

AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WORKING IN THE TWIN CITIES DURING THE  
MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY: DISCOVERING THEIR VOCATIONAL IDENTITY

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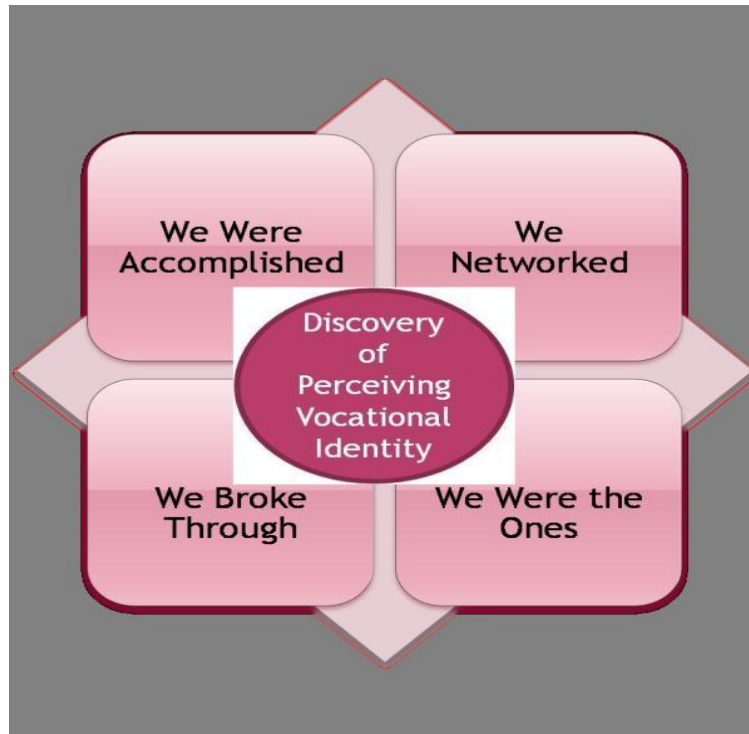
## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to all the women and who offered their narratives making it possible for me to complete this study. In addition to the women on these pages, I dedicate this dissertation to all grandparents, great aunts, and uncles.

## ABSTRACT

Existing scholarship has no examination of attributing the discourse on vocational identity to African American women, which in this study, has been defined as what a woman ought to be and do. African American women have been a subject of scholarly inquiry on having the longest history of paid work. This qualitative dissertation contains their narrative excerpts on working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century (1945-1985) from interviews with seventeen women aged 65 to 87. Analyzed topics were the concept of vocation, the ideology of vocation within the intersections of race, gender, and class related to paid and unpaid work. Hermeneutic philosophy advanced by Gadamer (1960/1975) formed the methodological approach to elicit themes of their perceived vocational identity.

*Figure 1.* Four interpreted thematic domains that are both attributes and outcomes of perceiving vocational identity.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The problem has been that existing scholarship has not examined vocational identity for the women in America who have worked the longest as a legacy of slavery (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977; Mullings, 1997; Wuthnow, 2003). Therefore, the purpose of this interpretative hermeneutical study is to discover the perceptions that reveal the vocational identity of African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century (1945-1985). The ideological expectation for all women was that the home served as the only place to exercise their vocation (Giddings, 1984; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002; Welter, 1966). Conversely, it appears that paid work was the societal expectation for African American women since slavery (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Jones, 1982, 1986).

Historical and contemporary studies have connected women and paid work; some include studies on the employment history of Black women. Black women have had a long history of paid work or employment in the U.S. attributed to slavery (Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977; Mullings, 1997; Mullings, Tobach, & Rosoff, 1980; Wuthnow, 2003).

The sweeping societal expectation for all women, before and well after World War II, was unpaid work in the home, which was the only source and strength of vocational identity (Giddings, 1984; Landry, 2000; Mullings, 1997; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002; Welter, 1966). African American women performed paid work outside of

their homes regardless of the fact that the overarching societal expectation for women was to focus exclusively on private home life (Giddings, 1984; Landry, 2000; Mullings, 1997; Mutari et al., 2002; Welter, 1966).

This research study defines vocational identity as what a woman ought to be and do Hurston (1937). This current study examined Black women's intimations about how they perceived themselves and what they thought they ought to do through their paid and unpaid work. This first chapter examines the origins and need for the study, its location and boundaries, the scholarly background, purpose and research question as well as the limitations of the study. In addition, key terms are defined, followed by the significance and overview of this research. This first chapter concludes with reflections on subjectivity (i. e. personal/self reflexivity).

### Origins of this Study

I conceived this research subject from watching a play by playwright Syl Jones entitled the *Daughters of Africa* (1990). It was a one-woman musical historical review of African-American women in the United States. The performer played a flight attendant who also narrated and acted the roles of various pivotal African American women known throughout history. The theater became a plane flying through time, with the audience members as passengers. The flight attendant guided the passengers through 300 years of American history. She pointed out in-flight magazine articles on African-American



women who were slaves, slave rescuers, domestics, educators, stage and screen performers, authors, journalists, legislators, and entrepreneurs.

In her role as the flight attendant, the performer would announce the oncoming turbulence that surrounded the lives of these women, turbulence that would come from the oppressive political, economic, and social forces, events, and issues ongoing in American society. This cosmic rattling served as an index of the forces that tested the courage and strength of African-American women.

While watching, I thought about the work each woman performed in this collective recollection of history. Work, whether paid or unpaid, has always been a common daily human experience. The play unfolded the work Black women performed during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in America, fixing them as the first paid female workers. This pattern continued into the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Aldridge, 1989; Smith, 1985). One of the challenges Jones's play presented was about unknown African-American women who were paid workers in the midst of turbulent political, economic, and social forces affecting their work yet creating the means for discovering their vocational identity.

*Daughters of Africa* (Jones, 1990) stirred in me questions about women, work, and vocational identity. This study proposes to capture the imaginative ways and means that working African American women in the mid-twentieth century created their vocational identity from their working experiences and contributed to that discourse.

### The Location and Boundaries of the Research

While watching *Daughters of Africa* I thought about the way each woman was portrayed in this collective recollection of history. The narratives in the play signaled that African American women thought about themselves through their work—who they were as women and as workers. I pondered this suggestion about the construct of vocational identity as the lens for analyzing working African American women. Unknown African-American women working in the midst of turbulent political, economic, and social forces, events, and issues could provide an enlarged understanding of vocation under oppressive circumstances.

Limited existing scholarship has addressed the insights African-American women obtained from their experiences of working. One would think that in order to be complete, the concept of vocational identity in the U.S. should include the voices of all people. For the purposes of this study, vocational identity has been defined by a quotation from a fictional character created by the author Zora Neale Hurston. The solo performer in the play quoted the character Nanny whom Hurston created. This quote prompted me to examine further the novel by Hurston containing the character, Nanny.

Hurston authored the novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, about the life of the character Janie. In conversations with Nanny, her grandmother, Nanny explains to Janie “. . . so it wasn’t for me to fulfill my dreams of whut a woman oughta be and to do” (Hurston, 1937, p. 21). This current study examines the perceptions held by Black

women about who they ought to be and what they ought to do through their paid and unpaid work. These perceptions have been defined as vocational identity elicited from their oral work history narratives.

Two other works, one fictional, the other scholarly, summarize Black women seeking to fulfill their vocational identity of what they ought to be and do through paid and unpaid work. Quotations from these works embody the cultural and ideological perspectives about Black women that scholars have emphasized. The perspectives were created from the experiences of Black women not seen in the scholarship bridging vocational identity and work (Dill, 1994, p. 4).

The first quotation suggests the shape and tone of the reflections about working African American women from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid-twentieth century articulated by the performer in the play *Daughters of Africa* (Jones, 1990). The author Toni Morrison like the performer in Jones play emphasized Black women discovering--who they were and what they had to do.

True, the Black woman did the housework, the drudgery; true, she reared the children, often alone, but she did all of that while occupying a place on the job market, a place her mate could not get or which his pride would not let him accept. And she had nothing to fall back on: not maleness, not whiteness, not ladyhood, not anything. And out of the profound desolation of her reality, she may very well have invented herself. (Morrison, 1971, p. 63)

The second quotation comes from existing scholarship. This quotation encapsulates the dramatizations by the performer of well-known and unknown Black women learning about themselves by doing the work set before them.

They were taught that they had to learn to be flexible . . . they had to learn to wash, cook, sew, get an education, raise children, work in their churches and clubs, . . . everything else that needed to be done to improve human life.

(Ladner, 1989, p. 87)

### Background

This section will introduce the limited scholarship on the subject of paid and unpaid work held by African American women. Jones (1990), Etter-Lewis (1993) Ladner (1989), and Morrison (1971) conveyed African American women as a research subject were either in the background or ignored. This subject on their working has been one of the major scholarly attempts to bring the lives of African American women to the foreground.

Numerous scholars have unearthed the cultural and economic history of the lived experiences of working African American women (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Anderson, 1982; Blackwelder, 1997; Boris, 1989; Davis, 1971; Dill, 1994; Giddings, 1984; Goldin, 1977; Harley, 1990; Hesse-Biber, 1986; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986; Landry, 2000; Newman, 1986; Mullings, 1997, Mullings, Tobach, & Rosoff, 1980; Shaw, 1996; White,

1999). These researchers viewed the lives of African-American women through the lens of feminist theory, economics and history.

The scholarly lens of feminist economic history and theory revealed that the vocation for *everywoman* [italics added] meant working for wages a brief period before marriage and motherhood (Giddings, 1984; Landry, 2000; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002). The mid-twentieth century understanding of vocation for women excluded continuous paid work (Giddings, 1984; Landry, 2000; Mutari et al., 2002). This understanding of vocation arose in “the cult of true womanhood” where a woman’s home was her only sphere of influence (Welter, 1966, p. 166).

According to Mullings (1997), African American women were the first example of this “. . . discrepancy between their roles determined by the division of labor and the ideology of vocation that decreed the place of power and influence for a woman was within her home” (p. 25). Brown (1989) and Harrison (1974) expressed a similar view. The “racialized social norm” (Muter, Power & Figart, 2002, p. 55) of the breadwinner male and female homemaker excluded a Black woman by the nature of her circumstances as a “moral or true woman” (Giddings, 1984, p. 47). For African-American women, the choice of staying at home or entering the labor force was never a real one (Aldridge, 1989).

From the 1870s until the 1890s, the post-emancipation era, women made up the largest number of freed people (Jones, 1986). To be a lady like a White woman in the late

nineteenth century until the twentieth century meant being at home (Brand, 1987, 1988; Chafe, 1991; Giddings, 1984; Hunter, 1997; Palmer, 1983, 1989; Shaw, 1996; Welter, 1966; White, 1999). White male and female employers detested Black freedwomen not working and/or remaining at home which implied they were acting as ladies (Hunter, 1997; White, 1999).

Palmer (1983) referred to this exclusion of Black women from the homemaker role as the bad woman versus good woman dualism that separated Black and White women. The good woman (White) dissociated herself from work even inside the home if she or her household could afford domestic service and outside the home if she had material resources or household members who worked. To work meant being a *bad* [italics added] woman, the identity borne by women of color (Dill, 1988a; Glenn, 1987; Hurtado, 1989; Palmer, 1983). Palmer (1983) and Shaw (1996) concluded that bad women functioned as adults by earning a living, showing independence and brawn, and creating a place for themselves in a complex world.

Newman (1986) insisted the twentieth century emerged with one-third of Black women in the labor force. African American women working for paid wages during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were unconsidered as having the vocational identity of a wife and a mother (Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002; Giddings, 1984; Landry, 2000; Shaw, 1986). Yet, their emergence in the labor force in such large numbers meant they had to re-frame a vocational identity for themselves, apart from the ideologies of the

culture (Dill, 1988a, 1994; Grim, 1996; Jones, 1982, 1986; Landry, 2000; Palmer, 1983, 1989; Rollins, 1985; White, 1999). African-American women established the longest history of working for wages as a vestige of slavery enclosed within a prevalent ideology of vocation (Aldridge, 1989; Blackwelder, 1997; Costa, 2000; Davis, 1971; Goldin, 1977; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1982, 1986). African American women moved from working girls to working women without the benefit of unpacking for themselves a vocational identity (Weiner, 1985).

According to Flannery (1994), concepts such as vocation became problematical because of the focus on universality without the particularity of knowledge building from the experiences of mature African-American women as subjects. In the field of adult education, for vocation to have sense and strength, it has to be multi-vocal or acknowledge the intersecting platforms of race, gender, and class encompassing the “polyrhythmic realities” from living within a socio-cultural, political, and historical context (Sheared, 1994). This understanding of universality has been considered racist and sexist by applying a universal conception of people, events, and ideas to all adult learners. Another contending force has been the universal application of vocation in the rising up and representation of a single group (White people) as the standard-bearers for behavior (Flannery, 1994). Scholars like Flannery would implicate vocational identity as an early twentieth century White male and middle class developmental model that accentuated “. . . individualism, linear thinking, and self-sufficiency . . .” (p. 17).

Similarly, Imel (2002) cautioned that vocational identity was traditionally a White male middle class orientation reflecting the Western cultural emphasis on the individual rather than including other dimensions (i.e., class, gender, and race). For African American women, class, gender, and race created peculiar and debilitating circumstances for the kind of paid work they were expected to perform (Dill, 1994; Giddings, 1984; Mutari, Power & Figart, 2002).

### Purpose of the Study and Research Question

The purpose of this interpretative hermeneutical study is to discover the perceptions that reveal the vocational identity of African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century (1945-1985). The ideological expectation for all women was that the home served as the only place to exercise their vocation (Giddings, 1984; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002; Welter, 1966). Conversely, it appears that paid work was the societal expectation for African American women since slavery (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Jones, 1982; 1986). Thus, the problem has been that existing scholarship has unexamined vocational identity for the women in America who have worked the longest (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977; Mullings, 1997; Wuthnow, 2003).

Therefore, the overarching research question is: How do African American women who were engaged in paid or non-paid work in the Twin Cities during the mid-



twentieth century perceive their vocational identity? Existing historical scholarship has described the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century as the Progressive era, a period that started roughly in the late 1800s and ended sometime in the 1940s. This period ushered in many societal changes, politically and economically, in the U. S. Those changes included increasing urbanization, migration, and the concentrated growth of manufacturing and industry in which women workers emerged (Blackwelder, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Lerner, 1979; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002; Shaw, 1996).

The Progressive era was accompanied by the Jim Crow era that enforced legislated racial segregation in all public and private accommodation until the 1960s (Amott & Matthaiei, 1996; Blackwelder, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Peterson, 2002; Shaw, 1996; White, 1999). During the Jim Crow era, there was a migration of African Americans from the rural South to urban centers there and in the North as a response to the expanding labor market, which, in turn, was an outcome of WWII (Boehm, 2009). It is within this context through oral history that the vocational identity of these women will be revealed. To that end, this hermeneutic study used narrative interviews.

### Need for the Study

This study has been needed for four reasons. First, the concept of vocation in the U. S. and within the field of adult education is incomplete without the voices of African American women. Perhaps their voices were unacknowledged because Black women

with other women described as racial and ethnic were seen historically and socially as laborers (Giddings, 1984; Glenn, 1987). White males along with employers who were women viewed the paid work performed by African American women — as they did themselves — an unwelcome necessity (Chafe, 1972; Dill, 1994; Janiewski, 1987; Jones, 1986; Newman, 1986; White, 1999).

Existing scholarship did not include the reflective and experiential insights of mature working African-American women (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990; Conway-Turner, 1999; Harrison, 1989; Hatch, 1991; Ralston, 1997; Shenk, Zablotsky & Croom, 1998). As Altschuler (2004) stated “. . . there is a paucity of studies on the meaning and experiences of paid work among older women . . .” (p. 224). Altschuler noted how her mature interviewees responded regarding the dearth of support or sanction for pursuing educational and vocational options: “We didn’t have job counseling then. We didn’t have lots of things that you have today, and we didn’t define ourselves as woman as a separate category of people who had different needs. None of that was thought of” (p. 230).

Secondly, this study will contribute to the growing practice of narrative research in adult education (Rossiter, 2002). According to Rossiter, identity formation and development are shaped by the events and actions of one’s life; analyzing narrative interview data provides the lens for interpreting life. In the current study, the life of African American women has been interpreted through the literature and interviews about their paid and unpaid work. Adult education as a field of practice has multiple

connections to learning to achieve academic credentials and/or meet performance objectives in the workplace.

Collins (1998, p. 83) has asserted, “. . . a critical task for educators at this time is to sustain a larger purview on the meaning of work, and, in particular, of its significance as the means through which human creative capacities and human potential are realized.” The concept of vocation has been infused with competing narratives about work from religious, academic, and popular discourses (Dawson, 2005). The objective of the adult educator will be to challenge and analyze those narratives that only support labor market significance about work (Collins, 1998; Reagan, 2000). Furthermore, such narratives have been based on discourses that have not included the reflective insights and experiences of working African American women.

My interest in this research study is on mature adult women who used their paid and unpaid work to learn how they perceived themselves as women and workers. Formal and informal knowledge gained from working has been a foundational subject for developing theories about learning in adulthood (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

In addition, Peterson (2002) emphasized that the institutionalization of adult education contributed to the creation of democratic citizens in that an educated citizenry became foundational for life at home, work, and in the community. African-Americans have contributed to the creation of democratic citizens consistently and with commitment since the formative years of adult education (Johnson-Bailey, 2006; Johnson-Bailey &

Cervero, 2000; Johnson-Bailey, Tisdell, & Cervero, 1994). Yet, these researchers pointed out that professional theorizing in adult education has been culturally specific and often drawn from the dominant or majority White culture; this, they claim, manifests racism and sexism (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2000; Johnson-Bailey et al., 1994; Peterson, 2002).

Thirdly, this study contributes to the life history of work in general (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990). As Boggs and Boggs (1974) affirmed, “. . . it is inconceivable that humankind could exist without work . . . . work is a way of expressing, developing, creating your humanity, the humanity which is essential to human identity . . .” (pp. 242-244). Work has been a connection throughout history that has dominated the childhood and adulthood of African-American women (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990; Boehm, 2009; Gilkes, 1990; Malson, 1983; Scott, 1980).

Work, whether paid or unpaid, had been and remained an important means for Black women to acquire freedom and options (Beal, 1975; Davis, 1971; Dill, 1988). Black and White feminist scholars in Britain and in former British colonies such as in the Caribbean region have recognized the centrality of paid work as a cultural and economic custom in the lives of Black women (Reynolds, 2001). Brand (1991) researched the lives of Black working women in Ontario, Canada between the 1920s and 1950s. Brand inferred that the respondents probably did not see their circumstances as different from Black men, since the subjects of their conversations were about supporting the Black

community rather than the political, economic, and social structures that circumscribed their lives as Black women.

Fourth, this study is one-step toward *righting some wrongs* [italics added]. Historically, the class, gender, and racial identities of African American women were used as an issue to hinder their ability to cultivate a vocational identity through work opportunities. Discriminated against because of the forces that assumed their separate and intersecting identities were inferior because native-born African American women may have descended from slavery and the assumed concomitant poverty (Aldridge, 1989; Burgess, & Hayward, 1993; Dill, 1994; Dubois, 1929; Giddings, 1984; Goldin, 1977; hooks, 1981; Hurtado, 1989).

Existing scholarship (Aldridge, 1989; Bierma, 2001; Bose, 1984; Charles, Buchmann, Halebsky, Powers, & Smith, 2001; Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977) confirms that the labor-force participation rate of Black women that began after slavery continued unabated until the twentieth century regardless of family shape and size. Black women have worked outside of their homes regardless of their marital status or the presence of children or dependents (Aldridge, 1989; Charles et al., 2001).

## Definitions

The following terms have been defined for their use within this study. The sources of most of the definitions have been cited, while others are compilations from multiple sources.

*Adult education:* A process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values or skills (Retrieved 09/28/06 from [www1.umn.edu/WHRE](http://www1.umn.edu/WHRE)).

*African American/Black:* The terms have been used interchangeably in this study to refer to people having origins in Africa. According to Johnson-Bailey (1999), these terms also refer to diversity based on color and class.

*African American/Black feminism (s):* the position of scholars and scholarship with a global feminist agenda concerned with multiple issues: women's economic status, political rights, health, marital and family status, and rights and the challenge of White feminism in the United States as exclusive (Houston and Davis, 2002).

*Discourse:* To go through in speech; to treat of in speech or writing; to talk over, discuss; to talk of, converse about; to tell, narrate, relate (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989).

*HBCU*: an acronym for historical Black colleges and universities (private and public).

*Labor*: The medieval sense of pain and toil that was predominant in the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Williams, 1976).

*Multi-vocal or polyrhythmic realities*: Voices of lived experiences from acquired knowledge and formed within socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts (Sheared, 1994).

*Racial ethnic*: A term used collectively for Blacks, Latino/as, and Asian Americans who shared "a legacy of labor exploitation" (Glenn, 1987, p. 73).

*Vocation*: What a woman ought to be and do (Hurston, 1937). According to Williams (1976), by the middle of the nineteenth century, vocation became subsumed under the word career to indicate movement in both. Vocation became interchangeable with career (Williams, 1976).

*Work*: General activity, effort or achievement through expending time and energy (Williams, 1976). Williams pressed further to show the irony in the fact that "an active woman, running a house and bringing up children is distinguished from a woman who

works” (1976, p. 282). Work moved into the “capitalist productive relations” of paid employment (Williams, 1976, p. 282) to indicate the predominant social relationship in that women running a house and bringing up children were said to be not working.

### Significance of the Research

This research study reclaims and reframes vocational identity through the insertion of paid and unpaid work narratives of African American women during the mid-twentieth century. Most studies about experiences obtaining and performing work have been dominated by a quantitative methodology using statistical methods (Cochran, 1990).

The inductive process for this research study relies on the development of the discourse on the concept of vocation, experiences at work, and memories of those experiences. The goal of this research has been to contribute to the discourse on vocational identity by including the narratives of African American women’s paid and unpaid work. Adding to the discourse on the concept of vocation from the experiences of working African American women during the mid-twentieth century has significance in re-focusing a concept in adult education.

Explaining the concept of vocation as it relates to working Black women has importance for contributing to research on the particularity of mature Black women, and the subject of work in North America. To that end, this research has a North American



and Western frame of reference. This research has been situated in the Twin Cities with African American women working in that setting.

From an adult learning approach, this research has shed light on vocational identity and shown its relevance to adult education and learning. The relevance to adult education has been in examining the developmental stance towards work. This study of extending vocational identity towards Black women could foster similar research with other communities.

#### Overview of the Research, the Philosophical Foundations, and Research Methods

Concept analysts and feminist theorists have approached any concept in education with manifold assumptions, such as vocation. Concept analysts examine the ways a term has been used and modeled. Feminist theorists examine the applicability of a concept and its practice for women.

Shaw (1991) defined the concept of socially responsible individualism. Shaw framed this concept on the quote by the fictional character Nanny in the novel by Hurston (1937). In this study pertaining to African American women leaders who worked between 1870 and 1950 during the Jim Crow era, Shaw explored their lives on from the angle of being and doing—becoming who they were and deciding what to do. This study discussed and examined available historical documents on the thoughts and actions of leading Black women during this period who received recognition through their essays,

lectures, leadership positions often in women's organizations, and biographies as well as autobiographies. Socially responsible individualism not only referred to who they saw themselves as and what they decided to do but also about their perceptions of their community's view of them and the need it had for them.

Peterson (1992) explored the free will construct from its philosophical and religious origins in the West. Peterson contended that Western free will conceptualizations remain a necessary framework to discuss its nature; however, these conceptualizations have been uninformative in shaping the understanding of a cultural construct defined as the "strong will of the Black woman" (p. 2). Peterson analyzed published literary, fictional narratives by Black female writers for the nature of this construct in the lives of Black women investigated in this research.

In contributing to the scholarship on African American women's development, Goodman (1990) interviewed African American women to obtain their self-knowledge of being in the world with and apart from community members and kin relatives. This study focused on the interaction of gender and race in women's self-development.

Boehm (2009) pursued resilience among African American women migrants of the second migration in the rural South to urban centers in the North. Resilience as defined by the respondents in their oral history narratives was the way of keeping on by drawing upon their personal inner and outer life as a resource.

The concept of vocation has been an “allied concept” in adult education (Tobias & Merriam, 1995, p. 184). Dawson (2005), Tobias and Merriam (1995) and Williams (1976) suggested that the scholarly discourses debating the content and analysis of the concept of vocation would continue as a philosophical foundation of adult education.

This research used the interpretative paradigm for qualitative methodology with hermeneutics as the method. The hermeneutic approach derived from the philosophy of Gadamer (1960/1975) was used to interpret perceptions of vocational identity of African American women who worked in the mid-twentieth century in the Twin Cities.

The data collection came from individual oral interviews of women describing when they first knew they were working whether paid or unpaid. The aim of this data collection was to interpret the perceived vocational identity of these women as they moved through their paid and unpaid work experiences.

Data analysis has been shaped by Gadamer’s (1960/1975) hermeneutical philosophy. This philosophy guided the approach to the transcriptions by asking questions and formulating responses directed by the fusions of past and present horizons within the hermeneutical circle to capture vocational identity as the future of horizon (Gadamer).

Chapter One introduces the focus of the study, origins and background, significance, the theoretical foundation, main purpose and research question. This chapter includes the definitions used, the significance as well as an overview of the study and

subjectivity as a characteristic of the structure of qualitative research studies.

Chapter Two contains an analysis of the concept of vocation. The sub-topics are the following: (a) origins, (b) the connection between vocation and work as well as (c) vocation and career development. This chapter comprises an examination of (a) the ideology of vocation, (b) the taxonomy of race, gender, and class and the use of the taxonomy as a lens to understanding, (c) the incongruities experienced by working Black women.

Included within Chapter Two are the incongruities Black women experienced in their labor as (a) enslaved, (b) paid, (c) developed as a career, and (d) unpaid. The subject of paid labor is segmented into the following foci: (a) domestic service, (b) home work, (c) entrepreneurship, (d) teaching, (e) pre and post WWII.

The last subject in Chapter Two is the Twin Cities. I examined three topics: a brief history of Black people and Black women's paid and also unpaid labor in the area. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Chapter Three includes a discussion of the interpretative paradigm and the reasons for using qualitative methodology for this study. The next section describes the brief origins of hermeneutics as a qualitative method. I explained the philosophy of Gadamer (1960/1975) on hermeneutics in relation to these structures: personal historical effect, openness, pre-understanding as well as understanding within a text, and the hermeneutic circle.

The subject of oral narratives and the hermeneutical method included two sub-topics: representation and truth in transcribed texts and the validity of concluding interpretative meanings. The section on data collection examines recruitment, control by non-respondents, interview approach, member checking, and the demographics of respondents. The chapter closed with coding guidelines.

Chapter Four contains each of the four themes. I discuss the hermeneutical interpretative process for drawing out or arriving at each theme and its relevance to perceiving vocational identity.

Chapter Five contains a discussion of each theme as a component of the women's' perception of their vocational identity and a contribution to the discourse on vocational identity. This chapter identifies subthemes and implications for further research and practice. The chapter concludes with some recommendations.

#### Limitations of the Study

Because this has been a doctoral study, I was the sole person who coded and identified themes in the data and discussed the analysis with the doctoral advisor. This process may allow for consistency in applying the method, but another coder with a perspective obtained from the literature review and methodological expertise was not used. Therefore, the qualifications of the researcher/s could be a limitation. Applicability of this oral history to other cultures and communities will be discussed in Chapter Five.

### The Unasked Question

The women in this study were probed with this question: When did you first know you were working, whether paid or unpaid? The intention of this query is to elicit orally from their memories when work whether paid or unpaid began in their lives. The focus of this interview question was to move them women to construct the beginning, middle, and end of working. This question brought forward their past at the pace and interest they wanted go. Their oral response became the content of the transcriptions on work life or work history that was examined for vocational identity--what each woman perceived she ought to be and do from their paid and unpaid work experiences. This research question seemed the best one to obtain a plurality of experiences. The unasked question was: What is your vocational identity? This section will discuss the appropriateness of asking when did you first knew you were working rather than what is your vocational identity?

The appropriateness of research questions pertains to validity. Qualitative research has been burdened with ascertaining epistemological validity. Garrison and Shale (1994) summarized validity as striving for the truth about knowledge rather than the certitude about the knowledge. Collins (1998) asserted concrete experience as one criterion of validity.

The interview probe invoked each woman to tell the truth of their personal experience working. Yet, I had this conflict that between which questions would invoke the truth of perceptions from working.

To lead this study with me asking the women to explain their vocational identity appeared to require etymological explanation that would instigate possibly frequent didactic moments during an interview. I think this approach would have been fitting if the women were gathered in a group. A group conversation may have facilitated this effort to explain the discourse of vocational identity and its usage. Within the group, participants may coalesce around one explanation embodying a shared experience.

However, the play by Jones (1990) was instructive in that individual narratives excerpts have content for multiple explorations. Polkinghorne (2003) suggested narratives contain descriptions of people's actions and assessments. Validity within qualitative research as a philosophy and its ensuring methodologies is in describing experiences by applying suitable language or linguistic terms. In this study, vocational identity is the linguistic term applied to the actions and assessment of the narratives on paid and unpaid work. The objective of this study is to name the perceived shaped of the discourse of vocational identity held by African American women. The validity of asking the women to begin their responses to the probe, when did you first know you were working, is in exploring their individual actions and assessments for a totality that is shared and explained with similar linguistic or language terms. Such terms can be renamed (Kroth & Boverie, 2000; Linn, 1996).

This study could have focused on African American women explaining or defining their vocational identity by querying contemporary women. Yet, the scholarship

from the literature review indicated that there have been gaps in the scholarship on mature African American women. These gaps lay bare that the conceptions held by mature African American women on their role and involvement in this society went unexamined. Narrative research filled in this gap.

The interview question probed for narratives rather than for specific answers that could have been provided when asked to explain your vocational identity. In asking the woman to explain their vocational identity, I could have led them through a series of provided responses. I could have structured this study on predicting respondents' choice in assigned words to describe the vocational identity of working Black women to measure the frequency of their responses. These frequencies would have validated the most frequent meaning of vocational identity by the assigned and chosen words. However, frequency as a research construct will not be overlooked in qualitative research using a coding analysis [see Chapter Three]. Both the play and the previous discussion within this chapter demonstrated that research has overlooked on the lives and the narratives of African American women therefore validating this study.

#### Subjectivity or Personal/Self-Reflexivity in the Research Process

Recognizing one's stance as a researcher using qualitative research methodology has become a theoretical requirement. This stance has become valuable, because scholars



outside this racial group (Burgess & Hayward, 1993) have conducted the majority of research on African Americans.

The challenge has been to evaluate the qualitative perspective of individuals reflecting in their own voices, from an insider perspective (Burgess & Hayward, 1993) when a Black woman has chosen to interview Black women as the subject of the research. For some Black women, connecting to their community through research has been an attempt to gain a broader understanding of the world. However, scholarship has been limited regarding the Black woman as a researcher (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Generett, & Jeffries, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Vaz, 1997).

Subjectivity or self-reflexivity means being accountable to the personal motivations for conducting this research with the population being studied (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Generett, & Jeffries, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Vaz, 1997). This focus on researcher attitudes and expectations shape the research process and project (Koch, 1996a, 1996 b; Walsh, 2003). Subjectivity or personal/self-reflexivity has been a stance of discovering one's unawareness of the many aspects of her presence and actions in the research process. (Walsh, 2003). This lack of awareness requires an interpretative stance towards the unconscious and self-deceptive aspects of one's presence and actions as a researcher. Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett (2003) referred to these unconscious and self-deceptive aspects as a form of academic elitism and exclusion. The researcher becomes an important entity with consciousness and self-

receptiveness in the task of analyzing and interpreting interview texts (Few et al., 2003; Generett, & Jeffries, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Koch, 1996; Vaz, 1997; Walsh, 2003).

My interest in this study of how African American women perceived their vocational identity became paramount for me. I became interested in the concept of vocation because of its use in the departmental philosophical framework in 2001: To improve theory and practice and to prepare professionals concerned with education and training that enable youth and adults to carry out the responsibilities of their vocations in the workplace, the family and the community. I wanted to expand the discourse on the concept of vocation and reframe the concept of vocation through research on working Black women whom existing scholarship had not addressed.

Secondly, I live as the respondents have, as an African American woman with the same social, political, and economic constructions that intersect race, gender, and class (Brewer, 1999; Brewer, Conrad, & King, 2002). Collins (1990) referred to this relationship as clarifying knowledge through shared membership. In addition, we may have shared similar views on color, the private talk among native-born Blacks about skin tones or shades (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Generett, & Jeffries, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Vaz, 1997). Thirdly, we may have similar socioeconomic backgrounds regarding our parents or guardians (Few et al., 2003; Generett, & Jeffries, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Vaz, 1997).

Race, gender, and class remain the elemental intersections that affect all interviewing (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Generett, & Jeffries, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Vaz, 1997). The African American women informants in this study were not my peers; they could have been my mother or an aunt. I could have been the daughter or niece of every respondent. Yet I was not their daughter or niece. Identifying this difference informs one's subjective motivations for research (Few et al. 2003; Generett, & Jeffries, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Vaz, 1997).

In interviewing African American women about their work narratives to discover their perceived vocational identity, Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett (2003), Johnson-Bailey (1994) and Collins (1989) recommended keeping a research journal to record conscious and unconscious thoughts about my role as researcher.

In addition, I met with a dissertation group to discuss the development of this study. This group provided resources about working Black women in the Twin Cities and beyond.

Emergent and established Black feminist scholarship within an adult education framework unearthed my voice for this research study. I need to make sure I do not shroud the voices of the respondents within this study because of differences in understanding race, gender, and class. It was unknown to me whether these respondents had the privilege to read refereed articles on Black feminism. However, these respondents achieved, from the generation before them paid and unpaid work that became the

research sources that formed the lens for Black feminism as academic scholarship across disciplines.

I view my role as researcher as Obbo (1997, pp. 42-43) explained: “This is a modest exercise in giving expression to women’s voices and in rescuing their perceptions and experiences from being mere murmurs or backdrop to political, social, and cultural happenings.” To that end, “. . . the experience of a Black woman interviewing a Black woman was advantageous” (Johnson-Bailey, 1999, p. 669).

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this interpretative study is to discover the vocational identity of African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century (1920-1980). The ideological expectation for all women was that the home served as the only place to exercise their vocation (Giddings, 1984; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002; Welter, 1966). Conversely, it appears that paid work was the societal expectation for African American women (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Jones, 1986). Black women have had a long history of paid work or employment in the U.S. (Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977; Mullings, 1997; Mullings, Tobach, & Rosoff, 1980; Wuthnow, 2003). Thus, the problem has been that existing scholarship has not examined vocational identity for the women in America who worked the longest as a legacy of slavery (Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977; Mullings, 1997; Wuthnow, 2003). Therefore, the overarching research question was: How do African American women who were engaged in paid or non-paid work in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century perceive their vocational identity?

Several studies (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Beal, 1975; Brewer, 1999; Dill, 1983, 1994; Harley, 1997; hooks, 1981; Hull, 1982; King, 1975; King, 1988; Lewis, 1988; Lykes, 1983) confirmed that Black women were not simply Blacks or women, but fully both, with a history and experience different from Black men and White women. Angela Davis put forward that Black women should not be a race-less gender or a gender-less

race (Angela Davis personal communication February 13, 2008).

There has been limited scholarship that examined the economic circumstances of African American women between 1890 until 1981 (Albelda, 1986; Becket, 1982; Cunningham and Zalokar; Fosu, 1992). Existing scholarship did not include the reflective and experiential insights obtained by working African-American women (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990; Conway-Turner, 1999; Harrison, 1989; Hatch, 1991; Ralston, 1997). As Altschuler (2004) stated “. . . there is a paucity of studies on the meaning and experiences of paid work among older women . . .” (p. 224). Shenk, Zablotsky, and Croom (1998) added that there has been little research systematically seeking the factors that contributed to the present and historical achievements of mature African American women.

This chapter contains an analysis of the concept of vocation. The sub-topics are the following: (a) origins, (b) the connection between vocation and work, as well as (c) vocation and career development. The next section comprises an examination of (a) the ideology of vocation, (b) the taxonomy of race, gender, and class, and (c) the incongruities within Black women’s labors.

The literature on the ideology of vocation and the taxonomy of race, gender, and class gave rise to a discussion of incongruities experienced by working Black women (Brewer, 1999, Brewer, Conrad, & King, 2002). The scholarship on the taxonomical lens takes in the discrepancies Black women experienced in their labor as (a) enslaved, (b)

paid, (c) developed as a career, and (d) unpaid. The subject of paid labor is segmented into the following foci: (a) domestic service, (b) home work, (c) entrepreneurship, (d) teaching, (e) pre and post WWII.

The last subject of this study is on the Twin Cities. I examined three topics: a brief history of Black people, Black women's paid and unpaid labor.

### The Concept of Vocation

Kroth and Boverie (2000) summarized that scholars have analyzed the constructs of calling, purpose, mission, and vocation to theorize on how adults learn and lead in contexts. Scholars who have used these terms sought to theorize about self-direction.

The concept of vocation has been central to the context of learning the leading or directing needed to work. Vocational identity has been extrapolated from the concept of vocation as foundational to self-discovery for work.

This section examines the extrapolations of the concept of vocation. The extrapolations of the concept of vocation began with its origins, and the connections between vocation and work, as well as vocation and career development.

### *Origins*

This section provides the religious, historical, and academic origins of the concept of vocation. The origins provide scholarly background on the development of the concept of vocation, which serves as the foundation for vocational identity.

The root word of vocational is vocation (Copa, 1988). The Western world has been the source for the history and the meaning of vocation (Copa, 1988). Therefore, the Oxford English Dictionary (1989) was the source for the definition of vocation. The dictionary had a multiplicity of definitions:

(a) the action on the part of God of calling a person to exercise some special function, especially of a spiritual nature, or to fill a certain position, (b) divine influence or guidance towards a definite (esp. religious) career, (c) the fact of being so called or directed towards a special work in life; natural tendency to, or fitness for, such work, (d) the particular function or station to which a person is called by God; a mode of life or sphere of action regarded as such, (e) one's ordinary occupation, business, or profession, (f) those who follow a particular business or profession, (g) a call *to* a public position; a designation or title (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989).

The term has been the basis of vocational education and its complement, adult education (Copa, 1988). As a concept, it has been foundational for shaping personal desires for paid work as well as public interests and commitments for service and



leadership (Copa, 1988; Hansen, 1994). It has been a construct used by formal, informal, and non-formal educational institutions and settings (Collins, 1991, 1998).

According to Dawson (2005), there have been three discourses on the concept of vocation: religious, academic or philosophical and popular. Linn (1996) ascribed the concept of vocation not as a discourse on scholarly vocation but as a linguistic discourse about language as a public description used by individuals to identify themselves or others.

This discourse on language and its use had engaged modernists and post-modernists scholars. The modernists viewed the concept of vocation as language that has enduring relevance as indicated by its religious usage in the Oxford dictionary (1989). Conversely, the post-modernists analyzed the concept of vocation for usage that becomes fluid, as in a mode of life or sphere of action regarded as one's ordinary occupation (Oxford Dictionary, 1989).

As put forward by Dawson (2005), an academic and philosophical discourse was concomitant with the religious discourse on the concept of vocation. The definition from the Oxford dictionary (1989) has as its source the religious discourse that evolved into academic and popular discourses on the concept of vocation. However, like all concepts, it too has underlying assumptions that arose out of a particular place time and place (Dawson, 2005; Williams, 1976).

Analysts and theorists have approached any concept in education with a myriad of assumptions. Concept analysts examine the ways a term has been used and modeled. Feminist theorists examine the applicability to women. The concept of vocation has been an “allied concept” in adult education (Elias & Merriam, 1995, p. 184).

Dawson (2005) proceeded by Elias and Merriam (1995) connected the discourse on the concept of vocation as a continuing debate within the philosophical foundations of adult education. The relevance of the concept of vocation influenced by European history and scholarship is a highly questionable discourse for African-American women whose work experiences shaped a discourse unrecorded by such scholars. Santamarina (2005) scrutinized nineteenth century autobiographical narratives by African American women workers who perceived that they and their labor had been of questionable value, yet they valued their labor contribution as a vocation.

The concept of vocation surfaced from medieval, Eurocentric, Christian culture that held the religious life as ideal (Andolsen, 1989; Copa, 1988; Rehm, 1999). A vocation defined the contemplative and productive activity of monks, nuns, and priests whose daily life served God and the church (Beder, 2000). The concept arose from within an agrarian way of life (Copa, 1988; Lock, 2005). This life began in primitive times when women gathered food and raised children. Men hunted and fought. In the Greco-Roman period work was the assigned toil of slaves, laborers, and women (Hardy, 1990). Freedom expressed itself in thinking and dialoguing about the public life. This

activity had status; the work performed by those of low status did not (Hardy, 1990). This conviction made way for the stratified medieval world that assigned people to certain categories and classes.

Lock (2005) described this medieval world of work in terms of slaves, peasants, and artisans. Pursuits involving literacy—politics, music, philosophy—belonged to the upper classes (Copa, 1988; Lock, 2005)

Martin Luther, a German theologian and former Augustinian monk, through his manuscripts entered this world of the monastic ideal of vocation by way of the Protestant Reformation in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. He refuted the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church and its various monastic orders by expanding the possibility of a divine calling to others regardless of station, status or occupation. Work and workers of secular communities became elevated as carriers of significant moral value (Beder, 2000).

### *Vocation and Work*

This discourse on the concept of vocation expanded from religious communities to work in the public sphere. This intellectual expansion was aided by interest in the discourse of vocation and its connection to work or paid employment and the latter construct of career development (Dawson, 2005).

John Calvin, a Protestant theologian, advanced daily work as a divine vocation (Hardy, 1990). This advancement occurred because of the social and intellectual changes as “. . . influenced by a rapidly expanding market economy, accelerated urbanization,

technological innovation, and vast political reorganization” (Hardy, 1990, p. 65). Because of these societal shifts, a Calvinistic view of work surfaced as a tool of virtue for reshaping the world order into the kingdom of God proven by one’s committed labors as a member of the Elect, “. . . those persons chosen by God to inherit eternal life” (Hill, 1996, p. 4).

In contrast to Luther’s perspective of accepting one’s place in the order of things, Calvin expected one to do diligent work as the elected chosen by God. An outcome of this diligence was movement into another social and class status (Beatty & Torbert, 2003). Scholars have speculated that assigning diligence to commerce gave it a moral sanction as encapsulated in the Protestant work ethic (Bernstein, 1997; Hardy, 1990; Hill, 1996).

With expanding entrepreneurial interests during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the concept of vocation became increasingly secular and “. . . reinforced the idea that the human being is essentially and primarily a worker” (Meilander, 2000, p. 13). Smith (1776) described the household as the unit of production whereby everyone—women, children, and men—worked. Work and the family was the same (Lock, 2005; Smith, 1776). Working was the role and responsibility of every family member to contribute to the household. Industrialization severed this relationship by redefining work as an activity outside the home (Imel, 2002; Lock, 2005).

Eventually, paid work became the primary expression for human fulfillment. The concept of vocation became interconnected with careers and occupations in the arena of paid employment. This melding met the consternation of Weber (1930/1976), who saw it as diminishing belief in the concept of vocation. Because of this diminishment, the concept of vocation became a contrivance of Western capitalism (Weber, 1919/1958 a, 1919/1958 b).

Weber proposed reconstituting the concept of vocation as a commitment to a larger objective than obtaining or producing capital (1919/1958 a, 1919/1958 b). Weber considered vocation, as Beder (2000) put forward as a hinge in society. Marx anticipated these concerns of sociologists such as Weber by subscribing to work as the activity in human life that first meets human needs. When work does not meet human needs, it becomes alien and the worker becomes alienated from his own work (Sayer, 1989).

Many contemporary writers, in revisiting and refashioning the discourse on vocation, interchange their use of the terms work (paid or unpaid), career, vocation and calling. The concept of vocation has been infused with competing narratives about work and the practices of it from popular, political, and academic discourses (Dawson, 2005).

Bauman (1998, p. 36) proposed that any analysis about the concept of vocation will reveal that the concept has become many things when connected to paid employment; however, it has not become a “. . . life-project or a whole-life strategy. . . .” especially for those who considered their paid work typical or drudgery. Bauman

emphasized any work, paid or unpaid, becomes a vocation when conceived as a duty well done. Santamarina (2005) would agree with Bauman that depreciated work and the Black women doing it were not included in the public discourse on vocation. However, Santamarina documented nineteenth century accounts of Black women workers who saw their commitment to a job well done as vocational affirmation.

Freire (1974) wrote that men's ontological vocations are a way of becoming more fully human. The objective of vocation from a Freirean perspective meant becoming an active agent transforming self and world. Through this course of activity one becomes more richly and fully human. Buechner (1973) summarized vocation metaphorically as the place where one's deep gladness and the world's hunger meet. Hansen (1994) described vocation as learning to build up the support someone needs. Rehm (1999) defined vocation as personally meaningful and morally responsible work.

Palmer (2000) characterized vocation as calling because its Latin root meant voice. One heard a voice external to oneself, a voice of moral demand that asked one to become better, different, beyond one's assumed reach, a person one has yet to become (Palmer, 2000).

Work cannot be dismissed; it has been an integrative function in the human condition (Arendt, 1958; Boggs & Boggs, 1974; Collins, 1998; Lock, 2005; Scott, 1980). As Boggs and Boggs (1974) affirmed, "it is inconceivable that humankind could exist without work . . . . work is a way of expressing, developing, creating your humanity, the

humanity which is essential to human identity” (pp. 242-244). Not working intimated a life without meaning (Lock, 2005; Scott, 1980). Nevertheless, compensation has remained the biggest motivation for work (Lock, 2005; Scott, 1980). Paid work has become the exemplar (Collins, 1998; Gilkes, 1990; Lock, 2005; Scott, 1980).

Santamarina (2005, p. 26) discussed the need working Black women have had since colonial America to assess “what constitutes ‘work’ and the kinds of value ‘work’ produces.” Work has been a connection throughout life history that has dominated the childhood and adulthood of African-American women (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990; Gilkes, 1990; Malson, 1983; Scott, 1980). Work, whether paid or unpaid, had been and remained an important means for Black women to acquire freedom and options (Beal, 1975; Davis, 1971; Dill, 1988a, 1988b).

Other kinds of activities have evolved for consideration as work: maintaining a home, raising children, serving community, and developing professionally and personally (Gilkes, 1980; Kerka, 2001; Lock, 2005). Time and energy spent on home and community life was undefined initially as work (Dawson, 2005; Williams, 1976) Work in an adult life became multifaceted, especially for African American women, encompassing multiple roles and responsibilities within the arenas of employment, community, and family (Gilkes, 1980; Kerka, 2001; Lock, 2005).

Religious significance was no longer seen as the guide for vocation in the industrial age. Dewey (1916), the educator, described the concept of vocation in what

was considered a challenging period for considering one's vocation. Dewey espoused a broad view of vocation as a continuous activity engaging one's personal powers to render service to others. Dewey believed one's vocation could not be dominant or hamper other relationships that encouraged one's interests. Dewey surmised an individual as having a variety of callings, but that vocation distinguished the individual from the callings one had in common with others. In this way, vocation unified all of one's callings.

Snedden, in keeping with the Social Darwinists and a former student of Dewey, viewed vocation primarily as one's employment (Wirth, 1980). Snedden believed a vocation was primarily an occupation by which adults produced the exchangeable services or commodities essential to their support (Wirth, 1980). The other activities and interests in one's life were a-vocational—not primary for earning income. This viewpoint of vocation, seeking an appropriate employment fit given one's capacities, became the purpose of the National Urban League and its local affiliate organizations during the period 1910 thru 1940 (Weiss, 1974).

Because the National Urban League arose with this aim during the Progressive and Jim Crow eras, an additional expectation of vocation for Black men and women included racially integrating the corporate activities of the nation, because one's capacities would determine fit in corporate organizations (Weiss, 1974). The National Urban League became a formal organization with the goal of connecting waged work as a vocation for Black women by preparing them to enter White-led organizations.



Cochran (1990), Dawson (2005), Imel (2002), Reagan (2000) and Rehm (1999) have been the scholarly exceptions in the discourse on vocational identity by discussing the inclusion or exclusion of women and racial and ethnic people. Imel (2002) asserted that scholars addressed vocational identity from a White male middle-class orientation, reflecting the Western cultural emphasis on the individual, rather than including other dimensions—of class as well as gender and race.

Dawson (2005) encapsulated the vocabularies defining the concept of vocation as conflicting but the similarity has been in not addressing race and gender as a force and issue. From this angle, the concept of vocation remains unfinished vocabulary because it needs many speakers to be an active structure of meaning to explain the sense of everyday work (Dawson 2005; Williams, 1976).

Chen (1997), Cochran (1990), Rehm (1999), and Collin & Young (1992) conceptualized vocation as a narrative of meaningful work. Chen explained vocation as a mission that included career as synonymous with integrating one's self in constructing a significant life story. Cochran served as a source for the scholarly approach taken by Rehm on vocation. Cochran introduced Booker T. Washington, creator and educator of the Tuskegee Institute, as the exemplary model in discussing the concept of vocation as a life story that unfolds with a beginning, middle, and end. Cochran quoted from the autobiography of Washington, a retrospective examination of his life as an enslaved child. Cochran reasoned that the insights Washington shared about the tasks he

performed during his enslaved childhood revealed vocational identity as distinguishing the experiential content within each season of life development.

Rehm (1999) wrote about César Chávez as significant for a vocational vision by evoking him as a discovery of meaningful work from a questionable or a traumatic experience. Rehm believed César Chávez's personal story shaped his vocational direction, beginning as a migrant farm worker to working as a human rights advocate for migrant farm workers. According to Rehm, César Chávez's embodiment of marginalization and limitation became a narrative of meaningful paid and unpaid work.

Rehm characterized the personal story of César Chávez as supporting evidence for the development of personal or autobiographical narratives that articulate insight gained from previous experiences. Rehm proposed people would plan their work if they connected to their pasts as they solved problems, addressed challenges, and discovered new opportunities to extend and alter their biographical stories.

Rehm (1999) envisioned vocational identity from César Chávez whose community and history was not included in the academic discourse on vocational identity. Rehm situated autobiographical narratives as the appropriate means to elicit the concept of vocation through an individual's locally grounded struggle or oppositional space (1999). These struggles exemplified their actual and contextual experiences. Rehm defined vocation as a life problem facing almost every individual that challenged them to

create a personally meaningful, critically discerning, and morally responsible story about work and its multiple facets.

Both Rehm (1999) and Cochran (1990) elicited vocational identity through narratives of men of color. Rehm referred to an autobiographical narrative from the twentieth century, whereas Cochran examined a narrative from the nineteenth century. Neither scholar obtained narratives of women of color. Santamarina investigated narratives of African American women working during the nineteenth century to explore their discourse on work.

Reagan (2000) proposed that societies such as African, Mesoamerican, indigenous North American, Chinese and the differing religious movements of those societies, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, have been attentive to the vocational needs of the individual, although many of these societies have different roles for men and women. The vocational focus of these societies has been different in significant ways when compared to American society.

Reagan (2000) and Collins (1998) acknowledged American society as having educational institutions serving the needs of the economy or the employer rather than the needs of the individual workers. Conversely, the educational traditions in Asian, African, Roma and indigenous societies has had as a principle to form the good person, and each tradition shares core features such as honesty in this objective.

### *Vocation and Career Development*

Career development has been defined as the roles a person plays during his or her life-span or life course development. The previously discussed scholarship by Cochran (1990) and Rehm (1999) connected career development to creating a vocation from significant encounters and events in one's life (Super, 1980). These planned and unexpected roles could define one's paid and unpaid work as a vocation (Super, 1980).

Other scholars such as Chen (1997) and Young & Collin (1992) acknowledged that the approach to career development research has been through a quantitative methodology, thereby measuring abilities or personality types to match with the existing functions and roles in the current workplaces. Chen (1997) and Collin & Young (1992) proposed that career pursuits become a matter of constructing a story or narrative that would embolden rather than constrain an individual amid ever-changing and challenging political, economic, and social contexts.

Career projection of one's life story meant entering shifting contexts by integrating meaningful experiences with new occurrences to draw further meaning. Reagan (2000) challenged this view by proposing that attained education and experiences in Western societies support the employer rather than guide the individual's career thinking.

Scholars affirmed the connections between career development constructs and adult development. Researchers of adult psychosocial development, Caffarella and Olson

(1993), constructed a critical literature review on traditional theories considered universal and often conceived by White male theorists. Caffarella and Olson summarized that a female perspective was lacking in the conceptual papers and empirical studies on women's adult development.

Caffarella and Olson cited only three studies out of eight that had samples containing women of color. Therefore, the outcomes of these studies reflected majority White women's developmental issues. Caffarella and Olson demonstrated that the voices of women of color have been unheard in adult development theory building.

The voices of women generally have been absent from adult development theory (Caffarella & Olson, 1993). Female adult educators in their classrooms and seminars have been implementing strategies to get women to speak up and openly about their personal transformation and apply this knowledge to continuing empirical research (Alfred, 2001; Baumgartner, Lee, Birden, & Flowers, 2003; Flannery, 1994; Gore, 1993; Marienau, 1995; Sheared, 1994; Stephenson & Burge, 1997; Taylor, 1995). There has been an absence of women's voices, and this has had continuing influence on the subject of gender in adult development (Ross-Gordon, 1999).

### The Ideology of Vocation, the Taxonomy of Race, Gender, and Class, and the Incongruities for Working African American Women

This section examines three related topics. The three related topics for working

African American women are (a) the ideology of vocation, (b) the taxonomy of race, gender, and class, and (c) the incongruities in their labor.

The literature on the ideology of vocation and the taxonomy of race, gender, and class gave rise to a discussion on labor contradictions experienced by working Black women. The scholarship on the taxonomical lens takes in the incongruities Black women experienced in (a) enslaved labor, (b) paid labor, (c) work as career development, and (d) unpaid labor. The subject of paid labor is segmented into the following foci: (a) domestic service, (b) home work, (c) entrepreneurship, (d) teaching, (e) pre and post WWII. Within each of these topics, the course of history is considered.

#### Ideology of Vocation

The homemaker role served as the vocational identity value in nineteenth and twentieth century society for American women regardless of the presence or absence of children in the home (King, 1975; Landry, 2000; Milkman, 1976; Mullings, 1997). This understanding of vocation arose in “the cult of true womanhood” where a woman’s home was her only sphere of influence (Welter, 1966, p. 165). Welter detected that all the institutions of society and the media promoted the discourse of the home as the workplace. This discourse inferred that if women were in the public arena then they should be addressing the role of women at home—the private space.

According to Jones (1986), during the 1870s, the post-emancipation era, women

made up the largest number of freed people. White male and female employers detested Black freedwomen acting as ladies (Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986). To be a lady like a White woman in the late nineteenth century meant being at home (Chafe, 1991; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1986; King, 1975; Klaczynska, 1976; Palmer, 1983; Shaw, 1996; Welter, 1966; White, 1999)). The “racialized social norm” (King, 1975; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002, p. 55) of the breadwinner male and female homemaker excluded a Black women as a “moral or true woman” by her social and economic circumstances (Giddings, 1984, p. 47; Lerner, 1979).

Palmer (1983) referred to this exclusion of Black women from the homemaker role as the bad woman versus good woman dualism that separated Black and White women. The good woman (White) dissociated herself from work inside the home if she or her household could afford domestic service and outside the home if she had material resources or household members who worked. To work meant being a bad woman, the very identity that women of color bore (Dill, 1988b; Glen, 1987; Hurtado, 1989; Mullings, 1994; Palmer, 1983).

Palmer (1983) noted that bad women functioned as adults because they earned a living, showed independence, were brawny, and understood the world as a complex place. Further compounding their paradoxical lives, White landowners held the view that Black women were lazy when they were not where they belonged—in the fields as

expected—even if they had responsibilities to their families (Blackwelder, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986; Smith, 1985; White, 1999).

### Taxonomy of Race, Gender, and Class

Scholars placed Black women at the center of research analyses (Boehm, 2009; Brewer, 1999, Brewer, Conrad, & King, 2002; Collins, 1986; Etter-Lewis 1991a, 1991b, 1993; Giddings, 1984; Goodman, 1990; Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982; Jones, 1986; King, 1988; Mullings, 1997; Mutari, Power & Figart, 2002; Rogers, 2004; Santamarina, 2005). Intersectional analysis of race, gender, and class theorizes that these constructs occur simultaneously during a specific time and place (Brewer, 1999, 2002).

Janiewski (1986) noticed that scholars such as Jones (1986) could not hold concurrently the theoretical constructs of race, gender, and class in their analysis of Black women's views about their labor. Different women in a specific time and place embody the race, gender, and class taxonomy (Brewer, 1999, 2002). All three intersecting constructs are connected to labor (Santamarina, 2005).

As an emergent example of the taxonomical discourse, during the nineteenth century, educational activist Anna Julia Cooper summarized the position of Black women as, “. . . confronted by a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or unacknowledged factor in both” (1892, p. 134). As Rogers put forward, the Black woman never finds herself only in a “race state, class state or gendered state ” (2004, p. 58).



Collins (1986) recognized that the marginalization of Black women has been characterized by their race and gender, which constitutes a shared experience.

Etter-Lewis (1991a) described the categories of race, gender, class, history, language and culture as textures with multiple layers. These categories serve as embodied realities that made Black women different from White women and Black men (Etter-Lewis, 1991a). These embodied realities should have prevented Black women from becoming too often a subset of theoretical and statistical literature on White women and/or Black men (Bailey & Collins, 2006; Etter-Lewis, 1991a; Johnson-Bailey, Tisdell & Cervero, 1994).

Etter-Lewis (1991a) considered scholarly research inappropriate when all women or all Black people have been grouped collectively to strengthen statistical power. Scholarship on Black women has ignored these categories under the expectation that they had “. . . to prove that their situations are radically different from those of White women . . . if not, then their lives are considered unremarkable” (p. 52).

Scholars of Black feminism recognized the duality Black women negotiated within Black culture and the dominant culture in their everyday experiences (Hooks, 1984). Analyzing the intersections of the constructs of race, gender, and class and using these constructs to theorize became the framework to explain the work and occupational status Black women achieved.

Scholars theorized that race, gender, and class have been intersecting constructs and forces forged in history. These intersecting forces determined past and current economic, political, and social practices (legal and customary) towards working Black women (Aldridge, 1989; Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Baumgartner et al., 2003; Brewer, 1999, 2002; Browne & Misra, 2003; Dill, 1983, 1988b; Duffy, 2007; Glenn, 1987, 1992; Hull, Bell-Scott & Smith, 1982; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Johnson-Bailey, Tisdell, & Cervero, 1994; King, 1988; King, 1975; Lewis, 1988; Mullings, 1997; Mutari, Power & Figart, 2002; Scherzer, 2003). The aforementioned scholars theorized that the intersecting forces of race, class, and gender identified these constructs as affecting the outcome for the kind of work that African American women received and how others have perceived them as workers.

Brand (1987, 1988) is consistent with Palmer (1983) in referring to the perception of Black women workers as not real women. “Real” women wouldn’t have to work or be made to work, and “real” women, if they did work, would occupy the pink-collar jobs, which White women supposedly occupied (Brand, 1988, p. 91). “Real women would be considered first and foremost mothers, not workers” (Brand, 1988, p. 91). Brand joins Williams (1976) in summarizing the ideological irony that mothers are not workers. The constraints of this ideological discourse had severe consequences for working African American women (Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002).

Alfred (2006) insisted that adult educators have to be attentive to women's economic development, especially when examining the issues of race and gender for African American women working during the mid-twentieth century. Issues pertaining to class or socioeconomic status for women of color have to be examined (Alfred).

Santamarina emphasized that scholars need to account for a wide range of "Black femininities" . . . in relation to all forms of interracial difference along the multiple axes of race, color, class, and gender (2005, p. 27). Santamarina ascertained working Black women during the antebellum period as having ". . . shifting and fluid racial and gender identities" due to the multiple kinds of value they believed their labor produced such as ". . . white privilege to self-worth, from Black respectability to sexual and racial equality, egalitarian reform, and alternative family models" (2005, p. 27).

Sojourner Truth, for example, ascribed to herself to her mother's legacy of honesty and spirituality as the rationale for her working; in no way did she work in an effort to collude or uphold slavery (Painter, 1996; Santamarina, 2005). Santamarina assessed that working Black women since the antebellum period did not rely on a singular identity category like race or gender to embrace as the personal interpretations of themselves or to respond to the obdurate tactics and unbalanced methods used to define them. This assessment may account for how Black women resisted the constraining external structures of labor coercion within themselves because moving up the economic

ladder or elevating themselves as ladies who were at home was an unlikely option (Santamarina, 2005).

Santamarina perceived that Black women could speak for their labor by refuting and/ or receiving the established limits of race, gender, and class accounts of identity set both inside and outside the Black community. This taxonomy of race, gender, and class had implications for the incongruities working Black women experienced. The contradictions working Black women experienced have a historical trajectory.

#### Incongruities in Black Women's Labor

The ideology of vocation meant the home as the workplace for women was a prominent perspective mediated during the Progressive Era, a period that spanned roughly the late 1800s to the 1920s. This period in the U.S. ushered in many political and economic social changes. Those changes included increasing urbanization, immigration, and the concentrated growth of manufacturing and industry with women workers emerging (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Blackwelder, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Lerner, 1979; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002; Shaw, 1996). These changes continued into the 1940s. Alongside the Progressive Era was the Jim Crow Era that enforced legislated racial segregation in all public and private accommodations until the 1960s (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Blackwelder, 1997; Bose, 1984; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986).

Chafe (1991) claimed that the Progressive Era was a historical contradiction.

Most of the legalized reforms during that era supported the growth and enlargement of “corporate capitalism,” racism, and the sanctioned disenfranchisement of Black male voters in the South, and that most of the social welfare programmatic activity was too little and late (Chafe, 1991, p. 160).

Furthermore, Chafe (1991) and Jones (1986) asserted that in this society of nineteenth century to twentieth century America, class, gender, and race determined eligibility for occupations. Race was the decisive factor as to whether a woman worked (Chafe, 1991; Klaczynska, 1976).

The event known commonly as the Great Migration occurred during the Progressive era in response to the industrialization of northern cities following World War I (Boehm, 2009). Black southerners moved from fields to factories—between 1910 and 1940, possibly half a million Black southerners’ migrated to northern industrial cities (Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986; Marks, 1993; Shaw, 1996; Smith, 1985). It was too challenging in the South for women who were heads of households with and without children to work as field hands or rent land as sharecroppers.

These circumstances motivated Black women to join the migration to urban centers in the North and South (Blackwelder, 1978, 1997; Clark-Lewis, 1987; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986; Landry, 2000; Shaw, 1996; Smith, 1985; Sterling, 1984; White, 1999). Black women's labor became important to their survival in northern and southern urban centers, even though they worked in the lowest earning positions (Aldridge, 1989;

Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Beckett, 1982; Blackwelder, 1978; Hunter, 1997; Janiewski, 1987; Marks, 1993; Newman, 1986; Smith, 1985).

Hunter (1997) and Jones (1986) indicated that between 1880 and 1910, nearly 25 percent of Black women in southern cities were widows who continued working for wages to contribute to the households, they shared with children or other family members. These women had the greatest incentive to migrate to northern cities for employment (Jones, 1986; Marks, 1993).

Another migration of Black people moving to work in northern and western cities occurred between 1940 and 1970 during the expanding economy of World War II (Boehm, 2009). According to Boehm, this period has been often overlooked by scholarship. Boehm brought to light through oral histories that Black women during this period continued to do domestic work, not as their starting and ending job as their predecessors did during the first migration, but as an alternating paid work used to steer themselves to other kinds of employment. Boehm credited both groups of migrants as the first women to learn the demands of the paid workplace during the early and mid-twentieth century.

To that end, Newman (1986) insisted the twentieth century emerged with one-third of Black women in the labor force. African American women working for paid wages until the mid-twentieth century called into question the vocational identity held by any women who stayed at home (Giddings, 1984; King, 1975; Landry, 2000; Mutari

Power, & Figart, 2002). As the first female workers with such a large presence in the labor force, knowingly or unknowingly they contradicted the ideology of vocation by re-framing vocational identity (Dill, 1988a, 1994; Grim, 1996; Jones, 1984; Landry, 2000; Palmer, 1983, 1989; Rollins, 1985; White, 1999; Wuthnow, 2003).

African American women working during this era were not considered as having the vocational identity of “moral or true woman” (Giddings, 1984, p. 47; see also King, 1975; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002). Moving from working girl to working woman implied that Black women worked against the dominant societal expectation about who a woman ought to be and what she ought to do. This contradiction began when they worked as children, teenagers, single women (divorced, never married, widowed), heads of households, and while married (Dill, 1988b, 1994; Grim, 1996; Harley, 1990; Jones, 1986; King, 1975; Ladner, 1971; Landry, 2000; Palmer, 1983, 1989, 1987; Weiner, 1985; White, 1999).

Dill (1994), Harley (1991), and Mullings (1997) did not contribute directly to the discourse on vocation to explore the paid and unpaid work in the lives of African American women. These scholars exposed the contradictions that working African American women experienced which had implications in discovering their vocation. The contradictory questions for working Black women: Is my labor of any human value when I work out of financial necessity, or what is the contribution of my labor when it is believed I am coerced to work (Santmarina, 2005)? The few studies of Black women not

only described their work, their “social relations,” and their representations in the “economies of work” but also Black women believed their labor had meaning and cultural significance as “work or vocation” (Santamarina, 2005. p. 25).

For example, Dill (1988a, 1988b) examined the ways African American women working as domestic servants made their employment serve their interests without support from their employers. Dill examined domestic servants’ resistance to having themselves and their labor demeaned. Santamarina recommended that though we have not seen this labor as “theirs,” working African American women during the nineteenth century claimed their labor had “social value” (p. 25). Smith (2005) and Bateson (1989) in their studies used metaphorical explanations to assert the value of the work professed by the research participants. Smith defined the efforts of enterprising African American women as quilting. Similarly, Bateson referred to the publicly notable women she interviewed as having a patchwork of improvising in desperation as their significant achievement.

Promoting the resilience and initiative of working Black women during the Progressive period of late nineteenth to early twentieth century was not the interest of Black owned newspapers that charged Black men with reticence for allowing their womenfolk to work outside the home (Santamarina, 2005). This ideological interest of Black newspapers belied their stated intention to expand the restricted labor mobility of Black workers and to recognize the necessity of Black women’s labor.



Santamarina (2005, p. 14) reasoned that it would have been difficult during this period to find Black or White owned newspapers promoting the home as the workplace for women by shaming “nondomestic or non-reform-oriented” working Black women. These women would be invisible workers unless they publicized their services as laundresses or lodging-house keepers. The elite free Black community was concerned with the domestic propriety of Black women, which meant they took suspicious view of all women’s public labor.

Still, African American women were the first example of the “. . . discrepancy between their roles determined by the division of labor and the ideology of vocation that decreed the place of power and influence for a woman was within her home” ( Mullings, 1997, p. 25). African American women lived a contradictory existence of working both inside and outside the home (Giddings, 1984; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002). Dubois (1929) interpreted their circumstances as having an unwelcome autonomy heaped upon them; yet, he believed that working outside the home would reveal to African American women their future life work and an embrace of economic independence.

Jones (1986) proposed that the labor of love for African American women as paid workers was in supporting their home life as wives, mothers, and community activists. This unpaid work supported by the discourse on the ideology of vocation privileged a few Black women, but not without constraints (Santamarina, 2005). However, Janiewski (1986) rejected this assertion by Jones because it did not envisage the complexity

between race, gender, and class taxonomy that pervaded the lives of working African American women.

### Enslaved, Paid, and Unpaid Labor

Scholars analyzing the experiences of working Black women created the previously discussed taxonomical lens for theorizing about their enslaved, paid, career development, and unpaid labors. Existing scholarship on the taxonomical lens of race, gender, and class has been the instrument for proposing that Black women were the first female paid workers and for understanding their discrepant position in the work force.

This literature review contains an examination of the scholarship on enslaved, paid and unpaid labor of Black women. Each of these topics is examined from their historical trajectory using the theoretical framework of race, gender, and class.

#### *Enslaved*

Scholars such as Amott (1996) and Jones (1986) confirm that slave labor instituted the labor history of African American women in the United States. Jones (1982, 1986) contended that there have been challenges in the scholarship when defining the unpaid and coerced labor of slave women. A pervasive quandary articulated by White (1985) has been the lack of definitive primary and secondary source material on the female slave. White stated

A consequence of the double jeopardy and powerlessness is the Black woman's

invisibility. Much of what is important to Black Americans is not visible to Whites and much what is important to women is not visible to men. Whites wrote most of antebellum America's record and African American males wrote just about all of the antebellum records left by Blacks. To both groups the female slaves' world was peripheral. (1985, p. 23)

Scholars have defined slavery as an economic and political system, whereby Whites extorted forcibly all the unpaid labor they could from Blacks of mixed and single or same Black offspring (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Giddings, 1984; Jones, 1982, 1986). Amott and Matthaei (1996) and Jones (1982, 1986) described slavery as critical to the economic growth of the United States.

The business of slavery began in the colonial period and did not end until the middle of the nineteenth century. This intercontinental system brought chained Africans, traded in Africa for goods such as cloth and guns manufactured by the British, and sold as slaves to colonial planters in America. This slave system began in the 1600s (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). By 1640, a racial caste system was in place that forced Black people into a lifetime of servitude (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Jones, 1982).

This system led to the economic subordination of Black people (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Jones, 1982). Amott and Matthaei (1996) illustrated the institutionalization of this subordination: Property-owning colonial masters paid taxes when they used white women for fieldwork. They were free to employ Black women for

agricultural work, making this labor the norm for Black women (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Jones, 1982; Jones, 1986; Wertheimer, 1977).

Enslaved women worked to produce goods and services for three different groups: the master, the slave community, and the family of the slave woman (Jones, 1986). Jones (1982, 1986) and Wertheimer (1977) summarized rural slave women lives governed by seasons of planting and harvesting in the North and South; therefore, their primary work was as agricultural laborers. In addition to farm work was domestic work, preparing meals, laundry, spinning yarn, and needlework as well as childcare for the master and family. On Sunday afternoons, the slave quarters and community needed these same products and services. These activities included childcare, cooking, repairing and making clothes, cleaning quarters and curing of ailments (Jones, 1982).

In the field, slave men and women worked alongside one another under the threat of violence. In this setting, the slave master ignored gender differences (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Beal, 1975; Davis, 1971; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1982, 1986; Wertheimer, 1977).

Amott and Matthaei (1996) argued that the views on women's uniqueness and weaknesses did not apply to slave women because of the profit motive. Painter (1996) asserted that the following words, shaped by the rural slavery experience of Sojourner Truth, identified herself as a productive worker to any man:

I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have

plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? . . . . I can carry as much as any man and can eat as much too . . . . I am strong as any man is now. (1996, p. 125)

Therefore, scholars emphasized that African American slave women were unsupported by the ideology of femininity and womanhood or as the *weaker sex* [italics added] (Brand, 1987, 1988; Davis, 1971; hooks, 1981; Jackson, 1990; Jones, 1982, 1986; Wertheimer, 1977; White, 1999). African American women had to bear the same productivity demands as African American male slaves, whether they served in the field or in the house. Davis explained this productivity as “the deformed equality of equal oppression” (1971, p. 8).

Nonetheless, intra-group gender differences existed (Beal, 1975; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1982, 1986 Santamarina, 2005). Gender differences were explicit, however, in that few slave women were likely to work as slave men in the positions of skilled crafts or artisans such as carpenter, cooper, wheelwright, tanner, blacksmith, or shoemaker. These positions required specialized training that would interrupt the childbearing of slave women (Beal, 1975; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1982). Enslavers hired out skilled slave men to other plantations. Slave owners did not permit absences by slave women, whose domestic skills were important to their plantation households (Beal, 1975; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1982).

Social equality existed among the sexes to the extent that they performed the

same agricultural tasks, but not in any other arena, because slave men were placed in leadership positions over slave women (Davis, 1971; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1986). Rarely were slave women placed in authority over slave men. They shared day-to-day existence under the same racist hierarchy, but there was sexist differentiation (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Davis, 1971; Fox & Hesse-Biber, 1984; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1982, 1986; King, 1975; Lerner, 1979). In describing the slave subculture, hooks (1981) emphasized the household and care-giving responsibilities of Black females. Black slave men viewed cooking, sewing, nursing, and even minor farm labor as women's work (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1982, 1986). Within the slave household, there was gender specific female slave work (Davis, 1971; hooks, 1981; Jones, 1986).

The case made by Beal (1975), Davis (1971), and hooks (1981) asserted Black women as facing a twofold exploitation – as slaves and as field hands, or as nurses, cooks, seamstresses, washerwomen, and maids in their own households. Black women therefore had masculine and feminine roles during slavery as well as the physical, emotional, and spiritual hardships that accompanied these roles (Beal, 1975; Brand, 1987, 1988; Davis, 1971; hooks, 1981). One of the more pressing hardships was the constant presence of the demanding and demeaning expectations of the slave mistresses and masters (Beal, 1975; Davis, 1971; hooks, 1981).

The nineteenth century ideological assumption of the home and the family as the woman's sphere of influence (Welter, 1966) had an impact on male-female sex roles and

patterns in slave relationships (Davis, 1971; hooks, 1981). Enslaved Black women considered working with Black men as field hands as demeaning because they were ashamed of working alongside their men.

In feeling this way, Black women inadvertently supported the sexist social order by desiring that their lot be similar to free White women (Hooks, 1981). However, Jones (1986) asserted that slave women would rather work in agricultural labor alongside their men rather than in domestic service because of the proximity of master and family. Wanting to work solely in domestic service was a romanticized notion created by the enslavers (Jones, 1986). Davis (1971) suggested that regardless of the labor productivity of slave women--working in fields or in owners' houses— when the owner permitted them they sought to purchase their own freedom and that of family members.

When possible, coercive and violent work had as the goal purchasing one's freedom from slavery (Davis, 1971). Davis conjectured that work, albeit coercive and violent, could be the means to meet a goal or objective. This conjecture is similar to the thesis held by Rehm (1999), who proposed that the work of César Chávez was an outgrowth of encountering coercive and violent migrant farm work that led to a vocation—advocating for farm workers.

Enslavement may have lead to the dual roles of African American women working both inside and outside the home—the private and public spheres (Beckett, 1982; Burgess & Hayward, 1993). This proposal that the slave experience conditioned an

engaged willingness of Black women to work for pay has permeated limited scholarship (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Costa, 2000; Davis, 1971; Goldin, 1977; Jones, 1986; King, 1975; Smith, 1985; Woody, 1992).

### *Paid*

The labor of Black women has been invisible in the scholarly accounts of industrializing and organizing labor (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Santamarina, 2005). One of the invisible historical facts about Black women's labor was that the local authorities taxed working Black women whether they were enslaved, free, married, or single (Santamarina). Black families bore this imposition, not imposed on White families. Taxation of Black female labor rendered their working when it was paid and outside of their homes unacceptable and connected to servitude. This social out-casting led to degrading them as laborers (Santamarina). Another factor serving the invisibility of Black women's labor has been the common occupations that have attributed to them the longest history of paid work—agricultural and domestic work (Amott & Matthaei, 1996).

No state in the U. S during the early twentieth century has established minimum wage legal protection for these occupations, which will be discussed further (Mutari, Power, and Figart, 2002). Therefore, the paid labor of African American women was an embattled means to gain control over what they lacked “. . . social power from their own productive energies and material resources” (Jones, 1986. p. 7).



A challenge faced by scholars of women's economic and labor history has been to explain the higher rate of labor force participation among Black women when compared to White women (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Burgess & Hayward, 1993; Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977; Hatch, 1991; Hesse-Biber, 1986; King, 1975; Malson, 1983; Mullings, 1997; Newman, 1986; Palmer, 1983; Silverman, Skirboll & Payne, 1996; Wallace, 1980; Woody, 1992; Wuthnow, 2003). Wuthnow specified careful scholarship as determining working-class African-American women (Black women in North America) were the forgers of the inclusion of women in the labor force. They were the primary gauge for the category of working women. Costa substantiated that the labor-force participation rates for Black women were proportionally higher than the rates for White women. Costa stated the rate at 43% prior to 1940. The reasons surmised for this higher percentage were the lower incomes of Black households, making the earnings by Black women an economic necessity, and the possibility that the coerced labor of slavery removed the stigma of Black women working for pay.

Scholars have hypothesized that African American women have had the longest history of paid labor because slavery initiated them as workers in the U.S. (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Costa, 2000; Davis, 1971; Goldin, 1977; Jones, 1986; King, 1975; Smith, 1985; Woody, 1992). Existing scholarship (Beckett, 1982; Bierma, 2001; Bose, 1984; Charles, Buchmann, Halebsky, Powers, & Smith, 2001; Costa, 2000; Cotter, Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2003; Goldin, 1977) sought to confirm the labor-force

participation rate of Black women that began after slavery and continued unabated until the twentieth century regardless of family shape and size. Sundstrom (2001) ascertained that Black women started the twentieth century with a higher labor-force participation rate. Black women have worked outside of their homes regardless of their marital status or the presence of children or dependents (Beckett, 1982; Charles et al., 2001; King, 1975; Malson, 1983; Persons, 1915; Wallace, 1980).

There have been difficulties in documenting with accuracy the employment patterns and specific numbers of Black women employed (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Conk, 1981; Woodson, 1930). Because this data have been defined as gender and race specific, it has been plagued by over and undercounting the labor-force participation rate of Black women prior to 1910 (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Burgess & Hayward, 1993; Conk, 1981; Woodson, 1930).

These scholars noted the inconsistencies in census racial and ethnic categories defining the employed and in what capacities. Bose (1987) pursued how unpaid work has been documented and attributed the ideology of vocation in defining as well as undercounting female employment and unemployment. These inconsistencies caused exclusions (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Bose, 1987; Burgess & Hayward, 1993; Conk, 1981). Burgess and Hayward (1993) attributed Goldin (1977) as the first to use archival data to study Black women's labor-force participation rate.

Higginbotham (1982) and Rollins (1985) espoused that the higher rate of labor force participation of Black women was due to their forging an expanded meaning of womanhood against the racist culture and out of economic need. All the aforementioned scholars recognized that Black women worked out of economic need, but interposed within this need, as Dubois (1929) projected, was an exercise of their own autonomy and agency.

Santamarina (2005) maintained that nineteenth century African American women workers explained their labor with regard to their economic need and entitlement--they exercised their power to work in the public realm. Scott (1980) asserted that Black women have a deep respect for paid work as part of their cultural and religious ethos.

Harley (1991), Lykes (1983), and Malson (1983) offered quotes from working African American women who emphasized no connections between themselves and their paid work considered by public perception as menial. Santamarina (2005, p. 23) purported this perception of physical labor as an opposing view of self-supporting labor because it held Black women's labor as "subordinated labor." Therefore, the quoted women offered by Harley, Lykes, and Malson dissociated themselves from their labor because they did not want to be perceived as subordinate as their labor. According to Harley, reformers promoting the ideology of vocation considered labor by Black women unnecessary by attributing to it low-status and marking the women as unproductive and

unrepresentative of women workers. Santamarina contended this perspective aided the public and scholarly invisibility of Black woman's labor.

Paid work had an effect on Black women's perceptions of themselves and in what they believed; others perceived their working outside the home even as the ideology of vocation as a cultural expectation disparaged work that was not homebound. Scholars of economic and feminist history and theory have been seeking to explicate this phenomenon of working African American women. Contemporary scholars theorized that the intersecting forces of race, gender, and class assigned paid domestic service as the first employment of African American women (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990; Almquist & Glazer-Malbin, 1977; Aptheker, 1982; Brewer, 1999; Brewer, Conrad, & King, 2002; Browne & Misra, 2003; Collins, 1989; Cotter Hermsen, & Vanneman, 2003; Dill, 1983, 1988b; Duffy, 2007; Gatz, 1982; Glenn, 1987; Higginbotham, 1982; Hull, Bell-Scott, & Smith, 1982; Hurtado, 1989; Johnson-Bailey, 1999, 2003; Jones, 1984; King, 1988; Mullings, 1997; Mutari, Power & Figart, 2002).

*Domestic service.*

Brewer (1999), Brown (1938), Dill (1988a, 1994), Jackson (1990) and Wallace (1980) asserted domestic service as the first movement in waged labor for Black women. Jackson (1990) clarified that this labor had been relegated to the concept of women's work.

Glenn (1992) referred to domestic service as reproductive work, a Marxist perspective, defining paid and unpaid household work. Domestic service as a waged labor phenomenon (a) epitomized class and race differences, (b) stereotyped all Black women as servants who met the expectations of White people of all ages, and (c) exploited Black women all over the United States (Blackwelder, 1978; Boris, 1989; Brown, 1938; Clark-Lewis, 1987; Dill, 1988a, 1994; Duffy, 2007; Glenn, 1987, 1992; Green, 2006; Grim, 1996; Grossman, 1980; Harley, 1978; Harley, 1990; Haynes, 1923; Helmbold & Schnofield, 1989; Hewitt, 1991; Jones, 1982, 1986; Klaczynska, 1976; Marks, 1993; Palmer, 1984, 1989, 1987; Rollins, 1985; Smith, 1985; Woodson, 1930).

Because professional trade organizations excluded African American women working as agricultural or manual laborers and as domestic servants, this exclusion reinforced the discourse that their lives were about servitude and dependency (Glenn, 1992; Santamarina, 2005). Rollins (1985) explained the domestic service relationship offered a robust opportunity in the United States to explore a situation in which the three structures of power interact: capitalist class structure, the patriarchal sex hierarchy, and the racial division of labor. Rollins argued

The origins of household work are with women; there has been a tradition throughout the millennia for female domestics to be used sexually; housework is manual labor and manual labor is universally denigrated; and until recent times,

there has been an association between domestic servitude and slavery (Rollins, 1985 pp. 16 & 24).

The work of the domestic servant centered on the relationship with the employer who sought to profit from the employee/maid's labor (Clark-Lewis, 1987; Dill, 1988a, 1994; Grossman, 1980; Marks, 1993; Palmer, 1984, 1989, 1987). Black female domestics had to wrestle self-respect and power by defying some of the expectations of White employers. White employers despised domestic service as lowly compensated employment, as well as the Black women they employed, because they were not laboring in their own households as dictated by the discourse on the ideology of vocation (Clark-Lewis, 1987; Dill, 1988a, 1994; Marks, 1993).

Under these circumstances, Black women had to derive their personal power from their labor (Hunter, 1997). Work, considered the public characteristic of Black womanhood because this kind of labor located them closer to slavery, led White employers to hire them for their households (Dill, 1982; Higginbotham, 1982). Their labor placed them in the most precarious situations over longer periods of their lives. Some scholars contended that Black women saw themselves worthy of respect from their White employers as they performed their work without constant scrutiny; if not, they would move to another employer (Clark-Lewis, 1987; Dill, 1988a, 1994; Grossman, 1980; Harley, 1990; Palmer, 1984, 1987, 1989).

Domestic service and Black women became linked, while middle and upper class White women who hired domestic servants saw themselves as managers. In 1923, Nannie H. Burroughs, a leader of the Women's Convention of the National Baptist Convention and founder of the National Wage Earners, a union for domestic workers, as well as a member of the National Association of Colored Women, challenged the audience at the Women's Bureau conference on Women in Industry. She argued “. . . fifty-seven percent of the Colored women in this country who are wage earners work in the homes of the White women of this country . . .” She pointed out that their labor made it possible for the White women delegates' interests and engagement with public life. Nannie H. Burroughs continued “. . . because there are women back in their homes . . . looking after their work . . .” (Women's Bureau, 1923, pp. 100-1).

Even though the only labor White women managed was not to perform labor in their own households (Clark-Lewis, 1987; Dill, 1988a; 1994; Palmer, 1984, 1987, 1989). With the help of Black clubwomen, and labor organizations that provided training and assistance to locate positions in households for those without personal connections, Black women made domestic work respectable for themselves (Dill, 1988a; 1994; Harley, 1991; Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995; White, 1999).

Black women focusing on their own interests by the mid-twentieth century offered to White households day work or day service (Boehm, 2009; Clark-Lewis, 1987; Dill, 1994; Fox, 1942; Grossman, 1980; Haynes, 1923; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986). Day

work had the advantage of Black women choosing the White women who would be their employers and the expectations they were willing to meet (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Clark-Lewis, 1987; Dill, 1994; Fox, 1942; Grossman, 1980; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986). Moreover, it allowed for the complicated schedules of working mothers that included checking on their children in the afternoon and being home at night (Clark-Lewis, 1987; Dill, 1994; Fox, 1942; Grossman, 1980; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986).

The shift to day work permitted Black women to have social lives of their own, and for women of childbearing age to have families of their own and not live in isolation (Clark-Lewis, 1987; Dill, 1994; Fox, 1942; Grossman, 1980; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986). They moved from this work with their specialized skills into profitable commercial settings such as laundries and lunchrooms (Palmer, 1984, 1987, 1989).

Blackwelder (1997) and Jones (1986) reported that these commercial laundries were poorly ventilated and unsanitary, the work was hot and damp, and the women were given inadequate breaks and rest rooms. The growth of this industry and the increased affordability of washing machines undercut their self-employment as laundresses (Blackwelder, 1997; Jones, 1986). Often, Black women performed hand ironing and flat work, which was the lowest paid and the least skilled, earning a wage of \$12 dollars a week in the Northeast and Midwest (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Blackwelder, 1997; Jones, 1986).

Accompanying this movement toward commercial laundries were ongoing racist



challenges to their womanhood. Green (2006) and Hunter (1997) reported that White supremacists portrayed Black washerwomen as mammies—servants to White womanhood. This image became more salient with the rise of commercial laundries.

*Homework.*

Known as homework, Boris (1989) proposed working from home as gendered employment or women's work, whereby women carried into their residences linens to wash and iron, fabric to sew or anything else that required coiling, rolling, or typing. Boris described home workers as independent contractors who controlled their labor.

Working from home was an ancillary labor alternative to and in combination with domestic service and agricultural work (Boris, 1989; Hunter, 1997). Working from home was hidden labor that permitted the appearance of the ideological vocation of womanhood by working for one's family and the employer within one's household (Welter, 1966). Boris illustrated the role and responsibilities of the laundry worker at home.

The laundress would pick up clothing bundles at the client or employer's home. This pick-up and return created an intimate relationship, because in addition to payment, the home worker might receive anything from food, clothes, or protection from other White people when seeking payment from tardy customers (Boris, 1989; Woodson, 1930). In the exchange of service, the home worker had to meet their scheduled expectations to gain future contracts (Boris, 1989).

Another option for household income was to receive boarders. In addition to the role of boarding housekeeper, other roles were laundress, seamstress, and dressmaker. The seamstress and dressmaker went to white households, or if they were lower class and/or Black households, these customers came to the home worker's residence (Boris, 1989). These entrepreneurs took measurements to make the product that was delivered to the customer. As in the case of the laundress, the dressmaker and seamstress were not compensated for pick-up and return and they lost time and money waiting for their work.

All home workers experienced seasonal unemployment, and the laundress received no pay when clients went on vacation. Black women aged thirty-five and older performed laundry work in their homes (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Blackwelder, 1978; Blackwelder, 1997; Boris, 1989; Jones, 1986; Ovington, 1911). Prior to commercial laundries, Black women working as washerwomen in their own households were seen as having more independence than cooks and maids who faced constant scrutiny from their White employers (Boris, 1989; Hunter, 1997; White, 1999; Woodson, 1930).

Paid labor in the home involved uncontrollable factors such as client expectations, labor market pressures, the affluence of Black clients and unevenness in receiving payment from White clients. Boris (1989) proposed that migrant Black women in the North worked in their homes as dressmakers and laundresses guided by both desire and lack of choice because homework served the needs of the employer. Boris explained that even though Black women did not like doing homework, they were excluded from work

with better pay in the emerging offices and department stores. Moreover, they had begun earning better wages doing domestic service in commercial laundries and lunch counters combined with homework.

Notwithstanding all the constraints, homework brought about measurable changes in Black women's occupations. This change permitted Black women to enter recognized occupations such as dress and hat makers, tailors, and seamstresses as well as workers in commercial laundries (Boris, 1989; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986; Weiner, 1985; White, 1999).

Smith (2001) considered homework as the historical beginnings of Black female entrepreneurship. Smith viewed homework as a business in the service sector similar to other forms of domestic service that benefitted families and communities from colonial slavery to the antebellum period.

#### *Entrepreneurship.*

Smith (2001) and Scott (1991) emphasized that Black women had habits of surviving that began during slavery. One aspect of the habit of surviving was in forming sole proprietorships permitted in the service sector through domestic and commercial cleaning services and homework activities (Scott, 1991). Black women worked in their own neighborhoods for Black entrepreneurs such as taxicab and insurance companies (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Jones, 1986, Walker, 1998).

Black women since the 1830s were proprietors of beauty parlors (Boris, 1989;

Jones, 1986; Wingfield, 2009). Blackwelder (2003), Boehm (2009) and Winfield (2009) asserted that these shops provided financial independence as one of the few careers Black women could enter on their own terms. Although most stylists learned the hair textures of Black and White patrons, most shops were as segregated as local church congregations were (Blackwelder, 2003; Boehm, 2009; Winfield, 2009).

The stylist-owner could manage a small shop in her home or rent a booth that created jobs and community (Boris, 1989; Jones, 1986; Wingfield, 2009). The stylist supported the community by accommodating hours for the schedules of domestic servants.

Even though they were small in number, Black women demonstrated their capability. In 1850, 438 of 48,888 free African American females were property owners. Statistics revealed that by 1860 another 2,000 free Black women in the South possessed property. All these women proprietors demonstrated a clear lesson: working for self rather than working for others became the means to achieve wealth (Walker, 1998).

Another habit of survival for Black women included informal networks of social and cooperative economics (Smith, 2001; Scott, 1991). Sterling (1984) resonated with Morrison (1971) in asserting that the vital uniqueness of Black women is embodied in their throwing their strength and skill into their survival and transmitting this effort to their descendants.

*Teaching.*

Boris (1989) viewed homework as advancement for working African American women. Other scholars ascertained that Black women were doing similar work to White women as a means to advancement, such as in teaching (Anderson, 1982; Jackson, 1990, Milkman, 1982).

According to Sterling (1984), and Cunningham and Zalokar (1992), since the nineteenth century teaching for Black women had a higher status than domestic labor in most northern states. However, employment and low compensation was the norm due to segregation and the opposition of White people to educating Black children.

*Pre and post WWII.*

Scholars have proposed World War II as a time of increased employment opportunities for women (Anderson, 1982). Honey (1999) stipulated that an invisible wartime labor force existed of 4,000 African American women in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and 330 in the Army Nurse Corps. However, there was much resistance from racist White male employers and White female employees to hiring Black women workers in defense plants, as sales clerks, telephone operators, and gas station attendants (Honey, 1999).

Chafe (1991) and Milkman (1982) estimated that as of 1942, nearly 1,000 black women received vocational training for manufacturing war jobs, but none received employment. Anderson (1982) attributed the ideology of vocation as one of the reasons

for White female employees refusing to work with Black women in any occupational setting.

It has been assumed that the social confinement resulting from household labor made White women oppose working with Black women—a behavior that often went unchallenged by private sector management, which limited the occupational gains and income of Black women (Anderson, 1982). Black women encountered this opposition in the automobile and aircraft industries (Anderson, 1982).

In northern cities, with the lack of governmental and union intervention, employers could count on unskilled positions becoming automated and offering low-level positions with low pay to White women (Blackwelder, 1997; Jones, 1986). There was little political or economic motivation to hire Black women (Blackwelder, 1997; Jones, 1986; Newman, 1986; White, 1999). They encountered little to no opposition when employed in the manufacturing sectors with regard to the most disdainful work, such as in munitions plants and heavy railroad labor (Anderson, 1982; Honey, 1999; Janiewski, 1987)).

During the early 1940s, Black women were unlikely to work in formal sector manufacturing, the manufacturing they did perform was as home dressmakers, 20 percent, in the garment as well as southern cigar and tobacco factories, 16 percent, and food processing at 11 percent (Janiewski, 1987; Jones, 1984; Jones, 1986). They usually performed the dangerous jobs of hog killing and beef casing (Amott & Matthaei, 1996;

Blackwelder, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Janiewski, 1987; Jones, 1986).

Circumstances such as these created opportunities for employers to take advantage of Black women by using them as a last resort workforce (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Blackwelder, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986; Landry, 2000). White women were hostile to Black women who employers hired as strikebreakers to mitigate the effects of a strike organized by labor unions that served only to perpetuate the marginal status of Black women workers (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Blackwelder, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Jones, 1986; Newman, 1986).

Honey (1999) and Jones (1986) indicated that United States government posters, vignettes in magazines, and recruitment propaganda sought working and middle class white women to enter war service. According to Jones (1986), if Black women were exhorted to enter war service it was through jobs that White women had abandoned in the laundries, cafeterias, and in private household help. This racist and sexist assumption engendered Black women workers as an invisible help line behind employed White women (Jones, 1986). Anderson (1982) concluded that the occupational progress of Black women from 1940 to 1944 seemed negligible because of persistent racial and gender exclusion.

Even so, Anderson (1982, p. 83) declared, “labor force statistics supported the contention that the war marked an important break with the historic allocation of work by race and sex.” Bailey and Collins (2006) determined that economic history could not be

understood without examining the productive and personal characteristics of Black women workers whose integration in formal sector occupations (outside of agriculture and private household service) were a watershed event during the 1940s. Anderson (1982) and King (1993) emphasized another important break had been the refusal of Black women's local and national club organizations to signal a return to domestic service.

In addition, Black women sought redress of job discrimination through civil rights organizations and Black men who were willing to strike when employers or the federal, state, and local government did not aid them (Anderson, 1982; Honey, 1999; Jones, 1986). Black women considered the federal Women's Bureau during this period as useless in responding to their reports of job discrimination (Anderson, 1982; Honey, 1999).

Black women would seek redress from the Urban League or the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Anderson, 1982; Weiss, 1974). During this period the Women's Bureau sought social security inclusion for domestic servants and a national training effort to prepare Black women for domestic service (Anderson, 1982). Because WWII created a severe labor shortage, Black women experienced occupational mobility in the civil service as clerical workers, and an increase in nursing training opportunities (Anderson, 1982; King, 1993; Power & Rosenberg, 1993; Scherzer, 2003).



During the nursing shortages of WWII Black women experienced exclusion from nursing education, training, and military and civilian employment opportunities, especially as registered nurses (Glenn, 1991, 1992; Hine, 1989; Scherzer, 2003). This exclusion continued during the postwar years except in instances where the Black nurses were educated and employed in Black nursing schools, hospitals or public health services (Glenn, 1991, 1992; Hine, 1989, Scherzer, 2003).

Scholarly views have differed regarding the occupational mobility of Black women. Albelda (1986) aggregated Black women as nonwhite women, a common problem for Black women scholars seeking to distinguish Black women according to the taxonomy of race, gender, and class (Etter-Lewis, 1991a; Few, Stephens, Rouse-Arnett, 2003).

During the period from 1958-1981, this designated nonwhite data group was purported to integrate occupations that White women held (Albelda, 1986). Brewer (1999) and King (1993) indicated Black women's continuous work in the labor force led them into new occupations; however, Jackson (1990) postulated that African American women moved into occupations that White women vacated. As an example, Jackson indicated that during the 1930s Black women moved in manufacturing as White women left that sphere for clerical and sales positions that excluded Black women.

Albelda (1986), Fosu (1995), and King (1993) inferred federal, state, and local governments were the first employer in hiring newly entering population groups in the

labor force during and after the WWII years. Scholars contend that Black women had a dichotomous experience during and after WWII. Although employed, they kept facing blatant discrimination and therefore faced challenges in obtaining and holding on to any job above the service level (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Anderson, 1982; Beckett, 1982; Hesse-Biber, 1986; Honey, 1999; Jones, 1986; Newman, 1986; White, 1999; Woody, 1992).

When the war ended, management efforts to remove White female defense workers from their jobs were used rampantly against Black women. These efforts included mass firings, layoffs, segregated seniority lists based on race and sex as well as union harassment of women who struggled to keep their positions (Anderson, 1982; Beal, 1975; Honey, 1999; Jones, 1986).

The postwar period signaled not only a return of male soldiers to their former employers, but also the return of women to the sphere of the home (Honey, 1999). The intention of the discourse of the ideology of vocation was to reduce the role of women in society, which encouraged their mass dismissal from the workforce (Honey, 1999).

By 1950, Black women in domestic service were not receiving still any benefits from national worker legislation that supported minimum wage or regulated hours of work, unemployment compensation or Social Security (Jones, 1986; Newman, 1986). They had to negotiate their status individually in and out of domestic service (Dill, 1994). These efforts by private for profit management caused Black women to face job

discontinuity after the war (Anderson, 1982).

Sixty percent of Black women in the years immediately preceding and after World War II continued to do service work in either private households or institutions, whereas forty percent of White women had clerical or sales jobs (Anderson, 1982; Fox, 1942; Honey, 1999; Grossman, 1980; Jones, 1986; King, 1993; Waggaman, 1945). The percentage of Black women in personal service work outside of private household work and in industrial occupations apart from agricultural labor was the same—between 17-18 percent (Anderson, 1982; Beckett, 1982).

The collaborative efforts of the unions, government, and private industry to expand the country's job structure and include working Black women did not occur until the mid-1960s, with mixed results (Albeda, 1986; Beckett, 1982; Boris, 1989; Fosu, 1995; Jones, 1986; King, 1993; Landry, 2000; Mutari et al., 2002; Newman, 1986).

Paid labor for Black women remained a fundamental expectation of their womanhood (Giddings, 1984; Hesse-Biber, 1986; Higginbotham, 1982; Jones, 1986; Landry, 2000; Mutari et al., 2002). Scholars have emphasized that by the mid-twentieth century, Black women had discovered that not even marriage would end their inescapable working for wages (Jones, 1986; Landry, 2000; Santamarina, 2005). Wilson (2003) confirmed in a quantitative study that Black women obtained income security from good jobs, such as those with fringe benefits, rather than marriage.

*Career Development*

Work has been a dominant experience in the lives of African American women (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990; Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Brand, 1987, 1988; Brown, 1938; Burgess & Hayward, 1993; Gilkes, 1990; Harley, 1991, 1997; Hesse-Biber, 1986; Jackson, 1990; Jones, 1986; Landry, 2000; Logan, 2002; Mullings, Tobach, & Rosoff, 1980; Newman, 1986; Scott, 1980; Wallace, 1980; Woody, 1992). Working to exercise personal freedom and pursue options has dominated the scholarly discourse defining the concept of vocation (Copa, 1988; Dawson, 2005; Wuthnow, 2003).

Scholarship by Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998) corresponds with other recent scholarship in noting the labor patterns of African American women working during the mid-twentieth century as house cleaners, cooks, and laundresses. For African American women, race, gender, and class construe as an issue created peculiar and debilitating circumstances because of the kind of work society expected them to perform, conceive, and organize was unconsidered as a vocation (Dill, 1983; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998; Rollins, 1985).

As a construct, career building belonged to the White male experience. African American women were overlooked and unconsidered as career builders (Alfred, 2001; Brown, 2002; Cook, Heppner, & O'Brien, 2002; Foua & Byars-Winston, 2005; Johnson-Bailey & Tisdell, 1998). Brown (2002) and Cook et al. (2002) ascertained that there has been profound cultural neglect in career development theorizing for ethnic and/or racial

minorities as well as for women. Career transitions corresponded to narrow White male models (Flannery, 1994; Imel, 2002; Sterrett, 1999).

Collins described the career development of African American women by the “outsider within” construct (1999, p. 89). Collins’ term defined the historical and social location of Black women domestic workers. This social location arose from the web of race, gender, and class constructions that ascribed only certain kinds of work to African American women.

While performing domestic service, Black women astutely began to resist their social location as despised workers doing despised work. Collins (1999) recommended that leaders of organizations examine and remove unjust practices resulting in working African American women perceiving themselves and others perceiving them as outsiders within organizations. Proudford and Thomas (1999) concluded that management scholars have been inattentive to work experiences, observations, and preferences of Black women within organizations.

The work experiences of Black women affected them. Gilkes, (1980, 1990), Lykes (1983), Malson (1983), Jones (1986) and Scott (1980) described this affect as twofold: the way Black women saw themselves as workers and the ways others have seen them as workers. Wuthnow (2003) hypothesized that African American women paved the way for all women to enter the labor market as a theory that has been overlooked,

particularly in connecting their working with the concept and practice of vocation—connecting who one is with what one does.

### *Unpaid*

Scholarly publications approach the unpaid work patterns of African American women by including women's volunteer club work. The scholarship on national Black women organizations acknowledges their contribution in supporting Black women as paid workers (Gilkes, 1980; Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995; Scott, 1980).

It appears that all working Black women were contradicting the dominant societal expectation, or the discourse on the ideology of vocation of the home as the only sphere of influence. There were conformers and resisters to this ideology in women's club work. Some women worked on the public level as volunteer civic leaders supporting many women who appeared to work where they belonged--in segregated employment inherited from slavery (Shaw, 1996).

Black women who participated in and led the women's club movement saw this space as lifting all women when any was excluded from economic, social, and political opportunities (White & Dobris, 2002). Black clubwomen attempted to "publicize" the value of Black women with their invisible and disparaging work (Santamarina, 2005, p. 22).

This historical scholarship on Black clubwomen elaborated the complexities of women whose labor outside the home was considered undignified and without domestic

femininity (Santamarina, 2005). Working Black women engaged their communities in ways that was “powerful and problematic” (Santamarina, 2005, p. xiii).

This view was similar to Palmer (1983). Palmer noted the distinction between the good woman who was White and the working Black woman who was bad. The ideological rhetoric from Black men and some clubwomen called for reform of the bad woman--a Black woman working out of necessity as her entitlement to independence (Santamarina, 2005).

The working Black women’s low status belied some clubwomen’s ideology of uplifting to enact suitable domestic womanhood (Santamarina, 2005). When the ideology of Black clubwomen focused on the dignity of all labor then the paradoxical dispute became how to do away with race, gender, and class constructs that prevailed in Black communities (Santamarina). The discourse on the ideology of vocation of a woman not working outside her home for income had cultural expectations that ignored the relationship to and the consequences for Black women (Carby, 1987).

Some Black women focused unpaid activities that supported the Black community (Hunter, 1997; Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995; Shaw, 1996; White, 1999). Black women’s organizations for the purpose of supporting individual and community enhancement for members of the particular organization, the Black community, or the general public good date back to 1832 (Carboy, 1987; Collins, 1986; Giddings, 1984;

Gilkes, 1980; Giant, 1996; Harley, 1990; Peterson, 2002; Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995; Shaw, 1996; White, 1999).

Gilkes (1980) defined this kind of community work and the workers as the moral division of labor. Black women worked not for professional rewards (income and prestige) but were conferred the status of respect based on informal community evaluation. Hewitt (1991) and Harley (1991) emphasized the deep respect Black women had for work committed to advocacy in the Black community regardless of compensation received for such work. Rehm (1999) held that the discourse on the concept of vocation included drawing upon meaningful unpaid work experiences.

According to Ross-Gordon and Dowling (1995), Black women working in voluntary organizations constituted the third working shift after work at home and paid work. Black women formed these organizations at the turn of the nineteenth century. They expanded, merged, and recreated them well into the twenty-first century (Hunter, 1997; Shaw, 1996; White, 1999).

One of the historical and contemporary objectives of the Black women's club movement has been to protect the rights of working women (Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995; White, 1999). Although it proved difficult to organize Black women working as domestics, these organizations strategized using the models of the woman's club movement to create self-help through mutual aid that supported the pursuit of the rights of women workers (Terborg-Penn, 1985).



### Working African American Women Experiences in the Twin Cities

This section provides a brief historical account of African American people in Minnesota. This topic includes the types of work African Americans performed as early inhabitants of Minnesota and the Twin Cities.

Both historical and contemporary scholarship includes narrative accounts by African American women working in the Twin Cities. These narratives introduce the continuity and discontinuity in their early work experiences as background for this study.

### Brief History of Black People in the Twin Cities

The focus this section is on working African American women during the mid-twentieth century in the cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The institutional and communal life of Black inhabitants in other areas of Minnesota was small and often an extension of organizations started in the Twin cities (Taylor, 1981, 1986, 2002). The Black populations in Minneapolis, the larger of the cities, were scattered across the city and tended to live adjacent with White ethnic communities of similar socio-economic status, whereas St. Paul was smaller, but had an older Black population dating back to 1849 (Harris, 1926; Murphy & Taylor, 1992-1993; Taylor, 1981, 1986, 2002).

Most Black people, free, enslaved, and fugitive slaves, migrated as early as 1800 to the Minnesota territory from the South for employment or farming (Taylor, 1981, 1986, 2002). The earliest settlers were Black men; very few Black women arrived with

them until the Great migration (Scott, 1976). Since Minnesota did not have a significant industrial and manufacturing base for employment, the migration of Black people was modest (Gilman, 2000; McWatt, 1991; Scott, 1976; Taylor, 1981, 1986, 2002).

### Paid Work

According to local researchers, the 1890 and 1910 census included Black women from Minneapolis and St. Paul who worked as personal or domestic servants (Gilman, 2000; Harris, 1926; McWatt, 1991; Scott, 1976; Taylor, 1981, 1986, 2002). During the demobilization after WWI, Black women worked as railroad car cleaners in Minneapolis and St. Paul (Gilman, 2000; Greenwald, 1975) and as power machine operators in Minneapolis (National Urban League, 1950).

During this period, the Minneapolis YWCA commissioned a survey on working women, and discovered that African American women with high school educations were employed in menial labor. The survey concluded the situation as lamentable “. . . the only fields open to them are unskilled factory service work and personal service as janitresses, matrons, maids or ushers, not a very inspiring outlook for girls who have had a high school education” (Griffith, 1919, p. 94). Lane (1919, p. 65) asserted in a Minneapolis study “Black women learned earlier than their White counterparts to work outside the home.” Decades later, a report concluded that Black women whose interests were supported by both Black and White feminist groups were not attaining social and economic mobility, although these organizations were portrayed Black women’s need for

equal employment and educational access as similar to White women (Minneapolis Urban League, 1984). Census data from 1980 demonstrated that Black women numbered about 16,350 in population. This span of 9 years includes the age range between 25 to 64 years for all women. In each age category, Black women had a 1-to-5 percentage points' higher working presence when compared to White women in the workforce (Minority Women in Minnesota, 1986).

Three local historical projects by Fairbanks (1990), Cavett (2005) and Murphy (1992-1993), and one journalist's undercover story, provided brief narrations about Black women's attempts to discover their vocational identity through paid work. Fairbanks wrote about an aunt, who, during the 1930s, provided day work—domestic service without staying overnight—to Jewish families who moved away from Rondo to Highland Park in St. Paul. Fairbanks stated that this aunt added laundry service to her paid work for bachelor men in Rondo. Fairbanks recalled this aunt no longer doing day work because laundry work made it possible for her not to have to leave home ever again to earn money.

Fairbanks revealed in her family's story an example of homework performed by Black women during the 1930s and 1940s (Boris, 1989). Eula Murphy conveyed to Taylor her experience living in Rondo and recalled “Black women without independent means, skills, or business interests were relegated to work as matrons, domestics, elevator operators, or lounge attendants—or they resorted to prostitution.” “The lack of

employment options made it virtually impossible for young Black women to become self-reliant” (Murphy & Taylor, 1992-1993, p. 14).

The first job for Eula Murphy was as a maid in the ladies’ lounge at a local theater. When the Depression ended, she obtained a filing clerk position. This work became available to young Black women through a federal government administration project (Murphy & Taylor, 1992-1993).

Saunders (1972), a reporter, decided to go undercover as a domestic worker. She discovered “condescension” in Minnesota, a place that had no political or legislative activity for providing domestic workers with federal minimum wages and benefits (p 12). Saunders reported that some housewives were keen to know that she was Black woman and emphasized that she would managed; yet Saunders heard that as “I would nearly do everything” (p. 12). Saunders concluded the foreign-born were the primary recipients experiencing economic vulnerability and exploitation that existed in domestic service.

### Unpaid Work

Cavett (2005) recorded the stories of nineteen African American women who were associated with the Hallie Q. Brown Center in Rondo. This center was named after a Black woman leader in the club movement. Previously the center was known as the Union Hall Association, formed to serve the unmet needs of the Black community in St. Paul, since Black people were unwelcome in White social establishments. The neighborhood center began in 1908 (Minnesota Historical Society, 1966). Although not

noted by in the materials held at the Minnesota Historical Society, Kreuter (2008) and Poastgieter (1968-69) inferred that the establishment of the Hallie Q. Brown Center occurred because Black girls were unwelcome at the Women's Christian Association in St. Paul, the predecessor organization to the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

Documents pertaining to the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House that began in 1924 in north Minneapolis mentioned racial exclusion from the Women's Christian Association, which did not want to house Black women who came to the city to find work (Minnesota Historical Society, 1949). One respondent from St. Paul recorded by Cavett (2005) recalled attending recreational and social facilities at the Phyllis Wheatley House. Three respondents worked as maids or matrons providing housekeeping services in private homes, stores, or the rail line, two worked at the Halle Q. Brown Center. One respondent recalled the knowledge she received at the Center helping her to communicate with others at work (Cavett, 2005). Blackwelder (1978) and Green (2006) surmised that Black women gathered informally to talk about their paid and unpaid work.

### Summary of the Literature Review

This research study seeks to answer this question from the literature: How did African American women who were engaged in waged and un-waged work in Minnesota during the mid-twentieth century perceive their vocational identity?

The scholarly discourses analyzing the concept of vocation, vocational identity, work, and career development have ignored or excluded working African American women. Yet, texts from literature and theater performance attested to African American women asking: Who am I and what am I to do?

However, existing scholarship by a few Black women identified the problematical situation faced by working African American women with the dominant discourse about the ideology of vocation defined as a women's role and responsibilities in working at home for the family of origin or family of choice. A few African American scholars emphasized the incongruity between working African American women and an ideological discourse that discouraged working outside the home.

There was disagreement among scholars about the influence of the discourse on the ideology of vocation on female and male slave relationships. Yet, the ideology of vocation defined the dominant role and identity of a woman as a homemaker. Enslavers manipulated the ideology of vocation to constrict the work roles of Black women.

Current scholarship proposes that the paid work roles of Black women were an assignment because of their race, gender, and class. There appears to be little scholarship

from the mid-twentieth century that specifically addressed how African American women interpreted the ideology of vocation or a vocational identity as paid and unpaid workers.

The entrance of Black women into the labor force has generated much debate by scholars since the nineteenth and well into the mid-twentieth century. Scholars from social science research disciplines contend that African American women have had the longest history of paid work in the U. S. because of the legacy of slavery. Nevertheless, the debate has stemmed from the paucity of research. Too many primary and secondary sources on working African American women aggregated them in a sample with other women of color even though presence in the labor-force has historical uniqueness in moving out of domestic service to other employment areas.

Theorizing about African American women as paid and unpaid workers from the constructs of race, gender, and class complexities has been emerging since the arrival of African American women as scholars in academia. Black feminist scholarship on these complexities unfolded after African American women had entered the workforce. The existing scholarship has examined retrospectively the influence of these constructs as societal forces on the initial work patterns of African American women. Furthermore, this scholarship has offered insight on the continuing influence of race, gender, and class complexities in the kinds of employment African American women obtained.

Existing scholarship on the career development of working African American women during the mid-twentieth century recognized patterns in the movement of Black

women's paid labor. A significant amount of scholarship provided evidence that the first labor movement for Black women was domestic service. Scholars overlooked domestic service for consideration as career development. Working Black women have been present but not seen as contributing to career theory development. This view held working Black women as overlooked and unconsidered to serve as a scholarly example for practicing vocation as an unfolding narrative development of meaningful work.

According to scholars, the Black women's club movement supported the initial efforts of Black women workers to receive fairness in wages and hours from their employers. The labor organizations formed by and for working Black women were not longstanding.

Working African American women in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century mirrored the larger societal pattern as reported by the existing scholarship. There were Black women who worked as leaders of organizations that assisted the unemployed in obtaining work.

Working in paid and unpaid capacities, African American women nationally and locally have been visible to the Black community. However, these aspects of their lives received rare and limited research inquiry until now.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this interpretative study is to discover the vocational identity of African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century (1920-1980). The ideological expectation for all women was that the home served as the only place to exercise their vocation (Giddings, 1984; Mutari, Power & Figart, 2002; Welter, 1966). Conversely, it appears that paid work was the societal expectation of African American women (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Jones, 1986). Thus, the problem has been that existing scholarship has not examined vocational identity for the women in America who have worked the longest as a legacy of slavery (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977; Mullings, 1997; Wuthnow, 2003).

The overarching research question is: How do African American women who were engaged in paid or non-paid work in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century perceive their vocational identity? Existing historical scholarship has described the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century as the Progressive era, a period that started roughly in the late 1800s and ended sometime in the 1940s. This period in the U.S. ushered in many societal changes, political and economic. Those changes included increasing urbanization, migration, and the concentrated growth of manufacturing and industry in which women workers emerged (Blackwelder, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Lerner, 1979; Mutari, Power, & Figart, 2002; Shaw, 1996). The Progressive era was

accompanied by the Jim Crow era that enforced legislated racial segregation in all public and private accommodation until the 1950s (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Blackwelder, 1997; Hunter, 1997; Peterson, 2002; Shaw, 1996; White, 1999). It is within this context that the oral history of the vocational identity of these women will be examined from their discussion about working. To that end, this hermeneutic study has utilized narrative interviews.

This chapter includes the purpose of the study and research question followed by the interpretative paradigm and the reasons for using this methodology. The origins of hermeneutics as a qualitative method are described briefly. I explain the philosophy of Gadamer (1960/1975) on hermeneutics covering these topics: personal historical effect, openness, pre-understanding as well as understanding within a text, and the hermeneutic circle. Oral narratives and the hermeneutic method made it possible to explain representation and truth in transcriptions, and the validity of concluding interpretative meanings. The section on data collection examines recruitment, control by non-respondents, interview approach, member-checking, and demographics of respondents. This chapter closes with coding guidelines.

## The Interpretative Paradigm

This study examines vocational identity as a phenomenon within the lives of African American women who worked in the Twin Cities. Therefore, this study focused on the interpreted literature and the perspectives of the participants about themselves as women and workers. The perspectives of participants form the “culture of inquiry” for creating knowledge about vocational identity from the participants (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, 9). Within the human sciences of knowledge production, there are “. . . varying conceptions and models of what knowledge is, how it is created, and what it looks like” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 9). Bentz and Shapiro emphasized that

Research is always carried out by an individual with a life and a lifeworld . . . a personality, a social context, and various personal and practical challenges and conflicts, all of which affect the research, from the choice of a research question or topic, through the method used, to the reporting of the project’s outcome. (p. 4).

Schwandt (2000) indicated that interpretive thinking has been associated with Weber (Weber, 1949). Schwandt explained that Weber introduced *verstehen* [italics added] or understanding, which has been the ideal objective for human science researchers. Crotty (1998) added that within qualitative inquiry, human phenomena can be interpreted culturally and situated historically within the social life world. Qualitative researchers seek meaning and understanding of human social action or experience.

Human science researchers, study the descriptive-interpretive patterns, structure, and/or levels of experiential and textual meaning (Schwandt, 2000; van Manen, 1997).

Bonteke (1996) referred to human science research as modes of knowing and being. Qualitative inquiry has been a multi-disciplinary field for researchers seeking meaning and understanding of the realities of individuals, groups and cultures using an array of stances, strategies, and methods (Schwandt, 2000). Qualitative researchers proceed with recognizing (a) human stories as valued criteria for study, (b) obtaining the subject's point of view, (c) examining this viewpoint within the challenges and changes of everyday life and, (d) seeking detailed descriptions, from a specific case or idiographic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

This study examined the individual development of vocational identity through paid and unpaid work within a racial and gender group. Because this study addresses the vocational identity of working African American women through their individual perceptions, it reflects an idiographic orientation (Freeman, 1997). The idiographic orientation looks at the singular and individual stories of African American women who worked mid-century to answer the question: What has been their discovery of their perceived vocational identity (Freeman, 1997)? In recalling their stories of paid and unpaid work, the women reveal who they believed they ought to be and what they ought to do through the “. . . routine and problematic moments and meanings in their lives” which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2003, p. 5), is the objective of qualitative

research. What did African American women perceive in their discoveries of vocational identity from their stories of paid and unpaid work? Although, the study starts with the work lives of African American women in the Twin Cities, it will include the cultural surroundings African American women workers carried, encountered, and imparted as suggested by Freeman (1997).

Hermeneutics is the method used to perceive the vocational identity of African American women working the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century. The event becomes interpreting what the women interviewed reveal about who they believe they are and what they ought to do (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001). The qualitative research approach as Smith and Heshusius (1986) pointed out is in the logic of justifying this study of vocational identity as knowledge creation not as a technique or guide that all researchers ought to follow. Existing scholarship refers to hermeneutics as a philosophy of interpretative understanding (Palmer, 1969; Schwandt, 2000; Walsh, 2003).

An interpretative understanding begins with grasping the context in order to understand particular human action in events, practices, and situations (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, the epistemological stance of hermeneutics has meant substantiating valid and objective knowledge arrived at demonstrating the interpretation as knowledge creation (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 2000; Smith & Heshusius, 1986). The ontological stance refers to one's reality or being in the world (Carter & Little, 2007; Koch, 1999). The ontological perspective for hermeneutic research adheres to the self-interpreting facility that

embodies what it means to be a person (Gadamer, 1960/1975; Koch, 1999; Odmann, 1992). In addition, the axiological stance of hermeneutics has been determined by its relevance to the criterion studied or the relevance and value of the research question to larger cultural concerns (Carter & Little, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Li & Seale, 2007). The epistemological, ontological, and axiological stances inform the method for analyzing data in qualitative inquiry (Carter & Little, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2003; Li & Seale, 2007).

In researching the historical development of hermeneutics, Palmer (1969) indicated there have been significant challenges of interpretation throughout history. Hermeneutics, more than any other term within qualitative inquiry has represented the science of interpretation (Palmer, 1969). The root word for hermeneutics from the Greek has meant to interpret (Palmer, 1969). There are three aspects of interpreting within the hermeneutic approach: a) to express openly through words; b) to explain situations, acknowledging one's view before calling for logical explanation; and c) to translate the textual unknown or foreign languages (Palmer, 1969).

Hermeneutics recognizes that language remains primarily a living sound (Palmer, 1969). Hermeneutic explanation in all of interpretive directions has to be contextual by providing a background of accepted meanings (Palmer, 1969). These three directions of interpretation obtain meaning that leads to understanding (Palmer, 1969). Linguistic or explicit meaning has been acquired using grammatical, historical, and other tools to

interpret an ancient text (Palmer, 1969). One acquired implicit meaning by understanding the context of the subject and situation for its significance within a text (Palmer, 1969).

Palmer explained hermeneutics exists through the created language themes. Koch (1999) referred to hermeneutics as understandings shared with another that occur through language. Koch (1999) inferred that a premise of hermeneutics has been the self-interpreting activity of humanity that allows them construct their own reality. According to Bonteke (1996), hermeneutical understanding has been a struggle through the use or workings of language to preserve a sense of an object's dignity. Lastly, hermeneutics became a basic theory of how understanding showed itself in human existence (Odmann, 1992; Palmer, 1969).

Palmer (1969) summarized that writing a history of hermeneutics, as system of implicit and explicit interpretation would be unmanageable. Historically, biblical scholars developed the philosophy of hermeneutics (Crotty, 1998; Palmer, 1969), defining it as the rules, methods, and/or theory governing biblical interpretation. In its later, scholarly development, it included non-biblical literature—legal, literary, and historical (Palmer, 1969).

The outcome of the biblical and then scholarly trajectories of hermeneutics has been two different and interacting foci (a) the phenomenon of understanding a text, and (b) addressing the question of existing understanding and interpretation (Palmer, 1969). Palmer described the first foci as the hermeneutical problem that functions for and

against the second foci, the hermeneutical principle. The hermeneutical problem as addressed by an array of early and contemporary scholarship has been the act of forming a theoretical, linguistic, and historical understanding as it functions in textual interpretation (Palmer, 1969). The hermeneutical problem as conveyed by Palmer has been obtaining understanding of the text by tackling another human perspective through historically entering the text (Moules, 2002; Odmann, 1992; Palmer, 1969). The hermeneutical principle has been recognizing that such interpretation will be shaped by the questions the interpreter uses to engage the subject of text (Odmann, 1992; Palmer, 1969).

The hermeneutical problem has created a vast scope of hermeneutical pursuits (Palmer, 1969). Because non-specialized or non-theological hermeneutics has no home in any established discipline or field of practice, it became a general discipline under the banner of the New Hermeneutic (Palmer, 1969). Scholarship on textual interpretation across disciplines defined the New Hermeneutic (Palmer, 1969). One of the many scholars of the New Hermeneutic has been Gadamer (1960/1975).

#### Gadamer on Hermeneutics

Palmer (1969) explained that Gadamer (1960/1975) developed what has been considered a philosophical hermeneutics that sought to know the meaning of understanding and interpretation. Hermeneutics as espoused by Gadamer was distinct



from a concern with method, methodology, and practice as sought by other scholars of the New Hermeneutic. According to Gadamer, method will not be the way to truth.

Truth became the event of meaning rather than an outcome obtained by objectivity and repetition (Moules, 2002). Truth could be understood differently and yet equally among us. Interpreting to understand meant that both meaning and truth would be encountered (Moules, 2002). Without both, understanding becomes impossible. Meaning and truth change based upon contingencies, preferences, and references (Moules, 2002). Truth in understanding implies that an account corresponds with human experience (Moules, 2002). Gadamer (1960/1975) provided the following instrumental structures for thinking hermeneutically. This section examines the following hermeneutical structures for textual interpretation and understanding: personal historical effect, openness, pre-understanding and understanding within texts.

### *Personal Historical Effect*

One structure for thinking hermeneutically has been the personal historical effect embodied in tradition and authority (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Tradition has been a nameless authority that connects people to the past (Gadamer). We are historical beings who need to affirm, embrace, and cultivate this foundation (Gadamer). Traditions, from society, family life, upbringing, and education, with our thoughts and feelings about them, shape our internal understanding (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001). This personal sense of tradition serves as a foundation of culture (Dahlberg et al., 2001).

Tradition became an institution forming and permeating our understanding of the world as it occurs (Bontekoe, 1996; Dahlberg et al., 2001; Odmann, 1992). Every encounter between human beings, all exchanges in the everyday world, even the activity of focused research, has history interwoven in it (Bontekoe, 1996; Dahlberg et al., 2001; Odmann, 1992; Palmer, 1969).

The current study about African American women discovering their vocational identity working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century is about their tradition as workers and the tradition of the ideology of vocation of the home as the only place for women to work. In addition, the history of African American women working in their families and in other settings accompanies their history as workers. Gadamer stated, “. . . in fact history does not belong to us, but we belong to it” (1960/1975, p. 245). This belonging to history, according to Gadamer, allows us to “. . . understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live” (1960/1975, p. 245).

However, history has not been evident because it enters the present concealed. Everything from the past flows into the present moment. Meaning obtained from the past connects to the present and future (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Therefore, interpretation includes the historical context of the past and present (Gadamer).

In addition, hermeneutics as a theory of interpretation and understanding postulates that all our realities require recognizing the “. . . particular historical and

cultural context because we use the concepts, language, and symbols, and meaning of our time to interpret everything” (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998, p. 40).

### *Openness*

Openness has been a characteristic of hermeneutical research (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001). Openness makes us available to the phenomenon of interest (Gadamer, 1960/1975). The natural tendency of a researcher has been to see events and objects as having meaning (Dahlberg et al., 2001). Openness requires cultivating vigilance to see thoughtfully the events or objects of the world (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Openness becomes a way of being with the event or object so that the knowledge is obtained by the researcher who will show how it has been studied, was studied and how or what it has been (Dahlberg et al., 2001; few et al., 2003). Palmer emphasized openness as “. . . the objectivity of the allowing the thing that that appears to be as it really is for us” (1969, p. 169).

Gadamer (1960/1975) considered openness as a methodological principle; yet, the question remained how to practice it without it becoming rote and routine (Dahlberg, Drew, Nystrom, 2001). The practice of openness will be subject to failure when it becomes a method rather than a dialectical process (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Freeman, 2006; Kvale, 1996a).

Palmer (1969) described a dialectical process for understanding a text by serving the text by listening to what it has said. In serving the text by listening to it, one belongs to the text. This dialectical process becomes the method for participating in the text.

Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom (2001), Koch (1996, 1999), and Kvale (1996a) proposed not the pursuit of a restrictive, methodical practice, but the willingness to await an object's or event's revelation. The only expectation of the openness construct is in entering the subject's world without applying the structural assumptions of theories and models as an investigative assignment.

One of the challenges of openness is encountering unpredictability (Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom, 2001). Meaning may not show itself in expected ways (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Koch, 1996, 1999). Defining a protocol will move one to use assumptions and preconceptions (Dahlberg et al.; Koch, 1996, 1999). However, openness does not mean withdrawing from epistemological matters (Carter & Little, 2007; Dahlberg et al.; Hultgren, 1993). Procedural steps to obtain certitude and certainty may block the demanding engagement with the event or object (Dahlberg et al.; Koch, 1996, 1999; Palmer, 1969; van Manen, 1997). Encountering periodic chaos may be the only way to proceed in the research (Dahlberg et al.).

Another challenge of openness will be the encounter between the researcher and respondent (Carter & Little, 2007; Dahlberg, Drew and Nystrom, 2001; Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). Inter-subjective openness has been defined as awareness of one's

approach to the respondent and his or her experience of an object or event (Carter & Little, 2007; Dahlberg et al., 2001; Few et al., 2003; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Inter-subjective openness or interpersonal reflexivity remain an aspect of openness in qualitative research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Schwandt, 2000; Walsh, 2003).

The researcher and respondent become entities in the context of research and this exchange may need to be disclosed (Carter, Jordens, McGrath, & Little, 2008; Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001; Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Kvale, 1996a; Walsh, 2003). The goal of the research relationship will be to produce knowledge (Carter & Little, 2007; Dahlberg et al., 2001; Few et al., 2003). The challenge of openness in the researcher and respondent relationship has twofold objectives (Carter et al., 2008; Dahlberg et al.; Few et al.). The twofold objectives of openness will be explored below.

The first objective will be attentiveness to the respondent's conveyance of the object or event studied (Carter & Little, 2007; Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001; Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003). The second objective will be attentiveness to the concerns and experiences the respondent has about being involved in the study (Carter et al., 2008; Dahlberg et al., 2001; Few et al., 2003). The experience of the informant has been a confidential space that the researcher enters by invitation (Carter & Little, 2007; Dahlberg et al.; Few et al.). The researcher needs to be cognizant of his or her approach philosophically and personally (Carter et al., 2008; Dahlberg et al.; Few et al.). An open

approach means restraining one's experience of the object or event and recognizing that the respondent's experience becomes primary (Dahlberg et al.; Few et al.).

*Pre-Understanding and Understanding within Text*

According to Dahlberg, Drew, and Nystrom, no researcher has ever been a “blank document” and there exists no “uncontaminated” place from which to start a research project (2001, p. 117). Gadamer (1960/1975) recognized researchers as having fundamental scientific presuppositions—considered pre-understanding that constrains openness. Pre-understanding blocks openness at the very beginning of the research process when choosing the topic, explaining the rationale for choosing, deciding research questions, the choosing method (Dahlberg et al., 2001). Hermeneutics as an interpretative methodology requires in the researcher recognition and reflection on pre-understanding and its role in interpretation (Dahlberg et al.; Koch, 1996; Moules, 2002).

Failure to reflect on pre-understanding means running the risk of labeling experiences and unrecognized beliefs as interpretations (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001; Koch, 1996, 1999; Odmann, 1992). The challenge has been that no one becomes aware fully of her or his pre-understandings. The content of pre-understandings recedes and submerges (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Pre-understanding has been difficult to extricate because it involves prejudice (Gadamer). Gadamer proposed that an object or an event has a fore-meaning or prejudice, an existing framework that has been active.

According to Gadamer (1960/1975), the first hermeneutical task is accepting one's own bias conditioned by historical circumstances when reading a text. The only way a text can assert its own truth and present itself as something will be when the researcher confronts her or his fore-meanings (Gadamer, 1960/1975). This approach to pre-understanding or prejudices will allow discernment of understanding (Gadamer, 1975).

The first condition of hermeneutics begins when the researcher addresses the pre-understanding of an object or event through questioning (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Questioning pre-understanding becomes the goal of the researcher (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001; Odmann, 1992). Gadamer defined pre-understanding as the tradition of situated attitudes and behavior. Pre-understanding has a history of effect (Gadamer). Pre-understanding has traditions that form its content and a common landscape for the researcher (Bontekoe, 1996; Dahlberg et al., 2001; Odmann, 1992). Pre-understanding can be defined as bias, pre-conceptions or common prejudices of the object and event (Bontekoe, 1996; Dahlberg et al.; Odmann, 1992). Pre-understanding could include models or theories that form the starting point for the research (Dahlberg et al.; van Manen, 1997).

The task for researchers must be questioning traditions and their own particular backgrounds (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001). Experience includes the taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that form prejudices that have had an effect on our approach

to the world (Dahlberg et al., 2001). Questioning forms the open stance in hermeneutical research by provoking our pre-understanding (Dahlberg et al.; van Manen, 1997). Questioning becomes a task in the process of distancing oneself through scientific openness that has been reflexive (Dahlberg et al.; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Walsh, 2003). Questioning opens infinite possibilities of meaning (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Questioning pre-understanding exposes its prejudices and whatever else one did not know (Dahlberg et al.; Odmann, 1992). Distancing becomes a function in approaching understanding (Dahlberg et al.; Odmann, 1992).

Distancing will reveal the prejudices that permit us to understand rather than the false prejudices that provoke misunderstanding or hinder our understanding (Gadamer, 1960/1975). The hermeneutical challenge would be the “. . . recognition that all understanding inevitably involves some prejudice” (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 239). The hermeneutical task in understanding the actual meaning of a text requires “. . . awareness of one’s own bias so that the text may present itself in all its newness and thus be able to assert its own truth against one’s fore-meanings” (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 238).

Understanding becomes an explicit interpretation (Gadamer, 1960/1975). The interpretation becomes the effort to apply understanding (Gadamer). The act of understanding as a scientific process will not be a subjective act but engagement with traditions as they have occurred and we relate to now (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001; Odmann, 1992; Palmer, 1969). The object or event studied has engaged the



researcher in the present and requires involvement with its past (Dahlberg et al., 2001; Odmann, 1992; Palmer, 1969). The researcher brings an accompanying present and past of tradition to the tradition of the object and event (Bontekoe, 1996; Dahlberg et al.; Odmann, 1992; Palmer, 1969). Hermeneutical research focuses on history, tradition, and self-awareness (Palmer, 1969).

Understanding, in the sense of knowing and explaining, has been participation in the stream of tradition—an accumulation of past and present (Gadamer, 1960/1975).

Hermeneutical theory accepts this conception of understanding (Palmer, 1969).

Understanding human experiences and conditions in the sense of knowing and explaining the meaning becomes the reference point (Odmann, 1992; Palmer, 1969). Understanding human experiences within texts becomes the hermeneutic situation—the past in relation to the present (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Gadamer explained the hermeneutic situation as interpreting a text to achieve understanding. Therefore for Gadamer:

to understand a text always means to apply it to ourselves, and to know that, even if it must always be understood in different ways, it is still the same text presenting itself to us in these different ways and thus through application hermeneutic interpretation produces a constant further development in the formation of ideas and understanding. (1960/1975, p. 359)

## Hermeneutic Circle

Kvale (1996a) emphasized that qualitative inquiry has a multitude of approaches for text analysis. These approaches for analyzing and constructing meaning cannot be a technological standard (Gadamer, 1960/1975; Kvale, 1996a; Palmer, 1969). Within the hermeneutical situation, the interpreter transmits the direction of text (Palmer, 1969). The spoken content of a text has an explicit meaning, but there remains an implicit direction in what was unspoken (Palmer, 1969).

Therefore, the task of hermeneutics has been for the interpreter to enter into a question and answer dialogue with texts to discover knowledge (Freeman, 2006; Koch, 1996b, 1999; Palmer, 1969). This question and answer dialogue with the text has been referred to as a dialectic to re-create the questions that the actions and words of the subject have answered explicitly (Palmer, 1969). The dialectic of question and answer begins the movement within the hermeneutic circle (Bontekoe, 1996; Crotty, 1998; Koch, 1996b, 1999).

Gadamer (1960/1975) believed the hermeneutic circle of interpretation becomes an ongoing process of discovery. The text and interpreter enter a hermeneutical conversation for achieving understanding (Gadamer, 1960/1975). Bentz and Shapiro (1998, p. 51) recommended applying “hermeneutical turns” for scholarly practice. These turns have to be the commitment of the researcher in applying competently the chosen methodology (Crotty, 1998).

All turns require examining texts as texts by including pre-existing understandings of situations and their germaneness (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). The researcher discovers meaning within from the whole, the interpretation of vocational identity, then works towards the parts, each line of the transcriptions, journals, and then returns to the whole again (Bontekoe, 1996; Crotty, 1998; Koch, 1996, 1999; Kvale, 1996b; Paterson & Higgs, 2005).

Table 1 delineates the turns of the hermeneutical circle for coding, categorizing and eliciting themes from interview data. The content of this table contains procedural questions and statements for encircling the interview data and reviewed literature as a whole and as parts by examining personal historical effect (past horizon), openness (past and present horizons), pre-understanding and understanding (past and present horizons) for working African American women. The fusion of horizons becomes the hermeneutical link for each past and present horizon. Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, (2003) and von Zweck, Paterson, & Pentland (2008) included tables in their study that served as models.

Table 1

*Hermeneutical Circle (Gadamer, 1960/1975)*

Horizons	Past	Present	Future
First Turn	Exploring	Questioning the	Recognizing
Practicing openness in listening to	researcher's past knowledge and	description of black women's labor	enablers and barriers to obtaining

audiotapes and reading unnumbered transcripts	experience as prejudices and pre- understandings (Gadamer, 1975)	movement, vocational ideology, factors influencing entrance and access to paid and unpaid work from transcriptions and literature review (von Zweck et al., 2008)	work for developing vocational identity from transcriptions and literature review (von Zweck et al., 2008)
Second turn: Gradual textual analysis of “units of data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 157) into codes Listening to the audiotapes and reading the transcriptions will	Recognizing enablers and barriers to obtaining work for perceiving vocational identity from transcriptions and literature review (von Zweck et al., 2008)	Reading for opportunities and requirements for black women entering and remaining in paid and unpaid work from interview transcriptions (von	Identifying respondents’ contexts for discovering vocational identity from paid and unpaid work (von Zweck et al., 2008)

reveal the culture  
 African American  
 women workers  
 carried, encountered,  
 and imparted

Zweck et al., 2008)

Third turn: Reading	Identifying	Asking self	Contextualizing
each numbered	respondents'	reflexively about	broad issues that
sentence within the	contexts for	history and culture	influence the
individual interviews	discovering	of respondents from	experiences of
becomes parts; each	vocational identity	transcriptions and	African American
transcription	from paid and	literature review	women developing
contains subparts.	unpaid work (Few et	about intersectional	their vocational
The reading and	al., 2003)	analysis of race,	identity when
rereading from the		gender, and class	working in the Twin
parts to the whole		and its impact on	Cities during the
Coded data units		African American	mid-twentieth
placed into		women discovering	century (Few et al.,
categories that form		their vocational	2003)
each numbered text		identity from paid	

		and unpaid work (Few et al., 2003)	
(Morse, 2008)			
Fourth turn:	Contextualizing	Questioning	Sharing discoveries
Fashioning group themes from coded categories (Aronson, 1994; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2005) Group themes will be corroborated with data units in each coded category and pre-existent understandings (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984)	broad issues that influenced the experiences of African American women discovering their vocational identity when working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century (Few et al., 2003)	specific instances that influenced African American women discovering their vocational identity when working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century (Few et al., 2003)	of meanings and understandings of enablers and barriers to discovering vocational identity through paid and unpaid work in the Twin Cities(von Zweck et al., 2008)
Fifth turn: Unfolding themes to discover the understandings	Shared discoveries of meanings and understanding of	Interpreted themes connect with codes and categories from	Presenting understandings and meanings based on

and meanings of	enablers and	transcriptions and	explicit and implicit
vocational identity	barriers to	literature review	themes within
held by African	perceiving	(Morse, Barrett,	transcriptions
American women	vocational identity	Mayan, & Spiers,	(Palmer, 1969)
working during the	through paid and	2002)	
mid-twentieth	unpaid work in the		
century in the Twin	Twin Cities (von		
Cities	Zweck et al., 2008)		

### Oral Narratives

Existing scholarship supports interviewing as the means to obtain oral narratives of African American women perceiving their vocational identity from working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century. Narratives obtained from interviews lend themselves to a hermeneutic approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

In this study, the challenge became discovering the heuristic links between the participants' memories of their everyday talk about paid and unpaid work in their narratives to vocational identity (Collin & Young, 1992). Vocational identity as a term has a specific location in history (Dawson, 2005; Williams, 1976), but has been used in contemporary texts about what creates work and the kinds of value work has produced (Santamarina, 2005).

According to Polkinghorne, (2007) narrative became the foundational view of human meaning-making because the human story has been a reliable entryway to knowledge. Meaning-making signifies the ways “. . . through which history, culture, institutions, relationships, and language made themselves present to us” (Collin & Young, 1992, p. 8). Etter-Lewis proposed that oral narratives reveal “. . . multi-layered textured lives of African American women” (1991 a, p. 43). Etter-Lewis (1991a) and Sheared (1994) described multi-vocal or polyrhythmic realities and/or multi-layered textures as the categories of race, gender, class, history, language, and culture. Collins (1989) asserted that personal narrative has been an appropriate mechanism for research with Black women because its use recounted the reality of their experience.

The growing practice of narrative research in adult education connects narrative to a human science orientation, the foundation of qualitative inquiry (Freeman, 1997; Hendry, 2007; Rossiter, 2002, 2007). According to Rossiter (2002, 2007), events and actions of one’s life shaped identity formation and development. Analyzing narrative interview data provides the lens for interpreting life (Freeman, 1997, 2006, 2007; Hendry, 2007; Rossiter, 2002, 2007).

Adult education as a field of practice has multiple connections to learning to achieve an education and/or acquire employment. Narrative research within adult education has been about adult development (Rossiter, 2002). Narratives emphasize inductive processes, contextualized knowledge, and human intention with an aim towards



description and interpretation (Rossiter, 2002). The privilege for a narrative researcher has been to interpret the narration of the adults in question (Rossiter, 2002).

The narrative perspective focuses on the context and experience of the adult progressing towards his or her goals and purposes--evaluating significant occurrences and vicissitudes (Rossiter, 2002). The attention of narrative has been towards understanding development in retrospect (Rossiter, 2002). The adult in question tells or retells what has gone on before. This content and context obtained from telling and retelling becomes the narrative for interpreting the particular course in his or her life (Rossiter, 2002).

Researchers obtain narratives from respondents who tell or retell life events to produce such texts. These texts raise interpretative questions about representation and truth. Scholars, particularly Reissman (1993) proposed viewing the narrative as a representation of the narrator's experience at different levels. Other scholars have focused on the trustworthiness of the narrator in telling or retelling experiences.

### *Representation in Transcriptions*

Reissman (1993) argued that researchers do not have direct access to another's experience. Text and interpretation represent the experience of another (Reissman, 1993). This study researched oral narrative representations of Black women who spoke about their work constraints and opportunities that revealed their "working womanhood" (Santamarina, 2005, p. 24). According to Reissman (1993), representations of the respondents occur at five levels (Reissman, 1993).

The first level of representing a subject's experience attended to a specific segment of the experience (Reissman, 1993). This study has attended to paid and unpaid labor as the foundation for vocational identity, what a woman ought to be and do. The choice has been to attend to paid and unpaid labor as the significant experience to define vocational identity from the paid and unpaid labor experience of African American women.

The second level for the researcher to represent is bridging the gap that the narrator has posed in telling about the experiences as lived and communicating the lived experience (Reissman, 1993). The narrator, in telling the researcher about the experiences, shapes a new self by the meanings that emerge (Reissman, 1993). The narrator speaks for herself in text form (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Obbo, 1997).

The next level of representation involves the researcher who records the talk about the experience for transcription (Reissman, 1993). At this level, the transcription of the recorded experience as provided by the narrator has been "incomplete, selective, and partial" (Reissman, 1993, p. 11).

Transcribing becomes the researcher's initial decision on making the case for what to interpret (Reissman, 1993). Kvale (1996a) referred to transcribing as transforming, changing from an oral, social conversation to an abstract set in time. The challenge will be in viewing the transcript as a dialogue with a text by entering into an

“imagined conversation” with the “author” about the meaning of the text (Kvale, 1996a, p. 280). This continued dialogue with the text will be a renewed conversation with the interviewee opening the way to a horizon of possible meanings (Koch, 1996; Kvale, 1996a).

The fourth level of representation of text is the analysis of text (Reissman, 1993). The level has been about categorizing the glimpses of the lives shared in an interview (Reissman, 1993). This categorization of smaller stories will become the mega-text indicating the significance within each edited and reshaped interview (Reissman, 1993).

Reissman (1993) defined the final level of representation as the mega-text that becomes multi-vocal, representing the many voices contributed by the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Sheared, 1994). The mega-text for this study becomes the themes coded and categorized from the interview data for African American women working during the mid-twentieth century in the Twin Cities. Reissman acknowledged that the mega-text would not become ascribed universally to everyone, but would be relevant to the time-specific community (Reissman, 1993).

### *Truth in Texts*

Narratives as texts and/or interpretations pose a challenge of trustworthiness (Lundin, 1985; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Riessman, 1993). This issue of truth surrounds the use of narrative in qualitative research (Lundin, 1985; Personal Narratives Group, 1989; Riessman, 1993). Lundin, Thiselton, and Walhout (1985) proposed that two

objectives have been at stake with hermeneutical interpretation, the truth of one's interpretations and the shaping of human thought and action by such truth. The Personal Narratives Group view of truth (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 261):

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet, they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past as it actually was aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences. . . Unlike the Truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the worldviews that inform them. Sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters 'outside' the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays a part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them.

Etter-Lewis (1991a, 1994, 1996b) examined the truthfulness of oral narratives from the norm of objective singular reality. Etter-Lewis and Few, Stephens & Rouse-Arnett (2003) have observed the absence of Black women as the subject of scholarly research in most disciplines. Most scholarly research has concentrated on either the White male experience as the norm or the White female middle-class as representative of all female experience (Etter-Lewis; Few et al., 2003). Therefore, the singular reality has

been to deny there have been alternative experiences outside the viewpoints of the dominant group.

Another singular reality that Etter-Lewis ( 1991a, 1994, 1996b) and Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett (2003) exposed has been the scientific method as the normative research enterprise. This method adheres to a platform, the assumption that a set of procedures will inform the researcher, who has maintained a value-free objectivity. This standard has been difficult to achieve or to hold researchers accountable to achieve. Impartial reasoning has been believed to be imbued with value-free objectivity. All research has been value-laden (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998). Studies theorizing about Black women have come from the stance of impressionistic or generally accepted data that has holistically misrepresented, misappropriated and misconstrued Black women's lives (Etter-Lewis, Few et al., 2003)

Etter-Lewis (1991a, 1994, 1996b) argued for the use of oral narratives as a methodology or set within a methodology to provide the researcher with the stance that the subject's story has distinctiveness that will be preserved, and that the inclusion of constructs such as race, gender, and class can be accommodated. Etter-Lewis contended that these constructs reveal information about the larger society that influences the respondents' actions and their perceptions about themselves and others. Etter-Lewis surmised oral narratives as revealing the inner voice of the narrator about this context, which becomes valuable in discovering history and culture as forces that influence an

individual's life. Etter Lewis concluded that truth in the data has not been limited to historical facts, but included interpretation from the personal to the general, from extrinsic to intrinsic meaning.

These interpretative observations about representation and truth form the foundation for the academic discourse on memory. Boehm (2009) introduced the complexities of memory within oral history narratives of migrant Black women. Boehm asserted that memories shape individuality and culture. One cannot be and do without a memory. Boehm recognized the academic interest in memory as having both problems and strengths with representation and trustworthiness. Boehm explored oral history narratives because the memories not only were celebrated but also were examined critically for agency in the women's lives.

Although Gadamer (1960/1975) discussed tradition and history rather than memory, the explanation of history included memory by the emphasis of belonging to the past as one lives in the present. Memories recall history by bringing facts, experiences, and meaning into the present. This fluidity of past and present become the horizons that the hermeneutical researcher fuses into a horizon of meaning interpreted from the text.

This study began with pursuing the scholarly traditions about the meaning of the concept of vocation, its inclusion and relation to the discourses on paid and unpaid work and the absence of Black women in those discourses. African American women who worked primarily during the mid-twentieth century were interviewed for their narratives

about their memories of themselves as workers. These narratives were examined by questions of the hermeneutical circle that probed their interpretations of vocational identity based on they thought they were as women and what they did as workers. Their meaning of vocational identity formed from their horizons of the past as remembered in the present becomes fused through the queries of the hermeneutical circle. This fusion of horizons brings forward a discovery of vocational identity as perceived by the women from their transcriptions.

### *Concluding and Validating Interpretative Meanings*

In general, validity as a common goal of all research has been regarded as the striving for truth about knowledge rather than the certainty of it (Garrison & Shale, 1994). Garrison and Shale proposed that validity has been an ideal standard because it cannot be achieved by a single strategy or method.

Polkinghorne (2003) described the standards for validity in qualitative research. Validity or validation has been a process of accepting descriptions in language terms about what humans have done in their circumstances or the information people have given about their perspectives or the understanding humans ascribed to themselves, others, and the physical and social environments (Polkinghorne, 2003). Therefore, validity is the application of this experience (Moules, 2002). Madison (1988) summarized experience as meaningful when it has found a home in language. The closure for interpretative findings will be in bridging the familiar with the unfamiliar (Paterson &

Higgs, 2005). The subject and the interpreter expressed the meaning of the text through her or his own thoughts that unlocked the meaning of the text—the “fusion of horizons” (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 273). The horizon of the present, the transcriptions bound the interpreter/researcher to the historical horizon, the past of the text that includes the literature review (Paterson & Higgs, 2005). The interpreter broadens her horizon by learning that the text speaks a heritage (Gadamer, 1960/1975). This hermeneutical horizon permits the meaning of the text to become conscious (Gadamer, 1960/1975).

The conscious meaning will arise when interpretations adhere to the norms of coherence, comprehensiveness, penetration, thoroughness, appropriateness, contextuality, agreement, and potential (Madison, 1988). These principles become ethical in the sense that they guide the course of actions within the hermeneutic circle to valid interpretations (Madison, 1988). Madison proposed that a valid interpretation becomes the one more accepted over another because it seems more “. . . fruitful, more promising. It seems to make more and better sense of the text . . . it opens up greater horizons of meaning (1988, p. 15). Madison explained that interpretations validate truth when they speak of future interpretations or experiences.

Coherence and comprehensiveness address the contradictions within a text (Madison, 1988). Coherence arrives in the creation of themes when they demonstrate a unified and sensible pattern (Kvale, 1996b). Comprehensiveness conveys the text as a unified completion including the incoherence (Gadamer, 1960/1975).



Penetration, thoroughness, and appropriateness become figures of the question and answer dialogue with the texts and/or interviews (Madison, 1988). Interpreted meanings become penetrating, thorough, and appropriate when wrestling with the questionable in statements made and questions raised by the respondents and researcher (Madison). The appropriateness of these questions engaged the respondents' concerns. These hermeneutical norms for thematic analysis engaged the interview not as a static text, but as an interaction (Kvale, 1996b; Madison, 1988).

Agreement as norm of thematic analysis implies comparing the interpretations of single statements with the overall intention of the interview and additional information gained about the respondent (Kvale, 1996b). Complementing the agreement standard is the norm of autonomy (Kvale). The autonomy of a text means, “. . . the objectivity of allowing the thing that appears to be as it really is to us” (Palmer, 1969, p. 179). The interpretation contains statements expressed from the transcribed interview texts (Kvale). Contextuality refers to personal historical effect (Gadamer, 1960/1975) in that the interpretation has to include the historical and cultural context (Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003; Kvale, 1996b; Madison, 1988; Moules, 2002; Odmann, 1992; Palmer, 1969). Contextuality contributes to awareness about the theme of the text in different settings and shadings of meaning (Kvale).

As a figure of meaning, potential applies to the Gadamerian structures of openness and pre-understanding (Gadamer, 1960/1975; Kvale, 1996b; Madison, 1988).

Potential implies that the interpretation of the text contains presuppositions that need to become explicit and conscious (Kvale). Awareness of the possibilities of influence and pre-understandings becomes required when making an interpretation. Potential opens the text and interview to “. . . differentiations and interrelations to extend its meaning” (Kvale, 1996b, p. 50).

Collins (1989) emphasized that the validity of knowledge claims begins with standpoint, the foundation of feminist and Afrocentric epistemology. The standpoint of black women “. . . emphasizes the plurality of their experiences” (Collins, 1989, in note 8, p. 747) as women within a racial community. The experiences of Black women arise from an alternative perspective based on their paid and unpaid work, the communities in which they reside, and the relationships in which they engage. These experiences of Black women provide the means for assessing knowledge claims. Collins explained that the knowledge claims made by Black women for Black women need to be assessed within one of four following categories: “. . . concrete experience as a criterion of meaning, the use of dialogue, the ethic of caring, and the ethic of personal accountability” (Collins, 1989, pp. 763-768; see also Few, Stephens, & Rouse-Arnett, 2003).

## Data Collection

### *Recruitment*

I purchased classified advertisements containing the research announcement (Appendix B) in the following Twin Cities Black owned newspapers from March through

July of 2007: *Minnesota Spokesman Recorder*, Minneapolis and *St. Paul Insight News*, as well the *Minnesota Women's Press* in 2008. The announcement included a gift card drawing when the interviews were completed. In addition, I posted research announcements at the community centers and local libraries in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Lastly, I made public announcements at the meetings of senior and retired adult women at two community centers that served primarily the African American population, Sabathani in Minneapolis and Hallie Q. Brown in St. Paul. I met additional respondents from two other historically Black organizations, Minneapolis Urban League and Phyllis Wheatley. Within each of the narratives, I referred to these organizations only as centers in the city in order to protect the respondents' privacy. Only one person in the city of Minneapolis responded to the announcement in the *Minnesota Spokesman Recorder*. She recommended that I meet with her mother.

Announcements (Appendix B) were posted in the following public libraries: Hosmer (Minneapolis) and Rondo (St. Paul). The secretary of the Minnesota chapter of the Association of Black Women in Higher Education announced this research at a local chapter meeting during my absence. A local writer, in attendance, recommended that I interview her mother in Minneapolis. Her mother recommended that I interview her friends—all participants at a center in the city. The transcriptionist recommended my former employer, one of the centers in the city where I obtained another respondent. I met another respondent through a faculty member from Minneapolis Community and

Technical College. The last respondent, a participant from one of the above centers, had a prolonged illness as reported by a family member who confirmed that she was unable to interview. I decided to call the respondent a year later and at that time, she agreed to the interview.

There were no responses to the research announcements publicized in St. Paul. I continued to seek interviewees by meeting twice with the scheduled senior women's group at the Hallie Q. Brown Center. No one responded to my requests. A friend, who worked at the University of Minnesota Center on Aging, suggested I meet with a professor at the Center. This professor recommended to me women from St. Paul whom she had met through her community organization.

Another recommendation for possible respondents came from an electronic mail I sent to a former dean of the University of Minnesota who resided in St. Paul. I located the telephone numbers of the women named by the professor and former dean. I introduced the study and myself by telephone; when I requested an interview, I mentioned our mutual contact who shared their name with me. This current professor and former dean generated eleven informants in St. Paul. A former regent and a current faculty member at the University of Minnesota provided me with the name of a faculty member who in turn suggested a staff member to interview. This respondent was the only one whom I met at a public library. All the respondents in Minneapolis and St. Paul invited me to their homes.

A resident manager of a senior housing development in St. Paul received my research announcement from an academic colleague at the University of Minnesota. This effort generated an interview in St. Paul at that senior housing center. I met the remaining respondent from a suburb of St. Paul in her home because she had previously hired my husband to work on her home.

These recruitment approaches generated by a purposeful and snowball sample as indicated by Bogdan and Bilken (1982). Seventeen respondents were obtained during the years, 2007-2009. I asked three respondents to re-interview. I did not receive responses from them, although they all received letters of appreciation. Seventeen women in all were interviewed. This research study includes the transcripts of fourteen interviews.

#### *Control by Non-Respondents*

Gadamer (1960/1975) explained that individuals not only impart history and tradition, but also amass these forces. Boehm (2009) confirmed memory as a challenge to oral history methodology. The veracity of respondents in qualitative methodologies has been challenged by memory as a source and a construct for data gathering and validity. The respondents in this current study recalled significant and salient memories that held examined and unexamined power ( Alexander, 1988; Etter-Lewis, 1991a, 1991b, 1993, 1996a). The respondents had to decide to trust me with their memories and trust the institutional power that I represented but did not control.

I will discuss encounters with respondents who exercised their agency and autonomy in refusing to interview. The following discussion will include the contexts of these refusals.

I explained the objectives of the research and my request for African American women to interview to a group of senior adults at a center in Minneapolis. A mature Black woman claimed, in response to my research announcement, that White women stopped hiring Black women as domestics because they began purchasing electrical appliances. I told her I would like to hear more about this view in an interview. She mumbled something inaudible to my comment.

On two separate occasions, I asked women to interview at a center in the city. One attendee stood up and described openly and unfavorably her employment in the household of a Jewish family. She spoke angrily, recalling conversations she had heard when she was thirteen years of age. During the second occasion when I requested research participants, I met a volunteer in the office who recalled her experience with hiring authorities at the County who did not offer her the position of social worker. This volunteer responded to my request for an interview by giving me her personal telephone number. I called her, explained my research, and requested an interview at her convenience. She declined my request and asked me not to call her again. I apologized to her.

Three women withdrew from the research study after having been interviewed. The first woman did not answer the interview questions. I received her name from her daughter who responded to my research announcement in the classified section of the *Minnesota Spokesman Recorder*. The daughter called me suggesting that I interview her mother, and she provided me with her mother's telephone number and home address. I agreed, on the assumption that since my first interview in Minneapolis occurred in this manner of a daughter consulting with her mother, which snowballed into three additional interviews. I arrived at our scheduled appointment, sat as directed in the kitchen, gave her the consent form to read and sign and signed a copy with my signature. I began the interview by asking her: When did you first know you were working, whether paid or unpaid? She began with I was a nurse at a hospital. I asked her whether she was volunteering or employed before she decided to go to nursing school. She continued to respond to this query: I was a nurse at a hospital. I listened and recorded that which she was willing to share. I thanked her and followed up with a note of appreciation. Two women refused to interview after having met me and providing their telephone numbers. Neither woman returned my telephone calls.

### *Interview Approach*

I scheduled open and semi-structured interviews at the convenience of each respondent (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982). Each respondent received a consent form to read and sign (Appendix C). After signing the consent form, the interview began with each

respondent answering the question “When did you first know you were working, whether paid or unpaid?” Questions asked during the interviews explored the interpretive meaning of discovering vocational identity—who they thought they were and what they needed to do.

A hermeneutic interview reveals that the respondents will have more than a slight interest in discussing their work story (van Manen, 1997). The interviews lasted 90 minutes to 2.5 hours. I recorded the narratives using a cassette recorder. I used a digital recorder for the subsequent interviews. The earlier taped interviews are on compact discs. The transcriptionist noted verbatim the utterances in the interviews. Incomplete thoughts were included in the transcripts. When the respondent uttered truncated speech or used words incorrectly, the transcript was not corrected unless requested by the respondent after having received a copy of transcription. The intention of this practice was to preserve their speech. The respondents remembered all kinds of paid and unpaid employment and wished they had written down their work story before the interview.

Because conversation continued after I announced that the interview had concluded, I took notes that I included at the end of the transcription. These field notes (Vaz, 1997) included additional comments, observations, and impressions not noted during the interview. After the interview ended, I wrote notes right away while still in my car. In addition, I maintained a personal journal to track my thoughts, feelings, and questions. These processes helped me recall the nuances of the interview such as body



language, tone of voice, hand and facial gestures and eye contact as I listened to the taped interviews.

### *Member-Checking*

Each respondent received a letter (Appendix D) expressing my gratitude for the interview and an invitation to ask questions about the content of the enclosed transcript of the interview. I made follow-up calls to each respondent asking whether they received the transcript, read it, and had any questions or changes they wanted to make. Two respondents requested changes to the transcripts during the telephone call. I made the requested changes while they were speaking to me. The winner of the drawing received a \$40.00 gift card. The other interviewees received \$5.00 gift cards. Table 2 identifies all the respondents by pseudonym, age (if they responded to the question), paid and unpaid work and their attained education. There are transcriptions for each woman in the table.

Table 2

### *Respondents' Pseudonyms and Demographics*

Pseudonyms	Age	Paid/Unpaid Work	Education
Barbara	84	Domestic and Factory worker;	High school diploma; Twin Cities
		Owner/Operator beauty salon;	Public University Bachelor's degree
		Vocational Education Instructor	
Buelle	83	Federal government employee	High school diploma

Cicily	87	City government employee	College: Two Years
Dee	77	Volunteer/Employee , Executive Director: Community center	High school diploma; Some college attended both in Twin Cities
Ede	77	Domestic and Factory worker; Professional Actress	General education diploma and Bachelor's degree both earned in Twin Cities
Nettie	Not stated	Administrative Assistant, Community Center	High school diploma
Lillie	68	Public school teacher	Bachelor's degree Public University
Ava	77	Nurse	High school diploma and nursing degree both earned in the Twin Cities
Sissie	65	Accountancy	High school diploma; AAS Degree earned in Twin Cities For Profit University
June	68	Self-employed business owner	High school diploma; Bachelor's degree HBCU
Lea	Not Stated	Factory worker; Management, private corporation	High school diploma
Hettie	77	Management, private corporation	High school diploma; Bachelor's degree HBCU

Bea	68	Public school teacher	High school diploma; Bachelor's degree HBCU and Graduate degree, Private University
Mimi	87	Domestic and Factory worker; Retail sales; Management, private Corporation	High school diploma earned in Twin Cities

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*Note.* Unstated locations means outside Minnesota; GED (General Education Diploma) HBCU (Historically Black Colleges and Universities).

#### Coding Guidelines

Bogdan and Bilken (1982) provided guidelines for coding. Codes become “units of data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 157) containing observations, ideas, interpretations, and thoughts connecting work to self and/or others. This material will be highlighted within each numbered text (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Enhanced coding efforts occurred by keeping these “units of data” intact (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982, p. 157). Attaching numbers and letters to the categories make the codes fit the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Depending on the amount of data collected and depth of complexity, the coding of data into groups for a final sorting has been the most physically demanding process (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984).

All but three of the interviews were recorded digitally and uploaded onto the University of Minnesota *Netfiles*<sup>TM</sup> system. I hired a professional transcriptionist for content accuracy. I made copies of each transcription. Each of the transcriptions were numbered sequentially so that each line of the interview exposed its parts as *units of data* [italics added] within each of the transcriptions. I listened to taped interview three times with the copy of the numbered sequentially transcriptions at hand. I wrote down on note cards the line numbers that indicated responses were indicative of vocational identity-- who they thought they were and what they ought to do. I returned to the numbered sequentially transcriptions with colored markers to write the initial codes from the notes cards onto the line numbers. I read and reread the numbered sequentially transcriptions coding for the subjects' stories or use of words or phrases that were unfamiliar (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Whatever appeared unfamiliar in the transcriptions, I listened again to sections of the taped interview.

Straus (1990) added reading for repetition that reveals emotions and terms specific to the respondent's community and context. I reread the transcripts where they remained unmarked to search for missing information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Linguistic questions can aid coding (Etter-Lewis, 1994). Reading the texts further for transitions, metaphors, analogies, and connectors will aid in uncovering core beliefs and feelings (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The challenge with reading for repetition, which was necessary for marking the texts, was that the women's vocal inflection was missing in the transcriptions with and without line numbers. I had to read the transcriptions and listen to the actual interview to understand the community and context.

Alexander (1988) recommended nine identifiers of salience to assist coding. The principal identifiers are primacy, frequency, omission, uniqueness, isolation, negation, emphasis, error, and incompleteness. Primacy indicates what the speaker mentions first in their story. Frequency and omission have been recurrent signals; frequency revealed emphasis by counting the number of times a respondent mentioned a topic; omission, concealed by breaks or gaps in the flow of a story. Uniqueness and isolation signaled that which was unusual in a text. Uniqueness indicated a shift from formal speech to idiomatic expressions. Isolation was the occurrence of relevant or misplaced content in a text, raising the question of appropriateness to the story.

Negation and emphasis served as opposites in speech (Alexander, 1988). Negation demonstrated unimportance, whereas emphasis showed the significance of the topic. The last two identifiers were error, distortion of a fact deemed obvious or incorrect speech, and incompleteness, the conclusion of the story having an abrupt or illogical outcome. These identifiers of salience provided a way to extricate meaning in coding rather than attribute meaning.

I read again each of the marked or highlighted line numbers in the transcriptions for the delineations suggested by Alexander (1998). The nine identifiers of salience formed the initial categories.

Many of the respondents made the sound “Mhm.” In all the transcriptions, this sound was noticed, but it did not always serve as a linguistic connector. It could mean I had to repeat a question or a comment. It may have meant they were still reflecting about their past because of the comment or questions I raised or they were filtering the content they were going to reveal.

Listening in this manner held importance for Johnson-Bailey as recognition of cultural relevance (1994, 2002). Etter-Lewis (1991b, 1993) recommended listening for the particular ways Black women communicate. Words and context provide rich meaning (Etter-Lewis). This listening required recognizing techniques such as repeating words and phrasing words to emphasize meaning and the use of Black English that exhibits emphatic emotion (Etter-Lewis).

Words and phrases will arise to form the preliminary coding categories shaped by these *units of data* [italics added] from the texts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 157). Morse (2008) and Strauss (1990) referred to categories as higher-level concepts. Categories become similar kinds of data arranged in the same place. The purpose of categorizing will be to see the patterns of the respondents within their contexts from the coding of the text (Morse, 2008b; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

I wrote categorical phrases that captured the coded thoughts, observations, and interpretations about self and work. As an example, *negotiating* and *resisting* [italics added] was a code that became the category *changing employers* [italics added]. This category referred to the respondents' observations or explanations about their movement to different employment. The category, *better environment*, [italics added] surfaced from the respondents' comments coded when they provided examples of speaking openly against expectations that they felt they should not have to fulfill.

Morse and Richards (2002) formed coding categories by linking the data. The linked units by codes move from the observations, ideas, interpretation and thoughts back to the data within the text of the interview. The codes should move back and forth from the data units within the transcribed interview (Morse & Richards). With refinement, the *units of data* [italics added] will fall under the particular topic represented by the coded category (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, pp. 157,165).

I understood this explanation by Morse (2008b) to mean that the categories should contain codes as specific examples from the interview data. A linguistic example that captures the women interviewed in this study should either be in the code and/or the category. The fluidity of movement between interview data, codes, and categories implies that saturation is attainable.

Each interview began with this probe: When did you first know you were working whether paid or unpaid? This probe introduced narratives that could include descriptions

of work settings or contexts, situations, perspectives, strategies, relationships (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982).

After deciding upon the initial coded categories, I read the transcriptions without line numbers again for other data to code for sub-categories or for having the categories change and/or remain the same. It appeared that the emerged patterns of data remained the same in that the respondents' observations and ideas about their strategies, actions, relationships, and social structures defined broadly the coded categories. There was little salient data to code for a subcategory such as similar descriptions of work environment.

The intention within each coded category is to discover a thematic "story-line" of vocational identity of African American women working in Minnesota during the mid twentieth century (Aronson, 1994; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2005; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 136). Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggested writing in a methodological manner to discern the relationships between and among the coded categories. From this arrangement, it might become possible to form conceptualizations and propositions that support existing evidence presented in the literature review or develop new theories.

In the current study, the themes emerged from the coded categories by examining and evaluating the process and content of Table 1. With consultation from my graduate advisor, I elongated each theme into a sentence to capture, according to Kvale (1996b), the contextuality, coherence, and comprehensiveness of each of the categories.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS: THEMES OF DISCOVERING VOCATIONAL IDENTITY

The purpose of this interpretative study is to discover the vocational identity of African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century (1920-1980). The ideological expectation for all women was that the home served as the only place to exercise their vocation (Giddings, 1984; Mutari, Power & Figart, 2002; Welter, 1966). Conversely, it appears that paid work was the societal expectation of African American women (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Jones, 1986). Thus, the problem has been that existing scholarship has not examined vocational identity for the women in America who have worked the longest as legacy of slavery (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977; Mullings, 1997; Wuthnow, 2003).

The research question for this study was: How do African American women who were engaged in paid or non-paid work in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century perceive their vocational identity? This chapter contains an overview followed by each of the themes derived from the interview data.

The process of the theme development was to code the women's observations and interpretations that indicated their vocational identity as defined as who they ought to be and what they ought to do. Their statements were categorized for patterns shared between and among the coded examples. The four themes analyzed using the hermeneutical

process of this study were: We were accomplished. We networked with kin and community. We broke through. We were the ones.

These themes derived from the hermeneutical circle process indicated these women's strivings within their local settings amid broad contextual forces and issues. Vocational identity is formed within and amid the struggles in one's own context (Rehm, 1999). The women in this study began their narratives after this probe: "When did you first know you were working, whether paid or unpaid?"

From their voices, their stories unfolded. However, their talk within the transcriptions exemplified a specific genre--that of the quest.

The literature for this study defined vocational identity as what a woman ought to be and do. This definition for vocational identity arose from a play, *Daughters of Africa* (1990), narrating the lives of Black women residents in the U. S. throughout the centuries. The play quoted a novelist, Zora Neale Hurston, who wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel about the character Janie, who heard from her grandmother that ". . . so it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman ought to be and do" (Hurston, 1937, p. 21).

In the novel, Janie went on a quest to discover who she ought to be and what she ought to do (Kaplan, 2000; track 2). The women in this study were asked to explore when they first knew they were working because this probe set in motion their storyline about their vocational identity.

The qualitative research ideals were involved in deducing the themes from hermeneutical interpretation. The themes drawn from the women's narratives were iterative in that they related to each other. I quoted lengthy excerpts because they are a compilation of narratives within the transcriptions formed from the coded categories that engendered the themes. The quoted narrated excerpts are not chronological. Every woman interviewed began with memories consisting not only of the past but also of the many events about working even as recent as an observation about work that took place just before the scheduled interview. Coded and categorized statements from the transcriptions were their memories about working and about themselves as workers. The themes emerged from the coded categories either included their own words or encapsulated their actions as rich descriptions of who they were and what they ought to be doing.

The narrative interviews were also recursive in that each woman shared a similar story related to each theme. Although hermeneutical circle delineated the steps towards this iteration, an effect of this iterative process was that the coded categorical excerpts could apply to other themes as well. The interview data was examined for the women's perceptions of their vocational identity, how they perceived themselves as women and as workers as narrated from their memories.

## Overview

The taxonomical lens of race, gender and class were the iterative theoretical constructs for this study about the vocational identity of African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century. The taxonomy of race, gender, and class constructions permeated the themes of accomplishments, kin and personal networks, breakthroughs, and being “the ones.”

As the investigator, I discerned from listening, coding, and categorizing the women’s narratives that each theme related to the other. Therefore, these thematic deductions were iterative, each theme relates to the other themes. No theme stands alone without the other themes.

The taxonomical constructions of race, gender, and class exemplified contextual broad forces and issues, were amplified in the interview data. These constructs forced issues of single and multiple identities on the women in this study. These constructions are like natural forces in an ecological system, difficult for any single individual to address and to examine in a qualitative study. This study provides examples of the constructions of race, gender and class as a contextual issue in the thematic domains. These constructs captured the uniqueness of each theme. These intersecting constructions personified contextual patterns of engagement and disengagement within each theme.

The intersecting constructs of race, gender, and class, as an issue, challenged the women in attributing the institutional and/or personal inclusion or exclusion they

remembered to one or all of the constructs. The constructions of race, gender, and class as a force permeated and mediated spoken and unspoken meanings from their memories during the interview. As an issue, these constructs reified the women's experience in the workplace. As a force, these constructs inhabited their observations and interpretations about who they were and what they ought to be doing. As an issue, these constructs inhabited their contexts as the women offered their discourse about these constructions and received discourse articulated by others about who they were and what they ought to be doing. They chose when and what to reveal about their constructions of race, gender, and class and the identities they were assigned as women and workers. These constructions yielded malleable and assailable outcomes in all that they encountered.

To protect their identities, pseudonyms were assigned [see Chapter Three]. In addition, the phrase "center in the city" was used to refer to any one of the four organizations: Halle Q. Brown Center in St. Paul, Minneapolis Urban League as well as Phyllis Wheatley, and Sabathani community centers in Minneapolis. I gave pseudonyms to the individuals they named in their narratives. Some of the questions that I had asked have been removed from the transcriptions as a part of the coding and categorizing to engender thematic development. Suitable changes were made only to assist in subject and verb agreement for readability because this effort contributed to thematic clarity.

The narrative excerpts were shortened when repetitious. This editing did not detract from speaking styles. No words were added to their excerpts and racial epithets

were not deleted from the excerpts, because removing them could change the impact and intent of the narration.

The following are themes that revealed how the women perceived vocational identity from their paid and unpaid work: accomplishments, kin and communal networks, breakthroughs and being “the ones.” The themes are presented according to Collins’ (1989) criteria for validity: The first criterion is accountability [See Chapter Three]. The women were accountable to themselves, their kin, and communal networks that encouraged and challenged their quest to be the ones to accomplish and break through. The themes of accomplishments, networking, and breakthrough personified the women’s agency and autonomy (Dubois, 1929). The theme criteria of being “the ones” typifies the contextual forces and issues that the women struggled within to maintain their agency and autonomy (Dubois, 1929).

### We Were Accomplished

The women remembered explicitly their pride in their accomplishments, although no one stated as such verbatim. Rather, they referred to the acknowledgement their accomplishments achieved while working. Several women mentioned their awards and other outcomes of their performance at work as a source of immense pride.

Buelle worked for the federal government in the Twin Cities for 12 years, but worked in other cities prior to moving to the Twin Cities. Mimi worked in a private corporation that formed partnerships with minority entrepreneurs. She began talking

about a receiving a volunteer award. “I was awarded one of their (AARP) highest awards; we can go back here to see.” Similarly to Buelle, Mimi showed me every award she had received and told me about it—every certificate of appreciation and letter of recommendation had been framed for display.

Buelle invited me back to her home after the first interview. It was unclear to me the reason she asked me to return to her apartment, but I knew she wanted to show me some things from her years of working. There were items covering each cushion of the sofa, and an entire table in front of the sofa. Buelle showed me every newspaper clipping related to her previous employments. One newspaper clipping contained a photograph of black and white women working at the same plant in the defense industry during WWII. I saw the programs from award banquets. She unpacked every certificate she had earned from completed training programs and the accompanying manuals. There were photographs of former colleagues and letters of commendation. This accrual was like evidence of having worked at such a level that her achievement surprised her still. Buelle pointed to a large floor vase her mother had given her. Her mother received this gift as appreciation for her domestic service. Buelle remembered that one gift her mother received and passed onto her. Buelle had numerous gifts to show me her vocational passage.

Bea thought her volunteering outside the classroom supported her role as public school teacher. Working as a classroom teacher and as a liaison in different capacities for

teachers and pupils in the Twin Cities was a two-pronged accomplishment towards being the kind of teacher she wanted to be. Bea stated, “As a matter of fact, I was a runner up for Teacher of the Year one year.”

Ede also remembered all of her accomplishments. She had dropped out of high school and worked in domestic service, a factory, and as a cook for children and seniors at a community center and camp. She then went on to complete her general education diploma to attend a Twin Cities university to obtain her bachelor of arts in theater.

The women spoke not only about their own successes, but also of their peers. For example, Ava had a health crisis during her nursing career that ended her career as a nurse. She acknowledged the accomplishments of her roommate—another Black female in the nursing cadet corp. Ava exclaimed, “She went on to do great things.”

Another form of accomplishment was community validation. For instance, at the close of the interview, Nettie shared proudly the fact that clients she served at a center in the city referred to her as “Mama Nettie.”

Buelle: I have a picture of me getting an award in Washington. . . I got some trips home, because whenever they sent me to school, it turned out to be on the East coast, so Washington, or someplace, so away I’d go. So, when I got the award and I was in Washington, D. C., my family, all of them came from Philadelphia and, Baltimore. They were all down there in Washington for that award speech.



Mimi: Affirmative action was coming along. Company T was looking for people to promote to management. And so I was one of the persons that were picked to be considered for management. That was the beginning of the minority business. Yes, yes. So that's what I got. That was going to be my job. I knew quite a few Black business persons, or businesses, you know, and so I started a fair for minority businesses. I called it, the Corporate Minority Business Exchange.

Dee: I really started as a volunteer. Black people didn't use the word volunteer. It was you gave of yourself to help somebody else. I use the word now, because that's what everybody calls it, but I thought it was innate to help your family and neighbors—second nature. Even in some of my earlier babysitting, I didn't get paid for that. If they were my mother's friends and my father's friends--you know, so you helped out. So, I don't know. Volunteering is a way of life though. It's very rewarding. I did some volunteering at the center where I eventually wound up working--but paid. But, I was helping with their mailing, and I was doing some of the United Way campaigning. I recently retired, from the center--, I'm still involved in all my volunteer work. But I felt that it was at a good time in my life. I'd worked all those years. I started with Girl Scouts in '59, and then I was hired while I was doing some volunteering for the center too, but then I think I was hired full time in '63. So I had worked ever since then at the different

positions for 44 years. I was truly amazed. They had—the mayor made it Dee Rams Day at my retirement party.

Bea: Well, for a while I was president of the City Association. I also served as a trustee for a pension fund. I took all kinds of classes and all kinds of—whenever they needed somebody. For one thing, it was a way of keeping abreast of new stuff, and I just happened to like that kind of stuff. For one thing, it makes your job easier. For one thing, as a teacher, if you don't do that, it's real easy to get stuck into a rut--the same thing. You know, some teachers just don't want to make a change. They have the same worksheets they've had people not using. Yeah, I've always liked being involved. I've always done—matter of fact, last—the first time I retired, they had the convention out in D.C., which is where my daughter is. I made myself not go. I really wanted to go. I needed to end it. But I always went. I was on the elections committee, so I always had to be there working for all those people. If I'm going to work, I want to, you know. So when I volunteer, I'm volunteering. But if I'm working, I want to get paid. It's as simple as that. As a matter of fact, I was a runner up for Teacher of the Year in one year. The way they do that is to have your former students' write why you should be it. There was one little girl that said—and you need a box of tissues to read them. It validates everything you've done. Ms. Wayne should be teacher of the year — and she was to graduate — I never would have been anything if Ms.

Wayne hadn't been so mean to me. I got chills. Because you know, I always did what I thought—you know--nobody's perfect. If I ever sat down and wrote all the stuff I'd been involved in, it was work.

Ede: And I cooked the food for them. And then, later on, man, I was still cooking down there. I started my first play down there in—71 maybe it says on that the résumé down there. Albert Stance called me on the phone and asked me if I would come and audition for the—well, he asked me, and he said have you ever done any acting before? And I said no, I've never done any acting before. So he said, Oh well, let me tell you all the reason I think you would be a good actress. So he told me all the reasons he thought I would make a good actress. He said tomorrow night, so, I want you to come down here and audition. I came in. My name is Ede. I'm here to audition. Who do I see? And she said, now come down here and get on the stage. I couldn't see. It was dark, except for lights on the stage. I went down there and got on the stage, and she said, well, tell me something about you. I talked and talked till I got tired of talking. I said, now what else do you want me to do? She said, you done enough. Can you be here tomorrow? I said, sure, I can be here tomorrow--be in my play. I said, oh yes, it was so. She asked me to be in—what was the name of that thing? Oh, I'll think of it. It was Fearless Fan. That's where it began. I started in 1975. And, I've been in theater ever since.

Yeah, and I had a very lucrative career in theater--almost to a fault. That's just a brief résumé for when I audition for commercials and print work and stuff. And I got my GED when I went to medical school. Then, I went to school. And I sent that application for the school and they accepted me to graduate school--when I hadn't even been to the school yet. But honey, I told them I'm going to be the best actress that ever comes out of the school. And I got the theatre award—I got the undergrad actress award. I wonder if any Black has won it since. Well I was the first one in 50 years. No one had ever won it. No Black person or person of color had ever won it. And that was then 50 years in the history of the school theatre. I was surprised. I didn't know anything about it. Next time I wouldn't mind that fifty dollars— I said, alright girl. Go on. And that play that I won it for got turned into another play. And we did it in Detroit, and I got an award for it in Detroit. I've gotten quite a few awards.

I: Did you feel your career was curtailed?

Ava: Oh definitely, definitely

I: What about your roommate?

Ava: Oh, she went on to do great things. She went and got her bachelor's and she was a head nurse over a surgical station. She did very well.

I: You must be proud of her. Do you keep touch with her?

Ava: Well not, you know. What should I say? We don't talk a lot, but we exchange Christmas cards and that type of thing.

Nettie: Well, people come in, you know, sometimes they come in and they're acting really nasty, really nasty. And then you wonder, well, what's wrong. What's their problem? They've got a problem. There's something back there that's causing it and they are asking for help. And sometimes you get into it with them, and then the next time they come back you're able to talk to them. They call me Mama Nettie. It's been good.

#### We Networked With Kin And Community

Hettie named a number of women whom she admired: a Black woman colleague at her first workplace in St. Paul and she named Mimi, another respondent in this study, and all the Black women who joined her at Company T describing their relationships as "all of us kind of just fell in." Barbara suggested I interview two of her friends whom she referred to as the "cream of the crop." Significant relationships were formed by paid and unpaid work connections among women thinking and talking about whom they were and what they ought to do.

Ava and June were the only respondents to mention their husbands as interveners. Ava's husband as intervened in her challenge to find childcare for completing her nursing program. June and husband met a woman and subsequently her husband in the Twin

Cities. This couple invited June and her husband into their network to start their employment search.

The women recalled the voices and experiences of their mothers, sisters, aunts, and friends—womenfolk—whom they respected and admired even though there were generational and circumstantial dissimilarities. The women in the respondents' lives led, not as hiring authorities, but as vocational models suggesting different ways to view themselves as women and as workers.

Recognizing achievements in a specific time and place meant recalling those who cheered you on--mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, and friends, colleagues as a resource and with resources. The women spoke about their vocational models from cherished relationships and unexpected encounters. Curiously, each respondent would give the full name of the assisting kin or community member, further emphasizing the relating and connecting to each other about their working. As noted previously, pseudonyms are used for kin and community members named by the respondents.

Ava: I was waiting for my friend to graduate, and we were going into nursing together. I went in with the nurse cadet corps. Probably you're too young to remember that.

I: Was that an all-Black corps?

Ava: Oh, no. No, no. It was for everybody or anybody that would qualify. And so be it, my friend did not. Then I was behind, because I had waited for her. I thought it would be fun to go through together, you know.

Ava: Well, I had a sidetrack. I got married, and I had two years out, and I didn't think I was ever going to go back. But my aunt told me that she would take care of my kids. But when I got my grades and everything back to where I was ready to re-start, my aunt decided that she couldn't take care of the kids. But I had a bright start. One of my friend's sisters was having trouble at home. And she had had a youngster, out of wedlock, and she was having a lot of trouble. So my husband asked her if she would like to move in with us and take care of my children and hers while I went to school. That worked out beautifully.

I: Did she ever go on to anything?

Ava: Peggy was her name. What she did after she left us? I don't—I know she had a couple more children. I don't think she finished high school, because of her pregnancy and what not.

Ede: No, I used to go to the High School. That was almost downtown here. It was a good day for my mom, because the day that I came home—my mother always wanted to check the pot, you know, and taste everything. It was in a pressure

cooker. You know that little thing you set on the top—it hadn't finished rocking. And when she twisted the top, the whole thing blew up. It blew in her face, and she had this hot rice all over, and she was just screaming when I came in at the bottom of the steps. I decided to get some water and throw on her, you know, loose that rice. And she was saying, it's burning, it's burning. I would say, yeah Mom, good thing I quit school today and came home or you would have been in trouble. I explained things to her, and she said, yeah, well, so no school. You got to get a job. I went down to the Salvation Army. So me and my girlfriends we used to go down to the center, when it used to be down on Aurora, you know, down in St. Paul. And Edith Ann Framer was there, and she had what you call a chat n' chew group. And that's ladies who go down there every single morning at nine o'clock. And learn how to manage our money. She was a graduate of Home Economics. But you know, it was just us all being together.

I: Did you use that time together to find work too?

Ede: I ended up cooking at the Center for the daycare, through Edith Ann Fraser.

Lea: I relocated here in '70.

I: Oh, ok. What brought you here?

Lea: My aunt.

I: Did you move here to help her?



Lea: No, I needed a change. I was a young person, I needed the change.

I: Oh sure. Ok. So what did you do here in the 70s?

Lea: Here, I first got a job at the packing house, in South St. Paul but I wasn't suited to that. I didn't stay there very long. Not long at all. I'd never seen anything like that in my life. Oh, and it smells so horrible. I thought I'd never eat meat again. After the packing house, where did I go? I did—just let me think a minute. I believe I went to Company C. Yep.

June: I called my aunt in Dayton, Ohio, and I said, Aunt Edie, we're thinking about going to this place called Minneapolis just to see what it's like. She says I know one person in Minneapolis. I've even been up there before to visit. And I said, well who was that? And she said his name was Gerry Grange, who owned the Skyway. Gerry was the only Black man in the city that had a liquor license. And she had gone to college with him. I talked to her about everything. This is my mother's older sister and she and I are just like that [puts hand together to show closeness]. So, she calls Gerry, and she says my niece and her husband are coming out to Minneapolis just to see your town. And she says they're in the advertising business. He says well, my granddaughter works out at Company Y. He says, give her a call, and just let her know what it is you do. We said, ok, fine. We call her. She says I am going to put you in touch with someone by the name of Stacy Mains. Stacy Mains is the president and CEO of Mains Products—

condiments. —so, we called Stacy. We tell her what we do. She says I would like to set up a conference for you all out here at the Company. Do you have portfolios? Yes, we had our portfolios. I'd like for you to come out here and meet you. We go to the Company, and we tell the receptionist that we want to see Stacy, and the woman says, oh, Stacy is such a wonderful woman. Now, you don't the receptionist saying she's just such a wonderful woman in New York. And she calls Stacy and says your guests are here. Stacy says send them on down. We meet her. She gives us—cause she was over the testing kitchens at the Company. She gives us a sheet of paper describing all the people that are going to be in this conference. She invited all the food stylists, the photographers in the Company, and some other people in the testing kitchens. She sets up a meeting for us. We show our portfolios. And so they ask us umpteen questions, which is a typical Midwestern approach to everything. And after the meeting, we talked about how things went, and I told Stacy, we really appreciate what you've done. If you ever come to New York, please give us a call. By Thanksgiving—I think we were here in September when we came that first time. While we were still here that first time, we call the Advertisers. We go down there. Meet an art director-- immediately he just embraced us. White guy--his name is Wy Irons. We go back to New York. We get a call at Thanksgiving from this gruff old man who says, uh, my name is Ron Mains. We didn't know who Ron Mains was. He said I'm

Stacy's husband. Stacy and I are coming to New York for Thanksgiving and we want you to come to our hotel and have dinner with us. My husband says we got something better than that. We are cooking Thanksgiving dinner, and we would like for you to come to visit us—come to our place. Ok. They come to town. They come to our loft there in New York. He was so impressed with the fact that I could cook—he says are you niggers really interested in coming to Minnesota. And we said, well, we're considering it. He says if you're really interested in moving to Minnesota, I'll tell you what I'm going to do for you. Dean looks at him and says what is it you're going to do for us? He says, I will send, you and your wife, a round trip ticket to come to Minneapolis. I will put you up for as long as needed. I will introduce you to the people that you need to know, and help you find a place. Dean looks at me, and he says, what does this man want? Because we've never had, anybody say that to us. We're kind of like leery of it. This is an opportunity. Let's go ahead and take this man up on this. Let's go on out to Minneapolis and see what it's like. Stacy had told me who the printing company was—the publishers—of the Little Books--which was McGrath. She told me who to contact at McGrath in New York. I took my book down there to this guy, showed it to him. He says great. You're hired to do our next book. They would send me out here to Minnesota to style those hardcover books.

Barbara: I always wanted to do hair. That's the only thing I ever wanted to do.

See my mother did hair, so that was only—that was my, whatever you call it, role model. She got about fifty cents, I think, for doing a head of hair. I got much more than she ever made, but, now my granddaughter's getting much more than I ever thought of making.

Buelle: And back at my mother's house, we decided that, I needed to go to work, again. She said there's no point in the two of us sitting home. So mom would take care of my baby. Well, it was easy, because I went to work for Social Security—I went down and took a federal exam—already remember I worked for the federal government already. And I passed that exam, like that, and went to work at Social Security.

### We Broke Through

A breakthrough exposed the unprecedented ways the women met challenges. They identified their enablers and barriers in their quest to obtain the work they perceived as their vocation. The enablers to breaking through were their accomplishments and networks. The barriers they identified often were structural. These barriers manifested in their personal lives such as inadequate childcare or preparatory opportunities. The barriers did not break down as they broke through into the workplaces they desired. The women sought to articulate the location, moment or context when they perceived the

break occurring. As Ede stated, “So, that’s where that was that I came to use later in life when I ended up being an actress.”

Breakthroughs signaled the agency and autonomy they exercised in thinking and acting within their settings amid broad contextual forces and issues. A breakthrough embodied thinking and acting in a way that exemplified vocational identity as addressing problems by seizing opportunities.

A breakthrough was indicative of thematic iteration. The women networked with kin and community in breaking through in their quest for vocational identity, shaping the discourse about who they were and what they ought to do. As an example, Hettie observed the arrival of the very few Black women who worked in the offices of White male employers in positions identified as good—that offered the benefits of social security, pension, and health care. Women in this study perceived working in such offices as a breakthrough. The scholars of Black women’s employment indicated in their research that clerical work has been a later labor achievement.

The woman recalled domestic service as an income source but as they experienced and the literature supported the benefit structure was nonexistent or inconsistent. Yet, Mimi and Ede knew that many Black women stayed where they started—in service work. Mimi and Ede began their work quest perceiving their vocational identity in service work because that work fulfilled their goal of contributing to household income as their mothers expected. As Barbara explained at the close of her

interview, "I preferred working with a pencil rather than on my hands and knees." During her interview Ede stated "I didn't like being on my hands and knees." Hettie referred to domestic labor as the work that "kept us" by providing the compensation to meet their needs. The breakthrough was in obtaining the work they would rather or ought to do and keep.

Mimi: Twenty-five cents an hour--there wasn't a lot offered to Black women at that time. I guess everybody that I knew was doing housework. Those that were fortunate enough to continue schooling, you know. I think there might have been some that were on scholarships and all, but I knew that I had to go to work. There was nothing else to do.

I: How did you know that?

Mimi: Well, because my mother never worked. If my mother worked, I can't remember it being lengthy, at all. Because, it would have been probably housework and she had enough housework with five kids. I think the war was over when I laid off from the New Brighton arsenal making bullets. Everyone was. And then after that, I think my next job was at a hosiery knitting mill. Yes. The center has always been active in Minneapolis, and there to help us to find jobs. And they had a Mr. Shaw, the industrial secretary, I believe he was called. His job was to go to factories and places of business that, during the war, hired

Blacks. He then would follow you, and do whatever he could to encourage you.

After the war, they went back to their old way of hiring.

I: Oh, ok. So not only did they go back to what they used to do, but back to excluding Black people.

Mimi: Exactly, exactly-- I applied there and was hired. We got a lot of information from the center as to how to apply for jobs, and what to say to make us, you know—

I: To become employable--

Mimi: And after the war, like I said, they weren't hiring Blacks, so I was the first Black hired after the war--into this hosiery knitting mill. They took me down into the basement. They let me know that that wasn't the sub-basement. There was something farther down than that. I don't know what it would have been. It would have been a hole. But that is where they stripped the hosiery, off season, and re-dyed them. So I was called a re-dye clerk. That was my job. I must have been there for a while when I realized that the hosiery that were being stripped were coming from the third floor. I found out that the person that had that job before me did it on the third floor. So needless to say, I had to report that to the center-- cause I have a fat mouth.

I: Did White women employees tell you?

Mimi: Right, sure. I told Mr. Shaw about it, and he suggested that we have a—oh, in the meantime I had joined the union, paid my dues, and had gotten real chummy with the union. I noticed that the power machine operators were on piecework, making big bucks. I had always been interested in a machine. We had an old machine at home. We made doll clothes and what not. I thought, well, that's something that I should be able to do. I asked if I could be considered for this seam job. I suggested to them that I think I would like to try it--because you make more money. The White woman supervisor told the union that Blacks would not be able to do that, because their hands were too thick. Needless to say, I did not stop asking about the job. And I got very, very chummy with the union. I was going to hockey games, and whatever else they had going on. I was their nigger. You know. I got in with them, and they liked me. And so they sort of forced her to try me. I was so close to making it within the 13 weeks' training. It may have taken me 15 weeks' training. As a matter of fact I had made it. I got on that power machine, and was making good money. I finally made piecework and was doing fine. So they (at the unemployment commission) said, well how would you like to get in on the ground floor of a new store that's opening up out in the south suburban community? They were government employee marts. It was a membership deal. You'd work for the government, or on government projects or what not, you could shop there. It was the first of the discount stores. I was the



first hired. Yeah. I helped get the merchandise off the trucks and into the warehouse for the linen department, very interesting. I learned the linen department up and down, and was doing real well. Then that manager hired a White woman--big, heavy, set woman. We were friends and all that, but I noticed something on her working with the cash register. I don't know what she was doing, but I wasn't going to be caught in a bind. You know what I mean. I started looking for another job in the store. I was hired in the luggage department. I had a good reputation for being able to sell, so the owner of the luggage and handbag department was Jewish—well, most of them were Jewish. I happened to have come out of school with his sister. I'm lucky. So he hired me. Meantime, let's see, they built a store over in the north suburban community. After I was there, he decided that he would manage the store in in the north suburban community, and I would manage the store in the south suburban community. Yeah. Something came up with his wife—very hard to deal with. I got into it with something—but I decided it was time to move on. Somebody had come in the store, and I was selling them luggage. He was from the Company T. I said, you know I've wanted to work for the Company T. So I had mentioned to this fellow that I was selling the luggage too, that I'd always wanted to work for Company T. So, when I went back to the center, I must have told them I wanted to try out at the Company T. So I had an interview-- was hired in advertising department--first black to sell. You

didn't go out on the premise sales, women worked in an office, and they dealt with churches, and small towns--the small directories around Minnesota--but we were kept in the areas that wasn't lucrative, really. The people on the premise sales were mostly men-- you know what I mean. I did really well selling my ads.

Ede: They just said well, more than likely you'll probably get some day work, I don't know how many hours it'd be, or if they'll keep you on, or if it'll be for one day or a few hours, or if they'll want you tomorrow or later on in the week. But whatever, that's just for one day. That's why they called it day work.

I: How long did you do day work after you quit school?

Ede: I did it for a while. But I didn't like that either. Cause of them women. Specifically, Jewish women who are used to having people work for them. You know that they want every spot spic and span. They don't want you to miss nothing. Not a hair, not—nothing--I mean absolutely nothing. You had to go back and get it and do it over. Which is fine with me--cause I'm a perfectionist anyway. I didn't mind. But of course, I was trying to do better than everybody else, so I'd get called back. You know. The less they have to go over—that is the truth. Yes. They'd go over your work with white gloves on. I very seldom had to go back and when I did, I thanked them for calling that to my attention, and I never missed that again. I never let that same situation come up again and that

was for one dollar an hour. Oh, I must have done that for a few months. So that worked out pretty well. I'm telling you, I was too outdone when the woman— wanted me to wash her underwear, by hand--in the hopper downstairs. I said, now, if your drawers cost that much, you ought to be able to put them in the washing machine. So why should I wash them on my hands? The only underwear I'm going to wash on my hand is mine. I put them right there in the washing machine with the other clothes, and rinsed them, and hung them up on the line. She said they're hand washed; did you get that done too? I said, yes ma'am. I had to tell a tale about that, cause I really wasn't going to wash that woman's underwear on my hands. I told her from then on, I said, well I'm not good at hand washing. They would say, well why? What do you mean you're not good at hand washing? I said I just seem to have more strength in my hands than normal from scrubbing floors on my hands and knees and things. So, I think my hands is just too strong for that kind of delicate stuff. Absolutely does not make no sense to me at all. If something cost that much money, it should be able to go through a tornado. You know they did. A lot of people did have to do it--to keep their job. Cause I didn't like being on my hands and knees, and the first toilet I washed, I swore that I would not be down there long on my knees, washing nobody else's toilet but my own. I decided right then, the first toilet I washed, that I was going to go back and get my education. Yes ma'am, I said, oh no, no, no, no.

Somebody will be washing my toilets, and I will be explaining to them why they need to get off their knees. That's what I think to this day. I went back to school in—oh, that was a long process. Cause after that job, at the Salvation Army, I would always look in the paper and see if anything was familiar to me that I could do. So, I said, oh well, I know how to sew a little bit. I saw this ad in the paper for power machine operator. I'd seen one in the hall down at Young Way High School. I had that in common with it. I had sewn on one. I made a skirt down in Home Ec class. So I said, oh shucks, I can handle that, so I went down and interviewed for the job that—didn't even know what it was. I think it was Company H. And come to find the lady said, ok, well you come back tomorrow. You've got the job. So I went back the next day. Come to find out it was making and repairing building awnings. I was totally outdone. I had my little cotton skirt on and it's grey and black and white stripes, and my little white blouse. These nasty awnings--I think I lasted about three days. That was enough nastiness for me. Yeah, cause--I brought my clothes in and I changed clothes, and the funny thing about it, the lady she laughed. She told me later on, she said you were so precious, you were so cute. She said, when I realized that you didn't know anything about this machine, she said, but you kept up a strong front. I said well this is not working here. So, I knew how to do the day work then. So I got smart. Me and my sister, we put our heads together and we decided we was going to put

us an ad in the paper—saying, you know, experience, and how much we wanted an hour. Then we could even name the days that we wanted--and the times. Now that I'm experienced—and asking for my own pocket money-- two whole dollars an hour. I cooked at the center for two years. I had gotten my GED by then. The reason why I left was the pay discrepancy. I had been there two years, and I still was getting the same amount of pay. I couldn't understand that. I said why am I not getting a cost of living raise? Don't you have it in your rules or by-laws or charter or something? I didn't know where to go. It seemed to me there should be something in writing where you get a cost of living raise. They said, no. I said, oh, well, we can just call the meeting here. So me and the administrator and whoever else, and Janie Way, and all of them big folks, and Shelia Putty called a meeting, and I told them that there needs to be a cost of living raise, every year. Couldn't just pass people over and sit up here and give him \$30,000, just cause he's a man. I never seen him doing nothing, but sitting up in there. He didn't feed nobody. He ain't teaching nobody no ABCs and no 123s. You know, so I didn't think it was fair. I just absolutely—that was not fair. So after I got that straightened out, then I decided to go to medical school. So I decided, well--it is a histopathology technician. It's a person that slices the tissue to see if it's cancerous. The tissue is frozen, and you slice it into a tiny cube. Then you slice it on a prostate five centimeters thick. You melt the wax off and you stain it on a slide with different

colored stains. The agents have to be a certain temperature, a certain percentage and everything for every single thing in a cell is to be its particular color on the slides. Being a perfectionist was right up my alley, because I was like—I like things to be perfect. I went to the school, over in Minneapolis. I went there a year. I started out being a lab tech and I flunked the whole first quarter. This thing's not going to do. They suggested that I quit, and then that's when I ran to the histologist just taking more interest, and then I switched over to the histology-- loved it. So I went down to the hospital with my little box of slides, I had to do a year internship with a licensed pathologist. He thought my slides were wonderful. He just fell in love with them. He took me into the lab to introduce me to my partners who were going to help me out for this year, and I was going to come back the next day. Walked into the lab and there on the counter was a basin with a woman's breast in it full of beta dye. I had never seen anything cut off. They would just send us, at the school cadaverous tissue. We never saw a whole part. You know, an arm or a leg or a finger or a hand or anything like that. So, when I saw that breast, I stayed cool, but I was shaking like a leaf inside. I couldn't handle it. I couldn't handle it. I would have to take the part and dissect the material--couldn't do it. I took my little box of slides and went home, and never went back. Mm--but you know, it was alright--I was always putting myself as something. After school and I'd walked out on my job, I still furthered my

education. I heard through Edith Ann Fraser that they going to show me girl how to make computers at an elementary school, here in the city. Honey, I hopped it on up there and sat down and just started doing what everybody else was doing up there. I filled out all the stubs and the papers that they were filling out for the day. The man looked at me and he said, you weren't here yesterday, were you? I said yesterday? Was I supposed to be here yesterday? He said yeah. I said, oh, no, I wasn't here yesterday. I go, where are those papers at? He said well let me get them. You have to fill those papers out first. He went and got the papers for me to fill them out. I had enrolled to learn how to write something at Company C. I started out wire wrapping, and then I went to the components, which was part of that department. I didn't care for that idea on the line. Me and that line didn't work. It was going so fast it made me nervous and I would knock a piece off and then couldn't find the piece and I would just get so confused. We were just standing so close to each other but I knew all my components and everything. Then they had us soldering. Well, I guess I really wasn't telling the woman no lie about my hands being heavy and strong, cause they kept burning up the boards. The supervisor, she came and talked to me. You know—work--don't have to be a drag until I was there all by myself, just me, and the supervisor because they started laying people off. I think I got laid off in '69 or 70. You know, I danced all the way out of that building. I was so tired of working, period.

I: Did you watch the actors at the theatre?

Ede: I watch them rehearse when I was on my break at the center cooking for kids. One day I saw the script on the table and I just picked it up and starting reading all the parts like I saw them doing it during the rehearsal. Each character, I was doing their part just like they did it. I thought that was so funny and I said on this is cool. I put the script down, gave the kids their snack and I didn't think no more of it. So, that's where that was that I came to use later in life, when I ended up being an actress.

Hettie: In St. Paul, I worked at Company I. I remember only one other Black woman—Renaë Mabre. She's still living in St. Paul. There wasn't many Black women working in good jobs, you know.

Hettie: Everybody says you're wasting your time because they don't hire Blacks at the Company T in downtown Minneapolis.

I: Are black people you know, saying this to you?

Hettie: Yeah, the people I knew—I had met in '57. But one day in the paper, I saw this ad from the Company T. So I get dressed and I go down there. They [White people] looked at me like I was crazy. Truly, as if to say, well, why are you here? And by the way, when I walked in I saw one Black person and she was running the elevator. That's all they let us do in downtown Minneapolis. I spoke



to her and then I talked to this White lady who said the first thing we do is test. I never took so many tests in my life. They said that was the best test score even of the Whites, that they had ever seen. She said Well, I don't know if something opens up, I'll call you. One day, she called: Ms. Yates, when could you start work? I said Right now. So I went downtown and they had accounting jobs from 3 to 5 and I said I would take that. When you signed up, they said you can't take off work if your kids get sick. I said, well before I take this job, my family comes first and I will stay home to take care of them. So, they said ok and they took me. They had a funny rule that I didn't like and I didn't do. I'm just that way. She said, Hettie, you're going to have to start wearing make-up, which I've never done in my life. And she said, and then every Friday night you have to go out with us. I was management then. And I told them, I said, well I'm sorry. I don't wear make-up, and I don't drink. And after seeing you guys five days a week, I don't think I want to be with you on Friday night. She said, well that's a rule. Then I'm going, but I couldn't go against what I felt. So a couple weeks went by, and they said, well you don't know what you're missing. I said, no, but I'm not interested.

I: So, they did not pull you out of your job.

Hettie: No, she didn't pull me. I don't think she could. Anyway, I was doing so well, you know, you've got to have a reason to fire somebody, and they didn't

know what I would do. I started interviewing—finally when they put me on my own, I began to get more Black people coming in. And I would tell them, I said, hey, you're representing me. If you go in there and mess up, this is what's going to happen. I said they're going to fire you, and I'm going to get blamed for hiring somebody that they couldn't depend on. I said that's what they're counting on. I said so please, keep your job, come when you're supposed to. Do you know I have one just retired—he was handicapped on top of it—and Jane just retired I guess about two years ago. She stayed that long and afterwards. So out of all the Black people I hired, which were about 15, I only lost about three. I thought that was pretty doggone good. Yeah, and most of them, you know, retired or left and went to other jobs. So then, after I left accounting-- I was promoted. After I left accounting, they put me into what they call toll. That's where the operators were-- and I told them I didn't want to be an operator. So I was in a secretarial position--I didn't like operator. I didn't want to do that. But, during the time I was in that department, they had a strike, so they had to teach everybody how to—you know, so—from there I went into personnel. It's really human resources. and that's where I retired from.

I: What brought you here?

June: The thing we noticed is that the advertising agencies in Minneapolis were beginning to take the awards over the New York agencies. You know, all of the

big agencies that were in Minneapolis were getting all these great awards. That's when we realized there was an advertising market here. Oh yeah--any type of styling is a well-kept secret. You don't find food stylists around here in the city. There are only a handful of us. And that's in any city. That's something that we [Black people] are not privy to. That's a profession that you just don't see us [Black people] in. Because I don't think that we have relatives, and I don't think that we have family that's working in advertising agencies who know that that kind of a business exists. Had it not been for that Egg McMuffin girl coming to that studio, I would not even have known that people make money doing that.

I: So you saw this White woman doing this work—

June: And I said I can do that.

Lea: I believe I went to Company C and I was there until 1986. There I started off as a keypunch operator, data entry operator. And I worked odd shifts so that I could, you know, get ahead.

I: How did you figure that out?

Lea: It wasn't rocket science. If I was needed on second shift, and I worked second shift, I volunteer and work second shift, then the next time their needs are third shift, and I volunteer and do that, then will I not get ahead? I can get a promotion on the one shift, go to the next shift, and keep going. When I left there, I did manage the department. It was just the way to go. Actually, the reason that I

took the risk was because I needed the job, ok? I was promoted from data entry operator I to II and then a lead, or a back-up lead, and then a lead, and, you know, like that. The promotions brought me additional money and a higher-grade level.

Retirements were a breakthrough to other working opportunities. At retirement, the women realized they could choose to continue paid work or stop. Lillie joined an all Black male investment club. Hettie explained her retirement from the telephone company as an opportunity to work with her daughter. Buelle retired from the Department of Agriculture to work as an office administrator in a daycare facility.

Lillie: I was the only woman in the club, 25 years ago. It met once a month in the city. There were people in and out—you know. I think only one other Black woman came in. Most of them weren't married. I shouldn't make generalizations actually mainly the women don't think of ahead of making their money work for them. I got some bad tips from stockbrokers. And that's when I started making my own decisions by looking at our society. I am just a long-term investor in commodities, utilities, restaurants, and stores. I don't get on the truck, sell them one day, and buy them back the next day. I'm not talking about that type of thing. I used my stock dividends to start my own shop business.

Hettie: Oh God, they transferred me to St. Paul, so I worked in St. Paul about three years in the employment office. Because they were, cutting and they didn't want to hire anybody. So I took the bus every morning to St. Paul. And I did that for three years. And then I came back to Minneapolis to do the same thing. And that's when the Company was changing. See, Omaha was the main office. So you either had to go to Omaha or a different job— according to seniority, or they'd buy you out. I knew I wasn't going to Omaha. I told them—I just worked as long as I could and let it go. And you could just buy me out. So that's really—I stayed into '86. I retired. Because then they had sold it to—or Company U had come in and that's when I left. I came home, I stayed, and I didn't do nothing. Then after the kids are graduating and everything, and I said, why am I not working? Niecy, my daughter had her child, so we opened up the daycare center in St. Paul at a religious school. We ran that for 22 years. I stayed in there for 20 years and I said Niecy I got to go. I'm getting too old--cause you know, I'd like to play, and run, she said ok. So she kept it a little while afterward. She hired people--then after that, I didn't do much. I decided I would work part time. So I went out to the south store applied and worked for him for about four years, until he sold. He owned that before. No, he owned it for a long time. I worked until he sold back it to whatchacallim. I worked out there four years. He owned that one, and another one. Yeah. I don't know if he still has that one or not. I found out he was one

[meaning Black like me]. We saw each other and we kind of cracked up. He was as shocked as I was when he came in one day checking over and he said what are you doing here. I said I'm one of your employees. After that, I haven't done anything.

Buelle: I decided well, I'll have to think of something else to do now, possibly, so I went to my church, and one of the trustees said to me, Sister Buelle now that you've retired would you like to have a job. That didn't come out right--well, I just retired last week. Oh, we need someone in our childcare center. I said, no no no-- I do not do little children. He said I don't want you to do little children, he said, I know what you've been through supervising for twelve years in Minneapolis and he said we need someone to administrate in the office. So I went into the church office. He said why don't you go down and look at it. They had a beautiful day care center downstairs where they had preschool children. And as I took on that job then I got involved with computers.

I: Were you volunteering while you were working?

Buelle: The first two years I didn't, because I had to apply for Social Security. She told me I didn't have enough time in, because I'd been getting retirement from the federal government over the years. So she said why don't you just put in

some time in the day care in their system, and let them count that as job opportunity working. So as soon as that was finished then I quit. So then they gave me a stipend for my transportation and stuff like that, which is what I kept up to twenty-one years. I began to train the new directors as they came in, and help them along with what they needed to know. The church had a very popular day care center--its gone now-- but roughly, I was there for twenty-one years.

#### We Were “the ones”

Not only did African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century become accomplished, establishing networks with kin and community and breaking through, but they did so individually. All of the women except for Dee, Ede, and Nettie worked in predominantly White workplaces within for-profit and not-for-profit organizations as secretaries, accountants, human resource personnel, and teachers. All the women working in those settings except for Buelle observed, “I was the only one” or “the first one.” They began their paid work peerless as the only Black woman. They entered these workplaces to begin and end their working day as the first or only Black women. As Bea stated “You keep on trying.”

They were the ones who experienced racial incidents instigated generally by White female employees. They heard stereotypical discourses about Black people and were the only ones present either to challenge or disapprove with silence.

Hettie, Barbara, and Sissies remembered racial incidents that singled them out, as they had no peers in their racial, gender, and class categories. Bea registered her incredulity over a White female supervisor's comments and behavior. Lea spoke with ungrudgingly but factually about the racial culture of the company. Cicily recalled the comments of white people in the office and the unpaid work she and other Black employees did for a local chapter of a historical Black national organization while at work. Lillie explained incidents that had racial and gender connotations.

Disbelief and exasperation can be heard still in their voices. The women's voices in the following excerpts read as if they are continuing the conversations they remember having with themselves or with the offending person/persons.

Hettie: When I got there, the girls just kept—they didn't know—they were just very ill at ease. There was about four of them. I introduced myself. The lady had introduced me. After so long, I said, is something wrong that you guys, you know, can't interact with me or whatever? They said, well, we've never really been around Black people before. One of them said, well, the only contact I've had with Blacks is school, and they were always beating me up. And things like that. Those were the answers. I said, well I'm sorry. One day they looked at me and they said you've got freckles. I said so? The next night I went to work—have you ever had somebody watching you? You know you could see them—I mean you feel them and don't see them? They were coming and peeping around the column,



to see this Black woman with freckles. Cause they had told the other people that worked on the night shift. Well, one night I just got tired of it. I said, ok, this is it. I told my supervisor. Go and get all of them. Bring them in, and take one good look at this Black woman with freckles, so they don't have to keep coming in spying. He did it. They all came. They were so amazed, cause they had no idea that a Black person could have freckles. And once they got that out of their system, it went just like that. Everything was fine. They'd never had any experience with Black people. That was in '57. I stayed there for—it had to be three or four years. Yeah. Because finally they were hiring Black operators, every now and then you could hire them. I moved in to personnel. The first job they gave me in personnel was to do exit interviews. Because they wanted to find out why the Black kids—how was it they made more money by not working than if they were working. And they couldn't understand that. That's what they wanted to find out--didn't find out much of course. But they didn't stay. And why, I can't answer you why—before I got the interviewing job, I used to work at public—they called it public relations. I'd go out to the schools, teach them how to do interviews, and job fairs, whatever we did. I did that for a long time. Oh, I liked that because you had a company car. You still did your work, but you'd go out to the schools, out in the area. The farthest I ever went was Owatonna and back. I remember the only place I felt that the people were uncomfortable—the students

and the teachers-- was Preston? Is it Preston, Minnesota? I think it was Preston. When they found out that I was Black, you could see that they were little disappointed and wondered what I would do, you know.

Bea: I always tell people I stayed two years too long. You know, you keep trying—I grew up in an age where you worked hard enough because it was your job and obligation. I was the only Black teacher at my school with a whole bunch of Black kids. A lot of them were from Africa, Somalia, and different places. It was only at the end. One thing, the principal, in all fairness to her was incompetent. I don't think it was her fault. This former religious woman--never could get through to her—and I mean no disrespect for practicing Christians, or anything like that—I can't say some of my best friends are like her. I think she wasn't used to Africans of any variety. Then you get a different culture coming in. She was basically scared; she was scared of them—always wanted me to be something that I wasn't. I mean, I kind of wouldn't care if a kid was magenta or red or cranberry, you know. I am here to help them learn. Well, I would keep the kids in for recess if they hadn't finished their work so I could help them on an individual basis. When one of the parents complained-- she come down on me. She wrote me a note I found when I was shifting junk. She wrote you know they can't learn. Yup, yup, she wrote that. If I had been principal, I would have said,

oh, I 'm sorry Miss Jones you feel that way. I'll be sure and tell Miss Bea not to do that with your child again. She's only trying to help. I would have said it all like that. Most parents were grateful.

I: I guess you don't feel she was your advocate?

Bea: She even asked me, you think you can talk back to me. I said I'm just stating my opinion, and I do have an opinion. Not only do I have a right, I have an obligation. I just don't feel right now I am being disrespectful. I believe in authority. I know who I am and all. I have no problem with authority, but don't just talk to me and try to treat me like I 'm not saying anything back. It was all I could do to keep from laughing. They removed the former religious woman. Now see, there was an easier way because of Naomi, the Black principal I had. Before the referendums and things, I ended up with 37 kids who were the hardest since I was certified in Special Ed, but these little Black boys were not certified in Special Ed and I didn't want to certify them as Special Ed because they'd carry a stigma. Naomi and I went to war about this many times—about how it wasn't fair that I get more kids. When I talked to her about it she would say stuff like, Bea you understand them. Actually, I didn't understand them but I wouldn't deprive them of anything. I would say to Naomi, you know dollar for dollar I make more money. I am making as much as you do. I'd teased her.

Barbara: Yeah. It was in a factory making—you know coat factory over there in the Warehouse District? The people were *very* [italics added] nervous about me being there. They were afraid that and I think it was a union thing that they were going to pay me less--because--I was new and Black and what not--you know. And it was really kind of hard to get a job over in there, but I did get a job there. And it paid well \$15-17 dollars a week, for that time, but there again I didn't stay there long, I think because of the children or something--but anyway babysitting problems and so on. Then I worked in a store downtown called Wrights. Do you know that is the first time I was aware that they were so prejudiced against Jews around here? Period, you know. This woman I had, who was the supervisor, called them--Jubes. It was a chain at the time, so it probably was owned by Jews so maybe they were her boss, you know. And that was the first time, I remember, this man that came in, he was our supervisor. He told me I was a mulatto. I'd never heard the word mulatto before.

Lea: The environment was fine for what it is. The people—I mean, you had Black-White issues then, definitely. Same as we've got now. Now, we are more assertive regarding that than we were then, because of fear. Now you know, if we fear it now to a degree, you know what it must have been like then. And people

hid behind more things then, than they do now. The reason for certain decisions, you know. It's as simple as that. It hasn't changed! It hasn't changed!

For instance, well, it was just like the rules and the regulations. Bending the rules for some and not bending them for others. Things like that and then trying to make you believe that this was the right thing to do, you know.

Mhm--Company C was a good company. I wouldn't knock Company C as I said it was a good company. It was one of the best, in my opinion. But, some things happened regardless. They had steps that you were to take, and that, but it was like, what good did it do you? People were disgruntled then just as they are now.

Cicily: Yeah. We didn't speak outwardly of any discrimination. In fact, many of them felt they didn't discriminate. You know, because—but they [White people] would tell tales like, you're the only Black person I know—cause we worked northeast. And the people northeast never came across this way till—they never seen any Black people. Now they do, but in those days, they didn't. We used to—some of us, cause some of the restaurants didn't serve Blacks, and The Restaurant was one. They said they didn't discriminate. They would say they turned away people who weren't dressed properly. So those of us who worked downtown—and at that time you dressed up and went to work. Nowadays, people don't dress up and go to work. So some of us would make a reservation and go to lunch to see

if they would let us in, and we would report to the NAACP how we were treated. You know, get those test cases. It was part of the procedure, yeah. We were active members of the NAACP, and we did it because they were trying to get a case against the people that were discriminating. And it was hard to prove, because—

Ok, you couldn't blame them until a person was turned away, somebody who looked tattered and torn when they had all these first-class people in their business. So we would—and many times, we were not turned away. I think maybe they were suspicious, or they realized that we were decent people. You know.

I: Why did you not stay at the Company R?

Sissie: I don't know. I guess, some of the things I liked about it, some of it I didn't. At the time, jobs were pretty plentiful. It wasn't like now, so you kinda had your choice of some of the jobs you wanted. Some of the stuff I was doing was not complete accounting. You know, it was like parts here parts there, you know, according to where I was working.

I: So they moved you from department to department.

Sissie: Right, so I decided that I would just go for a regular job. And that's what I did.

I: Now when you say a regular job, [was that] one where the position was clear to you?

Sissie: I don't know. Cause you really didn't get a chance to talk to a lot of the people there. Mostly it was just the people in whatever area I was in. Most of the time when I talked to them it was like break time or something. It's not like we was close enough to talk all day long. So that was part of it. I really didn't get to know anybody, really make friendships, or anything like that.

I: Did others leave when you left?

Sissie: I don't know. Like I said, I was the only one, so I don't know what the rest of them were doing. And then, you had such a short lunch, it was like—I think it was a half hour lunch or something like that. When you're downtown, you really can't say, well, I'm going to shop for my lunch hour. And so that's when I applied and started working at the School. Yeah, I liked it when I went to the School. And I liked the people I worked with. I was working more closer with people. And it wasn't really separated, so you could work and talk to someone too, you know, if you wanted to.

I: So did like any department better?

Sissie: Well, it was different reasons I moved. The first department, they decided that the work we were doing was similar to what another department was doing, so they decided to combine them. That's why I ended up in the combined department and only two of us ended up going to the combined department. Because I had enough seniority then to kind of move, so I stayed there for a while. And, I knew it was time to go.

I: How did you know it was time to go?

Sissie: Well, I was the only one. This lady was so prejudiced. She didn't even want to talk to me. She was over the whole department. She was like over the supervisors. They were like supervisors in name only. Anytime it came to anything, it was her. I mean, different little things happened. You know, I was there, but then I decided it's not even worth it being here. You know, just went through so much stuff. I mean, that's the worst department I was in, out of all of them.

I: Did you file any complaints?

Sissie: At that time--they let this lady get away with whatever she wanted to do! She would hire people from outside--young people. And she hired them. She didn't hire me. She didn't have a choice for me coming to her department. So, it



was like, she's here. You know? Didn't nobody last that long in that department, period. So I decided I've got to get out of here. This lady gonna kill me, or I'm going to kill her, I've been hearing, you know. It was terrible. It was very, very prejudiced, things going on there. I was the only one. Plus, since she did not hire me—me and another lady we asked to speak to who was going to be our supervisor, and talk to them before we went there--you know. Cause we had the choice to go there or try to go somewhere else. So, we asked to meet with the supervisor. We ended up having to meet with her. The supervisor's sitting in the corner and didn't even speak to us. Anyway, she was nice and friendly and stuff. You would think she was. We asked would there be a problem with us coming to your department? I don't know. Anybody had a problem they will be looking for another job. That's what she told us and she was right. Cause we didn't have no problem with anybody else. She was the problem. So, I stayed there for a while--then it's, no, it's not even worth it. I was there, oh, it might have been about a year. And it was time to go. It just wasn't going to work out, period. So I went on lay off. I said they've got to get me out of here. So I went on lay off about three, four months.

I: Oh, ok. Now when you went lay off, what does that mean?

Sissie: It means I talked to—I don't what they call them—reps--they had personnel reps and stuff at the time. So I just told them, I said, you gotta get me out of here. I cannot work here anymore. I said I did not have no letters in my file, no complaints or anything because I know I did my job.

I: And so she couldn't do that.

Sissie: Right, so I asked to get me out of here. I didn't just quit. I said; get me out of this department. And the only way they could was, you know, do the lay off. Lay me off. Then I ended up going back. It was so funny when I first went to the department and the lady had left the position, and they were just having her come in, paying her overtime to come in, to help out a little bit. So when I went there, they were going to have her train me. It really helped me being in different departments because I'd learned a lot of different things. So finally, here she comes, and I'm thinking, in the department I came from, the accounting was much stricter than this one was. This one was a little more lenient. So I said ok, show me your program, what you're doing here. That was all she had to do. I knew how to do that stuff. I told them, I said, well you guys don't have to continue to pay her to come up in here, paying her time and a half, and all she was doing was walking around chit chatting with people. She wasn't even there with me. You see, that's a waste of money. I said you guys can let her go. It wasn't

even a week. I just told them, you might as well just let her go. She can't train me. I knew more than she knew. Then I went to another department. That department was alright. It was ok. You run into these prejudice things, every department you go to--so some of that went on. But it wasn't my supervisor; it was some more people that worked there. What made it so bad, this one chick, the one that did this—something she did—and everybody was just, what? Something she did. Even my supervisor, she was so mad. She said I'm so glad you handled that the way you did. I said I'm a mature person. If I had been young and silly, no telling what may not have happened. You know, cause this was an incident she did. So, everybody was proud of me. I guess they were surprised, waiting for me to just blow up. But I didn't. I don't have time to act stupid. I know prejudice when I see it. So anyway, I left there because some of the jobs were going to end up being part time--about 80% rather than 100%. I got along with everybody there.

I: Did that person face any discipline?

Sissie: She tried to apologize to me and all this stuff, but I don't have time—just stay away from me. Because, I guess I'm funny about some things. It's different when people accidentally—I mean you know it, you know it when you see it, when you feel it. You know, when things happen, you know what's going on. That's the way she felt, period because otherwise she wouldn't have did and said

what she did. So don't come and apologize to me and say I'm sorry, cause I know you're not. You're just saying that. Because she figured, that's what she should say. Not because that's what you want to say or the way, you feel. So, that's the way I am.

I: Was this incident related to your work? Did she try to misrepresent you at work?

Sissie: No, it was a racial remark that she made. She didn't know I was standing there and heard her. She was saying it to someone else, and the other lady's like non-verbal. You know--and a couple of them, cause we was like in the main reception office. I went up in there, and she comes in. She didn't know I was around the corner so she didn't see me. So she came there talking, oh hi and then she starts talking. And when I stepped from around the corner— and the rest of them, they didn't say a word. They knew I was right there and they were kind of surprised, you know, about how she came. Why she—I don't know.

Ok. How the incident was, one of the ladies—and you know I'm the only one there. So she had on some black stockings. So she came in and showed the girl. You know, had her shoes off and stuff. Cause we had been just chit chatting. You know they knew I was around the corner. Just chit chatting, you know. So then, she comes in. She looked at her. Oh, you look like you got nigger feet.

Everybody's like, what? You know, cause she seen her with these black stockings on. But she wasn't one that I had to work closely with, cause she worked out in the hall for one other professor, doctors and stuff. So I would see her everyday-- but I didn't have to come in contact with her. So, anyway I left there because of the hours. I didn't have a problem with anybody.

I: Did you not have to go to the principal to talk about your problems?

Lillie: I'm sure there were a few little incidences. I had to get people straightened out over the years, you know. I went to the principal a couple of times, about different things, but they weren't major things, and they were taken care of. But you can be mature about it, and in a professional manner, handle this fine. You know, cause situations are going to come up, I think. There were things went on that the principal took care of. A male parent asked the principal for his child to be removed because the child was afraid of me. The principal told parent this would be good learning experience. A parent stopped at the door and said I was Black; I responded you are White. Parent laughed and stated that her child told her many things except that I was Black. Then I moved to the Prairie District there. That was kind of challenging, because there were—I was the only Afro-American teacher in the district for a while. There was one— Wanda Shane was a Black educator who got a Ph.D. She was a specialist in the district; she went to

different sites. I was the only classroom teacher. I was the first contact, Afro-American contact that they had. So, they got to know me, and I got to know them. There were a few little incidences--there were a couple. I had to get people straightened out. I remember one teacher called me Sunshine. You know. I don't think he really understood. I was trying to explain to him that this was wrong. My classroom's at the end of the hall, and his was like next to mine. So he had to pass all these other classrooms to get to me. He came in, and I heard him coming in. He was saying, oh good morning, Mrs. Wayne, good morning Miss So and So. Well, good morning Mr. So and So how are you today? When he gets to me, he says, well good morning, Sunshine. I said, Steve, you know, that was a really derogatory remark. It is--really? I said yes. I said, I don't—because I've known you all this time, really don't think you realize it, I said. If you were to say this to a group of Afro-American men, you might really cause a big controversy. I said it is a derogatory remark. What do you mean? It just means that we're friends and that you know, that you are really cheerful and, you know, I didn't mean anything by it. I said, well I'm sure you didn't, but I'm just—it's a matter of education. I've told you--please don't call me Miss Sunshine. I said, you don't realize it, but somewhere in the back of your mind, you didn't call Mrs. Wayne, sunshine, you didn't call Mr. Fraser, sunshine. You call everybody by name. When you got to me, you called me Sunshine. You know, that's not my name. So there has been a

couple cases, here and there. I don't think like he really knew--but somewhere in the back of his mind, subconsciously. But then you know there were just little things that they would say — I think I educated them to a certain extent.

I: Is that the first time you had to make sure you speak up for yourself?

Lillie: Oh, definitely, I can stick up for myself. No, I'm not going to stay in one school 27 years but say something. Even though they were all—White on the whole--they treated me very well.

Lillie: Well, being a tennis coach at the black colleges is my interest. Like I wouldn't mind--I enjoyed tennis so much; I wouldn't mind being an assistant coach. Oh, I forgot about that job. Yeah--head coach for the girls' tennis team. The girls--we didn't do too badly. We went—couple of the girls went to the next level—about three of them. That was the only time when I was teaching I felt a little animosity towards me. But it was from the other tennis coaches, from other districts. Because I was new--I didn't know where to go or anything at first--instead of this lady nurse telling me. So the girls came in with me to this area where we were going to play tennis. The coach comes up and starts yelling at my girls—you don't belong in here, get out, you're not supposed to be here. You're supposed to stay on the bus. It just took me back, you know, and I said, well excuse me, I said, but the girls are more my students from Lovely High. I said if

you're going to address them, I really wish you would do it through me. Let me talk to them, tell me what the rules are, because no one explained to me ahead of time what the procedure was. This was my first year there. That was the only one time I really felt resentment. I don't know why.

I: Were you the only Black woman teaching the White tennis girls?

Lillie: Mhm, mhm--well, I don't know whether that was it or not. It might have that way with anybody new. Cause see--my kids were from the high school, and the other kids, were throughout the whole metropolitan school district. She yelled, and I didn't think they had that kind of really—but I was very ladylike. I told her she was addressing me you know let me address my girls. Just screamed at them--you know--the girls got to looking at me. That wasn't the way you do things. Professionally, you know.

### Summary

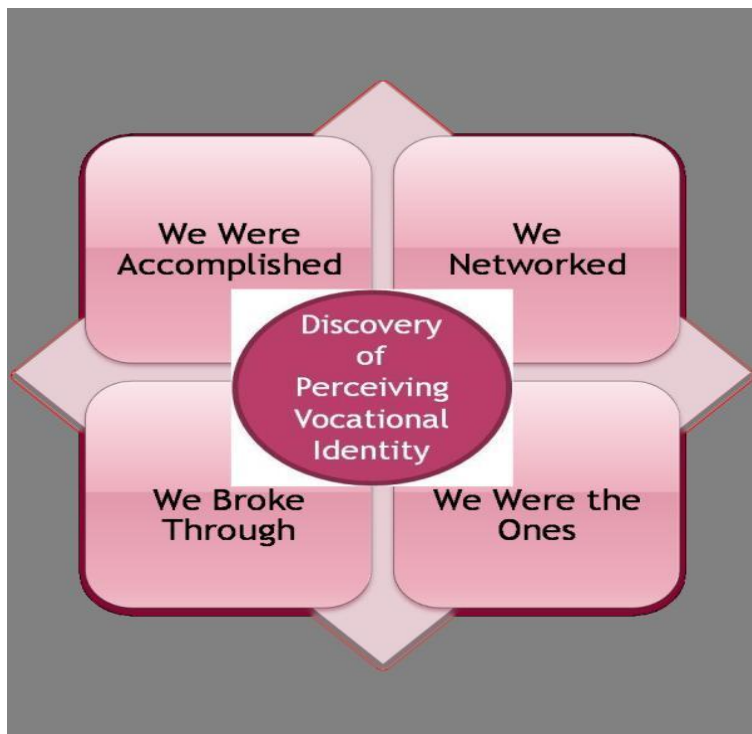
The themes of accomplishments, networks, breakthroughs, and being “the ones” revealed the perceptions the women in this study had about themselves and the perceptions others had about them as workers. These revealed perceptions elucidated the themes to constructing their vocational identity.

Reflecting on the whole and or parts of one's past is the primary trajectory to discover vocational identity. The women in this study narrated their history as workers, a



key component of this study and the hermeneutical method. The themes were derived from the process and structures of hermeneutical interpretation. Hermeneutical interpretation does not posit these were the only themes, but the best themes (Madison, 1988) from the content and contexts of the women's narratives that epitomized vocational identity.

*Figure 1.* Four thematic domains could be considered as attributes (who you are) and results (what you do) of the women perceiving their vocational identity through reflecting on their work narratives.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this interpretative study was to discover the vocational identity of African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century (1920-1980). The ideological expectation for all women was that the home served as the only place to exercise their vocation (Giddings, 1984; Mutari, Power & Figart, 2002; Welter, 1966).

Conversely, it appears that paid work was the societal expectation of African American women (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Jones, 1986). Thus, the problem has been that existing scholarship has not examined vocational identity for the women in America who have worked the longest as a legacy of slavery (Aldridge, 1989; Beckett, 1982; Costa, 2000; Goldin, 1977; Mullings, 1997; Wuthnow, 2003).

The overarching research question was: How do African American women who were engaged in paid or non-paid work in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century perceive their vocational identity? This chapter contains a brief overview followed by a discussion of each theme as a component of the women's perceptions of their vocational identity according to hermeneutical interpretation and in relation to the literature. Subthemes will also be identified. Implications for further research and practice will be noted, and the chapter concludes with some recommendations.

## Overview

The methodological intent of the themes derived from the process of the hermeneutical circle traces the lines within the women's narratives indicating their attributes and actions of perceiving vocational identity. The hermeneutical circle process permitted probing the transcriptions with a lens on the literature reviewed and dissecting the interviews into textual parts and returning to them for attributes and actions of vocational identity.

Scholars have long theorized in the literature the content and context of vocational identity. The literature for this study defined vocational identity as what a woman ought to be and do. This definition for vocational identity arose from a play narrating the lives of Black women in the U. S. throughout the centuries.

The play quoted a novelist, Zora Neale Hurston, who wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a novel about the character Janie who heard from her grandmother that "it wasn't for me to fulfill my dreams of what a woman ought to be and do" (Hurston, 1937, p. 21). In the novel, Janie went on a quest to discover what she ought to be and do (Kaplan, 2006, track 2). This study has been about the quest to discover vocational identity from the women's narrated interviews.

The dominant quest (Kaplan, 2006, track 2) for African American women in the Twin Cities was paid work, as it was for Black women nationally and as indicated by this question "Where would the negro (sic) woman apply for work" (Green, 2006, p. 95)?

However, the themes that arose from narratives about paid and unpaid work stressed, as Giddings (1984) summarized, that working Black women in the Twin Cities and throughout the nation took embattled steps that became stepping-stones to take control over who they believed they were and what they ought to do.

### Themes

The following themes were construed using hermeneutical interpretation: We were accomplished; we networked; we broke through; we were “the ones.” The themes were iterative in that they related to each other. The narrative interviews were also recursive in that each woman shared a similar story related to each theme. Although the hermeneutical circle delineated the steps towards this iteration, an effect of this iterative process was that the narratives within the transcriptions could apply to other themes as well.

Each of the following themes is discussed in relation to the literature. One quote is provided as an example of the content of theme and as a pattern of engaging vocational identity. The context of theme is examined to show its reflexivity to the other themes and its relationship to vocational identity.

#### *We were Accomplished*

According to the literature, Black women workers have been visible and valued to the Black community but were invisible, undervalued, or ignored by the White

community (Gilkes, 1980, 1990, 1994; Santamarina, 2005). Black women embraced their work as a public activity (Bell-Scott, 1980).

As a representation of this theme, Buelle embraced her accomplishments when she stated, “I have a picture of me receiving an award.” The women in this study removed the cloak of invisibility by receiving public recognition for their accomplishments in the array of awards, letters of commendation, and plaques expressing appreciation for exceeding expectations at White male led organizations. The women felt validated by their accomplishments because the accolades they received, however grand or small, symbolized that they and their work had value, even as they worked to pay for their own needs or worked unpaid to meet the needs in their community.

African American women have a long history of having their labor defined as menial. To reject this assertion meant that they had to speak up about their work as having value (Santamarina, 2005).

They spoke up in their narrations by recalling the celebrations of their individual and peer achievements. The interviews revealed that they celebrated their worth in the workplace. Interestingly, these women appreciated the recognition they earned, even though it arrived during their mature years of paid and unpaid work after a long period of no recognition. They perceived public recognition from predominantly White organizations as a celebration of their presence and productivity, and that they were indeed of value.

*We Networked with Kin and Community*

The scholarly literature informs us that Black women existed in separate spaces within the home, community, church, and women's organizations (Harley, 1990; Gilkes, 1994; Ross-Gordon & Dowling, 1995). These spaces were the locations from which Black women constructed their own self-definitions of their womanhood as workers.

This finding within the literature has led to me to think that this theme of networking has a twofold relevance to the discourse on vocational identity. One of the objectives of kin and communal networks has been to shape and define the meaning of a good person (Reagan, 2000). Secondly, networking has evolved to include both personal as well as professional formation through group affiliation to improve knowledge, skills, and abilities by making connections with others.

This theme of networking in this study focused on the personal and kin component. As Ada summarized, “We were going together.” In general, the workplace is a professional affiliation, but it was not the primary location for networking by working African American women during the mid-twentieth century. They entered into primarily White workplaces through the networking by African American men and women from organizations within their community. Working African American women were networked in by outside organizations.

Local organizations served the interests of working African American women in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century—organizations such as the Urban

League, Phyllis Wheatley, Sabathani, and Halle Q. Brown centers. These organizations functioned as a network of advocates to assert that these women had the vocational fit to enter White-led organizations (Weiss, 1974).

The women in this study named these advocating organizations as their networks. Intra-racial group networking was their only networking, and indicated, as I heard in their narratives, both a societal support and limitation. Within their personal and communal networks were conversations—the discourse that assisted them in becoming their own advocates. On the other hand, they had limited access to the discourse within the White workplaces because they were assigned the visible when necessary role of, as Collins asserted, as the “the outsider within” (1999, p. 89).

### *We Broke Through*

According to the scholarly debate that arose with Goldin (1977) and continued with Aldridge (1989), Burgess & Hayward (1993), Costa (2000), and Wuthnow (2003), African American women were the first women to enter the labor force as a vestige of slavery, becoming the longest working females in this country. Because they worked in fields, factories, and household and commercial service, they were unacknowledged as discoverers of vocational identity or as contributors to the discourse. This expectation of and commitment to paid work began in childhood and continued as a dominant characteristic of their life into mature adulthood (Allen & Chin-Sang, 1990; Bell-Scott, 1980; Harley, 1997; White, 1999).

Any paid and unpaid work outside of private or commercial household and factory service signaled a breakthrough (Anderson, 1982; Honey, 1999). Barbara signaled her breakthrough with these words, “I prefer working with a pencil rather than on my hands and knees.” Breakthroughs were internal and external. Whispered or spoken desires and interests may actually become reality--casting oneself in a purposeful and attained direction.

I believe Barbara’s insightful remark encapsulated her breakthrough because I maintain that it is similar to the interpretation held by Dubois (1929) and Santamarina (2005). Dubois averred that paid work for Black women became an embrace of their agency and autonomy. As Barbara remembered each paid work opportunity, she moved towards conversing about herself as an autonomous agency who could choose when and for whom to work.

On the other hand, a breakthrough did not signal to Barbara and the other women in this study that they would stop doing household work during the mid-twentieth century in the Twin Cities. According to Boehm (2009), they used that type of employment, as well as their future work, to achieve economic independence (Dubois, 1924). I offer the explanation by Smith (2005) and Bateson (1989) who described household and commercial service employment during the mid-twentieth century as quilting or patch working oneself to a desired intention. The breakthrough was in attaining any significant achievement with labor considered useless as a goal or for achieving goals. This quilting



(Smith, 2005) and patchwork (Bateson, 1989) has relevance to the discourse on vocational identity. Their scholarly discourse on vocational identity, according to Bauman (1998), Cochran (1990), and Rehm (1999), asserted vocational identity as making meaning from reflecting on the past. Reflection on experiences and drawing meaning is constitutive of forming vocational identity. Exercising one's ability to reflect and integrate experiences is a strategy to meet a goal or achieve an outcome.

*We Were "the ones."*

African American women have been outsiders inside predominantly White organizations (Collins, 1989, 1999; Proudford & Tisdell, 1999). The women in this study during the mid-twentieth century broke through as the first and only "ones" who were in offices predominantly with White women. Many of the women in this study had, as Boehm (2009) and Etter-Lewis (described, firsthand knowledge of themselves and others being the first and only "ones" working in White communities both privately and publicly.

Similar to Mimi who pointedly declared, "I was the first Black hired," the women in this study narrated their experiences in workplaces and volunteer capacities as Brand (1991) noted in a study about Black women in Canada. The women in the study by Brand referred to themselves solely as the only Black rather than as the only Black female. In this study, Lillie was the only woman who recalled a conversation she had with herself as

the “one” who is a Black female, “I walked down the hall, see my reflection, oh yeah, there is that Black girl.”

In addition, Lillie stated, “There were no Afro-American teachers in suburban schools.” She believed that her status as an only “one” carried the responsibility of integrating that White workplace. No other woman described her role as integrating the paid or unpaid work setting; however, Cicily mentioned that her unpaid work was the accepted responsibility to investigate White owned restaurants for refusing service to Black patrons.

This theme is consistent with other claims in the literature. The literature included a line of reasoning that attributed the perception to working Black women that they were historical, social, and economic anomalies. For example, the legislative and social reform movement begun by White people ignored the paid work Black women performed as dispensable for federal and state legislative labor protection (Amott & Matthaei, 1996; Mutari, Power & Figart, 2002). Furthermore, White society held the view that working Black women were an incongruity because their working went against the discourse on the ideology of vocation—the societal expectation that a women worked for a short time before marriage or worked only to support her family (Giddings, 1984; Mullins, 1997; Welter, 1966). Black women were the “ones” who were *bad* [italics added] for laboring outside the home, even though that labor made it possible for privileged White women to

reform underprivileged White women (Mullins, 1997; Mutari, Power & Figart, 2002; Palmer, 1983).

The literature contains additional assertions that reflect the perceptions of the women in this current study who saw themselves as “the ones.” Anderson (1982), Honey (1999), and Jones (1986) contended that White women had experienced social confinement resulting from the ideology of vocation that made them oppose working with Black women. Furthermore, these scholars maintained that Black women workers were needed only after White women had abdicated the menial jobs. In addition, they had firsthand knowledge of other Black women who were the “ones” as Hettie recalled her former employer “hiring Black operators every now and then.” Black women were to be the “the ones,” invisible at work (Anderson, 1982; Honey, 1999; Jones, 1986).

### Subthemes

Subthemes surfaced from the interview data that cut across the main themes. The first subtheme is that the women described themselves based on race. Most referred to themselves as the first or only Black “one” in their White workplaces. Although they did not state explicitly that “I was the only Black woman,” racial identity was more salient than their female identity—at least when they were with White female co-workers.

This self-reference was most notable when White female peers were perceived as racially obstructive, ignorant, or less skilled. Mimi affirmed she was the first Black to sell advertisements in the 1970s, but she recognized the shared womanhood with White

women in declaring that they sold advertisements in the office to areas that were not lucrative when compared to the on premises or door-to-door sales positions held by men. Mimi knew she was the only Black “one,” but she recognized she was also among the underpaid ones –the women.

This subtheme exemplified the incongruities working African American women experienced in the Twin Cities. Their working could not be combined with working White women and or Black workers often meaning Black men.

The organizations that supported their paid and unpaid work endeavors (such as the Urban League, Phyllis Wheatley, Halle Q. Brown and Sabbathani) articulated their roles as women meeting the needs of the Black family (Gilkes, 1994; Harley, 1990). The taxonomy of race, gender, and class was not the analytical construct used for reporting on the needs of working Black women. The women in this study were likely to speak about their role within the Black community or family. This study provided the first time any of the women spoke formerly about themselves solely as working Black women, and I believe, as did Santamarina (2005), that they did not have the organizational support to do so at the time they were working.

As an example of this subtheme, a monograph by the Minneapolis Urban League (1984) discussed the public claims by emergent White feminist organizations to work for economic stability and financial attainment for all women. This monograph sought evidence that this outcome of their public work went unfulfilled for Black women who

had not achieved comparable economic stability and financial attainment to White women.

Another subtheme that transcended all four main themes was that Black and White female co-workers might share the physical space of the workplace but little else. Helping each other was the exception, not the rule. The women remembered White colleagues and supervisors as intransigent. This subtheme refers directly to being “the ones.” Placed upon these women was the added discourse in their workplace of being the defacto spokeswomen for the entire Black community. They experienced little or no breakthroughs in the workplace discourse on the subject of race and gender. As Cicily recalled, “They [White people] would tell tales like you’re the only black person I know . . . they never see any Black people.”

A third subtheme, “I did not discuss private matters” also seemed to transcend the main themes. Buelle made that statement as she escorted me to the exit of her apartment building. As the interviewer, I originally assumed the private matters to which Buelle referred were related to family matters. As a generation of born between 1920 and 1945, these women whom I interviewed were private about their personal lives. However, as I reflected on the challenges I experienced in recruiting women to interview [See Chapter Three], I have come to realize that these matters were about not only family matters, but also the private thoughts of these women about their paid and unpaid work. These unrevealed thoughts and feelings were too private and perhaps too painful to be revealed

to me as a stranger, regardless of the fact that I, too, am a Black woman. In the first chapter of this dissertation, I discussed the advantages of being a Black woman researcher with Black women as the subject. This advantageous position was a priori in that it was all that I shared with the women. My a priori position was not a guarantee of access without an introduction from a member of their trusted network of family and friends. Being a Black woman did not permit me to break through to all that they held inside about working whether in a paid or unpaid capacity. I was treated as an outsider within (Collins, 1999) because of my status (student, relative age, and without personal connections).

#### Implications for Research and Practice

The African American women I interviewed who were working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century were engaged in paid and unpaid work and perceived their vocational identity through their accomplishments, networks, breakthroughs, and as the first and/or only “ones”. The applicability of these themes, which emerged from their oral histories, to other cultures and communities, is limited. Nevertheless, my findings and interpretations reveal some implications for research and practice.

1. A study focusing on perceiving and discovering vocational identity could involve untangling care-giving to elders and children and household tasks as the unpaid work rather than the broadly defined community service.

2. This study discussed the existence of a religious, academic, and popular discourse on vocational identity. Further research on adult learning and development might include whether the themes identified in this study: accomplishments, networks, breakthroughs, are germane to religious, academic, and popular discourse.
3. The theme of being the first and only “ones” referred to the experiences of being Black, first or foremost, and being the only Black working in many different settings during the mid-twentieth century. The scholarship on the taxonomy of race, gender, and class, which has a global lens in feminist and women’s studies, is fundamental for this theme. Researchers might study the impact of being “the only” lesbian woman or gay male or economically disadvantaged person from a specific ethnic and/or racial group in various dimensions of the world of work. As well, research on the vocational identity of Black women in other countries might consider this theme.
4. For the emerging twenty-first century, continuing this conversation about adult learning as a formation of race and gender in organizations has relevance. Would some of these themes emerge for working Black women still today? What can Black women today draw upon that sustained their forbearers?
5. A subtheme indicated that Black and White women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century shared the physical space of the workplace but little else. Examining key moments when Black and White women collaborate in organizational

learning to remove barriers continues to be a needed conversation for practitioners and scholars.

6. The four themes or domains that emerged as constitutive of vocational identity among African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century raises questions for other demographic groups and populations. Would these themes emerge within the narratives examined from native-born or immigrant African, Asian, Muslim, Hmong, and Latina women?

7. In theorizing about learning as a life-long process, how would it serve the interests of knowledge generation to introduce vocational identity as a Western terminology and discourse? If the terminological history and discourse on vocational identity is taught, then who will find it engaging and in what setting: (a) in mandated primary and secondary education for children and youth, (b) in post-secondary education for young, middle, and mature aged adults, (c) in an online format for displaced workers in transition?

### Concluding Thoughts

How do African American women who were engaged in paid or non-paid work in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century perceive their vocational identity? This study about perceptions has been governed by one of the structures of hermeneutical interpretation produced by Gadamer (1960/1975). According to Dahlberg, Drew, and Nystrom (2001), the structure of pre-understanding has served as a model, theory, or



tradition investigators use as the starting point for their research. Pre-understanding is revisited to conclude this research study. An underlying epistemological question of this study was: Is pre-understanding of vocational identity as a construct necessary for knowing or demonstrating that one has a vocational identity?

This underlying epistemological question did not appear to have a bearing on the theoretical framework of the literature on the concept of vocation. Rehm (1999) and Cochran (1998) used autobiographical texts of historical figures, César Chávez and Booker T. Washington, respectively. Although vocational identity is pre-understood as evolving from narrative discernment, work is problematical. Work is to be challenging and at times difficult. Rehm assumed that as one works problems arise for thinking through. However, work for Black women, as Green (2006) indicated, was the problem—whether or not employment is obtainable.

Rehm (1999) and Cochran (1998) analyzed the vocational identity in the narratives by Chávez and Washington as they worked under problematical conditions. This study uncovered a pre-understanding from the literature that work was both a welcomed and unwelcomed necessity in the lives of Black women. Their narratives were situated in a particular period in history. The scholarly literature and their oral narratives revealed encounters with societal or macro forces and issues in the micro or personal as did with Chávez and Washington.

In this study, the women's narratives were received orally before becoming texts. In narrating orally their work histories, the women's own voices became the first interpreter of their stories. This study revealed through the voices of the women as narrators, the history and culture of contextual forces and issues that influenced their workaday lives (Etter-Lewis, 1994; Gadamer, 1960/1976). This study drew upon their memories. There were domains that epitomized a pattern of being a working Black woman perceiving their discovery of vocational identity. Their memories exemplified within the themes the different patterns of engagement and disengagement because the women in this study.

With this probe, "Tell me when did you first know you were working, whether paid or unpaid," they decided when and what they would share. They were the filters of their stories. They spoke from their memories about that which they perceived about themselves as women and as workers. My filtering of their work narratives began with their listening to their voices from the interviews, not with the transcriptions. I had to listen to their voices, to hear the inflected language they used to their working. The inflection in their voices informed me on what to code in the transcriptions.

This study did not begin with a discussion of the women's pre-understandings of the manifold meanings of vocational identity before the women shared their work narratives. However, the absence of such a discussion did not mean they were not pre-disposed to having a pre-understanding of the discourse of vocational identity.

The thematic deductions drew upon their explanations of what they did and how they thought about it. Their narratives began with their engagement in the world of work. They were probed for their internalizations, externalizations, and interactions as women and workers. They were not probed for their pre-understanding of abstract terminology. They were probed for the concrete language that revealed their perceptions about their working from their narratives and as connected hermeneutically to the literature.

Therefore, the themes of accomplishing, networking, breaking through, and being “the ones” demonstrated their perceiving vocational identity as discovered within the content of their narratives. In other words, to know the women vocationally in this study, one needed to discover their narratives. Their vocational identity is in the story that they created and told about their perceptions of themselves and what they needed to do, not in describing their understanding or meaning of a construct. Rehm (1999) and Rossiter (2002) affirmed the women in this study exemplified that one narrates rather than names a vocational identity in order to interpret this construct by examining the content and the context of their lives from the past.

Vocational identity becomes a secondary distillation when a study begins as oral history narratives. The narrative is the primary artifact (Chen, 1997; Cochran, 1990; Collins, 1989; Etter-Lewis, 1991; Rehm, 1999; Collin & Young, 1992). The objective of this study was not to link a specific kind of work as the place or source for discovering

one's vocational identity, but to identify the observations, interpretations, and experiences that epitomized the perceptions of these women that was uncovered.

Within the literature, naming and describing a conceptual term such as vocation has been a daunting task. Dawson (2005) and Williams (1976) put forward that the concept of vocation had evolving definitions. Kroth and Boverie (2006) summarized that many words share the same meaning. Dawson claimed that there has been a religious, academic and popular discourse on vocation. The discourse on vocational identity has been relevant to this study because African American women have been under-utilized informants on the foundational use of this concept in adult education and narrative research.

This under-utilization as research subjects has been paradoxical. The paradox has been that researchers viewed the taxonomical lens of race, gender, and class as distorting or skewing the research agenda rather than enlarging the investigation (Etter-Lewis, 1994, 1996b). Santamarina (2005) asserted that African American working womanhood had an overlooked and ignored discourse. They sought to exemplify their self-possession in their work as a "vocation" even though they were not considered ladies who labored at home (Santamarina, 2005. p. 25; Giddings, 1984). This mediated discourse carried by society viewed Black women as laborers, but not laborers with a vocation because they and the kinds of work they did were excluded from consideration for vocational

formation since their work lives did not ascribe to the ideology vocation—a woman working in her own home.

Through historical scholarship, Santamarina (2005) demonstrated working Black women interposing themselves in the discourse on vocational identity through the taxonomy of race, gender, and class. This research study became another interposition by a Black woman on Black women. The language the women used to narrate their experiences situated them in the meanings of vocational identity. They described work and its significance as space for accomplishments, supported by their networks and a way to break through even as “the ones.”

Dawson (2005) and Williams (1976) upheld that the discourse on vocational identity in Western society could not become complete within the field of adult education and work without African American women. African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century demonstrated that though unnamed initially in the scholarly discourse on vocational identity, they possessed vocational identity, albeit unnamed within their narratives about working. The women went on their quest (Kaplan, 2006, track 2) for work exemplifying vocational identity, not needing a pre-understood discourse on vocational identity to guide them. Their absence in that discourse indicated a pattern of excluding narratives of those who did not name or were unnamed but self-possessed of vocational identity (Cochran, 1990; Flannery, 1994; Imel, 2002; Rehm, 1999).

Working African American women during the mid–twentieth century in the Twin Cities knew what was lacking in their lives concerning paid and unpaid work. They took embattled steps to control their productive energies and material resources (Giddings, 1984; Jones, 1986). Their personal social power came through in their own discourse, not as a murmur or a backdrop (Obbo, 1997), but supported by their networks as they broke through identifying their agency and autonomy (Dubois, 1929) to accomplish their vocation of being “the ones”.

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## Appendix A

## Electronic Mail Response from Institutional Review Board

Dates: November 13, 2006

Study Number: 0610P94686

Principal Investigator: Sharon Kelly

Title: *Hermeneutical Interpretative Study to Discover the Vocational Identity of African American Women Working in the Twin Cities During the Mid-Twentieth Century*

Thank you for submitting the application titled *Hermeneutical Interpretative Study to Discover the Vocational identity of African American Women Working in the Twin Cities During the Mid-twentieth Century*. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has determined that as described the project does not meet the threshold for human subject research and will not require IRB review because you are collecting oral histories. We often do not review oral history as human subjects' research.

Thank you  
Cynthia McGill CIP  
Regulatory Compliance Supervisor  
UMN RSPP

Jeffery Perkey, MLS, CIP  
Research Compliance Supervisor

Human Research Protection Program  
Institutional Review Board (IRB)  
Social and Behavioral Sciences  
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Mayo Mail Code (MMC) 820  
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perke001@umn.edu  
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## Appendix B

### Research Announcement: African American Women and Work

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota in the Department of Work and, Human Resource Education. My dissertation is about interviewing African American women at least 65 years of age about when they began working and their working in the Twin Cities. The interviewees are invited to speak about their paid and unpaid work. The interviews are 90 minutes. If you are willing to have me interview, I will need you to sign a consent form. Please call Sharon at 651-230-3062. With your consent, each interviewee will be entered in a drawing for a Target gift card.

## Appendix C

### Consent Form

*Hermeneutical Interpretative Study to Discover the Vocational Identity of African American Women Working in the Twin Cities during the Mid-Twentieth Century*

Thank you for responding to my request for a taped interview describing your employment and/or unpaid work while living in Minnesota. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to sign it.

This study is being conducted by Sharon F. Kelly, PhD candidate, Work and Human Resources Education, University of Minnesota

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to discover the vocational identity of African American women working in the Twin Cities during the mid-twentieth century.

#### **Procedures:**

A one hour and 30 minute taped interview will be mutually scheduled with the interviewer and interviewee. At the interview, the interviewer will ask the interviewee to recall and describe the kinds of paid work performed, the location, the schedule, the supervisor/s, the working relationships with the supervisor/s and if coworkers were present.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The risk to you is that you may reveal information that you prefer not to reveal. If you prefer not to reveal the information, the tape will be stopped and will resume only if you prefer.

The benefits to your interviewing is in contributing to (a) vocational identity of African American women has been negligible but will be enhanced by this contribution to the literature review; (b) you will have the satisfaction that you helped further important research.

**Confidentiality:**

Your name will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only I will have access to them.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your decision to respond to the classified advertisement will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota.

**Contacts and Questions:**

The researcher conducting this study: Sharon F. Kelly, you may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at 1008 27<sup>th</sup> Ave S. E. Apt. E 651-230-3062, [kell0751@umn.edu](mailto:kell0751@umn.edu), or my advisor, Dr. Shari Peterson, 612-624-4980, [peter007@umn.edu](mailto:peter007@umn.edu)

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Address (if you want your name included in the

drawing) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

## Example of Letter Sent to Respondents

Sharon F. Kelly  
1008 27th Ave. S.E. Apt. E  
Minneapolis, MN 55414  
651-230-3062

February 10, 2009

In regards to: Our taped interview on December 8, 2008

Lea Dansby  
Any Street West Apt. 108  
St. Paul, MN 55117

Dear Ms. Dansby:

Again, I appreciated your willingness and availability to interview with me. Please receive a copy of the transcribed interview. Another interviewee received the drawing for the gift card. I will need to call to ask your birthday and age at the time of our interview and other questions that may arise from reading the transcript. Please call me with any questions; you may have from reading the transcript.

Respectfully yours,

Sharon F. Kelly