her colleagues who have worked in such settings.

About Sheila Smith

Sheila Smith was a 38-year-old African American principal of an elementary magnet school. She has served as a principal for five years. She has worked on the elementary and secondary level and worked in all demographic settings. I met with Sheila at her work site, and we interviewed in her office. She had just finished conducting an interview for a long term substitute position. Sheila is a very busy administrator who is constantly involved in many tasks at once. From the time she met me in the front office and walked down the hallway to her office, we were stopped numerous times by staff members who seemed to just want to share something with her or pick her brain. I could tell that she had a great relationship with her staff members as she seemed very motherly. She greeted them with a gentle hand on their shoulder or pat on the back. This was done as we walked; she did not miss a beat.

When we discussed her leadership style, she stated that she was a transformational leader. Her main objective was to provide staff members with whatever

tools they needed to be successful. She considered herself a coach who is very candid and upfront with staff members. She stated, “It is a relationship building field, its sometimes one conversation at a time because you can say who you are and what you want people to believe about you, but they watch . . .”

Sheila’s attire consisted of some dress slacks with a blouse. She wore some dress shoes that had a slight heel and her blazer was donned across her office chair. As we began our interview she stated that she needed to slip out of her heels and get more comfortable. She stated, “I only wear heels on interview days.”

Shifting identities. Sheila definitely believed she had to shift her identity when she first started her role as a principal. She felt as though she had to prove herself upfront because of her age. “People assume that in a principal role it is someone older, people questioned my experience. I felt like there was things I had to change like how I dressed and how I communicated,” she explained. She revealed that she was told that she needed to tone down certain aspects of her identity. Also, she said she had to be cognizant of her facial expressions and hand movements, because of the stereotypes that exist.

Shifting communication. Sheila definitely recognized that she has changed her communication style. She stated that when she is amongst colleagues she hardly knows, she tends to be a bit reserved and spends more time listening and gauging the group dynamics. However, when she is in a setting in which she is more comfortable, she tends to be more vocal, more relaxed, and tends to “keep it real.” She stated that she likes to laugh and find the humor in things but it depends on the audience and it’s definitely about trust.

In the professional settings, Sheila stated that she changed her speech, how she expressed herself, and even who she associated with at meetings. People assumed that she liked certain people or subscribed to certain agendas because of who she sat near. She stated, “This was the feedback I was getting and hearing and some the assumptions were wrong but their perception is their perception.”

When dealing with parents, she tends to be more open and honest. She stated, “I count it a privilege to actually get to work with people’s kids, like we don’t have to be doing this, this is a gift, anybody can be chosen to do this, I am not so special, my teachers are not so special, we are just blessed with opportunity . . . you have no choice but to try to connect.” She believes that this line of work is a “public relations position and people who are not people persons need to know that early.” In her opinion, it is not public relations for her; it is just being real with the parents.

When dealing with some parents, Sheila states that she adjusts depending on the type of parents she encounters. She stated that she can speak using $50,000 words if needed, however, she has some parents who do not have an advanced vernacular and she will use one that is relaxed and less formal. She notes that she has some parents whom have confided in her stating that they did not graduate high school and cannot understand some things, even the notes and letters that their child’s teacher sends home. She admits that she has parents to whom she explains teacher correspondences to over the phone in an effort to keep them from being embarrassed that that lack the capacity to understand things that are being sent home.

Shifting appearance. When Sheila and I discussed appearance shifting she opened up about how she is now embarrassed to discuss some of the things she did to shift. She stated, "So, I have this baby face, I know that I have it and have been told I have it all my life. I got these chubby cheeks that naturally make me look younger. Well, I bought some glasses that were not prescription so that I looked a little older, and I changed my hair style. Believe it or not, I can't believe it to this day, I did it. I was natural with a little afro. I was told by my mentor that I should change it because sometimes as an African American woman, people do not take you seriously. They take it as being too aggressive looking or they can see you as being too earthy and whimsical." While she felt as though people should let her work speak for itself, she understood. She stated that people see you before they hear you.

Sheila noted that she changed her hair by getting a relaxer and purchasing glasses. To her relaxing her hair was a big step because in the African American community, going natural is considered a big thing because one's hair is viewed as one's glory. She felt it was an expression of herself yet she was criticized for it and eventually decided to relax it.

Sheila started dressing differently by wearing slacks and blouses but was told that she looked like a teacher. So, she began wearing blazers and jackets and went from wearing "stylish earrings to a pair of pearls." According to her, she even started wearing make-up. Sheila was not ashamed to discuss how she shifted; while it is somewhat embarrassing to her in retrospect she understands why she did it. It is a necessary survival technique for some Black women.

Currently, Sheila shifts her wardrobe on interview days or for official meetings. As an elementary principal, she spoke of how she spends a lot of time on the floor with students, playing basketball with them, spending days in conferences, and constantly walking the halls. For her, wearing heels is not a daily occurrence. When she has meetings or is working with a different type of clientele, she tends to be more business versus business casual. She does this because in her words, "I know people's perceptions are based on what they see 98% of the time."

Benefits and drawbacks of gender and race. While Sheila believes that her gender affects her more than her race, she noted both benefits and drawbacks for each. As a female, she noted that the benefit is that women tend to be more understanding and caring. They are naturally skilled in the relationship building piece. She stated that she always found it easier to talk to the mothers versus her fellow male administrators. However, she is firm in stating that she does not play the stereotypical submissive female role. She recalled prior experiences when she was the strong disciplinarian who was relentless and would "stick it to 'em" whereas her male counterpart would be more warm and fuzzy. She stated, "He was the good cop; I was the bad cop."

She found drawbacks to being a female in cases where it seemed as though she always had to prove herself, and had to double time the work. She stated, "It's like you can't be smart enough, you can't be as efficient, as vocal or whatever because you are a young Black female. It exhausted me for a while, frustrated me for a while, then I realized, it is what it is."

Sheila spoke of another situation in which she found her gender to be a drawback. She talked about how a male parent was very volatile in her office. She tried to calm him down and told him that for the conversation to continue he needed to stop yelling and using profanity or he would be asked to leave. He continued to do so, grew more belligerent and told her what she could do and where she could go. She telephoned the school resource officer to assist; however he was unavailable. She finally ushered the parent out of the building. The parent, in turn, walked right back into the building and demanding to speak to the male administrator. The parent, now quite settled and less confrontational proceeded to tell the principal and resource officer (who had now joined them) that Sheila was disrespectful to him. Sheila revealed that she was furious because she needed that parent to exit the campus but no one seemed to support her actions. She noted that this situation was not about age or race, it was clearly about gender.

In regards to her race, Sheila believed that her race benefits her because she is able to relate to her students. She expressed**,** "I come from where these kids come from. The ones that don't come from this neighborhood, I still can relate to them. I read my audience and know who I am dealing with." Sheila noted that with race she has to take more care in showing her passion for what she does. She explained**,**

> Not that I'm out for tiger blood, I'm going to state my point. I can be pretty passionate and aggressive about it. Sometimes [that] is misinterpreted, and race may be viewed as the background of that and then coupled with gender, I am just 'gonna go ahead and say it as the angry Black woman 'thang, people assume. I say that's not anger, that's passion, if I was in corporate America I would be rewarded for that, what that is is passion.

Sheila is aware of the stereotypes that plague Black women. As stated earlier, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) expressed that Black women use their speech as a way to counteract myths and stereotypes. Being that their pitch of her voice, rhythm of her speech, and the vocabulary she uses can mean the difference between acceptance or rejection. A woman who is passionate about a topic may speak quickly and loudly yet be perceived as aggressive, volatile, and difficult. Sheila clearly understands that she must adjust because one does not want to be perceived as too aggressive.

Recognizing shifting in others. Sheila talked openly about witnessing identity shifting in her colleagues. She talked about how some colleagues act different in various settings. For example, she described a colleague who is typically very creative and outside the box yet in certain settings, they tend to dumb down what they would say or do. She noted that some of her more outspoken colleagues tend to refrain from dialogue in certain settings.

Sheila has also noted that some of her colleagues make it a point not to sit near other African Americans. They chose to sit with people of diverse backgrounds. She has even noticed how some of her colleagues chose to sit near the front of the room. It is my assumption that they make this shift consciously and in an effort to avoid being stereotyped or to ensure they are seen a certain way.

Shifting to serve a different clientele. Sheila noted that if she was repositioned in another setting that was demographically different, she would definitely make it a point to shift certain aspects of her identity. She noted that in regards to her dress, she would dress more professionally. She would have to get to know her parents and form

strong relationships with them so that they can understand her leadership style and know that she is the type of administrator who likes to get down on the floor with students. Therefore, she would have to wait until that aspect of her identity is seen and understood before she could dress in a more student-friendly manner.

She also stated that she would have to increase the amount of communication and types of correspondence she provides to parents. Whereas her current parents have told her that they work multiple jobs and do not have time to listen to phones messages or read newsletters, a more affluent population of parents may be expecting such communication if not more.

About Porsha Paul

Porsha Paul was a 42-year-old African American female principal. She began her administrative career as an assistant principal at a high school for eight months and later became principal of a high school. After serving at the high school, she worked briefly at an elementary school and then returned to a high school two years later.

Most of Porsha's career has been spent working in high needs and Title I schools. Her current setting only has about 40% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. Porsha characterizes her school by saying that she serves a very affluent population and a population of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. She said that there is no middle ground, either they have it all or they have absolutely nothing. She has students that come to school to get a hot meal. She stated, "We have students whose parent are federal court judges, tons of money is here. . . . we have extremely wealthy people here who drive better cars than I do; I want to be like them when I grow up."

I met with Porsha at her school, and the interview was conducted in her office. It was exam week and the building as quiet. She was dressed modestly in a brown suit and was eager to assist me with this interview. While she appeared very busy, she had set aside time for our interview and her staff knew that we were not to be disturbed. This expectation was clear and evidenced by her leadership style.

Porsha viewed herself as an instructional leader. She stated that she does a lot of coaching and even works to develop her administrative team as instructional leaders. She wants to be a visionary and seeks to create a culture where everyone works together in an effort to transform the school.

When we discussed her leadership style and if she had to change herself because of her gender such as being more aggressive, Porsha felt that she was already aggressive. She stated:

> I am aggressive, I am very loud. I mean business and have very high expectations. I haven't had to change my aggression. I just expect people to do the things they need to do, period. This is your role, this is the role you play, so do it. So, I haven't had to be . . . I don't know . . . I think being an African American that is so much a part of your identity you don't even think about being female. It's like the second thing.

Shifting identities. Porsha and I discussed shifting and she definitely felt like she has made shifts throughout her career. She began code switching early and admitted that it was something her family does as well. She believes she had to make shifts in order to prove herself. She stated, "The Caucasian people, you have to prove to them that you can do it. You come in with all this stuff great, show us. It is like a trial basis. You have to show them who you are." While we discussed the politics associated with her school and

how she reaches out to the parents and community, she has found herself shifting and immersing herself in the public relations aspect of the role. She stated, “Before I go to this PTA meeting or this golf match, I remind myself of who I am and what people’s perceptions are and try to make sure that I shoot the perception down.”

Shifting communication. Porsha revealed that she always wanted to be a principal but was always afraid of speaking in front of groups. She worried about her accent because she was from the country. In order to shift, she learned to slow down when she spoke. She also was cognizant of her audience. If she was talking to African Americans in a meeting she would not code switch but make them feel comfortable and let them know that even though she is in the principal role, she still understood their views. She did admit to making a conscious effort to slow down and speak in the manner that best suited her audience.

Shifting appearance. In regards to her appearance, Porsha stated that she shifted by ensuring that she always has a professional look. She talked about how ten years ago she was able to wear her hair braided. However, she knew that in her current setting, she could never do that. She stated, “I would have to build my community and build myself and then maybe two years later, I could walk in here with braids. One thing I must remind myself is that I have to be professional at all times.” In her other school settings, she believes she could have worn braids. However, those schools were around 97% African American and low income.

Porsha considers herself a conservative person who does not worry about her nails and those types of things. Her biggest shift has been her speech. However, she stated

that she has also adjusted her style of dress by ensuring that she looks the part of a principal. She stated, "I think people should be able to pick you out and say that's the leader." She even considers this when she dresses down on Fridays. She tends to wear a jean suit versus jeans and a polo shirt. She said, "In an elementary school, I could put on the same thing [as teachers] and even put on my sneakers. At the high school, it is a different animal and in a political high school, I don't know who is going to walk in my door. So every day, I need to look like someone who can be the face of Joyner High School."

Benefits and drawbacks of gender and race. Porsha believed that her gender helped her in regards to getting things done. She felt that when it came to getting assistance from other people and departments such as maintenance, she was able to secure resources based on facets of her gender. She stated, "I am not saying you are flirtatious, cause you are not, but it seems to me and maybe every male principal can get done what they can get done too, but, I have special relationship with maintenance . . . I build relationships with people who can do things for me that I cannot do for myself." She then stated that she could not honestly say if these were benefits because of her gender or just because of her personality.

Some of the hindrances Porsha discussed dealt with fitting particular positions. She did think that people get positions because they look a certain way. She did not recall getting a position merely because she was female. However, she discussed a time when she was an ideal candidate for a position and had support in high places. She later

found out she did not receive the position because a male was determined to be a "better fit."

Porsha was the first African American to serve as principal at her current school setting. She has been faced with many challenges because this particular position has been quite political. She spoke of a conversation with a community member who said, "People were worried about whether you were going to treat the Black kids differently." Porsha was taken aback with the comment and wanted to respond by asking if anyone was worried about if she was going to treat the White kids differently. While she stated she would never verbalize that comment, those types of questions and comments were ones she frequently heard.

Porsha stated that when she first started her role, people seemed to doubt her abilities. She was not sure if this doubt was because of her gender, race, or the fact that she had never been principal of a high school of that size. She felt the majority of her challenges were based on her gender rather than her race. She found that White males seemed to have a difficult time taking authority from females. Porsha stated, "It's funny to think about that because to me it just comes with the territory. I almost forgot about that because it is what I deal with every day, whether is with a Black male or a White male . . . with White males it is more. There is a difference."

Recognizing shifting in others. Porsha admitted to seeing identity shifting among her colleagues. She has noted that on the district level she has been out with people and has seen them in different roles. She stated that she has seen people change

their voice and their mannerisms depending on the makeup of their audience. Porsha understood why people made these changes. She stated:

> I think for the African American groups you don't drop it all the way down though and talk down to them. When you are with the affluent group you want to be a part of them. If you are one of the soccer moms, you will be fine. When you walk into a meeting you have to decide what you want to leave these people with.

That comment alone confirms Porsha's focus on dispelling myths. She takes the time to consider the group she is with and changes as does a chameleon to fit in.

Shifting to serve a different clientele. Using this principal position as the scenario since she was new, Porsha stated that connecting with her affluent population was a major step. Being visible at the golf tournaments and swim meets and not just the football games was important. She also worked hard at being visible in an effort to help people embrace and accept the change. The shift for her was increasing visibility and being a part of what that community valued. It involved her altering her speech and being cognizant of her appearance. Her position is very political and she is still learning how to navigate in that particular setting.

The Master Narrative

As a part of applying critical race methodology to this study, my study contains a composite counter-narrative told from the point of view of African American female principals as well as a composite portrait of a week in the life of a Black female principal. Typically, master narratives precede counter stories. Therefore, this section is dedicated to the master narrative. According to Stanley (2007), a master narrative:

> Is a script that specifies and controls how some social processes are carried out. Furthermore, there is a master narrative operating in academia that often defines and limits what is valued as scholarship and who is entitled to create scholarship. This is problematic, because the dominant group in academia writes most research and, more often than not, they are White men. Members of marginalized groups, such as women and people of color, have had little or no input into the shaping of this master narrative. Therefore, research on marginalized groups by members of marginalized groups that reveals experiences that counter master narratives is often compared against the White norm. (p. 14)

This master narrative will repeat what many individuals already know as master narratives generally tell the story that is well known and always told. This master narrative is told from the perspective of the norm which is Caucasian male. In the preceding chapter, I will share brief excerpts detailing some of shifts made by Caucasian females whom also have a voice in the master narrative. A day in the life of a young White female principal will be compared to data gathered from a week in the life of a young Black female principal. The information below has been condensed as the Review of Literature was written based on the master narrative. Therefore, it has already been shared at length and in full detail.

When looking at the public education, males are most likely to hold administrative level positions even though women make up the majority of the workforce (Coleman, 2005). In leadership positions, men are generally viewed as being more skilled and more suitable to hold such positions. Women have been advised to embody male characteristics such as being aggressive and competitive, yet this causes many women to deny their true identities (Harris, 2004). While there are many challenges associated with women taking on male characteristics, some women have found success in doing so. One could note that Caucasian women do not subscribe to the master

narrative of Caucasian males in relation to gender as they are marginalized in that aspect. However, once we begin to discuss race, they become members of the master narrative as they are considered privileged in that regard.

In a survey by Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004), 80% of African American females confirmed that they had been personally affected by persistent racist and sexist assumptions. These women have been all the more affected as they are doubly marginalized. Gyant (1996) concluded that black skin is still equated by many with the lowering of standards. Therefore, Black women work harder to dispel stereotypes and prove themselves because of assumptions subscribed to by the majority of society.

The Composite Counter-Story

I use *composite counter-story* as a way to present my findings. As cited by Adams-Wiggan (2010), "Counter-story is a way a researcher tells the stories of people whose experiences are often not told" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 32). Adams-Wiggan (2010) used composite counter-storytelling to tell the stories of biculturality by "entwining informants' narratives, personalities, and demographic data with her own experiences and expert data in a creative yet plausible scenario while maintaining the integrity of individual data strands." For the sake of this research, I used composite counter-storytelling and a composite portrait as a way for readers to hear, understand, and respect the voices of the ladies interviewed. This method was a creative way to tell the story of principals and their processes of identity construction and navigation taking into account their individual personalities.

Ideally, using a focus group session in addition to the individual interviews would have assisted in providing meaningful data points. However, I wanted to give every participant an opportunity to speak freely regarding her intimate experiences whereas a focus group could have silenced some voices. If all of the women interviewed were familiar and comfortable with one another, it is possible that the focus group would have provided an opportunity for engaging and rich dialogue. Also, scheduling a time for all of the women to meet for the focus group would have been difficult because of their busy schedules. Therefore, this composite counter-story was written as a way to intertwine the stories based on the data retrieved from their interviews and scholarly interpretation. It begins in an office space with the six participants seated and engaged in causal dialogue. I signaled to the group that we would begin our dialogue.

I stated,

> Good afternoon ladies and thank you again for meeting to discuss our leadership identities and how they are affected by our race and gender. Everyone in this room is currently a principal, and we serve different school levels and settings. Today we will talk openly about our experiences of identity construction and navigation. First, I want us to talk about our experiences with race and gender.

"Well I will start, if that is okay with everyone," said Melissa.

> As I mentioned in the interview, I don't really see any barriers because of my race. I think I don't see this as a problem in my school because I am African American and a female. While I know that other people may experience some difficulties in their settings, I personally have not in this setting. I have a large student population that is of low socioeconomic status so I do not run into a lot of problems with the upper echelon parents.

"Upper echelon? You don't have to just have upper echelon parents to run into problems," Sheila interrupted.

> I know that, Melissa explained, but most of the principals I know who are Black tend to find the most resistance coming from Caucasian parents, especially those with money. They find themselves always on the defense. The principals are always working to prove themselves and to show parents that they know how to do their job. It's not fair.

"So, really, this could be a class issue and not just a gender and race issue," I stated. If I may, Ernestine politely started, "It is definitely a class issue as well as gender and race. Class and race privileges certain groups of people. Sadly we work tirelessly to earn that same privilege, but we will never have all the advantages that many Caucasian people have."

There was a brief silence in the room. Eventually, Sheila spoke up. "Well, I think we have some advantages," said Sheila, "our race benefits us when we lead predominately Black schools as we are usually the best fit for those schools. The kids see us as positive role models. We understand their struggles, and we genuinely care about them and want them to do well." "So, because we are Black, we are the best fit?" asked Melissa, "or are we the only fit as many Caucasian people do not want to lead Black schools?" Rochelle chimed in, "I think we are the only fit. I can't say that Caucasian leaders do not want to lead Black schools, I think part of it is political because the communities of predominately Black schools usually want a Black leader." Sheila began shaking her head, "Let's be realistic, many all Black schools or schools that are Title I are

considered trouble schools, no one really wants those schools because they are challenging; they can be career suicide."

I jumped in to change the direction of the session by noting that several principals in this room are leaders of Title I schools. "So, let's talk about the challenges we have as principals at these schools. Do we face any because of our race or gender?" "Well," chimed in Hailey,

> my school is not Title I, but I have many Black parents who treat me differently because I have status. I've had a parent to tell me I was a Black slave and pretty much say I could not relate to the Black children. I had to let her know that I came from the projects, and I was raised by a single parent. So, I can relate.

"So, you had to prove yourself . . . well, your Blackness," I stated. She nodded as did Sheila and Melissa.

I sensed the conversation was beginning to stifle, so I posed an additional question. "Aside from parents, what other challenges have you faced?" I asked. Porsha stated, "Well, I have had issues in my new setting with many of the White males. Well, even the Black males but more so with the White males. It seems they have difficulty with my authority. I do not know if it is because of my race or gender or maybe both." "Are they just plum defiant?," Ernestine asked. "No, it is just something, you can tell. It's like I see it in their eyes, their expressions and mannerisms," Porsha stated, "I feel like I have to show them that I am worthy of the position." "Oh 'child, I let mine know. I have a job to do and either you 'gonna get on board or you can work somewhere else. My expectations are so high, and I hold them accountable. They know I earned my role,"

Melissa spouted. "I definitely hold mine accountable, I am just saying it always seems as though you have to prove yourself to them," said Porsha.

So, what I am hearing you ladies say is that in Black schools, you are letting the parents know you relate and in White schools you are working to prove yourselves. So, let's talk about gender. "If I may," Ernestine started, "I think my gender has been a benefit in my setting, even my race as I am at a school that focuses on one gender. Therefore, I think I am a good fit because of my gender and race. It works for the community and for the young ladies." Sheila stated, "I agree with Ernestine, I do think my gender benefits me and really all of us as female principals, we have a nurturing aspect to our identity. We are very mothering and loving and children need that. I love what I do and genuinely love the students."

Sheila paused for a moment. She then stated, "I do not think males really invest themselves and give of their spirit like we do." "Uh huh, said Hailey, it is something about being a woman." "Exactly," Melissa agreed, "now, I have seen gender be a hindrance as well, because as a woman I think we have to work much harder than men do." "Twice as hard," Sheila chimed,

> people think we are soft and try to run over us. I saw this first hand when I had a difficult parent who was cursing at me and out of control. I made him leave the building and he turn right 'round and came back in and demanded to talk to a male administrator. He got his way and got to meet with him. I was mad as hell. 'Excuse my language. Not only was I mad at the man, I was mad at the male administrator because he was okay with that behavior. It was like he was okay with pacifying the man, like I did not matter. I knew that was a gender thing.

"Wow," Rochelle said,

> I definitely believe women do not get the same respect men get. It just seems easier for men, and I think society makes us feel that way. Society tells us that men are leaders. It is the natural order of the world. Men are heads of households. What did James Brown say, 'It is a man's world.'

Everyone laughed.

Rochelle stated,

> I don't like how men make it so obvious that they do not value women as leaders. At our last district meeting, did you all notice that when the women leaders presented, most of the people in the room were holding side conversations and had to be quieted but when the males spoke people got quiet?

"Oh, that's all the time," Sheila said. "That's when we have to command our presence, Melissa said, just because that is the norm that is not how it has to be. I like to show them that I can do it just as good if not better than a man can." "However, I going to do it with my womanly touch and with class, and leave you wondering how did she manage that," said Ernestine. "That's Ernestine, you always want to do something classy and sophisticated, go 'head," affirmed Hailey. "You have to, Sheila agreed, because if not you are gonna be that 'angry Black woman.' We are trying to get away from that stereotype."

"Well ladies," I interjected, "let's briefly discuss what we do to navigate those obstacles we just discussed. How do we shift?" "Well, when I first had my interview I did not think I made shifts but as I began talking, it became more evident that I shift in some way almost daily. It is hard to identify at times and I think it is because I do it so

much it seems like who I am," said Hailey. "Yeah, after the interview I started noticing it a lot more," said Porsha.

> I definitely shift in my role. You have to think about what I am up against. I am running this large high school that has never had an African American in charge. I feel like everyone is watching what I do. I am always attuned to my speech because 'yal know I am from the country. I work on adjusting my accent. I make sure I am dressed professionally so people know out the gate that I am the principal. I have made shifts because I work harder to reach out to all my different parent groups. My other schools were Title I schools. This school calls for me to be out in the community at golf tournaments and things of that nature. It is a major shift.

In order to gauge whether other individuals had experienced this, I asked, "Has anyone else had to adjust their speech?" Hailey stated that she has changed her speech. She said, "When I am around White folks, I talk like White folks." "Yep," Sheila added, "If I have to use $50,000 words I do, if I have to scale back to a relaxed vernacular because I am with a parent who did not graduate high school, I do it. It depends on your audience." "So," I polled, "by show of hands, how many of you ladies have shifted your speech in some way?" Everyone raised their hand.

"Okay ladies, let's shift gears and have a final discussion about appearance shifting. Who would like to go first?," I asked. "I will," said Sheila,

> I'm sorry I feel like I have been talking too much but I really like this topic. I told Ms. Robertson in the interview that I shifted my appearance because as you all can see my face is a little round and chubby and most people think I am young. Most principals are older, and it is something about looking older meaning you look wiser and more mature. So, I changed my look by wearing non-prescription glasses. I relaxed my hair and started wearing make-up. I used to dress a certain way because I grew up being a little athletic, now that I am a principal I find myself wearing blazers and jackets, well at least to important meetings.

Rochelle chimed in,

> I am glad I am not the only one to change my appearance because I look young. I always dealt with people saying I look like a student. That is irritating. I started wearing glasses and wearing my hair in a bun to look older. I think it is a respect thing, too. People seem to respect you more when you appear older and mature.

"For a moment, let's talk about hair," I stated. Melissa asked, "You relaxed your hair?" Sheila answered,

> I did, and it was hard for me because I was working hard to grow it out. There are so many negative perceptions about a Black woman going natural. Some people think is a militant act, like I am on a Black pride agenda. It can be intimidating. Or, as I have been told, I can be considered whimsical and earthy.

"My hair is natural and I am neither of those," Ernestine stated. "I think it is different for you, Ernestine because you are older and more established in your role where Sheila is still pretty new," said Hailey.

> I think it is different for Ernestine because for one she is older and classy (chuckling) and her hair is low, neat, and sophisticated. She has already made a name for herself so she can be freer. Also, look at the school you serve. Your school is historically Black and prides itself on empowerment, so it is safe for you,

said Rochelle. "Porsha definitely couldn't do it at her school." "You are right. I used to wear braids, and I stopped when I became principal of this school. I can't do braids here. Maybe down the road I could after I have built strong relationships with my school community," said Porsha. "People see you before they hear you. You do not want your appearance to keep them from listening," said Sheila.

Lastly, I asked the ladies to discuss their dress. "If I may," Ernestine began, "I believe in being prim, proper, and professional. My clothes are always pressed nicely and with creases." "Creases are old school," interrupted Rochelle. "I am old school and that's how I was raised," responded Ernestine. "Me too, Ernestine," said Hailey, "I was raised on the belief that you leave the house presentable. When I was young my mother made sure we were always neatly dressed going to school and when we came home we changed out of our school clothes and put on our play clothes." "I completely understand," said Rochelle, "you ladies are always dressed very professionally. I feel as though you are more comfortable dressing professionally, not that I am not. But, I think you do it effortlessly, and I am wondering is it because you are older." Sheila stated that she was

> more comfortable being business casual versus straight professional. You will not find me in heels, panty hose and suits a lot. I am one of the principals who gets down and dirty with the kids. I may be sitting on the floor with them or playing kickball. You can't do that with a suit and heels.

Melissa stated,

> I do understand what you all are saying. I am not sure about the age thing being linked to dress. I think I dress professional at all times. I wear nice shirts or blouses and trousers or skirts. I will sometimes wear heels or boots. I feel comfortable, but also, I have been in roles that called me to dress professionally for a while.

"I have seen your clothes, Melissa," Rochelle stated,

> but your dress is a little different when compared to Hailey and Ernestine. They are usually in suits and something very classy looking. Our dress clothes are

> more trendy business wear. We are more like N.Y. & Co. and Express and they are more like Talbots or Chicos. It is like we put a different spin on things. You will never see Ernestine with sneakers on at work.

"You are right, Rochelle. I do not dress down. It is business all the time for me," said Ernestine. "I think appearance and dress is big in portraying a certain image. People watch how you dress and those small things speak to people about you as a leader," said Rochelle. "Again," replied Sheila, "they see you before they hear you." Porsha stated, "Well, I know appearance is important because I see some colleagues dressing a certain way on meeting days than they do during regular days." "It is definitely about image," replied Rochelle, "I know of one colleague who makes sure she does not wear the same outfit twice to a meeting." "Really?" asked Melissa. "She literally remembered she wore an outfit to a meeting a month ago and stopped at the store on the way to the meeting to buy a brand new outfit and changed in the parking lot. Appearance is everything," Rochelle stated. Sheila added, "Yeah, people judge you on how you look."

"Well ladies, I think we are at a good stopping point. I really appreciate your openness today. Does anyone have any last remarks?," I asked. Sheila then stated,

> I think as Black women we face challenges that other people do not have. We have to think about things they don't. We have to always be on guard and aware of what people may be thinking or saying. We have to be ready to combat those stereotypes and negative perceptions people have. I hate it. I hate it that we have these struggles that other people don't have or understand.

"I hope by doing this study, we are able to help others understand what women and more so, Black women, deal with," I stated.

Summary

This chapter focused on data organization and the processes used to analyze the data. Data were gathered through the use of semi-structured interviews and later transcribed. The interview data were organized and separated in secure files until the analysis began. Initial themes emerged through the data collection process. Transcription data were coded and categorized and aligned to a particular theme. Brief vignettes of each research participant were shared in an effort to help others understand their lived experiences and the phenomenon being studied.

The interview data gathered in this study was then used to create a composite counter-story in which the six personalities from the research were placed in a plausible scenario and given the opportunity to dialogue about their experiences with race and gender related barriers and their shifting practices.

CHAPTER V

CRAFTING HER BRAND: SHANA'S STORIES OF SHIFTING

This chapter of my study serves as a composite portrait informed by my autoethnographic data as well as interview data obtained throughout this study. It examines shifting strategies used to combat gender and race related challenges. Inspired by the work of Oakley (2011) who explored a day in the life of Meredith, a young female White principal, I sought to provide readers with a composite narrative of a week in the life of Shana Thurman, a young female Black principal who engages in shifting. However, because my work focuses on African American women, my work provides a counter story to Oakley's work. Oakley's composite story of Meredith, a principal under the age of forty, was developed through an analysis of data from her five research participants. Oakley's composite portrait was used to protect identity of herself and her participants. Actual interview data from the six principals as well as my autoethnographic data from my journal reflections, emails, and interview notes informed my composite character. Therefore, this composite narrative will serve as a comparison of the experiences of a Black and White female principal.

Composite Portrait: The Story of Shana

As a new first year principal who is also female and African American, thirty-three year old Shana had learned that the position of a school administrator was very political. One's identity and image is critical in how one is perceived by stakeholders.

She has learned that a great deal of her success depends on her interactions with the general public. Almost daily, she encounters circumstances that warrant her to utilize shifting strategies in order to bypass gender and race related obstacles. The scenarios provided in this account deal with all the instances of shifting that occurred within the timeframe of one week.

May 10, 2013 Yesterday, Shana received a phone call at 2 pm stating that her school would serve as the host site for a media event in which the district would receive a national award. The event would be of a large caliber and be televised. Immediately, she began contacting the appropriate staff members to spruce up the building. Her Fridays are generally dress down days, so she sent an email out to staff members letting them know that the news media, board members, and the superintendent would be present. Therefore, if they were planning on dressing down, they would know that they would have guests in the building in case they wanted to alter their wardrobe and wear something more professional.

Before she left the office, she received an email that a few of her teachers had called district office questioning the fact that she had requested that they reapply for a school level leadership position within the school. Shana has the final say on which teachers are able to serve as the school level leaders. In order to increase their buy in and ensure that they would be fully committed to serving the upcoming school year, she asked that they reapply and re-interview for their position. She informed them that they would more than likely be selected again but wanted to provide the full staff an opportunity to apply. Because they were unhappy about having to reapply, several

teachers chose to email district office requesting a meeting. Much to their dismay, district office met with them and told them that Shana was within her rights in having them reapply and that technically she could start all over with a new staff.

Upon reflecting on this situation, Shana wondered what made this group of teachers feel it was acceptable to "go over her head" on this issue. Without coming to her to discuss the situation, they felt comfortable enough and entitled enough to simply go above her to question her decision. While Shana did not mind someone "double checking" if she was within her limits to have them reapply, she wondered would they have done this had she been a male? Would they have done this had she been White? She even wondered if it was an issue of age or experience level. Could it have been because she was a first year principal that they believed she did not know what she was doing? Or, could it have been them thinking that because she was young she was also immature. Did this make it acceptable for them to go over her head to report her actions to a superior? What if she was a firmer leader like a male? They may have feared she would retaliate because of their actions thus causing them to realize that going to her supervisors was not the right thing to do. Even Shana's supervisor questioned their actions and knew that they did not follow proper protocol.

The night before the news event, Shana spent a large amount of time sifting through her closet trying to determine what she would wear to the media event. Being that she was pregnant, her options were limited. She would not be able to wear a business suit or heels. However, she chose to wear a pair of maternity trousers, a red shirt and a black blazer. Adorned with a scarf and pearl earrings, her choice of attire was

business enough for being “on camera” despite her large pregnant stomach that generally limits her wardrobe to oversized blouses. Shana wore her small framed glasses because they tend to look more professional versus her thick black frames that were a bit trendier. She really wanted to project a polished image because this particular event would be televised.

Thirty minutes prior to the announcement being made, she was informed that she needed to give a welcome speech and introduce the superintendent. Shana quickly headed to her office to type up a brief script. She wanted to make sure she said just the right thing as she knew this would be televised and viewed by different audiences, not just the predominately African American school community she served. The event was related to the topic of character. When thinking about character, she immediately remembered a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King. What better person to use a quote from than one that stood for togetherness and equality. Therefore, she chose to use one of his quotes as a part of her introduction. She talked about service as her school provides clothes to the homeless once a month. Shana did not want to say “homeless” as the word seems inhumane and carries such a stigma. Not all the individuals they help are truly homeless; therefore, she used the words “less fortunate” to describe those individuals. Again, she wanted to be as politically correct as possible. Shana felt that using the term homeless invoked the image of people who stood on the corners with signs or slept under the overpasses she had seen. She had students who attended her school that were homeless and thought about how awkward they would feel with her talking about how the school feeds the homeless. While she knew that not all people who were

homeless fit the common image most Americans have in their minds, she did not want to offend her school community. Therefore, in her eyes she felt that less fortunate was more appropriate to describe the individuals that needed the food, clothing, and other services provided by the school.

Shana thought long and hard about what she would say to introduce the superintendent. It had to be just right. This is the man she reported to; he hired her. She had to make sure that when she spoke, he would still believe he made the right choice. He had to still see her as being the *right fit.* Therefore, after writing her speech and reading it to several staff members, she knew it was politically correct, polished, and would leave the right impression.

When the time came, Shana stepped up to the podium, welcomed the guests, and began her speech. While she was nervous, she felt confident that her words and the image she projected was aligned to who she wanted the world to see. After she sat down, she was sure to sit correctly with her legs crossed at the ankles and her hands clasped in her lap. She gave gentle head nods as the speakers spoke and smiled at the appropriate times. Shana had to show she was dignified and knew how to conduct herself in such settings. She thought about the stereotypes that she needed to combat. So, she made sure her wedding ring was turned towards the audience so that people would not stereotype her as another "unmarried pregnant Black woman." Sadly, the public still judges unwed mothers negatively. She recalled a time when she received a parent complaint about a teacher who was pregnant outside of wedlock. While the teacher was phenomenal, the parent requested that she find other job as she was not a good role model for the students.

This example is being shared to show that the public judges individuals who serve in particular roles such as leadership positions and positions that can influence children. Therefore, one's identity and image is always under scrutiny.

After the event, Shana made an announcement allowing her staff to leave early for their efforts in preparing for the event. She was called into the reading room as the custodian stated that there was leak. When she got there, the staff surprised her with a baby shower. At that time she shifted from an assertive leader to an equal and appreciative colleague. Forgetting about the challenges of the day such as dealing with teachers who had gone over her head to resolve a dispute regarding a policy she implemented, to thanking them in their efforts in planning such a wonderful event. Relinquishing her power to be submissive as they *ran the show,* she had to sit back and allow them to take lead. Within hours, she went from a leader in the public eye giving a speech and taking charge of a large scale event to shifting into a submissive role in the eyes of her staff. Shana fought to hold back tears of appreciation as she still wanted to be the woman in charge. But a shift was needed and she allowed her staff to see her true self.

Once Shana got home, she shifted into her nurturing, motherly role. Her husband had recently had surgery. So, she tended to him by giving him his dosage of medication and preparing his dinner. Because of his injury he chose to stay at home versus traveling with her for the weekend. Shana packed up their children to go spend mother's day weekend in their hometown. When she got to her mother's house, she was able to shift back to her most comfortable role, a daughter. In her mother's home, she had no need to

shift. She could be herself and revert to her home codes. Shana's mom fulfills her role as a grandmother and mother as Shana allows her mom to tend to her children. Shana can be her mother's baby. She does not have to shift between multiple identities. There, she is no longer "in charge." There, she is home.

May 13, 2013 Today, Shana prepared for her dissertation defense. As she dressed, she considered the image and identity she wanted to take on. The decision of what to wear was a difficult one. Generally, she would have easily thought to dress professionally with her hair up in a bun and wearing glasses. However, being that her dissertation committee was familiar with her work on shifting, she knew they would expect that. During her proposal defense, she was asked if she had self-hate because of the efforts she used to appear older and more mature because she had always seen her youthful appearance as a negative attribute. While Shana disagreed then, and even still now, her choosing to shift had nothing to do with self-hate. She still sees that in many situations having a youthful appearance and demeanor can serve as a barrier for some. Therefore, by Shana shifting her wardrobe, she did not want to inadvertently make the individuals on her committee feel as though she believed she had to shift in order to be taken seriously. Also, Shana contemplated not shifting her appearance being that they were familiar with her work, the topic, and the social justice aspect of the field, they should see past her appearance in the spirit of higher academia and not be succumbed to hegemonic principles that are so embedded in modern society. However, Shana chose to shift as it was comfortable for her, almost embedded in her psyche. She wanted to be sure she put her best foot forward. Therefore, she entered her defense wearing her hair

pulled back in a bun, light make-up, and her thin framed glasses. Shana also wore black trousers along with a black top and black blazer accented with a colorful scarf. She also wore a familiar staple, a pair of pearl earrings.

May 14, 2013 Today, Shana received a visit from her executive coach. Every first year principal is assigned a mentor/coach that helps them throughout the school year. Her coach serves as a non-biased party whom she is able to be open and honest with in regards to the principalship. They had worked together all year and were to have their final meeting today. Her coach was an older Caucasian woman who had served as a principal and assistant superintendent. They generally discuss things happening in the building and current issues Shana is dealing with. As they walked the building, they briefly discussed her dissertation topic. Shana's mentor definitely agreed with her belief that females have a more difficult time in the educational leadership setting than males. Her mentor discussed some the experiences she had encountered in her career, and they were aligned with some of the research Shana had read relating to how women are not taken as seriously as males. Shana and her mentor had spoken numerous times during the year about her leadership identity, and her mentor felt Shana's leadership style was appropriate for her staff as they needed someone who was warm and friendly in order to improve morale. She reassured Shana that she had had a successful year in her eyes and that she should not doubt herself. The mentor concluded the conversation as usual with, "Alright kiddo, call me if you need me." Shana wondered if her mentor had ever realized that she refers to her as "kiddo" almost every time they parted.

Shana began walking up the hall to conduct walkthroughs when an older staff member began to approach her. "I had to see who you were cause you looked like a student back there, and I was wondering who you were and why you were not in uniform," she stated. Shana replied, "I hope we don't have any students here who are pregnant, how in the world did you think that?" The staff member replied by saying that she could not tell Shana was pregnant from a distance. While this comment may not bother other people, it bothered Shana. Shana knew this particular staff member does not particularly care for her; therefore the comment was made to get under her skin. It worked; however, Shana laughed it off and continued walking down the hall. She thought to herself, what pregnant child would be walking around an elementary school?

May 15, 2013 Today, Shana noticed herself shifting around colleagues and parents. First, she was speaking with a student and parent whom were less fortunate. Shana considered them less fortunate as the child was on free lunch and generally wears the same clothing to school. It had been many times throughout the school year in which she had provided clothing for the family as well as even helped out paying some bills. Shana knew the parent and child lived in a less than ideal setting. As they were meeting, a large cockroach began crawling across the floor. Calmly, the parent and child alerted Shana by pointing in the direction of the critter. Shana's first instinct was to shriek and call the custodian to come kill and get rid of her little guest. However, she did not want the parent and child to think that she had "never seen a roach before." In Shana's eyes, to react in that manner was indicating that she thought she was too good to handle this bug by calling her custodian. Doing so would suggest that she was being what some people

term, *high sadity*. Shana had to maintain her home codes and let them know that this was no big deal. Shana could not lose her credibility with them. Therefore, she stood up nonchalantly, squashed the cockroach with her foot and continued talking without missing a beat. At the conclusion of the meeting and once the parent and child had left her office, she called her custodian to remove the bug's remains. She later reflected on her killing of the bug. Did she really think she was "too good" to kill the bug, if so then this a class issue. Or, could she have not wanted to kill the bug because when looking at gender, as a woman, she should not have to kill the bug because it can be considered a "man's job." Shana laughed to herself because so many politics exist surrounding her and this bug. Some individuals would have been mad at just the fact of the bug being killed, she thought about those individuals who believed all of God's creatures deserved to live. Shana thought about it for a moment and realized that she has killed many bugs in her life, but she chose not to clean it up because of her gender. She played the gender card and had her custodian come get it as he was a male, and he even expected to do it. Society had taught him as well that that was his role along with opening tight jars and taking out the trash. It was easy to rely on society's preset codes to get things done.

Shana began leaving her office when she was stopped by one of her tutors. She informed Shana that she did not know she was the principal when she first met her. She stated:

> I was wondering who that nice girl was that talked to me, honey, you look so young. I am sorry. But, I really enjoy working here and wanted you to know that this is a real good school you got here, and I feel blessed to be here.

Shana thanked her for her kind words and told the tutor that they were glad to have her here as well. It was amusing that as she was talking with the tutor, she kept her lips parted and shook her head with disbelief the entire time. She still seemed shocked that Shana was the principal.

A few hours later, Shana began heading out to conduct teacher interviews. As she was leaving a Caucasian parent, Ms. Baylor, approached her about her child getting hit with a bat at recess. The parent was upset and stated she was going to seek legal action. She stated that the teacher, an African American male, told her daughter that she did not get hit and to get back in line. Ms. Baylor stated that the students tried to tell the teacher that she did, but the teacher ignored the information. Shana told the mother she would investigate first thing in the morning as she needed to talk with the supervising teacher to get more details. Ms. Baylor stated she was going to take her daughter to the doctor to determine the severity of the injury. Shana provided her cell number to get an update on the child after the doctor visit.

Ms. Baylor called her back to state that the child suffered from a mild concussion and contusion to the head. Shana tried to contact the teacher to determine what exactly happened with the student, however, he did not return her call. Even though Shana's message stated it was urgent, she did not hear from him. Unfortunately, this particular teacher tends to avoid Shana when issues arise and addresses these with other staff members. He is a male and Shana is not certain if there are underlying issues associated with female leadership. Therefore, she ended her day wondering how her approach would be in addressing him as this issue is serious and needs to be handled firmly.

May 16, 2013 Today, Shana walked into the building and made arrangements for the teacher to come see her. He had not checked his voicemail and still did not know of the incident. As she called him in, he stood very firm by his account of the incident stating that the child was not touched with the bat. He kept stating that it was a plastic bat; therefore, it could not have caused a concussion. Shana tried to explain to the teacher that it could be possible he did not see the hit as the students saw it and the doctor's diagnosis confirmed it. The teacher continued to stand firm that his account of the incident was correct, and it was possible that the student did not want to participate so she may have pretended to be injured to get out of the physical activity. Shana told the teacher that legal action was being sought, and he needed to accept that the incident was possible. She explained to him that she would coach him on how to have a conversation with the parent in order to "smooth things over." He responded that he did not need her coaching as he knew what to say. At this point, the shifting began.

Shana realized that it was time to move from being the stereotypical nurturing female leader to one who is more assertive and direct. Therefore, she said quite firmly:

> I need you to realize that it is possible she got hit. I need you to accept that and fix this. I do not need to hear you continue to blame the victim and continue believing that everyone else is wrong in this situation. You need to take responsibility that you dropped the ball by not tending to the child and showing your compassion. You messed up, but it is okay. Things happen and we learn from it and move on. You need to call Ms. Baylor and express your apologies. This is not the time to try to say she did not want to participate nor is it time to explain your side and say she did not get hit. If you want to come out of this without a lawsuit, you need to accept that this could have happened and that you should have inquired more into her injury. You need to show remorse and fix this.

He tried to interject, and Shana said, “Are you going to let me finish?” He put his head down and said “yes, Mrs. Thurman.” She continued, “You are going to call Ms. Baylor now and make this right. Let her know that if there is anything he needs, let us know and we will assist. You need to go make the call, but not here in my office since you did not want to be coached. Come back and let me know what she said.” A few moments later he entered her office and told her the conversation went great. The mother was no longer pursuing legal action. The teacher also stated that he understood that this could have been avoided had he taken the time to listen to the student and showed compassion. Shana slammed her desk with both hands and threw them up in the air. She exclaimed, “Touchdown, we finally made progress.” The teacher chuckled and said, “I get it, I get it. Thank you.”

Shana thought that this dialogue between the male teacher and herself would have been different had she been a male. First, she believed he would have returned her call immediately as it seems to be an issue of respect. Also, she believed he would have more readily accepted that the incident could have been possible without trying to continuously refute the claims. They engaged in a back and forth dialogue that Shana believed would not have happened had Shana been a male, or better yet, a White male. She believed he would have showed a male more respect by being quiet and merely acting on his supervisor’s request without argument.

Shana’s age could have played a role since the teacher was much older than herself. He may have expected her to yield to his age and wisdom and trust that he *knew* how to do his job and how to interact with parents. In this scenario, the verbal exchange

between Shana and teacher could have also been different had she initially addressed him in a more assertive manner by being firm and telling him what she expected versus trying to explain and guide him into understanding the problem at hand. By doing so, Shana was taking on the motherly aspects of being a woman leader and trying to nurture and teach versus simply reprimanding the teacher and getting quick results.

May 21, 2013 Today, Shana's school had an event to promote literacy. They sponsored a literacy night in which parents were invited to the school to hear from a local author, learn about reading strategies and various online resources, and attend our school book fair. In order to get the students excited about reading, Shana and her staff encouraged students to dress as their favorite book character. Staff members also took part in the event by dressing as Fancy Nancy, Junie B. Jones, and many Harry Potter characters. Shana thought long and hard about if she was going to participate in the event and decided to do so. She thought that dressing as a book character was a great way to show that as the school leader, literacy was important to her. Therefore, she dressed as *The Old Lady that Swallowed a Fly*. Being that she was already of a larger size due to her pregnancy, she was able to pull the character off quite well. Students, as well as parents, loved her outfit as they made positive comments about it throughout the school day. Around lunch time, she was visited briefly by one of her district leaders. Shana quickly explained the reason for her attire in relation to the day's theme. It appeared that her boss understood. Later, Shana received a call that her attire and overall demeanor was too relaxed. She gathered from the conversation that her attire was inappropriate and

possibly unprofessional as it did not signal that she was “serious” about the upcoming end of grade testing.

After the call, Shana changed her clothes and proceeded to attend the evening’s events out of costume. While various staff members and parents asked her why she had changed as they had been looking forward to seeing her, she explained that the outfit was too hot.

In retrospect, Shana spent the day shifting. She started her day trying to be a leader that was involved and supportive of the school’s initiatives, yet her attire spoke a different language and told a different story to her supervisors. She definitely believed principals must know the politics associated with the field. While she sensed that in her particular setting she needed to be business minded at all times, she was not sure other principals would have faced reprimand in the same scenario. In fact, she believed a male would have been lauded for being involved with the school community. It is even possible a White female would not have received any reprimand as it is expected for them to be involved in such acts as they tend to be very mothering and nurturing and involved like the term “soccer mom” connotes. It is possible that as a Black woman, Shana was expected to be firm and tough. Therefore, her youthfulness, energy, and spiritedness were opposite of the expectations her supervisors had created in their minds as the “fit” they were looking for thus anything appearing contradictory to that image was deemed inappropriate. So, while her mind should have been fixed on improving her school and helping her students find success, it was now focused on what she did wrong and how she could go about proving and maintaining her fit in the eyes of her bosses.

Shana and Meredith: Sharing Similar Struggles and Similar Shifts

The previous section of this study detailed a week in the life of Shana Thurman. As indicated, Shana was a young, Black female who was a first year administrator. Over the course of one week, Shana encountered various situations in which a barrier was met that she felt had a racial or gender based implication. She even encountered situations that dealt with age and class implications. She utilized shifting strategies during these encounters in an effort to navigate through the circumstances. While many of the scenarios shared could have also been issues of classism and ageism, this study sought to focus on those related to gender and race. However, it is important that other barriers that marginalize individuals be recognized as they do intersect.

Comparison Point 1: Wardrobe/Image

As discussed throughout this study, shifts are made to make individuals become better "fits" for their positions and roles. Shana made shifts in regards to her wardrobe by making sure she projected a particular image in the public eye when she had the media event. She believed her image had to be acceptable to the public but she also took care to ensure that her wardrobe and demeanor combatted any stereotypes that the general public may have had about Black women and even pregnant women.

When looking at the work of Oakley (2011) and a day in the life of Meredith, a young Caucasian principal, she too, dealt with shifting in efforts to change her appearance based on her involvement with stakeholders. Oakley (2011) writes,

> **5:30 am.** After showering, Meredith is deciding what to wear. She knows she has Rotary and a Leadership Meeting today where parents will most certainly be in attendance, so a jacket and dress pants are probably appropriate. . . . During her

> first few years in the principalship, however, Meredith has realized that her appearance alone can have a significant impact, both positive and negative, in her work as a principal. She also realizes that she is, in fact, a Caucasian, middle class, heterosexual female, which also influences how she perceives others and how others perceive her. (pp. 91–92)

In the excerpt above, Oakley discussed how Meredith shifted her appearance for her stakeholders. Again, this strategy is one that Shana and many other individuals in leadership roles employ. Meredith was aware of the stakeholder group she would be serving and made sure she presented herself in a certain manner. Also, as Meredith prepared for the next day she made a decision to not dress down. Oakley writes, "Meredith gets ready for bed and picks out an outfit to wear tomorrow. Even though it is technically dress down day, she doesn't wear jeans on Fridays" (2011, p. 104). I am curious as to why Meredith chose to dress differently from her staff on a day in which individuals can dress casually. Unfortunately, it is not clearly stated in her text. However, I assume it is for the same reasons that have been discussed in this study such as wanting to maintain a differentiation from the staff and stand out as the school's leader.

Comparison Point 2: Age

Shana discussed how her youthful image was one that seemed to serve her negatively as people equate youth with immaturity and lack of wisdom and experience. The scenarios shared that discussed how she tried to invoke a spirit of maturity throughout her wardrobe choice at her dissertation defense, her feelings when her principal mentor referred to her as kiddo, and the offense she took when a staff member

thought she was a pregnant child walking down the hall were all illustrations of how Shana believed her age is a hindrance to her professionally.

Even though Meredith and Shana are different in regards to race, they share some of the same struggles in terms of other hindrances such as age. Meredith dealt with issues related to her youthful appearance. She had to shift in her communication and appearance. Oakley (2011) writes,

> Because classified employees cannot work over 40 hours, [Meredith] answers the phone until 7:30 am, intentionally making her voice sound lower and deeper because she has been told that she sounds like a kid on the phone.
>
> Within her own school building, Meredith is frequently mistaken by visitors to be a teacher, a secretary, or an office assistant. She recalls several events in which her appearance has led others to assume that she is not, in fact, the principal. One morning, Meredith remembers, a very angry parent came storming into the front office. Meredith was at the front desk because her secretary had not yet arrived. She listened to the mother's story and tried to calm her down. Meredith explained that the parent could set up a conference with the teacher in order to discuss her concerns. The mother began using profanity, and Meredith asked her to leave until she was calmed down. About an hour later, the angry parent returned. Meredith was back in her office during this time because her secretary had arrived for the day. The parent approached the front desk and asked to see the principal, and Meredith walked up the hallway. When the parent saw Meredith, she yelled, "I do NOT want to talk to that sassy secretary again! I asked for the principal!" "Ma'am, I am the principal," Meredith calmly replied. (pp. 93–94)

In another excerpt, Oakley (2011) states ". . . She [Meredith] is mistaken for one of the high school students by a Rotary member, who quickly apologizes, but continues to focus on how young she looks" (p. 98). As this situation describes, Meredith was not readily identified as the principal of the school due to her appearance. She discussed in the other excerpts how she took great care to ensure her wardrobe was befitting of a leader. As revealed in this study, Shana made these same shifts. Staff members and

other stakeholders made remarks geared to her not looking like the principal. This was something she constantly dealt with. She felt as though she had to be proactive daily in regards to her appearance and how she interacted with stakeholders.

Meredith also talked of how she changed her voice to sound more mature in conversation as people thought she sounded like a child. In this scenario, she changed her projection and the intonation of her voice. However, in the shifting strategies revealed through this study, many women of color shift their voice to hide certain accents and/or to alter their vernacular. None of the women interviewed talked about shifting their voice because they sounded young. They only shifted to sound more educated in particular settings or they relaxed their language based on the educational level of the parents they may have been dealing with.

Comparison Point 3: Gender

As stated earlier, Meredith and Shana differ in regards to race, yet they face similar issues related to gender. Oakley (2011) discussed a scenario in which Meredith felt her gender benefitted her in acquiring resources for her school. She wrote,

> On her way, she sees the maintenance guys have come to work on the air in the computer lab. Even though she knows she doesn't have time, Meredith stops and chats with them. She jokes with the maintenance guys about her school being their favorite even though she realizes that she is probably playing the "girl card." As she walks away, she notes that she doesn't really care if she is playing the "girl card" if she is able to get her school what it needs as efficiently as possible. (pp. 96–97)

Shana believed her gender allowed her to get more assistance in her building when it came to needing certain things done. She felt that she at times played the "poor little

woman" card. This was evidenced in the issue with the roach in her office. She generally calls on her custodians to deal with pests. Her rationale is that she is a woman therefore she is afraid of bugs. While she is a very strong woman, she is able to rely on this seemingly societal norm that women are afraid of insects. Therefore, without question, her custodial staff handles such pest problems with no second thoughts as they are males and have subscribed to the generalization that most women are scared of bugs.

In regards to the ease of inquiring resources, these same sentiments were shared amongst some of this study's participants as they, too, believed it was their gender that helped them secure resources for their school. These individuals all stated that this resource acquisitioning was easier for them because of their gender. While I have not personally seen my gender benefit me in this way, it may have been possible that it has and I simply thought my kindness got me the resources versus my gender.

Comparison Point 4: Female Leaders

While many of Shana's issues she believe are related to her gender, age, and race, overall, Meredith seemed to have issues related to her gender and age. Oakley talked about the struggles women in leadership positions have in regards to navigating the line between boss and friend because it is difficult territory for young female leaders (Oakley, 2011). According to Oakley, Meredith tries very hard not to cross that line, boss versus friend, but admits that she has found herself in some gray areas—

> Being young and female creates a very lonely position since you cannot cross that line of professionalism and friendship or personal relationships in the workplace, and that's kind of what will sometimes happen. And my husband has even said when you stay somewhere too long, you develop friendships, and that's just the girl part of me sometime. (2011, p. 103)

While Shana encountered the gray areas of being young and maintaining positive relationships with her coworkers, she tried hard not to establish friendships as this could cause additional troubles and add to the barriers she already face. There are other factors and dynamics that may exist here. As discussed in the literature review, African American women can run into difficulty in leadership positions because of the Queen Bee syndrome in which many other Black women view women of power as competition and/or threats. However, again, that is not the focus of this study. I am merely pointing out an additional obstacle that Black women in leadership roles may face that their White counterparts may not to the same extent.

The experiences shared in this chapter are but a small sample of the type of situations Black women encounter daily in which they have to shift their identity to fit their work space. Whether dealing with parents, supervisors, or subordinates, they have multiple identities that they must shift between depending on the person and/or circumstances. Oakley discussed challenges similar to these in regards to the different roles Meredith struggled with such as being a wife, mother, and principal. While I am sure many people deal with this same type of identity management, I think the struggles encountered by women of color are unique, complex, and far different from those experienced by others. So, while much information can be gleaned from comparing a day in the life of a White female principal with that of a Black female principal in an effort to understand the struggles they share, it is vital to remember that Meredith's perspective is that of the master narrative. Meredith's experiences are not those of individuals who live in the margins of society and deal with the intersectionalities of race,

gender, and class. While individuals can see similarities in the two narratives because of gender, Meredith's experiences cannot fully speak to those of African American women.

Summary

To strengthen this study, an autoethnography was created from interview data, a self-study, and document analysis. The autoethnography was later combined with interview data from the six interviewees to create the composite character of Shana Thurman. The composite portrait detailed a week in the life of a young Black female principal and compared it to a composite narrative of a young, White female principal. Comparisons were made between the experiences of the two administrators which highlighted the themes of young women needing to prove themselves based on their gender and age. These themes are unpacked and discussed in following chapter.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to discover how African American female principals formulate their professional identity. It also sought to explore how Black female principals shift their identities to fit their work spaces and meet the needs of their stakeholders. By using interpretive phenomenology as the methodology and conducting interviews with six Black female principals, I was able to hear the experiences of these women and ascertain their methods for shifting and navigating. Also, a composite narrative was written based on participant interview data combined with autoethnographic data obtained through an interview and a document analysis of a daily log of events, excerpts from a reflective journal, relevant emails, and memories. The autoethnographic focus allowed me to share my voice as an African American female who uses shifting strategies to navigate various work spaces. The data provided through the interviews and self-study were situated in the context of a composite counter-story and composite portrait. Several themes emerged from the data and were illustrated through the composite narratives.

Emergent Themes

Upon completion of the data analysis, several themes emerged. Some of these themes seemed to emerge during the principal interviews and during the collection of autoethnographic data. As stated earlier, just the act of collecting data generates themes.

Through the data collection and a thorough review of the interview transcriptions, most of the women admitted to changing some aspect of themselves because of their race or gender. While my self-study revealed the same themes generated from the six interviews, the issues of gender and age were also prevalent and noted in the work of Oakley (2011). An overarching theme was that all of the women were driven by two motivations: one was to prove themselves and the other was to disprove negative perceptions.

Many of the interviewees discussed why they felt they had to prove themselves. Porsha felt that she had to prove herself because of the demographic make-up of her school community. Being that she had several staff members who were Caucasian and her most vocal parent group were affluent Caucasians, she was very concerned about proving her ability to be principal and changing any negative perceptions they had about African American women in general. Rochelle, Sheila, and Melissa discussed having to prove themselves because of their age as well as their gender and race. Hailey had to prove herself to her Black families to let them know that she related to their struggles and experiences even though she was now in a position of power.

African American women shift to battle the myths, and they are constantly monitoring how they are being perceived. They do this in an effort to disprove and transcend society's misconceptions about them (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). The ladies interviewed also discussed shifting in order to dispel myths and stereotypes about African American women. They seemed to make it their duty to change people's perceptions about Black women. For example, because Sheila is very passionate about

her students and it shows strongly when she talks to her staff, she shifted her mannerisms, voice levels, and actions in an effort to steer away from the "angry Black woman" stereotype. Melissa let her staff know that all because she was female, she was not going to be overly sensitive on issues and her expectations would remain high and consistent. She would not succumb to the stereotype that women were weak and submissive. Porsha stated that before entering any meeting or function with the community, she considers the image she wants to leave with the audience.

These two motivations led the women of this study to shift their leadership identities. In an effort to do this, they shifted and navigated their identities by engaging in certain practices. Most of the women altered or adjusted their speech and behavior depending on their audience. This is a common shift according to the Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) study which found that 79% of their respondents changed their speech and mannerisms. I also noted the three younger women, as well as myself, that were interviewed stated that they adjusted their physical appearance because of their age. They felt that they had to appear older in an effort to be taken seriously. Therefore, other common themes were appearance and communication shifts. Again, these themes were present in the composite portrait of Shana and in the Oakley (2011) composite portrait of Meredith.

Lastly, these women believed that there were certain benefits and hindrances associated with being a female and/or being Black. These themes seemed to vary between the women but were similar based on the settings in which they served. For example, women that served in majoritarian settings encountered barriers amongst those

that were demographically different from themselves whereas women who worked in settings that were demographically similar were welcomed and accepted and saw their race as a benefit.

Common themes that arose from this study were that African American female school administrators made shifts in order to dispel stereotypes and myths and to prove themselves. They noted making changes to their personal appearance, behavior, and communication styles. While different women focused on different aspects of their identity, the central theme remained the same, they all felt they had to shift their identity because of their race and/or gender. They had to consider who they were and construct an identity befitting to their environment.

I was also able to address my initial research questions through an analysis of the responses of the six interview participants as well as data retrieved from my interview and presented through the portraiture.

Research Question 1

The first research question was how do African American female principals construct and navigate their leadership identities based on their gender and race? It was evident through the discussions with the research participants that being a leader who is female and African American presents challenges that many males and Caucasian women do not face. Some of the challenges the women expressed were feeling as though they had to prove themselves because of their race and/or gender (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Porsha noted the following:

> The Caucasian people, you have to prove to them that you can do it. You come in with all this stuff, great. Show us. It's like a trial basis. You have to show them who you are. One thing that is a positive and that has helped me with that is my accountability and high expectations. . . . High expectations have helped me set the tone for staff.

Sheila stated:

> I made changes to my identity because I think being in this field, I felt like I had to prove myself a lot up front because of my age. People assume that in a principal role it is someone older, people questioned my experience. I felt like there were things I had to change like how I dressed or how I communicated . . .

Rochelle shared:

> I kind of consider myself somewhat like a fun, youthful person. So as a leader, I kind of felt like I had to step away from that in a sense, to portray a more mature wiser leadership style. Meaning for one, I am young. I didn't want people to figure hey she's young she doesn't know anything. I wanted to come in like I knew what I was doing and that I was experienced and that type of thing. I wanted to prove that looks could be deceiving. I may be young but I know my stuff.

Uniquely, this sentiment was revealed in the literature review. According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004), African American women shift to battle the myths; scan, survey and scrutinize the environment; wall off the impact of discrimination; seek spiritual and emotional support through religious communities, friends, and family members; and retreat to the Black community and abide by home codes.

The interviews with the six participants revealed that they shifted in their roles in efforts to battle the myths and stereotypes and transcend society's misconceptions. Through dialogue with these women, they were skilled at scanning, surveying, and

scrutinizing the environment to be cognizant of how they were being perceived thus calling them to action in regards to the need for shifting. Porsha recognized this battling of the myths. She explained**:**

> One of the things that I have to do is remind myself of who I am and where I am. That is because of my race and not my gender. Before, I go to this PTA meeting or this golf match, I remind myself of who I am and what people's perceptions are and try to make sure that I shoot the perception down . . . because sometimes the person they interface with in a position of power is a Black woman.

Sheila said:

> I'm gonna state my point; I can be pretty passionate and aggressive about it. Sometimes it is misinterpreted and race may be viewed as the background of that and then coupled with the gender piece, I am just 'gonna go ahead say it, as the angry Black woman thang, people assume, I say that's not anger . . . that passion.

Melissa explained:

> I do understand that with my age sometimes you can be perceived differently and they [staff] don't take you seriously . . . Often and this is just my perception, I think often that young women have more of a difficult time with people hearing or understanding the purpose. They don't know what your true work ethic is and if you deserve to be where you are. It's not that you have to show how smart you are but you do have to let them understand that I am not here because of who I know. I am here because I am a hard worker, and I believe in educating our kids.

I even noted that some of the women abided by home codes in an effort to maintain positive relationships with other African Americans stakeholders such as their students' parents. In the composite portrait of Shana, she resorted to staying true to her home codes as she dealt with a parent in her office. She did not want to appear *high sadity* when it came to killing a roach in her office. So, she was nonchalant when killing

it as to show that seeing a roach was not novel for her. Even though her position was one of power and status, her status was not too high in which she did not forget where she came from.

Therefore, to answer the initial research question of how Black women construct and navigate their leadership identities, the women's whose experiences I have studied seem to construct their identities based on their work settings and the perception they wanted others to have. It appeared that the perception they wanted them to have was one that refuted any negative stereotype that was affixed to their gender and race. Therefore, they construct and navigate their identity by shifting based on their interpretations of what is needed in their particular setting or work space. As stated in the review of literature, how we explain, model, and understand who we are differs with different circumstances (Jung & Hect, 2004; Lakoff, 2004; Styker & Burke, 2000). These women changed aspects of themselves or who they believed they were based on their settings and differing situations. Slay and Smith (2011) stated that one's identity was their self-concept based on their beliefs, values, motives, and experiences. Therefore, as this study finds, African American women sought to refute negative stereotypes attached to their gender and race. Therefore, this was one of the motives that shaped their professional identity.

Gender-based Barriers

There is an abundance of research that states that "pervasive discrimination in hiring and promotion, lack of sponsoring and mentoring, and the entrenchment of the good old boy network are barriers to female administrators" (Loder, 2005b, p. 741). In

this study, many of the women spoke of barriers similar to these in which they encountered based on their gender. These barriers were blockades that hampered their leadership in some form because of the stereotypes associated with female leadership. As discussed in the literature review, women are viewed as soft, weak, and incompetent. Males are often viewed as the standard for a leader. Because of this stereotype, some of the participants approached barriers to their leadership. For example, Sheila discussed the difficulties she has had being taken seriously as a female. In this scenario, Sheila attributed her treatment to her gender. She stated:

> I will never forget there was this parent whose child was getting suspended. The child was on my hallway; we were departmentalized by grade level. The [student's] father was getting very aggressive. I was handling it. I told him if he did not calm down, unfortunately, I would have to ask him to leave. He became vocal about what his opinions were and was cursing at me and those things I was not putting up with. I told him again, Sir, I will ask you again to refrain from using profanity, please stop yelling at me. We can talk civilly, but this is not productive. He continued to tell me what I can do and where I can go, so I told him I would be contacting the SRO to remove him and his son from campus. I called the SRO but he couldn't come so I had to stand up at the door to get him to leave. He walked out, walked around the building and went straight to the principal who was a male. He told him I had disrespected him. I felt like I had done everything I was supposed to do and was justified in doing it. The SRO never came for me but made it to the front office finally and the [father] sat there with the two men and he complied and did what they asked him to do. I'm not going to lie to you I was mad. I was firing mad. What do you mean he came back in the building; I need him off campus. I told him to leave. That to me wasn't about age, because I was actually older than the principal it was definitely a gender thing. That's what I thought it was, and I would never forget that. It sticks out in my mind.

Also, Porsha spoke of having difficulties gaining the respect of her male teachers as they seemed to hold a sense of entitlement over her in regards to following her directives. Porsha stated, "I really believed sometimes they have a problem taking

authority from females . . . I deal with it every day." While they comply, she spoke of sensing that some of them still felt as though she was inferior to them.

The composite portrait of Shana revealed the same barriers and difficulties as Shana had difficulty with a male staff member that seemed to not show her the needed level of respect. Shana had attributed this to the fact that she was a female. The staff member always tried to over talk her and did not take her directives well.

Porsha also spoke of her gender being a barrier for her with a job opportunity. She discussed how she was an ideal candidate for a particular position and had the support of many people in high places; however, the position was given to a male who was determined to a better fit.

Melissa's experiences were a little different. When she began her role as a principal she felt that staff embraced her quickly because she was a woman as they had previously had a male leader. She stated:

> Now, do I feel like people will perceive a man differently and respond to a male differently than they respond to me? As far as my staff goes, yes. I just think that's because of the way of the world. I think that's where we have to go into the identity shifting because you can't go to that sister girl relationship so much and you have to be like, I like you but this is the job. I am a person that does not have a separation issue. I can separate work and professional. I can also separate our relationship period. If it doesn't work for me then okay, I'm done that's just who I am as a person. So, I did think it has played a part in how I am perceived but I think that my staff understands very clearly what my expectations are because of the way that I have delivered them; they probably will respond regardless just because I don't make decisions based upon my heart or my emotion or my sex. I base decisions on what is going to be best for the masses the 570+ kids. But I do think that from the beginning my staff was like, 'oh you're female, ok, great.' They were thinking we might have a little more lead way because she is a female and she might be a little warm and fuzzy in all actuality, I'm just getting to the warm and fuzzy. In the beginning, I was very work driven. They have said to me, 'hmm, we were really concerned last year because you were not nice' and I

> would say, 'oh, you didn't think I was nice. I really thought I was a very nice person.' They would say, "No, you were just really direct, but this year we actually see that you are being warm and fuzzy." That was because I needed to set the ground line and the stage. Please don't perceive me just being a female that you can come in here and cry and that can make it all better or you can come in here and do whatever and I would be like I understand. No, I do understand we all have families, we all have lives, I have two kids and a husband myself; however, I do have a job and my boss expects . . . I'm expected to do certain things by my leadership and so you have to be expected to do certain things as well and you can either do them or you might want to do something different or work somewhere different, but these are my expectations.

Melissa shifted from that perception of being a quiet and meek female and was very firm and clear about her expectations from the beginning. Studies show that women who display competence and intensity are viewed as cold, distant and perfectionist (e.g., Smith, 2008). Melissa encountered this dilemma initially because her passion and drive was strong and as a result her staff did not think she was kind. Melissa was aware of such stereotypes, but the success of her school was more important. Therefore, her shift was one set to rebuke the belief that female leaders were passive, and Melissa's actions was completely opposite of what the majority of her staff members expected.

Rochelle discussed how she made a conscious effort to construct her leadership identity as a cross section between male and female leadership attributes. She discussed how she tried to possess and display the warmth and nurturing aspect of female leadership coupled with the assertive and direct approach witnessed in male leadership. "It has been difficult because when the nice approach does not work, you have to get a little rough, that is so out of my character, but it seems to get the job done" she told. She held that men tend to be unemotional and that may be why they can draw the line and be about business, women are just emotionally connected by nature.

Hailey felt that she was hindered by her gender and stated that women tended to work harder than males in leadership professions. She believed women spent more time reflecting about the job and less time with their families. She revealed:

> As an African American female, we feel that we've got to be just as good or if not better than the White principal, be it female or male and because of that, I think that the expectations we have for ourselves are extremely high.

She stated that her gender has taught her the need to understand and get to know her White counterparts and to understand their thinking so that she can be successful in playing the game.

Through the autoethnographic data gathered that allowed me to create the composite narrative of Shana, I was able to see more clearly that many of the situations encountered dealt with barriers related to gender. These were even evident when I compared the experiences of Shana to Meredith. Gender related barriers affected all of the women mentioned in this study. For example, Meredith, the White female principal from Oakley's (2011) study stated,

> He (the male assistant principal) could just go down the hallway and tell [teachers] the same thing that I told them, but it was a very different response. Teachers would do whatever he said without questioning him. I just thought it was pathetic. That's when I realized that most elementary school settings have a staff that is mostly female. And I just think that females respond differently to females than they do males. They are less likely to question or challenge male leaders. (p. 165)

As evidenced here, female school leaders do face and recognize gender-related barriers.

The review of literature spoke to these barriers as well as the findings to this research. The gendered expectations of women caused there to be an automatic undermining of their effectiveness (Smulyan, 2000). It does not help the case for women leaders as there is much research out suggesting that males are intellectually superior (Smith, 2008). Again, one must remember that the male story is often told due to hegemony and the fact that the master narrative is more frequently told. This was evident in the research findings of this study. However, African American women not only deal with gender related challenges, but they are doubly marginalized as their race affects their role as well.

Race-based Barriers

The literature on African American women argues that they experience many barriers based on their race. As cited in Jean-Marie, Williams, and Sherman (2009), Black women experience conditions in which their authority is challenged, their competence compromised, and their power restricted. The study participants that have served in predominately Caucasian settings all articulated challenges associated with parents. They talked about how the White parents seemed to challenge them more about how they ran the school. Again, they sensed some type of entitlement coming from the parents. Melissa discussed how some parents enter her office saying, “I know this, and I know that, I know this person, I know that person.” However, Melissa is very firm with how she does business with parents and prides herself on remaining firm and consistent. She said, “I say the fact still remains, you can contact whomever you like to contact, but our policies still say A, B, C, and D. I am going to treat your child like I treat any other

child in this building." She admitted to sometimes changing her conversations based on the group of parents with which she interacts because she feels more comfortable with the African American parents.

Porsha encountered racial barriers with her new role because she was the first African American principal to lead Joyner High School. She believed what helped ease her transition was recent leadership accolades which seemed to placate the public and endorse her abilities as a leader. Porsha's role is quite political in a sense as the parents and school community have a strong voice. Therefore, she constantly faced challenges in which she had to be attuned to her behaviors and actions and the perceptions of her constituents. Porsha's staff was mostly Caucasian. She found herself having to prove to them that she could do the job. She felt that what helped her was having high expectations and holding them accountable from the very beginning. In order to overcome the barriers associated with her race, Porsha noted that she has definitely learned and utilized shifting and code switching strategies. Most of the women interviewed only ran into race-related barriers if they worked at a school that was mostly Caucasian.

The literature has stated that as relative newcomers to educational leadership in terms of race and gender, Black women educational administrators are especially susceptible to scrutiny. They must take great care in managing the race and gender expectations and stereotypes held by the different audiences they encounter in their interactions at work (Moore, 2009; Tillman, 2004a; Wright, 2008). As women of color, Black women violate the expectation that White males will continue to govern leadership

in education. Black women's difference and status as "other" represents a potential disruption to the status quo and threatens White teachers' and White parents' sense of privilege in the school system (Johnson, 2006).

Women who worked at predominantly African American schools found their race to be beneficial as they were able to identify and connect with the students and their families. In *African American Principals: School Leadership and Success*, Lomotey (1989) examined three principals' leadership in three schools with a majority of students of color. He argued that Black principals do well in schools that have a majority Black student population because the principals share a similar culture with the Black students.

In regards to this study, the women at predominately Black schools discussed how they had to revert back to their home codes. They did not want to be seen as the woman who was a "sell out" or one who could not relate to the plight of African American people. They did not want to be seen as Hailey was termed by a Black parent as "a Black slave who is just like them." Therefore, these leaders abided by their home codes in letting parents and community members of color know that they could relate and had their children's best interest at heart. Their race was a benefit in predominately Black schools as they were aware and familiar with the struggles some of their students endured.

Through review of the data gathered for the composite portrait of Shana, race was not a major barrier. While the portrait only described the course of one week, most of the barriers she encountered were related to her gender and age. This could be attributed to her school's demographic makeup because it was predominately African American.

Therefore her race seemed to be more of a benefit than a hindrance and thus it did not play a major role in many issues that arose.

The only time race was a factor was when Shana chose to recognize it when preparing for the televised public address. She purposely sought to shift herself in order to be a positive representation of Black women by ensuring she spoke, behaved, and looked as polished and as professional as possible. She did so to refute any of the negative stereotypes that the general public who viewed the broadcast may have had regarding Black females.

As evidenced through the descriptions above, gender and racial barriers exist and have affected our participant sample in various ways and to different degrees. My initial inquiry into how African American female principals construct and navigate their leadership identities based on their gender and race varies based on the obstacles they face related to their gender and/or race. As seen above, different barriers affect different leaders thus causing them to shift in an effort to overcome that barrier whether it is to prove themselves or to battle stereotypes. We will now move on the second research question which details the "how" to this inquiry.

Research Question 2

Upon understanding why African American female principals construct and navigate their leadership identities based on their race and gender, the question then becomes how do Black female administrators describe their experiences with shifting in terms of physical appearance, behavior and personality. This section will explore the

experiences the study participants and Shana had in relation to shifting their outward identity and appearance.

A common theme amongst all the women was the importance of image and dressing professionally. Key factors that were noted were that principals in the secondary settings were more stringent to their personal dress code of always wearing business attire, whereas elementary principals were willing to be more flexible in their wardrobe selections. Elementary principals found themselves engaging with students more and filling the need to dress down on occasions in an effort to be more involved with their students' activities.

It was also noted that the older professional women in the study were more accustomed to professional dress because of values instilled in them from their youth regarding appearance. As Ernestine stated, "I am old school, I still crease my pants." Again, it is plausible to say that individuals who are older value and subscribe to certain standards of dress that the younger generation may not. For example, Rochelle stated that, "I was informed by a colleague that she was told the reason she did not get a principal position was because she did not wear panty hose to the job interview." Therefore, the ideals of what constitutes a professional image can vary based on age and generation.

In regards to how professional attire is used in shifting, I will discuss some additional findings from the study. Sheila discussed how she only wore blazers and suit jackets on days in which she conducted interviews or had district level meetings. Originally, that was not her choice of attire until she was told that she looked like a

teacher. She went from wearing trendy earrings to a pair of pearls in an effort to "look the part." She did this because she knows "People's perceptions are based on what they see 98% of the time."

Sheila also shifted her appearance because of her age. She stated, "I felt like I had to prove myself a lot up front because of my age. People assume that in a principal role it is someone older . . ." Therefore, Sheila changed how she dressed. She said:

> I am almost embarrassed to admit this. So, I have a baby face, I know that and have been told this all my life. I got these chubby cheeks that naturally make you look younger. But, I bought some glasses that were not prescription so that I looked a little older. I changed my hair style, believe it or not, I can't believe it to this day, I did it. But, I was natural and had a natural afro. I was told by a mentor that I should change it because sometimes people don't take you seriously because as an African American woman people take it as being too aggressive looking or they can see you as being earthy and whimsical. I thought should it matter? Shouldn't my work speak for itself? The truth is and sitting on this side of it I understand it. Now I agree. People see you before they hear you. So, I relaxed my hair, I am embarrassed to tell this now, but I did, I relaxed my hair bought some glasses.

Rochelle also shifted her appearance because of her age. She was constantly being compared to a student which made her seek an outward persona that looked like a leader versus a middle schooler. Rochelle began wearing her hair in a style that looked more mature. She wore her hair in a bun versus wearing pony-tails and curls. She also began wearing glasses; however, later ended up actually needing them. Rochelle made a conscious effort to dress more professionally than she did in her assistant principal roles. She stated, "I would try to wear suits but more so I am a trousers and button down shirt leader . . . still professional."

Melissa noted that her age seemed to be concerning for many people as they have a hard time because they do not know your true work ethic. Again, they see youth as a negative attribute. While Melissa did not discuss the measures she took to combat the stereotypes associated with age, she did discuss the importance of dressing professional. She felt that she did not make a conscious shift to dress professionally because in prior leadership roles outside of her school she was accustomed to dressing in a professional manner. Melissa's wardrobe choices consisted of slacks or skirts and blouses. She stated that she did not own many suit jackets. Her main concern in regards to her look was ensuring that she looked neat and presentable.

Through a review of the composite narrative, Shana found herself shifting her wardrobe choices based on the stakeholders she would be around. For example, she revealed that she shifted her image on the day she was being televised to one that positively represented Black women. Therefore, she ensured that she was dressed professionally and made an effort to display her wedding ring so that viewers would not think she was pregnant out of wedlock which would strengthen a common stereotype that many Black women are single mothers.

Not only did the women of this study make intentional wardrobe choices in relation to their role as a leader, the women surveyed in Oakley's study also described created an intentional impression of professionalism. Oakley noted:

> During the data collection, participants mentioned the importance of having the right outfit to match their position, carefully avoiding matronly dress while simultaneously steering clear of any image that may be misconstrued as provocative. Participants discussed the need to align their dress with their particular agenda for the each day (e.g. suits for board meetings, pants and

> blouses for PTA meetings, etc.). Young female principals . . . are overly concerned about how they will be perceived by others due to their age and gender in their role as principal. (2011, p. 173)

In regards to behavior and personality, all of the women articulated a leadership identity that was transformative and embodied a coaching and supportive role for their staff. Even though the women wanted to take on this identity, certain barriers restricted the identity they sought to portray. Gender and racial barriers urged the women to shift how they communicated with their staff members and parents. This shifting was necessary for them to find success in their particular workspaces.

Porsha changed some of her behaviors to fit her workspaces by reaching out to the affluent population of her school. She did this by being in attendance at golf matches and swim meets. Porsha made strong efforts to build relationships with her students, their families, and the school community.

Melissa changed her behavior when she began her administrative role by being very direct in regards to her expectations of staff. She let them know her expectations were high and she remained firm and held them accountable. While they expected her to be the stereotypical passive and warm female leader, she began her term being results driven.

Hailey has changed her behavior to fit her work spaces by shifting to play the part. When she is in within the White community or around the less fortunate she adjusts her behavior and communication style. She stated, “If I need to speak very distinctively, because I am in the presence of the elite, I do that.” Hailey stated that she does this because they need to understand that she feels just as important and empowered. So, she

makes shifts depending on the audience. She also stated, "If I am in the company of my community where we are in a meeting and they use slang . . . my professional hat comes off. I become a part of who they are." Hailey also admits that around Black parents she tends to open up and be more transparent. She tells them,

> If you want your children to be successful, this is the behavior that is accepted. You can be African American, but don't be African American and act the way people think you are going to act anyway. Prove others wrong and teach your children this is the way we behave no matter what color you are. Change the perception; change your mentality.

In a sense, Hailey is teaching her students and school community to shift. Hailey changed her behavior to being more transparent because she wanted her Black parents to know that they were all on the same team. On this team, she wants her students to be able to find success and shifting is an important skill to have.

Rochelle changed her behavior by adopting behaviors that made her appear older. She also changed her behavior based on her audience. If she was around those who were elite, she tended to expose her credentials. She would discuss things that were of interest to them to show them that they were not so different. It was her way of letting them see a positive example of a Black woman. However, when she was around other Blacks, she would stay true to her home codes and not venture far away from the norms of the her audience. Rochelle changes and shifts her behavior by being bicultural. She did a lot of shifting in her prior setting when she was working with both African American and Caucasian populations. Rochelle stated, "I will never forget after I gave the closing remarks at an assembly, one of our Indian academically gifted student's parents

approached me and told me, ‘you speak so well,’ I was shocked and wondered what she expected.”

Shana changed her behavior when she dealt with the male teacher who dismissed the child who got hit with the plastic bat. She tried to shift into a more masculine role in which she was more aggressive and to the point versus showing her passive and nurturing demeanor. In that particular situation, she needed her directives followed, and she needed to be respected. Shana saw the conversation was not going in that direction; therefore, she had to shift because she was facing a gender and possible age barrier.

The respondents described how they made shifts in relation to their outward appearance and identity. The women articulated how using these strategies to navigate their work spaces were necessary and beneficial. Their awareness of the barriers they faced due to their gender and race has equipped them with the knowledge to know the benefit of altering themselves in some way in order to fit.

Research Question 3

The final research question dealt with how principals use identity navigation and shifting to “fit” their work spaces. As it has evidenced throughout this chapter, Black female principals definitely use shifting to fit their work spaces. They seem to instinctively determine what role they must play in different settings. Whether they are amongst colleagues or presenting to a group of parents who are demographically different from themselves, they know have to navigate their identity. While, I cannot say this is accurate for all Black women, it appeared that the women in this sample, as well as myself, were quite familiar with this concept and strategy.

Ranging from how the principals adjusted their attire on district level meeting days to how they engaged and communicated with parents at golf tournaments, shifting to fit any given work space is a necessity for career survival. As stated in the literature review, leaders must seek to understand, obey, and perpetuate the rules of fit to obtain support and career security (Anderson, 1990; Benham & Heck, 1998, Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Hernandez, 2007; Oplatka, 2006). In order to be a successful African American female administrator it is important that one is aware of the gender and racial challenges and strategies for bypassing them; it is critical.

All the women in this study believed that when they began the principalship they did not know how to effectively shift and that it was something they seemed to learn. There was no formal education or principal preparatory program that taught them about shifting or how to be politically savvy. However, as stated earlier, shifting is a skill that Black women learn via life. How it is used is based on their role in society.

Conclusions

While society is aware of the inequities that exist between women and men, many people may not be aware of the double challenge faced by African American women. According to Slay and Smith (2011), recent research suggests that "changes to the labor market can be attributed to social mobilization based on identities linked to race, ethnicity, gender, or age rather than traditional workplace structures" (p. 86). They further state that it is not possible for one to imagine their career without incorporating one's social context into it—such as aspects of lives—as the social stigma that may attach to one's race, religion, or gender. Therefore, when looking at one's career, one must take

into account these social constructions as they play a role in his or her professional success. Great care must be given to their professional identities as career success is associated with successful identity construction. To understand this phenomenon, this study focused on the identities of Black female principals.

Through usage of the theoretical framework of black feminist theory, this study sought to put the experiences and perspectives of Black women in the forefront versus their historical marginal position (Simien, 2004). Because there is a lack of research related to Black female principals, this study sought to explore the terrain. This research seeks to illuminate the blind spots as black feminism incites one to question society. Black feminist thought operates on the premise that the experiences and stories of women resemble others yet it calls for those to define their own reality, those who actually live and experience it (Collins, 2000c). In this study, our composite character Shana was compared to Meredith, a young, female Caucasian principal. Meredith provided the master narrative as she maintained White privilege but dealt with barriers related to her gender and age. Shana provided the counter story to Meredith as she dealt with issues of race and gender. Counter-stories are an important part of critical race research.

Similar to black feminist theory, critical race theory also hinges on the importance of giving voice to those on the margins of society. It was also used as the theoretical framework and lens to which this study utilized. Critical race theory calls one to understand that racism is a systemic condition that must be challenged. African American women leaders not only face the issues of gender but those of race. CRT scholarship also subscribes to the belief that the lived experience and voice of minorities

are of worth and must be heard. Therefore, these two frameworks were heavily employed throughout this work.

The African American female principals in this study revealed intimate opinions, viewpoints, and stories related to their experiences with constructing and navigating their leadership identity based on their gender and race. Their voices served as the medium for gaining pertinent data detailing their experiences. Based on the findings of this study, Black women leaders encounter gender and race related barriers that prompt them to shift their leadership identity to be successful in their work space. Like many African American women, the women of this study were definitely aware of their shifting behaviors and practices and understood why such practices are needed (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

Each of the six principals interviewed discussed their experiences with gender and racial barriers that affected their leadership and required them to make shifts to their identity. Their experiences dealt with their relationships with parents, staff, colleagues, and district level personnel. They talked about how they had to shift aspects of their identity to build relationships with their parents. They discussed how they had to let parents of color know that they truly understood their struggles. They also spoke of having to prove themselves to White parents who may have doubted their ability. The women who were situated in positions in which they served mostly Caucasians found themselves seeking ways to be accepted by that group of constitutes as well as determining how to maintain their status as leader despite the politics involved.

Meaning, they had to find ways to articulate their strength amidst a population whom held the power merely because of their cultural capital.

The principals discussed how their race and gender may have played a role in determining their fit for prior and even their current principal positions. Some of the ladies believed they did not receive certain positions because of their gender. However, most of the ladies that were principals of predominately African American schools felt they were chosen as a good fit because they were Black and female.

The purpose of this study was to hear the voices of Black female principals and how they construct and navigate their leadership identity based on their gender and race. While all school administrators deal with different barriers and challenges, this study focused on the voices of the marginalized whose stories often go untold. Because of that focus, the purpose of this study was fulfilled by giving African American women an opportunity to share a glimpse of their lives and their stories as it relates to school leadership. It is my hope that this study educated many and increased awareness to the struggles of this demographic population in relation to their careers. I believe this study highlighted their resiliency, their creativity, and their skill for ensuring their professional survival. In many ways it revealed that these ladies are keen to *listening to the music being played and changing the dance* as the introductory quote suggested.

Implications for Educational Practitioners

Based on the findings of this study, the following implications are made for practitioners in educational leadership:

1. Administrators need to be equipped with knowledge related to navigating their leadership identities because of the politics associated with the field of education. Many are not aware of the public relation type demands the position entails.
2. Programs that prepare individuals for the principalship should bring awareness to the many challenges they may face related to diversity such as their gender, race, age, and sexuality. These programs may also need to focus on helping leaders learn to navigate and shift to bypass such barriers.
3. Because the experiences of African American women in leadership are omitted from mainstream literature, it is imperative that their perspectives are used to increase the knowledge base of women in administration (Smith, 2008).
4. Principals should have knowledge of the dynamic of fit as it can help them determine and possibly prepare for roles in which they wish to apply or in which they may be selected.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are being made for future research:

1. Conduct research that explores the intersectionality of race, gender, class on the experiences of African American female principals.
2. Conduct research that explores the experiences of a larger sample of African American female principals in order to increase generalizability.

3. Conduct research that explores the experiences of African American female principals using a regional sample to determine if racial and gender barriers are more prevalent in southern versus northern states.
4. Conduct research that compares the experiences of African American female principals to Caucasian female principals to note similarities and differences related to their race and gender.
5. Conduct research that compares the experiences of female principals of varying cultures to determine the similarities and differences faced across ethnicities.
6. Conduct research that compares the experiences of male and female leaders to determine the barriers each perceive they experience based on their gender.

Concluding Thoughts

As a first year African American female principal, I am in the process of constructing my leadership identity. I find myself altering some of my behaviors, adjusting my interactions, and even modifying my appearance. I am a leader; I must learn how to play the game. This game is political and in order to survive and advance to the next round, one must be a skilled navigator.

I have personally used observation as a learning tool and have witnessed many colleagues possessing multiple identities in different settings. I have noticed individuals who successfully adjust their identity when they are presented with different challenges and experiences. These observations compelled me to begin this study. I sought to understand the experiences of African American female principals and how they

addressed gender and race related challenges. I explored how they developed and shifted their leadership identities. I used interpretive phenomenology as my methodology so that I could glean relevant information about the phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants. I learned that all the women in the study made shifts of some kind and most were quite conscious of their shift.

Now that the study has concluded, I can speak on my thoughts regarding fit and the importance shifting. I believe all individuals in general make attempts to fit various situations. For example, in looking at one's personal life, teenagers go through stages in life where they may attempt to fit into different social groups. They may put forth the effort needed to try to join the "in-crowd" even if it means compromising who they are. When looking at those in the professional sector, people make attempts to fit various work roles and job types. This study focused on fitting into school leadership roles and the politics associated with gaining access to those positions. Fit was examined as it related to African American women and the barriers they faced due to their gender and ethnicity. I went on to discuss how Black women used shifting strategies to secure and maintain such positions. However, shifting strategies could also be used by other types of people. Women in general make shifts as I discussed in this work; however, I want to briefly provide examples on how other people in society make shifts. Many people make shifts to their physical appearance in an effort to meet society's standard of beauty. Women and men color their hair in an effort to hide grey hairs that could be indicative of aging. Women whom are overweight may wear dark colors to appear thinner. Males may take certain vitamins in order to increase their muscle mass to become more

attractive. These are examples of ways people in modern society make shifts to fit what they believe society considers as normal and/or beautiful. There are many examples of shifts people make; however, these are some that are most recognizable and obvious.

People shift their identities for multiple reasons and while some may relate one's need to change his or her self to a person being self-conscious or having low self-esteem, I believe people shift to survive. As society continues to change, people must do so as well in an effort to have their needs met. Shifting is akin to evolution in the sense that people must change to adapt to societal circumstances. For example, if the entire world became completely reliant on technology and the only careers to exist were related to computers, people would make a shift to be educated in that field. They would do whatever it took to be a good fit for those types of positions as that would be their only means of earning a living.

People shift to overcome obstacles that hinder their progression. This study focused on Black women and the challenges they face as school administrators. It spoke to their struggles and the situations they encountered as they navigated the political world of the principalship. This study evidenced the importance of being able to construct and navigate one's identity and revealed the prevalence of shifting amongst Black women.

I achieved my purpose through this study as the voices of the African American women interviewed will be heard. Their stories will give knowledge to others as purposed by black feminist theory. Through their voice, other principals who are African American and female will have knowledge of the challenges that lie ahead but will understand and be aware of the how to successfully navigate the obstacles that come their

way. Therefore, they too, will recognize the change in music warranting a change in the dance.

While African American women are aware of their positionality as a result of decades of oppression, many have chosen to either accept that place assigned by society while others have sought ways to remove themselves from that status. These women are the ones who persevere in an effort to not be labeled, classified, or placed in any category defined by society. These women, chameleons of society, have learned the tactics needed to navigate in a mainstream culture that holds the stereotypes of them as truths. They know how to play the *game*, to *craft their brand*, and to *change their dance.*

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you define/articulate your leadership identity?
2. When you first began the principalship did you feel you had to change any aspects of your identity, how so?
3. What do you do to shift your personal appearance for this position?
4. Describe your identity when you are among colleagues?
5. Describe your identity when you are around district-level personnel?
6. Describe your identity around students and their parents?
7. In what ways has your gender benefited and hindered your identity as a principal?
8. How have you used identity shifting to navigate through gender related challenges as a principal?
9. In what ways has your race/ethnicity benefited and/or hindered your identity as a principal?
10. How have you used identity shifting to navigate through race related challenges as a principal?
11. Have you seen identity shifting amongst colleagues and if so, how was it displayed?
12. If you were repositioned as an administrator at a school that was racially different from your own background, how would you shift your identity to “fit”?
13. As a principal, do you believe you are adept at effectively navigating work spaces?

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

1. Name

2. Age

3. Gender

4. Race/Ethnicity

5. Years as a Principal

6. Different School Settings Served

7. Description of Settings (Demographics)