The Negotiators: Black Professional Women, Success, and the Management of
Competing Identities

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Robin Gayle Harris, who showed me, through brilliant example, that with hard work Black women are capable of *anything*.

Abstract

This study uses qualitative interview data from 35 Black professional women in the Twin Cities metropolitan area to identify and further understand the complex negotiation of identities necessary for Black women to achieve professional success. It asks, (1) what combinations of factors associated with race, class, and gender do these Black women perceive have the greatest impact on the career trajectories of Black women? (2) What are racial and gendered expectations outside of the workplace these Black women perceive complicate their career trajectories? (3) How do these Black professional women perceive the politics of class, as well as race and gender impact their career trajectories? (4) How do these Black women use race, class, and gendered networks? The limited body of research on the experiences of Black professional women suggests assimilation, defined as absorbing and seeing oneself as a culture different from one's native culture, is not necessary for professional success, a claim which seems counter-intuitive to present day understandings within the Black community of how success is best achieved. This study seeks to address the void in the literature by attempting to connect professional success to the competing interests of Black women's personal and professional lives, such as attaining traditional roles of wife and/or mother, meeting cultural expectations of active community engagement, or taking on minority mentors, to highlight the often invisible barriers to professional success for Black women.

Through analysis of the individual personal and professional experiences of Black women, this dissertation identifies a combination of factors associated with race, class, and gender Black professional women perceive as impacting their career trajectories. The

findings of this study suggest that many of the study participants' personal commitments, such as active community outreach and a desire for occupational prestige are indeed perceived predictive of career success. Black women are encouraged early in their professional lives to value either family or career as most important. Their personal valuations, regardless of other objective similarities (such as level of education, or that of family members), are believed by these women to significantly inform how the degree of career success they achieve. While one cannot generalize from a case study of 35 Black women in the Twin Cities, the study offers clear directions for future research on the professional success of Black women. This research will help to further the important work of narrowing the wide gap in career achievement between Black and white women in the United States.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2012, the Fortune 500 list included 18 female CEOs, marking the first time more than 15 women had held the Chief Executive Officer position for such companies. Only one of the 18 female CEOs was a Black woman. In the same year, 20 women were elected to the U.S. Senate, the most in history; yet none of those women were Black. These figures demonstrate that we live in a peculiar moment in time, where, despite large increases in the number of advanced degrees conferred to Black women, they are still unable to make professional gains at the same rate as their white counterparts. The purpose of this study is to identify and examine interpersonal, cultural, and professional predictors of career success for Black women. In this study a professional is defined as a college- educated individual working in a full-time salaried position (i.e. teachers, lawyers, doctors, marketing/advertising executives etc.). Furthermore, a professional is defined as someone that has at least a measure of autonomy in the workplace, relative economic security, and is engaged in intellectually stimulating work.

Drawing on interview data carried out among professional Black women working in a variety of positions across the Minneapolis -St. Paul Minnesota metropolitan area, this dissertation addresses the balancing act required of Black professional women looking to manage personal desires and professional expectations. The rest of this chapter explains the purpose of the study, defines key research questions, offers a broader context for the study's concerns, and provides an overview of the chapters that follow.

PURPOSE OF STUDY and RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to identify and further understand the key set of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that may contribute to Black women's career success, defined here as a combination of objective dimensions, such as salary and title, and subjective factors, such as definitions of happiness or time available to spend with family[1]. The broad scope of personal and professional roles played by Black women will be unpacked in this study to understand their potential influence on Black women's success in a specific geographic setting—the Minneapolis/St Paul Twin Cities. The Twin Cities is understood to be a relatively non-diverse Midwestern state[2], where Black workers make up only a slim percentage (4.4 percent), of the total workforce.[3] In other words, the Twin Cities may be a difficult environment for Blacks looking to achieve professional success.

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[1] Objective definitions of career success include observable, measurable and verifiable achievements, such as pay, promotion and occupational status (Nicholson 2000, Dries, Pepermans and Carlier 2008). On the other hand, subjective definitions of career success refer to job satisfaction, individual perceptions of accomplishments, and future prospects (Ayree, Chay and Tan 1994, Melamed 1996, Nabi 1999, Weise Freund and Baltes (2002). Although, scholars in the work literature usually approach their research using one definition, Hall and Chandler (2005) highlight the two-sided nature of careers and stress that research should take both objective and subjective definitions of career success into account. The definition used in this study attempts to include aspects of both the objective and subjective understandings of professional success.

[2] The Black population in Minnesota is 5.4%, the national Black population is three times that at 13.1%. The Hispanic population in Minnesota is 4.9% and the national population is more than three times that of the state population at 16.7% (2010 U.S. Census).

[3] The Minnesota state workforce is 89.9% white and only 4.4% Black (U.S. Census 2010). Blacks are also three times more likely to be unemployed as whites in the state of Minnesota, where the percentage of unemployed Blacks sits at about 20%, compared to 7% of unemployed whites (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012).

I use qualitative interview data to understand the impact of a set of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors on the career trajectories of Black women. My sample consists of 35 American-born Black women with at least a college degree, working in a professional position, (defined as an educated individual working in a full-time salaried position). The professionals in this study have at least some autonomy in the workplace, relative economic security, and are engaged in intellectually engaging work in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul.

Recently, a Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation poll found Black women have conflicting ideas about whether work or family is most important (2012).[4] The Black women surveyed valued being successful in a career, having free time, being wealthy, and being respected more than did white women, who most highly valued being married, having children, being in a good romantic relationship, and being close with family. The results of the Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation Poll seem to demonstrate a contrast between Black women's drive for professional success and their (admittedly minimal in comparison to white women) desire to fulfill more traditional family and social goals like motherhood and community activism. Are Black women committed to their work due to the titles, promotions, and salaries promised as a result of their professional status? Or are they most dedicated to their families and communities due to the emotional satisfaction assured by their allegiance to these domains? Do the

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[4] Participants were read a list of some things that different people value in their lives and asked to tell the researcher how important each thing was to them personally. The list was as follows: (1) Being successful in a career? (2) Having enough free time to do things you want to do? (3) Being married? (4) Having children? (5) Being wealthy? (6) Being respected by others? (7) Being in a good romantic relationship? (8) Being close with your family? (9) Living a healthy lifestyle? (10) Being physically attractive?

results of Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation Poll suggest (a) that women must choose between work and family? (b) That Black women perceive themselves to be particularly pressured to choose one over the other? (3) What does prioritizing personal and communal goals over professional ones, or vice versa, mean for the level of professional success that black women are able to attain? The present study seeks to build on and extend the literature on career success for minority women in an effort to expand understanding of how Black women approach and experience professional success. I address each of the questions discussed above more broadly by asking the following research questions.

The central research questions that frame the study are:

1. What combinations of factors associated with race, class, and gender do these Black women perceive have the greatest impact on the career trajectories of Black women?

2. What are racial and gendered expectations outside of the workplace these Black women perceive complicate their career trajectories?

3. How do these Black professional women perceive the politics of class, as well as race and gender impact their career trajectories?

4. How do these Black women use race, class, and gendered networks?

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The prevailing myth that Black women are doubly advantaged in the U.S. – benefiting from being both Black and female would seem to have been undercut by recent reports concerning the dearth of Black women in executive positions (Huffington Post 9/13/2012). Why, then, has so little academic research attempted to highlight the race- and gender based challenges that Black women face as they attempt to enter and

thrive in professional positions (Kanter 1977, Bell 1990, Banks 2002)? In her research on women working in male-dominated corporations, Kanter (1977) described women's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors as consequences of their roles as tokens within their organizations. Experiencing pressures based on their heightened visibility and the contrast to their male counterparts, Kanter argued that women therefore must learn to assimilate to the dominant masculine culture; all but ignoring the role of race in her discussion of tokenism.

While Bell (1990) and Banks (2002) address the multiple facets of tokenism for Black professional women, they are in the minority. Furthermore, they do not investigate how Black women prioritize the dueling expectations of their personal and professional lives. Moreover, the limited body of research on the experiences of Black professional women suggests that assimilation defined as being absorbed by and seeing oneself as part of a culture different from your native culture, is *not* necessary for professional success (Bell and Nkomo 2001, King and Ferguson 2001). This is a claim that seems counter-intuitive to present day understandings within the Black community of how success is best achieved. As a concrete case for the intersectional lives of Black women and the effects of intersectionality on their career trajectories, this research seeks to address voids in the literature by attempting to connect professional success to the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of Black female professionals in the Twin Cities area.

Today, the mainstream media commonly suggests that Black women should spend less time worried about their careers and more time on marriage and family (Alexander 2009). Black women may shy away from lofty goals of professional achievement in

reaction to media portrayals of educated Black women as focused solely on their careers; aggressive and difficult "bitches" running men out of their lives, mean, unsympathetic, and incapable of positive relationships (Alexander 2009). Even Beyoncé, a global superstar, has been criticized for being too career-oriented, being accused of using a surrogate to bear her child because she was supposedly worried that having a baby would hurt her figure (Washington Post 10/11/2011, ABC News 10/11/2011, Huffington Post 10/13/2011, US Magazine 5/12/2012). In reality, very few Black women fit the prevailing stereotype (Huffington Post 9/13/2012). Yet in addition to the sexual and gendered norms they are expected to try to meet, Black professional women may also feel cultural pressure to commit time and resources to doing "uplift" work in the Black community (Washington 2003), which may also put their professional success at risk.

Given the potential strain of balancing their personal and professional identities, how do Black professional women interpret and negotiate these competing social positions? What happens when career goals put personal goals, such as marriage and family, at risk? Recent research on male blue collar workers demonstrates how white male professional networks have a positive impact on the career trajectories of skilled Black men's professional success (Royster 2009), however, there is still little understanding of exactly what has the greatest impact on the career trajectories of professional Black women. This study seeks to identify what impacts the career trajectories of Black professional women as they attempt to work within or against the "system" of professional, personal, and cultural expectations that are laid out before them.

SIGNIFICANCE

This study is important theoretically because it provides a key case (Black professional women) from which to view the intersectionality of race, class, and gender. It shows that these disaggregated into separate components, but rather, operate in transaction with each other. It also provides a welcome counterpoint to most studies of Black women focusing on low-wage workers or welcome recipients (CITES).

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

In chapter 2, I provide a detailed description of the literature that informs this project, highlighting the limitations of past and recent research in this area. As mentioned above, research on professionals has been largely restricted to the study of how mental and physical health outcomes are related to "objective" dimensions of success, such as salary, job title and number of subordinates. In reality a mixture of internal and external objective and "subjective" criteria, such as life satisfaction, may paint a more accurate picture of true career success (Poole et. al. 1993, Hall and Chandler 2005). Furthermore, the existing research is often more than a decade old, creating a need for current and relevant literature. Additionally, most research on Black professionals has neglected to consider differences internal to various groups of Black people, and the role of geography or place in influencing perceptions of success (Bell 1990, Bell and Nkomo 2001).

Chapter 3 details the research methodologies used in this study, which include in-depth interviews of 35 Black professional women in the Twin Cities area, an analysis of

emerging themes from the data based in grounded theory, and network analysis of personal and professional group memberships, in order to measure the attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors which may predict professional success.

Chapter 4 reports the study results in the form of descriptive findings based on the in-depth interview data. Key themes, which emerged as important to the career trajectories of Black professional women, are highlighted, using direct quotations, and then dissected to understand participants' perceptions of these issues.

Chapter 5 presents conclusions deduced from the descriptive findings presented in chapter 4, as well as a discussion of the implications of the research findings and suggestions for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE

Black women's experiences, especially those of the professional middle-class, have been either ignored or lumped together with studies of Black men or feminist theory more broadly (Torrey 1979, Collins 1998).[5] Yet black women's experiences differ definitively and systematically from those of both Black men and white women (Collins 1990). The life histories, life chances and outcomes of Black women are directly connected to their ability to maneuver the tightrope that is their collective identity (King and Ferguson 2001). As professionals holding dual minority group status, a media-driven myth arose, in the years following the passage of the first affirmative action legislation, that Black women held a double advantage in the professional world, as they could be counted as two minorities in corporations with Affirmative Action policies (Sokoloff 1992, Malveaux 1981, Nelson 1975). As a result, most existing research on Black professional women consists of comparison studies, in an attempt to test the double advantage theories, rather than singular work studying Black women in their own right (Bell 1990, Bell and Nkomo 2001, Banks 2002).

While there is very little literature studying Black professional women as a group unto themselves, in her ethnographic study of professional women, "Black Women and White Women in the Professions" (1992), scholar Natalie Sokoloff argues it can't be

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[5]Jane Torrey (1979) argues that a high level of Black consciousness may black the rise of feminist consciousness and result in a tendency among Black women to focus on the differences between Black and white women instead of the greater purpose of feminism as a whole.

assumed that the effect of gender is the same for Black and white professional women, or that the effect of race is the same for Black professional men and women, given the importance of the interaction between the two. She argues, "How we understand black women's progress in the professions depends in large part on the race/gender group to which they are compared. Moreover, the effects of race are not necessarily the same for men and women. Therefore, we must see the degree to which black men and black women have had similar or different experiences in their access to professions. Likewise, the effects of gender are very likely to be different for white women and black women (Sokoloff 1992, p. 97)."

Sokoloff's point is an one important when attempting to understand how cultural priorities can impact Black women's career trajectories. Black women may identify as strongly on the basis of their gender as on the basis of race, and these gender and racial identities are mutually reinforcing (Gay and Tate 1998, Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004, Jordan-Zachary 2007). The development of collective cultural norms and expectations informs the performance of race and class identities among African-Americans in the U.S (Moore 2008), as do expectations of professionals in the white male-dominated business world. What results is a Black middle-class whose members simultaneously have their racial authenticity questioned by other Blacks and their professional authenticity questioned by white co-workers and bosses. Moore (2008) notes,

> "This emphasis on performing race with social interactions allows one's racial identity to be challenged, based on class differences. Because of the common association in popular culture of blackness with the social and cultural experiences of the black lower-class, middle-class blacks may have their blackness interpreted as inauthentic (Moore 2008, p. 496)."

Most work on professional identity—feminist work included (Lerner 1972, Kanter 1977, Torrey 1979) – is three decades old, and predictably privileges white women while marginalizing black women (Asante and Davis 1985, Bell and Nkomo 2001). More research is needed on Black women as legitimate social actors; part of, rather than as peripheral to, professional culture (Kanter 1977, Bass and Avolio 1997, Budig 2002, Holmes 2006). This attention to the specificity of the experiences of black women is particularly important as it relates to social class. Perceptions of gender discrimination by Black women often serve as reflections of both race *and* class-based stereotypes not experienced by white women facing gender discrimination alone. In her theoretical analysis of economic perspectives on gender difference, economist Julianne Malveaux (1990) asserts, "[t]he heart of the matter between black women and white women is that white women who experience gender-based economic discrimination are the mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives of the patriarchs who have also institutionalized racial discrimination against Black people." Thus Black women suffer from racial and professional expectations concurrently, and more research is required on the effects of these expectations on their career trajectories.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What combinations of factors associated with race, class, and gender do these Black women perceive have the greatest impact on the career trajectories of Black women?

Who Does the Work?

Black women experience an economic oppression that has a basis in both race and gender, and is perpetuated by limited opportunities to achieve upward mobility. Black women have had one of the highest employment-population ratios for almost 40 years (Figure 1), yet historically have been simultaneously overrepresented in the manual labor and domestic service workforce[6] and underrepresented at the top of the ladder; a result of often being both primary breadwinner and primary caregiver in Black households and Black communities at large. The figure below from the Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010 Population Survey illustrates the percentage of women in the United States workforce by race from 1975 – 2010. With the exception of 1990 and 1992 Black women, though a much smaller part of the population, are employed at a rate similar to white women and greater than Hispanic women.

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[6]African-Americans rank second among majority groups in the U.S. (Wallace and Villa, 2003), representing a significant number of employees available for hire. In 2005, African-American women occupied 9,014,000 positions in the labor force, of which 2,483,000 were administrative and managerial positions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005). African-American women occupied only 1.6% of the 10,092 corporate office positions within Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2004a). African-American women are over-represented in service professions that include clerical and sales positions, and limited in positions such as officers, managers, professionals and technicians (Catalyst, 2003). The problem is that African-American women occupy less than 3% of all managerial positions and only 0.9% of senior positions in the U.S. (Bell, 2004).

Figure 1: Labor Force Participation rate of Women, by race and ethnicity (Annual averages, 1975-2010, ages 16 and older)

In her classic novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* Zora Neale Hurston's (1937) Nanny character describes Black women as the mules of the world.[7] Though more than 80 years have passed since Hurston wrote those words, the subjugation of Black women in Black culture and the larger social world continues. There is a social expectation of Black women that they must work for pay, but they also *must* raise the children, they *must* keep the household, and they absolutely *must* uplift their community. How are Black women expected to achieve traditional objective measures of professional success given these

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[7]"So de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de mule oh de world as fur as Ah can see" (Hurston 14).

crushing expectations? More importantly, if they do experience success what, if anything, have they given up for it?

Given this complicated history, for white women to assume an alliance between themselves and Black women without taking matters of race and family (and thus, Black men) into consideration is a mistake; one that "too frequently characterizes feminist theory, scholarship, activism, and policy development (Malveaux 1990, p. 229)." Black career-oriented women perceive themselves as living in two distinct cultural contexts, one Black and the other white (Bell 1990, Bell and Nkomo 2001, Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004). Patricia Hill Collins (1990) highlights the precarious position of Black women as experiencing binary oppressions:

> "African-American women occupy a position whereby the inferior half of a series of these binaries converges, and this placement has been central to our subordination. The allegedly emotional, passionate nature of Black women has long been used to justify Black women's sexual exploitation. Similarly, restricting Black women's literacy, then claiming that we lack the facts for sound judgment, relegates African-American women to the inferior side of the fact/opinion binary. Denying Black women status as fully human subjects by treating us as the objectified other within multiple binaries demonstrates the power that binary thinking, oppositional difference, and objectification wield within intersecting oppressions (p.71)."

The Black women in Collins' study compartmentalize the various components of their lives in order to manage their bicultural dimensions [re: their lives]. The findings from Ella Louise Bell's (1990) study on the bicultural life experiences of 21 career-oriented Black women revealed the costs of living in two distinct, often oppositional worlds, was loss of self. She found that such an experience,

> "…assumes there are mutual rewards and resources available in each group: having membership in one group is considered no more exclusive than having

membership in the other. The cultural characteristics of the subordinate group are acknowledged, valued, and maintained by its members rather than abandoned in an attempt to assimilate into the dominant group. There is a cultural pull, however. It stems from wanting to make accessible and embellish the resources, opportunities, and rewards from both groups. Forced assimilation is not the focal issue. Rather, the issue is to gain emotional wholeness with a sense of cultural integration among the groups in which one has membership. In this regard, the bicultural experience is a source of empowerment: the resources coming from both cultural contexts affirm and nurture a black woman's inner resources, giving her a feeling of spiritual, emotional and intellectual wholeness (p. 464)."

This leads to several questions about the connections between race, gender and careers: How do Black professional women view themselves in relation to both their culture and their careers? More specifically, what if any, negotiation is necessary for these women to move between their work, community, and home lives? How does this negotiation affect their identity formation and/or reformation? What degree of tokenism provides the most benefit, being Black or being female? These are all questions important to understanding what attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are important to the career trajectories of professional Black women and inform who achieves success. Has nothing changed in the last 20 years since Bell completed her research?

Are the Times Changing?

Black women in America have made historic strides both academically and professionally over the last 30 years. In fact, according to the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, at least 60% of Black students who are awarded undergraduate degrees are women, and Black women make up 71% of Black graduate students (2009). As shown in Figure 2 below, Black female college graduates have increased 13% since 1990, while Black male graduates only increased 8% over the same time period. Figure 3 shows that

Black women now out earn Black men in college degrees two to one by comparing types

of degrees earned by Black women per 100 Black males in 1976-1977 and 2006-2007.

Figure 2: Black Women Outpace Black Men in College Completions

Nationwide, the Black Student College Graduation Rate Is a Very Low 43 Percent. But Black Women Are Far More Likely Than Black Men to Complete College.

Black Women — 34% ... 47%

Black Men — 28% ... 36%

1990 ... 2006

Note: Figures are for the members of the National Collegiate Athletic Association's Division I. This group includes most of the nation's large research universities. The graduation rate is defined as all enrolled students who earn a degree within six years. These figures cover entering freshmen for the fall of 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999.

Chart © *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education.*

Source: Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2007. "*Black Student College Graduation Rates Inch Higher But a Large Racial Gap Persists.*"

Figure 3: Black Female College Degrees per 100 Black Males

Black Female College Degrees per 100 Black Males		
	1976-1977	2006-2007
Associate's	116.3	223.7
Bachelor's	133.2	195.2
Master's	170.4	249.4
Doctor's	63.6	190.7
Professional	44.1	173.4

Source: Perry 2009, 1976 – 2007 US Census Data, Blog for Economics and Finance

Given their tremendous advances in higher education, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the relative absence of Black women in professional positions across the United States (Figure 4). Moreover, though they are receiving undergraduate and graduate degrees in larger numbers than ever before (Black women represent 58 percent of all Black students earning a bachelor's degree), the percentage of Black women in executive level positions (defined as members of the C-suite – CEO, CFO, CIO etc. or near C-suit) -- a little over 1% -- does not reflect these increasing graduation rates (Catalyst 2006)[8] as shown in Figure 5 below.

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[8]Nationally, one-third of *employed* Black women work in management or professional jobs, and the number of businesses owned by Black women has nearly doubled in the past decade to more than 900,000 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2011). These numbers are not reflected in the state population of Minnesota where the 52% of the Black female population is employed, but the majority of these women are not working in management or professional jobs and the median income is only $30,000/year.

Figure 4: 2010 Employment by Occupation, Sex, Race, and Ethnicity

Employed people by occupation, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2010

According to a Risk and Reward Report (2011) released by the League of Black Women Global Research Institute, professional Black women made up only one percent of U.S. corporate officers, despite the fact that 75% of corporate executives believed that having minorities in senior level positions enables innovation and better serves a diverse customer base. Similarly, Black women held just 1.9% of board seats in the Fortune 500 compared to 12.7% for white women. As professionals, Black women often face more discrimination within mostly white, male work environments than experienced by white women in similar situations (Bell and Nkomo 2001).

Figure 5: Individuals One Step from CEO by Race and Gender in 2012
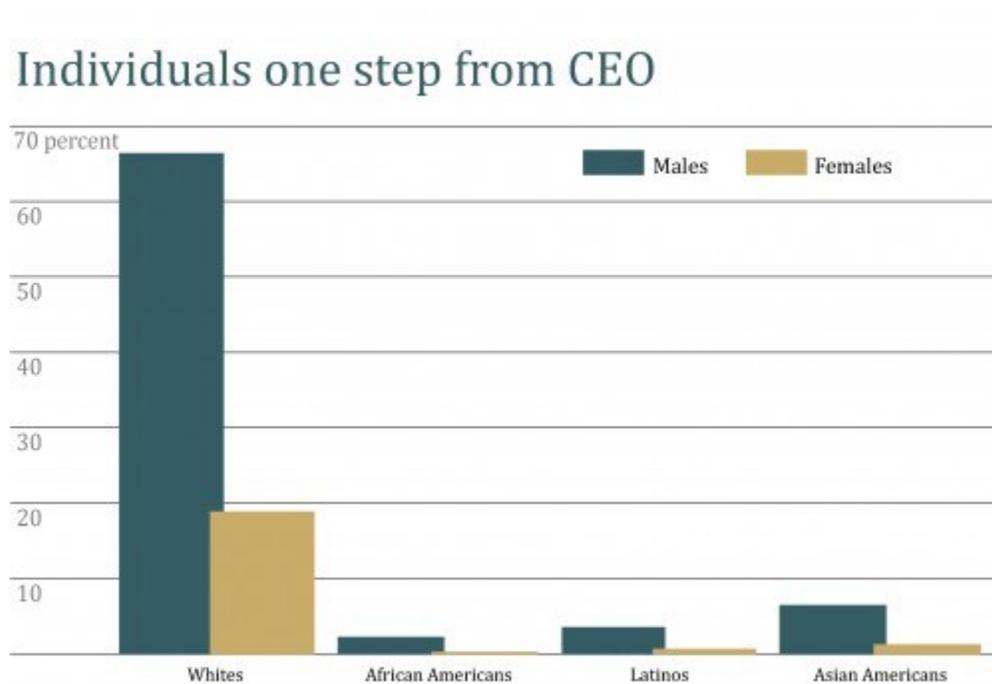
Individuals one step from CEO

Few have questioned why the disparity between Black women's rates of advanced

degrees and the proportion in executive positions exists. Most literature on the umbrella

topic of professional experience, especially that involving the role of cultural identity for

differently positioned professionals in the workplace, covers tangible outcomes such as

issues of stress and decreasing health (Jackson and Mustillo 2001, Bacchus 2008,

Cummings and Jackson 2008), caused by experiences of discrimination, cultural

differences, and familial stressors. Jackson and Mustillo (2001) examined the

psychological impact of cultural identity on Black women using data from the National

Survey of Black Americans (NSBA) but focused primarily on lower class Black women

with low educational attainments. Denise Bacchus (2008) studied coping mechanisms used by 203 Black women in a variety of professional jobs in two New York cities, but focused specifically on high stress levels while ignoring other issues, such as cultural and professional role strain and the coping mechanism used to address them. Cummings and Jackson (2008), using data from the General Social Survey (GSS), focus only on differences in self-assessed health in Black women over a 30-year period from 1974 – 2004 as a result of changing socioeconomic status, finding the gender gap in self-assessed health has narrowed considerably in that 30-year span as Black women make marked improvements in self-reported health.

George Wilson's (2012) recent research on the occupational mobility of Black women, using data from the 1998 to 2005 waves of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), included 528 full-time non-self-employed African American women, 983 white women, and 266 Latinas who were between the ages of 18 and 55. His findings suggest that the professional success[9] of Black women results from the narrow career paths available to them, (structured by traditional themes such as human capital and labor market conditions) in comparison to the broad "unstructured" career paths available to white women. This evidence is important for jumpstarting conversation on the ways Black women achieve success; however it ignores how the attitudes and beliefs of Black women affect career path behavior on the road to professional success. In an attempt to verify the current validity of decades older research on the experiences of Black

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[9] Wilson (2012) defines professional success as the attainment of "top-tier" occupational categories (C-suite executives, upper-level management).

professional women that finds their career trajectories impacted by successful

assimilation, my research asks if there are concrete sets of attitudes, beliefs, and

subsequent behaviors connected to contemporary Black women's negotiation of personal

and professional identities. If so, what are they and can they predict professional success?

The Media Effect

Mass media culture introduced and reproduces images of successful Black women as

abrasive, overly demanding, and hyper-aggressive. In her 2011opinion piece, "The

Undateable Black Women", Adeline argues that popular movies such as *Best Men (1999),*

Deliver Us from Eva (2003), Something New (2006), and *Why Did I Get Married (2007)*

reinforce the image of Black women with strong careers as synonymous with the image

of the emasculating, unlovable and un-datable Black woman. National newspaper and

magazine publications also perpetuate the idea of Black professional women as without

marriage potential within the Black culture in articles like, "An Interracial Fix for Black

Marriage (Wall Street Journal, August 6, 2011)," and "Real Talk: Single, Black and Bitter

(Essence.com, September 8, 2011)." These images and their claims are reinforced within

the Black community, where successful Black women are viewed as emasculating Black

men and losing a significant amount of their "marriage ability" (Young 2010).

Despite these negative images, another media-driven myth depicts Black women

as doubly advantaged in the professional world, since they could be counted as two

minorities in corporations with Affirmative Action policies (Sokoloff 1992, Malveaux

1981, Nelson 1975) and were thus more likely to get hired and be promoted to fill quotas.

More recent literature, however, positions Black professional women in the U.S. as

doubly *disadvantaged*, and data shows they have to work harder to achieve the same professional success as their white female counterparts. For example, Hughes and Dodge (1997) examined relationships between African American women's exposure to a range of occupational stressors, including two types of racial bias--institutional discrimination and interpersonal prejudice--and their evaluations of job quality. Similarly, Everett, Hall, and Hamilton-Mason 2011, using qualitative data from Black women between 18-55 years old (living in Boston or Northampton, Massachusetts; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Brooklyn, New York), found Black women are more likely to experience higher rates of unemployment, to work in support positions where there are fewer rewards, less opportunity for advancement or skill utilization and to work in jobs that are less secure than those held by men.[10]

Negative media portrayals of professional Black women also lead to experiences of internal cultural disadvantages. Many Black women lament the availability of fewer prospects to marry those who are equal in terms of education and class. According to Toldson and Marks' (2011) study using American Community survey data from the U.S Census. In fact, Black women receive undergraduate degrees 2-to-1 over Black men, with just over 2.5 million Black women in the United States holding bachelor's degrees compared to just over 1.5 million Black men with the same degrees (Toldson and Marks 2011). The lack of Black men -- at or above the educational level of Black professional

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[10] Brown & Keith (2003) report that racism and sexism also play a part in the occupations selected the income and benefits that African American women receive.

women, high levels of unemployment, and incarceration for Black men[11] -- limits their possibilities for traditional marriage and family. Has an entire generation of Black women given up on fitting into traditional marriage and family roles or wife and mother, in favor of focusing on their careers? The Results of the Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation Poll highlight this ideological shift by professional Black women, finding that 40% of Black women say marriage is important, compared with 55% of white women, and more than a fifth of Black women say being wealthy is very important compared to one in twenty white women (2012).

Class Matters

As professionals, the women in this study face race and class dynamics that may conflict. This section provides an overview of the literature on social class[12], and possible connections to race, which may prove problematic for Black professional women. Class status works as a great divider within the Black community (Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 1991, Zandy 1996, Lamont and Molnar 2002), and professional Black women hold a precarious position as upper middle class, defined by William Thompson and Joseph Hickey (2005) in their five class model of U.S. class stratification as white collar professionals with advanced post-secondary education.

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[11] More than 1 in 10 black men in their 20s or early 30s are currently incarcerated, and some experts estimate that as many as 1 in 4 black men will spend some time behind bars (Banks 2012).

[12] The Marxist conception of class involves a collective group that all share similar economic position and social relations relative to each other and to other groups in society (Marx 1848). For Marx, classes of people share a relationship to the means of production and are therefore aware of their similarity and common interests, both in the organization of work and the larger society (Marx 1848). In other words, they have a shared class-consciousness (Marx 1848). Concurrently, Max Weber (1964) defined class in terms of stratification and reflects the interconnection of wealth, power and prestige where classes, as well as status and party affiliation, are each aspects of the distribution of power within a community. In this dissertation, I combine the Marxist and Weberian conceptions of class as one's economic social position based on consumption of culture, defined by markers of wealth and income and rooted in stratified inequality.

French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) took Marxist and Weberian conceptions of class and developed theories of social stratification based on aesthetic taste in book *Distinction,* discussing the cultural practice of class by analyzing the tastes, symbols and lifestyle choices key to the reproduction of class privilege where dominant groups legitimize their own cultures as superior by dichotomizing tastes and lifestyle choices such as "distinguished/vulgar, aesthetic/practical and pure/impure (p.245)". According to Bourdieu's theory, how one chooses to present themselves to the world depicts one's status and distances oneself from the other classes, thus creating a lower class to judge in comparison to the dominant group and works to rationalize the exclusion of the lower class from positions of power and privilege (Bourdieu 1984). Born out of this understanding of class distinctions came Bourdieu's concept of *habitus,* the dispositions and tastes learned by one's social position. Understanding the development of Black professional women's tastes and lifestyle choices is important to understanding the lives of Black professional women and the impact of cultural and professional expectations on their career trajectories. How does their habitus affect professional success?

Class also has racial dynamics. Kesha Moore (2008), in an effort to better understand how Blacks articulate class differences, introduced the concept of Black middle-class habitus, a result of her research on Black participants' subjective assessments of class identity. Moore studied the various forms of Black middle-class identity in her empirical research, and used the neighborhood as a part of a larger self-determination project to solidify their social and economic positions. These women have

experienced social mobility in their lifetime and are constantly working to reconcile the

disconnection between their class identity formed in childhood and the one acquired in

adulthood (Moore 2008). However, for "middle-class minded" Blacks, defined by Moore

as traditionally middle-class, mirroring the white middle class in education, occupations,

and earnings, and very aware of class differences between themselves and less privileged

Blacks, the neighborhood provides access to amenities of the middle class lifestyle that

have historically eluded Blacks (Moore 2008). Below Figure 6 outlines Moore's (2008)

class structure of the African-American community based on the results of her interviews

of Black middle class residents from a low-income community close to downtown

Philadelphia. More specifically, it highlights the distinction between lower class and

middle-class/multi-class minded Blacks, representing the unique orientations to class

created by cultural difference.

FIGURE 6: Class Structure of African American Community

Class location	Low income			Middle-class		Upper-class
Class identity	Ghetto	Poor	Working class	Multi-class	Middle-class minded	Rich/Upper-class
Cultural orientation	Ghetto cultural influence (counter culture			Middle-class minded cultural influence (mainstream)		
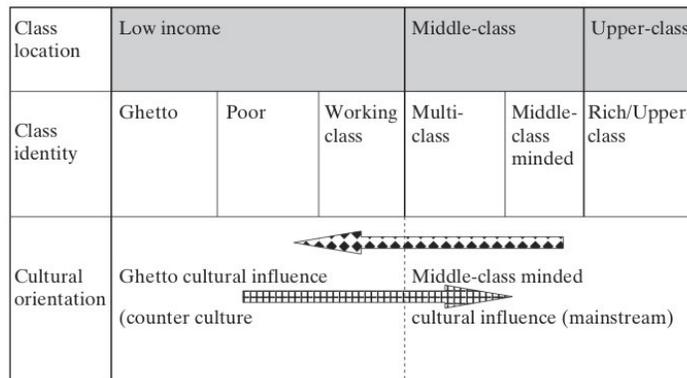
Source: Moore, Kesha S. 2008. "Class Formations: Competing Forms of Black Middle-Class Identity." *Ethnicities* 8(4): 492-517

This diversion in strategies is a result of different forms of Black middle-class *habitus*

(Moore 2008).[13] Moore (2008) challenges traditional notions of habitus by overlaying race as an integral piece of its conceptual framework. She argues,

> "Bourdieu's (1984) concept of *habitus* encapsulates the importance of culture and cultural identity in both class identity and the process of class stratification. Habitus is defined as the relationship between two capacities: the capacity to produce culturally specified products and actions, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these culturally specified products and action. Thus, members of the elite are able to make their cultural capital the most highly valued economically and socially. In this perspective, culture is both a product and creative force of the economic stratification process. Individuals may use cultural capital to acquire economic and social resources and vice versa. By identifying habitus with a racial descriptor, I am asserting that all forms of habitus exist within, and informed by, racial stratification (p.496-7)."

Describing the class-based tastes, preferences, and lifestyle choices of an individual as directly connected to their race may help answer more specific questions on the career trajectories of Black professional women. Is there a Black professional woman's habitus and what impact might it have on their career trajectories?

In sum the literature on class, race and gender as it pertains to professionalism suggests Black professional women hold a unique position because of the often-contradictory demands of race, class, and career identities. Therefore, the combination of factors associated with the race, class, and gender of Black professional women may have a profound impact on their career trajectories.

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[13] For a more detailed discussion of Black habitus see also: Ladner 1971, hooks 1984, Leadbeater and Way 1996, Craig 2002

RESEACH QUESTION 2:

What are racial and gendered expectations outside of the workplace these Black women perceive complicate their career trajectories?

Black professional women inhabit multiple, often conflicting roles simultaneously. From each of these roles comes a set of interests that Black women must order accordingly to fit in both their personal and professional lives. This is especially difficult due to the stark differences in African-American culture in comparison to White professional culture. As a result, Black professional women most negotiate the racial and gendered expectations outside of the workplace with their professional in an effort to achieve success.

In her classic 1990 book, Black Feminist Thought, Patricia Hill Collins (1990) used wide range of sources to dissect Black feminism, including fiction, poetry, music and oral histories by fellow Black feminists such as Angela Davis, Alice Walker, and Audre Lorde. Collins made three central claims regarding the life experiences of Black women. First, Collins (1990) claims oppressions of race, class and gender, sexuality and nationality are intersecting, mutually constructing systems of power. Second, she asserts that because Black women have unique histories at the intersections of systems of power, they have created worldviews in an attempt to define them as part of a larger social justice project (Collins 1990). Lastly, Collins (1990) found the specific experiences of Black women with these intersecting systems of oppression makes it difficult for them to exist independently in neither their own communities nor the larger social world. To that end, Collins theorized that Black women must live two lives, neither of them their own.

> "Black women's lives are a series of negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating our own internally defined images of self as African-American women without objectification as the other. The struggle of living two lives creates a peculiar tension to construct independent self-definitions within a context where Black womanhood remains routinely derogated (Collins 1990, p. 99-100)."

In the nearly 25 years since Collin's book was published Black women have continued to lead the employment population ratio, outgained their Black male counterparts in educational attainment, and still lag behind both white women and Black men at the top of the professional ladder. These changes have had little effect on Black women's position in the workforce, though it has increased their numbers in the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010). Existing Black feminist literature theorizes on the lives of Black women in general, the small subsection of literature on the professional identities of Black women stresses the need for assimilation to achieve success and acceptance among their non-white peers (Edmundson and Nkomo 2001) and in fact, though they were writing over a decade ago, most current workplace structures highlight this point (Banks 2002). In her historical analysis of Black women in the workplace from 1950 – 2000, Tanya Lovell Banks (2002) critiques the racialized standards of beauty in the U.S. and their application in workplace expectations of appearance; more than a decade ago Banks (2002) claimed,

> "Black women experience a distinctive and subtle form of employment discrimination embodied in so-called neutral employer-imposed appearance of grooming requirements. Courts, when applying federal anti-discrimination law, fail to acknowledge that these grooming standards rely heavily on notions of physical appearance predicated on white aesthetic norms. Employers justify grooming requirements by saying they contribute to the company's image, a transparent cover for their pandering to the preferences of white customers (Banks 2002, p. 25)."

A large part of Black women's expected workplace assimilation includes the elimination of culturally specific forms of dress and grooming (Banks 2002), and identifiably "Black" forms of language (Foster 1995). The question that drives this research, is do Banks' claims still hold true? More specifically, do Black women today chose to emphasize their cultural backgrounds, even when it might threaten their careers, like wearing natural Afros in place of chemically straightened hair? And how superficial is their so-called assimilation into white-defined workplace norms? Do black women use Black female networks to replace the peer networks missing in their everyday professional development?

Language also has gendered components of which professional women must be versed in to become successful professionals (Edelsky 1981, Tannen 1994, Holmes 2006, Ford 2008). Carol Edelsky (1981) pioneered the field of gender, work and language with her book Who's Got the Floor, highlighting her discourse analysis research of five Standing Committee meetings at Arizona State University in 1980. Edelsky (1981), attempted to answer questions regarding the conditions under which men and women interact (i.e. hold the floor) as equals and under what conditions do they not. As a result of her research, Edelsky confirms that women are capable of having the floor just like their male counterparts. More recently, Janet Holmes (2006) completed conversation analysis of 2500 interactions at 22 diverse workplace settings in New Zealand in an attempt to understand how women speak in professional settings. She found that the women in her study, by making use of strategies traditionally associated with male ways

of talking, were able to de-gender and re-categorize them as neutral tools of leadership discourse, rather than an exclusively male discursive strategy. More specifically, she argues,

> "In interviews, team discussions, classrooms, and department meetings, patterns of domination of talking time, disruptive interruption, competitive and confrontational discourse, have been noted as characterizing authoritative, powerful and assertive talk, and interactional styles conventionally associated with men rather than women, indicating why such features are so widely regarded as indexing masculinity, and associated with relatively masculine rather than feminine ways of speaking (Holmes 2006, p.7)."

Cecelia Ford (2008), using 23 hours conversation analysis data collected during workplace meetings, argues that women are highly adept and command the linguistic skills necessary to get and use turns in workplace meetings, even as they simultaneously work under disadvantaged circumstances and perform dispreferred tasks. In highlighting the inherent difference between the circumstances and tasks under which women converse in comparison to men, Ford's research is a compliment to Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker's (1988) theoretical analysis on male/female miscommunication. They theorize that miscommunication is an expected result when dealing with disparate cultures, which they argue men and women are. For them, "women and men have different cultural rules for friendly conversation and that these rules come into conflict when women and men attempt to talk to each other as friends and equals in casual conversation (Maltz and Borker 1988, p. 429)."   For many Black professional women then, code switching is a matter of long-term survival and career success, a skill that must be mastered to provide career opportunities and work to reinvent prevailing images of Blacks in the larger society (Koch et al. 2001).

Lanita Jacobs-Huey (2006) sought to understand how Black women use language to negotiate their life experiences using ethnographic research of Black hair salons, hair shows and religious meetings in Oakland, CA, Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Charleston, SC and London from 2004-2006. She claims that race is an integral, albeit often missing link to current conversations on gender and language (Jacobs-Huey 2006). Moreover, the language use of Black women, more so than most other cultural language use is constantly being compared to stereotypical images perpetuated by the media, as a result their voices are often distorted and misunderstood (Jacobs-Huey 2006). Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) echo this sentiment in their work on the intersectionality of Black women's lives, asserting,

> "If she is opinionated, she is difficult. If she speaks with passion she is volatile. If she explodes with laughter, she is unrefined. If she pitches her neck as she makes a point, she is streetwise and coarse. So much of what Black women say, and how they say it, pushes other people to buy into the myth that Black women are inferior, harsh, and less feminine than other women (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004, p. 102)."

Being able to circumvent existing stereotypes through language use is an important tool for negotiating multiple roles in society (Baugh 1983). Given that most professional organizations are built and controlled by upper class white males, the ability to communicate using Standard English is necessary to be taken seriously but, as Jones and Shorter-Gooden claim,

> "Shifting can also be profoundly self-destructive to a Black woman. Too often she moves from being in touch with her inner authentic experience to putting all her attention into creating an outer acceptable facade. Rather than maintaining a healthy consideration of others, she acquiesces to the tyranny of their biases, needs and expectations. She feels frustrated lonely, and inadequate. Or as she is pressured to bounce between divergent identities – one 'Black,' one 'White' – experiencing what we call the yo-yo paradox, she may start to feel that she is

constantly treading on shaky ground; confused, self-conscious, and conflicted (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004, p. 64)."

The silence these women feel, being forced out of their native tongues is mirrored in the ways Black professional women are studied and written about, often victims of silencing in the academy as well.

It is especially pertinent here to again consider Bell's (1990) empirical research on the "bicultural" experiences of career-oriented Black women when discussing the differences between assimilation and compartmentalization and their positions as useful tools in the professional world. Bell (1990) highlighted the distinction by defining compartmentalization keeping the work lives (white) from the personal lives (black). She argued,

> "Assimilation requires blacks to conform to the traditions, values, and norms of the dominant white culture. Under these circumstances, black professional women divest themselves of their culture of origin, the black community. Instead, they attempt to fit into the dominant white community, where there are few models or images of black womanhood. Compartmentalization, the alternative behavioral response, occurs when blacks established rigid boundaries between the white and black life contexts. This particular response requires black professional women to shuttle back and forth regularly between their cultural contexts, since each cultural context is perceived as distinct and separate (p.462)."

Kanter (1977), in her now famous research study on corporate power, especially as it then related to women and their workplace experiences, described how the numerical composition of the upper echelons of a firm created different interaction contexts for majorities and minorities, and produced stereotypic exchanges between "dominants" and "tokens". Again, this research is more than 35 years old, when attitudes about minorities in the workplace were rooted in the racial and political tone of the times, yet very little

regarding existence or experiences of tokens in the workplace has changed from then to now. Kanter argued that being in a minority group could affect one's performance because of the increased visibility of tokens and the pressure to perform; both resulted in fewer promotions or opportunities for advancement (1997). The researcher's task in this study is to figure out, what if anything has changed over the last 35 years, are these claims made by a past generation of scholars, about Black women's professional lives, and the difficulty negotiating personal and professional identities, valid today?

Bourdieu' concept of habitus (1984), a system of dispositions, sensibilities and tastes developed in reaction to objective social structures, is central to the conscious and subconscious changes, both physical and psychosocial, that Black professional women may undergo when moving between their workplace cultures and personal lives (Gilkes 1982, Bell 1990, Bell and Nkomo 2001, Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004, Carter 2007). Here we can also consider W.E.B. DuBois' theory of double-consciousness, first used in his collection of sociological essays, *Souls of Black Folk* (1903). DuBois (1903) coined the term "double consciousness" to describe the multifaceted identities that Black people inhabited; where both the external and internal worlds of Black people and the dynamics that resulted from living in an oppressive society shaped who they became. For DuBois, the disconnection between the internal and external lives of Black people is a result of a tension between Black cultural values and the expectations of the larger social world (DuBois 1903). DuBois stated that Blacks were perceived as second-class citizens by white America; and therefore being both Black and American raised profound

contradictions in identity (Dubois 1903). DuBois (1903) argues that this contradiction

creates,

> "…A world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,--an American, a Negro; two warring souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (p.5)."

It is useful to apply DuBois' theory of double-consciousness in an attempt to understand

the experiences of Black professional women, as they are dealing with a similar "two-

ness", their personal and professional identities. In fact, the lives of Black professional

women today may be even more complicated, an important question to this research,

especially given Bell's (1990) findings regarding the life experiences of professional

black women, and the self-identification of the participants in her study as bicultural,

constantly negotiating the norms, behaviors and expectations of their personal lives with

those of their professional lives. According to Bell (1990),

> "…beyond the pressures to conform to professional standards and dominant culture values found in organizations, black professional women must also manage expectations, values and roles in relation to the black community – a community with its own norms regarding the status of women (p.460)."

In sum the findings/theories of bicultural identities, professional assimilation and Black

cultural identity serve to inform research question #2, that is, what racial and gendered

expectations outside of the workplace Black professional perceive as complicating their

career trajectories, by raising issues of racial identity, cultural expectations, and

professional self. This study attempts to decipher exactly how much has changed in the

lives of Black professional from the time Bell was writing to now. Are Black women actively compartmentalizing their professional and personal lives to create two distinct selves? Is this the surest route to career success? Lastly, if not, what are the alternatives?

Research Question 3:
How do these Black professional women perceive the politics of class, as well as race and gender impact their career trajectories?

In her work on gender stereotypes in the hiring of women, Elizabeth Gorman (2005), using data from a 1996 survey of large U.S. law firms, found that culturally shared gender and racial stereotypes among white women and white men can influence workplace outcomes for women and minorities in ways that may have little to do with conscious prejudice and everything to do with subconscious preference. If this is the case, Black women very probably begin their careers with strategies for addressing their, often problematic, multifaceted roles in an effort to achieve career success. The class dynamics associated with these Black professional women's roles in the workplace in combination with the racial and gendered identities may impact their overall career trajectories. This section dissects the politics of these identities as they pertain to career success for Black women.

Who Wants Success?
Objective career success has been defined as including observable, measurable and verifiable achievements, such as pay, promotion and occupational status (Nicholson

2000, Dries, Pepermans and Carlier 2008). Recall that in this thesis I am operationalizing career success as a combination of objective measures, such as salary and title, and more subjective dimensions, such as job satisfaction and time available for family. Most Americans have been socialized to a "career mystique", the belief that the good life means success in the form of more money, more status, and power (Moen 2005). Ralph Turner (1960) describes the race to attain these types of objective measures of professional success as "contest mobility." Turner (1960) posits that those engaged in contest mobility (defined by Turner as a system of social mobility where individuals act as contestants in a race to win elite status) are constantly competing with other professionals for better titles, higher salaries and more overall objective career success as a manifestation of the culture of attainment in which we live. However, the playing fields on which these battles for professional success take place are not created equal.

Historically, women and minorities have had only limited access to the same opportunities for advancement as their white female and Black male counterparts (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, and Bretz 1995, Melamed 1996, Nabi 1999, Russ-Eft, Disckison, and Levine 2009). Little is known about how professionals in these historically disadvantaged subgroups have subjectively appraised their degree of success. Accordingly, this research seeks to understand the function Black women may inadvertently play in their own career trajectories.

Cultural Tracking

Max Weber (1920) introduced the sociological concept of the Iron Cage to refer to the increased rationalization inherent in Western capitalist society, where individuals are

trapped in bureaucratic systems based on efficiency and control. According to Weber, bureaucracy leads to a technically ordered, rigid, and dehumanized society, an "iron cage' of rules and laws to which we are all subjected and most adhere. A more modern way to think about this issue borrows from the educational sociology literature on academic tracking (Hallinan 1994). Academic tracking separates students by perceived academic ability. However, research shows that this type of tracking is not an accurate reflection of student ability and results in the stigmatization of "low" tracks (Oakes 1987, Hallinan 1994). In a sense, tracking creates similar gender, race, and/or class-based biases, as a result of social perceptions of ability may separate Black professional women from their white female and Black male counterparts; developing ideal types, defined by Weber as,

> "The one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view and by the synthesis of a great many diffuse, discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent concrete individual phenomena which are, according to those one-sidedly emphasized viewpoints into a unified analytical construct (Weber 1949, p.90),"

of Black professional women.

Negotiating Identity

Sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) drew extensively on his own personal experiences, as well as those captured in his case study research to analyze stigma and the feelings of the stigmatized person. His research explores the variety of strategies employed by stigmatized individuals to deal with social rejection and though dated, is useful for understanding how Black women negotiate oft-competing personal and professional success. In his book *Stigma,* Goffman (1963) defines stigma as attributes or behaviors

resulting in a socially discredited reputation, causing the stigmatized individual to be considered undesirable or rejected. According to Goffman (1963), society categorizes people based on the "natural" characteristics attributed to members of distinct groups. Therefore, when we first meet a person we use these characteristics to place him or her into a group and makes assumptions about that person's social identity (Goffman 1963). Goffman (1963) theorizes that we lean on these assumptions of individual identity, transforming them first into normative expectations, and then to "righteously presented demands," creating an individual's *virtual social identity,* that is when a social situation arises, the response we assume will be provided by the individual based on our own presumptions (Goffman 1963). An individual's *actual social identity* materializes when he or she provides a response counter to our own assumptions (Goffman 1963).

Two decades later, Black feminist Audre Lorde (1984) expanded Goffman's theory of stigma to understand how difference plays out in the larger social world. Lorde (1984) claimed,

> "Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders to surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have *all* been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle that difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that is not possible, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate (Lorde 1984, p. 704)."

The hegemonic and patriarchal character of the larger society institutionalizes racism and sexism in ways that impede black women's capacities to value self and other. King and Ferguson (2001) also found some of the most common sources of stress for Black women include (1) isolation in white organizations; (2) decisions on public allegiance to gender

38

or race; (3) assimilation to connect with organizations white elite; (4) trouble balancing bicultural identities; (5) conflicting expectations in cultural race and gender norms; (6) being unable to fit well in native cultural because of power and success. Once again, more than a decade later, and absent more current work on the experiences of Black professional women, the disadvantage in their ability to overcome the stigma of being tokens within an organization, especially when compared to their male counterparts, remains (Banks 2002, 2009).

Angela Murphy (2005) studied the disparate relationship between Black professionals in their attempts to develop professional relationships with their white equivalents. Using the life histories of 57 Black male and female first-year Master of Business Administration (MBA) candidates in a private Midwestern university, Murphy found that Black professional men were able to develop peer relationships, and in some cases even mentoring relationships, with white professional men using sports (Murphy 2005). Concurrently, Patricia Parker (2005) found, using her 1995 in-depth interview data of 15 African-American female executives, that Black professional women have to work substantially harder in an attempt to develop relationships and enact community building within an organization, often including the mastery of white culture and language to overcome the cultural stereotypes placed on them (Parker 2005), a catalyst for the long list of stressors experienced by Black professional women (King and Ferguson 2001).

In sum, the literature on career success, educational tracking and negotiating multiple identities informs question #3, How Black professional women perceive racial and gendered expectations outside of the workplace as complicating their career paths, by

dissecting the application of racial and gendered identities to issues of career advancement. The following section reviews literature on social networks in combination race, gender, and class-based identities to understand the importance of social networking in the lives of professional Black women.

Research Question 4:

How do these Black women use race, class, and gendered networks?

Social networks are the dyadic ties between a set of actors, such as individuals, organizations, or countries, within a social structure. Studying social networks allows researchers to identify patterns and dynamics within these structures. Simmel (1908) theorizes that one's individuality is a result of the social circles in which they are embedded. Social network theory takes this idea a step further, suggesting that the "connectivity" between group members affects the level of individuality available.[14] Black women are often denied access to those professional networks which could advance their careers making it difficult for Black women to embed themselves in local professional communities and potentially impacting their career trajectories.

Networking and Career Theory

Networks are an important concept in understanding career theory and its three traditional components: (1) the process of developing one's career and the stages of achievement reached throughout that development, (2) the context of one's career and intrinsic and

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[14]In a small town you can't do anything anonymously, everyone knows everyone else's business resulting in low personal individuality, but high group identity. Conversely, in a big city you can be almost completely anonymous and have high personal individuality, but low group identity. In the first case there is a clear sense of what you can and should do, in the second case there is not.

extrinsic motivations driving a career, and (3) the process and context overlap (Super 1957, Krumholtz 2003). Though dated, the connection between social networks and career theory is an important one, mostly because of career theory's incomplete view of minority membership. One of the inherent weaknesses of contemporary career theory is its focus on the individual (Sturges 1999) and its inability to adequately conceptualize career development, and the subsequent career success from the perspective of groups, minority groups in particular. One of the reasons we know so little about the career trajectories of Black professional women is because career theory is an inadequate tool for understanding the complicated balancing act of culture and work for minority professionals.

Framing career development as an individualized process ignores the complexities of minority status in the U.S. and the effect of minority identities on the development of a career. An example of the effect of minority status on career development can be seen in the literature on the "old boy's network", generally white and male network connections, which clearly positions membership as tantamount to professional success (Royster 2003).

Black women are neither white nor male; a general prerequisite for entrance to such networks. Accordingly, they are often denied access and therefore must achieve professional success using other means or look to redefine their conceptions of success. However, researchers looking to understand how race and/or ethnicity affect social processes of professional attainment must study a combination of cultural components, behavioral expectations, as well as patterns of interaction that link group members

41

(Sanders 2002). For example, minority networks tend to reinforce values, beliefs, and knowledge across a range of issues (St. Clair et al. 1989), whereas white networks will value more tangible expressions of potential success, like access to resources, alma mater, and extensive cosmopolitan networks (Royster 2003). How do these differences affect network membership and the importance of network connections to Black women's professional success?

In their work on social network structure and prenatal care utilization, Patricia St. Clair, Vincent L. Smeriglio, Cheryl S. Alexander, and David D. Celentano (1989) highlight five dimensions of network structure,

> "The size of the network, or the number of people with whom the reference individual maintains contact; the strength of relational ties, which refers to the emotional intimacy and the frequency of interpersonal contact between the reference individual and each member of his/her network; the density of the network, which is the extent to which the members of an individual's social network know and contact one another independently of the reference individual; the dispersion of the network, or the ease with which network members can make face-to-face contact; and the diversity of the network, often characterized as the number of different types of social relationships and individual maintains (p.824)."

Members of minority groups often seek homophilous – having similar social attributes -- networks in response to expectations of exclusion from majority group networks (Mollica, Gray, and Trevino 2003). In the workplace, access to resources and the activation of social ties is directly related to one's race and/or ethnicity (Kmec 2007). Black women feel the effects of their coworkers' and employers' cultural views through organizations' approach to diversity and diverse relationships in the workplace (Bacchus 2008, Bell and Nkomo 2001).

42

More than 20 years ago, Hermina Ibarra (1992) described three types of networks important to business success: operational, personal and strategic. Operational networking involves cultivating the relationships with people you need to accomplish your job, and personal networks allow you to meet a diverse group of like-minded professionals. Today, networks are even more important to the development of social skills for many professionals and strategic networking, including contact with peers and with senior executives in the field, and allowing professionals to share ideas about best practices, learn new approaches and keep close tabs on developments in their field. If Black professional women are not privy to the networks that help provide these skills, how are they to achieve the same type of success as their white counterparts?

Cultural Networking

In her research on gender differences in networking and access at an advertising firm, Ibarra further notes that creating an organizational culture of homophiles, people who prefer spending time with others of the same race or gender, may lead decision makers to prefer working with similar others. The result, are subtle forms of discrimination and stereotyping across the professional landscape, creating structures of oppression which prevent minorities for achieving professional success (Brewer 1996, Browne and Misra 1994). This happens in two ways: first, the application of cultural schema and stereotypes on to minority group employees and second, showing favoritism towards members of their own groups (Gorman 2005). Again, little research has been done in the interim to see if these things are still important to the professional lives of Black women, but it can be assumed that most employment still begins with employers' informally classifying

employees into gender and race-related categories (Ridgeway 1997, Gorman 2005).

In their research on the intersections of race and gender on individual, occupational and industrial characteristics on earning, Kilbourne et al. (1994) conceptualized the issue of homophily as the development of interrelated cultural stratification systems. In her theoretical analysis of the networking capabilities on the specific ways interaction networks of men and women, whites and minorities differ in management positions, Ibarra (1993) also hypothesized that greater insight into the difficulties faced by minorities may be gained by exploring and creating a link between the obstacles they're up against and the corresponding interaction with majority groups. Two decades have passed since these authors emphasized the importance of the continued study of minorities in the workplace, yet we have little new information on what they experience, with which they connect, and the effect on their professional success.

When discussing the African-American female experience, it is tempting to speculate about whether sexism or racism is a more destructive influence, especially for professional women who have stepped outside of traditional social worlds (Crenshaw 1989, Gay and Tate 1998, Budig 2006, Jordan-Zachary 2007). A closer look however, such as that taken by Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis (1993) in her interviews of 80 college-educated Black women from 1920 – 1940, shows that it is more likely a combination of both sexism and racism, which have had a complex effect on their lives. Likewise, in her paper "Love, School and Money: Stress and Cultural Coping Among Ethnically Diverse Black College Women (2009)," Psychologist Tracy Robinson-Wood found, as a result of

her mixed method research on 80 Black female college students, that much of the stress the women felt – measured using the Africultural Coping Systems Inventory – can be attributed to social realities unique to Black women as a function of their multiple minority status.

In her work on the exclusion of Black men from blue-collar jobs through white networks, Deirdre Royster (2003) found that workers emphasized the importance of network membership to professional success, that is, "it is not simply knowing the right people that matters; it is sharing the right sort of bonds with the right people that influences what those people would be willing to do to assist you (p.179)." Additionally, in a discussion of the complex negotiation of culture and careers by Black women, Bell and Nkomo (2001) argue assimilation (that is the gradual acceptance of the norms, attitudes, and customs of the dominant culture) is often the only tool deemed appropriate by white counterparts for achieving professional success.

However, the idea of assimilating to advance their careers is not viable to Black women, who often view their cultural identity as the only support system available to them. They found,

> "Advancing in a predominately white setting can go against one's cultural heritage and can feel tantamount to abandoning core aspects of identity, family, and community. Successful African-American women managers refused to abandon their cultural and racial identities in order to be accepted in their organizations. Having to be seen as 'not black' by their colleagues was intolerable; it would undermine their self-esteem and self-efficacy. Keeping in touch with their culture helped the women prevail in spite of the obstacles they encountered (Bell and Nkomo 2001, p. 169)."

These findings are counter-intuitive to expectations of assimilation discussed in similar

literature. Mary Helen Washington (2002), in her discourse analysis on making the choice between one's culture and work, concludes that assimilation is a difficult choice to make for Black women, in that their cultural membership may act as a barrier to professional success, but abandoning their culture is not seen as a better option.

African-American culture encourages Black women to do uplift work (i.e. church groups, community organizing, familial leadership) within the community along with their full-time jobs, and second-shift (Hochschild 1990) work at home. The result, according to Washington (2002), is an entire generation of women who feel ambivalence and anxiety about their careers because of the disconnection between their cultural identity and professional achievement. These women blame the challenges they face fitting into expected cultural roles on their professional position and likewise blame issues achieving success in their careers on cultural membership.

In sum the literature on networks suggests Black professional women are doubly-bound by their membership in professional and cultural networks, with the former asking them to shed their cultural identities as a prerequisite for membership (if they are allowed membership at all), and latter challenging them to abandon their desire for entrance into professional networks all together. Taken as a whole, this study seeks to answer questions on the perceptions Black women identify as affecting their career trajectories and ultimately their professional success. How are these factors associated with race, gender, and class impacting the personal and professional lives of Black women? The following chapter outlines the methodologies undertaken to answer the research questions driving this research.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand how Black women negotiate the often competing cultural and professional identities, and the impact of these identities on their career trajectories.

A qualitative, inductive approach with descriptive methods of data collection was utilized in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. What combinations of factors associated with race, class, and gender do these Black women perceive have the greatest impact on the career trajectories of Black women?

2. What are racial and gendered expectations outside of the workplace these Black women perceive complicate their career trajectories?

3. How do these Black professional women perceive the politics of class, as well as race and gender impact their career trajectories?

4. How do these Black women use race, class, and gendered networks?

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990a, 1998) study examines the lives of 35 Black women across three categories, here used to describe groups organized by objective career success markers. Each category, very successful, moderately successful

and less successful[15], is defined by annual salary, job title, and number of subordinates and works as the dependent variable in the study.[16] More specifically, this study seeks to identify and understand the complex negotiation of personal beliefs and behaviors with workplace expectations impacting Black women's career trajectories. Participants have been working in their current fields for at least four years and are employed across a wide range of professions, including, but not limited to: education, finance, sales and marketing, non-profits, television and radio, communications, law and medicine.

In this study success is operationalized using objective dimensions including salary, title, number of subordinates. Subjective dimensions including job satisfaction, free time and individual perceptions of success are considered during the analysis of study participants' responses.[17] Data was collected through in-depth interviews with 35 women selected by participant driven sample and analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1987) open coding techniques. The study seeks to dissect how Black women approach and prioritize the expectations of their personal and professional lives, as well as challenges encountered in the process of achieving career success. The wider goal of the research is to understand how race and gender shape Black women professionals' experience of work in the 21st century.

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[15] These groups only take into account objective measures of success. Subjective measures of success are nominal variables and therefore not quantifiable. However, a discussion of subjective measures of success what beliefs impact career trajectories is included in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation.

[16] Very successful >$100K/year, high level management or executive position, moderately successful >$60K/year, mid-level manager position, less successful $30K - $59K/per year, non-managerial or low-level manager

[17] See section titled "Redefining Success", pages 100 – 102 of this dissertation.

DEFINITION and OPERATIONALIZATIONS OF TERMS

The researcher has specifically defined some of the following terms for the purposes of this study; others are defined as they appear in the literature, and those sources are cited.

Black women. The use of the term "Black" to describe one's race or ethnicity has an array of meanings depending on the individual, the community from which they originate and the community in which they currently live. In the Twin Cities, where there is a large community of foreign-born Blacks, the use of this term is especially problematic. For the purposes of this study, *Black woman,* refers to American-born[18] Black females.

Homophily. This term refers to the extent to which actors form ties with similar vs. dissimilar others. Similarity can be defined by gender, race, age, occupation, educational attainment, status, values, or any other salient characteristics.

Intersectionality. Describes the importance of a using multidimensional analysis of power structures and positions in oppressive institutions (racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, classism, etc.) as interconnected and cannot be examined separately from one another (Crenshaw 1989).

Professional. A college-educated individual working in a full-time salaried position (i.e. teachers, lawyers, doctors, marketing/advertising executives etc.) is considered professional. Furthermore, a professional is defined as someone that has at least a

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[18]Though religious affiliation is not discussed in this study, none of the Black women in this study are Muslim, an important distinction to combat against the assumption of foreign nationality connected to the wearing of hijab in a population where this stereotype is often true (Karim 2009).

measure of autonomy in the workplace, relative economic security, and is engaged in intellectually stimulating work.

Success. Objective dimensions of success include salary, job title, and subordinates (Parcel and Mueller 1983, Hout 1988, Bridges and Villemez 1994) across the three categories of success using 2010 U.S. Department of Labor statistics on Minneapolis/St. Paul hourly wage earnings, work levels and title.

- Very successful: salary over $100K/per year, executive-level job title, more than three subordinates

- Moderately successful: salary $60K - $100K/per year, mid-level manager job title, one to three subordinates

- Less successful: salary less than $60K/per year, entry-level or low-level manager job title, no subordinates

Subjective dimensions of success are defined by one's reactions to his or her professional experiences (Hughes 1937, 1958, Heslin 2004). Markers of subjective success include less tangible achievements, including job satisfaction, (Rus-Eft, Dickison, and Levine 2009), autonomy over work hours (Lee, Lirio, Karakas, MacDermid, Buck, and Kossek 2006), and fulfillment and/or contribution to society (Heslin 2004).

THE QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Employing qualitative research methods to data gathering and analysis has significantly increased in popularity over the past two decades (Strauss and Corbin 2006). "Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality...They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, p. 8)." In contrast to quantitative inquiry where representations of the world are symbolized numerically, qualitative inquiry offers representations of the world that are primarily linguistic (Heppner, Kivlighan and Wampold 1999). The general goal of qualitative research is to identify commonalities, or if none can be found, expound from the data more micro-level groupings and identify commonalities within those groups; "consequently, qualitative researchers want to study behavior in context and might even go so far as to contend that it is the interpretation of the context that is the essential process to be studied (Heppner, Kivlighan, and Wampold 1999, p. 246)." Applying a constructivist approach within this qualitative method of inquiry allows for the study of the "*how*-and sometimes *why*-participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations (Charmaz 2006, p. 130)."

This type of investigation allows for the subtleties of human experiences to float to the surface. Attention to subtle and, at times, nebulous, experiences requires the researcher to "sustain a fair amount of ambiguity" through flexibility and openness towards the data (Strauss and Corbin 2006, p. 5). By maintaining a "beginners mind, a

mind that is willing to see everything as if for the first time" the qualitative researcher supports a methodology which is ideal for explorative research of a new, or relatively new, social experience (Kabat-Zinn 1990, p. 35).

This study seeks to understand how Black professional women's cultural and professional identities impact career trajectories. Qualitative inquiry and analysis fit this purpose with greater sensitivity than offered by quantitative methods. Given that little research on this topic exists, the use of qualitative methods allows the data to highlight issues in a more exploratory fashion. More specifically, using in-depth interview data on the personal and professional experiences of 35 Black women across three categories defined in terms of levels of professional success attained, this study explores differences in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in each professional achievement category. Given that qualitative methodology uses context, individual experience, and subjective interpretation, generalizability is not possible, nor is it a goal (Heppner, Kivlighan and Wampold 1999).

The qualitative inquiry, as applied in this study, offers a high level of internal validity, as the participants and researcher co-create the data as they explore the road to professional success. However, external validity, such as the ability to generalize these findings to the experience of all Black professional women, is not possible, nor intended. Applicability of the study to the reader's personal experience, however, is a goal. Such applicability would allow readers of the study and future researchers to identify pieces of the data that may create an interest or spark the development of questions within the contexts of their own lives or future research.

Grounded Theory

A grounded theory research method allows the researcher to generate theory from the collected data (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This method places considerable onus on the researcher to present and interpret the study from a more subjective perspective, which John W. Cresswell (1998) observes, benefits from a "procedure that is thoroughly discussed and systematic," as well as the necessity that the "language and feel of the article are scientific and objective while, at the same time, addressing a sensitive topic effusively (p.34)." The guiding questions for a researcher using qualitative methodologies are what parts of a whole are we seeing and how do they fit together?

Likewise, according to Cresswell (1998) both case study and grounded theory are to be applied to the study of a phenomenon when it is important for the researcher to study participants' interactions, actions, and engagement in a process. Using these approaches, this study includes extensive narratives describing the cultural concepts and categories of intersectionality (relying on data from researchers such as Bell, Crenshaw, Morgan and Jordan-Zachary) and a general background on the women participating in the study (including age, marital status and educational background). The research conclusions will "construct interpretive narratives from their data and try to capture the complexity of the phenomenon under study (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, p.103)," as is requisite of effective qualitative research.

The use of this type of grounded theory methodology is known as the Straussian school of Grounded Theory. After the initial development of the method, founders Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss differed (Glaser and Strauss 1967) on its application

and a bifurcation of the theory developed. This study refers to the Straussian school as a tool for the application of the grounded theory method. The differences between the Glaserian and Straussian schools are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Comparisons of the two schools of Grounded Theory (Onions 2006)

"GLASERIAN"	"STRAUSSIAN"
Beginning with general wonderment (an empty mind)	Having a general idea of where to begin
Emerging theory, with neutral questions	Forcing the theory, with structured questions
Development of a conceptual theory	Conceptual description (description of situations)
Theoretical sensitivity (the ability to perceive variables and relationships) comes from immersion in the data	Theoretical sensitivity comes from methods and Tools
The theory is grounded in the data	The theory is interpreted by an observer
The credibility of the theory, or verification, is derived from its grounding in the data	The credibility of the theory comes from the rigor of the method
A basic social process should be identified	Basic social processes need not be identified
The researcher is passive, exhibiting disciplined restraint	The researcher is active
Data reveals the theory	Data is structured to reveal the theory

Source: Onions, P.E.W. (2006). "Grounded theory application in reviewing knowledge management literature."

Exploring the Black Middle Class

To avoid the pitfalls of most existing literature on Black women, which focuses on their role in the underclass (Schmitz 1976, Henry 1995, Gilbert 1998) and ignores the experiences of middle and upper-class Black women (Newsome and Dodoo 2002, Davis

2004), and to best capture and organize participant experiences, the research

methodology used in this study incorporates grounded theory using interview data and

seeking ways to analyze professional experiences and trade-offs as they correspond

career success for Black women.

Black Feminist Methodology

Before addressing the connection between race and gender in this study, it is important to

reinsert a discussion of Black feminism as a basis for the methods used in this study.

Black feminist thought provides a theoretical grounding for the qualitative methodology

used in this study as a context to examine the choices made by Black women and analyze

the ways these women attempt to overcome the basic obstacles of being Black and female

in a white male world. According to Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003), "Black

feminism stems from critical scientific inquiry. Critical social scientists suggest that all

men and women are potentially active agents in the construction of their social world and

their personal lives. 'They analyze the meanings, social rules, values, and motives that

govern action in a specific context (Comstock 1982). Human action and interpretations

are considered historical by-products of collective experience. As a field of inquiry that

emerged from both feminist and critical race theories, Black feminist thought validates

the experiences of Black women in the creation of knowledge (p.206)." They go on to say

that the specific type of marginalization felt by Black women in the United States is an

important part of their lived experience, one shared by the entire group, and which must

be addressed in any research including Black female participants.

"For example, for Black women race is the most salient construct centering both

their individual and group identity (Shorter-Gooden and Washington 1996). Race is viewed as a sociopolitical term that distinguishes between true biological differences and also classifies people according to sociopolitical and economic categories where membership is determined by physical characteristics (Helms 1995). Both as biological construct and as sociohistorical reality, ideas about race have placed Black women in America at a disadvantaged position as evidenced by interactions with others (Collins, Giddings 1985, Lerner 1972, Scales-Trent 1993). Black feminists argue that there is a complex dual relationship in both Black culture and the dominant culture that Black women have to negotiate in their daily interactions (hooks 1984) (Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett 2003)."

I chose and combined these methodologies for several reasons: (a) to accurately study past and present experiences and participants' responses to them; (b) to incorporate elements such as context, strategies and consequences; and (c) to highlight the context-based nature of experiences. The use of these qualitative methodologies ensures that the study's research findings may later be used to educate organizational leaders on the issues facing Black female employees and create additional support systems (i.e. the formation of more professionally oriented groups for Black women, more mentors within organizations, and organizational policies addressing stereotypes and discrimination) to address their under-representation in professional settings.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Beginning in September 2010, I began attending professional organization meetings for the Black Law Students Association (BLSA) and the Black Graduate and Professional Students Association (BGAPSA) on the campus of the University of Minnesota in an effort to make connections with Black professional women in the Minneapolis/Saint Paul, MN metropolitan area. Each of these organizations held several career engagement events throughout the year to which minority professionals from across the state were

invited to attend, speak and/or advise minority graduate students. Time for networking over refreshments immediately followed each event, at which time the researcher introduced herself to many of the Black female attendees. Those Black professional women who expressed interested in the proposed research topic were invited to exchange contact information for participation at a later date.

Of the original ten women who were contacted via email to participate in the current study based on their initial interest, four women were identified as being a fit for the research based on their current status as being Black American, female, a Minnesota resident, working or having previously worked full-time in a professional, and for at least four years.[19] These women were interviewed either via phone or in-person between December 2010 and October 2011, after which, each woman was asked to volunteer at least two additional names of women whom they thought to be a good fit for the study based on the aforementioned criteria.

Using the participant-driven sampling method, these four women made initial contact with their potential volunteers and provided an introduction to the researcher only after the women had agreed to participate. Once the introduction was made scheduling of the interview, as well as the interview itself, took place between the participant and research alone. This process continued until saturation in the population was reached; meaning the responses of participants no longer provided new data and instead echoed the responses of earlier participants. The final 31 interviews were completed between November 2011 and October 2012.

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[19] A few study participants were simultaneously working in a professional setting and attending graduate school, but this was the exception, not the norm. No participants were graduate students only.

DATA COLLECTION

Participants

Given that the professional and personal experiences of the participants in this study were

diverse, and that one interview per participant was collected, 35 interviews were

conducted out of 40 women who expressed interest in participating. Decisions for

interview selection were based primarily on the availability of interview times that

corresponded between the female participant and researcher.

Several authors (Hill et al. 1997; Hill et al. 2005) recommend the use of 8-15

interview participants for consensual qualitative research studies similar to this one, more

specifically studies,

> (a) open-ended questions in semi structured data collection techniques (typically
> in interviews), which allow for the collection of consistent data across individuals
> as well as a more in-depth examination of individual experiences; (b) several
> judges throughout the data analysis process to foster multiple perspectives; (c)
> consensus to arrive at judgments about the meaning of the data; (d) at least one
> auditor to check the work of the primary team of judges and minimize the effects
> of groupthink in the primary team; and (e) domains, core ideas, and cross-
> analyses in the data analysis (p.2)."

Hill et. al (2005) goes on to assert that fewer participants are needed when more than one

interview is conducted per participant or when the group of participants is particularly

homogenous. The use of 35 participants did create some overlap in the data, however it

ensured the data was exhaustive.

For Black women in diverse metropolitan areas, and perhaps internationally, professional success may be less contingent on entrance into predominately white male professional networks, in part due to the availability of more race- and gender-based networking opportunities. However, in the Midwestern United States, and specifically in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, where the percentage of educated professional Black women is much smaller than in larger, more diverse cities (Ibarra 1993), the existence of professional networks is less likely. The Twin Cities does have a vibrant Black professional scene, yet still pales in comparison to larger more diverse cities on both coasts.

Historically, Black communities in the Minneapolis/Saint Paul area tended to develop more slowly than in other cities; in part, because Minnesota never had the manufacturing jobs available in other northern cities like Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland and Chicago. Instead, Black migrants to Minnesota tended to get service jobs, such as at hotels and, especially, on the railroads, the biggest historical employer of Blacks in the state (McGill 2012). The fact that railroad jobs often took black men away from home for long periods also encouraged women in Black communities in the state to become self-sufficient; leading to more stable, middle-class and women-led Black communities in Minneapolis than in other northern cities. However, this also led to the unintended creation of very small, insular communities of Black women in the state.

SAMPLING

Participant-driven sampling is a method used to obtain research and knowledge from

extended associations, through previous acquaintances. "Participant-driven sampling uses recommendations to find people with the specific range of skills that has been determined as being useful (Hill et. al 2005, p. 8)." An individual or a group receives information from different places through a mutual intermediary. This is referred to metaphorically as participant-driven sampling because as more relationships are built through mutual association, more connections can be made through those new relationships and a plethora of information can be shared and collected, much like a snowball that rolls and increases in size as it collects more snow. Participant-driven sampling is a useful tool for building networks and increasing the number of participants (Hill et. al 2005). However, the success of this technique depends greatly on the initial contacts and connections made. Thus it is important to connect with those that are popular and honorable to create more opportunities to grow, but also to create a credible and dependable reputation. As a Black woman, I was afforded more initial credibility than would be given white researchers; however, my limited business knowledge took away from my credibility with some women. To combat this issue, the following process was followed to assert my credibility with potential research participants and ensure the collection of a valid sample, using a reliable data collection tool.

1. Draft up a participation program (likely to be subject to change, but indicative).

2. Approach stakeholders and ask for contacts.

3. Gain contacts and ask them to participate.

4. Community issues may emerge that can be included in the participation program.

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5. Continue the participant-driven sampling with contacts to gain more stakeholders if necessary.

6. Ensure a diversity of contacts by widening the profile of persons involved in the participant-driven sampling exercise.

There are many different kinds of sampling, each with their own advantages and disadvantages. Participant-driven sampling has a lot of advantages as opposed to other sampling methods. It is possible for the surveyors to include people in the survey that they would not have known. It is also very good for locating people of a specific population if they are difficult to locate. The advantage of this is that researchers can quickly find people who are experts in their fields, because people often know someone who is better at their job than them. This leads to only having the most well known experts for the sampling group, and also can help find lead users more simply.

Participant-driven sampling is also inexact, and can produce varied and inaccurate results. The method is heavily reliant on the skill of the individual conducting the actual sampling, and that individual's ability to vertically network and find an appropriate sample. To be successful requires previous contacts within the target areas, and the ability to keep the information flow going throughout the target group. Identifying the appropriate person to conduct the sampling, as well as locating the correct targets is a time consuming process that renders the benefits only slightly outweighing the costs. Another disadvantage of participant-driven sampling is the lack of definite knowledge as to whether or not the sample is an accurate reading of the target population. By targeting

only a few select people, it is not always indicative of the actual trends within the result group. To help mitigate these risks, it is important to not rely on any one single method of sampling to gather data about a target sector. In order to most accurately obtain information, a researcher must do everything it possibly can to ensure that the sampling is controlled. Also, it is imperative that the correct personnel are used to execute the actual sampling, because one missed opportunity could skew the results. For the purposes of this study several different contact points were used to address these sampling risks.

The sample in this study includes Black women living and working in professional occupations in the Twin Cities metro-area and across a variety of disciplines including, but not limited to nursing, law, communications, human resources, and management. The research involves Black women currently or recently employed in these positions. Direct quotes may be used from the women gleaned through private formal interviews.

Dual Roles: Researcher and Cultural Membership

Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) address the issues of Black feminist scholars doing qualitative work on Black women, and the inescapable fact of their culture membership. They argue, "That although we came from diverse families of origin, linguistic traditions, geographical locations, and socioeconomic status…we were bound by the commonalities of being both Black and female (p.205)." Patricia Hill Collins (1998) asserts that theorizing from the point-of-view of an outsider-within allows one to reflect on the multiplicity of identities, stripped of the hegemonic discourse of "elite

knowledge". The outsider/within status of the researcher, as a Black professional woman and a sociologist with the power to create knowledge[20] – a position that no one else in the sites of research hold – allows the researcher access to more personal experiences of subtle discrimination and racism in the workplace.[21] Researchers of other races and/or genders may spark non-normal behaviors in participants and call into question the verity of the analysis.

However, sharing an insider status with research participants does not promise lack of distance between research and informant. Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett (2003) remind us,

> "As Black women researchers, we share race and gender with our informants, but barriers are possible because of differences in class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or nationality. In other words, the 'isms' of daily life – racism, sexism, and classism for instance – must be negotiated with informants throughout the research process. Sharing certain identities is not enough to presume an insider status. Idiosyncrasies are embedded in our identities that inevitably create moments of intimacy and distance between the informant and researcher (p.207)."

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[20]I go into this study assuming that Black women who spent the majority of their time networking with their white, male counterparts and traditional roles such as getting married, having children and actively participating in the Black community on the back burner experience greater professional success. For Black women professional success is antithetical to personal happiness, the more she has of one, the less she will have of the other. I define professional success using a combination of objective and subjective dimensions and personal trade-offs as marrying and having children before the age of 30 than the women who networked mostly with other Black women, married and had children at a young age. I believe this research will show that the race and gender of those in the professional networks of Black women has an important effect on the personal choices made and by extension their level of professional success.

[21]I am very conscious of my need to represent myself as a Black American woman and admittedly cannot unpack my multi-conscious experience as such from my role as researcher in this project. This does not hinder the quality of the work. On the contrary, my ability to move between various social locations affords me a closer connection to the very women I study and the ability to analyze them using an academic lens. In *Teaching to Transgress* (1994b) bell hooks acknowledges that, "the engaged voice must never be fixed and absolute but always changing, and always evolving in dialogue with a world beyond it (p.11)." As such, I approach this research with an engaged voice in the discussion of the complex identities of Black professional women.

During the interviews for this study I paid close attention to my clothing, hairstyles, cultural expressions, etc., to limit the visible distance between the research participants and myself as the researcher as much as possible.

Interviews

The study interviews consisted of formal Q&A audio recorded in closed private settings for about 45 minutes. Interviews were generally held over the phone or in the participant's office. Participants were asked a series of 21 open-ended questions to identify aspects of their professional lives with which they felt dissatisfied, with a particular emphasis on any personal decisions made as a result of this dissatisfaction.

In their work on the challenges for Black female researchers doing qualitative research on Black women involving sensitive topics, Few, Stephens and Rouse-Arnett identified five ways the experiences of Black women have been misrepresented, misappropriated, and/or misconstrued in the academic presentation of research across disciplines (Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett 2003). This list includes:

1. Deviance and negative developmental outcomes historically have been the dominant foci of studies on Black family life (Bell-Scott, 1982; McLoyd, 1998).

2. Researchers commonly have represented Black family life through comparative quantitative data collected mostly from Whites. Other racial-ethnic groups were included less often. Thus, Blackness or the experiences of Blacks was defined in terms of difference from Whiteness (Jones, 1991).

3. Although studies on sensitive topics with Blacks often are descriptive in nature, they lack within-group investigations and often are based on non-representative groups of Blacks drawn from clinical, high-risk, and convenience samples (Murray, 1992, 1995; Staples, 1994; Wyatt, 1991).

4. Quantitative findings about the effect of race generally are by-products of

statistical controls for race or ethnicity (McLoyd, 1998).

5. Researchers have used steadfastly traditional theories that do not holistically reflect Black women's experiences (Allen, 2000; Bell-Scott, 1982; Dilworth-Anderson, Burton, & Johnson, 1993; McAdoo, 1991; McLoyd, 1998; Staples, 1970).

Various steps were taken to prevent the misrepresentations described by Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett. Whenever possible, I as the Principal Investigator and fellow Black female professional conducted the interviews. Being interviewed by a researcher with similar cultural, educational and professional background may encourage participants to be more forthcoming in discussions (Few, Stephens, and Rouse-Arnett 2003) of workplace discrimination and barriers to success, therefore informal and unplanned interviews may take place within the sites of research as needed. Throughout the interview process, the connections between the lived experiences of both participants and the researcher encouraged the women to share resources, and knowledge attached to such experiences. The use of oral histories and focus on framing participants' experiences as Black women without comparisons to white professional women prevents definitions of Blackness only in comparison to whiteness. Participants were chosen based on their professional diversity to ensure representativeness. New innovative theories were used to frame the significance of this research. The interview schedule, found below, acted as a guideline for jump starting conversation during formal interviews. Informal interviews were conducted in accordance with this schedule whenever possible.

Interview Schedule

1. How old are you?

2. Where did you go to college/graduate school?

3. What is the highest degree you've completed?

4. What is your current position? Have you worked at any other salaried positions?

5. How long have you worked at your current position?

6. Are you married? If not, why not? Do you want to get married?

7. Do you have children? How many? If you have none, why? Do you want children?

8. In what city do you currently live?

9. How long have you lived in the Twin Cites?

10. Did you grow up in the metro-area, if not, where did you group up?

11. What jobs did your parents hold? Did they go to college?

12. How often do you get together with your friends? What is the racial make-up of your "friend group"?

13. How do you identify your race/ethnicity (i.e. do you say "I am Black, I am African-American, and I am Brown?")? Do you feel most comfortable with this designation? Why or Why not?

14. What is your current salary?

15. What events led to your current position?

16. Did you/do you have a professional mentor? How has this person helped (or hindered) your success?

17. Are you involved in professional organizations? If so, which ones and why did you decide to join? What, if any, benefits have you been given as a result of membership?

18. Do you participate in community-based organizations? Why or why not?

19. How important is your career to you?

20. How important is your personal life? What about traditional family roles like marriage and children, do these factor into your idea of a successful life?

21. How many hours do you work per week? Do you wish you worked more or less?

Sample Size, and Saturation

Qualitative research samples are generally much smaller than quantitative samples; there are many reasons for this, including time and cost associated with expansive qualitative data collection, however, the most important reason is the diminishing return in qualitative samples. Unlike most quantitative studies, extending a qualitative study – adding more participants – does not necessarily lead to more information (Mason 2010). According to Mason (2010), this is because "one occurrence of a piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. Frequencies are rarely important in qualitative research, as one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic…qualitative research is concerned with meaning and not making generalized hypothesis statements (p. 1)." Determining the appropriate size of a qualitative sample is then a difficult task, it cannot be too small or you risk losing the diverse opinions of potential participants, however if the sample size is too large you risk a repetitive, or even superfluous, data set.

Though study participants can have a diverse array of opinions and experiences on the subject matter, and the sample size must be large enough to accommodate such diversity, once saturation is achieved no new interviews are necessary. Glaser and Strauss (1967) define saturation as the inability of new data to shed any further light on the topic being investigated. This was the guiding principle used throughout the data collection and

analysis process.

Charmaz (2006) in her book on constructing grounded theory suggests that studies with "modest claims" (p.114) may reach saturation more quickly than studies attempting to make large generalizations across a population. Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) outline additional points which may affect potential sample size,

> "…the heterogeneity of the population; the number of selection criteria; the extent to which 'nesting' of criteria is needed; groups of special interest that require intensive study; multiple samples within one study; types of data collection methods use; and the budget and resources available (p.84)".

Given that the current study does not attempt to generalize to the larger national or international population of Black professional women, and instead focuses on the experiences of a very particular set of women (Black American, between the ages of 25-65, working in the Twin Cities area at least four years, with an annual salary of at least $30,000) it can be presupposed that saturation was reached rather quickly. Using this set of parameters, participants in this study are at least middle class, as all Black women in the area, even those working full-time, making less than $30,000 per year were excluded from the study.[22] As a result there are no unsuccessful women in this study; rather the participants have achieved varying levels of success.

Strauss and Corbin (1999) describe saturation as a "matter of degree" (p.136), suggesting that no matter how long one analyzes data, new ideas can and will emerge. They conclude that saturation is reached when the discovery of "new" ideas becomes

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[22] All participants in the study meet the aforementioned guidelines and are considered professional. The threshold for the median "moderate" success is $60,000 annual salary and at least a mid-level manager (or equivalent) position. For more information, see Footnote 8.

counter-productive, no longer adding anything to the developed frameworks, and suggest that the problem in developing conclusions from qualitative work is a result of too much data, rather than too little. Green and Thorogood (2009) similarly argue that in interview studies very little "new" information comes out of data after interviewing around twenty people. After completing a systematic analysis of their own interview data from 60 women on reproductive health care in Africa, Guest et. al. (2006) concluded that data saturation occurs at a very early stage. They examined their 60 interviews to identify at what point no new codes developed, and found of the thirty six codes developed for the study, thirty four were developed from the first few interviews, and thirty-five were developed after twelve interviews, concluding that from "a sample of six interviews may [be] sufficient to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations (Guest et. al. 2006, p.78)." In conducting the research for this study, similar narratives began to develop from the in-depth interview data as the number of participants increased. As a result, participation was capped at 35 women, though the data collection tool used allowed for additional participants.

As mentioned previously, participants for this study were collected using participant-driven sampling, where a set of initial participants will be enlisted using contacts in local networking organizations, by attending organizations' events and introductions to board members. Subsequent participants were recommended and recruited by existing participants, allowing the sample group to grow like a snowball. For example, an introduction to a successful Black female lawyer, led her to participate and provide a list of other women she suggested to participate. These women were contacted

69

via email or phone regarding participation and after they completed their respective interviews also provided names and contact information for other women to participate.

The issue of representativeness, "the degree to which [an event] (i) is similar in essential characteristics to its parent population, and (ii) reflects the salient features of the process by which it is generated" (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982, p. 33) is often a concern in studies with small sample sizes. Representative bias is often an unintended consequence of participant-driven sampling, and can be a result of the overall population size of the study group. Testing saturation and choosing from a wide range of occupations are two strategies used to ensure representativeness, albeit of a very select group of women.

DATA ANALYSIS

Interview data was analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's (1990a, 1998) three-phase coding procedure, open coding, axial coding and selective coding, as these are currently the most widely accepted phases of Grounded Theory methodology (LaRossa 2005) and I believe, the most productive. Though I began this research with a set of concepts connected to the research phenomena (Black women in executive positions), open coding, defined by Strauss and Corbin as a procedure where "the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena reflected in the data" (1990a, p. 62; 1998, p. 102), was used to reveal unexpected concepts. This coding technique helped identify the most important concepts in the data, and connected them to corresponding indicators or variables, exact words, sentences or phrases occurring throughout the interviews. Axial coding, defined

as "intense analysis done around one category at a time, in terms of paradigm items (conditions, consequences, and so forth) (Strauss 1987, p. 32)," then allowed me to relate categories detailed using opening coding and to corresponding subcategories to answer the when, where, why and how of concepts within the data. Lastly, selective coding was used to define the main story underlying the analysis. This entailed identification of a core variable or concept that is centrally relevant to story.

The principal investigator conducted analysis as well as undergraduate research assistants trained in coding and data analysis using grounded theory. All researchers practiced reflexivity throughout the project, being aware of how our own positionality impacts the research process (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2007). A preliminary analysis will be done as an iterative process, consistent with grounded theory, through which a set of initial codes from the data will be used to jump-start the theory development process.

In order to clarify concepts and synthesize patterns across interviews, the free-writing process was used. For example, to get a handle on a common theme related to respondents' sense of belonging in their organizations and how this may influence the types of networks of which they are members. Some of the initial codes could be "perceived belonging," "working in primarily in white businesses," and "strong identification with white peers." All of these codes contribute to the focused code "sense of belonging." Other themes coded for during the data analysis process include, but are not limited to:

- Cultural Communications

- The Difficult Black Woman

71

- Class and Community

- Diverse Networking

- Perceptions of Institutional Racism/Sexism

- Peer Support Networks

Interviews were coded thematically within Atlas TI, a computer-assisted software program for the analysis of qualitative data, and were reviewed, evaluated, and reevaluated through the aforementioned three-phase coding procedure outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990a, 1998). Free writing provides a way to reflect on one's data and to verbalize how categories are connected in the overall process, serving as an analytic bridge between theory and data collection. We used it to analyze our current interviews and point to specific areas or topics that we needed to investigate further. As salient topics emerge they were explored through subsequent interviews in the study. This process allowed data, ideas, and questions from one interview to influence and be worked out in later interviews.

Categories

Participants were placed into one of three categories, previously defined as social groupings, (very successful, moderately successful, and less successful) using the aforementioned definitions of objective success, salary, direct reports, and organizational position/title. Interview data was analyzed by category, after which prevailing codes were

compared to those found in the remaining categories.

Social Networks Analysis

Social network analysis views social relationships in terms of network theory, consisting of nodes, which represent individual actors within the network, and ties, representing relationships between the actors including friendship, kinship, organizational position, sexual relations etc. (Sanders 2002). While the interview as a method of data collection assesses what groups people in a network see as meaningful, social network analysis helps quantify how tightly connected those groups are and how they are connected. Moreover, "social networks and the social capital derived from them are central to the study of ethnicity in plural societies (Sanders 2002, p. 329)," making the addition of social network analysis and integral part of this study.

During the preliminary open coding phase of data analysis the researcher noticed the emergence of similar group membership across study participants; for example many women were members of the same sororities, attended the same churches, and networked at the same events. As a result, supplemental questions were added to the interview schedule, as seen above, regarding groups to which study participants had membership to see if additional connections emerged. The networks connections that emerged are mapped and discussed in the conclusions chapter.

Reliability and Validity

This study incorporates analysis of career success through the professional and personal experiences. A group of 35 participants for the study includes Black women in

Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minn. Currently holding positions across the three

aforementioned categories of success in professional organizations through August 2012.

The participants were interviewed regarding their personal and professional experiences.

The data was analyzed and compared between the researcher and a qualified second

observed in an effort to test emerging themes from the data and ensure data reliability and

validity. Abiding by the policies of the Institutional Review Board, the study research

methods have been approved by the administration of University of Minnesota IRB, and

participants provided their consent.

Ethical Considerations

General safeguards to participants during the interview included the use of an informed

consent form, a discussion of the interview agenda and time frame, and the use of a tape

recorder to insure accuracy. The researcher read a standard ethics protocol to the

participants prior to the interview (Appendix A). The researcher kept all agreements made

with subjects in this study. In addition, the identity of the subjects, any other informants

and the districts were held in confidence.

Study Delimitation

The Black professional women referenced in this study necessarily reside in the

Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. This area is a unique research site because of

issues of ethnic heterogeneity across the African Diaspora arising from the designation as

a refugee city for African immigrants and the overall lack of diversity statewide which

does not exist in other metropolitan cities in the U.S. Issues of racial and ethnic culture

take on added dimensions in regards to both the cultural experiences of women in the study and the structure and culture of organizations based around the metro-area. The Twin Cities is hardly representative of the large diversity of Black professional women across the United States, but instead represents, with its changing definitions of Blackness, the leading edge site of broader phenomena around race and ethnicity.

Study Limitations

As a Black female professional, the researcher conducting this study was privy to the names and contact information for several Black female professionals in the area prior to beginning the research. Most of the participants in this study were contacted using participant-driven sampling, that is, they were contacted via referrals from other women already participating in the study. Also, as the population of Black professional women in the Twin Cities area is so small (less than 10% of the total state population) many of the participants know one another and referred those interested in participating and those they thought might be a good fit for the study. Therefore, the majority of women are members of the same or similar professional and personal circles, even if they worked in different disciplines, and therefore have similar experiences that affected the generalizability of study results.

Furthermore, racism and discrimination in the workplace are very sensitive subjects, especially for Black women looking to move up the corporate ladder. Therefore, those women who agreed to participate in the study may have less to lose professionally than those who opted not to participate. This may have skewed research

findings, based on current positions within organizations, and resulted in participants

with high degrees of subjective dimensions of success.

Chapter 4: Descriptive Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceived impact of negotiating cultural and professional identities on the career trajectories of Black professional women. The women who participated in this study were found in diverse occupations and positions, ranging from nonprofit work in domestic abuse to executive level finance. They reacted differently to shared (Twin Cities) surroundings, and respond more uniquely regarding their specific disciplines, and discussed openly with the researcher in varying degrees. Great care was taken by the researcher to utilize research understandings as they surfaced to improve the data gathering and interpretation process in an on-going fashion. Literature on the social position of women and Blacks in the United States, and the structural and cultural make-up of U.S. society was used as a framework for this study.

The following research questions guided data collection in the study:

1. What combinations of factors associated with race, class, and gender do these Black women perceive have the greatest impact on the career trajectories of Black women?

2. What are racial and gendered expectations outside of the workplace these Black women perceive complicate their career trajectories?

3. How do these Black professional women perceive the politics of class, as well as race and gender impact their career trajectories?

4. How do these Black women use race, class, and gendered networks?

The analysis of this data yielded twelve emergent codes, from three core ideas, which highlight the overarching perspectives of Black professional women in the Twin Cities, Race and Ethnicity, Cultural and/or Professional Expectations, and Social Networks (see

Table 2 for Summary of Codes). This chapter includes data from all thirty-five interviews

and connects the data to the emerging concepts that developed through qualitative

analysis. Each concept addresses issues that arose in a majority of interviews.

Table 2: Summary of Codes Emerging from Data Analysis

Research Code	Description
Cultural Communication	How do Black women communicate with co-workers? What reactions stem from these forms of communication?
The Difficult Black Woman	How are popular culture stereotypes of Black professional women addressed in the workplace? What are the personal and professional implications of this?
Class and Community	What, if any, class dimensions of community engagement exist for Black professional women?
Diverse Networking	How important is networking to professional success for Black professional women? Does the race and gendered component of networking matter?
Perceptions Institutional Racism/Sexism	Do professional Black women perceive instances of institutional racism or sexism as barriers in the workplace? Why or why not?
Internal Definition of Success	How do Black professional women define success? What subjective and objective measures matter most?
Marriage/Kids	Do the traditionally heterosexual roles of mother and wife inhibit black women's professional success?
Mentoring	Are professional mentors an integral part of professional success for Black women? Why or why not?
Lack of Space Safe Space?	Is it important to have available spaces for Black professional women to discuss their experiences? What are the ramifications of not

	having such a space?
Tokenism	Do Black professional women exist as tokens in their respective organizations? How does this affect their search for professional success?
Peer Support Networks	How important are peer support networks to the professional success of Black women?

RESEARCH QUESTION 1:

What combinations of factors associated with race, class, and gender do these Black women perceive have the greatest impact on the career trajectories of Black women?

The Black professional women in this study identified several concepts associated with their race, class, and gender as impacting their career trajectories, including their perceptions of discrimination or prejudice based on their race, as well the absence of available communal physical meeting space for Black women within organizations and involvement in the community. This section unpacks these factors along with the participants' perceptions of the importance of these factors on their careers.

Race and Ethnicity

How the participants identified with their race and gender in the study emerged as a set of defining attitudes and beliefs pertinent to professional attainment levels of Black women in the Twin Cities area. Furthermore, the ways that each of the women identified themselves were often in conflict with beliefs about "acceptable" forms of cultural identification in the workplace.

The combination of historical forces within the state of Minnesota has resulted in

a very unique environment for Black professional women in the Twin Cities, who often

find themselves at once without external support and competing with other Black, but not

African-American, women for jobs, status and social position. Study participants are not

only aware of the perceived connections between Black Americans and Black Africans in

the Twin Cities, but also attempt to circumvent such connections in their individual

assertions of racial and ethnic identities. The majority of women in the study self-

identified as Black, but acknowledged the political implications of the word Black as a

marker of identity and the stereotypes rooted in its use.

Many of the participants in the study voiced concerns regarding the

universalization the African-American and African immigrant experiences, in preventing

them from asserting their identities as uniquely different. Rashida, a lawyer, framed her

frustrations about assumed Black homogeneity within her personal experiences as a

debutante, and the backlash their Cotillions have received from prominent members of

the Black community.

> *RASHIDA: That's the crazy thing, we're taught racial solidarity from a very young age right? But what we do is so different from other Blacks. Like I was a debutante in a cotillion [black high society rite of passage for women] and I had a story published negating this law professor's article about how Black people shouldn't participate in cotillions because it was originally meant for white people in Europe and Blacks were purposely excluded, but how does that make sense? We're only supposed to do stuff that Black people have always done? And it isn't all Blacks anyway it's a specific segment of the Black American middle-class, and we get scholarships and learn to waltz. It's like Blackness is so complicated. It's about skin tone and hair texture and so much stuff.*

Regardless of the unique experiences shaped by citizenship status, country of origin,

native language etc., many of the participants expressed feeling that as a racial group they are expected (read: required) to adhere to the social stereotypes and expectations of this one all-encompassing label; that the memory of the painful histories of common ancestors binds them together in a political solidarity project, often rendering their individual voices silent. Here, again, Rashida's comments provide insight into feelings of animosity stemming from forced ignorance of ethnic distinctions:

> *RASHIDA: I hate when people talk about going to Africa as though they are going home. I have little to no connection to Africa. I read an article by this Black guy who said how surprised he was at how little connection he felt to being in Africa and the African people he met there. That's how I am. Sure, I wanna [sic] go there, but I'm not gonna [sic] drop to my knees and feel like I've reached the motherland. It's gonna [sic] be like visiting any other country for the first time.*

These issues are magnified in the Twin Cities where the large population of African immigrants intensifies issues of ethnic self-designation, especially in the workplace. While a majority of the women in this study recognize themselves as Black women, and therefore have at least race – if not ethnicity -- in common, they also understand their experiences as differentiated from African immigrant women in the same area.

> *CHANEL: I identify my race as African-American; this is my preference, although I am not opposed to being identified as Black. I do not think others perceptions of me change as a result of how I identify. I will admit that growing up in the South I generally associate more of negative connotations with the term "Black".*

Jalisa, a high-ranking executive in finance, discussed the difficulty in dealing with identity markers in the workplace. For her, and many of the women in this study, being

viewed as absent of mainstream stereotypes places the Black professional woman has its benefits.

> *JALISA: Some choose to ignore it by putting me in another category. I have had colleagues say to me, I don't think of you as black."Which says to me I must not fit some stereotype they have of what black'is? Others assume things based on their idea of a black person. They will be surprised by my east coast prep school background. Mostly I find it that the label of black carries a lot of baggage and stereotypes that make it harder for folks to see me as a person.*

That there are negative stereotypes associated with cultural displays of "Blackness" in the workplace is a much-discussed topic in the race and identity literature (Shelby 2003). To proudly display "Blackness" conjures ideas of Black nationalism, a holdover from the 1960s and the formation of the Black Panther party, and the avocation of Black self-determination, racial solidarity, group self-reliance, voluntary racial separation, militant resistance to anti-Black racism, and the development and preservation of Black ethno-cultural identity (Shelby 2003); already a long list of issues with which to contend. However, the political "baggage and stereotypes" Jalisa alludes to have an additional layer of complexity in such a homogenous city.

In the state of Minnesota, where, as previously mentioned, the Black American population is less than ten percent, 25 percent of African-American women are in prison, and the Black immigrant population is almost 50 percent of that of the total state population, public displays of "Blackness" like wearing natural hair, carries additional baggage related to language comprehension, class status, behavior and religious beliefs. The women in this study believe such displays may have negative effects on their

professional success because they perceive negative racial attitudes in the minds of their white coworkers and supervisors. Here, whether the coworkers or supervisors of the research participants really do harbor negative feelings for those women who proudly display cultural membership in the workplace, and embrace the political implications of that identity, are of a little consequence, and indeed not something this study is equipped to measure. That the women in this study *perceive* this kind of discrimination affects both their personal and professional choices and therefore may have an effect on their professional success.

The Difficult Black Woman

The most common theme highlighted in the interview data was the perception of being stereotyped as a difficult co-worker. Nearly all participants felt they faced such perceptions, of those who agreed a majority felt these views were a result of their race and gender. Many of the participants described workplace experiences where co-workers and/or superiors alluded to their behavior as typical of "women like them". Gina[23], a local attorney, describes this as an overreaction to simple questions, or attempts to think creatively.

> *GINA: people assume that if we have a question or if we don't go along with the program that we're being difficult…with other people it's just curiosity or if they are risk takers or that they um that they could think out of the box. Whereas with us when we have questions it becomes a question of whether or not we are competent or whether or not we're being difficult.*

She goes even further to suggest that attempts to circumvent being stereotyped as difficult

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[23]See Appendix B for detailed description of each participant.

to work with may have ethical ramifications, where one most choose between following her morals and gaining the trust and respect of her colleagues.

> *GINA: I truly believe that especially as an attorney I have an ethical obligation to do the right thing, and I don't feel like and I will not follow a policy just because it's a policy. You know, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to charge a case if they're in front of me if I don't think I have the evidence and I don't think I can prove it. I will not go forward with it because I'm ethically obligated not to. And for me at the end of the day it's my law license. And I will tell people, I'm not doing it and it's caused backlash and it's caused questioning or caused them to give me a bad review or whatever and once I had a review because people were complaining because they said I didn't play nice or I didn't get along with people or I didn't like them or something and I said, that's not a part of my job. I don't really have to be, you know it's not my job to get along with people or to make them comfortable and if they're uncomfortable with me then they should probably take a look at why. You know, that's not my job in life to make you feel good, you know.*

Francesca, a pediatrician, echoed Gina's sentiments, suggesting that the word "difficult" is proxy for "menacing" or "intimidating," and that Black professional women would need to engage in serious behavior modification to meet the requirements of white colleagues and supervisors.

> *FRANCESCA: I think because I really think I don't know why they are intimidated by us. I just really don't. But they are…I'm not going to change just to get along.*

Noelle, a bank executive, connects perceived feelings of fear and distrust from her white co-workers to cultural definitions of aggression. While within Black culture, directness is not necessarily viewed as aggressive behavior, for Midwestern whites, aggression and directness are interchangeably concepts.

> *NOELLE: My challenge with the Minnesota thing is I think I'm the least aggressive person I know, but I am thought to be very aggressive and direct and that's a bad thing. And I'm like, you gotta [sic] welcome it all. You can't beat around the bush all the time and in my world I don't be around the bush. It's black*

and white to me. Sometimes shades of grey, but mostly black and white…and what that meant was that if people didn't know and accept who I was then I didn't have any use for people.

Regardless of their individual experiences, the majority of women in this study felt colleagues consistently perceived their behavior as problematic even when they themselves did not feel they were being particularly combative or confrontational. Moreover, participants describe these perceptions of their behavior as resulting from stereotypes of Black women as angry, bitter, and combative.

Battling Feelings of Discrimination

While this study was not constructed to get at actual feelings of racism directly from white professionals; the women in this study perceived racism to be present and constant in both their personal and professional lives. These perceptions, real or not, are real in their consequences for these women, ones which manifest themselves in the forms of closed networks created for and used solely by Black professional women as a response to perceived racist and sexist conditions in the workplace.

Making conscious decisions about everyday choices such as dress, hairstyle, and office décor in order to either highlight or downplay cultural distinctiveness is an issue often discussed in the academic literature. However, it is the presence of an additional set of responses that provides the most critical piece in understanding how Black professional women's experiences differ from those of their peers in more diverse cities. As discussed in the literature review of the formation of cultural traits of ethnic groups in plural societies, ethnic networks are used as a form of social organization and to develop

"bonded solidarity". The participants in this study use such networks to remain connected to other Blacks in the Twin Cities and a large majority of Black professional women in the area are members of "closed" personal and professional groups outside of their workplace organizations. Black book clubs, singles mixers, networking events, mentoring organizations, and even private schools across the cities are used as meeting grounds to escape the depoliticized professional identities carefully crafted during the work day in favor of environments where cultural identity and the politics it inherently entails are exalted rather than lamented. Of note here, are the ethnic lines along which these groups are drawn. Black Africans are not found in these spaces and though never explicitly turned away, ethnic homogeneity here is implied.

One major finding of this study was that a majority of participants perceived their workplaces as engaged in institutionally racist and sexist practices.

> *MAX: I've never been promoted. That's one of those things that really drives me crazy. I'm not gonna [sic] make a big fuss about it at work though, but if they think I haven't noticed that other people are getting promoted and I'm not... Of course they'll never come out and say it's about my being a Black woman, right? But it does.*

For these women the consequences of such perceptions have important ramifications regardless of whether or not the organizations are actually engaged in racist or sexist practices. These women describe working in this type of environment as one of both invisibility and hyper visibility, where the presence and opinion of Black professional doesn't matter, yet is consistently criticized. The women in this study often accept or ignore incidents that reinforce their invisibility, though they understand them as a parts of their daily professional lives that effect the subsequent choices they make regarding their

careers. They choose professional mentors based upon on race and gender, decide what types of networking organizations they should seek membership in, and make even more personal choices regarding marriage and family, community engagement, dress and hair styles, all as a result of their perceptions of discrimination and racism in the workplace.

That Jalisa, a finance VP, perceives sexism to have a bigger role in her professional experiences than racism; is unsurprising, given the gender imbalance in the finance industry. The majority of women in the study, however, perceived race to be more important to workplace discrimination, than gender.

> *JALISA: The other part would be more about being a woman. The places where I have typically worked in this organization have been areas where there have not been a lot of traditional women type roles. So it's not HR it's not marketing, it's not that…And then the 3rd would be, you know uh, race. I believe, and its belief so, you know whatever, I believe in this country there's a lot of colorism as opposed to racism. Someone who looks like me benefits from that. Did not get a lot of stuff that I think a person of color would get different than I would get…and so that has been less of an issue.*

Regardless of whether race or gender was the basis, Gina, perceives discrimination to be part of the very fabric of the organization, and she believes that the resulting practices, whether racist or sexist in nature, to underlay many professional interactions.

> *GINA: I think there's a built in bias and I think often people don't recognize that there's a built in bias.*

Perceptions of institutional racism and sexism transcend age, salary, and position. In fact, Gina states that her professional twenty-something daughter and her daughter's professional friends were shocked by the severity of racism and sexism they faced when they entered the workforce.

> *GINA: they all experienced other things they were questioned more; they were*

judged more they found a hard time fitting in, people said they did not meet their corporate culture.

She also describes her own experiences of racism as making her job particularly difficult. More than half of the women in the study expressed similar concerns, with the majority blaming racist practices for hindering their professional mobility.

GINA: I've had situations where um you know I've made a decision and people have questioned and I know it was questioned because of who I am as opposed to the decision itself and you know that happens and has happened on a number of occasions.

Kendall, a theology professor at a local college, experiences racism and sexism as rendering her voiceless within the institution. She is thought of as adding to the organization's diversity, but is often treated as though her opinions are less valuable than those of her white colleagues.

KENDALL: And so he was like, well it doesn't seem like anyone in the bible department was even there, and so she was like, well this person was there and that person was there, and then he was like, well [Kendall] was there, but [Kendall] doesn't count. And then I was like pardon me? And he was like; well you know what I mean. And so in his mind, I'm an African American, so my vote doesn't count, well of course I'm going to vote for this thing but I don't count.

She also sees the trickle-down effect of institutionally racist policies at higher education institutions, where students are following their institution's lead.

KENDALL: the culture is very much a white conservative evangelical, politically conservative. Those are the values of the students AND faculty…and it's that sameness of students that has created a culture that's not always open to diversity and so, as an African American woman or African American person coming in, that means I have to do a lot of the work to cross those barriers, those walls. And so the institution, sometimes sways and says yes, the students should learn to do that and sometimes it swings back and says no were not open to diversity…They all email the white professor, except one other person who I know who's in my major and the TA to check in with me, so it's like this is a constant, this kind of

88

stuff is what you have to put up with and deal with, and so there's this mountain that I have to climb, with every new class…As a minority, you acknowledge another minority, you know, you look at them and you lift your chin a little bit, but you know. People at [my university], they don't assimilate, they don't make eye contact, they keep their eyes down and they never look at me, because they know people of color do that, and so it breaks my heart when I see them do that. And they often avoid my class, and I've had composed ministers saying that kids avoid my class, and they don't want to take my class because you're a black professor. So there are students who don't want to take me [at all].

Bank executive, Noelle, corroborates the claim that institutional racism renders Black professional women voiceless, a result of an overall ignorance of the professional struggles associated with being Black and female.

> *NOELLE: And it's more common, I'm going to board meetings and I am the only person of color and am generally one of maybe three women in a meeting and it's just funny to me because at this day in age you'd think we'd be so much further along and that wouldn't even be a consideration, but when I continue to walk into meetings and I'm the only black person or I'm the only person of color be it black or Hispanic or Asian it just seems odd to me…They're like OK, she's only here because of affirmative action or how did she get here or what is she doing here and I get mistaken for the crew that is delivering lunch or whatever may be happening, but that's their problem, not mine.*

These women perceive their status as Black women to be incompatible with the majority of professional workplaces and the racist and sexist behaviors that they encourage. Regardless of the professional category they belong to, the women in this study highlight these practices as a major in their ability to attain objective measures of professional success.

Missing "Safe" Physical Spaces

Several of the women in this study described their race and gender identities as having negatively affected their sense of place within their respective organizations. Participants feel the need for opportunities to meet and vent. The absence of women who look like

them limits the available space, both physical and metaphorical, for voicing concerns and frustrations about their professional experiences and those of Black women like them.

Gina describes how this issue permeates not only professional expectations, but also expectations around physical appearance.

> GINA: People make a lot of assumptions, when I started work people make assumptions about how I look and how I dress and those combinations made people so uncomfortable in terms of how they approach me and I feel how people are still they always walk around saying who is she married to is she from money? Really? Why does it matter, you know?

Here again, Gina's discussion of her daughter's friends' experiences is useful, highlighting potential unintended consequences of racism in the workplace, effectively preventing Black professional women from feeling as though they "fit".

> GINA: they all experienced other things they were questioned more; they were judged more they found a hard time fitting in, people said they did not meet their corporate culture. They could not…they were not fitting in.

Kendall suggests that that these expectations extend beyond physical appearance to any manifestations of cultural allegiances. She believes it important for Black professional women to carve out their own spaces where they can exist without judgment.

> KENDALL: historically, their reputation in the black community has not always been good. Uhm, I'm positive [it] wasn't always seen as a safe place for people of color…so there's this clash of cultures, and that itself can be very wearing, and it can happen in a thousand different ways. I've had people , you know I put pictures and figurines on my desk, like most of the professors do, I've had people come into my office and say "This stuff is just too black" and so then I'm like, what?? So then I'm like oh, well then maybe I need to change and take things

down because I have a picture of black women dancing, these little figurines of black women preachers and these little people in black churches, black angels, and there's pictures of family who are African American of course but then there's a whole board of my students, and they're all white…I have to create safe places, like in my office and other nooks and crannies in the university.

Gina echoes these sentiments and describes a space designed for professional Black women, where regardless of the professional diversity of the group the women have had similar professional experiences and all are grateful for a space to have an open discussion.

GINA: I belong to a book club and we have an opportunity we have a cross section of people in the book club, finance people and HR people, can all come together and we genuinely have the same experience in the workplace whether we're in corporate or whether we're in the public sector, and I think we have to realize, as an African American woman, that the world is going to be difficult for you and you make the decision as to how much of that you're going to deal with.

Many of the participants alluded to the importance of having space and time to interact with other Black professional women, if only to compare experiences, and complained that the lack of such a space left them feeling as though they were expected to be the spokesperson for all Black women.

GINA: there's this assumption that we should all come from a certain background and that and it is an assumption that if something happens in our community that we somehow should all know about it and that we should be an expert on it. I'm not an expert on the black community. I'm not an expert on the black community in Minnesota or in Minneapolis.

When active peer groups or intra-organizational networks were not available, many participants sought co-workers with shared characteristics other than race – such as

91

gender or class – with whom to develop allied relationships.

> *NOELLE: Yeah it's very interesting because she was, we connected because of her accent because she felt that some people her in the states were prejudice and thought she was ignorant because she couldn't speak as clearly as they could and she said I never treated her that way. So that was one of the reasons we connected.*

The absence of significant pools of Black professional women within professional organizations has had the unintended consequence of leaving these women metaphorically stranded in the workplace. Without other women with whom to connect they do not feel free to express themselves or their opinions, or have opportunities to share war stories of daily life as a Black professional woman.

Tokenism

Though Kanter (1977) first introduced the term *token* in 1977, this study has found that tokenism is alive and well in the 21st century professional world. More than ninety percent of the women in this study both defined being a "token" as a negative professional trait and described themselves as tokens within their organizations.

Noelle describes often being mistaken for "the help" within her organization, something she attributes to her race and gender.

NOELLE: They're like OK, she's only here because of affirmative action or how did she get here or what is she doing here and I get mistaken for the crew that is delivering lunch or whatever may be happening, but that's their problem, not mine.

Chanel, an executive in the retail industry, highlights the benefits of tokenism, and attributes her professional rise at least in part to institutions' search for diversity.

> *CHANEL: not a lot of diversity on the domestic side and so one thing was that were much more interested and were offering diverse students fellowship and so I*

was able to get a fellowship.

Kendall asserts that the same search for diversity that benefits Chanel is problematic because it is often insincere. Such insincerity results in an ignorance of the real issues of Black professionals in favor of being viewed favorably.

> *KENDALL: [the university] wants to have good report and it wants to have those kinds of relationships even to the point of [the university] saying "we want to be an anti-racist institution" and so if they're going to be that so who's going to be accountable for that. So they get black pastors within the community to hold their word accountable, to that aspiration, to that bowl of becoming an antiracist institution and so [the university] intentionally tried to build some of those relationships and so being seen as a glaze on between the black churches, making that connection, helps to build that...So they hired me and they would brag about having two black chaplains because none of the other institutions had black chaplains and so they were being very progressive in all this stuff, in diversity. And they would make us come to all this stuff and I was like why do we want to do to this stuff and she was like they just want to show us off.*

Many of the participants describe feeling "used" as a token in their organization. They describe such tokenism as resulting in a difficult negotiation between achieving professional successes and being true to themselves.

> *KENDALL: the fact that I have a voice in the community, and I'm seen as kind of a glaze in-between [my university] and the black community because [my organization] doesn't have a lot of ingrowths in the community, they want to and they want to be seen well and so my position of leadership is an asset to them and it helps me, and its expected, it's something I put on my resume and it's something, that counts as they look at promoting me and all that kind of stuff, in service, your expected to do service and scholarship, and the service is an institution outside and so the service outside is good for my career.*

For the participants in this study there is a fine line between the price and the payoffs of being seen as a token. Likewise, choosing between their race and gender identities and their professional mobility is a choice most Black professional women are not ready to

93

make.

Class and Community

During the data collection process, each study participant was asked to estimate how many hours they committed to community service each month. More than 70 percent of the women in this study are actively engaged in community outreach. The amount of time spent doing outreach work is negatively correlated with annual salary (FIGURE 7). The women who estimated their commitment to working with community outreach programs to more than 60 hours in a given month were much more likely to be defined as less successful using objective measures of success (salary, job title, number of direct reports, levels of professional autonomy) than the women who estimated committing fewer than 20 hours a month. Salary is also connected to the kinds of volunteering in which the women participated.

Figure 7[24]: Correlation Between Objective Measures of Success and Community
Involvement

Correlation Between Objective Measures of Success and Community Involvement
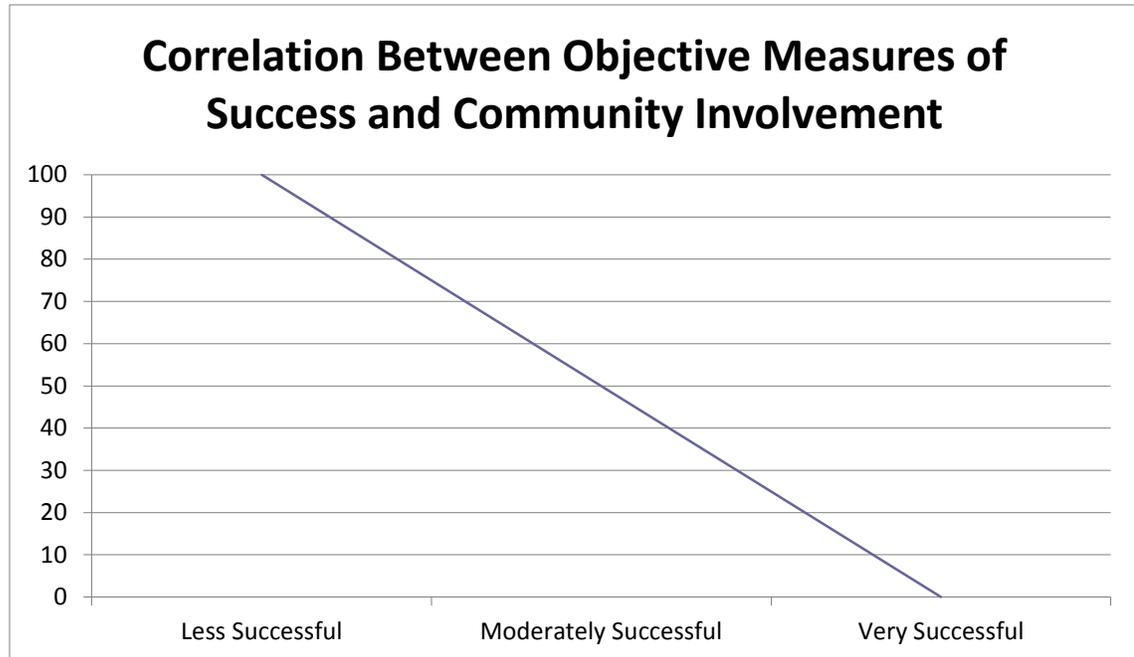
Max, a social worker, believes it to be her cultural duty to give back to the community,

regardless of the effect on her ability to achieve objective measures of success such as

high salary and job prestige.

> *MAX: It's important to me to not forget to look back. I can't abandon the
> community I was raised in. So yeah, sometimes that means sacrificing
> professional opportunities in favor or volunteering, or organizing, or
> something. But I feel it is important to make that choice.*

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[24]This table is based on numerical data on the hours per month participants spent actively involved in the
community. This self-reported data was gathered as part of the qualitative interview process. A majority of
respondents simply estimated time spent rather than providing data based on actual logged hours. As a
result, the linear correlation in this graph acts as an illustration of those estimations, rather than
highlighting a strictly or directly linear relationship.

In fact, many of the participants in this study who make less than $100K/year suggest that objective measures of success are less important to them than being actively engaged the local Black community.

Noelle and Chanel suggests these connections are a direct result of who encourages the engagement and the class dynamics inherent in that relationship; meaning if you are encouraged to volunteer by your boss, or professional mentor you are more likely to participate in more upper-class forms of outreach, including memberships on corporate boards and in professional organizations.

> *NOELLE: The first bank president I worked for, he took me under his wing and he was my solid champion, not only form a professional perspective, but also within the community. He got my involved with a number of non-profits and boards. He supported me to become very engaged in the chamber of commerce and getting connected with a number of folks in the community...I generally try to focus my attention on a non-profit perspective on organizations that support housing, self-sufficiency, community development, so job creation and things like that, and young people in understanding the value of money and using money as a tool and not putting all the other expectations on what money means.*

> *CHANEL: I was also involved in National Black MBA association where I met one of my mentors and became involved as a mentor for the leaders of tomorrow program which mentors high school students who are interested in going into business.*

The class-based dynamics of community engagement keep many Black professional women in the boardrooms, and in meetings rather than on the ground in the communities themselves directly engaged with those less fortunate.

> *MARY: Community-based organizations. Not sure if you're referring to board service. If so, then yes, I am a member of the Ripley Advisory Board – and organization that provides funding for programs that seek to prevent teen pregnancy. The MN Women's Foundation serves as administrator.*

This is not to say that Black professional women are disconnected from their community. In fact, a majority of women in the study listed community outreach as very important in their life, an testament to Black cultural history where women were required to do the community uplift work.

> JANE: In order of priority, career is 3rd on my list. God, Family, Career, and Community. I am passionate about my career yet refuse to sacrifice my relationship with God and my family for it.

In sum, the Black professional women in this study perceive their racial identities, as well as their co-workers responses to those identities, as having an important impact on their career trajectories. Likewise, the racial and gendered components of safe physical spaces and the lack of those types of spaces for Black professional women in the workplace, and the class dynamics attached to community engagement were also perceived as impactful to their career trajectories. The following section dissects those expectations *outside* of the workplace associated with Black women's race and gender these women perceive as complicating their career trajectories.

RESEACH QUESTION 2:
What are racial and gendered expectations outside of the workplace these Black women perceive complicate their career trajectories?

Study participants described managing personal goals with the needs and expectations of their families and larger social cultures as the most difficult aspect of their day-to-day lives. Career, motherhood, and cultural membership often conflicted in the lives of these

women and just as often it was how they responded to this conflict, which forecast how much success, they achieved.

Marriage and Kids

Faced with generalized pressures from the Black community to marry and have children, often manifested as direct pressures from extended family, many Black women are forced to develop elaborate means of fitting traditional heteronormative roles into their busy professional lives. Chanel voices the difficulty of executing this balancing act.

> *CHANEL: So with that she [mentor] knew that those sales years would be pretty tough because you're traveling, we have 400 stores across the country, so at the time our territory or region was the south central part of the country and at least once or twice a month I'd have to go out into the field for work. And so one of the things we did with my career planning is we did that prior to when we knew we wanted to have a child, so it's just something that pretty much up until my maternity leave I was still supporting sales and then came back after a few months and that's when I made the change.*

For Chanel, having a child meant a year or more of planning to first meet professional milestones and ensure there would be no significant drop off in her professional achievement; and included extensive mentoring sessions on best practices for juggling career and motherhood. It meant family planning with her husband and peer support groups to confirm childcare options in a variety of potential situations. In short, Chanel planned the adoption of the role of mother with the same care, detail, and subsequent high stress levels as she strategized her career trajectory. This was obviously difficult, but the alternative, not meeting the familial expectations of an entire culture, and by extension letting down her family, her community, and herself, was simply not an alternative for many women.

98

Many Black women are simply foregoing traditional heteronormative roles rather than become subject to the personal stresses and professional compromises necessary to achieve them; however they are still haunted by gender-based cultural roles associated with Black middle-class notions of "respectability"[25]. In the case of Noelle, her recent marriage was not a part of her life plans, nor a part of her initial career plans. She describes the initial decision not to marry as a tool for expressing her individuality, but was open to changing her mind when she met her soul mate. Noelle also asserts that her views towards marriage are not a result of the relationships she watched as a child, but rather rooted in her individual opinions.

> *NOELLE: Early in my life I just never thought of myself as the marrying kind. My parents were married for 40 years before my mother passed away, so I came from household where there was a mom and a dad and a husband and a wife. But it just didn't seem like that was road I wanted to take. I didn't have a desire to a mother, I didn't have a desire to be a wife, I just wanted to be me. And what that meant was that if people didn't know and accept who I was then I didn't have any use for people. So, I think I'm an anomaly in the fact that I love to date. I was happy dating, I probably would have still been dating if my soul mate hadn't popped into my life and changed the direction of my ship, but I just felt satisfied not being married.*

Kendall suggests that her never married status has nothing to do with her hunger for career success and everything to do with lack of prospects. In actuality, Black professional women's shrinking marriage rates may be affected by both lack of marriage prospects *and* career choices. Black women have left Black men far behind in receiving

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[25] Black middle-class respectability, including high class status, high levels of education, heterosexuality, and willingness to sacrifice career for mother and family (Williamson 2011, Harris 2012), is often a hyper reflection of the white female idol, "inherently chaste, pious, childlike, and…submissive" (Harris 2012).

advanced degrees leaving fewer equitable prospects and encouraging women to focus on

their careers. Kendall's experiences echo the literature, however, few women in this study

had similar experiences, and those who did where at least 10 years younger than Kendall.

> *KENDALL: Never been married.*
> *RESEARCHER: Is there a specific reason for that?*
> *KENDALL: Because nobody asked me, I mean I wanted to get married. But it was never, just, yeah, I didn't get married.*
> *RESEARCHER: And did it have anything to do with your job; sometimes it comes down to a choice between the job and marriage.*
> *KENDALL: No. Nothing like that.*

Conversely, Noelle describes viewpoints toward motherhood as more culturally

grounded. Like marriage, she views motherhood as simply not for her, however, she

admits that the social pressures to become a mother are much more difficult to withstand.

Criticisms resulting from hegemonic cultural norms often become personal. As in

Noelle's case, cultural membership assumes the assignation of certain roles, and to

purposely circumvent those roles implies personal issues that must be overcome.

> *RESEARCHER: And you don't have any kids and you don't feel a desire to have kids?*
> *NOELLE: No. No. I don't.*
> *RESEARCHER: Do you think that, do people question that?*
> *NOELLE: All the time and I find it more in our culture than in others. That it's not normal for people to make that decision. My aunts and my godmother, they're like what's wrong with you, you know. It's like something ain't [sic] right if you don't have kids by the time you're 30. Even though I wasn't married they were expecting me to have a baby. What do I need a baby for you know? I like to travel, I like to do things, I don't need a baby.*

Mary, a business executive echoes Noelle's assertion that time is important in the decision

not to have children, though she admits that her decision may not have been entirely

conscious. Instead, she describes her childlessness as an unintended consequence of her professional focus.

> MARY: Um I don't know that I'd necessarily say that career is more important to me than having a family. I mean indirectly it may be but if you're focused on one thing or the other I mean for me I think that's a difficult question to tell you know I'm sure there's a correlation between the two that you can be more focused on work because I travel a lot so that's definitely not … at all.

> RESEARCHER: Right, but you're not making a conscious decision to not be in a relationship or get married specifically because of your career?

> MARY: No, but I think it does … traveling time, bills, but I mean yeah I think that you know I have made I have made room and you have different priorities.

Jalisa, who has child, but no partner (both conscious choices) suggests that being a mother and not a wife was a way to cut down on the stressors attached to assuming traditional heteronormative roles.

> JALISA: I did not necessarily want to compromise in a lot of things like when you have to live with another adult individual like what city do you love in how do you juggle their work vs. your work that kinda [sic] thing when you're in a relationship with someone and it's not marriage and you're not living together then it's a different set of conversations so I lived with someone for 3 years and after that I decided I didn't wanna [sic] do that.

Of the Black professional women who participated in this study, almost two-thirds where either unmarried or childless. More than three-quarters of the women in the very successful category where unmarried and childless, suggesting that traditional roles of wife and mother are negatively correlated to professional achievement. The reasons for this correlation are complex and include lack of time, lack of men they believed to be "marriageable," prospects, and emotional stressors associated with their professional lives.

(Black) Talk is Cheap

The Twin Cities has a unique history affecting the type of communication used by most natives. Minnesota's original settlers migrated primarily from Scandinavia. For centuries, the traditional cultures of Norway and Sweden were based on the concept of One People, One Language, One Religion (McKnight 2012). This concept encouraged a level of formality between peers and co-workers until a deep friendship was cemented, and has prevailed in the form of "Minnesota Nice", a term used to describe the loyalty and neighborly connection between locals, but kept from outsiders (Yuen 2012). Conversely, Black cultural communication is by its very nature more direct and inclusive, Marcyliena Morgan (2002), in her theoretical analysis of language, discourse and power in African-American culture, highlights the importance of cultural dialects to the Black community. She argued, "The language of African Americans does not simply reflect what happened, but through interaction it reconfirms and reconstructs what happened to others and us. Rather than try to erase the past, the language works to expose it -- not to embarrass -- but to lay bare the entire range and history of Black life in America (Morgan 2002, p.34).

These two often conflicting communication styles leaves Black professional women in a precarious position of trying to communicate in a culture with colleagues whose communication styles are in direct opposition to their own. Almost all participants in the study mentioned communication style as significantly impacting their professional success.

> *GINA: You know I'm a straightforward person. I don't play games. People like to play games in Minnesota. I just don't do it. I don't have time for it. Yesterday I was in a meeting with someone and she didn't seem to be getting what we were telling her and so I told her very clearly what was going on and what was going to happen and afterward one of the young people came up to me and said "you know*

I really like what you approached her by telling her point blank how this was going to happen and not allow her an opportunity just to play around with it." I said, "You know I had to. She wasn't getting it" we would've been sitting there all day with her playing these games and you know, we just can't do this...I'm not going to change just to get along.

Kendall suggests that the Black cultural communication style is deemed too aggressive for White, Minnesotan-born co-workers, and it is that perception of aggression that prevents successful discussions.

> *KENDALL: it's very hard when the dominant culture's, communication pattern is passive aggressive. I come from an African American community where the communication pattern is direct, and so coming in with this direct communication, so coming into a community where the communication is passive aggressive, there's a clash there. And so my communication pattern is perceived as 'aggressive' and so I'm seen as attacking students when really I'm just asking a question, but from their perspective, I'm attacking them. And but instead of telling me or saying something, I hear it in evaluation and I just think, we could've worked something out or something like that if you had just said something, and so the perceptions are different and so there's this clash of cultures, and that itself can be very wearing, and it can happen in a thousand different ways.*

Noelle echoes Kendall's thoughts, and suggests that it may be fear of face-to-face confrontation that often prevents fruitful discussion.

> *NOELLE: The one thing that I struggled with when I first came here is I'm a direct person. I like to have direct conversation and I like to know that we are on the same page. And I could not understand why in a meeting environment we would all be aligned and then I'd come back to my office and my email would be full of people questioning the things that we had just decided...they don't deal with things directly and a lot of Minnesotans have a challenge being honest and open about what they feel. They won't do it in a group environment, but they feel comfortable doing it in a one-on-one or through email. My challenge with the Minnesota thing is I think I'm the least aggressive person I know, but I am thought to be very aggressive and direct and that's a bad thing.*

According to Kendall, this is an entirely one-sided issue, with Black professional women

adapting to this passive-aggressive communication style and never vice-versa. The

burden is completely on them.

> *KENDALL: so what I need to work on is communicating passive aggressively, so my goal is to speak passive aggressively, and my action steps, you know and I'm sitting here and I'm like wait no, I can't believe I'm writing this, this is assimilation, so I scratch it all and so I write in the report "I feel like I cannot be myself, it is very difficult because my perspective is different my communication style, my world view. And instead of them coming to meet me, I have to do all the work."*

Noelle uses an anecdote to highlight the basic differences between the way her white

colleagues communicate and the way she communicates with her Black friends and

family.

> *NOELLE: all along while we talk about mentors I think of my circle of older family and friends who are women guiding me from a foundation of who I am, who are mentors as well. So I have my godmother Ms. Lo, who is not a professional person, but she knows the graces of how you're supposed to act when you go out and she'll say [Noelle] your slip is showing, you know.*

Differences in communication styles, as well as unwillingness by White professionals in

the area to acknowledge these differences, affects the ability Black women satisfy

workplace expectations. The participants in the study were vocal about the importance of

this issue, but they were at a loss for strategies (other than total assimilation) to overcome

it.

Research Question 3:

How do these Black professional women perceive the politics of class, as well as race and gender impact their career trajectories?

Black professional women often find cultural expectations conflicting with role demands in the workplace, causing participants to prioritize which set of expectations needed to be met first, and to judge the potential effect of meeting those expectations on their career paths. The bicultural lives of Black professional women, as discussed by Ella Louise Bell (1990), akin to DuBois' "double-consciousness," result from conflicting cultural and professional expectations. The women in this study perceived the tensions between these expectations as having a negative impact on their professional achievement.

Redefining Success

While objective measures of success including salary, title, and number of subordinates, were important to a majority of study participants, several non-material definitions of success emerged during data collection. Though many listed non-material dimensions of success, the economic freedom provided by salary underscored many of these other subjective forms of success.

For many of these women, it is not simply about how much money you make, but what quality of life high salaries can provide for you. Noelle highlights this point.

> *NOELLE: I really think of success as being able to do what you love to do and making enough that you're comfortable, where money is not a worry. When you have to focus on how you're gonna keep the lights on, you're not caring about it you like what you do...I really think it's based some inner accomplishment meter that you have and you say, OK, I want to make sure I hit these designations and I want to be able to make this kind of money or I want to be able to do these things with my family. It's a combination of those things and very little of it is geared around work. It's more about your own internal expectations and deliverables.*

105

In the moderately successful category, Chanel's position does not afford her the same

control over her work hours that other women are privy to. Therefore, though her

personal definition of success does not specifically address salary, it is a salient issue.

> *CHANEL: I wish there was more, not so much consistency to it, but I wish sometimes I had control of the work, not that I'd want to work more or less, but I do like having the flexibility and control.*

Jane connects success to her Christian faith, downplaying the importance of traditional

roles in favor of faith. For Jane, it is one's commitment to their faith that makes them

successful.

> *JANE: For me, a successful life is one that brings glory to God in everything you do, say, think. Marriage, children, career, etc. are manifestations of God's goodness and grace toward us along with so many other wonderful things. So when you "stay connected to the vine", you bear good fruit which can be revealed in many diverse ways.   We should never limit success to just being married or having children.*

By contrast, Mary insinuates that women who do not want to make more money are not

being honest, either with themselves or each other.

> *MARY: You tell me somebody that says more [money, power, success] is not important and I'll tell them that they're lying.*

Rita, a communications executive, cites traditional roles of mother and wife provide her

with the greatest fulfillment.

> *RITA: Absolutely, my personal life and my family life are very important to me. My husband and I have been married for 50 ½ years. We have two grown sons, a daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. They are a source both of fulfillment and strength to help me succeed in my careers. Likewise, I have been a source of help to them. In various ways, my traditional family roles with marriage and children have figured greatly in my successes.*

Rita's age, however, may contribute to the way she defines success. Price, a long-time

communications consultant suggests that her definitions of success have changed over

time, and that the older she gets the less important her career becomes.

> *PRICE: My career is very important to me – but it doesn't define me as much as it did when I was younger. My career is now just a <u>part</u> of who I am – not the whole. Now, it is a marriage of all of my skill sets being applied in a variety of areas of my life.*

Jalisa, too, describes things other than her career as most important to her, using

anecdotal evidence of her leaving a high-paying job for a low-paying one because she felt

unfilled. However, it is the privilege of making such a high salary (hers is almost $500K),

which allows her the freedom to make such choices.

> *JALISA: My career is not that important to me, doing things that I like to do is more important to me, which is why I left and then I was teaching for several years and doing other things. So if you want to stack up a career, if you call a career a succession of advancements those have probably not been very important to me. I've been to VP levels and step down to lower levels to take jobs that I thought were more interesting, gone back up, gone back down, I tend to chase the work that I want to do versus have this kind of, orderly career progression.*

Though very few of the women in this study specifically listed a salary as important to

their subjective definitions of success, money, along with age were useful in predicting

how Black professional define success.

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> *NOELLE: The one thing that I struggled with when I first came here is I'm a direct person. I like to have direct conversation and I like to know that we are on the same page. And I could not understand why in a meeting environment we would all be aligned and then I'd come back to my office and my email would be full of people questioning the things that we had just decided...they don't deal with things directly and a lot of Minnesotans have a challenge being honest and open about what they feel. They won't do it in a group environment, but they feel comfortable doing it in a one-on-one or through email. My challenge with the Minnesota thing is I think I'm the least aggressive person I know, but I am thought to be very aggressive and direct and that's a bad thing.*

According to Kendall, this is an entirely one-sided issue, with Black professional women adapting to this passive-aggressive communication style and never vice-versa. The burden is completely on them.

> *KENDALL: so what I need to work on is communicating passive aggressively, so my goal is to speak passive aggressively, and my action steps, you know and I'm sitting here and I'm like wait no, I can't believe I'm writing this, this is assimilation, so I scratch it all and so I write in the report "I feel like I cannot be myself, it is very difficult because my perspective is different my communication*

109

style, my world view. And instead of them coming to meet me, I have to do all the work."

Noelle uses an anecdote to highlight the basic differences between the way her white colleagues communicate and the way she communicates with her Black friends and family.

> *NOELLE: all along while we talk about mentors I think of my circle of older family and friends who are women guiding me from a foundation of who I am, who are mentors as well. So I have my godmother Ms. Lo, who is not a professional person, but she knows the graces of how you're supposed to act when you go out and she'll say [Noelle] your slip is showing, you know.*

Differences in communication styles, as well as unwillingness by White professionals in the area to acknowledge these differences, affects the ability Black women satisfy workplace expectations. The participants in the study were vocal about the importance of this issue, but they were at a loss for strategies (other than total assimilation) to overcome it.

Research Question 4:
How do these Black women use race, class, and gendered networks?

Study participants highlighted the networks Black professional women forged, both personally and professionally, as integral to their professional achievement. These social networks differed greatly in their race and gender makeup, which significantly defined how the networks were used. The following excerpts break down the types of networks

these women formed and their roles in facilitating professional success for the

participants.

Diverse Networking

Diversity, both in the race and gender makeup of group members, and the kinds of

professional groups of which they are members, was a useful component of professional

achievement for Black professional women. Noelle describes it a stepping out of one's

"comfort zone," suggesting that while achieving diverse networks is not easy, avoiding

such networking can forestall or abort continued professional achievement.

> *NOELLE: If you stay in your comfort zone and only deal with the people who are you like you, the same age, the same ethnicity the same gender, you're not going to progress very far.*

Mary cautions that gaining access to the "right" social networks is not easy, as it often

requires much trial and error. She strongly believes that how soon one is able to find the

right combination of group memberships is important to career success.

> *MARY: one of the things that you know I kind of came to the realization of this later in my career um and um I -- one of the things that I think from a benefits perspective, it would've been beneficial to have had access earlier, and I think that access is only if you know somebody in the community. It's not something that you know is highly publicized you know unless you're looking for, right? I mean the colleges that I went to were primarily you know they were not ranked. So if you knew about the National Black MBA it was kind of personal so it becomes more important when you're in business school not so much as an undergrad although it can be important then to. But you know there was not something that was highly publicized so for like when I was in business school I would've benefited greatly I think if I had had that, my personal life may have went a little different if um, if I had access at that point. You know with a career fair and so I mean I probably would've gone down a different path.*

Mentoring

Often in tandem with developing diverse social networks, establishing a strong base of

mentorship is important to professional success as well. Here, according to lawyer, Gina,

the race and gender of mentors does not matter; however being a Black professional

woman is often a hindrance to receiving quality mentorship in majority white

organizations.

> *GINA: find a mentor within the organization. If it's a woman, great. If it's an African American woman, great, but if it's not, so be it but find someone that's been in that organization, that's been in that field for a while that you feel like you, can trust and turn to and then also join whatever professional organizations there may be in that chosen field and then work with those organizations. Because those people have common experiences…I found it extremely difficult to find a mentor within this office. I think some organizations are designed and developed to do that more so. But I think this office it was difficult and I think because, I guess I should back up. When I originally came I had a really good friend here and I think there was this assumption that they were my mentor so other people just did a sort of hands off deal and that person I loved to death and he truly was a mentor but it would've been nice to have had another lawyer that would've taken the time to see me. I think it happens more now um they're just weren't prepared to have a black woman in the office. You know. I think now that there's been some recognition of it they're doing better.*

Noelle was able to find a mentor in a white, international, female supervisor, who she

describes as her "champion." She suggests, here, that a mentor must be willing to defend

you in battle. As many of the research participants described their career path as a battle,

finding a mentor willing to fight that battle with you in certainly important to your ability

to be successful.

> *NOELLE: she definitely made me recognize the value of managing up, and establishing friendships and connections and networks with folks that you traditionally wouldn't do that with…I think it's critical for you to always have someone who is going to be your champion and put you on the right path and connect you with the right people.*

112

Chanel suggests that more than being an advocate, a mentor's ability to connect you with the influential people is the mark of a great mentor. That it is often the white, male mentor with access to the most prominent social networks makes them the most sought after mentors.

> *CHANEL: I had a white male mentor who, I don't know, we just made a connection very early on in my time at university. I had him for a course and he was the dean of the graduate program there and so I started considering graduate school…He was one of the best mentors I had at the undergraduate level because I felt like he was not just able to introduce me to people, but get me connected within the university in the right way.*

Jane describes her mentor network as her "personal board of directors"; a diverse group of professionals chosen for the special skill sets, social networks, and amount of support they can provide and working together to ensure her success.

> *JANE: Yes, I have many mentors who are my "Personal Board of Directors" and these dynamic individuals have helped me tremendously by giving me career development advice, sponsorship, recommendations, tough love, and whatever I needed for specific situations.*

That many of the Black professional women in this study have specific people in mind, as well as detailed plans for the cultivation of useful mentoring relationships highlights the importance of mentorship for Black women looking to achieve professional success. For these women, good, reliable mentors are hard to come by, especially a mentor willing to advocate for a Black women despite the potential consequences.

113

Peer Support Networks

Though many women in the study highlighted the importance of diverse networking and quality mentorship, the role of peer support networks on the road professional achievement cannot be ignored. The connection to other women dealing with similar issues and experiences over which to bond, not only provided an outlet for frustrations and disappointments, but also opened doors to useful professional networks.

Chanel, a member of a popular Black sorority, highlights the dual roles of her sorority membership to both her personal and professional lives. She also credits finding a church home with the development of her peer support network.

> *CHANEL: I was in a sorority in undergrad, so that was an easy entrance for me for finding people here in the cities to get connected with and then I think once I made that connection through the sorority and the church, I found a church here and once I found those two connections it allowed me to tap into a more diverse group of mentors and so I think some of the other best mentors that I would know African American male, Glenda[26] being one of them, African American female.*

Noelle, a transplant to the Twin Cities area, submits that peer networks are even more important in cities with low diversity because of the difficulties in finding places to eat, get your hair done, and to worship.

> *NOELLE: When I first moved here it was kind of interesting because there was new group just forming called The Partnership and it was for newly relocated minority professionals to get acclimated within the city and become familiar with some of the cultural offerings and to network with people and I was like oh this is great, they're really progressive. They know it's a challenge for us to figure out where we can get out hair done or where you can go to church and all of these other things that they were introducing us to.*

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[26] Name changed

Gina echoed similar desires for peer support needs for her entire family. For those women

with children, peer networks serve the additional purpose of providing friendship and

support for children without regular contact with other non-white children.

> GINA*: Yeah a lot of the things I chose to do when I came to the cities because I had children when I came back here, my oldest daughter was eight and my youngest daughter was two, and I moved to Plymouth and we were the only African American family initially and then we had three other—two other families that moved in. And in the neighborhood I'm in now I'm the only one and so with my girls they were at school in Wayzata and I had to make the conscious decision that I did not want them around that and to grow up with that view so I joined Jack and Jill which is a wonderful organization for networking for the mother as well as for the children and I think if you're in an area like this you have to find a way to make your children feel welcome.*

> GINA: I wanted her to grow up knowing to have a solid foundation of who she was. So I made the choice to send her to Harvest preparatory and that was before it became a charter school it was a private school and I made that choice every day to bring her from Plymouth to the heart of Minneapolis to daycare and to preschool and I kept her at that school till she was 2nd or 3rd grade to keep her at who she was and you know she learned the national black anthem when she was very young she learned all these black historical figures as a young kid and she really got a keen sense of who she was and she was able to be around other African Americans because she didn't have any family and so I think as a parent you have to make that decision as to how you want your kids to see themselves.*

The development of a solid social network foundation, including a diverse combination

of collegial co-workers, and group membership, mentors committed to advocacy on your

part, and peer support, work together to help Black professional women achieve career

success.

Hidden Network Connections

Many of the participants in this study are at least tangentially connected to each other

either personally or professionally. This is a symptom of both the data collection method

– participant driven samples often generate selection biases which prevent the generalizability of study results out to a broader population – and indicative of a larger problem in the Twin Cities, lack of available spaces for Black women to bond over experiences in their personal or professional lives. The condensed network is in part a simple numbers issue. The fact is that this group of women comes from an insular community, both because of the importance of networking and the networking options available.

Many of the programs and organizations these women connect with purposely target the Twin Cities Black middle-class, as result it can only be assumed that though the participants may not know each other formally, they are all connected. In the end, there are only a finite number of women with whom, or organizations in which, these women feel comfortable, so even though they do not all personally know each other it is almost impossible to ask that they not be at least minimally connected. A social network analysis of group membership among study participants works to unpack these network connections.

In the Twin Cities, Black professional women use a small number of community and professional organizations to cope with their position as minorities in the area. The following table (TABLE 3) describes each organization, the percentage of study participants who are currently members or have been members in the past. It also identifies whether this group is used for personal or professional support.

Table 3: Organizational Membership of Study Participants

Group Name	Group Description[27]	Types of Support Provided by Group
Black Graduate and Professional Association	The primary mission of BGAPSA is to support graduate and professional students of African descent in their quest to graduation by building a community where they might express their successes and stresses, participate in social events and educational experiences, and engage in the broader community through service.	Professional
Black Law Students Association	The Black Law Students Association (BLSA) at the University of Minnesota is committed to promoting a legal environment of professional-minded black attorneys. We stand true to the ideals of our mission statement by providing a forum where black law students can express their unique needs and concerns while also promoting diversity in the law school.	Professional
Jack & Jill	The late Marion Stubbs Thomas founded Jack and Jill of America, Incorporated on January 24, 1938 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Twenty mothers came together to discuss creating an organization to provide social, cultural and educational opportunities for youth between the ages of two and nineteen. Today, Jack and Jill boasts over 220 chapters nationwide, representing over 30,000 family members.	Personal
National Black MBA	Established in 1970, the National Black MBA Association is dedicated to develop partnerships that result in the creation of intellectual and economic wealth in the black community.	Professional
Fellowship Church	Our Mission is to bring persons into a saving redemptive relationship with Jesus Christ. We are a spiritual body whose only foundation is the Word of God. We fulfill our ministry as we preach and teach, pray and empower, forgive and reconcile. FMBC seeks to be a congregation that ministers to all of its members and values its youth by religiously educating them so that they may live balanced and fruitful lives.	Personal
Omarose	A book club for African-American women in the Twin Cities to read and discuss books with Black authors and/or a subject matter centered on the African-American culture.[28]	Personal

[27]All group descriptions are direct quotes from the organizations online Mission Statements and are not a reflection of the research participants perceptions of the group.

[28] Objective information was not available for this organization. In its place participants were asked to define the group as objectively as possible. Any subjective comments were disregarded.

| Minneapolis Urban League	Founded in 1926, the mission of the Minneapolis Urban League is to link African descendants and other people of color to opportunities that result in economic success and prosperity, and effectively advocate for policies that eradicate racial disparities.	Professional
Black Sororities	For 104 years, the oldest Greek-letter organization for African-American women, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., has been in the forefront of providing "Service to All Mankind." Since the chartering of Delta Phi Omega we have worked hard to serve countless individuals and families throughout the Twin Cities drawing on strength, dedication and a commitment to serve. We plan to impart a legacy of sisterhood, selflessness, leadership, academia, and service all while continuing to strive to uphold the ideals of our beloved Founders. Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. is an organization of college educated women committed to constructive development of its members and to public service with a primary focus of the Black community	Personal Professional

The Social Network Silo

Using a participant driven samples assures that the participants in this study are at least connected in pairs. However, as highlighted in Table 4, because of the limited numbers of available culturally focused organizations available in the Twin Cities, many of the women in this study belong to similar social networks. This is not to say that all the participants are friends, or even belong to the same social group, but many of these women have interacted as a result of their group membership. Black women in the Twin Cities exist in a social network silo, that is, these women are connected, even when they do not know each other personally. More specifically, much like a corn silo on a farm, Black women's opportunities for personal and professional networking in the Twin Cities are set in a defined amount of available space (or organizations in this case). In a corn silo those kernels at the bottom have no direct connection to those at the top and yet they

still share two important details, they exist under the same confines and are weakly tied to one another. Black women in the Twin Cities share these similar weak connections, an unintended consequence of being a small population, and having a relatively small number of organizational opportunities. The result is a condensed network of Black female professionals simultaneously competing for positions and resources, and providing an intricate support system for one another. This social demographic trait made collecting participants using a participant driven sampling method especially difficult, as multiple people were offered as potential participants, often by women, whom by their own admission, they did not know personally.

Figure 8 below illustrates the make-up of the social network connections discovered in conducting this research. This map suggests that though the study participants do not feel connected or perceive the Twin Cities as difficult to navigate as a minority professional, the social network silo is structured to provide both personal and professional support.

Figure 8: Participants Network Connections Map
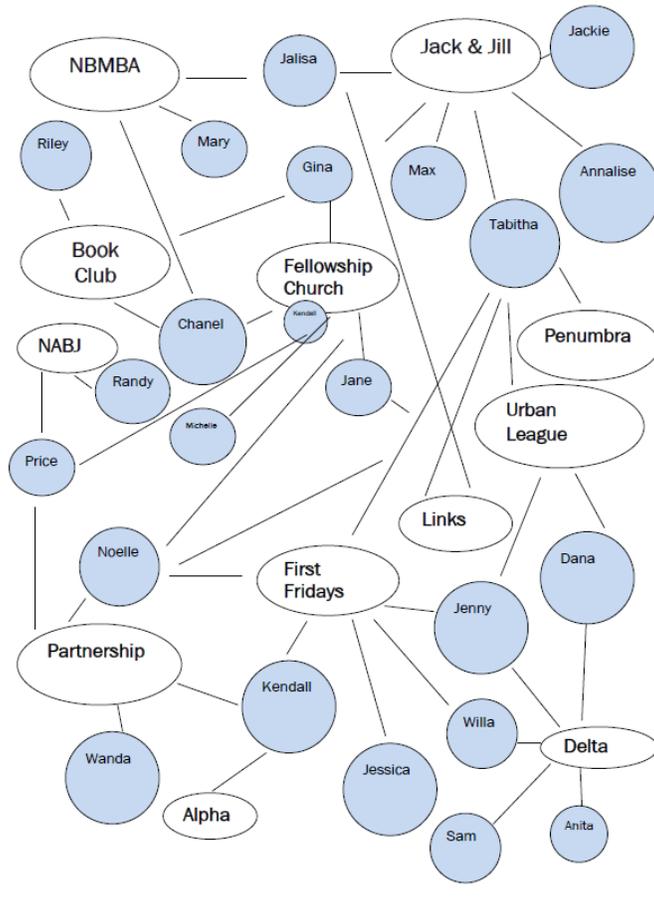
While it is not a new insight to suggest that background networks are important to the study of Black professional women because of their role in organizing and promoting ways of thinking among them, the existence of and reliance on such a network, given its small demographic size and socially expansive nature, provides new insight as to how Black-targeted programs within the network are used by the women in this study and to what effect. Throughout the study two parallel uses for the social networks of Black

professional women in the Twin Cities developed, one to achieve professional goals and

the other to realize cultural expectations and achieve goals set forward by those

expectations. For some women the networks serve a very straightforward, material

purpose, access to mentoring or potential jobs, for others it is a means to staying

connected to and continuing uplift work in the Black community.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe participants' experiences as Black professional women in the Minneapolis and Saint Paul Metropolitan area. Using the proposed research questions,

1. What combinations of factors associated with race, class, and gender do these Black women perceive have the greatest impact on the career trajectories of Black women?

2. What are racial and gendered expectations outside of the workplace these Black women perceive complicate their career trajectories?

3. How do these Black professional women perceive the politics of class, as well as race and gender impact their career trajectories?

4. How do these Black women use race, class, and gendered networks?

The study was able to get a glimpse into the lives and decision-making procedures of Black professional women in the Twin Cities as they navigate their careers and attempt to climb the ladder to career success.

The unique and specific characteristics of Black women's relationships to their career trajectories, as well as to each other, in the Twin Cities suggests that the maintenance of their careers carries a particular importance which differs greatly from men, or non-Black women in the same area. Given the importance of understanding the lives of not just lower class Black women, to which most social science research gives precedence, but middle and upper-class Black women as well, an investigation into what

contributes to the professional success of these women was warranted. A survey of literature provided some direction for the exploratory research questions that guided the development of the interview protocol.

Participants included in this study included 35 Black professional women across three categories of objective success (less successful $n=7$, moderately successful $n=10$, very successful $n=17$)[29] living and working in the Twin Cities area. The primary researcher and a research assistant conducted face-to-face, telephone, or email interviews. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, coded using Atlas TI, and then analyzed using the Straussian School of grounded theory methodology. Data analysis revealed twelve themes and three core ideas as a basis for the theoretical conceptualization of the Black female professional experience.

The interview data suggests time, either time spent doing community uplift work or fulfilling traditional roles, and potential for professional advancement contribute most to objective dimensions of success. More specifically, those expectations, which require extensive time commitments, are negatively correlated with their contribution to the professional success of Black women. Those that directly affect potential for professional advancement, such as mentorship, parenthood, and community engagement, are positively correlated.

Though the participants in this study had varied attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, the similarities in their responses suggest that professional Black women in the Twin

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[29] One participant, "Price", declined to provide salary information

Cities exist as a cohesive subculture. The values and beliefs rooted amongst them, that professional success results in spite of race and gender, rather than because of them, and the end goal – regardless of your personal definitions of professional success – is existing outside of stereotypical ideals of what a Black woman "is," highlights the perceptions by these women of race, more than gender, as vital aspect of their everyday lives. However, intersectionality theory tells us that gender cannot be separate from race and vice versa, even if the participants in the study believe it to be true.

The results of this study suggest a similar, more informal, system defines the career trajectories of Black women based on internal valuations of professional success. They are forced to answer the question, "what is more important to me, career or family/community? They are tracked into one of two groups of professional based on their answers. More specifically, in order to be objectively successful as Black women in the Twin Cities, there is an "iron cage" of requirements to which one must adhere (Weber 1949). Black women are expected to distance themselves from the politics associated with their racial and ethnic identities. They must work under white or often male mentors, and forgo traditional heteronormative social roles, like marriage and family – or at least forgo traditional timelines for such roles, and lastly, they must adopt the passive-aggressive, non-affected communication styles of the white, Minnesotan majority. Such efforts trap Black women in an iron cage of professional success that hinders their ability to strive for more subjective dimensions of success, like community engagement, or personal fulfillment. Borne out of this is a dichotomous set of roles as responses to this reality; the "depoliticized laborer" and the "cultural workhorse".

The "Depoliticized Laborer"

For the "depoliticized laborer", work is a setting where the politics associated with race and genders are forcibly stripped in favor of less threatening characteristics within an organization. Neutralizing one's office décor, communication style, dress, hairstyles, political affiliation, and even the Black body more generally on the road to advancement work as tools to attract white, and/or male mentors, and encourage promotion. This depoliticization differs from assimilation in that it is not simply the adoption of an alternative culture. The term assimilation is often misused to describe the change in behavior of minorities in majority white social groups. Assimilation is not simply the adoption of alternative behaviors and it is not always a conscious process. More specifically, assimilation is the gradual acceptance of the norms, attitudes, and customs of the dominant culture. Conversely, depoliticization is the conscious decision to suppress those cultural norms, values, and attitudes that imply identity politics in favor of a more neutral identity.

The Black women in this study do not perceive themselves as assimilating into the white, male business world. Instead, after careful review of the expectations within their given organization, those women who have adopted the role of depoliticized laborer perceive their neutral professional identities as a necessary evil in route to career success. They understand and carefully vet each choice and utilize cultural peer and/or friend groups as spaces where neutrality is not a prerequisite, providing support and understanding about the burden of success for Black women, the iron cage of their professional success.

The "Cultural Workhorse"

The "Cultural Workhorse" also experiences professional success, however, the women who have chosen to inhabit this role made the decision to focus their ideas of success on more value-laden objectives, such as community engagement and traditional familial roles. Black women are historically expected to work as community builders within the Black culture. Rather than focus all of their efforts on achieving professional success, they are counted on to reach back and uplift the Black community.

The Black women in this study who have chosen to take on this role invest their time as members of community-focused organizations, working as mentors to other young Blacks in the area, typically opt to work in less demanding occupations with more flexible work hours. This enables them to spend more time with family, at church, or doing additional types of uplift work. These women perceive themselves as living above the fray. They understand the pressures and demands of the "Depoliticized Laborer" role and opt not to subject themselves to that kind of lifestyle. In the minds of these Black women, true success is more about achieving subjective goals like reasonable work hours, comfortable salaries, and the freedom to assert one's cultural identity. For them, the demands of family and community, though often comparably stressful to the demands of experienced by the "Depoliticized Laborer", are viewed as more worthwhile and are therefore more acceptable endeavors to pursue.

According to Weber (1949) ideal types are useful tool for analyzing and interpreting particular social phenomena. The use of ideal types does not equal a claim of

direct connection with social reality. As such, it is not the goal of this discussion to assert the validity of these roles in speaking for all the experiences of Black women. Instead, these ideal types should be used as an interpretation of the phenomena highlighted throughout the data analysis process. The disadvantages of this kind of cultural tracking are similar to those of educational tracking, as they do not reflect the professional abilities of Black women, but are, rather, a reflection of what is important to Black professional women as individuals. Likewise, cultural tracking stigmatizes Black women as incapable of handling the pressures of high-level executive positions rather than recognizing their unwillingness to take on the extensive responsibilities associated with such positions.

Lived Experiences (Making the Leap)

Inhabiting the role of the "Depoliticized Laborer" or the "Cultural Workhorse" is not a static occurrence. One need not become a depoliticized laborer and continue in that role for the remainder of her career. Likewise, a Black woman may not endure the burdens of the cultural workhorse role for her entire life. These roles are fluid, and Black women can move between them with relative ease. In fact, many of the women in this study describe this transition as a conscious choice derived from some major life change. Often the women from the less successful category transitioned from "Cultural Workhorse" to "Depoliticized Laborer" in an effort to reach some major career milestone. These transitions usually correlated to a jump from the less successful to moderately successful categories. Conversely, the women in the very successful (and to a lesser extent the

moderately successful) category often moved from "Depoliticized Laborer" to "Cultural Workhorse" after feeling more professional established and in favor of more family and community-related goals.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

A primary strength of this study is the fit between the research topic, research participants, and research methodology. The slim array of academic work grounding the Black female experience in existing theory uses Black feminist thought as a tool of critical scientific inquiry for validating those experiences. As a researcher and a Black woman, I have been tasked with the creation of knowledge amidst my shared experiences of marginalization. The combination of research topic, participants, and methodology create research that is not simply *about* Black women, but also *for* them. In the true spirit of Black feminist thought, I have learned as much about being an academic and a Black woman, as I have about the experiences of my research participants.

The main limitation of this study is its' dependence on Black women's perceptions of outside expectations. Without interviewing co-workers and family members, or observing participants at work, at home, or in the community this research cannot reach any conclusions about actual racism or gender discrimination in the workplace, or race and gendered expectations of individual family or community members. Instead, it is addressing the perceptions of such issues by Black professional women and connecting those perceptions to levels of professional success. An additional limitation is the inability of the findings to generalize to larger populations of Black

professional women. Comparative studies are necessary to measure whether or not

perceptions match up with reality.

Methodological Fit

Qualitative methodology, Grounded Theory in particular, is often referred to as a feminist

methodology because of its ability to highlight the lived experiences of women.

Moreover,

> "Since women have so often been relegated to the private, domestic arena, their actions in everyday life define them in a way that is not the case for men, who are accustomed to defining themselves in the public arena and who exist as actors in a world of abstract thought and concrete public action (Weiler, 1988: 60)."

Likewise, Black women have been relegated to the background of academic research

unless they are poor and/or uneducated. Their daily actions define them in a completely

different way than men, or even white women. The experiences of individuals are a direct

reflection of the influence of race and gender on everyday life. Likewise, Black Feminist

Thought supports the use of qualitative methods, like Grounded Theory, to fill the gaps in

knowledge about the Black female experience. Therefore, attempting to comprehend the

lives of professional Black women means that we are interested in a very specific form of

material life, where the consciousness of these women is grounded in experiences which

are neither white, nor male, and thus often ignored by the academy. Qualitative

methodology also utilizes a phenomenological paradigm; defining experiences as socially

constructed identities – whether individual or collective. As such, the grounded theory

method, as a feminist methodology, was best fit as they tool a choice to study the Black professional women at the center of this study.

Future Directions and Conclusions

The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul provided a useful initial setting for research on Black professional women because of its position at the forefront of potential ethnic tensions sparked by large populations of Black Africans in the area. Such tensions potentially exacerbate issues within the professional experiences of Black Americans sharing the same space. Comparison studies on Black professional women in other metropolitan cities across the United States with varying racial demographics will more specifically highlight the degree to which ethnic tensions affect these experiences.

In both the case of the "Depoliticized Laborer" and the "Cultural Workhorse", Black professional women are disenchanted by their professional reality. Each is forced to choose between "value-rational actions" – those important to the actor in and for itself, and "instrumental-rational actions" – those completed for employers and institutions. Such loss of agency leaves these women wholly unfilled; trapped in an iron cage.

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APPENDIX A – CONSENT FORM

You are invited to be in a research study of network membership and personal sacrifice for Black women as part of my doctoral dissertation. You were selected as a possible participant because of your status as a Black female professional. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Jasmine L. Harris-LaMothe, Sociology, University of Minnesota

Background Information:

This study seeks to understand how network membership affects professional success for Black women. What types of networks are necessary for these women to be successful and what, if any, personal sacrifices are made for entry into these networks? This study examines the differences in network membership and personal sacrifice across levels of success.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to be interviewed and permit me to observe you in your workplace (with notes gathered in person by the researcher or via videotapes). The interview includes open-ended questions regarding your career, your

ethnic culture and the difficulties you have balancing the two. A sample of the questions you will be asked are: Do you feel you have to tone-down your ethnic heritage in the workplace? If so, in what ways? Has your race and/or gender affected the amount of power you have the workplace? Have you ever been looked over for a promotion because of your race/gender?

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

This study presents minimal risks, and there are no direct benefits to participating in it.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we 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 the records. Any video recordings made will be kept under lock and key by the principal investigator (myself) and only for expressed research use.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Jasmine L. Harris-LaMothe. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at (952) 380-8742, harr0954@umn.edu. Or you can contact my advisor Phyllis Moen, at (612) 625-5483 or by email at phylmoen@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: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____

(If minors are involved)

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B – PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

Name	Jalisa	Gina	Noelle	Rachel	Rashida
Marriage Status	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Children	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No
Occupation	Finance Executive	Attorney	Bank Executive	Business Director	Attorney
Salary	$500K/year	$120K/year	$200K/year	$400K/year	$150K/year

Name	Annalise	Mary	Price	Stacy	Tami
Marriage Status	Yes	No	No	No	No
Children	Yes	No	No	No	No
Occupation	Higher Ed Administration	Business Executive	Communications Executive	Professor	Professor
Salary	$80K/year	$250K/year	Declined to provide	$76K/year	$70K/year

Name	Tanya	Chanel	Tabitha	Dana	Kendall
Marriage Status	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Children	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Occupation	Journalist	Retail Executive	Politician	Psychologist	Professor
Salary	$200K/year	$90K/year	$100K/year	$105K/year	$80K/year

Name	Rita	Jane	Randy	Nikki	Gabi
Marriage Status	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Children	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Occupation	Doctor	Communications Executive	Human Resources Executive	Education Administration	Non-profit
Salary	$225K/year	$150K/year	$120K/year	$100K/year	$45K/year

Name	Sam	Francesca	Jackie	Michelle	Max
Marriage Status	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Children	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Occupation	Surgeon	Clergy	PR Executive	Writer	Social Worker
Salary	$450K/year	$37K/year	$90K/year	$75K/year	$31K/year

Name	Cheryl	Natasha	Willa	Riley	Jessica
Marriage Status	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Children	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Occupation	Pilot	Caretaker	Consultant	Administration Assistant	Publishing
Salary	$115K/year	$42K/year	$65K/year	$52K/year	$250K/year

Name	Jenny	Wanda	Anita	Diane	Kimberly
Marriage Status	No	No	No	No	Yes
Children	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Occupation	University administration	Scientist	Teacher	Security	Retail
Salary	$90K/year	$310K/year	$67K/year	$40K/year	$35K/year