ABSTRACT

Title of Document:	A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF FOUR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S WORK EXPERIENCES ACROSS FOUR DIVERSE FIELDS AND THE MEANING CONSTRUCTED AT THE INTERSECTION OF RACE AND GENDER
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African American women have been disparaged in the workplace because of their embodied characteristics – race and gender. It is a little understood phenomenon how African American women have put forth the public agency to become pioneers in the workforce within this context. The purpose of this study is to explore how African American women, who are perceived as pioneers within the workforce of banking, education, law, and organized religion, construct self-defined standpoints. The study is guided by the research question – what do the narratives of African American women, who work in the domains of banking, education, law, and organized religion, reveal about how they construct meanings of self-valuation, self-definition, and standpoint from their workplace experiences? The compatible methods of constructivism, feminist interpretive, and narrative inquiry research are employed to collect the data. Four professional African American women comprise the purposeful sampling. The

participants construct and articulate self-described workplace experiences, which they consider discriminatory or oppressive at the intersection of race and gender, and their responses to the experiences. The 60-90 minute dialogic interview sessions were recorded and transcribed. Excerpts from the text were coded, identified according to emerging themes and categories, and reconstructed to reflect the described experience. Analyses and interpretation of the reconstructed statements were accomplished, using narrative analysis, constant comparison analysis, and a qualitative data analysis software. The findings reveal:

1. An emerging pattern illustrates one way that the four African American women develop a self-defined standpoint (worldview).

2. The participants expose religion/spirituality, role models, and mentors as the components of their support systems.

3. None of the four participants commits acts of public activism to address incidents of discrimination or oppressive structures at their job sites.

4. The relationship between the experiences of the Black women leaders and their consciousness is reciprocal; experiences and consciousness inform each other.

5. The four participants link aspects of their self-valuation and self-definition to their leadership attributes.

6. Participants speak in terms of how they 'felt' when they describe their experiences related to discrimination and oppression. Yet, race consciousness appears to be more intense than gender consciousness.

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WOMEN'S WORK EXPERIENCES ACROSS FOUR DIVERSE FIELDS
AND THE MEANING CONSTRUCTED AT THE
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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2005),

African American women represent the largest rate of employment (7.6 percent of the

total work force in 2001) among women of color. The number of African American

women who are reported as officials and managers has increased from 111,318 to

195,784, three percent of all positions in management ranks. But, Black women have

made the smallest gains with regard to total employment and higher-level positions.

African American women hold a disproportionate number of positions as sales workers,

clericals, and service jobs. Nursing and residential care facilities employ the largest

percentages (23.4 percent) of African American women (p. 2).

African American, or Black, is an expression used in the United States (U.S.) to

describe people of color who are of African descent. The term African American

women, within this dissertation, is used interchangeably with the term Black women.

This study concentrates on the working experiences of professional Black women, who,

based on the perspective of King and Ferguson (2001), include

> those who define themselves as ongoing participants in the paid or unpaid labor
>
> force (e.g., political action, community service), who internalize a view of
>
> themselves as having a professional identity, and who are developing or have
>
> developed expertise through training, education, or experience for purposes of
>
> maintaining a career over the course of the life span (p. 126).

Within the U. S., the dominant culture, or hegemony, is the group of people with

the greatest political, social, and economic power to oppress those with lesser amounts of

the same powers. Groups such as African American women who have a lesser amount of power are relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy or are subjected to subordination. Collins (2000) outlines four domains of power – structural, disciplinary, hegemonic and interpersonal. First, the structural domain of power is how social institutions are organized to exclude Black women from living in decent housing or from getting certain jobs or positions, thereby reproducing women's subordination within due course. Bureaucracy is the power that promotes policies that control the workforce and clients as well so as to advance or retain oppressive structures. Next, the structural and disciplinary domains of power operate through systemwide social policies, while the hegemonic domain of power deals with ideology, culture, and consciousness and acts as a link between social institutions and everyday activities. Finally, the interpersonal domain of power functions through day-to-day practices of how people treat one another.

Members of the hegemonic group, through interaction with African American women over time, have categorized the meaning of Black women's actions. Individuals have internalized these meanings and the meanings have been embedded into society as a belief system regarding what is true. In addition, the way that African American women are perceived, based on these meanings, no matter how erroneous, have been presented as normal, common practices, as customary and/or usual. Social reality therefore becomes socially constructed when the determinations made about Black women by the hegemony are embedded into the institutions and structures of society (Allen, 2007).

The expected roles and behaviors of African American women or Black women have been historically influenced by the socially constructed ideas of the dominant group. Markers such as race, gender, and class are examples of the distinctions that the dominant

group has used to determine the placement of Black women in the social hierarchy. African American women in the U. S. are a distinctive group because we possess two highly visible markers - race and gender. We, as Black women, are often faced with societal perceptions about us because of these markers. Further, societal beliefs about African American women, based on these markers, are often manifested in our everyday working lives as discriminatory action or oppressive structures.

"Women's economic history shows how, for centuries, sex has inscribed a durable inequality into the structure of American labor markets that civil and political rights have moderated but not removed" (Katz, Stern & Fader, 2005, p. 65). King and Ferguson (2001) state that "black [sic] women had only begun to enter the professional ranks in significant numbers in the 1970s" (p. 4), due in large part to federal civil rights and women's rights legislation and class action lawsuits. Katz et al. (2005) report that

> in 1910, 95 percent of its [banks'] employees were men; in 2000, 69 percent were women. As women moved into clerical work, taking the position of teller, men moved into management and professional positions (p. 79) and after 1970, women made striking inroads into both management and professional and technical positions in banking and credit (p. 80).

Murtadha and Watts (2005) declare that, historically, Black educational leaders overcame barriers (social constructions, lack of resources, qualified teachers) to create schools that were of service to the African American community. "Motivated by the belief that education would 'uplift the race,' women and men organized and developed institutions to mitigate the hash realities of Black life…" (p. 591). Alston (2000) examines the history of hiring in administration (educational leadership or

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superintendency) and discovers that while there are more women in the workplace, the administrative ranks of most professions still remain predominantly male and predominantly White. "Women and minorities [African American women] in American society are accustomed to the contemporary reality of having to 'prove themselves' in a world that privileges White males" (Tribble, 2005, p. 71). Yet, "despite a long history of being locked out of prominent positions in higher education, African American women have, over the last few years, taken over top leadership jobs at mainstream colleges and universities across the country" (Watson, 2004, p. 1).

Similarly, African American women in increasing numbers are becoming preachers in Black churches. These Black women are highly qualified and competent, i.e., they have earned seminary degrees, have been college-educated and ordained and certified. But, they still "struggle against oppressive forces of racism, sexism, and classism in church…" (Tribble, p. 60).

In the field of law, Pilgram (1986) reports, "Mayor LaGuardia appointed the first Black woman to a judgeship in the U. S. in 1939" (p. 180). *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* confirms that it was not until 1956 that the first Black woman graduated from Harvard Law School (Black Women, 2000-2001). But, by 2000/2001, there were 1,654 Black women enrolled at the fifty highest-ranked law schools in the United States. No matter the work domain of choice for Black women, "overcoming hurdles *to enter* nontraditional fields is one thing; gaining respect *to be promoted* in these fields is another thing" (Tribble, 2005, p. 71).

Conditions of African American women's lives have been constrained by socially constructed perceptions since the days of slavery. The dominant social group assumed that Black women were promiscuous, immoral, and unintelligent. When Black women slaves were freed, the cultural majority treated African American or Black women in America as a marginalized group. Negative controlling images and stereotypes of African American women in the U. S., such as mammies, jezebels, Aunt Jemimas, Black prostitutes, welfare mothers, and 'hoochies,' were applied to Black women to justify oppression. Hegemonic ideas have permeated the social structure to such a degree that the ideas were, and are, seen as natural, normal, inevitable, and legitimate.

Freed Black women organized movements or became part of other women's rights movements to respond to the challenges confronted. These organized movements sponsored discussions of women's issues, which resulted in the development of feminist and gender theories that furthered the causes of the women's rights movement. But, a dispute occurred during the 1970s between Black and White women about the focus and the priorities of the women's rights movement. Black feminism as a theoretical framework, which was not considered a part of mainstream research or the thinking about African American women in America, was publicly connected to a Black women's standpoint. A Black women's standpoint is the collective responses of Black women regarding their experiences at intersecting oppressions and their oppositional knowledge (Collins 1991, 2000). When women of color used the self-identifying term of 'Black feminists,' some members of the hegemonic group publicly ridiculed the Black women

because they considered the term 'Black feminists' to be pejorative. But, African American women, as a group and with a diverse group of supporters and backers, have continued their struggle to achieve equal rights in the U. S.

Historically, African American women have dared to challenge their location and treatment in the structures of the dominant social order and the legitimization of the dominant social order's knowledge claims and power over them. The struggle still continues today with African American women challenging the social and political constructs that limit their access to liberties and rights afforded others in the U. S. The fight for equal rights is further complicated by the manifestation of the dominant race's negative beliefs about the roles that Black women can assume in society, along with the stereotypic assessment of the characteristics and traits of African American women in the workplace. Black women, because of their intersectionality as both 'women' and 'of color,' are positioned as a marginalized group within both identity groups within the American social structures. Therefore, I believe that we – Black women as a group – have diverse perspectives because of the treatment we receive in America from the hegemonic group and the choices that are available to us within our worksites.

I also believe that controlling negative images, stereotypes, and oppressive workplace structures have more than a superficial effect on the individual Black woman or Black women as a group of human beings. Experiences with controlling negative images, stereotypes, and discriminatory or oppressive work structures influence how African American women construct knowledge about their self-valuation, self-definition, and self-defined standpoint. Self-valuation is the African American woman's display of aspects of her identity that may be maligned by the negative stereotypes of society.

Self-definition is the Black woman's internalized positive conceptualization of her identity that empowers her to take social action to eliminate the negative perceptions that society may have about that identity. The existence of self-definition is an essential ingredient for developing a self-defined standpoint. A self-defined standpoint is how African American women think, what African American women say, and what African American women do about an issue.

In this study, I conduct research, using qualitative data that concerns the construction of knowledge. As Williamson (2006) explains, construction is synonymous with meanings:

> Constructivism or meaning-making is an interpretivist paradigm that is concerned with the meanings and experiences of human beings. The central tenet is that people are constantly involved in interpreting their everchanging world, especially their social world, which is constructed by people (p. 84).

Therefore, a constructivist framework is used because this study is concerned with how people construct their worlds. "Actors interpret the meanings of their own actions and those of others with whom we [they] interact" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 193). Interpretivists reconstruct the self-understanding of actors engaged in particular action.

A limited number of research studies has sought to understand the impact on Black women of being placed in a subjugated location. However, the knowledge that Black women produced, or African American women's self-valuation, self-definition and self-defined standpoint, have not been examined in depth. So, the focus of this study is how African American women define themselves within the confines of race and gender.

This study mainly concentrates on the public life – workplace experience – versus the private life of each participant. Furthermore, the topic of this study is comprehensively explored with only Black women participants who are pioneers within their respective workplaces.

The purposeful sampling of participants facilitates understanding the intersection of race and gender because both markers are embodied in each one of the individual participants. Further, Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996) assert that

> Black women represent an untapped source of significant research opportunity as a correlational lens through which many dynamics [issues of race, gender, class, colorism, and different backgrounds] can be simultaneously studied. Viewing Black women as a separate entity or including issues of race, gender, class, and color does not crowd or dilute the research agenda nor does it skew the focus from Blacks, women, or Whites. It merely completes the research picture (p. 155).

The Black women participants deconstruct (dismantle and analyze components of their beliefs) and construct (use mental synthesis to interpret or explain or create meaning from an experiential occurrence) stories and reflections. This rearticulation (retelling) of events yields descriptions of workplace situations that have been previously experienced.

This study spotlights the thinking of four members of one historically constructed group – African American women. Yet, the social location and individual agency of each participant in this study are considered most important. First, special attention is centered on the intersectionality of race and gender in the workplace when the markers are embodied in one individual. Black women's impressions about the intersection of race

and gender and Black women's collective responses to self-described oppressive or discriminatory incidents are interpreted. Next, African American women's core belief system in the form of self-valuation and how African American women display their Black womanhood in the form of self-definition are interpreted. Then, the way that Black women construct knowledge from their workplace experiences and develop a Black women's standpoint that is forged by their workplace experiences and their responses to those experiences is analyzed.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how African American women who are perceived as local pioneers within the workforce realms of banking, education, law, and organized religion, construct self-defined standpoints about their workplace experiences at the intersection of race and gender. The participants have been among the first group of African American women who have assumed leadership positions within their respective workforce realms. The representation of African American women from different workplaces as participants in this study is more than a mere footnote, and it was designed to include only African American women as participants, for two reasons. First, I wanted to create a forum where the voices of African American women leaders and pioneers could be heard. Second, I wanted to conduct a project that would add to the body of research about African American women. Therefore, the participation of African American women who have had workplace experiences in the four domains of banking, education, law, and organized religion, was solicited.

Mattis (2002) believes that "the failure to attend to meaning has been especially evident in research on the lives of African American women" (p. 19). Generally, knowledge, when constructed by a subordinate group such as Black women, is viewed by the dominant social group as subjugated knowledge, which is generally collected and blended with the whole of a study. At other times, subjugated knowledge is kept separate from the main body of work and is interpreted based on Euro-centric standards.

It is important that the perspectives of African American women who work or have worked across diverse fields be collected, analyzed, and interpreted. This collected data – the perspectives of Black women of different ages who worked across diverse fields – has enriched the findings, which relate to Black women's standpoint about workplace experiences at the intersection of gender and race. Themes and categories capture the influence of lessons learned from previous experiences on the Black women's viewpoint; the impact of self-described incidents on participants' self-valuation, self-definition, and self-defined standpoint; strategies for survival in the workplace; participants' diverse responses to discriminatory or oppressive workplace incidents; the visibility of Black women leaders at the worksite, and the support system for Black women leaders at a cross-section of work domains, not just in one area.

Research Question

The research question relates principally to the constructed knowledge of African American women, while drawing attention to the centrality of gender and race in the workplace experiences of four African American women. The impact and influence that the intersection of race and gender has on the work-related experiences of African

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American women are also examined, as are the responses that African American women have to workplace experiences related to the intersection of race and gender. Consequently, the research question inquires:

What do the narratives of African American women, who work in the domains of banking, education, law, and organized religion, reveal about how they construct meanings of self-valuation, self-definition, and standpoint from their workplace experiences?

Relevance

This project gives a voice to each of the African American women, who are perceived as local pioneers within the four workforce realms of banking, education, law, and organized religion, with the understanding that coming to voice involves more than simply speaking out. As Lindsay (2000) states, "the stories we reveal as we tell each other of our experiences have meaning in terms of what we do with other people" (p. 165). Forman (1994) confirms that coming to voice also "involves a process of self-realization within the personal struggle to define one's social identity" (p. 41).

The participants in this study are four Black women who are perceived as local pioneers because they were among the first African American women to assume a leadership position in the workforce fields of banking, education, law, and organized religion. The four participants have earned credentials as professional Black women with middle class socio-economic status. But, they are everyday identities (role models and mentors), not mega-media superstars, and thus might give the reader a realistic sense that their own goals might be achieved (Guy-Sheftall, 2002; Radford-Hill, 2002; Springer,

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2002). Today, young Black women have access to different political and social landscapes and employment opportunities that were denied to African American women a mere thirty years ago. But, some of the same racial and sexist injustices that Black women wrestled with in the past still exist today, especially in the private sector (King & Ferguson, 2001; McGlowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004-2005). Brush (2005) explains, "we cannot assume that the institutional, cultural, and interpersonal dimensions of racism [sexism] end where expanded opportunity structures and pronouncement of racial [gender] equality begin" (p. 194).

The findings of this study have intergenerational implications for African American women – mothers, daughters, and sisters - by providing an understanding of how Black women leaders who were pioneers in their career choices traversed through their workday lives. Thus the findings might urge and inspire young women's leadership and activism in the struggle to dismantle sexist and racist behaviors and improve the women-women and women-men relationships in Black communities. The findings of the study might also serve as lessons learned (knowledge gained) by other African American women that may be transferable, not generalizable, to current and future generations of Black women, who might use the knowledge gained to foster their resiliency and develop survival skills and knowledge when they face some of the same situations.

This study informs our knowledge of self-valuation, self-definition, and standpoint, and in so doing, helps to broaden the knowledge base about African American women. It also explores how meanings of race and gender emerge and interrelate in the workplace for Black women leaders. As a result, the findings of this

study add to the body of research that concerns how meanings of race and gender interconnect when embodied in one individual.

Organization of Study

This dissertation is conducted and written within the tradition of constructivism, which is an interpretivist paradigm, a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), and qualitative interpretive research. Also, feminist thinking is used to foreshadow the research text and to avoid treating the participants as objectified subjects of a study. Moreover, the research methods influenced my style of writing the research text, as well as my involvement in this project as a learner. The use of the researcher's "I" conveys a sense of social significance in my connection with the "they," the participants.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the qualitative study, its focus, purpose, research questions, relevance/significance, and definitions. Chapter 2 includes my personal perspective that was the basis for beginning this dissertation. Then, salient points from the existing body of literature and research studies are provided to support my arguments about how to understand the meaning that African American women in the U. S. make from their workplace experiences. Chapter 3 is comprised of the description of the methodological approaches used to conduct the study. I outline the design of the study, the recruitment and selection of participants, collection of data, and analysis of that data, using the options of the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 2.0, and a heuristic map. I also address the issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations in this section.

Chapter 4 contains the introductions of the participants, along with their accompanying biographical information, and describes workplace incidents. The details of the bedrock of my constructed heuristic map, which are drawn from a review of the related research and constant comparative analysis, are detailed. I present the findings – the analyses and interpretations of the data – in Chapter 5, and analyze the usefulness and significance of the heuristic map as a theoretical framework. In Chapter 6, I discuss the findings about the phenomenon of interest based on the research literature and the limitations of the study, and finally, offer implications for theory (practice), policy, and further research. The Appendices provide the reader with copies of the communications with the organizations that nominated participants, and with the participants, and institutional review board forms, the demographic form, and interview protocol and guide questions. Node listings (coding), results of the coding process, a copy of one lexical search, and the heuristic map with its theoretical components are also included to illustrate the capacity of the qualitative software, NVivo 2.0.

Definitions

The following words and terms frequently appear throughout the dissertation. Their definitions are included in this section to provide the meaning of each of the words and terms, so that there will be a common understanding between the researcher and the reader. Collins (2000) is selected as the main reference resource, inclusive of explications from related research literature and my own experiences.

WORD OR TERM	MEANING
African American or Black	Expressions used in the U. S. to describe people of color who are of African descent
Consciousness	Strong awareness of one's perceptions, thoughts, and concerns - political and social, for example – and having the public agency to respond accordingly when experiencing discrimination
Construct	Act of using mental synthesis to interpret or explain or create meaning that is derived from an experiential occurrence
Constructivism	Synonymous with meaning making. One approach focuses on personally constructed reality. The other approach focuses on the shared meanings developed by a group for their activities together, i.e., social construction.
Controlling images	Hegemonic ideas permeating the social structure to such a degree that they are seen as natural, normal, and legitimate; when attached to Black women in the U. S., they are used as justifications for oppression.
Deconstruct	Dismantle and analyze components of beliefs
Dominated	Under the control of another, specifically referring to women's subordination to men in a patriarchal society.
Epistemology	Standards used to assess knowledge; how we know what we know, or why we believe what we believe
Experiences	Phenomenon of interest; direct participation in events as a basis of knowledge; information (data) provided by participants; the phenomenon of interest studied

Feminism	Taking action to promote and achieve a prioritization of issues that are relevant and relate to women in order for women to achieve full citizenship rights
Gendered	Description of socially constructed characteristics that distinguish women from men, as opposed to those traits that are biologically determined
Generalizability	Findings, after analysis of information, having general applicability for other populations of cases
Hegemony	Dominant socially constructed, raced-based, or cultural group in power
Interpretivism	Variety of social constructionism based on the understanding and belief that there is no foundational, mind-independent, and permanently fixed reality that could be grasped or even sensibly thought of without the mediation of human structuring (Schwandt, 2000, p. 201)
Intersectionality	An analysis of the point where the identities of race and gender meet and form mutually constructed features of social organization, which shape Black women's experiences and, in turn, are shaped by Black women
Narrative	Linguistic expressions of one's cognitive processes, knowledge, rationalizations or reality
Negotiation	Agreement between researcher and participants about a compilation of collaborative principles that will facilitate accessing, collecting, and interpreting data, using the narrative inquiry method
Oppression	Forceful, paternalistic domination that arbitrarily places people in a particular social group and then bars that particular social group over a long period of time from enjoying the same rights and privileges as the dominant social group
Oppressive structures	Social policy influences on organizational and institutional practices that assign and keep African American women in subordinate places

Phenomenon	Verbal description of experienced situations and incidents; central concept being examined
Racialized	Assignment of a racial meaning to a previously racially neutral event
Rearticulation	Infusion of previous learning with new meaning to create new framework of thinking
Reconstruct	Reassemble new knowledge as a result of lessons learned from previous experiences
Reflexivity	Conscious bias, values, and experiences being made explicit in study
Self-defined standpoint	How Black women think, what Black women say, and what Black women do about an issue, as embedded in their consciousness
Self-definition	Internalized positive conception of one's identity that empowers one to take social action to eliminate the negative perceptions that society may have about that identity
Self-valuation	Self-described acts that stress the content of Black women's self-definition, especially self-respect, respect for others, and respect from others, or authentic images of African American women
Social Construction	Determination made about Black women by the hegemony, as embedded in the institutions and structures of society
Standpoint theory	Social theory that argues that group location in hierarchical power relations produces shared experiences for individuals in those groups. These experiences can foster similar angles of vision, leading to a group's knowledge.
Stereotypes	Unsubstantiated beliefs, opinions, and representations held without critical judgment by members of a group about members of another group
Theory	Set of concepts and their proposed relationships

Transferability	Reader determines whether the findings can be applied to other settings because of shared characteristics. The reader is provided with detailed descriptions about the participants and the issue of focus.
Transformative	Converts aspects of inner self to reflect what was learned from personal experiences or the experiences of others

Chapter 2: Conceptual Context

None of my life experiences has been without some struggle and challenge. Quite often, I have had no choice except to create and live a life - economical, material, social, and political – within a societal structure over which I had little control. I wondered how other Black women might have handled some of the same struggles and challenges.

Personal Perspective

I grew up in an era in which one was primarily viewed through the lens of race and gender. The mainstream culture, informally and formally, sanctioned entrances into certain fields of work and involvement in societal activities based on those factors. Despite the gender-specific constrictions of the larger society, there were no different standards and roles for males and females in my home. My parents told my siblings and me to ignore personal, disparaging, racist remarks and modeled for us how to deal with negative affronts displayed by some members of the dominant social order. My attitudes, values, and opinions were shaped by the influence of my parents and extended family members, teachers, the church, and the racialized and gendered structures that existed in society at particular times.

My views about women are not radical by today's standards. But, I do remember times between 1960 and 1980 when my perspectives were considered as such. I believed that education was the key to social and political advancement. This was the catalyst that would bring about legal changes that, in turn, would eradicate discriminatory practices inherent in socially constructed structures. I was an advocate for change through lawful

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means and believed that one should work within the American legal system to change unjust and unfair, racist and sexist practices, which, in my view, were placed under the heading of humankind's inhumanity to humankind. Women, regardless of their color or class, could do anything they wanted and should have the same opportunities as men. When one woman benefited, all women benefited.

I felt this was a certainty when I became the first African American woman to hold the first nightshift position as supervisor of staff who processed bankcard payments. A White woman on the day shift had previously supervised the work that was done by a different staff, a staff that was all White and female. The volume of the work had grown so much that the full responsibility for its completion was assigned to me. The number of members in the department grew from one to eight persons within the first year. Members of the department now included seven Black women and one White woman. At the end of my first year as supervisor, I decided to apply for one of the bank's newly created management trainee positions. I felt I had a good chance of being accepted in the program. My performance evaluations documented that I had more than satisfactorily met my present job expectations. Also, the bank officer heading the new program had been a former supervisor and was already aware of my skills.

During my interview, the White male bank officer did not ask many questions. Instead, he pointed out what he believed were facts about my life and career circumstances. "You were recently graduated from college. You will not want to stay here," said the bank officer. When I told him of my intent to follow a career path in banking and described my strengths that would assure my success, he appeared unimpressed. The bank official then began justifying his claim. He insisted that as a

single female, I would soon get married and have children. These hypothetical acts, which he treated as a foregone conclusion, would waste all the time and money that the bank would have invested in me. I thanked him for his time and asked that he give me serious consideration for the job.

Within the same time period, I briefly supervised another White woman who was single. She had been placed in my department, even though no vacancies existed. She did not perform her duties in a satisfactory manner. According to her own statements, she had held many positions in different departments of the bank for short periods of time. She, nonetheless, was hired to fill one of the newly created management trainee positions. I later overheard her telling another employee that her father had social contacts with several bank officials.

I did not receive any official follow-up information about the management trainee job and assumed I had not been accepted into the program simply because I was a Black person who just happened to be single. I thought about what I could have done to change the situation. It was obvious that I could not change my gender or the color of my skin. At that point in my life, I had not even considered marriage. I felt demoralized, bewildered, and powerless to change a practice that seemed to be institutionalized in the organization. Yet, the very inferences that I was being rejected for a job based on my marital status, gender, and color was something I would not forget; something that was a concern whenever I sought other jobs, as well as when I interacted with others in authority who were not Black and/or women. I felt that not being considered for a promotion position was an overt, discriminatory act that attacked my self-esteem.

But, I did not let that setback and disappointment dissuade me from pursuing other career goals. I felt confident that I could expertly handle any position of advancement. I left banking after three years and entered the field of education. During my tenure in the field of education, I continued to enroll in courses, gained knowledge from practical experiences, and earned promotions. I also continued to face and to overcome challenges and obstacles, although different ones from my banking experience.

However, on occasion, and to this day, I still question whether the decision to hire the White woman for the management trainee position at the bank so many years ago was made long before the interview process began. I also pondered whether the White woman's movement between departments was advanced training before the formal hiring process had been completed. Even at this moment, I am unsure what part my race, gender, marital status, and educational background (class) actually played in that development. I wondered what other Black women have done to persevere under similar circumstances, especially other Black women who were the first to hold management, supervisory, or highly visible positions of leadership at work.

Interest in this subject led me to research the topic and to write this dissertation. I kept thinking that it could not be that I alone was the only Black woman who felt she had experienced some unfavorable treatment regarding her job because of some discriminatory markers. Further, I alone could not be the only Black woman who reacted in a certain way to an unpleasant situation. Then, I smile with pride when I remember that I am a descendant of a long line of strong Black women who experienced ordeals, among them, slavery, that were a great deal worse than my situation. Yet, they…we… had survived.

From a Legacy of Discrimination

Slavery was once conspicuously an integral part of the economy of the U. S.

Slavery was also the primer for socially constructing the subordinate placement of one

group of Americans. A racial divide separated the public and private worlds of the Black

slaves and White America, even though Black slaves worked within the public and

private worlds of Whites. Slavery is designated as a point of origin because the history of

African Americans is intricately intertwined with the infrastructures of slavery.

Black women were not treated as White women were during slavery, even though

they were of the same gender. It could be said that African American women lost their

gender identity in the minds of the dominant culture; however, the dominant culture

continued simultaneously to view Black women as objects to be oppressed physically,

sexually, and economically. African American women survived their maltreatment, yet

maintained their roles as mothers, wives, and women in the slave community (Cole &

Guy-Sheftall, 2003).

Eventually, the law of the land in the U. S. unencumbered both Black women and

men slaves from the role of exploited labor. The idea of emancipation held out the

promise that Black men and Black women would live financially and socially

independent of slave owners, once they were freed. But, that same racial divide that

separated enslaved Blacks from the civil society of Whites continued to separate Blacks

from the White public world of the capitalist political economy (Collins, 2000).

Furthermore, when Black women were descended from a history of slavery and a

legacy of racial discrimination, only the concrete contraptions of bondage were left

behind. Negative images about Black women, which originated in the historical context of, and the societal positioning of, Black women during slavery, were embedded in social mores. The prior status of African American women as slaves affected the hegemonic opinions of the roles and identity of free Black women. Even today, the historical period of slavery in the U.S. still influences the potential and opportunities of U. S. Black women (McGlowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004-2005).

Recognizing the fragile start that African American women had in the U. S., it is a wonder that Black communities, as well as our distinct race, still exists. But, African American women have persevered and survived, as has an entire race of people. White (as cited by Collins, 2000) attributes the survival of the entire race of African American people in the U. S. to Black women's survival, nurturing of children, and efforts to build communities, both literally and figuratively.

African American women live on social landscapes where markers of difference such as gender and race are used by the dominant social order as synonyms for inferiority. Negative images about Black women have transcended the centuries in the form of controlling images which are negative, gender-specific depictions of women of African descent within the dominant culture, tied closely to power relations of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Collins, 2004). The negative representations and stereotypes created by the majority race were designed to manipulate the beliefs about, and the placement of African American women in, social, political, economic, and social orders. Controlling images, in addition, have permeated the social structure and are fundamental to the oppression of Black women.

The dominant social order also subjugates or disregards any knowledge produced by members of the group (African American or Black women) and resists the political pressures exerted by the group (African American or Black women) for equality. The effects of gender and racial discrimination have served as a barrier to keep African American women from the capitalist political economy (Collins, 2000). Hence, the economy, polity, and ideology of the dominant social structure have been designed to keep African American women in an assigned and subordinate role (Collins, 2000).

Nonetheless, African American women have lived with, confronted, surmounted and survived many societal obstacles, even when these obstacles were transplanted into the workplace. However, the thinking that goes into African American women's construction of knowledge or creation of meaning from experiences is unclear. It is also unclear how discriminatory challenges are faced and/or conquered. Moreover, the impact of experiencing situations that might affect self-valuation, self-definition, and standpoint is as yet unknown. Albeit women in general fought for full social, economic, and political equality, most of the challenges faced and conquered by Black women might be considered more stringent than those by other women of our gender, but not of our color.

Basis for a Feminist Stance

Categorizations of women's concerns and the efforts of women to change intolerable conditions have historically evolved over time into organized movements and theories. Endeavors to understand the issues facing women have coincided with revelations about gender – physical characteristics that individuals cannot predestine or manipulate before birth. When women of all colors gave impetus to the movement to

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gain equal rights, mainstream theories on social movements became tied to the theories of gender.

Gender and Feminist Theories

Feminism**,** a term derived from its Latin (*femina*-woman) root, is the most notable of the gender and feminist theories (Weiner, 1997). Feminism is one of the initial women's movements that included ideas about what constitutes a woman and addressed the concerns of women. The movement, in addition, seeks to eliminate and correct the negative and oppressive challenges that women confront because of their gender, especially roles that limit or deny them the same opportunities and benefits as others in the U. S. Gender roles are a set of behavioral norms perceived by society as natural and normal. As feminism developed as a theoretical stance, the place that gender plays in women's circumstances in society has been scrutinized.

> Linking theories of gender to mainstream theories on social movements allows us
> to recognize gender as a key explanatory factor in social movements and, in turn,
> to identify the role that social movements play in the social construction of gender
> (Taylor, 1999, p. 439).

In other words, feminism describes the action taken to promote and achieve a prioritization of issues that are relevant and related to women in order for women to achieve full citizenship rights. Feminists' thinking emerged from decades of discussions on the issues facing women. Issues concerning women and issues that a woman sees as important to her and others of her gender are not new phenomena, nor did they have their origin in the women's rights movement of the 1960's in the U. S. Feminism – the belief

in social, political, and economic equality of the sexes – appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The strong point of the movement was the belief that gender should not be the pre-determined factor shaping a person's social identity or socio-political or economic rights. Gender, during the 1970's, was identified with sexual stereotypes.

Women, generally working as a group, spearheaded the hard work needed to achieve equal rights. For example, "banks hired more women [during the 1970s] because of the pressure of federal regulations and anti-discrimination laws and because women launched successful and highly publicized suits against them for employment discrimination" (Katz, Stern, & Fader, 2005, p. 80). As some women moved to the forefront and became very outspoken and visible as individuals in the struggle for equality, similarly, other women began to take the lead in an effort to identify issues that concerned women. Still other women, likewise, took the lead in determining and combatting the reasons for the subordinate status of women. Women had become politically active as a result of their experiences.

The upshot of the discussions among women and their hard work to change their lot in life is usually a raised consciousness. Consciousness is considered a strong awareness of one's perceptions, thoughts, and concerns – political and social, for example – and having the public agency to respond accordingly when experiencing discrimination. A raised consciousness is the hallmark of modern feminism, i.e., a concern to understand what has caused women's subordination in order to campaign and struggle against it. This raised consciousness is a form of provoked social activism that struggles against oppressive forces. However, even though some concerns are the same,

there are varied platforms of priorities promoted by different groups of women of color in the U. S. Feminism has prioritized issues that were relevant to women and that arose when situated within passing eras. Feminist theories emerged with women placed at the center; patriarchy was identified as central to understanding women's marginalized experiences and status; sources of cultural, institutional, and forces of oppression were uncovered; and women's subjective experiences were named and valued.

Powers, Suitor, Guerra, Shackelford, Mecom and Gusman (2003) examined the effects of region on gender-role attitudes of Black and Whites in the South and non-South in the 1980s and 1990s, using data collected by the National Opinion Research Center's General Social Survey between 1985 and 1998. The cross-sectional national survey included in this analysis had a sub-sample of 12,350 respondents who completed the gender-role attitudes scale. The sub-sample was restricted to Whites (87 percent) and Blacks (13 percent), because the two groups were the foci of the study. Respondents were between the ages of eighteen and eighty-nine years. Powers, et al. (2003) investigated whether regional changes in attitudes across time differ by race and ethnicity. The findings revealed 1) that it was important to examine the effects of region separately by gender and race, 2) region was a prominent factor affecting Black women's gender-role attitudes in the 1980s, but its effects had lessened by the 1990s, and 3) "those who held substantially more traditional gender-role attitudes" (p. 52) were White men and both Black and White women. Oddly, "region and religiosity had no effect on Black men's attitudes" (p. 51).

It should be acknowledged that society's views of women's roles have undergone change over time. There have been continuing social and economic changes in the

conditions in which women are situated (Weiner, 1997). Yet, residual discriminatory

practices as they apply to African American women in general continue almost in concert

with what may outwardly appear as advancement toward equality.

This point is illustrated in *Catalyst,* a New York-based, non-profit women's

research and advisory firm that is "the premier resource for information and data about

women in the workplace" (p. 1). *Catalyst* has released research on women of color in

corporate management since 1997. Brown (2004) cited an article, "Advancing African

American Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know," which was

published by *Catalyst,* and the following insight:

> The most common barriers that deter African American women from advancing
>
> in corporate America: are not having an influential sponsor/mentor; lack of
>
> informal networks; lack of company role models of the same racial/ethnic group;
>
> and lack of high-visibility project. The biggest barriers faced are negative, race-
>
> based stereotypes; more frequent questioning of their credibility and authority;
>
> and a lack of institutional support (p. 46).

McGlowan-Fellows and Thomas (2004-2005) also characterize similar deterrence of

Black women from corporate power. Exclusion from access to influential people and

from organizational networks that are associated with long-term success are the central

and most significant factors.

My experiences in the workplace as a young Black woman feminist during the

early 1970's reflected the times. Women of color were offered some opportunities for

career advancement, which, at times, were veiled attempts to disguise what was really

happening. Advancement of the African American woman in the workplace still had not

reached parity with the promotions of White females or other mainstream groups, despite the political activism of feminists. There are still many areas of employment, especially in non-traditional jobs, which are unsanctioned for Black women's inclusion. Often promotions for the woman of color depend on the career field.

Black Feminism

The concept of Black feminism originated in the lived experiences of African women who were brought to America as slaves, and the tradition continued, even though it was modified by slavery. In the post-slavery era, the Black cultural community encouraged Black women to maintain their definition of womanhood (independence, self-reliance, and resourcefulness). The strength of womanhood, as Sanders-Lawson, Smith-Campbell and Benham (2006) also contend, is connected to self-valuation (disposition, nurturing, professional, and hardworking).

Black feminism is "a process of self-conscious struggle that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community" (Collins, 1991, p. 39). Black feminism, in addition, is an intellectual tradition in which African American women serve as actors or agents of change, and not as objectified victims. According to Taylor (2001), Black feminism includes four core themes: legacy of struggle, search for a voice as a Black woman, independence of thought and action, and significance of empowerment in everyday life. The ultimate goal of Black feminism is to "create a political movement that struggles against exploitative capitalism…but also seeks to develop institutions to protect black [sic] women's minds and bodies – traits the dominant culture has little respect and value for" (Taylor, 2001, p.18).

Black and White feminists have been united in their efforts to achieve parity, with gender as the common denominator. But, Black feminists refuse to go along with a notion of universal sisterhood in which all women experience the same type of oppression that is being espoused by the White feminist movement. "Black feminists believed that they experienced the triple whammy of discrimination based on sex, race, and class" (Schiller, 2000, p. 2). Thus, they organized around "the notion that race, class, gender, and sexuality are codependent variables that cannot readily be separated and ranked in scholarship, in political practice, or in lived experience" (Ransby, 2000, p. 1219). Following this notion, Black feminist politics broke apart the idea that Black women have mutually exclusive and competing identities and interests and exposed the political process as organic, fluid, interdependent, dynamic, and historical (Ransby, 2000; Taylor, 2001). Thus, Black feminism, according to Weiner (1997), exposed the connection between racism, sexism, and class.

Yancy (2000) has analyzed the structure of Whiteness (racism) and how it shaped the feminist movement, thus marginalizing the voices and political concerns of Black women. The structure of 'Whiteness,' as categorized by Yancy (2000), is an "uninterrogated site of privilege" that forms the core ideology and the structure of the feminist movement. Breines (2002) assesses the situation differently and offers the following perspective.

> Overt racism was not the motivating issue ... The critical charge against White feminists was their analysis, the focus on gender as the sole explanatory factor in the subordination of women, their apparent ignorance of and insensitivity to the intersection of gender, class, and race in African American women's lives.

…Black women understood racism to revolve around their invisibility (p. 1123). Olesen (2000) concurs and adds that Black women are missing from, and are invisible in, certain arenas of social life.

Another salient concern of Black feminists was that when White men are identified as the only oppressors of women, it is implied that men of other colors are not. Black feminists perceived this belief as a fallacy and a myth. In the 1960's, racism privileged the Black woman and reversed the natural order of things with respect to manhood and womanhood (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). There was an influx of African American women into the workplace as opposed to African American men. These African American women, in some cases, replaced African American men as the major wage earners in the household. The hegemony appeared threatened by Black men as a group, but not by Black women. These individual African American women were perceived as fostering their gender identity in lieu of supporting the African American community's ideas, beliefs, and aims (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Settles, 2006). Though Black feminism serves to empower both Black men and Black women within the community to act with a humanistic view that will benefit the whole race, African American women were seen as advancing their identities as Black women instead of furthering the goals of the Black community, especially the interests of the Black men in the community. African American men tried to regain what they perceived were their rightful place in the employment market as well as the role of dominant wage earner in the homes. During this time period, individual Black women sensed the political tension between the goals of Black people as a group and Black women as a group.

But, African American women, as a group, "shared a history that was steeped in both oppression and spirituality" (Starks & Hughey, 2003, p. 133). So, the Black women turned to the church for support, even though "…religious… institutions are the very ones that often oppress them (Starks & Hughey, 2003, p. 144). Terrelonge (as cited by Clawson & Clark, 2003) argues that the black [sic] church is the most important social institution for black [sic] women, yet the church acts to inhibit feminist consciousness (p. 213). This is in contrast to the support found by men, who were the most visible leaders during the civil rights movement. In fact, the Black churches were the primary social institutions that supported the efforts of men during the struggle for civil rights. Yet, the Black church is generally passive regarding women's equality (Clawson & Clark, 2003). "While racism is a legitimate phenomenon to oppose in church [and with support of the Black community members], sexism does not appear to be evaluated as the same order of injustice" (Wiggins, 2005, p. 131).

During the late 1960's and early 1970's, Black feminists pointed out that not only were Black women oppressed by the White patriarchal society, but also the White women's movement did not publicly recognize the economic and social differences between the two groups of women. By the early 1970's, this controversy split the women's rights movement along racial lines in America. Black and White feminists were voicing and assuming divergent stances about the focus on issues that impacted each group of women. Sometimes, these stances were in sharp contrast, and the disagreements resulted in heated discussions and competition for limited resources (Clawson & Clark, 2003). Black feminists were also trying to reconcile their political agenda with that of the Black community-at-large.

Thus, in the 1980s and 1990s, Black women became activists and developed a distinct feminist consciousness that gave them an agency to strive for empowerment on their own terms. "…their feminism was more expansive than the agenda put forth by White women, in that specific social, economic, and political issues facing African American communities were incorporated into a theoretical paradigm that today we call black [sic] feminism" (Taylor, 2000, p. 18). In other words, "the practice of Black feminism recognizes a direct link between experience and consciousness" (Woodard & Mastin, 2005, p. 267).

Black Feminist Thought

Black feminist thought is based in part on the traditions of Black feminism. Patricia Hill Collins (1991), a pre-eminent sociological scholar of Black feminism, originally articulated the notions of Black feminist thought in an attempt to further its development. Her theory was an "interpretation of Black women's experiences and ideas by those who participate in them" (p. 15). The two basic components of Black feminist thought were its thematic content and epistemological approach, which were shaped by Black women within a society shaped by social construction.

African American women kept trying to achieve equal rights in America. They publicly exposed experiences that perpetuated their subordinate status and prevented them from achieving equal rights, with, in the foreground, the portrayal of the women rights movement as only focusing on White women. As individuals and as groups, African American women pointedly staged political activities that highlighted their

experiences of oppression and discrimination, but with mixed results, none of which were synonymous with full access.

Ten years later, Collins (2000), revisiting and expanding the theory of Black feminist thought to foster both Black women's empowerment and the conditions of social justice, wrote, "I now recognize that empowerment for African-American women will never occur in a context characterized by oppression and social injustice" (p. x). The features of the thematic content of Black feminist thought are described within the context of standpoint theory and a Black feminist epistemology. Epistemology is defined as the standard used to assess knowledge, how we know what we know or why we believe what we believe. Standpoint theory rests on the perspective of humans as demonstrated in their relations with one another and the world, although this relationship may not be visible. Also, standpoint theory offers a conceptual framework that focuses on the deconstruction and decentralization of dominant ideologies and begins from the position of the marginalized (Lenz, 2004).

Black feminist thought is comprised of three themes and six distinguishing features that, according to Collins (2000), are not unique and might be similar to other bodies of knowledge. But, what makes Black feminist thought unique is the "convergence of these distinguishing features that give U. S. Black feminist thought its distinctive contours" (p. 22). The three key themes are a) self-definition and self-valuation, (b) the interlocking nature of oppression (giving equal attention to race, gender, and class oppression when embodied in one individual), and (c) the relationship between the consciousness of oppressed people and the actions they take to deal with oppressive structures, which should be analyzed. Black feminist thought requires a

questioning of what structures can be characterized as being oppressive and limiting in terms of what choices Black women may make. Likewise, the ultimate goal of Black feminist thought is to elevate humankind to a heightened level of humanness with conditions of equality and equity provided as realities for all.

The aspects of Black feminist thought that are most germane to this study are the attempts to determine the link between race and gender when embodied in one person. While not explicating any one component as a variable, Black feminist thought also seeks to develop new theoretical interpretations of the interactive process between the interrelated variables of race and gender, rather than adding to existing theories by inserting or withdrawing select variables. "Race and gender may be analytically distinct, but in Black women's everyday lives, they work together" (Collins, 2000, p. 269). Accordingly, the epistemology that is used to rearticulate Black women's standpoint reflects the convergence of both sets of experiences.

A look through the lens of Black feminism at the multi-layered tapestries of Black women's lives would provide further understanding of how African American women deal with the influence that race and gender has on their lives. This study takes one microcosmic look through that lens at one workplace incident that involves the interlocking nature of race and gender. The existing body of literature supports the contention that while Black women's race consciousness is taken for granted in studies, the ramifications of racial discrimination are often presupposed (Brush, 2001; Collins, 1991). Brush (2001) adds that race is the dominant explanatory theme and gender, class, and age inequality are all perceptible undercurrents. Yet, the gender consciousness of African American women is usually analyzed in much more detail than class and age.

It is important to discern the knowledge that African American women construct from their experiences within the worksite at the intersection of race and gender, especially the knowledge that is related to the development of standpoint, self-definition and self-valuation. However, it is difficult to decipher the specific thinking of African American women. The standpoint of <u>all</u> <u>women</u> is usually blurred or merged or added in research projects, for the most part. Little consideration is given to the differences in experiences or the influence that race and gender might play. Exploration of this topic is significant to understanding what aspects play a part in the development of Black women's self-definition.

Moreover, it is important to distinguish how African American women, as a group, cope with any negative or controlling images within the work environment. It would be useful to understand whether Black women develop a conceptualization of self in the form of self-definition based on the internalization of their experiences or on external influences. "Because self-definition is key to individual and group empowerment, ceding the power of self-definition to other groups, no matter how well-meaning or supportive of Black women they may be, in essence replicates power hierarchies" (Collins, 2000, p. 36). But, self-definition must not be studied in isolation. Self-valuation, which has important underpinnings for the content of a Black woman's self-definition in the form of respect, must also be examined, studied, and considered in conjunction with self-definition.

Women do not leave the essence of who they are and their aspirations (personal, political, economics, career, and social) outside the workplace door. Yet, the scope and depth of Black woman's standpoint and our own self-definitions versus the perceptions of

the dominant social structure still remain unclear. Even more obscure is the source and sustenance of Black women's self-valuations.

Standpoint Theories: Differences, Knowledge, Epistemology, and Truth

In the process of researching the area of interest, I found it particularly germane that Yancy (2000) maintains that feminism is limited in terms of its hegemonic racial epistemological standpoint, that is, Black women's issues concerning pain, suffering, and self-identity. Still, I searched for a feminist tradition that would facilitate exploring the way(s) that African American women could tell and categorize their experiences. I kept in mind the definition of feminism - a concern to understand what has caused women's subordination in order to campaign and struggle against it – and the goal of feminism – a raised consciousness.

Political scientist Hartsock (1997) and sociologist Smith (1997) assess that women's daily lives are grounded in feminist theory. Feminist theories are connected to standpoint and standpoint theories. For example, feminist theories have utility. The feminist standpoint approach unearths acts of oppression and allows research participants to tell their own stories, with no perceived categories in which researchers intend to place their responses (Allen, 1996).

I then expanded my search to discover do-able working definitions of standpoint and standpoint theories. Martin, Reynolds and Keith (2002) assert that standpoint theory suggests that women are sensitized to gender-based discrimination because of their experiences. Hartsock (1997) argues that standpoint theories are technical, theoretical devices that can allow for the creation of accounts of society that can work for more

satisfactory social relations. Philosopher Harding (1997, 2004) characterizes standpoint theory as figuring out how to justify feminist claims to be more accurate accounts of reality. In addition, Harding (1986, 2004) claims that a feminist standpoint arises from sources of feminine knowledge: women's own experiences, their subjective assessments of the world, and the values associated with their ways of knowing. Collins (2000) defines standpoint theory as

> a social theory arguing that group location in hierarchical power relations produces common challenges for individuals in those groups. Moreover, shared experiences can foster similar angles of vision leading to group knowledge or standpoint deemed essential for informed political action (p. 300).

The African American women participants in this study are considered members of a group that has historically shared a subordinated and common placement with similar experiences in a social hierarchy of power relations over an extended period of time. However, "because group standpoints are situated in, reflect, and help shape unjust power relations, standpoints are not static. Thus, common challenges may foster similar angles of vision leading to a group knowledge or standpoint among African-American women. Or they may not" (Collins, 2000, p. 25). Martin, Reynolds and Keith (2002) support the theory "that experiences associated with a subordinated or marginal standpoint give those located in it knowledge of 'how the world works' that those in more privileged positions lack" (p. 690).

But, Collins (1997) declares that the impact of power relations, when considering feminist standpoint theory (epistemological stance that focuses on gender differences), has been ignored. "Standpoint theory encompasses more than changing the language

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game of politics. Oppression is not a game, nor is it solely about language—for many of us, it still remains profoundly real" (p. 381).   However, Collins argues for a unique standpoint theory that places emphasis on the socially constructed conditions that create subjugated social groups, that is, a standpoint of Black women that does not deny the differences among Black women.

There is support for this belief. Yancy (2000) contends that Black women's standpoint must be understood within the framework of their own unique, oppressive, existential experiences and how they have created unique and positive ways of effectively combating oppression. On the other hand, Reynolds (2002) argues

> Black feminist standpoint is rooted in this legacy of oppression and particular notions of experience based on black [sic] women's victimhood status. Yet, the concept of experience is rarely demystified, resulting in an essentialized and reductionist image of black [sic] womanhood (p. 603).

In spite of that argument, Reynolds asserts

> changes are required so that black [sic] feminist standpoint theory is able to promote a more inclusive model of black womanhood. black [sic] feminist standpoint must take a more contextual, more reflexive, fluid and locally based approach to understanding black [sic] women's lives so that the scope, complexities and diversity of black [sic] women's lives can be successfully captured. By doing so, it will avoid much of the criticism leveled against it (p. 604).

A divergent point of view from feminist standpoint theory is woman's standpoint. Taylor (2001) credits Alice Walker with coining the term 'womanism,' which has four

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elements that include being a "black (sic) feminist or feminist of color; appreciation and preference for women's culture; love of culture and 'self'; and womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (p. 26). Smith argues that women's standpoint is rooted in everyday experiences and is constructed by theorists who reflect on that experience. Further, Smith (1997) recommends locating proposed knowledge or inquiry in women's actual lived experiences (a category that encompasses the diversity of women's lives and activities demonstrated by daily routines, activities, and practices).

As the discussions continue, knowledge, truth, and privileging one group's standpoint over another group's are highlighted. Harding (1997, 2004) states that knowledge claims are always socially situated and difference should be addressed through intersectionality, an analysis of social relations from the standpoint of women's daily lives. Hekman (1997) theorizes that women are in particular social locations and see the world in a particular way because of material life structures. These social positions must be (re)constructed and transformed for understanding. Both Harding (1997) and Hartsock (1997) appear to agree that the knowledge of women who are oppressed by race and class will provide a more objective account of social reality. Yet, Smith (1997) "takes the view that the social is always being brought into being in the concerting of people's local activities. It is never already there" (p. 395).

Although in favor of the notion that all knowledge is situated and discursive, Hekman (1997) rejects the definition of knowledge and truth as either universal or relative. But, Hartsock (1997) offers this observation: the categories and criteria that are used to judge truths are likely those of the dominant groups that have been made true through a variety of repeated social practices. Harding (2004), Hartsock (1997), Hekman

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(1997), and Smith (1997), nevertheless, are concerned about privileging some knowledge over others. If one standpoint is privileged over another, ethical and political issues or relationships are called into play, rather than purely epistemological for the possibility of more social justice.

Collins (1997) rejects the perspective that the oppressed yields absolute truth, and relativism claims that all visions are equal as the truth status of Black feminist thought. Collins also contends that the ideas validated by different standpoints produce the most objective truth. Yet, Collins asserts that standpoints should be judged not only by their epistemological contributions, but also by the terms of their participation in hierarchical power relations. "A discourse… that assumes that the tools of science can represent reality and discover universal truth" (Collins, 1998, p. 279) is not appropriate for this study. A positivist position holding that truth should be measured against some objective criteria is not in sync with the research questions or methods for the study that was conducted.

"Epistemology is more than a 'way of knowing'. An epistemology is a 'system of knowing' that has both an internal logic and external validity," believes Ladson-Billings (2000, p. 257). External validity relates to the standards of evidence that should be used to seek truth about the human experience. Brockmeier and Harre (1997) provide a recommendation for this concern:

> Stories are told from 'positions,' that is, they 'happen' in local moral orders in which the rights and duties of persons as speakers influence the location of the prime authorial voice. They must be heard as articulations of particular narratives from particular points of view and in particular voices (p. 46).

After analyzing the connection between Black feminist standpoint and genres of academic, literature, and other popular cultural forms, Reynolds (2002) notes that the privileging of the experiences of Black feminist standpoint is not a unique phenomenon. She infers that the privileging of experience within Black feminist standpoint theory and more traditional standpoint is an inevitable outcome of a society wherein there are differences in socially constructed groups.

But, the prospect of considering one right perspective or one truth by which other knowledge is measured still looms just below the debating surface for some feminist theorists. However, Ladson-Billings (2000) fittingly informs us "…there are well-developed systems of knowledge, or epistemologies, that stand in contrast to the dominant Euro-American epistemology" (p. 258). "In spite of diversity of beliefs about function and definition of standpoint theory, …if standpoint theory does not answer the recurring questions in the theory of knowledge, it has helped reframe the terrain in which epistemology can be done" (Longino, 1993, p. 212). Moreover, Campbell and Wasco (2000) state, "Feminist epistemologies, such as … standpoint theory …recognize women's lived experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge. Feminist methodologies attempt to eradicate sexist bias in research and find ways to capture women's voices that are consistent with feminist ideals" (p. 1).

Parker (2002) conducted a study using standpoint analysis based on the collective standpoint epistemologies of Collins (1991), Hartsock (1987), and Smith (1987) to analyze the ongoing process of how African American women develop a standpoint. The focus was on how African American women managed their identities within dominant organizational cultures. Emphasis was placed on the influence of both race and

gender when embodied in one individual in the positioning of Black women in society. Yet, the findings of the study were not comprehensive enough to definitively know that racism exists or that gender discrimination persists in a complex organizational system, even though participants might have believed:

- there existed or there was a potential for differential treatment based on gender and race, there were discrepancies in the women's interpretation of how race and gender influenced their interactions.

- conflict was not with bosses, but with White male peers or White male subordinates, and

- African American women differed in way they found voice in a particular interactive context. But, Black women emphasized their identity as Black women, which was common among the narratives (Parker, 2002).

I pointedly address the issues of epistemology and standpoint because these concepts are crucial to understanding how the participants construct meaning. But, I remain mindful of what passed as truth and how one arrives at that truth. I accept, with verifications that will be discussed later in Chapter 3, whatever the participants identified as their beliefs or described as their perception of reality.

I read the arguments of theorists Allen, 1996; Collins, 1997; Hallstein, 1999; Harding, 1986, 1997, and 2004; Hartsock, 1997; Hekman, 1997; Lenz, 2004; Longino, 1993; and Smith, 1997. I gave special attention to Olesen's (2000) discussion of standpoint theory, which cited Collins, 1998, p. 205; Harding, 1993, p. 56; Hartsock, 1983, 1985, 1998; Smith, 1987, p. 91. I noted the different interpretations of the

constructs of standpoint theory and determined that all feminist standpoint theories are related because they all have origins in situated material (economic) or political or social locations. Further, the circumstances of the women within these locations are experiences that have been shaped by those situations. Knowledge is socially located and arises in social positions that are structured by power relations (Collins, 1997; Hallstein, 1999; Harding, 1997 and 2004; Hartsock, 1997; and Hekman, 1997). Standpoint is based on the experiences that one has within a specific location in society; it, notably, is also a concept that addresses the differences (social location and thinking) among women and the status of feminism's truth claims.

Black women's perceptions are forged based on their social and economic locations within what the dominant group has constructed as the legitimatized social structure (Collins, 1997; Forman, 1994; and Reynolds, 2002). I suggest, therefore, that Black women have different perspectives because they see things from different vantage points. These vantage points are influenced by multi-faceted challenges such as race, politics, economics, social levels, and gender. In addition, our perspectives are vested in our everyday experiences in life, which are usually unlike those of other women not of color.

In spite of our past, we are now living well within the twenty-first century. Yet, discriminatory factors, both past and present, and their residual societal and political consequences, affect the lives of Black women. It is important to understand specifically what and how African American women, individually or as a group, think about the impact of discrimination in their lives. The findings and implications of a study that seeks to understand how discrimination impacts Black women's lives would be more

credible if the sampling population were only African American women. The workplace is a good site to explore the topic. Furthermore, exposing how African American women categorize their work experiences and comparing their experiences might be revealing and enlightening for the greater society.

I proceeded with this study, operating in the belief that the Black women participants would come to voice. Coming to voice means that the African American women participants would let be heard their inner voices within their own consciousness that is hidden from hierarchal power relations, as they recounted experiential events in their lives (Collins, 1997). I concluded this study, believing that African American women do have privileged pathways of knowledge to individual agency (Collins, 2000; Harding 1997, 1986; and Smith, 1997). Each of the four Black women participants in this study have power and agency over their consciousness that is constructed in their minds and their voices are used to express that consciousness.

Research Context

I reviewed the bodies of research that were relevant to how African American women construct knowledge from their workplace experiences, organizing the research literature into five areas: impact of race and gender, race and gender consciousness, absence of Black women in leadership roles, survival strategies, and communication styles.

Impact of Race and Gender

A few empirical studies and analytical articles have exposed African American women's perceptions about how race and gender, when embodied in one person, impact their experiences as well as their construction of knowledge. The relationship between race and gender in the self-definition of African American women, some of whom have not attended predominately White colleges and universities, has been explored with combined descriptive and statistical analyses. Jackson (1998) finds that:

- maintaining the individual bounded categories of race and gender limits the ability to understand how African American women experience multiple positionalities and define their identity.

- there is a need to explore more carefully and critically the ways that race and gender do come to define who we are and how relationships between such categories result in complex identities and definition of self.

- complex identities are important because they can take African American women beyond the stereotypes and narrow expectations of society and community to places where they can make their own choices in the development of their self-definitions.

In a similar study, Watt (2006) examines the racial identity of African American college students attending single-sex and co-educational settings at historically Black colleges and universities and at predominately White higher education institutions. Watt (2006) finds that the perceptions of race and gender can play a role in how the students experience college and the perceptions that the students have of the differences in the

college environments. Yet, he finds, "the attitudes about being both Black and female seem to interrelate for African American college women regardless of campus environment" (p. 10). One implication of the students' responses is that it appears that the convergence of race and gender in the lives of Black college women determines how they view the world.

In another similar study, Collins and Lightsey (2001) have conducted a pilot study with two populations, totaling 70 African American participants, to investigate the possibility that generalized self-efficacy (GSE) mediates the relationship between racial identity attitudes and self-esteem. GSE is defined as beliefs that one can persevere and complete tasks across a variety of situations, even under adverse conditions. Self-esteem is defined as the prevailing sense of self-acceptance or self-respect. Racial identity attitudes are found possibly to have played a different role in self-esteem in different groups of African American women. Collins and Lightsey (2001) assert that African American women are socialized to the majority culture, which means a diminished African American identity. But, African Americans, according to their research, can regain a strong African American identity by progressing through five development stages of growth and discovery.

McCowan and Alston (1998) also examine the relationships among racial identity, African self-consciousness, and career decidedness in 212 African American women who were seniors at a historically Black university and at a predominately White university. The synthesized definition of racial identity in this study refers to one's belief and attitudes about one's own race and subsequent acknowledgement of membership in that racial group. Further, McCowan and Alston (1998) assert that racial identity is a

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four-stage developmental process. African Americans must go from the very least White frame of reference (self-loathing) to the most positive Black frame of reference (inner peace and fulfillment in being an African American and an appreciation of other cultures). The differences in the higher education environments are found not to be significant. In this study, McCowan and Alston (1998) find that career decidedness is not strongly associated with the level of racial identity or African self-consciousness. One interesting note described as a possible conclusion is that "African self-consciousness is instilled before college and is likely maintained throughout the college experience" (p. 36).

In a related study, Anderson (2001) uses the Interpretive Discourse Method and constant comparative analysis to better understand and describe how others perceive Black women administrators in higher education and how the Black women administrators perceive themselves. It is found that the positive perceptions that others have about Black women administrators serve as motivation and confirmation as Black women administrators continue their leadership. In contrast, negative perceptions cause changes in the attitudes and behaviors of the Black women administrators. Steel (as cited by Anderson, 2001) adds support by stating "external perceptions inevitably affect one's self-perception" (p. 91).

Yet, details of what behaviors the Black women administrators display as they perform their jobs when negative perceptions about them related to race and gender, categories over which they have no control, are not indicated. In other words, the particular way that others perceive Black women leaders in higher education and specifically how the Black women leaders perceive themselves are not delineated. Full

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explanations of these issues are critical to understanding the self-valuation of the Black women leaders. Further, questions that concern how the embodiment of race and gender in one person should be expressly asked of African American women leaders who work in any career field as a way to explore the underpinnings of a Black women's self-definition.

Race and Gender Consciousness

Understanding how Black women leaders differentiate between acts of bias as either racism and sexism provides insight into the effect of discrimination and oppression on African American women's self-definition and standpoint. Yet, Brush (2001) argues that feminist studies of the intersection of race and gender have failed to make an issue of the race consciousness of women of color, but have problematized gender consciousness among women of color. According to Brush (2001), it is assumed that race consciousness is a given among women of color. Race is further understood to be a central element of identity, a basis of domination or privilege, and can become a point of resistance.

In an associated study (Settles, 2006), an intersectional approach examines the racial and gender identities of 89 Black women, undergraduate and graduate students at 31 universities in the U. S. The study is designed to apply intersectionality, role/identity conflict, and role/identity complexity theories empirically to the lives and experiences of Black women. Settles (2006) uses both qualitative and quantitative analyses and finds that

Black women placed equal importance on their race and gender, but the black

[sic]-woman identity was rated as more important than either the black [sic] or

woman identities. Thus, black [sic] women may choose to create a sense of self

that combines and unifies these two aspects of who they are. (p. 597)

However, Clawson and Clark (2003) argue that the structure of the policy

attitudes of Black women, who are political party activists, emerges from their lived

experiences with racism and sexism. Additionally, the civil rights movement, the

women's movement, and the Black church have shaped Black women activists. Data

from the 1991 Southern Grassroots Party Activist Project contain over ten thousand

precincts and county-level party activists and are used for analyses. Selected data are

limited to Democratic activists, which includes a number of women and African

Americans, and make analyses of subgroups feasible. Based on the findings, Clawson

and Clark (2003) suggest that African American women have a unique attitudinal

structure where race and gender are intertwined influences, except on the issue of

abortion, where the Black church plays a dominant role in shaping the political attitudes

of some of the southern Democratic party activists who regularly attend church.

Definitive explanations from Black women about how acts of discrimination and

oppression are determined to be gender bias or racial bias are missing. Understanding

how African American women identify acts as racism and sexism would increase

knowledge about the effects of experiencing both sexism and racism simultaneously, or

either one of the biases separately. Moreover, unearthing this information is critical to

increasing the factual knowledge about a historically and socially constructed

marginalized group within U. S. society who embody the markers of race and gender –

African American women.

Absence of Black Women in Leadership Roles

The workplace landscape is changing and the faces of people at worksites are also

changing at the same rate. Some Black women have attained leadership positions, but

not without facing a set of challenges. Moreover, the acceptance of a few African

American women into these leadership positions in the workforce does not ensure full

acceptance of all Black women as leaders at the work location.

King and Ferguson (2001) have expertise in the field of organizational behavior

and collaborate with African American professional women. From their standpoint, a

Black professional woman is defined in an inclusive manner and leadership development

is defined within narrow parameters, with broad applicability within the wide field of

leadership and leadership development. "Black professional women are participants in

the labor force and view themselves with a professional identity that was developed

through training, education, or experience for maintaining a career over a lifetime"

(p. 126). Leadership development consists of "activities, processes, and methods that aid

in clarifying a woman's 1) understanding of herself in relation to the groups,

communities, and societies of which she is a part and 2) sense of personal efficacy and

collective purpose" (p. 126).

King and Ferguson (2001) describe their retreats, hosted since the 1980s, as

focusing on understanding how Black women's bonding relationships with one another

have been critically important to the support and development of people and groups. The

researarchers note that "Black women had only begun to enter the professional ranks in significant numbers in the 1970s" (p. 126). They argue that the facilitation of women's personal development and capacities for shaping their worlds are pivotal to their overall commitment to social change. Further, King and Ferguson (2001) offer what they call 'an engaged voice' in the discussion of this topic, because the Black women participants inform them in their research.

My study focuses on one incident in the work life of individual Black women from the perspectives of the African American women leaders. My aim is to offer the readers some enlightenment or to help facilitate the transformation of the readers after the described incidents have been deconstructed, reconstructed, and rearticulated in the constructed narratives. King and Ferguson (2001), on the contrary, focus on the multi-expectations from work, family, and the community as well as the professional obligations within the workplace of African American professional women. Black women are actively guided and supported into moving from the margin to the center in a process called self-restoration. King and Ferguson (2001) detail 'charting' (a deliberate group process wherein women help each other deconstruct and reframe problematic issues) as a strategy of personal efficacy and power. Regardless of their different purpose, King and Ferguson (2001) offer practical and useful techniques for supporting professional African American women when they assume new roles as leaders.

This professional support for African American women leaders is compatible with the contentions made by Murtadha and Watts (2005), who analyzed historical (from 1787 to early twentieth century), biographical narratives of African American leaders (five of them, women) who define "educational leadership not as service to a single Black

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institution but as involvement in movements for social change" (p. 592). The profiles of

the African American women serve as models for school leadership, which provides a

resource for understanding predominantly Black student populations and communities.

Murtadha and Watts (2005) find that the early scholars of leadership viewed research on

women and people of color as inconsequential. But now, a new trend is developing, with

important implications. Members of marginalized groups are increasingly entering the

domain of educational administration.

> By studying African American educational leadership, researchers find that
>
> mainstream theories are increasingly deficient in understanding leadership from
>
> the perspectives of diverse cultural groups who fight for equity in this society. If
>
> we are to develop schools to meet the needs of diverse student populations today,
>
> the use of cultural knowledge from the historical biographies of successful
>
> African American educational leaders may serve as valuable resources. This
>
> omission limits both our ability to frame problems and produce viable strategies
>
> that improve public schools (Murtadha & Watts, 2005, p. 606).

However, Alston (2000), in a related article, examines the lack of research studies

that focus on women in educational administration, none of which focus solely on

African American women. Mentoring is prescribed for women who seek leadership

positions/roles in non-traditional fields and for women of color. Furthermore, mentoring

is found to greatly aid Black women in obtaining, maintaining, and retaining their

positions as superintendents.

Nonetheless, Green and King (2002), in another article, describe an Africentric

career and leadership development project that was designed for African American

women at a predominately White metropolitan research university in Central Florida. Fifty-five percent of the approximately 34,000 students were female, and 7.5% were of Black, non-Hispanic origin. One hundred fifty-six Black women of the 3,000 full-time employees served at different levels throughout the university. The project was leadership development, designed to help employees (women of African descent) in higher education to identify, challenge, and break through workplace barriers ranging from subtle racist attitudes and prejudices to blatant discriminatory practices. The Sisters Mentoring Sisters (SISTERS) Project is pointed out as being "unique because it focuses on the personal and professional development of the total employee population of Black women, across all employment categories" (Green & King, 2002, p. 158). The researchers also maintain that 1) mentoring, which is an important component, has expanded to include some of the growing Black student population as mentees and 2) the SISTERS Project has significant implications. The Africentic framework "seemed to have contributed to the heightened sense of empowerment that these women exhibited as they engaged in traditional and new roles within the academy, thus affirming them as women and as leaders" (Green & King, 2002, p. 164).

Dixon-Reeves (2003), as well, wrote an article about the mentoring experiences of recently graduated African American doctorates in the field of sociology. She finds that African American women academics do not mentor graduate students at the same rate as African American men. However, she finds no concrete reasons for this occurrence.

Yet, there appears to be a demand for African American women as leaders in the workforce realm. McGlowan-Fellows and Thomas (2004-2005) advocate increasing

racial and gender diversity in the senior executive ranks of multinational corporations

with new roles suggested for mental health practitioners. The researchers conducted an

interdisciplinary examination and review of academic literature for a two-fold purpose.

The first was to draw attention to management and mentoring experiences of women of

color. The second was to address the concern that racial issues are on equal footing with

other social issues of marginalized groups. McGlowan-Fellows and Thomas (2004-2005)

argue that new trends emerging within world-wide markets, such as the increasing

number of people of color, the less-male-dominant culture in corporations, global

information and technology, and the link between corporations' financial performance

and gender diversity, are offering great opportunities for Black women. Recognizing that

African American women are often excluded from the boardrooms and have limited

access to powerbrokers in organizations, McGlowan-Fellows and Thomas (2004-2005)

find that mentoring – the traditional transfer of knowledge, values, and power to those

who match the corporate style and who are like-minded with senior executives – is

viewed as the vehicle for avoiding exclusion from the sites of power in corporations. The

authors (McGlowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004-2005) find that, "…absent formal

mentoring programs, women of color, black [sic] women, and persons of color generally

may have to depend on being 'coached' by random process into new roles and

availabilities" (p. 14). They categorize this assertion as a call for practitioners in the field

of health (psychology) and social work to assume the new roles of mentors.

There are a few African American women in place as leaders within businesses

and educational institutions. Still others are seeking leadership positions, hoping to take

advantage of openings or promotional opportunities, whenever they appear. Mentoring is

described as a professional development approach, process, and strategy to support the entry, retention, and promotion of African American women. However, mentoring alone will not sustain the resiliency, resistance, and survival of Black women leaders in the workplace, and other measures will be needed.

Survival Strategies

Role models are one such measure that support the efforts of Black women leaders. Jackson and Kite (1996) explore the link between the availability of an appropriate role model and the self-concept of African American women. Seventy-six per cent of the 159 African American females, higher education participants, "indicated they did have an achievement role model they looked up to" (p. 6), usually a relative, teacher/professor, or person in the media. Other findings worth noting are: the majority of the role models are not members of the university community (98 percent); the role models are primarily African American women (74 percent), followed by African American men (15.3 percent); satisfaction with the role model, regardless of race is high (5.17) on a 6-point scale; race of role model is marginally related to within culture identity; gender of the role model is related to within culture identity; and "those who placed greater importance on both race and gender (85.5 percent) were more likely to prefer a female role model compared to those who placed greater importance on either race or gender (58.3 percent) or their American identity (54.5 percent)" (Jackson & Kite, 1996, p. 6). The lack of a role model appears not to affect perceptions about the campus climate; however, the findings do indicate that cultural identity is related to well-being.

Moreover, African American women leaders develop belief systems to sustain them through periods of trials and tribulations. Bacchus (2002) finds descriptive information on the types of coping resources used by professional Black women when dealing with stress. The participants resided in two New York state communities during January through May 2000. "Professional Black women were more likely to use emotional-focused coping in response to work-related stress, although spirituality and religious rituals were cited most frequently as a problem-focused coping strategy" (Bacchus, 2002, p. 1).

Similarly, in two separate focus groups of five women each and one-on-one interviews with one volunteer from each group, Fall (2002) uses narratives and questionnaires to gather data. The participants are from New Orleans, LA, ranged in ages between 25-52 years, and have varied backgrounds. Fall (2002) studies how spirituality can be manifested (defined and talked about in the daily lives) as a form of resistance and resiliency in the lives of some Black women. The researcher gains insights into how the intersection of race and class could lead some Black women to rely heavily on spirituality. Further, Fall (2002) reveals uncertainty about whether the participants depend on spirituality because their lives are more difficult due to socialization of their race and gender, spiritual and religious traditions passed through their family for generations, or because of the participants' personalities. No implications are provided. After completion of the study, Fall (2002) claims to have a deeper understanding of the way the participants define spirituality and how spirituality is used to help with challenging situations (sexism, racism, family obligations) in their lives, which is

consistent with the notion that feminist research is transforming for the participant and the researcher.

Still, Mattis (2002) examines the way that twenty-three African American women use religion/spirituality to cope and to construct meaning in times of adversity. The content analysis of the narratives reveals eight overlapping or descriptive themes: interrogating and accepting reality, gaining insight and courage needed to engage in spiritual surrender, confronting and transcending limitations, identifying and grappling with existential questions and life lessons, recognizing purpose and destiny, defining character and acting within subjectively meaningful moral principles, achieving growth, and trusting in the validity of transcendent sources of knowledge and communication. The findings indicate that relationships (with God and others) and intimacy (self-reflection, self-criticism, and self-awareness) in the meaning-making process are important. In order to be clear about the definitions of religion and spirituality, I also reviewed a past study, Mattis (2000).

Mattis (2000) uses a two-part qualitative approach to 1) identify definitions of spirituality that are privileged by 128 African American lay women, and 2) to identify the distinctions that participants make between spirituality and religiosity. As a result, the content analysis reveals thirteen "categories of responses, including their definitions and the frequency with which women endorsed each category" (Mattis, 2000, p. 107) as it relates to the definition of spirituality. Further, participants list three key distinctions between spirituality and religiosity, which describe two different experiences. African American women's conceptualization of religion and spirituality is complex, individualized, and influenced by factors such as age, cultural background, education,

gender socialization, social class and life experience (Mattis, 2000, p. 119).

Nevertheless, an analysis of the responses discloses that, "for most women, spirituality is

a belief in the sacred force that resides in all things" (Mattis, 2000, p. 117), and "for

many participants, religiosity is defined as one's adherence to prescribed rituals and

beliefs about God…" (Mattis, 2000, p. 118).

Survival strategies, in the context of this study, are those responses or reactions to

discriminatory or oppressive experiences. The responses might be similar or varied

among the four Black women leaders. Nonetheless, the responses have a connection to

Black women's self-valuation, self-definition, and self-defined standpoint.

Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996) examine the educational narratives of Black

women who were reentering higher education to determine how the dynamics of the

larger society are played out in higher education. They find that their African American

women informants (including the lead researcher, Johnson-Bailey)

- consistently join gender and race in their responses, without being asked

- speak of being a Black woman, rather than a woman or Black only

    perceive their positions in academia to be different and separate from that of

    other women and from Black men; new entrants to higher education saw

    themselves at the bottom of the academic hierarchy when power and

    place were considered

- respond to situations that occurred in the classroom as reflections of the

    larger society (perceived as oppressive and discriminatory) by using

    strategies of silence, negotiation, and resistance to cope

- indicate problems faced in the classroom are the same problems, whether in school, workplace, or community

Although the participants in this study mention self-doubt and discrimination when encountering racism and gender subordination in classroom and society, no mention or analysis is of made regarding the impact that these factors have on the participants' self-valuation and self-definition. Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996) also discover that participants encounter the same issues, whether in the school, workplace, family, or community. The women participants rely on familiar coping strategies (silence, negotiation, and resistance) to respond to racism, sexism, classism, and colorism.

In an unrelated study, Fulton (2004) analyzes the comedic material of African American comediennes regarding women's position at the intersection of race, gender, and class dynamics. The performers are marked as Black women entertainers, not as only Black, or not as only women. She argues that humor has traditionally been used by African Americans to mask pain, a strategy of resiliency. Portions of the performers' comedic sketches are examined to understand the historical and cultural factors underlying the humor as well as to render credible and satisfactory analyses. Cited examples of humor are interpreted as illustrations of consciousness: race and gender, awareness of social structures in the greater society, relationships with other Black women, and the ability to communicate the context of material to general audiences. Fulton (2004) asserts "…detailed attention to the material reveals resistance to dominant ideas and self-definition without essentializing Black women and our experiences" (p. 89).

African American women use a variety of strategies to survive in the workplace. These survival strategies, for example, include coping and religion/spirituality. Resiliency, as a survival strategy, often requires effective communication.

Communication Styles

Johnson-Bailey (1999) expands the comprehensive examination and analysis of the coping strategies of Black women that emerged from a previous study (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996). The purpose of the new study is to explore the impact that the relationship of race and gender, color, and perceived class (socio-economic status) differences between researcher and participants has on the interviewing process. Johnson-Bailey (1999), who was the lone researcher and one of the participants in the study, concludes:

> Interviewing remains work, even and sometimes especially when Black women interview other Black women. The differences of class and color, whether perceived or real, initially served as shackles on this explorative process of interviewing. Therefore, it was vital to the procedure that I was fully aware of the added forces of talking within my racial and gender group. But there were many more times when the experience of a Black woman interviewing a Black woman was advantageous. At these times the link of shared backgrounds and similar pains moved the women on both sides of the tape recorder to greater intimacy and trust and occasionally to tears (p. 660).

But, there is still a need to complete more in-depth studies to understand the complexities of the Black women's daily life and decision-making process.

The method of oral narrative can be used to broadcast the voice of one Black woman. Washington (1998)'s study is a "furtherance of literature that gives voice to the lives and ideologies of the Black woman" (p. 32), thus promoting Black women who are crying to be heard. The collected data are analyzed using the constant comparative method. Washington (1998), influenced by the theories of Collins (1991) and Guy-Sheftall (1995), concludes that a limited amount of stories are thriving because of the fidelity of past and present-day women writers who are of African descent. However, a faithful few cannot carry the burden of telling the lives of an entire group of people.

But, the way and manner in which African American women converse must also be analyzed. Gergen (as cited by Schwandt, 2000) maintains, "It is human interchange that gives language its capacity to mean and it must stand as the critical locus of concern" (p. 198). One study focuses on how African American women construct definitions of their talk and conduct their communicative lives. Houston (2000) analyzes narrative descriptions from the perspectives of the participants and finds:

> Each of these ways of conceiving their talk demonstrated the respondent's struggle to positively construct her voice in the midst of a discourse environment that continues to disparage speech and speakers marked as black [sic] and woman. Admittedly, speaking perspectives tell us how individuals think about talk, but not how they use language in actual communication interactions (p. 7).

Houston (2000) concludes, firstly, that the rationale for the growing interest in Black women's experience by racially dominant groups is fundamentally concerned with promoting images that fit reinforced existing preconceptions and racial stereotypes of Black womanhood. There is also a supposition that the entertainment world and the

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literary communities have shown an interest in print and electronic material that is about or written by Black women. This postulation, however, does not exclude mainstream feminist standpoint theorists. Secondly, Black women themselves are implicated in this process by recreating stories of lives that perpetuate the one-dimensional images of Black women's lives, because such stories are currently marketable and will sell. Thirdly, there are a tension and a discontinuity between academic and theoretical accounts of experiences and the way Black women actually perceive their social worlds.

Therefore, the way that language is used in narratives must be carefully considered. The non-verbal body language that accompanies words must also be examined. Most importantly, language is just not mirroring some aspect of the world experienced by participants. Giddens (as cited by Schwandt, 2000) asserts that

…language is embedded in social practices or a form of life. Moreover, the rules that govern a form of life circumscribe and close that form of life off to others. Hence, it is only within and with reference to a particular form of life that the meaning of an action can be described and deciphered (p. 200).

But, Potter (as cited by Schwandt, 2000) argues that the method of social constructionism functions as a way to facilitate understanding the social practices and to analyze the abstract language that constitutes representation and description. Lastly, communication through language is an expression of standpoint. There is an implication that one would be wise to question the motives of each principal involved in the development, procurement, distribution, and advocacy of such projects that are produced by the mass media for public viewing.

Through the use of language, African American women can give their meanings about particular words, utterances, and actions and describe specific social practices that occur in the workplace. Black women also have opportunities to carry on the oral tradition of telling the history of other African American women through stories. Further, the correlation between what Black women say about their examples of discrimination or oppression and their responses can be analyzed. But, as a final point, it is significant to understand how African American women leaders use verbal language to communicate. Significance is attached to language usage for Black women leaders because language is representative of self; and for that reason, communicative skills can be directly related to self-valuation, self-definition, and standpoint.

Synthesis of Research Literature

In the review of the body of literature, I found support for my argument that African American women have been marginalized and subordinated as a group by the hegemony in the U. S. In addition, hegemonic opinions about today's African American women are similar to those that existed during the period when slavery was pivotal to the country's economic solvency. Socially constructed beliefs still help shape discriminatory attitudes and oppressive structures about African American women in the workplace (McGlowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004-2005). Some Black women have assumed prominent leadership positions in the workplace, regardless of these erroneous beliefs. However, the literature indicates that African American women who achieve this level of leadership generally are rendered invisible in the workplace (Collins 1991, 2000). Therefore, in this study, I have privileged the perspective of African American women

who are leaders to understand how they are impacted by this situation. Although it is important to understand the self-defined standpoint of Black women regarding workplace experiences at the intersection of race and gender, I discovered it was even more crucial to examine the self-valuation and self-definition of African American women in regard to workplace incidents.

I found from completing the review of the empirical research that there was limited indication of an understanding of race and gender in the self-valuation, self-definition, and standpoint of African American women. The studies' findings and conclusions, however, did suggest that further research associated with Black women's construction of knowledge needed to be conducted. Additional research will increase the understanding of how the workplace experiences at the intersection of race and gender influence Black women's self-valuation, self-definition, and standpoint. I will follow the recommendations of Fulton (2004) and Watt (2006) to explore the relationship between identity development (self-definition) and standpoint. This is consistent with Clawson and Clark (2003), who suggest exploring how race and gender interconnect to influence the attitudes of Black women. Based on the recommendations of Collins and Lightsey (2001) and Jackson (1998), my study will further explore the relationship between race and gender and how these markers define identity. My study also will convey information about the relationship between identity and the social environment (Jackson & Kite, 1996; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; McCowan & Alston, 1998). The recommendations of Anderson (2001) and Settles (2006) to examine how external and internal perceptions of professional Black women leaders influence the development of their self-definition are included in my study. I present strategies for becoming a workplace pioneer, being

promoted, and surviving workplace experiences at the intersection of race and gender from reconstructed narratives, using the voices of the African American women leaders in the manner of Washington (1998).

I am mindful of my role and demeanor as an African American woman interviewing other African American women. I am also aware that the participants' uses of linguistics in the narratives were also expressions of standpoint and survival (Houston, 2000). Moreover, the finding of the studies conducted by Houston (2000) and Johnson-Bailey (1999) primarily helped me to establish the trustworthiness of my study.

I decided that other issues were worth considering, if they appeared as themes within the narratives of my study. For example, Brush (2001) advocates problematizing, not only gender consciousness, but also race consciousness, especially with women of color. I know that Black women are independently securing positions of leadership in the marketplace with inadequate support systems. The influences of mentors, role models, coping resources, or other alternatives to support Black women as they enter new roles will be investigated if they emerge as themes. Alston (2000), Dixon-Reeves (2003), Green & King (2002), Jackson & Kite (1996), King & Ferguson (2001), McCowan & Alston (1998), and McGlowan-Fellows & Thomas (2004-2005) refer to the lack of Black women who serve as role models and mentors, which negatively impacts the success of African American women in the workplace. Discovering the role that religion and spirituality play in the lives of African American women has been advised by Bacchus (2002), Fall (2002), and Mattis (2000, 2002).

Summary

The search of empirical studies revealed that a great deal more could be understood about the intersection of gender and race when the markers of gender and race are embodied in one individual. Therefore, I continued to advance an additional study about race and gender to add to the existing literature. After reviewing related research literature and studies, I established a conceptual framework for my study. There were recommendations within the reviewed body of research for furthering the understanding of how African American women construct knowledge from their workplace experiences. Authors and researchers called for research that critically explores:

- ways that African American women define race and gender

- relationships between race and gender

- the complex identities and definition of self that develop because of the relationship between race and gender when embodied in one person (Black women do not experience their gender and cultural ethnicity as separate identities)

- how African American women describe and resist socially constructed perceptions and frameworks

- discontinuities between academic and theoretical accounts of experiences and how African American women actually experience their social world

- impacts of the lack of African American women role models and mentors.

Implications of the completed studies also generally indicate that there are many questions that have yet to be answered. These questions are in regard to how Black

women experience life within the context of changing political, economic, and social landscapes. The three themes that emerge from the research studies review are:

- The expected roles and behaviors of African American women have been historically devised by socially constructed ideas of a dominant group.

- There is limited ability to understand how African American women experience multiple positionalities (define multiple identities) when restricted to only defining themselves within the confines of race and gender.

- Black women's standpoint must be understood within the framework of their own unique, oppressive, existential experiences and how they have created ingenious and positive ways of effectively resisting oppression.

There are a limited number of studies incorporating Black women, although intellectuals, researchers, interested students, and the public at large increasingly recognize the absence of studies that only focus on Black women. But, the reviewed research literature in this study places Black women at the center. In this dissertation, I am creating an alternate approach to traditional theories and methods to explore how African American women's experiences in the workplace are related to self-valuation, self-definition, standpoint, and the intersectionality of race and gender. So, I have made three resolutions. I conclude that the link between gender and feminist theories is so relevant that my study must reflect that connection. The second decision is to locate my study within the context of the influences that help to shape the working lives of the African American participants. Finally, I use the group as a focal point, with the understanding that the social location of each participant, not the results of collective

decision-making by individuals in the group, is most important. Using the group as the focal point does not preclude space for individual agency. Further, the tellers' voices are privileged (the methods of facilitation are discussed in Chapter 3).

The synthesized information from the research literature points out the gaps in research related to the thinking and life circumstances of African American women. Yet, and most importantly, the recommendations of the reviewed literature and studies are compatible with the primary purpose of my study and the posed research question. The purpose is to explore how four African American women, who are perceived as local pioneers within the workforce realms of banking, education, law, and organized religion, construct self-defined standpoints. The research question inquires:

What do the narratives of African American women, who work in the domains of banking, education, law, and organized religion, reveal about how they construct meanings of self-valuation, self-definition, and standpoint from their workplace experiences?

I focus firstly on only one situation in the daily lives of the participants and I have reconstructed incidents, using the descriptive words of the participants, to reveal aspects of their self-valuation, their self-definition, and their self-defined standpoint. Secondly, I explore the intersection of race and gender as an intrinsic constant that are embodied in one individual in changing social, political, and economic landscapes. Thirdly, I seek to identify commonly experienced situations/events, responses to those situations/events, and the meanings that Black women across the four domains of banking, education, law, and organized religion construct from those experienced situations/events.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The use of the qualitative research genre for this study is an appropriate approach because it presents the most comprehensive method to gather and interpret the meanings that African American women have constructed for themselves based on their lived experiences. Through qualitative research, women deconstruct their meanings, actions, and perceptions of society to reveal how they construct knowledge. The use of qualitative research is promoted and supported for this project, for a number of reasons.

A review of qualitative research (Creswell, 1998; Gibbs, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Maxwell, 1996; McBride & Schostak, 2004; Olesen, 2000) reveals the following. First, qualitative research engages participants. This engagement gives the participants a stake in, and an understanding of, the conducted research, which is the basis for action and change. Second, qualitative research pays attention to the action it seeks to bring about. Third, the thinking of the participants is accentuated, since their articulated views are rooted in their realities. Further, qualitative research is concerned with understanding behavior, not just with describing behavior. Fourth, the research is face-to-face interaction that focuses on the everyday routine. Finally, participants are afforded fundamental respect as individual human beings when employing the qualitative research method.

Rationale for Research Methods

I draw on different bodies of research – constructivism, feminist qualitative research, and narrative inquiry – to conduct this study. The three different research

methods address the complexities of the main components of the research. First, I capture the participants' descriptions and definition of a workplace incident as well as reproduce their meaning and intent. Next, I reconstruct participants' meanings and actions, within the context of their usage, and indicate those instances when utterances/non-verbal acts represent speech activity. Then, I analyze and interpret those reconstructions to understand the meaning that the participants make from their workplace experiences at the intersection of race and gender.

Constructivism

Williams (2006) defines constructivism as a "body of research that investigates constructions or meaning about broad concepts or more specific issues or ideas" (p. 85). Further, constructivism is categorized as an interpretivist paradigm, with two major approaches. One approach focuses on the individual or personal constructions or a personally constructed reality. The other approach is social constructionism, where the focus is on the shared meaning that can be said to reflect the meaning that people or a group develop for their activities together. The method of constructivism is suited for in-depth exploration of human action and experience, as well as the meaning that human beings make as a result.

Moreover, interpretivism, a variety of social constructionism, is based on the understanding and belief that "knowledge of what others are doing and saying always depends upon some background or context of other meanings, beliefs, values, practices, and so forth" (Schmandt, 2000, p. 201). Three understandings constitute the tradition of interpretivism:

All three understandings share the following features: view human action as

meaningful, evince an ethical commitment in the form of respect for and fidelity

to the life world, and emphasize the contribution of human subjectivity to

knowledge without thereby sacrificing the objectivity of knowledge (Schwandt,

2000, p. 192).

Feminist Qualitative Research

Olesen (2000) declares that feminist qualitative research focuses on problems

affecting women and institutions that frame those circumstances, examines frameworks

to grasp social justice for women in specific contexts, generates new ideas about

knowledge from oppressed groups into the research, and produces ideas that might foster

action or further research. Feminist research is reflexive, woman-centered,

deconstruction of women's lived experiences, and transformation of patriarchy and

corresponding empowerment of women (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). In summary,

Campbell & Wasco favor a feminist research process with primary features that include:

- expansion of methodology to include both quantitative and qualitative methods

- connection of women for group-level data collection

- reduction of hierarchical relationship between researcher and participants to
  facilitate trust and disclosure

Still, Jansen and Davis (1998) argue for a feminist interpretive approach that offers more

personal and interactive communication and has the potential to diminish the typical

(hierarchical) power relations inherent in conventional research. "When researchers aim

to capture the complexity of sensitive, everyday life experiences with the goal of

understanding the perspectives of those who live it, a feminist interpretive method is the

referred method for increasing understanding and giving voice and visibility" (p. 296).

In addition, the approach of interpretive research should go beyond reporting to

exemplifying a method that searches for meaning, an approach that aims to elevate the

perspectives of the participants.

On the other hand, Howard-Hamilton (2003) makes a case in a monograph for a

theory-to-practice approach that offers promise for understanding the intersecting

identities of African American women and for explaining the ways their needs can be

addressed effectively.

> Overall, the development and socialization of African Americans have been
>
> molded and understood within the framework of the perceptions and agenda of
>
> members of the dominant society. Selecting appropriate theories, for
>
> understanding the needs of African American women should, however, be based
>
> on their cultural, personal, and social contexts, which clearly differ significantly
>
> from those of men and women who have not experienced racial and gender
>
> oppression (p. 20).

But, the common criticism is that feminist qualitative research is a type of research that

does have the potential to obscure the differences in women. The differences in women

are often hidden by a blurring of feminine identity and a feminist position in the narrative

of telling another's story as the story of one's feminism (Rooney, 1996).

Nonetheless, feminist qualitative research is a significant means to study the

experiences of women. The use of feminist research is an effective way to explore how

African American women articulate their responses (Weiner, 1997, p. 144). "It is well to

remember that feminist research is highly diverse," has no boundaries, and may use a

wide range of methods (Olesen, 2000, p.216). The overarching goal of feminist research

is the identification of ways in which multiple forms of oppression impact women's lives

and the empowerment of women to tell their stories (Campbell & Wasco, 2000). The

practice of using storytelling has influenced the shaping of both the feminist approaches

to narratives written by women specifically, and feminist reflections on narrative

structures in general. Storytelling is currently recognized as being among the most

influential narrative practices at work in feminist theory (Rooney, 1996). Moreover,

Black women's stories are products of their constructions.

Narrative Inquiry

The specific method of narrative inquiry, which is employed in this project, is

grounded in the thinking and scholarship of Clandinin and Connelly (2000). The goal of

narrative inquiry is to construct stories, as opposed to discovering solutions. In other

words, since there is no one absolute, underlying, and true human reality, narrative

inquiry is a way of "primarily dealing not with a mode of representing but with a specific

mode of constructing and constituting reality…" (Brockmeier & Harre, 1997, p. 60).

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method and research technique that will help to

draw out the complex stories of Black women. As a research method, narrative inquiry is

compatible with the interaction between the researcher and the participant as well as the

stories that are told. Learning is not only underlined for the individual; it is underscored

for the researcher. The researcher is placed within the study to avoid objectification and

to conduct research that is transformative (Creswell, 1998). The features of narrative

inquiry enable me to probe into different settings, times, and situations in order to uncover the core issues of the experiences, regardless of how many times the stories have been told or retold.

Narrative inquiry, as a technique, prevents me from reducing the stories told by the Black women participants to an anecdotal collection. Narrative inquiry begins with unstructured interviews, although negotiations start before the formal interview process begins and continue throughout the research process. "Negotiating entry is commonly seen as an ethical matter framed in terms of principles that establish responsibilities for both researchers and practitioners " (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 3). Areas of negotiation include access, boundaries, and accounts. Negotiation calls for the researcher and each participant to reach agreement on when, where, and how the interviews take place, as well as whether to include information perceived by the participant as extremely intimate or personally sensitive.

Probing in-depth interviews are conducted and interviews (text) provide the opportunity to explicate a way of making sense of the occurrences in the lives of four African American women, from their own words. "Narratives involve the personal dimension…" (Gibbs, 2002, p. 174) and are a way to capture the key components and the essence of particular personal experiences, thereby, facilitating the analysis and interpretation processes. Emerging themes are categorized and findings are interpreted to suggest implications. It is only after these stories are deconstructed, reconstructed, and rearticulated that the readers are able to make some personal sense and construct their own knowledge of the text and context of the experiences, the ultimate goal of narrative inquiry.

So, this study has been conducted using the combined methods of constructivism, feminist qualitative research, and narrative inquiry. These are three methodologies that are well suited to facilitate the discovery and understanding of the experiences of the Black women participants. After inviting participants to tell their experiences in their own words, I can analyze the collected data to understand the thinking of the African American woman.

Design Decisions

The purpose of this study is to explore how African American women who are perceived as local pioneers within the workforce realms of banking, education, law, and organized religion, construct self-defined standpoints. The participants' personal descriptions of situations, reconstructed from interviews, are encircled by the social, political, racial, gendered, and/or economic locations of the settings and place in time. More importantly, based on the thinking of Olesen (2000), I placed African American participants at the center of this study to understand through text, discourses, and encounters how these women's lives are contextualized and framed.

Recruitment Procedures

African American women participants generally have not been the only participant groups included in the many empirical studies that focus on Black women or women of color. As a result, Black women's knowledge has been subjugated or blurred within the findings that might have included different genders, other ethnic groups, and the dominant social group. I purposefully sought out African American women to

participate in this study to document the group experience of a historically constructed group. This research study values the knowledge and experiences of Black women leaders who have become pioneers in their respective workplace choices.

I conducted a search for African American women who grew up during periods of time in the U. S. – between 1970 and 1990 - when Black women were blatantly, negatively, and pronouncedly identified in the public view because of their cultural ethnicity and gender. I set up a procedure for selecting African American women participants that ensured the participant-researcher relationship was void of complex emotional ties or a stance of power in the researcher-participant relationship. I established procedures that made sure that possible issues related to bias, ethics, and validity in how I selected the purposeful sampling were eliminated.

I contacted the presidents of twenty national, state, and local associations and organizations; some had only women as their membership or only African American women as members. I requested the nomination of African American women who were the first persons of their race and gender (or among the first group of Black women) to achieve a certain degree of success (assumption of a leadership, supervisory, or management position) in their workplace site. I provided a full explanation of the parameters that would be used for the selection of participants. I received in return a total of twelve nominations of potential candidates who might participate in my project. I was also pointed in the direction of two individual, independent African American women who might agree to participate. The potential participants were either leaders within local, state, or national organizations or represented the workforce realms of banking, certified public accountants, education, financial advisors/investors, law, and religion.

As soon as I received a referral, I contacted that potential participant via the telephone. I made fourteen individual telephone calls and also wrote five emails. During each call and in each email, I introduced myself, gave a brief overview of the research I was conducting, and listed what would be required of each participant. Lastly, I inquired about the interest of each potential candidate in becoming involved as a participant in the project.

When a prospective candidate indicated interest in participating, I provided full, detailed information through written correspondence. I mailed that individual a packet, for a total of thirteen packets that were mailed out. Each packet contained a Letter of Introduction, an Informed Consent Form, and a Demographic Form (See Appendix A), which fully explained the goals of the research, purpose, methods, techniques, and time frame for completion of this project. The estimated time that might be invested in completing this project, including the anticipated accountability of each participant and me, was also made clear. I provided my telephone number and e-mail address so that the potential participants could contact me with any questions or concerns. I also included a stamped self-addressed envelope to make the return of the signed and completed forms easy.

Selection of Participants

Feminist theorists (Collins, 2000; Harding, 1997; Hartsock, 1997; Hekman, 1997; Smith, 1997) categorize diverse workforce fields that shape the lives of women as education, material, political, and social. Therefore, I conducted a deliberate search to find one African American woman from each the workforce realms of banking,

education, law, and organized religion. This was done in order to get different perspectives of African American women from across the diverse workforce fields that helped shape the landscape in which Black women live.

Criteria for selection were:

- Was an African American/Black woman

- Was described as being a pioneer or was the first African American woman to assume a position within a particular workforce realm

- Was in the workforce and earned wages between the years of 1970 and 1990

- Was willing to openly share and be questioned by me regarding beliefs and incidents or situations related to experiences at work

- Was committed to devoting time necessary for the completion of the data collection process

- Signed the informed consent form and completed the demographic questionnaire.

Child of God (COG) – a pseudonym – was the first African American woman who returned her completed forms to me. COG met the criteria for participation because she was the first African American woman in her religious denomination to be appointed as superintendent. I reviewed the goals of the research, purpose, methods, techniques, and time frame for completion of this project in a telephone conversation. Additionally, I acknowledged receipt of her short demographic form and we scheduled the first interview. We decided on the name COG for her identity during the first interview.

I selected COG to serve as a prototype for, and to participate in, trial interviews. The trial interviews were conducted in the living room or kitchen of her suburban home

between November 2004 and February 2005. The results of the trial interviews enabled me to ascertain if the interview questions communicated what was intended, to refine the interviewing process, and to look for possible solutions for any problems that might develop. COG was not included in the purposeful sampling of this study.

Then, I chose the finalists in the nomination process because they had met the criteria for participation; there were no significant economic (class) differences among the four Black professional women that I selected. Also, the finalists had signed and returned the completed forms to me by return mail. Each of the participants demonstrated her willingness to openly share her responses to my questions and her beliefs by engaging in the recruitment process (listening to my explanations, asking questions, beginning to discuss possible examples of possible incidents, asking more questions, and voluntarily agreeing to participate) and agreeing to audiotaped interview sessions. Additionally, the participants demonstrated their commitment to devoting the time necessary for me to collect data from them by scheduling 60- to 90-minute blocks of time, over a four-month period, for each of the four interviews.

Subsequently, I placed my second telephone call to each participant to

- review the goals of the research, purpose, methods, techniques, and time frame for completion of this project
- acknowledge receipt of the signed Informed Consent Form and completed demographic form
- assign a pseudonym, which was either the individual's personal choice or an assumed name that I gave

- arrange a date, time, and location for our first interview session

In due course, the four African American women – the finalists – became the foci of this study that was conducted by an African American woman researcher. Diana, Jewel, PJ, and Sheila – all fictitious names – became the purposeful sample that was pivotal to this research. A purposeful sample is important to qualitative interpretive research because a great deal can be learned from the in-depth study of the incidents described by selected information-rich participants.

Schedule of Interviews

The interview sites, dates, and times were negotiated and agreed upon with the selected interviewees. I established from the beginning that I, and I alone, would be the one who would do the traveling to any designated location to complete the interviews. Each participant and I strictly adhered to our arranged interviewing schedule, which showed that each of us valued the other's time. But, if there were a need to reschedule an interview because of some unforeseen circumstances, the affected party would call the other so that another time could be arranged. This indicated our flexibility in working together and our sensitivity to each other.

I met with Judge Diana in her chambers at the courthouse for our series of interview sessions because it was convenient for her and offered us a great deal of privacy. I understood that I had to wait until Judge Diana's docket for the day was completed or business for the day was concluded before each interview would begin. I waited in the courtroom where Judge Diana was still presiding over a case before beginning the first interview. I then went directly to the judge's chambers and promptly

began the subsequent interviews. The judge's chamber was a small, modestly furnished office with a large window that gave one a view of a grassy outside area. A reception area and a desk for a secretary were just outside of the judge's chambers.

Pastor Jewel and I agreed to meet at her church in order to conduct the series of interview sessions. This site was convenient for the pastor as well as providing us with a certain degree of privacy. The first, second, and third interview sessions occurred in a windowless room in the church hall, which was just off and around the corner from the main sanctuary. The fourth and addendum interview sessions were conducted in the dining area of the parsonage. The pastor agreed to the additional session so that I could bring closure to her participation in my research project.

Principal PJ and I agreed to meet for our first interview session in her home. We also arranged for subsequent interview sessions to be conducted in the living room of her home - a rancher with a two-car garage and large yard. The location was convenient for PJ and ensured privacy.

Head bank teller Sheila and I arranged for our four interview sessions to occur in her home. Each of the four interview sessions was conducted in the dining room of Sheila's brick row house. This arrangement was convenient and comfortable for Sheila as well as providing a private environment.

Generally, the reception at the first interview session with each of the four participants was similar. I was welcomed with smiles, firm handshakes, and wide-open eyes that seemed to convey a sense of inquisitiveness. Even though participants verbalized some concern because they did not know what they had to offer to my project, they were nonetheless proud to have been selected to participate. Although the

participants appeared slightly apprehensive, at first, especially when I activated the tape

recorder, each of the participants intrepidly and enthusiastically cooperated. Interview

sessions were conducted and completed with Diana, judge; Jewel, pastor; PJ, principal;

and Sheila, head bank teller between July 2005 and June 2006.

Data Collection

In-depth, open-ended, unstructured, and dialogic interview techniques were my

primary data collection tools. Narrative inquiry was the secondary data-gathering

method. Phase one of the data collection process was to engage each participant in a

series of four, sixty-to-ninety minute, interactive, dialogic manner interviews. I had

positioned myself as a researcher in a feminist qualitative research project. Therefore, I

took steps to ensure that the research environment was unrestricted and respectful.   I

created an interview protocol (see Appendix B), using the framework suggested by

Collins (2000), a heuristic guide produced by Acker (2000), a synthesis of empirical

studies' procedures, and my own professional experience. I planned to conduct

interviews in a conversational manner, in order to gather information-rich data to address

the research questions.

Acceptance without judgment was the standard that I set and adhered to while I

completed the study. Truth, like beauty, is in the eye or mind of the beholder. Collins

(1991) maintains that positivist science is "a discourse… that assumes that the tools of

science can represent reality and discover universal truth" (p. 279). A positivist position

holding that truth should be measured against some objective criteria is not appropriate

for the type of study that I conducted. The positivist position was not in sync with the research questions or the methods that framed this study.

The interview sites were as personal to the participants as were the individual times and dates scheduled for the interviews. Each of the specific locations assured privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, and comfort for each of the participants. Confidentiality was the most serious concern for the two participants who were still actively employed. I set up the tape recorder at the start of each session as the participant and I usually bonded with light conversation. When the tape recorder, with built-in microphone, was placed in close proximity to the informant, I customarily greeted the participant by name and set the stage for developing the interview for that day. When I became aware that participants might add to their contributions of data before and/or after the official interview, I gave notice that I would turn on the tape recorder once I entered the location. The machine would continue to record until I left the premises. The few occurrences when the tape recorder was turned off and on during interviews were documented on the interview tapes and the printed transcripts.

I began the initial interview with each participant, using a dialogic approach. But, I had to adjust my strategies at different times within the first interview, as well as in later interviews, depending on the participants' responses. When participants were talkative, I exercised active listening skills and took notes. When participants responded in short, terse phrases, I either probed for a more expanded reply, made direct inquiries, set up hypothetical examples and devised questions about that situation, allowed participants 'think time', and/or asked for the same information later in the same interview or in a subsequent interview session. Sometimes, I had to foreshadow what questions should be

anticipated in future sessions. Therefore, I knowingly completed phase one, realizing

that a combination of interview strategies (the aforementioned as well as the semi-

structured and direct questioning type) had been used to collect data.

At the start of the first interview session, I disclosed some information about

myself, which would begin to foster a sense of collaboration between the participant and

me. Although the content of the first query was the same for all of the participants, the

phrasing of that first open-ended statement during the first session was a natural and

logical outgrowth of the conversation in which the participant and I were engaged. The

statement was, *tell me about your workplace experiences as an African American woman*

who has been described as the first person of your color and gender to assume such a

position. The particular setting and the borders of the personal account were

contextualized within the boundaries of the narrative.

The range of topics the participants discussed during the sequential interview

sessions included:

- Job in general and a specific incident

- Analysis of treatment at job site; lessons learned

- Coping strategies

- Family, school, and community

- Other employment

- Choice of occupation

- Analysis of self and marital status

- Interpersonal relationships

- How others perceived them

- Leadership

- Personal belief system, interests, and social life

I composed field notes that only captured the thick descriptions of the situations or mannerisms displayed by the participants during interview sessions. These field texts clarified and depicted the foreground and background of particular situations or events. Based on the recommendations of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I stayed alert to what the participants did and said as part of the ongoing research process and how the participants dealt with the interview experience. At the end of each interview session, I completed what I considered an important act in preparation for the analysis of the collected data. I followed the advice of Creswell (1998) and wrote self-reflexive memos about what was happening as each interview was conducted and heeded the warning of Brockmeier and Harre (1997) that "there is no such thing as an isolated sentence or a preposition" (p. 47). The writing of reflection notes/memos helped me to avoid becoming intertwined in and being a part of the informants' stories. The written reflexive and reflection notes and memos were kept separate from the field notes. Also, at the end of the first interview session, the date and time for the next session were arranged. This procedure was followed after each interview session.

I next sent the audiotape via a delivery service to an experienced professional transcriber who was hired to create printed transcripts from the recorded interviews. The transcriber sent me a hard copy of the contents of the recorded interviews via e-mail, followed by the return of the audiotape via a delivery service within seven days. I then

listened to the audiotaped recording of the interview as I compared the printed transcript. I made necessary changes on the printed transcript and composed notes to participants regarding inaudibility or needed clarifications. The information written in the communication was merged with the techniques of members' check and the development of follow-up questions required for clarification and fullness or accuracy or understanding at the next session. Finally, I wrote additional reflective and reflexive notes, when necessary.

A printed copy of the transcript was delivered to the participants by hand, U.S. mail, email, or delivery service within three weeks following an interview. The participants reviewed the printed transcripts and presented me with additions, corrections, and notations at the beginning of the next interview or over the telephone or through emails. This process was an effective two-way communication system as well as containing the properties of data collection in phase two.

Phase two involved verification procedures. I reviewed with each participant the contents of the written interview transcripts (the product of interaction between the participants and me) as a way of ensuring credibility and accuracy. The technique of member checks allowed each informant some interactive participation and the assumption of some ownership for the research study. In cases of disagreement, we discussed the issue of concern and came to an agreement. I provided interviewees with the opportunity to clarify their ideas and meanings, to remove misunderstandings, and finally to agree that their accounts and meanings of their transcribed stories were accurately represented. I did note either date of change or, where decipherable, I noted participants' reasons for requesting the change. The rationale was noted on the printed

transcript. For my purposes, I made the necessary changes requested by the participants when it was deemed feasible. The collection of high-quality data only enhanced the analyses processes. Later, I would share the findings of the study with the participants in the final copy of my dissertation.

Data Management and Analysis

The collected data were four sets of four semi-structured interviews with one addendum to one interview, four self-reporting written portraits, and one newspaper article, totaling twenty-one documents that were organized for analysis and interpretation. The self-reporting written portraits and the newspaper article, with identifying information, were kept under lock and key in a metal storage box along with the signed copies of the approved Institutional Review Board (IRB) forms, signed consent forms, completed demographic forms, letters of introduction, and any data associated with the actual participants. The audiotapes of interviews were labeled with each participant's assumed name and also placed in the locked metal storage box. When a transcript was emailed to me from the transcriber, I would transfer the document to my computer's hard drive and floppy disks. The floppy disks were filed according to the participants' assumed names. Paper copies of the documents were labeled with the assumed names of each participant and placed in individual notebooks. The notebooks were divided into sections: document listing – dated interview number; interview related documents - notes, reflections, and reflexive comments; memoranda; and node coding reports.

The first and second readings of the documents were completed to identify general themes, categories, and patterns and to unearth core ideas and concepts (nodes)

that were reflected in the narratives. The data analysis began with scrutinizing the

collected data, coding selected sections of documents, and sorting chosen data into

categories, themes, and patterns. Each assertion was coded as a node.

After what I considered the final coding, I began to organize the data for

interpretation. It was at this point that I realized that I had identified thematic content

that added to the list of nodes (coding). But, the thematic content could not be situated

into broad or common themes, categories, or patterns that related to the focus of my

research. The process of coding had been a random endeavor. Each node was an

independent idea that stood alone because I open-coded passages. Coding had been done

based on the content or context of particular text, without regard to linkage of any kind

among any of the other codes.

I reviewed my scholarly readings and devised a guide to facilitate addressing the

research questions to help shape the project. Themes were then defined as large

umbrellas under which certain ideas or categories were grouped. Based on the review of

the existing literature, some of the themes that emerged were the same as the premises of

a Black women's standpoint. The themes were aptly named as themes of a Black

women's standpoint because, according to Collins (2000), "no homogeneous Black

woman's standpoint exists" (p. 28). Factors in Black women's lives influence diverse

responses to common challenges. Therefore, a Black women's standpoint is one that is

characterized by the collective responses of Black women regarding experiences at

intersecting oppressions and the oppositional knowledge (the converse of things that the

hegemony believe are true about African American women) that Black women construct

(Collins 1991, 2000). Next, other emerging patterns and themes were identified.

Then, I made use of the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 2.0, which

facilitated the grouping of data by code, compared themes, checked frequency of themes

across interviews, and related how the themes connected to each other and to the research

(see Appendix C). The practical use of nodes within the qualitative data analysis

software was the ease of coding or changing the coding of relevant passages in

documents. I defined and used the nodes – the concepts being studied - as

representations of the themes of a Black women's standpoint (see Appendix C for

complete listing of the nodes). A full description and definition of each theme and

category of a Black women's standpoint are provided under the heading of *Heuristic Map*

as a Guide. Patterns – continuum of occurrences - made up the blueprint for how the

participants constructed knowledge. Portions of the data were coded, based on the

constant comparison of experiences (descriptions). Emerging patterns and themes were

identified and coded.

The heuristic map (see Appendix D) that I created was a solidification of the

context and direction of my research. After that, I again read each transcript and

organized the findings, based on the features of the heuristic map that I had created. The

heuristic map identified prominent themes that emerged – key themes of a Black

women's standpoint (Collins 1991, 2000). I removed the nodes that were established by

the random coding and repeated the identification process, using selective coding. I

again identified (coded) specific sections of the text with nodes (concepts or ideas

developed with the use of NVivo 2.0) that were consistent with the heuristic map.

For a second time, I discovered something interesting during subsequent analysis

of the coded concepts. Even though I had initially coded the parts of the narratives that

were related to one specific incident with components related in the heuristic map, I found other situations (succeeding events or unrelated events) that could be associated with aspects of the heuristic map. These situations were also coded and notations were made to ensure appropriate management of the data that were unrelated to, and not specifically coupled with, the significant incident under discussion.

Since descriptions of incidents were not told in sequence and in total, I asked follow-up questions to verify information or for clarity and accuracy throughout the series of interviews. As a result, I had to construct narratives from each of the participants' respective series of interviews that described a particular workplace experience. I was able to align my memos and notes of reflection and reflexivity with passages made in the narratives by the participants. I was also able to analyze the participants' statements in light of their demeanor during the interview. This process was consistent with the tradition of narrative analysis where expressions of feelings in language validate how meaning is constructed. "In narrative analysis, every utterance, even repetitions and noises are regarded as part of the data" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996, p. 145). The functions of narrative inquiry and narrative analysis are to construct stories, not to determine solutions. Coding, reading, rereading, recoding, and restructuring the coding of the printed transcripts facilitated this process, the prelude to the interpretation processes.

I conducted different types of searches, using the qualitative data analysis software, as the next step in order to find any use of figurative language within the text, to compare themes, to check the frequency of themes, and to relate how themes were connected to each other and to the research. In addition, I made several searches within

document passages. A lexical search (See Appendix C) was made for the word 'felt'.

Participants frequently used the word 'felt' when they talked about racial discrimination.

I additionally searched for the words 'obedient,' 'obedience,' 'strong-willed,' and

'determined' – other words participants used frequently in their self-descriptions. I

studied the text surrounding these words to gain insight into the meanings that the

participants had constructed. I also conducted Boolean searches to look for similar words

such as 'injustice,' 'prejudice,' 'discrimination,' 'unfair,' 'bias,' and 'oppression' in order

to understand the context in which the words were used. Texts were searched for

passages that were coded with two concepts, such as self-definition and self-valuation;

self-definition and thought and action; self-definition and consciousness and standpoint,

and race and gender. Document passages were searched for occurrences of words, such

as 'Black female,' 'Black woman', 'race and gender,' and 'race and sex.' "Shared

expressions and shared vocabulary can tell us a lot about how social groups see

themselves and how they account for their experiences" (Gibbs, 2002, p. 121).

The narrative analysis process moved between theory (heuristic map) and

collected data to identify and refine themes, categories, and patterns from transcribed

texts before findings were interpreted and reported. The findings were interpreted from

the perspective I used to create the heuristic model. This model was an interpretative

framework that facilitated the analysis of the meaning of each identified theme. The

framework of the heuristic map, narrative analysis, and my position or perspective as a

Black feminist ultimately shaped the interpretation of the research data.

Finally, the research text grew out of repeated questions concerning meaning and

significance. Transcriptions, handwritten interview notes, reflective memos, and

reflexivity notes were actually merged and compared to form the research text. The Black women participants' voices were placed within the research text, in a manner described by Creswell (1998), through the use of three types of quotes: (a) dialogues or statements of significance; (b) participants' own words to support a theme; and (c) participants' own words that express multifaceted ideas.

Denzin (as cited in Creswell, 1998) describes the writing of qualitative research, especially the narrative, in a manner that "presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationship…[and] evokes emotionality and self-feelings…The voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (p. 186). The narratives present revealing pictures of the surroundings, other involved actors, and a specific situation within a particular setting. The imagery is supported with each participant's taped and transcribed words and my field notes. Thick description is the key component of qualitative research and narrative inquiry. The use of thick descriptions helped to explore and understand how Black women act in response to the interactive dynamics, as members of a marginalized group, within a worksite domain. Richardson (as cited in Creswell, 1998) defines this process as verisimilitude. Verisimilitude is "a criterion for a good literary study in which the writing seems 'real' and 'alive,' transporting the reader directly into the world of study" (p. 256).

Heuristic Map as a Guide

The first step during the initial stage of analysis involved reading the collected data several times. When I began to make deductions about certain information in the narratives, I noticed the emergence of general trends. The trends are called themes and

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are labeled as specific nodes and coded, with the use of NVivo 2.0, qualitative data analysis software.   The titles of some of the extracted nodes are labeled as the components of a Black women's standpoint (Collins 1991, 2000). Other nodes labeled, as themes are those gathered from research literature, that emerged during the analysis, or that have been recalled from my training as an educational leader. A Black women's standpoint is composed of many themes, and those are assembled in a manner to convey an emerging theory. The heuristic guide is intended to reflect an interactive relationship, not a linear hierarchical relationship, of the identified themes. The heuristic map is a representation of the interaction and the overlapping of themes. The final outcome is the representation of one possible process that the African American women participants use to construct knowledge from a work site experience.

The first component – interdependence of experience and consciousness – portrays what African American women do and how African American women think. Black women learn lessons from previous work experiences and apply that wisdom when employed at subsequent facilities, if there is a need. The second area is identified as the legacies of struggle. Situations of struggle are the core themes that Black women have historically used to identify their realities, especially in their response to continuing forms of violence. This overarching theme has evolved, since its origin, into meaning descriptions of discriminatory challenges or obstacles that limit Black women's choices in the workplace. Location of oppression, self-valuation, sexual politics, and activism are grouped in this broad area.

The dominant societal group uses markers of difference for other groups and their members within the same society. The markers such as age, gender, and race combine to

form an interlocking nature of oppression that is identified as the location of oppression, according to the participants. Self-valuation considers accounts of self-described acts that stress the content of Black women's self-definition. These accounts especially include acts of self-respect, respect for others, and respect from others or publicly advocating the replacing of externally derived images (negative controlling images) with authentic images of African American women. Sexual politics focuses on sensitivity to the set of ideas and social practices that are shaped by gender, race, and sexuality, which, within this context, are framed with how Black men and Black women treat each other and how African Americans are perceived and treated by others. Political actions by a group or an individual are signs of activism. This activism is the outcome for a self-determined (power to decide an outcome for oneself) Black woman. In addition, Black women's relationships with one another in the community are also regarded as important.

Black women act or respond in a variety of ways to resist oppressive or discriminatory situations, which is fitting for the category of diverse responses. Responses are influenced by internal and external factors. The responses are also sorted into two categories, thought and action, and consciousness and standpoint. Interdependence of thought and action pertain to experiences where action and thought inform each other through a process of rearticulation. Changes in thinking are accompanied by changed actions, as a result of this ongoing dialogue with self. Hence, altered experiences have stimulated a changed consciousness, in turn. Consciousness and standpoint illustrate the struggle for a self-defined standpoint, i.e., examples of how African American women think and what they say and do about an issue. The existence

of self-definition is an essential ingredient. Models of Black women's reliance on relationships with one another, as well as individual Black women's independence, are deemed significant. The convergence of identified themes facilitates the reconstruction of the narratives. The analysis and interpretation of the narratives point toward a Black women's self-defined standpoint.

Patterns, themes, categories, and relationships have continued to unfold and the heuristic map has been adjusted accordingly during the coding and analysis processes. The heuristic map has changed into a pictorial that depicts a belief about how African American women leaders construct a self-defined standpoint. The heuristic map helped steer the interpretive process of this project and eventually has evolved into a guide for understanding how African American women construct knowledge. The heuristic map and its transformations are based on discoveries about aspects of Black women's standpoint.

The core themes of Black women's standpoint have been placed on the map. One finding is that aspects of a Black women's standpoint are related to each other, in spite of variations. The major core themes are experience and consciousness, legacies of struggle, and diverse responses. Thought and action, <u>and</u> consciousness and standpoint, are categories of diverse responses. The categories of legacies of struggle are the location of oppression, sexual politics, self-valuation, and activism. Themes and categories are first organized in a vertical manner to indicate a process of construction that flows from the core theme experience and consciousness to the core theme of diverse responses. The finding is initially based on the premise that the core themes of Black women's standpoint are rigidly encased and independently isolated from the each other.

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Themes have been later discovered to be interactive and not linear, either vertical or horizontal. The interdependence of experience and consciousness, which originally was only related to past workplace experiences across the expanse of one's life, is found not to be restricted to workplace experience. Participants also benefit from lessons learned from experiencing situations within other domains, such as the community, educational institutions, and in the family unit. Therefore, the heuristic map has changed into a representation of the reciprocal relationship that exists between each theme that composes a Black women's standpoint (see Appendix D).

Trustworthiness

Narrative inquiry involves the researcher as part of the told story, experience, location, and described situation. But, this involvement only entails the researcher, participants, and readers coming away from immersion in the renderings with a deeper understanding of particular issues, an appreciation of the complexities involved in the situations, and/or more trustworthy frames of reference (Conle, 2003). I have respected and appreciated each of the participants as well as their accounts of lived experiences. I have created an accepting environment where the participants could give as accurate an accounting as possible about the phenomenon of interest. Still, I have focused intently on another critical concern.

The constructed meanings of the participants have been the only data that were used for interpretation. I have avoided producing arbitrary, oppressive views about Black women and using my personal and subjective interests and views as the content or findings. Care has been taken to prevent aspects of my experiences, beliefs, non-verbal

cues, and investigative strategies from influencing the information that the participants

have revealed during the interactive interviews. I have paid close attention to possible

biases in interpretation and put a strategic plan in place as a way to ensure and assure

validity (see Data Collection and Data Management and Analysis). The dominant

themes, categories, and patterns that are reported may be verified by the raw data that

have been securely placed in a locked file that is in my care.

Ethical Considerations

I entered the interview portion of this research project by implementing strategies

that established trust between the participants and me. I have attended to this concern

with some urgency since all of the information that I sought was not considered public

knowledge. Negotiating entry into the lives of the participants has been governed by a

set of principles that define how the individuals and I choose to interact with each other

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1990).

Within the context of this study, ethical implications include having the approval

of the IRB to conduct research with human subjects; asking for and receiving consent

from each participant for the interviews to be conducted and recorded; consistently

assuring and ensuring privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity to accommodate principles

of openness; proceeding through the research process with professionalism; fairly treating

individual participants and gathered data; and developing a negotiated agreement to

which both participants and I adhered (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). The participants

have had the option of withdrawing from the study at any point in time, with or without

explanation.

The participants in the study have been made aware of the purpose and the intended use of the interviews' content. The scope of the research project is overtly, not covertly, written in the Informed Consent Form and my letter of introduction. In addition, each participant has been informed of the study's purpose and intended use of the recorded interviews before the first interview. This was done to avoid confusion or misunderstandings between the participants and me. I have professionally and competently handled challenges that arose during the research process by demonstrating my ability and flexibility to negotiate.

Chapter 4: 'In Her Own Words'

I begin these introductions of the participants with some personal biographical information. This section is also designed to present how the participants – Jewel, Sheila, PJ, and Diana – describe themselves. I have reconstructed the descriptions from the written biographical portrait that each participant provided and statements made across the total series of interviews. Next, I capture the descriptions the participants use to speak about their backgrounds (family, education, and community) in their respective narratives. Following that, I summarize the details of how and why each participant has chosen to work within a given profession or career. Lastly, I reconstruct and expose the workplace incident that is described by the participants during their interviews. The reconstructed descriptions are reproduced with their original meanings. This reported workplace incident is but one significant and memorable event from the participants' total life history of workplace experiences. The incidents have been described in response to my first open-ended inquiry, *tell me about your workplace experiences as an African American woman who has been described as the first person of your color and gender to assume such a position*. Although participants give a firsthand account or personal point of view, I have reconstructed the text of the printed transcript to present the picture that they have painted. I draw the descriptive words of each participant from the narratives and not from my own perspective, taking great care to avoid syntheses of *our experiences* [italics added]. When there is a need, I have enclosed the words that I have added for clarity or understanding of a sentence or thought in parentheses [].

Diana – Introduction

This single African American woman has no children and now lives in what is described as a suburban area. Diana became the first African American female to be appointed in her jurisdiction as a judge. She describes herself as being "hardworking, fair-minded, and committed to ensuring equal justice for all under the law" (Diana, personal communication, June 2, 2005).

Diana was reared in a home with a mother, father, grandmother, two younger brothers, and one older sister. Diana told me that she discerned how to behave appropriately, both inside the home and in public, from the teachings of her mother and grandmother. Negative conduct was unacceptable in either place. According to Diana, she did not have a privileged background. She grew up primarily in military communities, both on and off bases in other countries besides America. These communities were small towns as well as large urban centers. Despite relocating approximately every three years for most of her young life, Diana spent the latter part of her adolescence (and attended high school) in a very small town in rural southern America before attending college. Diana commented, "So I never was one to think that the world was only black or white or rich or poor because the world that I grew up in was defined by many different socioeconomic and racial factors" (personal communication, July 28, 2005).

Diana earned her bachelor's, master's, and jurisdoctorate degrees from a large university in a state other than the one where she now resides. She has, in the past, worked as an usher in a local concert hall, a secretary for a college department, a food

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processor in a factory, and an analyst for a tri-state transportation commission. Diana has also completed clerkships and an internship with the state legislature (personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Diana has a love for music, which she combines with 'working out'. She is an experienced aerobics instructor. Her off-the-bench activities also involve volunteerism. She sits on different types of professional and community-based committees as well as mentors high school students (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005).

"I'm No Annie Sullivan"

Diana told me that people, throughout her lifetime, have made remarks about how they thought she could have been a model because of her physical beauty. But, Diana admitted she has no fantasies or delusions of grandeur about a career as a model or entertainer. Diana laughed as she told me why.

> I don't look in the mirror and think, oh, I'm this or I'm that. I don't think I could have been that. And I don't think I was ever one of these young women who thought, oh, I feel Hollywood calling me. I certainly don't have musical talent and I think anybody who ever saw me do my bit as Annie Sullivan…act that part in high school would know Hollywood was not calling my name (personal communication, July 28, 2005).

Diana verbalized her reasons for selecting a law career. "…I probably have not the best motivation for wanting to be a lawyer" (personal communication, July 28, 2005). One of the primary reasons was that she just did not want to be poor any longer and wanted to escape the confines of a small southern town. Diana did not want to be

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stymied from becoming somebody, or maybe something is more appropriate, although she did not consciously think initially of the connection between her chosen career and the help she might provide people in need.

Diana repeatedly mentioned in different interview sessions that she did not have a privileged background and that she had a desire to excel at something professional. She believed this professional career would afford her economic advantages.

> I didn't know any lawyers. I certainly didn't know any doctors, but it was clear to me that if you wanted to make money, if that is your definition of success, as mine was early on - that you needed to go to college and then you needed to try to become a doctor, lawyer, or other type of professional that made a lot of money (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005).

Diana decided to become a lawyer because "Well, I realized early on I didn't like science that involved blood or cutting. So I knew I couldn't be a doctor. That only left being a lawyer" (personal communication, July 28, 2005). Her notion of attaining a law degree was shaped by popular television shows of the time and reading books.

Diana – The Incident

Judge Diana described a compilation of two specific types of court cases and resultant situations that occurred some four years apart. Diana pondered these occurrences and eventually decided that the reasons that these cases came before her were purely coincidental. "But, it just seemed to me that I seem to be getting all of the politically and racially charged Black cases initially" (Diana, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

The first group of cases was heard within the first six months of Judge Diana's

sitting on the bench. The cases concerned the conflict between the police departments

and the African American communities within several small towns in the county. Diana

remarked that great pressure was placed on her as a new judge, including the involvement

of the media (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

After more than ten hours of testimony and deliberation in one case, Judge Diana

found against the defendant on one count and offered the defendant probation. But, she

complied with the request of the defense attorneys who wanted to appeal the case. Judge

Diana made a decision that would facilitate the appeal, despite the fact that

> I felt like their decision to steer their client in that way was so wrong. But, it's not
>
> my job to say, are you sure you want to listen to your attorney? I can't do that.
>
> The attorneys have to give them advice (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

The second situation involved a female police officer, who lived within the

jurisdiction and worked in another county. The police officer had been involved in a

traffic accident that resulted in the death of a man who was walking his dog in a

crosswalk. The police did not publicly identify the female police officer by name nor did

they charge the officer with any crime, based on their investigation, for some period of

time. When the case was turned over to the state attorney's office, the police officer was

subsequently charged with failing to yield the right of way to a pedestrian in a crosswalk

(Diana, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Judge Diana found the police officer guilty, based on testimony, and imposed the

outcome as prescribed by law. According to the judge, that particular offense only

carried two months in jail and/or a $500 fine. "…newspaper articles were written,

editorials were written, just skewering me for not finding that she had killed this gentleman, and for not imposing any jail time" (Diana, personal communication, July 28, 2005).

Recently, the police officer appealed her case to a higher court. That judge decided that the female police officer had been improperly charged under this particular statute, i.e., the statute in question did not apply in a case where a traffic light controlled the intersection. The second judge, a White male, dismissed that charge and refused to let the state attorney's office charge the officer with a routine traffic violation (Diana, personal communication, July 28, 2005).

Her approach to working through these challenges was forged by the internalization of lessons learned from previous work experiences. Oft times, she had been the only African American within a particular work site. Judge Diana stated

I can't say that I experienced any negative consequences as, you know, as a result of being African American in any of those jobs. But, I can see how I was treated differently or expected to do nothing in those types of jobs because I was African American (personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Living within a variety of communities, she found that her previous work experiences as theater usher, 'number cruncher,' secretary in a work study program, assembly line worker, and intern with the state legislature influenced her outlook on the world. "…some things I had to tolerate; I had to put up with. But I think today I would have challenged those people" (Diana, personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Judge Diana now has the attitude that she would mentor others.

And I think I have figured out that regardless of whatever position I'm in; I

need to encourage people who are coming up behind me, not to just take it. There are ways of getting beyond others' low expectations of you and learning how to deal with racism. I would never do that today and I would never encourage anybody else in that situation today to put up with it (personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Diana has made an effort to differentiate between the factors that influenced her treatment. "…it's hard not to think about being an African American and a woman doing this job in this particular county, either, because there are only a few of us women doing this job in this county" (personal communication, July 12, 2005). Diana thought that society found White male judges and older women, regardless of their races, as acceptable. But, she contended that her age was also part of the equation, along with gender and race, that influenced why she was treated in a particular fashion.

…sometimes it's a little hard to tell with people. But, I can clearly always tell the folks who think that because I'm African American and a woman that I should rule…that they don't like that. And then it's harder to pick the ones out that think it's more of a youth thing (Diana, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Diana suggested two more factors – politics, and job ranking, as well. Diana regarded the reluctance of the police department and the state attorney's office to charge the African American police officer as political. "This is a fairly conservative county or it seems conservative in many ways…" (personal communication, July 12, 2005). Despite that analysis, Judge Diana still had to decide the case.

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Then Diana remembered that sometimes,

…there are people…they sort of forget that they are the lawyer and that I am the

judge and they try to do a little role reversal. But, I found it to be more effective

to use gentle reminders as to who gets to do what, you know (personal

communication, July 12, 2005).

Diana, in addition, addressed how she, as an African American judge, thought of her

contemporaries. "There is so much diversity on the 'bench' now … Judges come in so

many stripes and colors." As a member of The National Association of Women Judges,

Diana observed, "We are also very different looking. I look at some of those other

judges. I can't believe they're judges. So we all hold our own biases in some way"

(personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Diana revealed that she profited from the described experiences that occurred

within the first six months that she was on the 'bench'.

So I learned now how to do the right thing and teach people about how the law

really operates at the same time and also get people to understand that by the time

a case gets to court, it's no longer in their control to direct how it's going to end

up. And that whatever result they expect, it's not often guaranteed by the legal

system (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

In the end, Diana believed that she also offered valuable insights to her colleagues

and others who are members of the hegemony.

Because when everybody is alike and everybody wants to think alike, act alike, be

alike, I, at least, can recognize I don't have to be alike. I may like what they're

doing. But, I may understand that there are folks that are never going to be just

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like them and may not necessarily do things just like them and that they really need to be considering that and they ought to be considerate of it. So, I think that's a valuable part of being the first and, unfortunately, the only (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Diana, at the end of the final interview, made a statement similar to an epilogue. I don't journal, but this experience has led me to want to do that because I found it so refreshing and such a wonderful opportunity to speak my thoughts out loud about who I am. I think the ability to be able to talk to you about things that have shaped who I am, not only as a person, but as a judge, has really opened my eyes even more to how I want to live my life (personal communication, November 9, 2005).

Jewel – Introduction

This single African American woman has no children and lives in the church parsonage, which is next to the church. Pastor Jewel resides in a geographic area that has been changing rapidly from very rural to more suburban within the last few years. This area is within a half-hour's driving distance of the city where Pastor Jewel grew up with her nuclear family (personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Jewel became the first African American female to be appointed minister at Holy Woods Church by the leadership of her denomination. Jewel said,

…having been raised, reared, and kept in the church, I am thankful to God for my relationship with God and Jesus the Christ. Every day, my walk with God gets

closer and better. I praise God for the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes life worth living (personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Jewel and her two older sisters grew up with their two parents within what she describes as a close-knit neighborhood within the inner city. Her father was a minister and her mother was an English teacher. Although many of the family's activities seemed to revolve around church functions, Jewel was not completely aware of the complexities of the role that a minister has in heading a church.

> …I think that we were sheltered from knowing all that's involved in a church and being a pastor of a church. And it could be that was just never part of our conversations. And we were a family that sat around the table at dinner (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Jewel received her first through twelfth-grade education in the public school system of a large city. She attended a historically Black college where she received her bachelor's degree. Following that, Jewel received a master's degree from a large, internationally known college located within the city, which was her first exposure to an integrated school setting. After working in a public school system as an elementary school teacher in a poor community for a few years, she went to seminary, which was a part of a private Ivy League university. Jewel has also worked as a FBI agent and a guidance counselor at an alternative learning center for young adults (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Jewel is now on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, in order to tend to the 'needs' of the families in the congregation. In addition, she serves on denomination committees and attends social gatherings as part of her community

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obligations. Jewel also belongs to two study groups. One is a prayer group and the other one is a scripture study and sermon preparation group. When not involved with professional commitments, Jewel spends her time shopping and dining out (personal communication, September 7, 2005).

Jewel thought she was personable and perceived well by others, which gave rise to her concern about her speech and language when giving her sermons, when speaking to me during the interviews, and most importantly, when reviewing the printed transcript of our recorded interview sessions. In spite of these issues, Jewel stated that, "my make-up…I really try to be Bible-fed and Holy Ghost-fed and I know that is a cliché, but that's how I live my life. I'm spirit-led." In addition, Jewel included "I am a child of God, a woman, a daughter, a person, and pastor" (personal communication, September 7, 2005).

"My Journey from PK to My Calling"

As Jewel talked about her present ministry, she said,

Let me tell you one thing for sure and it's just and I'll say coincidental. It's coincidentally that I'm a P.K. A P.K. is a preacher's kid. I say that because this was not my plan. All right, I had not planned to become a pastor. (Laughs and says, Hey! Hey!) And that's why again I say coincidentally because I did not choose this…(personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Then, I said that I believed that ministers have a 'calling' and do not choose the ministry as a profession. I asked Jewel if that were a part of her? She replied,

Absolutely, it's a part of me, in that I know that I was 'called'. I did not choose this and many times in these recent months…I mean, throughout my span as a

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pastor, I'm like, Lord, I didn't ask for this and it's not only when it's getting

difficult. But, no, I did not choose this, and I've told other people, too. I was

quite happy doing what I was doing, whatever I was doing in the secular world.

…I always had a job and I maybe even made more money than I make now

 (Jewel, personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Jewel revealed that she has attended church all of her life, beginning when she

was a youngster with her family, and continued, even when she reached an age when she

could decide for herself. As a young adult, she served as a worship leader in the church

that she attended, not unlike other members of the church's congregation. But, on a

particular Sunday, when Jewel was the worship leader at the church, a director of

multi-cultural centers at three different schools of higher learning approached her.

According to Jewel, the director saw something in her that he felt should be further

expanded. The director gave Jewel his card and said she should call him if she were

interested. Jewel called him later, and then "he put the wheels in motion" (personal

communication, July 21, 2005).

After Jewel received her master's degree, she had not planned to attend another

institution of higher learning. But, in order to develop her gifts and talents, Jewel now

decided to attend the seminary and enrolled, although she repeatedly questioned herself

as to why she was again engaging in the rigors of academia. Nonetheless, Jewel enjoyed

the experience, because it realized one of her dreams, that is, living in a dormitory on a

college campus. "…and see, I went from high school to college, but then I worked, then

went to seminary, which also meant I was a little more mature than some of my fellow

students" (personal communication, July 21, 2005). Jewel also had experiences as a

teacher and guidance counselor, experiences that were compatible with the prerequisites for becoming a pastor within an organized religion.

In actuality, Jewel had no real regrets about the challenges she faced on the path to her 'calling'.

…I can look back over my life and just see how the Lord was preparing me. I know I needed the teaching component in order to do what I do today. I needed to have the teaching experience because a lot of what I do is to teach (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Further, in a moment of reflection, Jewel explained,

I think that in life, and I know that we have to have a plan and we do things according to and, you know, think about our life ahead of time, and I just know God's hand has been on my life, because I don't think I put a lot of planning in my life… So, that's how I look when I look back over my life. I think about that too and just how doors opened up and I probably would not have chosen anything differently that I can think of. Even today, I'm amazed at how that happened… (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

But, at times, Jewel wavered between accepting that her life's course was chosen either for her by a divine power or by her own free will.

I didn't know it was so much to being a pastor and I think that the average parishioner doesn't understand that. And see, I'm actually on call 24/7. I can get a call any time, any day and I think sometimes, if I had known as much as I know now, I wonder if I would do what I'm doing. But again, I did not choose this (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Jewel – The Incident

Pastor Jewel had previously worked as a government employee, an educator, and counselor before being ordained. Nonetheless, she described as her one incident a collection of events involving her position as pastor and community member. She recalled a lesson learned and internalized from her first assignment (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005).

A group of community members demonstrated an interest in Jewel, and Jewel socialized with them. It appeared to others that she had begun to favor this particular faction of the church's congregation. But, Jewel later discovered that the group's only interest in her was to gain information about her personal life. Many years later, at her current site, Jewel became aware of a parallel situation that had begun to develop with longtime members of the church and community who also happened to be family members. But, Jewel appeared to feel some uneasiness about the latter development and chastised herself once she recognized this situation was being repeated.

> I am so aware that I live in a glass house, which is, you know, which is fine, and then I continue to learn things and so now I'm just more conscious about not being connected with different, especially groups in the church and trying to spread myself around so that everybody can quote/unquote have a piece of me and that is their desire. But, it is so important not to be seen as being connected with a faction, nor a family in the church. That has been a great growing area for me (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Jewel found it difficult to define racism in words. Nevertheless, she believed that racism could be sensed.

…most of the racial discrimination that I felt in life didn't have anything to

directly do with me being a pastor, just dealing in the world. Living in the world,

seeing just racism…how racism rears its ugly head in different situations…

different instances. Sometimes it's hard to describe and define…

(Jewel, personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Even though Jewel expressed the view that she might not be able to explain racism, she believed she knew racism because of how situations made her feel.

Jewel described the racial make-up of the people within her church assignment as "99.9 percent Black" (personal communications, July 21, 2005 and September 7, 2005), which appeared to bear out her belief about her experiences with racism on the job. "So the racial part as far as being a pastor of churches, I haven't really felt that" (personal communication, July 21, 2005). But, Jewel reported that within her denomination, which is still predominately Caucasian, she had seen a lot of racism. "I just watch the White boys operate" (personal communication, June 15, 2005). According to Jewel, there was more of an attempt to keep the Black male pastor down than the Black woman pastor. "The White male pastors are power-hungry and power-struck; they tried to get and keep the top positions – control the money" (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005) The White male ministers benefit from being the pastors at bigger churches with the larger membership, staff, and buildings; they earn larger salaries.

Then, Jewel said, "…but being a woman …I tried to make it up in my mind that if a person has a problem with me as a woman, that's their problem and not my problem,"

(personal communication, July 21, 2005) as she rolled her eyes and sucked her teeth. Her

gender was an issue when she became pastor at the present site. Jewel noted that her

treatment was also tempered with her age as a factor.

> But I came here…had more people in my age category here. Hanging out with a
>
> particular group of people, but yet…now that I look back on it, it was probably
>
> not a good thing to do because people saw it, as me in this group of people…
>
> (personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Jewel offered other explanations. The first is "…these people are not doing as

well economically as they would want people to believe they are" (personal

communication, September 7, 2005). The second is some people in the congregation

have married their own relatives, since this is a small and close-knit Black community.

Lastly, Jewel described the fact that she lived within the parsonage, a church owned

home within the community, as a tension.

> …and I still think some today have some difficulty with me being a
>
> single woman. But probably they are more comfortable with me now
>
> than they were at first. And that's one of those things I think is just a
>
> woman thing. But, I also believe that it is insecure women who have a
>
> problem with single women –insecure in themselves, insecure in their
>
> relationships – because I've seen people and I know that some people
>
> who I think are so secure in their relationship that it's not constantly
>
> on their mind that somebody's going to take their husband (personal
>
> communication, September 7, 2005).

Jewel shielded her beliefs about other African Americans of both genders in her congregation with her own sense of purpose and did not take ownership of others' ideas about her. Jewel explained the reason for much of the anxiety in the community. It "was not unheard of or neither uncommon in…I think Black communities about a woman becoming a pastor. There are still many places where it's not 'accepted'" (personal communication, June 15, 2005). Jewel elucidated certain observations.

…narrowing it down, the men in this congregation…what really comes to my mind, is poor men. Then telling them what to do, but we know nothing will…I believe nothing will get done if they're not told what to do (personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Jewel further added that some of the men in the congregation had difficulty dealing with her because she was a woman who was giving them direction as part of her leadership role.

Jewel also expressed her disappointment about men, predominately Black men, whom she believes lack gumption to develop and assume leadership roles in the church. Jewel held that even though men were the most outspoken about her assignment to the church, women offered the most opposition. Jewel voiced a pensive account.

And I realize that there was a time that I was really hard on men…and probably was even hard on men from the pulpit. (Laughs). So, I think I accept that as having been a reality or part of who I was…and have really eased up… (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Next, Jewel talked about another concern. "…the male pastor versus female pastor…based on my experiences…I noticed one major difference is, male pastors are

invited to family homes, I think on a larger, much larger rate, than women pastors are."

Jewel continued "…especially in the Black church, it was not uncommon for the pastor

and the pastor's family to be invited to a family's home every Sunday after dinner. …I

think the visitation from male pastors … is different from women pastors..." (personal

communication, July 15, 2005).

Jewel made use of the mechanisms of the denomination and Holy Woods Church

to resolve issues. "We [church council] set up an ad hoc committee to study [certain

issues]. The ad hoc committee …reports to the church council" (Jewel, personal

communication, June 15, 2005). On the other hand, Jewel admitted

> I guess I am defensive sometime. Yes and I did come here with my guns drawn
>
> when I was appointed to this church. And, I do keep my guns drawn because…I
>
> guess, because of mean people, you know, and who wants…I don't want to have
>
> my feelings hurt. And, if there is a situation where I think it may be some tension
>
> involved in it, then I try to prepare myself before I go to that situation (personal
>
> communication, October 5, 2005).

Moreover, Jewel noted that she does have some flexibility in making independent

decisions, "even when it comes to running the church as a business, and my thing is oh,

let's try it." According to Jewel, she also welcomes everyone's participation in the

function and operation of the church.

> There's room for everybody and, if you want to try an idea, all you've got to do is
>
> just tell me what the idea is. Let's try it. If it fails, it fails. But you have the
>
> right…you have the support of my saying, let's try it. …I know that in [the time
>
> that I have been here] there have been very few times when I have put my foot

down and just said no…because a lot of times there's people who are older than I

am (personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Yet, Jewel stated, "I play hardball, which means I don't allow people to walk over me"

(personal communication, September 7, 2005). Jewel responded to living her life in the

proverbial fish bowl by

not giving them anything they can say negative about me and that's as far, you

know, as my dating life and who I see and where I go. …when I do have

company, and this is my choice, …my company is gone long before midnight,

okay (Laughs)? (personal communication, October 5, 2005).

This strategy also extended to her interaction with different allied groups within the

church and community, specifically

…the people who were trying to get close to me were trying to get close to me for

the wrong reasons. And what I really did, …I cut them off and I probably did it

rather quickly, rather than gradually (Jewel, personal communication, September

7, 2005).

A protracted situation is connected to her profession as well as her place of

residence – in the church's parsonage. Jewel said, "When I'm here in this community, I

am in my role 24/7, …in my role as a pastor…and I live it." Jewel related that whether

she is going to her mailbox across the road or to a grocery store down the road,

I have to be conscious of how I look…I am conscious of how I look…just try not

to look shabby just to give something else to talk about. I try to be professional at

all times. And thus I have to also be conscious of the amount of time I am able to

spend out of the community (Jewel, personal communication, October 5, 2005).

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Jewel concluded the last interview session by making reference to a new episode developing within her life. Jewel had just spent some time away from her official church duties. According to Jewel, she returned to duty refreshed and looking forward to starting again. She described her new way of thinking as a time of renewal.

Oh, you've been a lot of help. Oh, it's been real good. It has, as you can tell, it's been good for me, also because it has made me think about other areas of my life or think about who I really am. So, I just know that that's another part of what God wants me to really look at…the answer to who I am. It's been good, and in some ways, I'm sorry it's coming to an end (personal communication, October 5, 2005).

PJ – Introduction

This African American woman was married and does not have any children. She now lives in a home in suburbia. PJ became the first African American woman in her local county to be promoted to principal of a school. In a written statement of reflection about her career, PJ said

my initial teaching experiences were in a segregated setting in the mid-50s. This experience provided me with learning experiences that will always remain a part of me. For instance, I learned to make the most of every experience that came up. I learned to be patient, tolerant and to encourage my students to push hard to be well-rounded productive citizens of their communities…'That Education Is The Key' (personal communication, August 1, 2005).

PJ was fifth in the birth order of the six siblings born to her parents in a very

rural and segregated community. Her father was a factory mechanic until he became a

school bus contractor. Her mother did seasonal work in factories and did housework in

the homes of White people. One set of her grandparents who lived nearby, and extended

family members who lived at other locations in other states, played active roles in her

nuclear family's life. "My family is like this. Whatever you choose to do, they support

you and we discuss things with each other" (PJ, personal communication, December 5,

2005). For example, according to PJ, the family learned vicarious lessons from discussing

her father's experiences in integrated situations.

PJ was educated in segregated settings from first to twelfth grade and earned her

bachelor's degree at a historically Black college. She earned her master's degree and

completed postgraduate credits from a large urban university in another state, which were

her first experiences with integrated schooling. PJ had worked as a farm field worker,

factory worker, science lab assistant, assistant in her college physical education

department, a physical education teacher, and assistant principal, prior to becoming a

principal. She also has worked at the local hospital as a volunteer and is presently a

member of the Ladies Auxiliary. Today, PJ is a member of her church and is involved

with its organization and structure (personal communication, November 3, 2005).

PJ characterized African American women as having "courage and are

determined…are able to see the entire picture…realizing their limitations in society, but

pushing to the limit to get what they felt they deserved…[They] shared their

thoughts…cared about their character, how they were perceived." She continued,

> They were women who wanted or did carry themselves to demand the respect that
>
> a woman should have. They were classy. They had character. They wanted not

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to be so much outstanding and recognized, but they wanted to be someone and they wanted what they did to help someone else. They weren't selfish. They shared and they wanted you to see them as a person who cared. And they wanted to make a difference (PJ, personal communication, October 10, 2005).

"I Was Obedient"

PJ's odyssey began when she was a physical education teacher at a middle school. I can recall when my principal told me to apply for a position as an assistant principal. And I said, I don't want to be an assistant principal, and he said, apply. And you know, I can be obedient [compliant] sometimes. I'm not always this obedient, and I applied, and I got the Dear John letter, and I thought it was all over. And one day, I was out with the kids, and I remember, a hot day teaching archery. So I was working with her…a little short girl and I was behind her, helping her to aim and pull her bowstring back, and all of a sudden, the principal touched me on the shoulder. And, of course that wasn't the thing to do in the archery class. But, luckily, I guess I composed myself to not let the bowstring go (PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005).

The principal, according to PJ, directed her to arrange coverage for her class so she could return a telephone call to the assistant superintendent regarding an interview. "So I was obedient. I did as requested." On the next morning, PJ met with the assistant superintendent of schools, who interviewed her and also told her that personnel wanted to interview her.

And I said, okay, still knowing that, you know, I don't really want to be an

assistant principal. So I got over that hump. Interviewed with the superintendent

and I got over with that hump. So I was appointed there (personal

communication, September 12, 2005).

This very same principal, on the eve of his transfer to another school some three

years later, gave PJ an envelope. The principal also gave the other assistant principal,

who was a White male, an envelope. Enclosed in each of the envelopes was an

application for the position of principal. The principal was scheduled to leave to attend a

convention. The principal left PJ in charge during his absence. Before leaving, the

principal told both assistant principals to complete the application only after he had gone.

Would you believe we [the other assistant principal and PJ] had interviews the

same day, back to back, at the Board? And then, I still didn't feel like I really

wanted the job. But, I guess I was just silly and I went with the flow, knowing

well, maybe a 'Doubting Thomas' that, you know, I won't be selected anyway

(PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005).

Following the interview process, PJ was not concerned about the lack of

information regarding the promotion, "because I never aspired to be an administrator. I

thought it was one of those thankless jobs that no one appreciated and it is, in a sense.

You don't get the immediate gratification" (personal communication, September 12,

2005). She heard no news about her promotion until the very last day of school for

students.

The supervisor announced as I was coming in…I heard this announcement and he

was telling the staff that I would be the principal of their school the next year.

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And all I could hear was PJ…principal. I could hear people Ah-h-h-h! (CHEERING AND YELLING!) and I walked in the office and they all sat in there, those that were looking at me, and I'm just like, oh, my God! Oh, my, gosh, it's reality. What am I going to do? (Laughs) So, I got my little congratulations and the principal said to me, well, we've got a lot of work to do before I leave. And that's when it hit me. He is leaving. I had been doing what he has been asking for three years. Now, it's in my ballpark. And I thought, what are the teachers going to do? How are they going to accept me, having been a colleague of theirs, and how is this assistant principal going to work with me, when he has more experience than I have? And those things began to roll over in my mind (PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005).

PJ was particularly concerned about working with the assistant principal, who displayed anger and an attitude of resentment toward her because of the promotion.

PJ did what she had become accustomed to doing for a while. She turned first to her father, and then to her husband, to discuss her appointment.

And I said well, on the weekend, Dad, I'll be down. We need to talk. He said, you don't need to talk to me. He said, you accepted it. You need to talk to God. You need to take it to Him and I hope you've been involving Him in these decisions. I said, Daddy, He had to be in the decision because it seems as though I'm not making any of them. I'm just rolling with the tide. So he said, you'll be all right (PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005).

Thus, PJ rose to the next level within the field of education and began her tenure as school principal.

PJ stated she saw race and class as issues within the community where her school was located because of the "military versus the civilian community and the poverty areas." There were also integrated and segregated community developments that were not disadvantaged. Children from these communities were enrolled in her school. "…the kids were taught that we are different because maybe they didn't even know why. It was just that we're here and you are there" (personal communication, November 3, 2005).

<center>*PJ – The Incident*</center>

PJ identified her previous employment experience as working in menial jobs within the community and in work-study programs at college before entering the teaching profession. She stated that she benefited from the reflections of her father, in particular, as they related to working within integrated situations or getting along with White people. According to PJ, her father "…in the early '20s, was exposed to integration in Philadelphia. So he had experiences that he could give to us, especially to me, about integration because I came through the segregated school system…" (PJ, personal communication, December 5, 2005). If PJ had a problem that she could not resolve on her own, she consulted with her father and confidently reached a decision.

But, PJ's lesson learned was

…you have to have a love for what you're doing. You can't do it because it is a position and it gives you prestige. Prestige for you comes later on and it may not come at all in your lifetime. Just like you very seldom ever see the fruits of your teaching today. It isn't until later on when the kids mature. Well, I think

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administration is the same way. …no one appreciates what you're doing. They think you don't do anything. You sit behind a desk all day. But, when they get to the root of it and see, hey, that's a tough job. You just have to learn how to manage it (personal communication, September 12, 2005).

PJ believed that administrative positions in her local county, before she was appointed as an administrator, might be categorized as a "Good Ole Boys' Club or a Big Boys' Club. And the males were sort of, you know, they were always top dog and you have this female population that's coming in and being appointed." Her local education district had started to rapidly promote females and the promotion of African American women was also a beginning step toward integration. This move was, according to PJ, parallel to the inroads that women were making into administrative and business fields; "we were moving up the ladder nationally" (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

Principal PJ described a combined set of incidents that occurred within her first ten years as principal as her one experience. When she described the incident with her assistant principal within her composite situation, she thought that "there was anger in him and there was jealousy." She went on to say "…and [assistant principal] had to learn to deal with Blackness; even though he had a lot of experience in [working with African Americans at another school site], he had to learn to deal with Blackness" (PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005). PJ believed that the assistant principal's stereotypical attitude toward African Americans reflected that period of time within the local county, i.e., that African Americans, regardless of gender, should not receive the same rights and privileges (salaries, job positions, schooling, and fair or humanistic treatment) as the majority race. Yet, PJ assessed that the assistant principal's anger and

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jealousy over her promotion overrode any feelings that he had about racism and sexism. He had been her assistant principal at one time, and now she was his supervisor. Also, PJ averred that his dysfunctional relationships within his personal life and with his colleagues were apparent.

PJ was also involved in another situation that seemed simultaneously to parallel the aforementioned incident.

Now I found that the military officers were prejudiced toward me. You were supposed to jump when they came in. I used to tell them I don't know your rank. It doesn't mean anything to me. You're a man. You're sir. I'm not in the military. But, there were prejudices there, you know. I'm in charge…control type of thing, you know, when they come in (PJ, personal communication, October 10, 2005).

When reflecting on her interaction with each person in the described incidents, PJ thought that racism was involved.

But they sort of tried to, you know, to keep…it was subtle. It was more subtle than it was overt and you had to kind of look beyond the sheets. Look under the sheets, but it was there. But many of them could control it (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

Regardless of the distractions that she faced in doing her job, PJ consistently and repeatedly returned to one issue – her resolve to perform well.

…I guess all of this determination and all of this drive sort of propelled me… And me with my determination, I was going to be the best that I could, as a result of what my father taught me as a child. If you're going to be a ditch digger, be

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the best one and whatever it is you do, you do well (PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005).

PJ stated that she "put that strong will and determination as my goal…I pushed the limit, in that I was determined I wanted to do what was best for the population of the kids in our area." Moreover, PJ was thoughtful of others in her response.

I'm going to keep this school moving and we are going to make changes that are applicable to our needs. I'm going to do it. It's going to be hard work. I don't want any accolades, but I'm going to do it because I owe it to my people to not fail. I owe it to the younger generation. I want them to say, hey. It can be done. I am a woman. I can do what I want to do (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

PJ pondered other people's motives when they approached her in an offensive manner. "Is it against me personally, is it against my color and my race or is it just one of those problems where they're testing my integrity?" PJ continued by describing her demeanor when confronted by any of the people involved in any of her described incidents.

I talk with my eyes and I always listened to what they had to say. And I try to maintain my composure. But I always look them in the eye. And when their eyes, head dropped and this, that and the other, then I'd say, you really don't want to talk to me. That was in my mind. You really just want to come and complain, so I'm going to let you complain. And I'm going to listen and I'm going to continue to look and then I would explain my position (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

But, PJ conceded that the use of this tactic was not always successful.

> There were times when I showed my anger because the anger directed at me was something that I could not sit back and say, you're going to come in here and curse at me and degrade me and I not respond. And I responded negatively to some. Didn't do it often, but there were times when I had to do that (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

As the final interview ended, PJ added another folder to her nostalgic file of reminiscences.

> …I'm honored to have a former student to come back …and one of my athletic students who chose to be a physical educator. And then who, at least, chose to be an administrator just like I did. So I am thrilled. It's wonderful to have…see students do well and to come back and respect you (personal communication, December 5, 2005).

Sheila – Introduction

This single African American woman resides in the heart of a large urban center, where she has been a longtime homeowner. Sheila has one grown son and cares for foster children in her home. Sheila said, "I am quiet-spirited, peaceful, kind person and very protective of those I love. Most importantly, I am a child of God" (personal communication, April 4, 2005). Sheila was promoted to the position of head bank teller at a banking center. She was among the first three African American women who were promoted to such a position between 1966 and 1970 at that particular site.

The only female sibling, Sheila had three brothers, a mother, and a father in her immediate family. Sheila confessed that the way she is today is the result of lessons learned early in life. According to Sheila, she learned how to cope with life from teachers, from attending school, and from living in the country. Sheila still remembered what she described as the most important lesson learned within the home of her parents. Her mother, in particular, laced her child rearing with teachings of biblical tenets. According to Sheila, her mother always said there was "value in not stealing and work for what you want" (personal communication, April 19, 2006). Sheila seemed to idolize her brothers, admittedly tried to simulate the way that they handled their problems, and had learned how to 'move on'.

Sheila lived and worked on a farm in another state as a child. She also attended segregated schools from grades one through twelve and a historically Black college in that state. Sheila's mother became ill and passed away during her third year of college. Then, Sheila moved to another state with one of her brothers and worked for one year as a nurse's aide in the pediatrics department of a hospital, instead of returning to college. Sheila finally settled in a large city in a third state, where she began work as a retail clerk, and where she still resides. Sheila presently is a member of the finance committee and is part of the team that is organizing her new church. She attends bible study and works with others to distribute baskets to children on holidays and at the beginning of the school year (personal communication, May 10, 2006).

When asked if she saw a difference between the African American woman and the White woman, Sheila indicated that there was no distinction between Black women and White women in her mind. "A woman is a woman, as long as they are respectful;

they're kind; they take care of the family. They work in the household. I don't think there's a difference. The color of the skin doesn't make a difference." Sheila continued, "A woman is a person that's kind. She has wisdom. She cares for her family. She's respectful and she fears the Lord. That means she's going to do what is right…what's perceived…She's humble to the Lord" (personal communication, June 1, 2006).

<div align="center">*"I passed the Test"*</div>

When Sheila first relocated to the large city, she lived with an aunt as she looked for a job, took tests for employment, and went to interviews. In the interim of locating full-time employment that met her needs, Sheila worked in a five-and-ten-cent store. One of the tests she took was an attempt to secure a position as bank teller at Main National Bank. "Actually I had no educational preparation for working in banking." Sheila laughed as she said, "And it was three weeks before they found me after I took the test. When they finally caught up with me, I went down and, you know, took the interview again and I was hired as a teller" (personal communication, April 19, 2005). Main National Bank sent Sheila to teller training for three weeks, where she learned the required skills necessary to do the job as teller. Sheila passed another test at the end of the three weeks that was related to the tellers' training, and began her career in banking, even though she had neither a background in accounting nor any experiences related to banking. "But, I was looking for a job and that was the job that came available and I passed the test. No finances, no nothing" (Sheila, personal communication, April 19, 2006).

Sheila – The Incident

Head bank teller Sheila worked in a hospital before being employed at the bank; she also worked a second job as a clerk in a store after becoming a teller. When asked if she had experienced discrimination based on her race and gender, Sheila repeated the question after me, then said, "No, not really." Next, I asked Sheila how would she define racial and gender discrimination. In response, Sheila defined each type of discrimination and provided hypothetical examples. After that, Sheila told why she felt her direct line supervisor was prejudiced. But, Sheila emphatically stated that this described incident was the only act of discrimination or oppression that she had experienced in life or in any other type of work experience (personal communication, June 6, 2006).

Sheila cited an example where she thought her race was the reason for her treatment in the workplace. "I had this one particular manager which I felt was prejudiced towards the Black people that worked there because …if you didn't have a degree, even as a teller, … she was prejudiced…" Sheila described her bank manager as providing preferential treatment to her [Sheila's] subordinate. Sheila perceived that this treatment precipitated denying her opportunities for advancement. "…I felt that it was prejudice because we were Black and she was White and she just…and that's the way she portrayed herself" (personal communication, April 19, 2006).

Sheila went on, "But I just dealt with the situation." Sheila further vowed to hone her professional skills to avoid ever remaining in such a situation. "You know, you have to be able to deal with the situation and you don't sit there and fester with it. That's not

going to get you anyplace. Get yourself together and get I guess motivation, you know"

(Sheila, personal communication, April 19, 2006).

Sheila opted to remove herself from the setting through promotion.   She asked

herself, "How would you go about preparing yourself for this other position, which was,

you know like, moving from teller line to the office?" Then, with a proactive outlook,

she said

> …if you just sit back and just look and grumble about it and don't do anything
>
> about it, you're going to still be there. But, if you prepare yourself, you know,
>
> work towards getting out of those situations – learning and getting the knowledge
>
> to move on, you know, then you're getting yourself out of it (Sheila, personal
>
> communication, April 19, 2006).

After head bank teller Sheila had been promoted to another position as senior

customer account representative and after holding the position for a while at a new

banking center, she was exposed to an interesting situation. Sheila applied for yet

another promotion to assistant manager of a branch of Main National Bank. "I was

interviewed and the manager at that banking center was impressed of the knowledge that

I had gained and I know for that position" (Sheila, personal communication, April 19,

2006). But, the male bank manager revealed to her that he wanted a male for the position

and not a female. After intervention of the human resources department, Sheila was

accepted at the branch as the assistant bank manager.

During the last interview segment, Sheila reflected about her recollection of that

one particular situation with the White female bank manager.

I just find it quite interesting, you know, that you just, like, boggled my mind

and took me back, you know, took me back years. And for me to remember

some of those things, …make me think about my life over the past, I would

say almost 40 years. …what I did is what I really enjoy and I'm glad that I

took the path that I took for my career. Because coming from high school and

going to college, that was not my career goal. But, then this is what I, you

know, chose to do after that. And I really have no regrets. I mean it was

rewarding to me and I enjoyed it (personal communication, June 21, 2006).

Summary

Local African American women, who have been considered as local pioneers in

their respective workforce realms, related self-described major discriminatory or

oppressive events that they had experienced in their working lives during recorded

interview sessions. Diana, Jewel, PJ, and Sheila – pseudonyms – are four professional

Black women who range in ages between 46 and 70 years old. The participants' ages

represent four different age brackets in decades and span twenty-four years, the

difference in ages between the youngest and the oldest participants. The participants

were promoted to leadership positions in the workplace between 1970 and 2000, a period

of 30 years. Despite the expanse of time between their actual ages at the time of the

interviewing process, each of the participants were similar in age – in their early 40s –

when they first assumed their work positions as leaders.

Judge Diana has a jurisdoctorate, represents the workforce realm of law, is single,

and does not have any children. Pastor Jewel, an ordained minister, has earned two

master's degrees, represents the workforce realm of organized religion, is single, and does not have any children. Principal PJ has earned a master's degree and some postgraduate credits, represents the workforce realm of education, is married, and does not have any children. Head bank teller Sheila has completed three years of college, represents the workforce realm of banking, is single, and has one child. One (Sheila) of the participants resides in a large urban area and the remaining three participants (Diana, Jewel, and PJ) live in rural or suburban jurisdictions.

Participants, in response to an open-ended question at the onset of the interview series, generally described a compilation of acts that were perceived as discriminatory or oppressive in sequential order. But, when asked for greater details, explanations, or clarifications during the interviews, participants made references to similar situations that occurred at other times in their lives to illustrate points. Further, each of the participants classified their respective challenging situations based on what they perceived as the factors that influenced and caused their treatment, and how they were treated in a particular manner. In addition, the informants sorted out what they did in response to the situation, and why. Finally, each participant provided an introspective about the consequences of reliving their experience through the interview process.

The impact of past experiences was relevant and profound enough to remain in the memories of participants. The participants indicated in the narratives what they had learned from their previous work experience(s) and how they applied the lesson(s) learned to their described incident. The participants, in addition, described the impact that their families, community, and educational backgrounds had on their lives as well as how they influenced their reasons for selecting their chosen professions. The participants

also presented pictures of the surroundings and other involved actors. All of the

participants - Sheila, Jewel, PJ, and Diana – provided illustrations of their descriptions

and portrayed themselves as proud African American women. Constructed statements

from the narratives depicted the African American participants as self-confident,

self-determined, and forthright, yet tactful individuals.

Chapter 5: Main Themes of Black Women's Standpoint

Standpoint deals with issues of truth and reality, the relationship between social power and the production of knowledge claims, and the analysis of social relationships from the perspective of the African American women's daily lives (Collins 1997, 1998, 2000; Harding 1986, 1997, 2000; Hartsock, 1997; Hekman, 1997). Standpoint is also related to the issues of consciousness and empowerment (Collins 1997, 1998, 2000; Hartsock (1997). In this research, a look is taken at how standpoint is shaped by the working conditions of the participants. The four Black professional women who informed this study do not have great economic (class) differences among them. The dimensions of standpoint – 1) consciousness, 2) the interlocking nature of race and gender, and 3) how African American women survive an oppressive or discriminatory workplace – are explored.

Each of the presented exemplars of the findings corresponds to a theme or category that emerged during the analysis process. Further, I present explicated exemplars of themes under the heading of a figurative language phrase. I make it a point to present some of the findings with the use of figurative language terms in order to enhance the readers' visualization of the participants' constructions and articulations and to make my interpretations of those constructed statements vivid.

The findings help to broaden the knowledge base about African American women, and, in addition, demonstrate how the participants interconnect the meanings of race and gender. The findings also indicate aspects of the participants' self-valuation and self-definition.

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'On My Guard'

'On My Guard' – the interdependence of experience and consciousness – reflects what the participants have done or thought in order to deal with any stressful situation in their jobs. The interdependence of experience and consciousness was originally thought only to be internalized results of work experiences and manifested as lesson (s) learned prior to experiencing a repeat of specific or related incidents on a job. Lessons learned from past work experiences influence how Black women respond to oppressive occurrences in subsequent work situations. Moreover, the participants remain on the lookout for discriminatory or oppressive circumstances in the workplace.

Judge Diana realizes that she is under public scrutiny and faces the difficult task of "doing the things that the law requires you to do the way the law requires you to do it. So I think I did it the way I was supposed to do it." She believes that what she has experienced and discovered as a Black female gives her an advantage in pressure situations. "We have grown up knowing that there are always going to be detractors, that we need to always be vigilant. Like we always like to say, my momma didn't raise no fool" (personal communication, July 12, 2005). Diana adds, "I think it has made me assertive. I think I recognize that the value of my background means that I don't have to take stuff from you just because you want to hand it out to me" (personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Principal PJ notes that during the first year of her principalship, that 'everything' went smoothly with her relationship with staff and the everyday workings of her school. But, PJ is cognizant that while one faction might want her to fail in her position, there is

another faction that wants her to be successful. She even believes that many thought she had been placed in the position of principal to be a 'token' because she could not succeed on her own merits. Nonetheless, PJ is not sidetracked by the negative thinking of others and relies on her own determination and drive to propel her along the path of success (personal communication, September 12, 2005).

The participants have learned lessons as a result of their watchfulness and alertness for negative influences and treatment on the job. Diana, PJ, and Jewel offer examples of how lessons learned (experience and consciousness) are the basis for their analyses of current situations and their decisions about how to proceed when confronted with similar incidents. Diana reflects,

So I might have had one or two sleepless nights. But, believe me, I know where to point the finger and if pointing it, even if it's just privately, helps me keep my sanity. What it means to me is that fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. I won't be played that way again (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Faced with people who challenge her because of her color, PJ states that her "best defense in dealing with people like that was to let them explore." This tactic allows those who offer challenges to her authority to come into her office and to "start lambasting me. You start doing this. You start doing the other and I just sit and listen" (personal communication, September 12, 2005).

Pastor Jewel has learned to follow the canons of the denomination. Therefore, she refers issues of conflict to the church council for resolution. When Jewel confessed that she was continuing to grow when relating to church congregations, she recollected

her first appointment. "There were dynamics about who is going to be closest to the pastor" (personal communication, June 15, 2005). As a result of this experience, she consciously does not practice exclusivity when associating with different groups within the current church's congregation. This is one example of how experience and consciousness are used as the basis for Pastor Jewel's analysis of her present situation. Her decision about how to proceed is based on lessons learned from a similar incident.

Further, Pastor Jewel described her behavior when she thought 'mean people' might challenge her. I summarized her self-protective actions as being defensive, and Pastor Jewel agreed that might be an appropriate categorization. Even though her initial response to oppression was to make a mental note of the occurrence and 'go with the flow,' this response was dependent upon the location or the occasion. But, Pastor Jewel was animated and spoke in a very strong voice when she said,

> I probably go most places, if I know where I'm going, with my guns drawn or my going knowing that I'm going into this situation and I try to prepare myself for what it may be. I'm probably going to defend against my feelings being hurt or defend against being ready to accept whatever is going to be (personal communication, September 7, 2005).

Despite further questioning in our third interview about her meaning of and the causes of her feelings being hurt, Jewel requested additional time to think about a precise reply, thus appearing to evade the questions.

Before expanding on the topic of 'hurting my feelings' in interview four, Jewel came clean. "I didn't give it any thought (laughs)" (personal communication, October 5, 2005) and nervously touched her hair repeatedly. Then, she subsequently talked about

being defensive and keeping her guns drawn when she was first appointed to this particular assignment.

She also cited her unhappiness and restlessness with a group of congregation members. Jewel shared that she was privately wrestling with the thoughts of [leaving her current assignment] and ultimately working at another location. She stated, "So I'm doing [another year] here and I'm also in prayer and just have to be obedient to be with the Lord…where the Lord wants me to be and do what the Lord wants me to do" (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005). Jewel used the word 'obedient' to indicate a spiritual connection, or a connection to a higher power that provided guidance, or following the Lord's commandments. (It should be pointed out that PJ also used the word 'obedient' with a different connotation).

Another example of an eye-opener was Sheila's contention that she had experienced only one type of discrimination within her everyday life (private and public worlds), only one time. That experience was described as her incident. In the middle of our first interview, Sheila commented that she had never really encountered any problems with Whites on the job because she was Black, other than the one incident that she described. Sheila added "They [her White supervisors while working in a pediatrics department] didn't treat me any different than they did the other ones that were White" (personal communication, April 19, 2006). Sheila admitted to seeing others being victims of prejudice or discrimination, "but it never really happened to me…only with that incident." In interview two, I asked Sheila if there had ever been anything else that was even similar to that [described incident] that occurred within her life experiences. Sheila answered, "Not in a situation…within the banking with the Black-White situation"

(personal communication, May 10, 2006). By the end of interview four, Sheila still maintained that she had not personally experienced any discrimination, except for that one described incident (personal communication, June 21, 2006).

In addition, I asked Sheila several hypothetical questions about her exposure to discrimination based on race, gender, and age in order to broaden this conversation. Sheila repeated each question or asked me the same questions before answering. I asked the question, *do you have a definition of racial bias or racial discrimination?* Sheila responded, "Not really. But, I see it all the time." When I asked her clarifying questions, Sheila gave examples in housing situations in certain areas of the city where she lived. I asked the next question, *what is your definition of gender bias?* Sheila said, "It's somewhat the same." She provided an example where "they give a position to a man; they will not give it to a woman. In that situation, there was bias towards a woman…certain positions men – certain positions women. I mean it could go either way" (Sheila, personal communication, May 10, 2006).

The response to the question of *what would you do if you thought that you were being discriminated against because of your age* was the most revealing. Sheila defined age bias as "when you get old, they push you out like they did…tried to do to me. They'll push you out and look for the younger people – younger generation." Sheila was certain "that means they do anything they can so that you will leave the position or they'll terminate you or they'll make the position so hard that you just don't want it" (personal communication, May 10, 2006).

Then, Sheila asked, "You know what I'd do; what did I do? I was in that position that I left." At that point, I uttered that she had retired after thirty-eight years and I

thought that was wonderful. But, Sheila continued, "I'm not going to sit here and go through this hassle." I then asked was there one distinction that would definitely identify the type of bias or discrimination? Sheila referred to the incident that she had experienced before she left the workforce. "…I could see it was being more difficult…more pressure on the older people…being so hard that you would leave or…so hard that you're being terminated…and being replaced by the younger, maybe two to the one" (Sheila, personal communication, May 10, 2006). I later discovered that Sheila was referring to how she deemed she was being treated at the end of her career, due to her age. As a result of that treatment, Sheila made the decision to retire.

Sheila's response to the last question in the series resembled an analysis. She stated with a great deal of certainty, after providing examples, the reason for how she was treated. Ageism appeared to spark as much emotion in her voice and to animate her body as much as relating her self-described workplace incident, which involved oppression and discrimination.

It was believed initially that the narratives would provide insight about lessons learned from only previous work experiences. In spite of that assumption, full transcripts of narratives were explored and analyzed. The analysis of the reconstructed statements from the narratives illustrated that the participants also recalled lessons learned from their previous experiences within their educational, family, and community backgrounds. Therefore, the interdependence of consciousness and experiences was not restricted to specific influences and factors. Further, oppressive structures or acts of discrimination might make imminent appearances at any time, without notice, to limit the opportunities

of Black women in the workplace. This possibility – nay probability – requires that African American women remain vigilant in order to deal with these biased incidents.

'And the Struggle is Still Ongoing'

'And the Struggle is Still Ongoing' refers to the legacies of struggle, which are the core themes that Black women have historically used to identify their realities, especially in response to continuing forms of violence. Today, this term has evolved into meaning any oppressive or discriminatory obstacle for African American women that are based on societal markers of difference. The interlocking nature of oppression (the dominant societal group's markers of differences for other groups within the same society) has historically been linked with physical violence. However, none of the participants indicated that any form of physical violence had been threatened or perpetrated against them. The theme of legacies of struggle also includes the categories of location of oppression and sexual politics.

Location of Oppression

The reasons for the unfair treatment of Black women by the hegemony can be found in the interlocking nature of oppression. Markers about African American women defined by the dominant social group form a location of socially constructed differences. I searched the participants' self-described incidents in each of the narratives for the identification of their locations of oppression. The participants first identified their experiences with the socially constructed markers of difference such as age, education, gender, job ranking, marital status, politics, and race. Secondly, the participants

continued the conversation by describing the location of oppression that they were

confronted with at their worksites.

Age. One of the markers is age. Diana believed, "Looking a certain age has

something to do with giving people a certain sense of authority. I think because I look

like I could be the youngest [judge ever appointed to the bench within the state], people

assume that" (personal communication, July 28, 2005). But, Diana was not the youngest

judge who had been appointed to the bench within the state. Diana added that age – or at

least looking young - put another set of forces into play for her. She stated

> I think some times that it isn't always my being an African American female
>
> that works against me. I think some people perceive me to be younger than I
>
> am and, therefore, they think that they ought to decide how I should rule (personal
>
> communication, July 12, 2005).

Jewel added that one faction within the church where she had been assigned "had more

people in my age category" and she began to socialize with them. But, she learned later

on that "the motivation behind this particular group was not to show support to me as a

pastor. It was really just to learn stuff about me so that they could use it later" (Jewel,

personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Gender. Gender is another primary marker. Diana implied that there were only a

few White women judges in her jurisdiction when she said that there were only a "few of

us women" (personal communication, July 12, 2005) who were in positions as judges

within her jurisdiction. Since Diana was the first African American woman appointed, it

would be appropriate to infer that judges of her gender who were previously assigned

were not women of color.

Jewel believed that gender was the marker that indicated differences between pastors. Pastor Jewel asserted that male pastors are treated differently than women pastors. "I think male pastors are more readily invited into peoples' homes than women pastors" because males are more accepted as pastors than women. Then, Jewel pondered whether or not the marital status of the male pastor influenced the number of times invitations were extended. But, Jewel could not remember if any of her male colleagues were still single. Next Jewel considered, "Sometimes I wonder what's the attraction (Ha! Ha!), other than them being a man." Jewel believed that many times single women were enamored of the single male pastor (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Jewel appeared to complain that men who are pastors command more attention than women who are members of the clergy. "That a man with a collar on walks into a room and it's almost like people snap to attention. That's just my reality." But, in a contradictory observation, Pastor Jewel sensed the attitudes of people changed when she visited other churches, especially when she was dressed in regular clothing.

> When I go in with regular street clothes on, then I look like everybody else. And, of course, I get 'the everybody else' treatment. And then somebody might say, well, this is our pastor…this is Reverend Jewel and then it's like, snap to attention. The attitudes change (Jewel, personal communication, September 7, 2005).

Another area that Pastor Jewel named was the questioning of the preaching capabilities of the woman pastor. This question was not asked about a male pastor, according to Jewel. The connotation regarding gender and one's ability to perform was the basis for this allegation.

In support of this claim, Jewel advised there were still many places where it was unconventional and unacceptable for a woman to become a pastor. This belief was prevalent in some Black communities. Pastor Jewel described this situation as 'the struggles with being a woman pastor'. "So I know that there are some men who have difficulty with and dealing with me because I'm a woman and I'm a woman out front telling them what to do" (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005). PJ supported this contention. "And, there were many White males who wanted to see me fail because they don't like women bosses" (PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005). This trend was also apparent when head bank teller Sheila was seeking a second promotion. The bank's White male manager "did not want to take me because I was a female and he wanted a male. He wanted a man for the position" (Sheila, personal communication, April 19, 2006).

Then Jewel recollected one Black woman minister who was a pastor at a predominantly White Church. Jewel believed that this appointment was because the Black woman pastor was married to a White man. This observation contradicted her previous statements about the bias in the denomination and the places where Black women ministers would not be appointed. Subsequently, Pastor Jewel reasoned that the new Bishop was making some inroads into the White patriarchal structure of the churches in the conference. This new Bishop, breaking away from unwritten traditions, had assigned a few women pastors to the larger churches.

Race. One of the major markers of oppression is race. Judge Diana defined two major categories of racism – blatant and benign – that manifested in different ways. Blatant racism occurred when someone thinks they are superior to other people because

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of their skin color and cultural background and act on those beliefs. Benign racism happened when one's skin color and cultural background were used as a basis for negative stereotypes. Nevertheless, Diana accepted her appointment as a judge and faced the prospect that "some people will perceive that me being here means that I'm going to favor African Americans" (personal communication, July 12, 2005). Diana further hypothesized about the racially charged case that she had heard and ruled on; the defendant was found guilty. When the defendant appealed the case, a White male judge in a higher court dismissed the case.

> …all the while the press has skewered me for not giving this family justice. Now that the case is dismissed, somehow they've discovered that maybe there's no justice that could be given in this case. Maybe it's not a racial thing, but it just seems to me that they were quick to decide that I was so wrong when they didn't decide that and certainly didn't say anything about the White male judge who dismissed the case outright against the officer (Diana, personal communication, July 28, 2005).

PJ remark mistreatment because of her race was more subtle than overt. The tone of one reflective comment made by PJ was as if it were being spoken to the dominant cultural group in an open forum about living in a social world and working in a position where colleagues did not welcome African American women.

> White man, not realizing that when you try to suppress us, that helped us to be strong. We may not have shown it, but it helped us to be strong in our minds. I can do that, but I'm not allowed to do that. I'm excluded, but I want to be

included. We're just more intense (PJ, personal communication, November 3, 2005).

Sheila described a work environment where there were more African American women bank tellers than White women who were bank tellers. Nonetheless, Sheila believed that the opportunities for her and other Black women tellers lessened when conditions changed at her work site. The change was the presence of a new bank manager who was a White female. Sheila said the forward movement (advancements) for Black women had come to a halt and she had a 'feeling' that this bank manager was biased (personal communication, April 19, 2006).

On the other hand, Jewel revealed that she had only been a pastor at churches where the congregation was predominately or 100 percent African American and had not directly experienced any racial discrimination from the community or congregation members. Pastor Jewel recalled some examples where pastors who were not of color were ministers of African American churches. Pastor Jewel further advised that appointments within her denomination were supposedly made without regard to gender and race, "but I know that's not true." According to Jewel, Black people head what might be classified as lesser committees. White people chair committees that control millions of dollars (Jewel, personal communication, September 7, 2005).

Even though Pastor Jewel mentioned that she had not experienced racial discrimination from the community or congregation, there was still an obvious omission in her declaration. Jewel did not mention the impact of the relationship between the leadership of the denomination, where she had described some aspects of racism and sexism, and the operations of her individual church. But, Jewel admitted most of the

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racial discrimination that she felt she had experienced was just dealing in the world and didn't have any direct relation to her being a pastor. "Some things have a racial component to it because a lot of times, it's a feeling like I've been discriminated against. I can see how I've been discriminated against." Jewel continued, "I know racism sometimes because I feel it. I may not even be able to explain it…" But, Jewel had made up her mind that 'we' live in a racist society (personal communication, September 7, 2005).

> When we get to heaven or when Judgment Day comes, I think so many people
> are going to be disappointed on the amount of time we spent on racism…on
> skin color, instead of getting the business done that the Lord wants us to do
> (Jewel, personal communication, July 21, 2005).

> *Race and gender.* The location of race and gender was disquieting. PJ related

how a woman approached her at a parent-teachers' association meeting. The woman stated she was anxious to meet PJ because her daughter was ecstatic about having a woman principal for the first time. The woman looked at PJ and said, "but she didn't tell me she was Black" (PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005). Judge Diana recalled people directly pointing out to her that she was African American and female within the first weeks she spent on the bench. Although she felt that these traits were pointed out to indicate difference in a negative sense, Diana had no concrete evidence to support that contention (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

The prospect of conditions improving was bleak. "I know when it comes to appointments in this denomination that appointments supposedly are made without regard to gender and race," but this was not the reality of the appointments by the denomination,

according to Jewel. "There are some churches that a Black person, let alone a Black woman, will never serve. I know never is a long time. We shouldn't say never. If it happens, it won't be in my lifetime" (Jewel, personal communication, September 7, 2005).

Age, race, and gender. The interlocking nature of age, race, and gender as a location of oppression is formidable. Diana observed,

> I think it's easy for people to see White men particularly as judges and maybe to even see older women, whether they're Black or White, as judges. But to see women who look young, but may not necessarily be young, I think it creates a whole different dynamic because people treat you differently and I know I get treated differently than White female judges (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Jewel described a scenario where she, as an African American pastor, lived and worked in a Black community. Her 'calling' had collided with cultural expectations for the place that an African American woman should occupy within that community. She too faced interlocking markers of differences such as age, race, and gender; albeit the location of oppression was actively maintained by members of her own gender and race as opposed to the White dominant social group (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Other locations of oppression. Other locations of oppression often combine other markers such as education, job ranking, marital status, and politics with the markers of age, gender, and race. "It was more Black tellers at that time than it was the White ones in this particular banking center that I worked in," Sheila reported. As head bank teller,

Sheila was in charge of the teller line. Yet, the bank manager gave information to Sheila's subordinate, instead of her. The only differences between Sheila, who was Black, and her subordinate, who was White, other than the assigned position, were race and a college degree. Therefore, Sheila classified education and race as a location "because I felt like she [the White female supervisor] was like really holding us [African American women who were bank tellers] back…" (Sheila, personal communication, April 19, 2006).

Jewel recognized her marital status as a marker of oppression. "And that's one of those things I think is just a woman thing. But, I also believe that it is insecure women who have a problem with single women…and that's the real issue." But, Jewel quickly added, "Being single is not an issue for me" (personal communication, September 7, 2005). Diana, familiar with same marker, asked herself a rhetorical question. "Do I really want to do that [get married] or do I need to, and do I need to feel defined in a negative way by other people just because I'm not married?" (Diana, personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Another identified marker deciphered was politics – competing interests of different groups – within a jurisdiction that Diana categorized as fairly conservative. Diana noted that she did not have to seek the support of any political group in order to secure her position. Diana reflected about the case that she had described and said "…they [police and States Attorney's Office] were either too afraid to do it [not charge the driver which was a fact of the law and would also resolve the case] or afraid of the political fallout from it [not having a trial]…" Judge Diana continued with a declaration.

And had they had the political and moral courage not to do so and just accepted

whatever negative publicity may have arisen from the press, I think it would have

lessened the expectations of the family of the gentleman who had died that

somehow the judge could deliver in a situation where neither the police nor the

States Attorney's Office could (Diana, personal communication, July 28, 2005).

This encapsulation illustrates the impact of how just considering the ways that political

pitfalls might be imposed on a situation actually have an effect on existing situations.

Jewel reported there were times when there was tension between some women

members of the African American community and her. She hinted that the combination

of class, education, and economics might have formed an interlocking nature that was the

cause of that uneasiness.

…these people are not doing as well economically as they would want people to

believe they are. And even today I have people who will dress to the nigh [sic] so

that people can think all is well and they got it going on. Truth of the matter is,

all is not well. But, that's what they want people to believe (Jewel, personal

communication, September 7, 2005).

This posed a problem when members of the congregation compared their attire to

Jewel's apparel. This area also included the salary that she was paid. Some members of

the congregation thought it was adequate compensation for the duties performed, while

others thought the "pastor's salary is the pits and pitiful" (Jewel, personal

communication, September 7, 2005). Still others believed that the salary was a lot of

money. This site of concern was further complicated by the fact that Jewel resided in the

church's parsonage. This tension appeared to be exacerbated because Jewel's salary and home were partly subsidized by the members of the congregation.

Jewel continued by explaining why members of the community also engaged in oppressive acts. She described where she lived as a "small, Black, and rural community where people have inter-married. I am of the mindset that if you marry your relatives too close, somebody's going to be affected by that mentally" (Jewel, personal communication, September 7, 2005).

Even though the participants were asked about the intersection of race and gender, Sheila, PJ, Jewel, and Diana did not limit their comments regarding discrimination to within those bounded categories. Locations of oppression among the participants in this study were interpreted as a mixture of different markers such as age, education, gender, job ranking, marital status (single), politics, and race – the dominant societal group's markers of differences for other groups within the same society. The most important observation was not the interlocking nature of specific markers. It was the fact that markers were still used in the workplace to suppress opportunities or the quality of performance for Black women leaders.

Sexual Politics

Sexual politics is sensitivity to the set of ideas and social practices that were shaped by gender, race, and sexuality, which framed how Black men and Black women treated each other and how African Americans were perceived and treated by others. Diana tied the perceptions that others might have had about her to the dilemma she faced when deciding two racially charged cases. She commented,

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I just wonder sometimes if these cases got to me by happenstance because

people think that it's better to let me decide them, being an African American

woman, and therefore, no negative repercussion or fallout will fall on me the

way that it may on them because they happen to be of the majority race.

(Diana, personal communication, July 28, 2005).

But, Diana was unfaltering when she assessed what it meant when people,

especially those who might be considered disadvantaged within the community, saw her

as a judge in court. Although she perceived her appointment as a wonderful thing and a

great feather in her cap, Diana still remembered that she came from a number of

disadvantages and has largely represented people who have been disadvantaged during

her career. Diana wanted people to feel that she was going to be fair because she had

some understanding of their circumstances, whether they were White or Black.

But, I think for African Americans, they feel a great deal more kinship with me

along those lines because they're not used to walking into a courtroom in this

community and feeling like maybe I'll be heard and understood. Even if things

don't go their way, they'll be heard and understood (Diana, personal

communication, July 12, 2005).

As she spoke about the demographics of her community, Jewel described the

members in general.

So I do have some folk who really like people to believe they are middle class and

so in their minds you don't out dress them and you don't be smarter than them.

Don't be attractive, don't be single; don't be all of those things can in some

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people's minds go work against you…against the person (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Jewel's perceptions and observations about some members of the community definitely deflected any comparisons of similarities between her and members of the community. In fact, Jewel steadfastly contended that her actions were in direct contrast to those demonstrated by members in the community/congregation, without even considering that any commonalities might exist.

Jewel also made some remarks about men in leadership positions within the congregation that were in direct contrast to her stance about her leadership. Jewel saw her role as an African American women leader as affecting the psyche of Black men in the congregation, although she had no concrete proof. Jewel thought she was perceived by African American men in the congregation as another Black woman who was trying to tell them what to do, much like their wives and some of their supervisors – the strong women in their lives (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Jewel categorized her leadership relations with Black male church members as a 'power thing'. Whether imagined or real, Jewel declared that "Black men are afraid of Black women" because Black women are strong and forceful. Jewel professed,

women are just moving into rightful places and that's why more and more women are for example becoming pastors, moving into government and in leadership positions. In secular life, as well as in the church, God will get whomever He needs to get His job done. Women are not taking men's spots. There was nobody to fill the spot. So God had to get somebody. God moved women forward to do

what He needs to do. If more and more men are being called, they're not

answering the call (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Jewel continued, "Besides I don't think they are motivated enough to do anything…"

Yet, Jewel described herself as being an inclusive leader whose mantra is 'let's try it',

when working with the church's congregation. Jewel revealed,

my tolerance level is kind of low when it comes to men. It is men not being all

they could be in my estimation…men not being all that the Lord intended them to

be. Men not doing all that the Lord intended to do (personal communication, July

21, 2005).

Pastor Jewel continued and elaborated on her premise, although she admitted

there are exceptions. Her first point was that men should be mentally stronger than they

are. Secondly, men should use common sense better than they do. Next, men don't think

with their whole brain that the Lord has given to them, lots of the time. Then, men think

more highly of themselves than they should. But, Jewel recognized that Black men have

had it hard and are continuing to struggle, even though she followed up by saying that we

all have had difficulties in our lives. On the other hand, Jewel stated, "I'm very disturbed

by what so many women allow men to get away with. So I don't blame the men for

that." She continued, "We, African American women, have the ability to be strong

women when we become all who God created us to be, even though we all were raised

differently." Jewel added that "Women can have so much more going on for them if we

were really able to let down some barriers and let things go" (Jewel, personal

communication, July 25, 2005). According to Jewel, 'let things go' meant women must

refrain from constantly and enviously comparing themselves to other women and allowing jealousy to become an issue.

Jewel exposed her analysis of the way that men and women pastors are received within the African American community, describing what she called a classic example, and I call a comparison of the genders that happen to be in the same profession. Within a social setting, Jewel had been introduced to people, who were surprised when they learned that she was a pastor. "And then, this is, I think, more has to do with a woman thing…the people I was meeting for the first time and of course they wanted to know well, can she preach?" Jewel added wryly, "If they met a male for the first time and somebody introduced the male as a pastor, nobody asks, can that pastor preach? They're just accepted as reverend so-and-so, pastor of so-and-so church" (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Jewel admitted that she had heard comments contrasting her with male pastors. "So-and-so might not have done that if you were not a woman or …if we had a male pastor, they would have never said that," adding ironically, "specifically what's said or what they specifically would have done, I'm not 100 percent sure at this time" (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Pastor Jewel, as a preacher's kid – the daughter of a Black male pastor – and from her association with friends, spoke about her familiarity with the experiences of African American male ministers. She indicated that somebody in the church always invites the pastor to dinner, especially within Black churches. In her experience, however,

male pastors are invited into people's homes on a far greater number of times and on a far greater scale, or the number of times they are invited into homes far exceeds the number of times that I have been invited into people's homes (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Yet, she added, "there are some who believe that if they were the pastor, they would do it another way, or whatever. I think that's just a woman thing." Jewel acknowledged that her experiences might be the same as some clichés, with a few exceptions. "Women are catty, picky, and jealous," she said. In addition, Jewel identified African American women as having the "capabilities and abilities that God has given to us to use that we just don't seem to grasp and move forward, knowing that we walk forth in the strength of the Lord." But, in general, Jewel described women as being women's worst enemy (personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Jewel described one person in the congregation who behaved like she was the pastor sometimes. She laughed when she said, "Just likes to call the shots. I think she doesn't run decisions by not even our council." Jewel added that she could name a few more women who think that if they were the pastor, they would do a better job. "We always are dealing with the envy factor and the jealousy factor as well." Jewel thought

women, generally speaking, don't trust each other and a caveat to that has to do with the men 'thing' (laughs)…a lot of men…women are jealous of each other and that's physically speaking. I think women always try to see whose smarter, who has more going on for them…(personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Jewel disclosed her overall opinion of women. "I don't have a very high opinion of women when it comes to trusting women" (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

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Women, according to Jewel, were constantly looking at each other and making comparisons about other women's sizes, shapes, and figures. Jewel spent a great deal of time expressing her opinions about African American women's relationships. During this process, she merely mentioned the relationship that she had with her two biological sisters. "It's been proven to me, I guess too many times, that girlfriends – a 'girlfriend thing' – you can only take it to a certain level" (Jewel, personal communication, July 21, 2005). I framed her analogies within the context of sexual politics. It was unclear whether her opinions, and her relationships with African American women, in general, also applied to her relationships with and opinions of her two older female siblings, who are married with children.

This opinion of women, however, extended to her perceptions about women in the community who, she believed, undergo feelings of insecurity about their significant others because of her single status. Jewel believed that women were afraid that someone was going to take their husbands or significant others. "And that's one of those things I think is just a woman thing" (Jewel, personal communication, September 7, 2005).

Jewel's impression of most African American women's relationships with each other was categorized as being a "woman thing". This categorization painted Black women as petty, envious, insecure, and insincere. Jewel usually sat with her arms folded across her chest during the interviews. Whenever she talked about the "woman thing' or her feelings about African American men or men versus women, her body language and hand movements became very animated. At other times, Jewel generally kept her hands placed on the table. But, on occasion, they were raised and lowered slightly to emphasize points in her account.

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Jewel, at a certain point, began to put forth an argument about the differences between a married male pastor and a single male pastor. But, she could not recall any of her fellow male pastors who were still single. "For one thing, the women in the church are only going to let him stay single for so long (Jewel and I started to laugh) because he is single. And I don't care. He could be a frog…he could be a 'dog'" (personal communication, July 21, 2005).

'And the First Shall Last'

'And The First Shall Last' is the theme that includes reflections of how the four participants were assigned their positions and how they face skepticism about their competencies. PJ used the word 'obedient' to describe her compliant response to her supervisor who told her to apply for promotional positions. This supervisor was the White male who at that time was her principal and mentor. PJ might have been urged to apply for promotional positions, but she also met the state-mandated qualifications for the publicized position of principal. Further, a White male school superintendent appointed her as principal at a time when women were being promoted nationally to leadership positions. PJ exclaimed

> I never really thought about being the first female or the first African American in the job when I was applying for it…even after I received it, personally that was the furthest thing from my mind. I never aspired to be an administrator (personal communication, September 12, 2005).

Moreover, PJ explained that she exerted her energies to prove that she was competent as a principal and that her color had nothing to do with performing the job (PJ,

personal communication, September 12, 2005). Yet, PJ confessed, she was not always

obedient, though "I was never insubordinate and I never pushed the policy out of focus."

Often, she skirted insubordination by pushing parameters and not following procedures to

the letter. According to PJ, this was done to ensure getting the resources that met the

needs of her school's population (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

Similarly, Diana was a lawyer working as an advocate for the disadvantaged

when an elected White male state official selected her from a large number of eligible

people and appointed her as a judge. Diana believed that she had realized her dream when

she secured her seat on the bench and she was not going to allow her opponents to take

that away from her. If her opponents thought that she did not belong on the bench, then

that was their problem. Diana affirmed that much of her focus was on the person and

case that was in front of her bench.

> …I'm here [on the bench] and I'm the one that has to address it [cases]…So I've
>
> learned how to do the right things and to teach people how the law really
>
> operates…and whatever result they expect is not often guaranteed by the legal
>
> system (Diana, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Diana confirmed that she was fair to her opponents when she was working in her

professional capacity. But, she had not bent over backwards; her opponents got what she

was required to provide by law. Diana, however, said with conviction that she had not

had to deal with her opponents on a personal level. Therefore, she could afford to ignore

them.

In her journey toward competency and authority, Jewel responded to 'her calling',

joined her denomination, became ordained as a pastor, and was appointed to a church by

the conference. She insisted, "I had not planned to become a pastor (laughs and says, Hey! Hey!)" (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005). Since then, Jewel has relied on the counsel of the Lord in order to be effective.

Sheila traveled along a different tract after she had been promoted to the head bank teller position. She deliberately applied for and obtained a promotion so that she would be assigned to another site in order to leave what she deemed was an oppressive work site, but not her career field. Her decision to gain knowledge about different aspects of the job in order to move forward, to relate to people in their different situations, to recognize individual differences in people, and to practice listening more than talking had big dividends for Sheila, as she continued to earn advanced promotional positions within her chosen profession (Sheila, personal communication, May 10, 2006).

'Had to Prove Myself All the Time'

'Had To Prove Myself All The Time' is the theme that reveals *s*ome coping, resiliency, and resistance strategies that the participants employed when they faced challenges to their authority. Diana confirmed that her professional credibility was questioned when she heard what she described as politically and racially charged cases shortly after her appointment as a judge. The context was that African American members of the community and the police department of several towns were at odds.

> And that on both sides I felt like there was a test. Like the White power structure
> was looking to see how I would rule and the Black defendants and members of
> the community were looking to see how I would rule and that somehow that

would be a test as to where my allegiance lay (Diana, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Diana continued by saying that there have been a few people "who have little more brazenness in thinking that I was going to see it their way and in pointing out to me that I didn't see it their way." These people "sort of forget that they are the lawyers and I am the judge and they try to do a little role reversal." But, Diana confidently added,

I can't even worry about what they may be saying behind my back. I just don't think there is any better remedy for that than just doing the job the way I think it ought to be done – to the best of my ability – and let that speak for itself (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

PJ verified that, "Most of the opposition came from White males because at that particular time, females period were being promoted rapidly in [the local county]." Yet, parents, subordinates, and students also offered challenges. With regard to challenges to her competency, PJ disclosed that she did not search for symptoms of racism or sexism. She usually maintained a demeanor that appeared as if issues of race and gender did not affect her. But, there was one caveat: PJ's composure was not sustained when she felt she was being verbally abused. At that point, PJ either responded negatively to the perpetrators or referred the persons to her supervisor and/or superintendent (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

But, skepticism about the leadership abilities of Black women was not restricted to the hegemony or to a specific gender. Diana informed me "there are people both Black and White that I've encountered who don't think that I deserve to be here…" (personal communication, July 12, 2005). Jewel, as well, told me

I found women to be the greatest opponents. A lot of the times, women always

think they can do a better job…no matter how good you are at what you're

doing. There are some who really believe they can do better. There are some

who believe they should be the pastor (personal communication, June 15, 2005).

When confronted with opponents' biases about her being an African American

woman cleric, Jewel generally shakes her head, makes a mental note, and goes with the

'flow.' But, it was not her problem if someone had a problem with her because of her

gender. Jewel also mentioned that she dealt professionally with challengers in her

congregation and in the community. For example, after initial interaction with a select

group of parishioners, she radically cut off the relationship when she became aware of the

group's hidden agenda. The agenda was not one of support for her, but was focused on

discovering personal aspects of her life. Thus, Jewel made a conscious effort to not

provide the community with anything negative about her dating life. More importantly,

Jewel revealed that she had softened her position about men when she spoke from the

pulpit (personal communication, July 21, 2005). As for Sheila's strategy regarding

challenges to her authority, instead of instigating a face-to-face confrontation with the

White female bank manager who limited her career choices, Sheila showed her

resourcefulness by networking with colleagues, contacts, and a circle of friends to gain

information about vacancies at other locations or means to acquire necessary skills.

I Live in a Glass House

The theme '*I Live In A Glass House'* is an exposé of issues related to the visibility

of Judge Diana and Pastor Jewel at their respective jobs. High visibility is a fact of life for

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each of these women. Diana performed her job in full view of the public. Members of the public community regularly scrutinized her performance and competency, and she had to control the interaction between herself and the attorneys, whose roles were adversarial by nature. Diana was in charge of the legal proceedings within her courtroom where these adversaries would attempt to sway her to their point of view. At least one party would end up unhappy at the conclusion of each case.

Moreover, Diana lives in a social world that is framed by some constraints of her profession.

I can't forget that I am a judge because I operate sometimes under the worst scenario…construct. If I'm out and everybody says, well let's do this. I do think, Okay, yeah that sounds like a lot of fun. But, if push comes to shove and something wrong happens - something bad happens - guess what the papers are going to be saying? Guess whose name will be up there just because I was along for the ride? So, I do think about it in that context…(personal communication, July 12, 2005).

She is consistently mindful of her deportment outside of the work site and the possible consequences of public condemnation, through the mass media, for inappropriate behavior. "I'm not the person that you're going to go to with an idea that might get the two of us into trouble" (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005).

Regarding her high visibility, Jewel works and resides in a predominantly African American community. Her home is the church-owned parsonage, located next door to the church. Because of this, Jewel stated she was aware that she lived in a glass house, both literally and figuratively, and accepted that she was watched constantly as she went

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about her daily activities. "If people don't have anything to say about you, they'll make stuff up. So I don't give them anything that's factual that they can talk about" (Jewel, personal communication, October 5, 2005).

As a result of this high visibility, Jewel is cautious about whom she selects as friends, especially men. She even is careful about her interactions with men in the congregation, whether or not the men are single or married.

Let me see how I can say it nicely (claps hands). I learned a long time ago, probably after I went to my first job. You don't mess up where you eat. (Laughs). I would never be involved with anybody in any congregation that I work in or with (Jewel, personal communication, October 5, 2005).

However, Jewel distinguishes between what happens because of where she lives and what happens because of where she works. She depicts where she lives as living in a glass house and illustrated the circumstances at work as living in a fish bowl.

[The congregation] People look at me from the crown of my head to the bottom of my feet and I better not have a string hanging…they're looking for stuff always. Just let something be out of place and it becomes an issue. And oh, God knows if I have a run in my stocking (Laughs)… (Jewel, personal communication, October 5, 2005).

Jewel considers this the attitude of a "mostly middle-class, wannabe congregation" where members deem one's physical appearance and dress as important.

'The Wind Beneath My Wings'

To be able to meet the challenges of their high visibility and the questioning of their authority and competence, the participants have had to create a support system to give them strength and encouragement. *'The Wind Beneath My Wings'* is a theme that lists categories of the support system utilized by the Black women participants. The support system includes mentors, role models, and spirituality as categories. The participants are local pioneers who self-selected an individual or individuals who exemplified excellence and success to admire and emulate. Further, their entry into the workplace has been achieved with many forms of mentoring, much of it informal, from these self-selected mentors and role models. None of the participants mentioned more formal support, such as an official on-site program sponsored by the employer to promote their continued professional growth.

Role Models

In their support systems, role models were most important. PJ mentioned several times during the interview sessions that she used to watch and learn from strong Black women such as her mother, aunt, women in the community, two of her teachers, and her high school principal. She provided vignettes in her interviews that described the three women who seemed to have had the greatest impact on her professional life. She was, in fact, in awe of the woman who had been her principal in grade and high school because of the way the principal had managed to do her job and the way that the principal had established relationships with students.

She had a very positive influence on me, not realizing that I would ever be like

her. But, to think back in the '40s, here was this woman, single woman, who took

over this job as principal, temporarily, because the principal was called into

service [military]. But, yet, she kept that job. He never came back to that job (PJ,

personal communication, December 5, 2005).

PJ enthusiastically added,

I was always amazed at how she could handle all kinds of problems and yet be so

calm…she just moved about like nothing ever bothered her. She was to me the

woman who had it all. …there was a woman who was principal and I'm sure

there weren't that many then, who dealt in a man's world. It was an integrated

world, but she dealt basically with Black males… So she was really a role model

in those days for a lot of kids, especially females (personal communication,

December 5, 2005).

PJ depicted her first grade teacher as a "mother image. She loved, nurtured,

taught, and disciplined you…always encouraged you to do your best…was positive in her

thinking, and was sympathetic. I just worshipped that woman." Along with this

memory, PJ recalled that her twelfth teacher…"taught me study habits and work ethic

academically that no one had ever taught me before" (personal communication, October

10, 2005).

Similarly, Jewel looked toward her mother and her maternal aunts as role models.

"…Yeah, my mother is…and her sisters…they are as nice as they can be. But, these are

strong Black women who don't take a whole lot of stuff." She continued, "I think that

my mother and her mother were known to us as this third generation of women and…we

realized we came from strong stock" (Jewel, personal communication, September 7, 2005). For her role models, Diana remembered "I saw [former U.S. Representative] Barbara Jordan and some others with backgrounds in the public sector speak. I got hooked and knew I wanted to work in the public sector" (personal communication, November 9, 2005).

Mentoring

PJ deemed her father as her ultimate mentor. "Daddy was a man of a lot of wisdom…" because of his exposure to integration within the public school system in the early '20s in a large city. He was one of two or three Black students who attended a predominantly White high school.

> So he had experiences that he could give …especially to me about integration
> because I came through the segregated school system up until graduate school.
> …if I had a problem, I felt I could always go to him because he had been a
> product of really, really, really segregation that was rough (PJ, personal
> communication, December 5, 2005).

PJ commented that she also had some contact – which she considered as mentoring – with her former first grade teacher and former high school principal from her segregated school. Both mentors "were both alive when I became principal so I talked with them." Then, her former White male principal mentored her before she was promoted to her position as principal. PJ classified her former supervisor as a really good mentor "when he was mentoring me, and I did not know why." According to PJ, he involved her as observer when he went about his duties. He gave her opportunities for

professional growth and "I thanked him for it. When I became principal, I could look back and see what he was trying to do." But, she also added her husband, a friend who was a minister, and an aunt to the list of those she considered her mentors (PJ, personal communication, October 10, 2005).

Sheila acknowledged her White male bank manager, her supervisor when she was assistant bank manager, as being her mentor. "He taught me. He showed me things. He just gave me everything. Anything I asked him, he did it. When he left for another position, that manager wrote, telling the next manager how I did my job" (Sheila, personal communication, April 19, 2006). This particular bank manager recommended her for the position of temporary manager at a banking center, where she eventually worked for a short period of time.

Diana also reminisced about her first mentor, who was in a college department where she completed her work-study job.

> She was the first African American professor that I had any contact with at that school, a school of about 48,000 students. And it was inspiring to see her in that position because it really just encouraged me that we, as African American women, can be successful, instead of just always being the negative images of us on TV that were portrayed even back in the late '70s early '80s, when I was in college…from time to time, she would just give me encouragement and words of wisdom about just working hard and staying out of trouble and trying to graduate on time and doing the best that I could (Diana, personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Diana went on to say

> …even educationally I had mentors, professors, or teachers, really it was more for
> the purpose of getting through school or even clerkship – just brief interactions
> with people who mentored me through that process. And I certainly don't
> discount the mentoring that they gave me. But I would say that in terms of the
> substantive mentoring process, I would say that every boss that I had mentored
> me in different ways… each boss that I've had has really been wonderful at
> looking at my background, looking at my strengths and weaknesses, and not just
> ignoring whatever potential they saw in me and helping me to develop that
> potential (personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Diana said she was also mentored, "…even from people [women and men of different races] who are outside of directly supervising me" (personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Jewel divulged that she did not have a self-chosen mentor. But, "…the denomination assigns you a mentor after you get to a certain point in becoming a pastor" (personal communication, June 15, 2005). Until that point was reached, there were lay people who just guided the candidates to be ordained as ministers through the process to become pastors of churches.

As a result of receiving mentoring, these African American women, of their own accord, sought out opportunities to help others succeed either at a particular job or to refine their skills. The participants volunteered their time and expertise to mentor others and appeared to recognize that being in their present positions might influence others to imitate their actions, achievements, work skills, and ethics.

PJ delegates tasks to her assistant principals and helps them to improve their skills. Even though she is now retired, PJ still mentors young people in her church. She notes her pride in what she calls 'my girls' [former students] "because they're still swinging" (PJ, personal communication, November 3, 2005). PJ adds

> they [the girls] are becoming the doctors and the lawyers. In the last three or four years, the girls have just squashed the boys by speaking up, by applying for scholarship, [and] by doing very well in school. I know in church we have boys that have a lot of smarts. But, they don't seem to want to be aggressive about it.

Recognizing that times have changed, PJ challenges young men "[by saying] are you going to let the girls outdo you? Get some spunk behind you" (PJ, personal communication, December 5, 2005).

Sheila recalled an experience when she was working as an assistant manager of a bank. She helped a female employee by answering her questions, showing her how to complete tasks, encouraging her to apply for a promotion, and preparing her for the interview. Once the employee received the promotion, she expressed some apprehension about accepting the position because of what others had told her about the job. So Sheila told her "…the situation is different for every person wherein [one] person might have liked it, it might not affect you. You might like it and it might be different for you." The employee did subsequently accept the promotion. "I didn't hold her back because she was working under me. I let her go" (Sheila, personal communication, May 10, 2006). Sheila, who is living as a retiree today, continues to mentor by helping her goddaughter, who often asks for advice.

Diana works with a group of high school students and said, "Because of my work with them this year, I'm encouraged to ask to be involved next year." Diana is pleased

> that they could see me as a real person that they could relate to. I hope I have given them some idea that I don't have to be the only one who can be a judge or I don't have to be the only one who can excel in a certain profession, whatever it may be; that they can be too (personal communication, November 9, 2005).

Diana tells the students to

> …try to have fun along the way while you're working hard at accomplishing your goals because life is a journey; it's not a destination. I want you to be able to look back and say I worked hard to accomplish what my goals are and I have no regrets (personal communication, November 9, 2005).

> Diana admitted to passing on the advice because "that's certainly something that I live by. It's hard sometimes, but it's certainly what I think will make me happiest today." Then she added, "If I can be a positive role model to people, I'll be happy" (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005).

> Pastor Jewel sees that the young men in her church spend a great deal of time with women who are single mothers and/or women teachers. So she has forged ahead and involved congregation members in setting up a program where mentoring would be 'gender by gender'. Jewel also wanted men to become mentors to boys, in part, to increase men's involvement with leadership. "But, finding men who are willing to mentor these boys has not been easy either," she said (Jewel, personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Spirituality

Another source of support is the participants' spirituality. Diana, when reflecting about one of the cases that she described, stated that the media was involved, which made her feel as if she were Solomon. "I had to call on a great deal of faith. It's here and I'm the one that has to address it and somebody upstairs thinks I can do it" (Diana, personal communication, July 12, 2005). The 'somebody upstairs' to whom Diana referred was a higher power.

> I guess sometimes when you feel that there's a lot of pressure on you, you really
> have to just dig down deep, look to your faith and just have faith that you have the
> ability and you have the skill to do whatever it takes to make the right decision
> (Diana, personal communication, July 28, 2005). …there's a higher being up
> there that has us in a particular position for a reason. I just think that God gave us
> whatever soul or whatever spirit there is inside of us to be able to do anything that
> we want to do (Diana, personal communication, October 12, 2005).

But, Diana also expressed some thoughts that might be contrary to her original statement of spiritual beliefs. With regard to her difficult case, she pondered whether or not "somewhere the 'fates' were conspiring to hand me this case because no one else could make the difficult decision involved in it." These 'fates' said, "let's give this to someone else who has to make the decision and then that person can take the heat for whatever happens in this case." Although she did not have any evidence that that was indeed true, Diana revealed, "…that's just what my gut tells me" (Diana, personal communication, July 28, 2005).

For PJ, spirituality is a main support. She maintains she never wanted to be an administrator, for a number of reasons. But, "I believe that one's life is planned for them from birth. It's in the plan and it has to come from the Creator; it comes from God. I think everything is destined for you" (PJ, personal communication, December 5, 2005). PJ believes that an example of that was when the opportunity for promotion presented itself. After receiving the promotion, she had to contend with many challenges and obstacles. "I believe in the power of prayer and when things really get down…get to you, you just go in your little secret corner, sit there and meditate, and ask for directions" (PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005).

According to Jewel, she seeks the guidance of God and espouses a stance of speaking from the Source of strength.

> I try to know what the word of God says…to teach from the word of God…to live the way that God would have me to live…walking in the Spirit, always conscious of who I am, where I am and what I'm doing (Jewel, personal communication, September 7, 2005).

In addition, Jewel declared

> I'm a child of God. I'm a child of the King. I'm the woman of God, the woman that God intended me to be. I want to become all that God wants me to become…And I'm going to run on to see what it is that God wants me to be…the goals. I like to believe that we have the ability to be strong women when we become all who God created us to be…(personal communication, December 23, 2005).

When Sheila was asked, *on what is your value system based? On what standards do you base your value system of right or wrong?* Sheila answered, "Biblical…the commandments of God…your values of God" (personal communication, May 10, 2006).

<center>*Stand for Something or Fall for Anything*</center>

Stand for Something or Fall for Anything is the theme for self-valuation, which reveals the keystones of the four African American women pioneers' self-definition. Components of self-valuation include aspects of self-respect, respect for and from others, perception of how one presents self to others, and valuing, articulating, and displaying positive aspects of Black womanhood, in spite of those characteristics being disparagingly criticized by the negative stereotypes of society. Facets of each of the components of self-valuation are ascribed to statements made by each of the four women leaders in their narratives, which further acknowledge the basis of their thinking.

Diana revealed that being a judge had made her assertive. But, the development of this skill had not deterred her from remaining fair, regardless of the prejudices that others might have about her. Her self-valuation was tied to her beliefs about a 'higher power' and the importance of achieving 'justice' for all under the law. The concept of 'justice' appeared to have significance for Diana, since she mentioned the word 'justice' several times within the descriptions of her workforce experience, when she spoke about 'justice' for those in society who might have disadvantages, when she assessed whether or not 'justice' might be found in the criminal justice system, when the press passed judgment on her for not giving 'justice' to the family of a deceased man, and when she

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mused that the family of the deceased man might have discovered that there was no 'justice' in the court system (Diana, personal communication, July 28, 2005).

Diana divulged she thought she was an optimist who looked for the best in people. She continued, "There is so much to look forward to in this world and that whatever I can do to make it a better place for other people, I'll use whatever God given talents I have to do that" (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005). Diana also exposed another point of view, as it related to being African American [race]. She hinted by inference that she was outfitted with special qualities. "I think we [African Americans] are such bedrock people. We are such strong people and that has nothing to do with education. I think that, that just has to do with spiritual grounding and environmental nurturing." Furthermore, Diana held that "…African American women are (laughing) the better part of our gender because we have persevered through so much hardship" (personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Regarding her self-valuation, Jewel affirmed that she was a Christian, liked living the Christian life style, and based her perspectives on life on the Bible and the teachings of Jesus the Christ. "So I don't spend a lot of time with people who actually are not about anything." Jewel maintained that "everything that I do I am reminded of who I am and whose I am." So, her decisions are based on W.W.J. D. - what would Jesus do? (Jewel, personal communication, October 5, 2005).

PJ indicated that she was more aggressive now, as a direct result of the pressures to perform her job well as principal. She also shared her belief that God planned one's life from birth. Therefore, she believed that she was destined to experience every event that she encountered (PJ, personal communication, December 5, 2005).   .

Sheila has put her beliefs into practice. When faced with a conflict, she observed

what was happening and analyzed it, without talking. "I think before I speak because

sometimes, speaking out of anger gets you in trouble." Sheila also believed that there

was a source from whence strength can be gained in order to persevere during times of

strife. She admonished,

> It's just that people don't realize that they have to give back to God. All the stuff
>
> that's going on, …they're just doing stuff themselves. They're not heeding to the
>
> Word and if they read and heed to the Word, all this stuff wouldn't be going on
>
> today (Sheila, personal communication, June 21, 2006).

'I Know Who I Am'

'I Know Who I Am' is the theme for self-definition. For the participants,

indicators of self-definition were understanding and recognizing how stereotypes

functioned as controlling images, placing themselves at the center of the analysis of their

described situations, identifying themselves within the context of Black women as a

group (conceptualized self in relation to others), communicating that negative societal

perceptions were not internalized, naming their own reality (created an identity that was

larger than the one that society had prescribed for them), and moving from silence to

language to action (empowerment to name one's own reality). The theme of

self-definition was defined as the power to name one's own reality and the internal and

public rejection of controlling images.

Diana recalled that there were people who constantly reminded her that she was

African American and a woman within the very first weeks of her appointment. She did

not understand why people felt they had to do this, except they possibly had their own reasons that were unknown to her, or they didn't even think about why they were doing it. Although this act had stopped, Diana believed, that in the past, she had been "scrutinized in many instances in that regard. I don't need to be reminded of that, as though that there is something wrong with that. That's something I take pride in… But I never thought that I couldn't do the job." Diana decided,

I think my best way of operating under those conditions is to show people that's not something they need to point out to me like I find it to be negative and that I'm going to treat them fairly and honestly and as best as I can. And hopefully then, they'll realize that those aren't things that they need to point out to people like we don't know it (personal communication, July 12, 2005).

When Diana reflected about one the cases that she had previously described, she said, "I don't have any misgivings about the decision that I made. I'm not one to necessarily try to point out the wrongful thinking of people who want to think that way [basing competence on race and gender]." Moreover, Diana determinedly stated, "I'm more apt to just do what I'm going to do…from my base of strength…" when commenting about her competence as an African American woman who was a judge. "I honestly never think that there's anything better than just being extremely competent to get the point across" (Diana, personal communication, July 12, 2005). Diana believed that working to the best of her ability would speak volumes about her competency.

Diana is a self-described solution-oriented problem-solver, a helper of people in need, and an innovator who tries to find a way to 'fix things'. "That's probably my biggest problem. I just always want to help people…no matter what they've done"

(Diana, personal communication, October 12, 2005). Diana appeared frustrated that we, as human beings – with all the available resources – are not able to provide remedies for less fortunate individuals; some of these individuals work against great odds to live a life with greater benefits. "Mankind prefers to label them," she said. Quite often newspapers just present these incidents, "as if they [the newspapers] are just windows to the world" (Diana, personal communication, October 12, 2005) and do not have the capacity to garner resources or implement plans for the improvement of others' lives.

> In addition, Diana strongly stated her forthrightness when interacting with others. I don't say things to people that I don't mean, even if it's a defendant. I tend to tell people exactly what I think…in a way that's tempered…with what I think they're feeling or maybe even what I think they should feel, in some cases if they haven't figured out that that's how they should feel yet (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005).

Sometimes Diana resembles a person with a strong self-definition supported by an even stronger platform of self-valuation. Yet, at other times, Diana seems to be the epitome of internalized experience and consciousness. On this point, Diana compared her thinking with what she thought were the insights of other African American women.

> We can see the world from so many angles. We are capable of such a broad range of experiences that if there is such a thing as a female Atlas, it's an African American woman holding this world up on her shoulders (Diana, personal communication, October 12, 2005).

Diana believed that other people might view her as being very proper and 'boring'. But, she admitted presenting herself as an African American woman who had accomplished a great deal in life and someone that other people might admire or see as a role model.

Diana struggled to describe herself, despite voicing the former opinions about herself. " …in many ways I feel that it's hard to have an identity outside of what I do," she said. "I think it's harder now." Nevertheless, she appreciates being a judge because it has influenced her outlook of the world. "I think it' also made me less quick to judge in the sense of permanently casting someone in a certain light." Yet, her most important concern is "that people not feel that I'm going to betray them in any way…" (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005). Diana continued,

> …deep down I am just a loving and caring person. I am an over-achiever. That's
> for sure, good or bad as that may be. I'm interested in issues about how your
> existence in the world affects the rest of the world…(personal communication,
> October 12, 2005).

Regarding her self-valuation, PJ stated that she knew she was a trailblazer, when she was appointed as a principal. She also was aware that many just saw her gender and race. "I wanted them to know that I was competent. I was strong. I was capable and my color had nothing to do with my doing my job" (PJ, personal communication, October 10, 2005). PJ remembered her connections to the lineage and suffering of African Americans as a group and adhered to, and operated by using, certain affirmations that she held about Black women in America.

> We learned how to do things based on necessity because we weren't given those
> privileges that the White woman was given. So, all along we have been creative.

We've just been smart (PJ, personal communication, November 3, 2005). When you look now at the successes of many of our African American women, in a sense, they are leading our men. Maybe it's not unusual. They never believed that we could do those things (PJ, personal communication, December 5, 2005).

PJ described herself as being "just big, bold, and brazen" and was adamant about how she dealt with instances of oppression. "If you tell me I can't do it, I'm going to prove to you that I can." PJ added, "I don't go out and look for these symptoms of racism. And when they come up, I handle them to the point that people say, just leave her alone because it's not going to affect her" (PJ, personal communication, November 3, 2005). She has entered certain arenas, not to be the first or only Black woman, but so that she might gain enlightenment about relevant issues or to take advantage of opportunities offered.

PJ divulged many of her individual features. "I want to be perceived as a woman of competency…a leader." But, "I don't like people who drag their feet. And I get in trouble for that many times…" PJ explained, "I am of that 'giving' type person," and she believes, according to the Creator's plan, seeds of determination, integrity, honesty, sharing, and giving were planted somewhere along the line in her life, although she cannot determine if the seeds were planted by heritage or environment (PJ, personal communication, October 10, 2005).

When PJ began to inventory her personality traits, she also began to objectify herself. When she described her personality, she said, "PJ is, first of all, PJ is a warm person. PJ likes people. PJ is family-oriented. PJ can flow with the situation. PJ can be demanding. PJ can be arrogant." Then, PJ mixed first and third person in the same

sentence. "PJ can…I can analyze a task and I can do it, regardless of what it is, if I want to." Afterwards, PJ returned to referring to herself by name: "PJ can be stubborn. PJ can be loving. " As the conversation continued, PJ explained,

> I am a planner…if I start something, I want to see it completed. When I start, I, in my mind, visualize step by step and I can always see the end. Now I'm going to work for the end (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

Nonetheless, she admitted, "I'm not well organized, not as well organized as I could be." But, afterwards, she said,

> I know I am PJ. PJ can…she can laugh about a situation, even though it may be hurting her. I can use laughter and humor to get over many problems that I've had. I try not to worry about them (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

Her statements now included a mixture of subjective and objective references to herself.

As a outgrowth of the analysis process, I interpreted PJ's reference to herself as a third person as significant, because of the relationship between her self-valuation and self-definition. PJ might have switched between subject/noun forms to indicate the difficulty she was having in voicing a description about herself that differentiated between what she thought and what she did.

In contrast to PJ's self-valuation, Jewel explained her own position concerning her interaction with church members. "I don't allow people to step over me because of the size of this building and the size of our community." She continued, "I can't let people just walk over me and hurt my feelings and do nothing about it." Jewel contended that she tried to be obedient by following the teachings of God, not fueling gossip, and trying not to be too sensitive, but conceded that she "…probably hear[s] more than what I

actually see for myself …and I don't push people wondering if they'll say something"

regarding gossiping or talking about her behind her back (Jewel, personal

communication, September 7, 2005). But, she endeavored to put that aside and

concentrated on providing meaningful sermons from which lessons might be taught each

Sunday. "I'm just the kind of person who needs to put a lot of time into a message

(sermon) and I spend a lot time here [preparation of sermons]" (Jewel, personal

communication, July 21, 2005). This has resulted in an increased number of new people

joining the church, according to Pastor Jewel.   In addition, Jewel proudly stated that,

"I'm a person who never left the church", even when her parents allowed her to make

that decision for herself. "But, I guess it has a lot to do with who I am today. (Laughs)"

(Jewel, personal communication, July 21, 2005).

Jewel professed, "I am wonderfully and beautifully made because of where I

come from…and tough (laughs). I don't live a pretentious life, a pretend life. I don't

pretend and try to be anything other than who I am." Jewel believes that is contrary to

what her community had done. She has tried to understand where they're [community

and congregation members] "coming from but, on the other hand, I don't understand it

and I don't want to live in that kind of environment" (Jewel, personal communication,

September 7, 2005).

At different intervals throughout our four-session interview series, I asked Jewel,

"Who are you?" My intent was to get a first response and then corroborating responses.

But, whenever I asked the question, Jewel usually became very pensive or said she had to

think about it. Thus, she did not fully respond or evaded the question.

But, when I asked Jewel, "What type of woman are you?" Jewel responded, "Type? (Laughs loudly)" (personal communication, October 5, 2005). I inferred from Jewel's tone of voice that she objected to my use of the word 'type' in the question. This also appeared to be one of those moments when 'she had her guns drawn'. Nevertheless, Jewel listed her persona as

> multi-faceted, dynamic, smart, love the Lord is in there, and I really love the Lord
> and love what the Lord has called me to do. Sometimes I'm not always happy
> with it, but I'm just so grateful. I'm grateful for who I am. I'm grateful for the
> life that I live and just pray that God will continue to allow me to continue to live
> this lifestyle that I have become accustomed to…what I call, good life style
> (personal communication, October 5, 2005).

Finding herself or at least discovering how she might define herself might have been one of the reasons that Jewel took a Sabbath Leave following our fourth interview session. But, we met for an addendum session and Jewel shared what she regarded as her makeup.

> I'm a child of God. I'm a child of the King. Sometimes it feels like I'm the
> King's kid…King's child…woman of God, the woman that God intended me to
> be. But, I'm still in the perpetual posture of becoming so I still haven't reached
> my full potential. But, I want to become all that God wants me to become, all
> who God created me to be. And I'm going to run on until I get to the end (Jewel,
> personal communication, December 23, 2005).

Sheila, on the other hand, said "I am a person that can understand; give empathy. I can sympathize. I just think I can do all those things. I just think I'm a good person. I

really think that I can help someone; share their heartaches." But, she quickly added, "I'm the type of a person that I'm like, kind of quiet-like. But, then, don't get me wrong" (Sheila, personal communication, May 10, 2006). Sheila's trait of quietness, however, definitely was not synonymous with submissiveness. Others "find out that in certain situations, I will get my point across. I don't have to be loud. I don't have to be. But, I will get my point across…" Sheila added, "I'm very quiet and I listen. I know what's right. I know what's wrong and I know I stand for the right things in life and I'm not easily persuaded by the world and the worldly things" (personal communication, May 10, 2006). Then, Sheila provided a glimpse into her core.

> Just because someone said this was what it should be, if I don't feel it should
>
> be that way, I will express myself and let them know. I think about it. I really
>
> sit and think about the situation and even if I have to do some research that
>
> I'm not just going to fall for anything someone tells me. (Sheila, personal
>
> communication, June 1, 2006)

This stance appeared to be compatible with her outlook of life.

> As you go through life, you will find out you can't be persuaded by everyone
>
> that you come into contact with. You have to be able to sort out and figure
>
> out if that's the right thing to do or if that's something that you would just
>
> leave alone because it's not going to help you in life (Sheila, personal
>
> communication, May 10, 2006).

> Also, Sheila illustrated her resourcefulness in the way that she responded when

she felt her bank manager was snubbing her when she was made head bank teller. Sheila took pride in doing her job well and knowing that "I didn't have to go and ask someone

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for the answers. And I also learned how to find my answers sometimes without asking

people." According to Sheila, if she did not know the answer, she would do some

independent research so that she could provide the customer with accurate information

(personal communication, June 1, 2006).

Despite her resourcefulness and independence, Sheila appeared apprehensive

about verbally identifying her strengths or her skills or her capabilities that ensured her

promotion, thereby, claiming personal credit and ownership for the promotion. In spite

of all the preparation she undertook to earn a promotion, Sheila stated, instead, "I was

promoted" or "he promoted me." These were curiously passive and modest comments

that are in contrast with the initiative that Sheila described as using to 'overcome' an

oppressive situation a short period of time before she was promoted.

Leaders on Leadership

Jewel described her leadership style as surrounding herself "with smart people,

who are about things…called movers and shakers…delegate… team" (personal

communication, June 15, 2005) and collaborates with the congregation and church

council. She depicted herself as an easygoing person when it comes to managing the

church as a business and an inventive leader who is inclusive. Jewel claimed that she

was motivating men to "do some things, as well as to do them differently, and to make

changes in the church. It is a struggle and it's difficult" (personal communication,

October 5, 2005). Yet, Jewel had given many African American women and men in the

congregation and the community a general vote of 'no-confidence' as a result of her

interaction with them. For example, Jewel believed that men in the congregation must be

told what to do as leaders within the congregation or nothing would get accomplished. Further, Jewel generally questioned the motives of some of the women in the congregation whom she viewed as her greatest opponents.

As a leader, Sheila used a differentiated approach when relating to people in different situations, "because you cannot respond to each individual the same way because everybody has a different make-up…does not think alike." Sheila's perception of her subordinates was that she **"**had no problems with them [tellers]. They really responded to me. Anything I asked them to do, they would do it and it was the way that I asked." (Sheila, personal communication, May 10, 2006). Sheila added that she

> had a good rapport with them [teller line] because I had no problem with
>
> explaining to them what they needed to do and how they should do it and any
>
> questions I would explain it to them. I had no problem with sharing my
>
> knowledge with someone else because we had a very good relationship of
>
> working together in order to make the job successful (personal communication,
>
> April 19, 2006).

Sheila found that asking the tellers, who were her subordinates, for support and help with tasks, without dictating, worked best for her.

PJ, on the other hand, appeared to evade – paused and hesitated – in describing her leadership style, when first asked.

> You just have to learn how to manage it. And that's another
>
> thing…management skills and delegation. I had a hard time delegating until I
>
> realized that's why they're paying the people [assistant principals]. I don't have

to do it all. If they do it wrong, so what? You jump on them (PJ, personal

communication, September 12, 2005).

Then, PJ explained that she was so busy doing what she had to do, that she did not take

the time to analyze what she did. But, she stated clearly that she was a risk-taker when

she undertook initiatives that specifically made a difference for the transient student

population in her school.

PJ might not have wanted to share her thoughts, or did not actually know her

leadership style, which might had been the reason for the pause and hesitation. "That's a

hard one, to determine your own leadership style. Well, my first thing is, you lead by

example. You don't ask anyone to do anything that you wouldn't think about doing

yourself" (PJ, personal communication, October 10, 2005).

Yet, after discussion and further questioning, it was still unclear how PJ

demonstrated the different dimensions of leadership skills at the job site. A single cause,

or a combination of causes, such as unfamiliarity with what I asked, or reluctance to tell

me, or difficulty in articulating a comprehensive response, or uncertainty about her

effectiveness as a leader, might have been root causes. But, PJ made her goal as a

principal very clear.

I wanted them to see that I was capable. I wanted them to see that I was

strong, that I could handle the situation, that I would be fair-minded, that I

would put children at the head. That was my job…teach children. That I

would make a sincere effort to involve the parents of that community, with the

running of their school. I would involve the politicians to the point that they

needed to know what we were doing, but not to ask for favors and all that

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good stuff. And I wanted them to know that, even though this woman was

working with an impoverished environment…disadvantaged, that we too were

capable. Give us a chance and I'm going to prove that we are capable

(PJ, personal communication, October 10, 2005).

PJ admitted to using diplomacy and tact when working with teachers because of the

teachers' union and worked collaboratively with a representative group of staff when

making sweeping changes within the school.

Then, PJ appeared to change gears and modestly say that "We are all leaders,"

depending on the situation (personal communication, November 3, 2005). Next, in the

midst of her discourse about leadership, PJ switched between her general definitions of

leader and followers. Finally, PJ admitted that she herself had leadership attributes.

I say I'm a leader because there are some initiatives that I take on my own. I

try to analyze, I try to plan them, and then I try to present them to the people

that will have to help me carry them out. I will step out there. But, I try to get

my thought processes together before I lead and I take the first step. I'm not

going to jump until I sort of analyze and involve somebody else (PJ, personal

communication, November 3, 2005).

On the topic of leadership, Diana concluded that she and other women of her

generation had grown up during the 1970s when many opportunities opened up for

women. "Women were really just beginning to assert their power and assert their

independence, and it wasn't always clear that we were expected to be in positions of

leadership" (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005). Diana determined

that the lack of role models to help young women to carve out paths of leadership for

themselves made recognition of different styles of leadership and leadership development difficult.

As a result, Diana was ambivalent in her thinking about having leadership skills and assuming the role of leader.

> I think I am a leader. I think my skills over the last seven or eight years, though, have evolved. But, I say I'm a leader because I've been put in leadership roles and because I have ideas and opinions on how to make things better, whatever the project might be. I don't think I always felt comfortable with that role though and I have over the last four or five years become more comfortable in the role of leader of whatever the project may be (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005).

Diana acknowledged, "Some projects are important to me. I have resources," But she declared that she had to learn to accept the role. "I was able to finally accept the role [when I understood that] I could be a leader and be criticized and that had nothing to do with me as a person" (Diana, personal communication, November 9, 2005).

This was an indication that Diana had acquired what she had described as the hallmarks of a leader. The hallmarks were caring about the subject, being persistent in figuring out how to resolve the problem or the issue or how to complete the project, and being able to inspire people to want to work with you to complete the task. Furthermore, Diana thought, "The skills of leadership transcend boundaries, whether it is a professional and a personal life…whether it's your subordinates or superiors or family members" (personal communication, November 9, 2005).

Simpson (2002) wondered whether Black women respond differently to similar situations or whether Black women experience the same situation differently, thereby having different responses. The findings of this study respond to these issues. Each of the Black women leaders held a self-talk or a mental conversation with themselves before responding or reacting to a specific incident that was perceived as discriminatory or oppressive in the workplace. The interactive dialogs, which all of the participants held with themselves, resulted in common decisions for the four African American women leaders. Yet, the decisions were made individually by each participant and were not group decisions.

The four participants faced the same real life dilemma – how, or do, they deal with a discriminatory or oppressive situation in order to keep a job for their (and their families') economic survival. Yet, in spite of their predicament, Sheila, PJ, Jewel, and Diana made some independent decisions, based on their own convictions. The first definitive decision made by Diana, Jewel, PJ, and Sheila was to remain on their jobs and to prove their competencies. Next, the participants independently adapted to the situations in which they found themselves. The participants also separately selected several other responses that were the result of their interactive dialogic conversations with themselves. The responses included as viable options networking, resourcefulness, coping, resiliency, resistance, and relying on a higher power for guidance.

In response to an open-ended query, each of the four Black women leaders self-described a situation as discriminatory or oppressive. The participants also described their responses (actions) to those self-described incidents. Internal and external factors that were peculiar to each participant combined to form diverse responses to their self-described incident. I categorized the diverse responses (one theme of a Black women's standpoint) of the participants as 'thought and action' and 'consciousness and standpoint'. Consciousness is considered a strong awareness of one's perceptions, thoughts, and concerns and having the public agency to respond accordingly when experiencing discrimination. In this study, consciousness was based on the previous experiences of the participants, which might have been the same or different.

Thought and Action

One's action and one's thought about that action continuously inform each other through a process of rearticulation. Therefore, an ongoing dialog with self about a discriminatory or an oppressive experience can result in changed thinking, which is accompanied by a changed action. A change in thinking and action alters any previous responses to experiences and stimulates a changed consciousness. The thinking of the participants' during this process varied.

Diana moved from the role of being an advocate for those who might be considered as having disadvantages. But, once appointed as a judge, Diana clearly indicated she had to abide by, and apply, a different, albeit related, set of skills and practices. Diana had to render decisions strictly on statutes and evidence presented to her, despite what people (the public) thought she should do. Diana illustrated a point,

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which added to her initial description of the work-related incident. "But I think people want the law to work miracles and they expect judges to work miracles. And the lesson that I learned is that I'm not a miracle worker. I'm human. I make mistakes and I try to do the very best that I can" (personal communication, July 12, 2005). But, Diana still dared to consider what was in the best interest of all concerned.

In contrast, Jewel's thinking process focused on how she outwardly expressed her inner feelings about an issue more so than how she performed her duties. Although Jewel stated she realized that she had been hard on men – even from the pulpit – she accepted that actuality as a part of who she was. Yet, Jewel did not readily accept this characterization the first time she heard it from others.

> But, I gave some thought to it. Paid some attention to it and said, maybe you're
>
> right, and backed up…backed off of that. I try to just see that it's men and
>
> women, and thank God, we're just totally different beings. We just don't see
>
> things the same way, which is all right, and I guess that's the way God intended it
>
> to be that way (Jewel, personal communication, July 21, 2005).

This change turned out to be what Jewel described as "another learning experience and also a growing experience" (personal communication, June 15, 2005).

Still, PJ gave thoughtful consideration to how she responded to disgruntled people, based on the way that she was treated. She usually made eye contact, listened and let them complain. But, there were times when she found it difficult to constrain her response, especially when profanity was directed at her or she believed she was being treated in a less than human manner. On those occasions, PJ responded, "I had to stand up and be a woman" (personal communication, October 10, 2005).

For her response to action, Sheila figured out a way to leave a situation that she said limited the choices available to her. She did not directly confront her bank manager because "I don't think I could control myself. And rather than go that route, I wouldn't do that because I really don't think…(and her voice fades out)" (Sheila, personal communication, April 19, 2006). As a result of Sheila feeling ignored and not receiving help from her immediate supervisor, she asked her network of friends at other banking centers for information and took classes to increase her knowledge so she would be eligible for promotion and escape the unpleasant situation.

Consciousness and Standpoint

Consciousness and standpoint are manifested in how the participants thought and what the participants said and did about an oppressive or discriminatory experience. In other words, the participants develop and express a self-defined standpoint. However, the development of self-definition (a conceptualization of self) is a prerequisite before consciousness and standpoint come to pass.

PJ asked herself, as well as others, some hard questions before she considered a promotion or membership in an organization.

Why are you asking me to join this organization? Is it because I have something to contribute or is it because you want numbers? Is it because you don't have any Blacks or is it because you think I have something to offer?

Then, she made decisions based on the responses.

Don't ask me if you don't want me. I go not to be the first, not to be the only one. But, I go for informational purposes because there are many things that they're

still hiding from us as a race of people (PJ, personal communication, November 3, 2005).

But, more to the point, PJ said that she was the kind of person who would have to be told by the people in charge why she could not join certain groups or professional associations or outside groups.

PJ said that the discrimination that she experienced in the position as the first African American woman administrator was a challenge, not to her intellect, but to her color. But, in actuality, it also challenged her intellect (PJ, personal communication, September 12, 2005). This was in reference to how she dealt with conflict, usually professionally and without retaliatory or vindictive actions. But, when PJ deemed it necessary, she did not tolerate others abusing her with profanity or debasing comments. At times, she referred vexatious challengers to her supervisors, just to prove that her decisions were not arbitrary or that she had the support of the district (PJ, personal communication, October 10, 2005).

Sheila, on the other hand, determined that she had to figure out a way to gain the necessary knowledge and skills for promotion to another site by herself.

You know you have to be able to deal with the situation and you don't just sit there and fester with it. Why? That's not going to get you any place. Get yourself together and get, I guess, motivation… Get what you need…your knowledge so that you can move on and you don't have to sit there in that situation. You have to do it for yourself. …keep going forward (Sheila, personal communication, April 19, 2006).

Diana, reflecting on her response, stated that her colleagues accepted that she was competent. Yet, she had to point out that everybody, especially those who were not members of the dominant race, did not think like the hegemony and might not have the same needs or interests.

> I think that one thing where I can make a difference, though, in that area that is
>
> pointing out to them ways to make decisions in a more diverse manner. I think
>
> I've brought that to their attention that they never had to confront before
>
> (Diana, personal communication, July 12, 2005).

Diana offered no apology for doing the job that she had been selected to do, despite some hazards that she might have had to face.

Opponents regularly reminded Diana that she was African American or that she was a woman, as if those characteristics were negative. Diana adamantly said,

> I'm a person that has learned not to adapt to a situation because it will make it
>
> easier on me or other people…I adapt because it enables me to do the best job that
>
> I can do, while at the same time, trying to make sure that those other people
>
> understand that I'm going to be who I am and that is an African American woman
>
> being a judge in this particular community (personal communication, July 12,
>
> 2005).

But, Diana was proud of those attributes and claimed they served her well as she performed her duties.

Jewel, for her part, made a conscious effort to spend some time physically out and away from the community to completely relax. She also maintained a demeanor that was beyond reproach, even when entertaining in her home. Her goal was to provide the

community and church members with nothing about her personal life regarding her morality that might prove detrimental to her reputation.

When analyzing and interpreting reconstructed statements from the participants' narratives, it was difficult at times to demarcate thought and action from consciousness and standpoint. Quite often, the responses would aptly fit into either of the two categories, which, for this reason, the categories of thought and action and consciousness and standpoint were depicted as overlapping. Nonetheless, the action taken by each participant in response to an oppressive or discriminatory experience was an indicator of a self-defined standpoint.

Summary

When asked, each of the participants – Sheila, PJ, Jewel and Diana – had described a work site incident that each believed to be oppressive or discriminatory. I explicated, reconstructed, and analyzed examples of the descriptive language constructed and articulated by the participants within their narratives about their respective discriminatory or oppressive incidents. The reconstructed accounts were also augmented or clarified with verification input from the participants themselves, their written biographical portraits, and my amassed field notes, reflexive notes, and memoranda. I used constant comparative analysis to identify emerging themes, categories, and patterns. Passages within the documents were coded as nodes, i.e., themes of a Black women's standpoint and several other emerging themes. Then, categories that were encompassed in themes were extracted. Next, a pattern (heuristic map) unfolded to suggest the manner in which a Black women's standpoint was developed. Using narrative analysis, I

searched the coded passages of the texts for related concepts (words) and for any relationship between concepts. The qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 2.0, facilitated each step of the analysis process by managing (handling) the data. Finally, (some of) the themes and categories that emerged were presented as figurative language terms. This was done to activate an enhanced visual image of the results of the analysis and interpretations (findings).

'On My Guard' signified the interdependence of experience and consciousness reflected in what the participants had done or thought in order to deal with any stressful situation on their jobs. Lessons learned from past work experiences influenced how Black women responded to oppressive occurrences in subsequent work situations. The interdependence of experience and consciousness was originally thought only to be internalized results of work experiences and manifested as lesson (s) learned prior to experiencing a repeat of specific or related incidents on the job. But, the reconstructed statements from the narratives illustrated that the participants also recalled lessons learned from their experiences within their educational, family, and community backgrounds. Sheila, PJ, Jewel, and Diana – ranging in age between 46 and 70 years, and representing a cross-section of workforce fields – confirmed this premise, as evidenced by the explanations given in their descriptive narratives.

'And the Struggle is Still Ongoing' - the legacies of struggle – were the core themes that Black women have historically used to identify their realities, especially in response to continuing forms of violence. Today that term has evolved into meaning any oppressive or discriminatory obstacle based on societal markers of difference about African American women. The theme of legacies of struggle also includes the categories

of location of oppression and sexual politics. Location of oppression identifies the interlocking nature of oppression by the formed relationship of markers that the dominant societal group noted as markers of differences for Black women. Locations of oppression in this study were interpreted as the interlocking nature of combining the varied markers of age, education, gender, job ranking, marital status (single), politics, and race – the dominant societal group's markers of differences for other groups within the same society. The intersection at gender and race was interpreted as the location of oppression for head bank teller Sheila, principal PJ, pastor Jewel, and judge Diana. Thus, the intersection where gender and race interlocked appeared as a location of oppression across all ages and career fields. However, there were other interpreted locations of oppression for the African American women participants that were composed of other markers, in addition to the markers of gender and race. Different combinations of the interlocking nature of a variety of markers, including race and gender, along with other such markers as age and single marital status, were interpreted as added locations of oppression for the two youngest participants and most recent entrants into the workplace – Diana (law) and Jewel (organized religion). Further, different combinations of the interlocking nature of a variety of markers such as age, gender, race, single marital status, politics, and job ranking were also interpreted as other locations of oppression for Diana. And for Sheila, the only mother in the study and the only participant without a post-secondary degree, different combinations of the interlocking nature of a variety of markers such as gender, race, and education were interpreted as locations of oppression.

Sexual politics is sensitivity to the set of ideas and social practices that have been shaped by gender, race, and sexuality, which frame how Black men and Black women

treat each other and how African Americans are perceived and treated by others. With regard to sexual politics, Diana stated her awareness of what she speculated was the majority race's perceptions of her. No matter the perceptions of her opponents, their perceptions shaped what was believed about her as an African American woman who is a judge. Jewel, in addition, exposed the beliefs that she held about African American women and men, described interactions with people within her congregation and the community, and illustrated how she dealt with people, both in her professional capacity and in her social life. The reconstructed accounts of Black women leaders who participated in this study from across diverse work domains illustrated that African American women were scrutinized on two fronts. First, the tenor of the interactions and relationships that the Black women leaders had with other African Americans and the hegemony was critiqued. And, secondly, African American women leaders were judged based on the markers that the majority societal group identified as indicating difference from other societal groups, as if these dynamics affected the quality of job performance.

Other themes, in addition to those that were initially considered as components of a Black women's standpoint, also emerged. The respective themes of *'And The First Shall Last'* and *'Had To Prove Myself All The Time'* reflected how each of the four participants faced skepticism about their competencies and challenges to their authority, revealing coping, resiliency, and resistance strategies. *'I Live In A Glass House'* was a theme that exposed issues related to the visibility of Judge Diana and Pastor Jewel in their respective jobs. *'The Wind Beneath My Wings'* was a theme for the support system that included the categories of mentors, role models, and spirituality established and used by the Black women who were pioneers in the workforce.

The theme of self-valuation revealed the keystones of the four African American women pioneers' self-definition. Components of self-valuation included aspects of self-respect, respect for and from others, perception of how one presents self to others, and valuing, articulating, and displaying positive aspects of Black womanhood, in spite of those characteristics being disparagingly criticized by the negative stereotypes of society. Facets of each of the components of self-valuation were ascribed to each of the four women leaders and were further acknowledged as the basis of their thinking. The foremost source for Sheila was the teachings of God. She stated that the Word and the readings must be heeded. Similarly, Jewel remarked that she was a Christian and followed the teachings of Jesus Christ. PJ believed, likewise, that God created her and her life had been planned since birth. Therefore, whatever happened in her life was destined, and PJ said she had accepted that and 'rolled with the punches'. Diana, to the contrary, was an optimist who regarded a sense of fairness and justice for all under the law pivotal to her belief system, even though she also believed in a higher power.

Each of the participants – Diana, PJ, Jewel, and Sheila – appeared to understand and recognize how stereotypes function as controlling images, placed themselves at the center of the analysis of their described situations, identified themselves within the context of Black women as a group (conceptualized self in relation to others), without a doubt articulated that negative societal perceptions were not internalized, named their own reality (created an identity that was larger than the one that society had prescribed for them), and moved from silence to language to action (empowerment to name own reality). Therefore, this was an indication of self-definition for each of the Black women leaders (Sheila, PJ, Jewel, and Diana) across the four workforce realms of law, organized

religion, education, and banking. The theme of self-definition was defined as the power

to name one's own reality and the internal and public rejection of controlling images.

The self-described acts of the four participants appeared to resemble the elements of

self-definition.

The four African American women, who were leaders within their respective

workplaces, completed a self-description of the dimensions of their leadership. Jewel

described herself as an easygoing manager of her church, who surrounded herself with

'movers and shakers'. She also listed the dimensions of delegating, teaming, inclusion,

collaborating, and supporting risk-takers, specifically the attempts to motivate men to

become leaders in the church. Sheila described her leadership style as allowing for the

individual differences among subordinates. She asked for their support and help,

explained information, shared expertise, and promoted group/team effort along with

collaboration. PJ described her primary 'management skill' as delegation. Other skill

dimensions described by PJ were being a risk-taker, being determined, inclusive, fair-

minded, a planner, organizer, problem-solver, and collaborator as well as leading by

example. Diana operated from a position of power where she was able to access

resources and described her leadership style as creative, which required that she become

thick-skinned. Also, Diana's description of her leadership dimensions included an

interest in issues, the capacity to stimulate others' interests in working on projects, the

analysis of problems, and the ability to bring work to fruition.

Sheila, PJ, Jewel, and Diana countered what they saw as unfair treatment on the

job with an individual response. The theme of diverse responses included two categories:

thought and action <u>and</u> consciousness and standpoint. Thought and action described the

rearticulation of events with self that precipitated a change in thinking, thus resulting in a

change in action that informed thought and action. Consciousness and standpoint

described how the participants thought and what the participants said and did about

oppressive or discriminatory experiences. Each of the African American women

participants listed influences that impacted their responses. These influences were

experience and consciousness, mentoring, role models, and spirituality. Furthermore, the

participants reciprocated the inspiration given to them by others as they became

present-day mentors and role models.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Analysis and Interpretation

This research project investigates the dynamics at the intersection of race and gender within the workplace of African American women leaders. The purpose of the study is to explore how African American women, who are perceived as local pioneers within the workforce realms of banking, education, law, and organized religion, construct self-defined standpoints. Black women's self-valuation and self-definition are also examined. The research questions draw attention to the centrality of gender and race in the workplace experiences of the four African American women leaders.

I purposefully sought nominations of African American women for participation in this study. Diana, Jewel, PJ, and Sheila – the assumed names of the African American women leaders – were the four pioneers selected. Diana had earned a jurisdoctorate as her highest level of education and represented the area of law. Jewel had earned two master's degrees as her highest level of education and represented the area of organized religion. PJ had earned a master's degree as her highest level of education and represented the area of education. Sheila had completed three years of college and represented the area of banking.

Compatible research methods – feminist qualitative research with an interpretive approach and narrative inquiry – were employed. The African American women leaders responded to open-ended, semi-structured, and follow-up questions during recorded interviews. The participants' constructed and articulated responses were compiled as a narrative account of one workplace experience that each participant self-described as discriminatory or oppressive. The perspectives of Sheila, PJ, Jewel, and Diana provided

information from across diverse workforce fields that shaped the landscape on which

Black women live and enhanced the findings. Then I reconstructed the self-described

oppressive or discriminatory incidents from the narratives, and analyzed (narrative and

constant comparison analyses) the data (transcriptions of audio-taped interviews, one

newspaper article, four written biographical portraits, interview notes, reflection and

reflexive notes, and memoranda). NVivo 2.0, the qualitative data analysis software,

facilitated the handling of the data. I interpret the analyzed data and discuss the findings

in relation to the research literature later in this chapter.

Addressing the Research Question

The research question queried, what do the narratives of African American

women, who work in the domains of banking, education, law, and organized religion,

reveal about how they construct meanings of self-valuation, self-definition, and

standpoint from their workplace experiences? I divided the research question into three

parts (self-valuation, self-definition, and self-defined standpoint). I addressed each

section separately in order to clearly consider each component of the question.

Self-valuation

Self-valuation was characterized as the foundation of the participants' beliefs and

stressed the content of the Black women's self-definition. Statements were reconstructed

from the narratives, analyzed, and interpreted to represent elements of self-valuation for

each of the four Black women leaders. Elements that formed self-valuation were:

self-described acts or statements that related to self-respect and respect for others, how the participants demonstrated they valued, articulated, and displayed positive aspects of Black womanhood, along with how the participants perceived they presented themselves to others (Collins, 2000; Settles, 2006). Black womanhood was related to the embedded character traits of independence, self-reliance, and resourcefulness. Anderson (2001) would say that the four African American participants "engaged in self-reflections and an unveiling of their own perceptions" (p. 92) when they described how others perceived them or how they presented themselves to others.

There were statements explicated from the narratives of the participants in this research that were signs of determination, self-reliance, independence, and resourcefulness. Also, statements coded as self-valuation in the participants' narratives were identified as the underpinnings of their self-definition. Three of the four Black women leaders indicated that they were grounded in Christianity or religious beliefs; one participant indicated that she was spiritually grounded. In addition, Diana's foundation was perseverance, fair-mindedness, optimism, justice for all, and the belief that she had special qualities as well as being the better part of her gender. Jewel's foundation was composed of choosing to associate only with positive people and the belief that she was well received by others. Sheila's foundation was pensiveness, analysis, and quietness.

All four of the Black women leaders consistently made sure that they practiced their faith and engaged in social or personal activities outside of the workplace to offset the effects of job-related stress. But, all such stresses could not be left in the workplace. Diana, the judge, and Jewel, the pastor – both unmarried women and by the nature of their jobs - had to be especially mindful of maintaining and demonstrating a sense of

personal and professional propriety outside of the worksite. The four participants "developed shared meaning through social processes involving people, language, and religion" (Williamson, 2006, p. 93), which was consistent with social constructionist theory.

Self-definition

Self-definition constituted the power of the Black women leaders to name their own realities and to internally and publicly reject controlling images. In addition, self-definition was seen as the internalized positive conception of one's identity that empowers one to take social action to eliminate the negative perceptions that society may have about that identity. Reconstructed statements from the narratives were labeled as a reflection of that power and indicated that the four African American women participants 1) dissected discriminatory or oppressive situations; 2) conceptualized identity; and 3) described a sense of empowerment. In other words, self-definition illustrated the way that each of the African American women participants thought of themselves.

The participants detected what they believed were racism and sexism by their gut feelings. Then, the four Black women leaders articulately described, labeled, and sorted out the specific circumstances that were believed to be the result of discrimination or oppression as racism or sexism, or a combination thereof. Next, each of the participants discerned the intersection of race and gender within an oppressive or discriminatory situation by their perceptions of the particular way they were treated or 'felt' they were treated. Yet, each of the participants struggled linguistically to define racial and gender biases.

Insight into this analysis process for identifying the interlocking nature of race and gender as a location of oppression was closely tied to how the participants identified themselves. In the written biographical sketch that was submitted before the interviewing process began, the four participants were free to select identifiers of their race and gender. Sheila, Jewel, and Diana indicated they were African American females. PJ indicated she was African American female/woman. The four participants also identified themselves as either African Americans or women in their narratives at times. At other times, the participants identified themselves as either Black women or African American women in their respective narratives. Collectively, the four pioneers had identified themselves within the narratives with terms such as African American or African American woman or even women or female, depending on the context of the response. But, the term Black was always linked to another word, such as Black women, Black woman, or we as Black people. "This combined black [sic]–woman identity may take precedence in their self-concept over the individual identities of black [sic] person and woman" (Settles, 2006, p. 590). Not one of the participants exhibited examples of dualistic thinking (Collins 1991, 2000) when each participant expressed who they were as a person (human being). Yet, two of the four participants paused when assessing whether they were discriminated against because of their race or their gender. Sheila repeatedly said, with certainty, that she was discriminated against because of her race and educational status. Jewel believed that she was discriminated against because of her gender, since she was a member of the same African American community where she worked.

The responses of the participants to their particular situation were consistent with the premise offered by Wiggins (2005). "While they [the four African American women leaders] acknowledged that racism and prejudice are still part of American society, the reminders aren't experienced as critical life-shaping realities that merit an overt personal response" (p. 166). Interestingly, each of the Black women leaders made conscious efforts to control outward appearance (kept composure) and to maintain self-determined attitudes in the face of being subjected to biases of the dominant racial culture's markers of differences. Each of the participants appeared to be determined and driven to show and to prove their competency to others, despite the reminders of the markers that the dominant social order had imposed. The four African American women leaders were secure in their knowledge that they had the capabilities to do their jobs well. Notwithstanding, the four African American women leaders seemed to have difficulty in separating the essence of who they were from what they did in their positions on the jobs.

The finding appeared to have significance concerning how Black women leaders see their roles within the context of multiple positionalities or their self-definition. King and Ferguson (2001) aver that the process to self-definition and 'uplifting' begins with developing the concept of grounding and centering self (personal development, self-discovery, and self-actualization). The Black women's concept of self in this study was connected to self-valuation and self-definition. Both race and gender appeared simultaneously central to self, depending on the way that the identifying traits of race and gender stood out in situations and socio-culture and historical context (Jackson, 1998). However, self-definition will change within the interpretations of one's personal

experiences and moments in history and will also shift within a social context (Brush, 2001).

Self-defined Standpoint

Standpoint in this study was based on the experiences that one had within a specific location in society; in essence, it was a concept that addressed the differences (social location and thinking) among women. Standpoint was what each Black woman thought, said, and did in response to a workplace incident that was described as discriminatory or oppressive, and was based on three components: consciousness, viewpoint about the intersection of race and gender, and wisdom about resiliency and survival in oppressive or discriminatory workplace situations.

The self-defined standpoints of all of the participants were connected to their consciousness, considered to be a strong awareness of one's perceptions, thoughts, and concerns and having the public agency to respond accordingly when experiencing discrimination. Consciousness, in this study, was based on the previous experiences of the participants, which were not the same.

The consciousness of each of the African American women participants was impacted by lessons learned from previous experiences (work, family, educational institutions, and community) and encounters with others, which added other dimensions. One of the reasons for this was their introduction to church and their upbringing in the family, community, and school that helped to outline the contours of their beliefs early in their lives. Further, the participants' level of consciousness regarding racism and sexism was influenced by the demands having both a personal and professional life. Moreover,

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the four African American women deliberately drew on their spirituality (religion and faithfulness), their self-selected support system, and their own self-valuation and self-definition to guide their decisions.

These workplace pioneers constructed impressions about the intersection of race and gender within the working realms of banking, education, law, and organized religion. Their opinions about the intersection of race and gender were considerably blurred or merged, based on the race and gender consciousness or priority of the individual participant. Still, the Black women leaders viewed this intersection as a place to feel a historical connection to Black women of the past, as a location to be confronted with the biases of others about African American women who were leaders in the workplace, and as an arena for power dealings.

The term power dealings related to making it clear who was in control. In the case of the head bank teller, Sheila, it was her White female bank manager who controlled the operations of the work site. Yet, Sheila made the independent and conscious decision to earn a position in order to leave the site. Jewel, the pastor, worked with others within the congregation to resolve issues. But, the decision as to where Jewel might be assigned rested with her area superintendent and her conference. PJ, the principal, also collaborated with parents and community members. But, a local school superintendent and school board ultimately decided PJ's placement. Yet, both Jewel and PJ had a certain degree of autonomy within their roles as leaders. Judge Diana had the greatest amount of control over her worksite; she held others accountable. Diana will remain in her position for life, unless she decides to voluntarily leave for whatever reason or is found to be guilty of malfeasance.

But, the participants prove to have withstood discriminatory or oppressive treatment through strategies involving coping, resistance, and resiliency. The four Black women described how they applied these survival strategies in response to their treatment as a knee jerk reaction and did not think about their response as having a formal category. Besides ignoring the situation and constantly working to prove their competency, Diana, Jewel, PJ, and Sheila mostly employed laughter and humor as their response to incidents that they self-described as discriminatory or oppressive. For example, Diana was amused when other suggested that because of her physical appearance she should have become a model or entertainer, instead of becoming a judge. Jewel consistently laughed at the irony of her situation – a Black woman cleric who was 'called' to pastoring. Yet, as an educated and seminary-trained pastor, Jewel consistently faced the scrutiny and biases of some members of the congregation and community – the predominantly Black congregation and community – that she served. PJ and Sheila attempted to eliminate worrying about things with laughter. Laughter and humor appeared to have also been used to deflect defensiveness, anger, disappointment, frustration, and nervousness. Jewel illustrated an example of humor during an interview when she was having difficulty remembering the names of any of her single male colleagues. Finally, she explained that single African American women did not let single African American men, whether or not they were pastors or 'frogs or dogs', stay single for long. Hence, laughter and humor were, and continue to be, strategies of coping and resiliency.

Each of the participants took a stance, based on their thinking about an issue, which indicated that each one had a self-defined standpoint. Another way to look at each of the participants' standpoints was to construct from the narratives what they would tell

others as a guide based on their experiences. Each of the leaders shared their experiences and lessons learned when they served as role models and/or voluntarily mentored young African American women. Mentees or protégés were given encouraging messages to become successful at whatever they desired. But, there was no mention of how to respond to discriminatory or oppression.

An analysis of the three components of a Black women's standpoint – consciousness, viewpoint about the intersections of race and gender, and resiliency and – survival – suggested that the thinking of the participants was not completely the same. Even though the resultant responses might have been similar, "…there is not a single, monolithic black [sic] woman's standpoint, because too many variables…divide and subdivide women" (Taylor, 2001, p. 25). This finding was consistent with the notion that there is not one standpoint that is reflective of all African American women (Collins, 2000). "When people share the experience [of embodying the same race and gender] within a particular society, it is likely that some shared meaning will emerge…as well as those that are not" (Williamson, 2006, p. 90). If standpoint must be captured in language, then a Black women's standpoint – a collective of a group of Black women – is the most germane (Collins, 1997).

Discussion of Findings Based on Research Literature

The purpose of this study is to explore how African American women, who are perceived as local pioneers within the workforce realms of banking, education, law, and organized religion, construct self-defined standpoints. The perspectives of Black women who worked across diverse fields were solicited to enrich the findings. I set the boundary

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to include only one chosen situation that was perceived as the site of discrimination or oppressive conditions. My goal was to listen and to foster participant responses in order to collect self-described incidents as narrative records.

The four African American women participants determined the incidents to self-describe. Their accounts were reflections of previous experiences and "their meanings [might] have shifted and changed over time [through] transformation [or] the stories were told differently this time" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p.3). Still, narrative inquiry, as a research technique, allowed me to delve into the core issues of the experiences, regardless of how many times the incidents had been told.

Also, Clandinin and Connelly (as cited by Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 3) stated that, "Successful negotiation and application of [ethical] principles do not guarantee a fruitful study." But, Sheila, PJ, Jewel, and Diana spent hours of their time voluntarily participating in my research study and thoughtfully responding to my queries during the interview sessions. The professional Black women participants might have described different experiences that might have resulted in other themes, categories, and patterns emerging. But, this is only conjecture.

Excerpts from the narratives, in the voices of the participants, were coded and reconstructed from their narratives. I then analyzed the statements, interpreted the meaning of the statements, placed statements under the heading of emerging themes and categories and attributed the interpreted meanings to each of the four African American women leaders. Similar to Collins (2000), I looked for new interpretations of familiar realities. But, in the cases of the researcher as well as the participants, "We do not

construct our interpretations in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practice, language and so forth" (Schwandt, 2005, p. 197).

In this section, I discuss the findings in light of the existing body of research and topical literature about African American women. I highlight six areas: acts of discrimination and oppression, impressions formed at the intersection of race and gender, sexual politics and self-valuation, experience and consciousness, support systems, and leadership.

Acts of Discrimination and Oppression

Olesen (2000) stresses that feminist qualitative research largely focuses on the institutions that frame the discriminatory practices to oppress. Institutionalized racism and sexism have been determined to be formidable oppressive obstacles to overcome. The findings of this study – based on the reconstructed statements of the participants in their narratives – suggest that each worksite, vis-à-vis profession, is described as promoting women and African American women in particular benefit. Three of the four participants specified there were instances where institutionalized discrimination occurred within their line of work. Interlocking markers of difference were self-described by only one of the four participants as forming the reason for her oppression at her particular job site. The African American women leaders maintained that gender and racial discrimination are institutionalized, respectively, 1) within the denomination, but not in her individual church; 2) within the justice system, but not in how she conducts proceedings or makes decisions within her individual courtroom; and 3) within the school system, but not in her individual school. The fourth participant

maintained that gender and racial discrimination were not institutionalized within

banking, but was imposed by individual supervisors. The participants' observations,

according to Thomas (2004), revealed that "family roles, communication patterns,

affective styles, and values (personal control, individualism, collectivism, spirituality and

religiosity) play a significant role in how Black women define and interpret events across

space and time" (p. 291). Nevertheless, the participants appeared aware that each line of

work employed individuals whose actions and language were reflective of racism and

sexism and believed that these individual beliefs were not necessarily embedded within

the culture of the four workforce realms of interest.

On the other hand, Simpson (2002) challenges the historically believed notion that

Black women's group location in intersecting oppressions produces commonalities

among individual African American women. This was partially the case in this study.

The four African American participants were members of a group that had been

historically marginalized by the dominant social order. The four women also had the

same status - professional Black women in the workplace. None of the four participants

described common or clear-cut acts nor made any common statements defining the

experienced racial discrimination or gender discrimination or gender bias or racial bias.

This lack of language usage and public activism was the commonality that was shared

among the four participants. Two of the four participants described incidents that were

similar in nature. The two participants 'felt' what they believed were attitudes of sexism

and racism. A third participant only described gender-based opposition. The fourth

participant described an obstruction placed in her path by one of her supervisors that

served as an oppressive structure. There were no described incidents where physical violence was threatened or carried out against any of the four Black women participants.

Sheila made a most interesting statement, which seemed dubious to me. She declared that she had only experienced one discriminatory incident within her life and one oppressive situation – her self-described incident. Yet, in the first portion of the first interview, Sheila had described her involvement in an organized movement, as a college student during the mid-60s, to integrate an off-campus movie theater. That described scenario was familiar to me. Buses took college students who volunteered to a movie house off-campus where Black people were not admitted. The college students sought admission. When this was not accomplished, the students then would stage a protest outside the theater. One of my siblings, when a college student during the early 1960's, had been arrested for taking part in such an organized movement to integrate an off-campus movie theater in another city. But, movie theaters were just one example of the businesses and social venues in this country that denied entry to those of color and that African Americans, as a group, worked to integrate. Even though I accepted and recorded Sheila's statement, I suspected that Sheila might not have fully understood the question that I had asked. Therefore, I asked variations of the same question during interviews two, three, and four.

Subsequently I asked similar questions about the same subject to see if Sheila would make a connection between the described workplace experience and any other previous experience that was considered discriminatory or oppressive. I decided to create questions in advance in the style that provoked extended responses from Sheila. I also wanted to delve into areas that would illuminate her awareness of biases, especially racial

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and gender discrimination. However, Sheila still, by the fourth interview, maintained that she had only experienced the one self-described oppressive incident.

None of the participants worked in a private institution. The public institutions of law, education, and banking were governed by state and federal regulations regarding discrimination against individuals based on such markers as race and gender. Each of the participants performed job-related duties that were regulated by specific guidelines or an established set of rules, policies, and procedures. Hiring and firing were based on individual performances that were ideally evaluated in an objective manner and attached to any markers of difference. Lastly, there was little or no interpersonal contact between employees and leaders that were not centered on work-related events.

According to Wiggins (2005), the "Black church of the twenty-first century has a large female constituency, depends on voluntary female labor, has a male-dominated clergy, and affirms traditional sex roles as biblically sanctioned in much of its preaching" (p. I). Contrary to this statement, members of the congregation described in this study were longtime residents of the same Black community, which also included the community church. This community appeared to live in a "culture that included shared values, norms, traditions, customs, arts, history, folklore, and institutions of a group of people" (Thomas, 2004, p. 291). Moreover, the community "considered the pulpit as being off limits to women, even ordained pastors and just tolerated" their existence "while offering little assistance" (Tribble, Sr., 2005, p. 70). Further, "women pastors' sermons are seen as teaching and men's forms are seen as loud proclamation and more vibrant presentation or delivery styles" (Wiggins, 2005, p. 131). The pastor dealt with

families within this socio-cultural group, who were grounded in community ethos, traditions, and local social capital.

Even though organized religion is constitutionally separated from aspects of secular mandates, Jewel contented that ministers, and their churches by association, were held accountable to a higher power. Unlike professionals in the fields of banking, education, and law, being a pastor of a church requires a great deal of personal interaction with the congregation and community members. Church congregations do have input, but not the final say, as to whether or not a pastor returns on a yearly basis. Pastors can also request to be reassigned.

This seemed to suggest, regardless of the organizational and governmental rules and policies put in place to prevent discriminatory practices in the workplace, that one lone person such as a bank manager could use the authority and power of a workplace position to circumvent rights and privileges provided by law. Anderson (2001) further observed that "discrimination is shrouded in subtlety where it is sometimes difficult to determine if Black women had been discriminated against. Even when the root of the problem is determined, it does not make lives and careers any easier" (p. 66).

Impressions Formed at the Intersection of Race and Gender

Societal beliefs about the roles that African American women should assume have been shaped by the majority culture's opinions about race and gender. The long-term effect is that "Black women have neither race nor gender on which to trade in a world that grants entitlements based on both" (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996, p. 143). History has revealed to us that what began as the physical power to rein in and control

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Black women slaves evolved into stereotypes about the inferiority of African American women. Some members of the dominant racial group persist today in believing those negative, controlling images of yesteryear, even though these negative images or stereotypes might not be plainly spoken in public or workplaces. Seashore and Fletcher (1994) describe this situation as category versus stereotypes (oppression). The characteristics and traits of the people in a group are diametrically opposed to the aspects thought by society as being common to everyone in the same group. But, the obvious and sometimes subtle thinking about African American women in terms of negative images, has manifested itself in the workplace as discriminatory practices or oppressive structure, even if not by overt design of individuals and institutions. Collins (2000) adamantly reminds us that "controlling images are designed to make racism, sexism and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life" (p. 69). The four participants confirmed this view and, yet, each still achieved success and maintained employed in their respective workforce realms in spite of racism and sexism.

The participants consistently identified themselves with terms such as African American women or Black woman; there was no dualistic thinking about their concepts of self. None of the participants identified herself strictly by race or gender. Therefore, it can be inferred that the African American women perceived any discriminatory or oppressive treatment that was received was because of both their gender and race, even though the participants also believed that varied markers also were combined with race and gender. Regardless of the other markers identified such as age, education, job

ranking, marital status, and politics, which formed the interlocking nature of oppression, race and gender were the constants. Race and gender shaped the lives of the participants.

This discovery was also consistent with the premise that intersectionality, particularly forms of oppression such as race and gender, cannot be reduced to one fundamental type (Collins, 2000). The intersection of oppression at race and gender was not an isolated location from other significant markers. The combination of markers such as age (or at least looking young), education (which could be synonymous with class), single marital status, and sexual politics, along with race and gender, form significant locations of oppression.

But, the finding seems to suggest that the acts of racism and sexism that the four participants self-described as experiencing were not "the primary shaping experiences of their adult lives" (Wiggins, 2005, p. 166). Further, the self-described events were shaped by how the experiences were interpreted across time and space (Thomas, 2004). The participants appeared to 'downplay' the importance of the self-described incidents in their lives. Yet, the memory of these self-described events had remained with the Black women leaders for periods of time ranging from five to thirty-five years.

Each of the four African American women participants described experiencing discrimination and oppression across the four work domains of banking, education, law, and organized religion. Their experiences were similar to the circumstances that were influenced by the political climate in the 1980s and 1990s as recalled by Collins (2000). It was a time when anti-discrimination and affirmative action programs were seen as 'unfair reverse racism'. "No matter how highly educated or demonstrably competent Black ladies may be, their accomplishments remain questionable" (Collins, 2000, p. 81)

in this climate. The dominant racial group, the White majority, when referring to only

the middle class professional and educated Black woman, used the term 'Black ladies'

during the years between 1980 and 1990. But, it was believed that these 'Black ladies'

took jobs that should have gone to more worthy White males, even though being Black

and female was not seen as being a serious threat to Whites. Many Black males also

thought that 'Black ladies' took jobs reserved for them and began to misinterpret Black

women's qualities of self-reliance and independence (Collins, 2000).

When Black women attained leadership positions, some in the hegemony acted as

if they did not exist; they were treated as if they were invisible. Sheila, the head bank

teller, experienced such treatment from her White female supervisor. There are

indications that neither a specific breakthrough decade, lapsed amounts of time, nor the

law of the land had completely eliminated the social constructs that cause African

American women to experience societal discrimination and oppression on the job.

In contrast, the skin color (race) and status as a female (gender) denied Diana,

Jewel, and PJ invisibility. The two detectable markers appeared firmly rooted as the

majority race's negative connotations of inferiority. African American women had been

historically viewed as being inferior because of their skin color and gender; therefore,

they were relegated to certain jobs within society. So, it became incomprehensible for

some people to accept that African American women could assume leadership roles.

When African American women leaders did come to the forefront, some vocal opponents

pointedly told PJ, Jewel, and Diana that they were Black or African American and

female, without a verbalized explanation. Other opponents voiced suspicions about the

three Black women leader's veracity, integrity, and competency, instead of ignoring

them. Race and gender were the majority societal culture's primary markers of difference for African American women, and these differences evoked questions and skepticism from some opponents about the Black women's ability to perform certain jobs.

The visibility of the local pioneer participants was also due in part to their status as somewhat public figures. The general population often sanctions and is entertained by the close inspection of the personal lives of public figures. Diana, Jewel, and PJ as Black women leaders were considered to be phenomenal and were seen as local public figures or celebrities. These three participants had to remain alert to the risk that some aspects of their lives might serve as fodder for public media attacks or gossip. It appeared that acts of discrimination and oppression, even when self-described, do not disappear because of the presence of locally or nationally prominent African American women leaders.

It was possible that their opponents objected to the new faces of leadership because the positions that the Black women leaders occupied were outside of the boundaries established by the White power structures. Moreover, the positions assumed by African American women were not positions recognized by some members of the African American community as a gender-specific place. But, the bias might have been just as simplistic and provocative as Sheila suggested. Sometimes the men in charge wanted other men to fill positions, regardless of their race and competencies. Men hired men, just because they were men. The people in charge or in positions to hire – generally the men of the majority culture – have a 'good ole boy' mentality and usually hire other members of the majority race (or select others, consciously or subconsciously, on the basis of who looks like them), and tend to choose others to mentor who are similar to

them (Alston, 2000; Dixon-Reeves, 2003). McGlowan-Fellows and Thomas (2004-2005) confirm that unofficial or official mentors usually have men-to-men relationships, might have introduced protégées to key contacts, helped mentees to find their way through complex organizational systems, and endorsed, hired, or promoted protégées within a chosen profession or sphere of influence.

The findings also indicated that a few members of both genders of the majority race perpetuated discriminatory or oppressive practices related to the intersection of race and gender for African American women who were leaders. But, Jewel, as an example, found that being Black, female, and a leader in an all-Black community still did not mean freedom from biased or prejudicial opinions. Despite the commonalities of skin color and confining societal structures as applied to Black citizens as a group, some members in the African American community mimicked aspects of the hegemonic society. Moreover, and possibly most curiously, both genders of African Americans also displayed biased attitudes toward African American women leaders. I elaborated on this topic under the heading of *Sexual Politics and Self-valuation*. Also, some members of the racial majority as well as some African Americans were not precluded from introducing other societal perceptions related to women in general, such as marital status, age (actual and young appearance), level of education (class), and type of job at the intersection of race and gender.

Johnson-Bailey and Cervero (1996) reveal that Black women participants talk in terms of gender and race, when outlining obstacles faced when reentering higher education. The four African American women pioneer leaders self-described incidents that interlocked the experiences of racism and sexism at the intersection of race and

gender within the workplace. Unraveling and classifying the described acts as either race or gender bias was a complex endeavor (Brush, 2005; Philpot & Walton, Jr., 2007; Settles, 2006). Diana, Jewel, and PJ spoke with certainty about issues of race, but mentioned issues that required using the word gender on occasion, or when directly asked. This gave me the impression that their consciousness of racial discrimination was more intense than their consciousness of gender bias, even though issues of race and gender created the conditions of African American women's daily lives.

Brush (2005) suggests that women of color who have experienced racism in their daily lives "…understood that race was an issue but did not necessarily understand how race was an issue" (p. 191). The same might be said of sexism. The issues of race and gender are mutually supporting until the interest of Blacks and women collide (Clawson & Clark, 2003; Philpot & Walton, Jr., 2007). This might be the reason that the participants talked in terms of what they 'felt' when their experiences were related to discrimination and oppression. Martin, Reynolds & Keith (2002) postulate that "minority women have no way of knowing if experiences with bias result from race-ethnicity or from gender, but their frequent experience of such dynamics can heighten awareness of both" (p. 673). Moreover, research conducted by Philpot & Walton, Jr. (2007) reveals that rather than striking a balance between the two identities, African Americans "frequently use their racial identity, while neglecting other identities" (p. 24). African American women, in particular, give this impression. Their level of racial understanding is not transferred to their gender consciousness (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003; Wiggins, 2005).

Brush (2005) recognizes the self as the configuration of meaning that arises at the intersection of consciousness and experiences. Brush (2005) also questions whether women of color develop race consciousness along with gender consciousness as points of resistance. But, Fulton (2004, p. 83) argues that African American women must develop a 'triple consciousness' that includes race consciousness, gender consciousness, and our own consciousness as selves (self-definition), which calls for struggle and laughter (resiliency).

Sexual Politics and Self-valuation

The theme S*exual Politics* depicted how African American women leaders perceived other African Americans, while the theme *Stand for Something or Fall for Anything* (self-valuation) depicted, in part, how the African American women leaders perceived how others viewed them. On some experiential or cognitive or emotional level, the Black women leaders might have anticipated members from the majority race discriminating against them. But, discriminatory treatment or verbalized bias from other African Americans, especially African American women, was not expected.

The nine participants in a study conducted by Settles (2006) describe feeling isolated from others, especially when they are the lone African American woman in a group or setting of Whites. But, these same nine Black participants feel special or unique, at the same time. The nine African American participants also identified their reasons for feeling isolated from Black people as a group as being perceived as an outsider, having darker or lighter skin tone, having different speech patterns, and just not belonging.

The self-described discrimination or oppressive acts against the participants in my study did not appear to be limited to, or solely based on, skin color or gender, as indicated in the data collected (reconstructed narratives). But, these markers of difference had not precluded opponents from easily identifying African American women leaders by pointing out to the participants that they were Black/African American and women because of their physical traits and societal markers. The discrimination self-described against the Black women appeared, more than likely, to have been because they held highly prominent and visible positions of leadership. Ironically, members of the majority culture were not the only ones who formed negative images of African American women. Some African Americans held some of the same biased opinions regarding Black women as the dominant social order, despite having a common history of discrimination by the will of that same dominant social group.

Jewel found that being African American, female, and a pastor in a predominantly Black church had not exempted her from being the recipient of gender bias. She was exposed to some prejudicial attitudes generated by members of the community – women and men – because she was a Black woman who was a member of the clergy. Jewel conceded that African American women in general were her greatest competitors, because they questioned her competency and leadership qualifications as an African American woman pastor. Furthermore, the African American women opponents seemed threatened by her single status and her physical appearance.

Wiggins (2005) notes two important points in this respect. Black churchwomen have no, or limited, relations with women pastors. Even where sexism is found in the Black church, women are hesitant to use secular strategies to rectify a situation. Using

secular strategies means to have government intervention or making use of civil litigation to address, mitigate, or resolve issues of gender discrimination, rather than relying on religious tenets. The second point relates specifically to Jewel because it concerns the concept of a 'calling'. "If the 'called' person is responding to the irresistible 'calling' of God, then she is expected "to trust God to 'raise her up' in due season" (p. 132), without the intervention of the laity regarding affirmative action or federal civil rights or equal rights legislation. "Ministry is a calling that must be embraced with a full awareness of the cost of full commitment" (Tribble, 2005, p. 81).

When the dominant societal group prohibited Black men from exercising their powers in public arenas in the past, Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2003) point out

> …they [Black men] were adamant about maintaining authority in the one institution they did manage to control, Black churches. Their embrace of patriarchy in Black churches was aided by passages in the Bible that support the subordination of women (p. 109).

Tribble (2005) adds, "Church policies and polity are based on patriarchy in the White hierarchical patriarchal church and in the attitudes and practices of the black [sic] church" (p. 59). In this instance,

> women's gender consciousness does not supercede their commitment to supporting black [sic] men, nor does it manifest itself in collective support for clergy women. In some ways, it is a recasting of the tension black [sic] women have lived historically: whether to align themselves along perceived gender lines (female clergy) or along racial lines (the state of black [sic] men) (Wiggins, 2005, p. 139).

But, "Black men are now more supportive of female clergy than Black women," states Harris (as cited by Clawson & Clark, 2003, p. 211). Those who rely more heavily on religion or who are especially active church members are less supportive of women clerics (Clawson & Clark, 2003), and the more they cling to traditional or conservative positions (Powers et al, 2003).

The result, whether the participants were consciously or unconsciously aware, was that issues related to racism appeared to have received greater attention than issues that related to gender. It was also possible that Jewel might have succumbed to the stereotypical beliefs of society about gender. For example, regardless of their race, women display certain behaviors, or as Jewel pronounced, "it's a woman thing." But, Jewel's statements also might be her response to the surprising rejection or hurtful betrayal of community members, especially African American women. King and Ferguson (2001) submit that

> the hegemonic and patriarchal character of the larger society institutionalizes racism and sexism in ways that impede black [sic] women's capacities to value self and other. Thus, the larger context of oppression can render problematic black [sic] woman to black [sic] woman relations (p. 133).

Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2003) suggest asking a question of Black men and Black women regarding any experience with oppression: is the problem coming from within the Black community?

Since Black men were not included in this study, there is no evidence to reveal their perceptions about their relationship with Black women. But, the issue of the relationship between African American women and men merits further exploration. The

insight of Collins (2004) brings this discussion to a close: "Black women can never be fully empowered in a context that harms Black men and Black men can never become fully empowered in a society in which Black woman cannot fully flourish as human beings" (p. 9).

Experience and Consciousness

"Black women produce different patterns of experiential knowledge that in turn shape individual reactions to the core themes" (Collins, 2000, p. 27) of a Black women's standpoint. For example, the theme of experience and consciousness is expressed as lessons learned. Smith (1997) asserts that the actuality of the lives that women live is within local particularities and tacit knowledge of what they know as a matter of daily/nightly practices is produced. Seashore and Fletcher (1994) contend that women of color will predict what will happen in certain situations based on previous negative experiences. Wherever one positions oneself on life's continuum, there is a past experiential base, which leads to an experiential future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Experience grows out of other experiences throughout life, is affected by the political and social landscapes, and leads to further experiences and knowledge.

As a consequence of the analyses and interpretive processes, I discovered that experience and consciousness (lessons learned) are not restricted to lessons learned from only the workplace. The participants made decisions according to the knowledge that they had constructed from previous personal or workplace experiences or from what they were taught by family members (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996). It was also probable that the four African American women leaders were prepared for experiencing some level

of difficulty in predominantly White environments through socialization by parents and family, teachers, community members, and mentors (Settles, 2006). *Black Enterprise* (Why Women Of Power Win, 2006) quotes Deborah C. Wright, chairwoman and CEO of Carver Bancorp Inc. in this regard. "Those who succeed have learned hard lessons about how to not take challenges personally—even when they are clearly discriminatory. Those who succeed understand the game, know the playing field, and have a strategy for winning. And they do" (p. 2). This contention is supported by constructivism.

> Constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience, and we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experiences (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197).

Experience and consciousness inform each of the core themes of a Black women's standpoint and are, in turn, informed by the core themes of a Black women's standpoint. The effect of experience and consciousness on each theme of a Black woman's standpoint appears to be analogous to the theme of thought and action. Experience and consciousness inform each other and generate lessons learned. Continual experiences and ongoing dialogues with oneself about the lessons learned from each experience result in a raised consciousness level. A raised consciousness level is an increased sensitivity to the existence of racism and sexism in the workplace.

Support Systems

The African American women participants described role models, mentors, and spirituality as parts of their support system, even though Black female role models and

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mentors were generally rare. Accordingly, the women appreciated having access to role models and mentors, even though these people might have voluntarily assumed these roles or were individually selected by the participants as a random act of survival. Their role models were those individuals whom the participants chose to admire and emulate. Mentoring is the process by which persons of superior rank, special achievements, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual (or career) development of persons identified as protégés or mentees (Dixon-Reeves, 2003, pp. 15-16; McClowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004-2005). But, the role models and mentoring programs for these participants would have been more effective, relevant, and valuable if they had been tied to specific work sites, had influential mentors/sponsors of the same racial group as the participants, and had informal networks (Brown, 2004).

The four African American women participants identified faith, belief in a higher power, tenets of religion, and religious values as their sources of subsistence and fortification against the negative aspects of life within the workplace. Spirituality, religion, and faithfulness became important findings for a number of reasons, as "…the church and the church community remain an important construct…" (Sanders-Lawson, Smith-Campbell & Benham, 2006, p. 42) for African American women.

The participants also identified spirituality, religion, and faithfulness as significant components of their self-valuation. "Spirituality is the appeal to a higher power, the reverence and respect for a higher being, by whatever name" (Sanders-Lawson, Smith-Campbell & Benham, 2006, p. 42). Wiggins (2005) chose the term religiosity over the term spirituality, because the latter has come to mean a departure from institutionalized religion. "Religiosity is an individual's beliefs and behaviors in

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relation to or on behalf of the supernatural, as well as the consequences of those aspects upon that individual" (Wiggins, 2005, p. 3). In contrast, "Religion is characteristically defined as a formally organized doctrine of beliefs, whereas spirituality is viewed as being more concerned with inner connectedness, meaning and purpose in life" (Starks & Hughey, 2003, p. 134). Mattis (2000), quite to the contrary, maintains that spirituality refers to the interpretation of scriptures within the Bible, is the relationship between God and humans, and is the active presence of the divine in the lives of humans. But, similar meanings have also been used to define religion. Regardless of the similar meanings that have been used to define religion and spirituality, spirituality is cited most frequently as a coping strategy (Bacchus, 2000). Siegal (as cited by Starks & Hughey, 2003) "acknowledges that religion can be a source of support and a vital part of the healing force, but he argued that it can also be a destructive force. Often, religion is preached more than it is practiced" (p. 134). Within the context of this study, the participants defined religion with references to God, Jesus, the Bible, or organized worship. Spirituality included references to 'someone upstairs,', a higher power, a higher purpose, inner direction, or inner connectedness (Starks & Hughey, 2003).

Fall (2002), in addition, identifies spirituality as an approach that helps to strengthen the individual resolve of the participants in her study when they employ coping, resiliency, and/or resistance strategies. But, Fall is not sure if the participants in her study depended on spirituality because life was more difficult because of the socialization of their race and gender; because spiritual and religious traditions were passed through their families for generations; or if it was the personal preference of the participants. Nonetheless, it appeared that spirituality is indeed a powerful and positive

force in the lives of African American women…and is directly related to the life satisfaction among African American women at mid-life (Starks & Hughey, 2003, p. 145). Diana (spirituality) as well as Jewel, PJ, and Sheila (religion) expressed sets of beliefs that were fundamental to the essence of their being. The participants cited examples where spirituality/religion had helped them to chart their courses in life and served as, figuratively speaking, protective armor against their opponents.

Leadership

Black women continually demonstrate leadership within their homes and the Black community. Despite this tradition of leadership, Collins' (2000) delineates a history outside the home and within the community where Black women have been relegated to subordinate positions in women's organizations and later denied chances for leadership in Black organizations. In recent times, Sheila, Jewel, PJ, and Diana have earned a place among other African American women pioneers who have helped to change that legacy for upcoming generations. They have attained success and acquired positions of leadership (power) within their respective workforce realms.

In addition, all four of the African American women participants adamantly asserted that they were leaders, without the trappings of educational or business/corporation jargon about leadership. The descriptive terms that were used fully depicted aspects of their leadership. Reconstructed statements from the interviews provided some indication as to the particular leadership preferences of the participants. Diana, Jewel, and PJ had two leadership traits in common – being goal-oriented and

involving others. Diana further added that she was a creative problem-solver with access to resources.   Jewel described herself as easygoing. PJ contributed that she was a risk-taker who modeled what a leader should do. Sheila talked about the synergy that she had established within her teller team.

When analyzing and interpreting the aspects of leadership described by the four African American participants, I initially returned for guidance to my roots of training as an educational leader. Yukl (1998) reports that the word leadership is taken from the common vocabulary and the definition is infused with the technical vocabularies of particular disciplines, without precisely redefining the word. Moreover, Yukl (1998) informs readers that empirical research on leadership did not begin until the twentieth century. Yet, it was not until 1997 that *Catalyst* began to continuously conduct and release findings of empirical studies about women of color - Black women in particular - in corporate management. So, there have been no comparable ideal models to compare the leadership as described by the African American women leaders. Then, after reading Gardner (1990), I was reminded that, "leaders come in many forms, with many styles and diverse qualities" (p. 5). This statement eliminated my tendency to confine and label leadership as described by the participants with ideal models. Yet, I believed the participants had assumed their roles as leaders, as they described and talked about the leadership qualities that were the most comfortable for them to describe.

Gardner (1990) also warns that the "acts of leadership take place in an unimaginable variety of settings, and the setting does much to determine the kinds of leaders that emerge and how they play their roles" (p. 6). The four participants described themselves as competent and capable of handling their jobs. This might explain why

each of the Black women participants tied their leadership attributes to components of their self-valuation and self-definition. Each of the four Black women leaders connected core beliefs about themselves to their leadership styles. The four clearly stated that they are grounded in their religious and spiritual beliefs. Sheila declared that she heeded the Word of God. PJ said God destines life and therefore, she handled situations as they arose. Jewel based decisions on the response to the question, what would Jesus do? Diana determined that she could make hard decisions based on the law, regardless of who was accused of what offense. But, she averred that she hesitated to judge people based on their societal markers or conditions in life.

Sheila, PJ, Jewel, and Diana also linked how they described displaying aspects of Black womanhood with dimensions of their leaderships. The four leaders related compatibility between their leadership dimensions and aspects of their self-definition. The participants used common descriptors, such as creative, proud, competent, strong, capable, determined, confident, organizer, understanding/caring, and fair/honest/forthright/tactful, to describe themselves. Similarly, dimensions of their leadership were described with such terms as strong, creative/inventive, organized, fair-minded, capable, competent, collaborative, and sharing expertise.

The individual and collective likeness of the four Black women pioneers' descriptors of leadership occurred for a reason. Anderson (2001) contends

> they described what was considered normal, thereby offering traditional views
> of leadership. Because Black women are viewed as the 'other' in comparison
> to White men and are a marginalized group, there is a need to be accepted and
> viewed as normal (p.71) .

Another school of thought is that the leaders have no official, on-site African American women role models from which to appropriate leadership behaviors. So, Sheila, PJ, Jewel, and Diana transformed their core beliefs and displays of authentic Black womanhood into forms of leadership styles. Further, the four participants, consciously or unconsciously, displayed leadership qualities such as independence, self-reliance, and resourcefulness, which were reflective of the tradition of Black feminism.

Kipp (1999) considers "leadership as a rumination of self from the bedrock for the development and renewal of leadership" (p. 1). Kipp (1999) also asserts that the pressure of the role as leader and competing tasks impact the defining moments that uncover one's character, stating that "The first principle of leadership is authenticity" (Kipp, 1999, p. 2). Finally, Kipp (1999) outlines a "three-tiered framework – personal, contextual, and behavioral – leaders think first about who they are, second about what's happening, and third about how they should act" (p. 4). On the other hand, Abdullah (2003) contends

Self-defined leadership among Black women is comprised of four key elements: 1) it is proactive in nature, 2) it is group-centered, 3) it requires a linkage between theory and practice and 4) it utilizes both traditional and non-traditional methods. This leadership model results in the manifestation of clear and distinct leadership styles among Black women leaders who either consciously or unconsciously draw from this tradition (p. 1).

The capacity to self-renew leadership was also found in this study. "No individual has all the skills – and certainly not the time – to carry out all the complex tasks of contemporary leadership" (Gardner, 1990, p. 10). Three of the four participants mentioned areas in which they continued to grow to improve their competency and

knowledge as leaders; thereby strengthening survival skills for resiliency in a hostile

work environment. Moreover, aspects of leadership were broadened during this process.

Diana was learning to listen to negative criticism as a leader, without internalizing it.

Jewel was working on how to be inclusive, without showing any real or perceived

favoritism to any one particular sect. PJ sought to delegate more tasks to subordinates,

thereby, reducing her stress and workload ('doing it all by herself' – being independent).

What Was Not Evident

All four of the Black women self-described additional accounts that they

perceived as discriminatory, other than the main incident considered as the phenomenon

for this study, to illustrate specific points. However, one of the participants described

two unrelated acts – attempting to integrate a movie theater, and a male bank manager

who wanted a male and not her as his assistant. But, she did not regard experiencing

these events as experiencing discrimination. The articulations of the four African

American women participants explicated from the narratives indicated that each had

developed self-valuation, self-definition, and a self-defined standpoint (consciousness).

Yet, there were no statements constructed or reconstructed from the narratives to interpret

as the connection (provocation for) to public action (activism) for the greater good of

Black women in regard to race and gender. Among what was not evident in this study

were these several aspects:

Firstly, a thoughtful response – a form of public activism – employed to eliminate

oppressive societal structures, racist and sexist attitudes, and discriminatory practices

from the workplace was absent. According to Collins (2000), there is a connection

between Black women's oppression and Black women's activism. Those links are related to self-valuation, self-definition, experiences of survival, and standpoint. Even though there were statements that were interpreted as self-valuation, there were no interpretive examples derived from the narratives that could be construed as having similarities of both self-valuation and activism. The lack of documentation for one part of self-valuation and activism created two of the three areas that were not evident in this study.

Secondly, self-valuation and activism were two categories of the theme legacies of struggle. Self-valuation was a category of this theme where issues concerning self-respect, respect for others, and respect from others were presented. In addition, the part of this category that advocated the public or private act of replacing negative controlling images with authentic images of African American women was pertinent. Activism is political action that is the result of self-determination (power to decide an outcome for oneself) and Black women's relationships with one another within the community.

At a point in time, African American women were excluded from many workplace sites and African American women, as a group, condemned the actions of these organizations. Now, Black women have entered these workforce realms and hold, or have held, major positions as leaders; they are part of the domains of power. Social institutions (schools and organized religion), financial or corporate offices (banks), and government agencies (court systems) employed the four participants in this study.

Although African American women are in the workplace, this does not mean that the culture of institutions is welcoming and bias-free. Collins (2000) contends that the few African American women who are in these leadership positions in the workplace are

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"constantly watching" (p. 97) or being watched. Black women leaders might have professional positions, but they still are accountable to the White power structure of organizations and institutions. The consequences of criticism might be removal from positions or dismissal.

Many African American women leaders "attempt change in a quiet manner to ensure rules will be fairly administered and existing policies are changing. Moreover, the women use bureaucratic resources toward humanist ends" (Collins, 2000, p. 281). Collins (2000) also asserts that "African American women find innovative ways to work the system so that it will become more fair, rarely mentioning words such as "racism," "sexism," "discrimination," and the like" (p. 282).

Brush (2005), offers a contrary point of view. "The decline of black [sic] activism, [which] meant the loss [declining] of a politicized discourse [and race and gender consciousness] to articulate their [Black women's] experiences in collective terms" (p. 191). Also, "by assuming that women of color always know and resist racial oppression, we short-circuit activism and ignore the need to raise race consciousness" (Brush, 2001, p. 195).

The findings of this study might have been different, had the participants described other incidents that were tied to experiences at the intersection of race and gender, the phenomenon under study. Nonetheless, this finding is not consistent with one theme in the theory of Black feminist thought.   The premise was that Black women must have self-definition in order to demonstrate public activism or social action. The underpinning of self-definition was self-valuation, especially replacing authentic images of African American women. After reviewing the narratives a number of times, I could

not locate an instance where any of the participants moved from silence to language to overt action. The lack of public acts detailing the assertion of Black womanhood and social activism is an indication that each component of a Black women's standpoint does not have to be clearly decipherable within an experienced discriminatory or oppressive incident in order for Black women to develop a standpoint.

The third area of what was not evident was that formal mentoring programs for the African American women leaders did not exist once they had become 'insiders' within their respective workforce realms. Even so, each of the four participants identified informal and self-selected mentors, who might not have been employed by the same organization or institution, as part of their support system. Mentoring is defined as the process by which persons of superior rank, special achievements, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual (or career) development of persons identified as protégés or mentees (Dixon-Reeves, 2003, pp. 15-16; McClowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004-2005). Based on the existing literature, mentoring has been determined to be effective in helping African American women leaders attain, retain, and be promoted in uncharted territories, that is, new positions that have heretofore been denied to Black women (Alston, 2000).

A predicament, or a vacuum, existed for the participants in this study. The participants were the first African American women leaders, or were among the first persons of their gender and race, to assume their respective positions in the workplace. Alas, there were no Black women leaders already employed as leaders to serve as their mentors. This discovery seemed to have more implications for organizational structures and the cultures of institutions than for the participants' actions. A lack of formal

mentoring programs leaves Black women leaders on their own to search for and find mentors, who might not have the knowledge, company values, and power relations necessary for their success (Jackson & Kite, 1996). But, the participants in this study happily credit, at least in part, their success to their self-selected mentors, as was predicted by McGlowan-Fellows and Thomas (2004-2005). Nevertheless, the responsibility for developing mentoring programs must rest on the institutions and organizations (Green & King, 2002). One problem that might arise is that mentors usually select or are assigned protégés or mentees who are culturally or racially similar. This challenge must be overcome; alternatives must be created (McGlowan-Fellows & Thomas, 2004-2005).

Limitations

There are two concerns that might be considered as the limitations of this study. I have pointedly attended to each issue and have removed the possibility that the outlined limitations will contaminate my research and present skewed findings. Concern one is that I made use of the methods of narrative inquiry and feminist interpretive research to conduct this study. These methods place the focus on the individual, rather than on the social context. But, the use of narrative inquiry might raise the possibility that participants would have selective recall, use inferences to fill memory gaps, and reinterpret past experiences. Further, the description of reality provided by the participants might be subjective and multiple. It is also forecasted that the post-experience reflections through the retelling/reliving process limits the degree of accuracy.

The telling of previous experiences may be influenced by factors such as age, memory, and information gained after the fact.

> …the very authority with which narrative presents its vision of reality is often achieved by obscuring large parts of that reality. …Narrative has a tendency to fuse diverse elements such as agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results, and other factors into a structured but inherently biased 'whole' (Brockmeier & Harre, 1997, p. 46).

I tackled the issue of subjective and multiple realities that might be presented by the participants and within my own mindset. I used the guidelines that addressed explanations being derived from the whole, as established by Clandinin and Connelly (1990).

> A plausible account is one that tends to ring true. It is an account where one might say 'I can see that happening'. Thus, although fantasy may be an invitational element in fictional narrative, plausibility exerts firmer tugs in empirical narratives (p. 8).

Using direct quotes, thick descriptions, figurative language in the words of the participants, and members checks, as well as probing for expanded meanings and comparisons offset the limitations that one's perception of reality might present.

The second concern was the relationship of the researcher to the participants. Issues could be raised about the complexity of whose knowledge is presented; where and how was the knowledge obtained; and by whom, from whom, and for what purpose (Olesen, 2000). I must confess that there were times during the interviewing process when "there were silent understandings, culture-bound phrases that did not need

interpretation, and non-verbalized answers conveyed with culture-specific hand gestures and facial expressions laced throughout the dialog" (Johnson-Bailey, 1999, p. 670).

I applied several techniques such as members checks, repeating the same question in another interview within the series, and/or asking a question in a different form sometime later in the same interview or in another one of the interviews. The techniques helped with clarity and substantiation of the participants' assertions, despite the retelling/reliving of a particular event. I wrote what was occurring during these particular times in my reflection and reflexive notes. Occasionally, I verbally described what was happening in a particular interview so that the information could be captured (recorded) and later transcribed into a document.

Since I was a Black woman interviewing other African American women, this brought up a related concern that was extremely important. I did not assume a detached posture that objectified the participants. I took on the role of collaborator/facilitator, and the participants were the knowers/tellers. Other researchers and readers might have a tendency to assume that the ultimate stories analyzed are solely part and parcel of my own experiences. I met this challenge by composing reflexive notes about the relationality with each participant or aspects of the interview process, writing field text, and penning reflection notes after each interview. These notes served as tools to flesh out the interviewees' actual narrative views of the experiences and ensured that the participants' voices clearly resound in the study.

Conclusions

This study, framed with a feminist stance and epistemology, explores the link between African American women's work experiences across diverse fields and their construction of knowledge at the intersection of race and gender. Black women, as a marginalized group who have been subordinated by a dominant social structure, offer insights. The compatible methods of narrative inquiry and feminist interpretive research facilitated the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data. The research methods of narrative inquiry and feminist interpretive research proved to be the best methods for gathering and presenting the most accurate information regarding how African American women construct knowledge from their workplace experiences.

Three of the four African American women participants self-described discriminatory incidents that happened at the intersection of race and gender. The fourth participant self-described an oppression that occurred at the intersection of race and education (class). Reconstructed statements from the narratives of the participants were analyzed and interpreted. These statements were determined to be reflections of the themes (experience and consciousness, legacies of struggle, sexual politics, and diverse responses) and categories (locations of oppression, sexual politics, thought and action, and consciousness and standpoint) of a Black women's standpoint and the other themes (support system, survival, and leadership) that emerged. Statements reconstructed from the narratives were also aligned with components of self-valuation and self-definition. Interpretations were based on reviews of related literature and research studies, constant comparison and narrative analysis, and the options of qualitative data analysis software,

NVivo 2.0. Understanding the interaction between aspects of a Black women's

standpoint was facilitated by the development and use of a heuristic map. As the result of

this analysis and interpretation, the findings indicated that each participant in this study

had developed a self-valuation, a self-definition, and a self-defined standpoint.

This research presents a way to consider and understand how Black women

pioneers who are leaders in the workforce realms of banking, education, law, and

organized religion construct knowledge from their workplace experiences. Yet, the

findings of this research only point out one way that Black women might develop a

self-defined standpoint. Still, the forming of positive self-valuation and self-definition is

relevant because of their connections to leadership styles and dimensions, survival

strategies, and processing and assessing experience and consciousness. According to

Collins (2000), broad-based activism to address the survival of Black women as a group,

transformation of social institutions, and Black women's leadership in the transforming

of social institutions are contingent on the power dynamics of us, as Black women, to

define ourselves. Yet, there is a lack of documentation in this research to support the

existence of public (social) activism that addresses discriminatory or oppressive incidents

in the workplace. But, this research points out that we are more than just Black and

women.

Implications

Two findings of this study have implications for practices in leadership programs

in higher education and the business world. First, each of the participants mentioned they

had no official role models or mentors. But, each of the participants selected someone,

within or outside the worksite, who suited their preference, to become their role models or mentors. This lends credence to the arguments that African American women role models and mentors in educational administration are scarce (Alston, 2000; Jackson, C., 1996). Moreover, Dixon-Reeves (2003) speculates that if African American scholars do not take the time to mentor African American graduate students, these students might not get mentored at all. Similarly, Jackson and Kite (1996) found that 85 percent of 159 African American women participants, who were enrolled in higher education and placed greater emphasis on the race and gender of a role model, were more likely to prefer female role models. This development places undue pressure on those Black women who are leaders. But, clearly there is a need to increase the number of mentors and role models, not only in the venues related to higher education, but also across diverse workplace domains.

Corporate offices and local education agencies, in collaboration with state departments of education, should give deliberate thought to forging partnerships to launch traditional mentoring or role modeling programs. Mentoring occurs when a role model or mentor who has knowledge and experience in a specific area shares it with a protégé or another person (McBrien & Brandt, 1997). Business, educational, and other social institutions would benefit from the reciprocal effects of providing and relating to a conglomeration of individual mentors/role models from across diverse workforce fields. In addition, mentoring services could be maximized through an innovative program of co-mentoring (McGuire & Reger, 2003) for African American women who have attained positions as leaders or are potential candidates for leadership in corporations or in school districts where the hegemony constitutes the majority of the worksite members.

McGuire and Reger (2003) describe co-mentoring as a non-hierarchical relationship between two individuals, with each having the opportunity to occupy the role of teacher and learner. "Co-mentoring is feminist [because] it acknowledges and values the responsibilities that academics, particularly women, have outside of the university by helping academics integrate their emotional, physical, and intellectual lives" (p. 55). This program might have utility for reconciling the tension that Reynolds (2002) asserts exists because of a discontinuity between academic and theoretical accounts of experiences and the way Black women actually perceive their social world.

Based on the existing literature, mentoring has been found to help African American women hurdle obstacles in their paths to higher level positions in the workplace, to heighten their sense of empowerment as they engage in new roles in the workplace, and to create a perpetual pool of prospective mentors and role models for others. In addition, Giscombe (as cited by Essence, 2005), confirms "African American women who have a mentor are more likely to get promoted. And those who have more than one mentor are most likely to get promoted" (p. 1). McGlowan-Fellows and Thomas (2004-2005) further believe that diversity mentoring is the route to leadership in corporate America. Dixon-Reeves (2003) also contend "Effective mentoring is the key to professional development, publication, tenure, and advancement through the ranks in academia. Without it, the advancement of African American doctorates will diminish significantly…" (p. 24).

The existing research also indicated a relationship between leadership and personal traits. Exposing potential leadership candidates to a variety of leadership styles through mentoring or role modeling has at least one important benefit. Candidates would

have the opportunity to modify their leadership styles or strengthen areas needing improvement or improve their performances as leaders, when their leadership is solely based on personal preference.

A second finding seems to suggest a change for policymakers, especially state legislators, to enact. The four participants across diverse fields of workplace experiences indicated that they 'felt' discrimination in their roles as leaders. Three of the four participants used the term 'felt' to make a direct correlation to how they thought they were treated, even though the three Black women leaders described their experiences as subtle racism or sexism. One of the participants described an oppressive structure that she encountered, although no overt mention was made about issues of sexism. Despite the leadership positions earned across the four diverse workplace domains by the four African American women, they still exposed incidents from their worksites in which they felt that the interlocking nature of gender and race, along with other markers such as age, marital status, and educational level, negatively affected the way they were treated.

Dantley and Tillman (2006) propose completions of equity audits to address a number of issues that include racism and sexism. An equity audit is also known as a representivity audit of the degree of compliance with civil rights statutes, federal and state mandates that prohibit discrimination, issues of equity (experience and training of teacher and teacher quality), curriculum and programmatic assignments (special education, advanced, bilingual, student discipline), and achievement gaps. Then, the results are incorporated into a plan to correct non-compliance (Skrla, Scheurich, James, Garcia & Nolly, 2006, p. 256). Modification and implementation of this type of educational audit within business and public venues might readily detect individuals,

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policies, and practices that discriminate or set up oppressive structures in social institutions. Equity audits would also help to identify and prevent the ongoing preservation of individuals in the workplace who practice racism and sexism. Furthermore, equity audits would identify discriminatory and oppressive policies, and practices that are implemented as, or operate as, unwritten and unspoken standard methods of operation.

Recommendations

This study has focused on how African American women leaders construct knowledge from their workplace experiences at the intersection of race and gender. As a result of the existing literature and the findings, I recommend modification of this study. The findings of further investigations related to this topic will add to the existing body of empirical research about how Black women leaders define themselves and the relationship of self-definition to African American women's leadership style. Additional studies will also increase our knowledge about the diversity of leadership (basis of thinking, perceptions, and actual practices). Therefore, exploration of the following topics might be considered:

Explore and investigate how African American women define their identity outside of the bounded categories of race and gender. The location of oppression focused on in this study is the intersection with the interlocking markers of race and gender. The participants involved in this study discussed these common markers, but also identified other intersections that varied, depending on the setting. Hence, multipositionality and the setting of the individual participant appeared to influence identification of the location

of oppression, self-definition, and standpoint. So, the defined identity that African American women developed outside of the bounded categories of race and gender is unknown.

Investigate attitudes of African American women and men toward African American women who assume leadership positions. It would be interesting to note the links that both African American women and men couple to the Black community (survival and role of or the expectations of Black women). Furthermore, it would be helpful to understand how to improve communication skills and relations between African American women and men.

Analyze gender consciousness and race consciousness of only a sample group of Black women participants to determine whether or not gender consciousness/perspective is omitted/obscured in deference to race relations. Some studies have found that gender consciousness is presupposed to be problematic and the racial dimension is assumed not be problematic because of recent advantages for people of color in the work world (Brush, 2001). The magnitude of the participants' racial and gender consciousness was unclear in this study.

Conduct research on leadership from the perspectives of African American women. A study of this type might determine the frameworks of leadership styles and dimensions that have utility for African American women across diverse fields. Also, findings might reveal the needs that Black women as leaders might require in order to take our places in new roles/positions on the national and international scene.

EPILOGUE

In the course of this study, I was searching for validation of my response to a discriminatory workplace incident that I had experienced more than thirty-five years ago. That memory has stayed with me and was the basis for beginning my journey with this project. My response to what I believed was a discriminatory experience in the field of banking was similar, although not the same as that of Sheila. But, our responses to the situation were the same. We were resourceful and networked to find other advanced positions. Sheila remained in the field of banking, but I left for a position in education. Sadly, experiences with discrimination and oppression have not been entirely eliminated from my life.

I had an unspoken connection with the four African American participants because of such commonalities as age, gender, race, and cultural experiences. I found that, on occasion, I engaged in a type of unspoken language to communicate with the participants. This is considered a drawback when an African American woman interviews African American women participants. As much as I tried to ensure that each participant clarified or expanded on each response, I discovered some instances where that was not the case. I found that I became immersed in the dialogic interviews, which was an indication of quality feminist qualitative research. But, the immersion might have caused me to neglect asking more pointed clarification questions. So, in retrospect, I jotted down probing questions as I reread the printed transcripts and asked the additional questions in subsequent interview sessions.

As the described incidents were read and reread, they revealed ways (strategies) that raised the consciousness of the teller, which is the hallmark of feminist studies, and provided the reader with some insight. After each interview session with the participants, I read the transcripts many, many, many times. I know that I assumed that any topic that abutted on discrimination or oppression was about race and gender. It went without saying in my mind. But, I generally had to explicitly ask questions that addressed issues of sexism for the participants. I was surprised to discover that gender consciousness might be dwarfed by race consciousness in the minds of the participants. Then, I took a good look at my own consciousness about race and gender. Even now, as I pen these remarks, as was the case when I was writing the research text, I routinely and subconsciously placed the word race before gender (interesting observation from a person who claims she is a Black feminist) when writing the phrase ~~race~~ gender and race bias.

Rearticulation of the events by the participants provided opportunities for the four Black women leaders to reflect about their experiences, to draw meaning(s) from their experiences, and to gain self-knowledge. We, the participants through the processes of construction and articulation, and I, through the processes of reconstruction, analysis, and interpretation, were enlightened; thus this research was transformative. My perceptions were exposed when I reconstructed, analyzed, and interpreted statement from the narratives. Researching this topic has helped to elicit and gain knowledge that will empower me from Black women who are perceived as pioneers in the workforce. My sense of self and my worth as a scholar have also increased tremendously since I began this project.

Each of the participants held my earning a doctoral degree in high esteem. As the interview process continued, the participants appeared to have become personally vested in my efforts to complete the project. I was made to feel that I had found a connection of 'sisterhood' with these individuals that would serve as an additional support system that was 'pulling for me' to complete my dissertation. This display of interest, support, admiration, and advocacy still prevails. I feel privileged to have worked with each of the participants.

Appendices

Appendix A – Communication with Participants

Institutional Review Board (IRB) - Informed Consent Form

Letter of Introduction Requesting Nominations from Organizations

Letter to Purposeful Sampling

Demographic Form

Appendix B – Interviews

Initial Introduction Script

Guiding Interview Questions

Appendix C – Examples of Analyses Facilitated by NVivo 2.0

Listing of Free Nodes and Descriptions

Listing of Tree Nodes and Descriptions

Analyses of Relationship between Nodes

Coding of Diana's Narrative

Coding of Jewel's Narrative

Coding of PJ's Narrative

Coding of Sheila's Narrative

One Lexical Search (Steps 1-4)

Appendix D – Heuristic Map

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
(Participant)

PROJECT: BLACK FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF HOW AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN CONSTRUCT KNOWLEDGE FROM THEIR LIVED EXPERIENCES

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Title: _____

I state that I am over 18 years of age, and agree to participate in a program of doctoral research being conducted by Elnora V. Saunders, under the supervision of Dr. Hanne Mawhinney in the Department of Education Policy and Leadership at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Purpose of the study
        The purpose of this study is to explore and investigate through qualitative research how African American women, who are perceived as pioneers within the workforce realms of education, law/politics, economics, and socio-cultural construct meanings of self- definition and self-valuation from their life experiences.

Procedures
        I want to locate African American women who are perceived as pioneers and are employed or have been employed in one of the four workplace realms of education, economics, law/politics, and socio-cultural between 1970 and 1990. I plan to locate African American women participants who meet the criteria through nomination from a local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or the Women of Achievement in Maryland History, Inc. The participants will be asked to sign a consent form to participate in the study. I intend to explore one incident in their lives within the context of a changing social and political climate. Participants will be asked to initially respond in depth to one open-ended statement: Tell me about your workplace experience as an African American woman who has been described as a pioneer. In subsequent interview sessions, participants will respond to another open-ended statement: Tell me about one specific incident that you perceive of as oppressive or discriminatory. Also, six planned follow up questions will be asked that will clarify the story being told. Interviews will be audio taped. Participants will also be asked to complete a brief demographic survey and write a brief personal portrait.

Each interview will be tape recorded. Each individual interview will be conducted over four sessions, but in no case will the interviews extend for more than a total of 6 hours

per participant. Once interview tapes have been transcribed, the participants will be given opportunity to review for accuracy and revision if necessary. The participants will be looking at their experiences and how meanings derived from those experiences have influenced them.

Confidentiality

    This informed consent form with the participant's name on it will be kept separately from all participant responses. Participant responses and data will be kept confidential means that no identifying information, such as a participant's name, will be on any information given by the participants. This means that none of the participants' responses or data can be identified as coming from any participant once the study been completed. All of the participant responses and data will be kept in the lock cabinet of Elnora Saunders, and only the Investigator, Ms. Saunders, will have access to this information. Identifying information about any participant will never appear in any public form. All records will be destroyed one year following completion of the study.

Risks and Benefits

    Participation in this research will involve minimal risks to the participants. Participants may have to confront or revisit issues that they may deem to be deeply sensitive, emotional, and personal. There are no direct benefits to participating in this stud than the opportunity to discuss and reflect on one's professional life as an Africa American woman.

Freedom to withdraw and Ability to ask questions

    Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and participants may discontinue participation at any time without prejudice or penalty. Participants are free to ask questions at any time. If participants have questions about the study, please contact me or Dr. Hanne Mawhinney, Ph.D. at the following address.

Department of Education Policy and Leadership
2110 Benjamin Building
College Park, Maryland 20742
(301) 405-4546
hmawhinn@wam.umd.edu

Elnora V. Saunders
Street Address
City, State, and Zip Code
Telephone Number
Email Address

Contact Information of Institutional Review Board: If you have questions about participants' rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:

Institutional Review Board Office

University of Maryland

College Park, Maryland 20742
(e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu
 Telephone: (301) 405-4212

If you agree to join this study, please sign your name below.

_____

Print Name of Participant

_____

Participant's signature   Date

IRB APPROVED
VALID UNTIL

JUL 3 1 2007

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND
COLLEGE PARK

Elnora V. Saunders
Street Address
City, State, and Zip Code
Telephone Number
Email address

Date

Name and Title
Name of Organization
Street Address
City, State, and Zip Code

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing this letter to introduce myself to you and to ask for your help. My name is Elnora V. Saunders and I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. Hanne Mawhinney at the University of Maryland. At the present time I am working on a doctoral dissertation researching how African American women describe events experienced in the workplace. I am seeking the names or contact information for at least ten African American women who are the first persons of their color and gender to have assumed their positions in one of four workplace realms. Also, please feel free to forward this letter requesting the nomination of possible participants to any individual as you deem appropriate.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of the study is to explore and investigate through qualitative research how African American women who are the first persons of the gender and race to assume their positions within four different realms of the workforce construct meanings of self-definition and self-valuation from their life experiences. Self-definition is defined as one's own perceived positive image of oneself that empowers one to take social action to eliminate the negative perceptions that society might have about that identity. Self-valuation is defined as displaying one's perceived authentic image or identity, even though society may malign those qualities.

Procedures
I want to locate African American women who are the first persons of their color and gender to assume their positions and are employed or have been employed

in one of the four workplace realms of education, economics, law/politics, and socio-cultural fields between 1970 and 1990. I plan to locate African American women participants who meet the criteria through nomination from local branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. The participants will be asked to sign a consent form to participate in the study. I intend to explore one incident that participants have perceived as influencing their lives because of their race and gender. Participants will be asked to initially respond in depth to one open-ended statement: Tell me about your workplace experience as the first African American woman who has held such a position. In subsequent interview sessions, participants will respond to another open-ended statement: Tell me about one specific incident that you perceive of as oppressive or discriminatory.   Also, six planned follow up questions will be asked that will clarify the story being told. Do you use any strategies to cope with situations that involve stereotypes or discrimination of African American or Black women? Do you think that only your race played a role in that experience and why? Do you think that only your gender played a role in that experience and why? Do you think that race and gender played roles in that experience and why? What has happened since the event occurred? What has been the impact of those experiences on you, others around you, and the organization?

Interviews will be audio taped. Once interview tapes have been transcribed, the participants will be given an opportunity to review for accuracy and revision if necessary. I expect that the individual interviews will be conducted over four sessions, but in no case will the interviews extend for more than a total of 6 hours per participant. Participants will also be asked to complete a brief demographic survey and write a brief personal portrait. The participants and I will be looking at their experiences and how meanings derived from those experiences have influenced them.

Confidentiality

The informed consent form with the participant's name on it will be kept separately from all participant responses. Participant responses and data will be kept confidential, which means that no identifying information, such as a participant's name, will be on any of the information given by the participants. This means that none of the participants' responses or data can be identified as coming from any participant once the study has been completed. All of the participant responses and data will be kept in the locked cabinet of Elnora Saunders, and only the Investigator, Ms. Saunders, will have access to this information. Identifying information about any participant will never appear in any public form. All records will be destroyed one year following completion of the study.

Risks and Benefits

Participation in this research will involve minimal risks to the participants. Participants may have to confront or revisit issues that they may deem to be deeply sensitive, emotional, and personal. There are no direct benefits to participating in this

study other than the opportunity to discuss and reflect on one's professional life as an African American woman.

Freedom to withdraw and Ability to ask questions

Participation in the study is entirely voluntary and participants may discontinue participation at any time without prejudice or penalty. Participants are free to ask questions at any time.

If participants have questions about the study, they should contact Dr. Hanne Mawhinney, Ph.D. at the following address.
Dr. Hanne Mawhinney, Ph.D.
Department of Education Policy and Leadership
2110 Benjamin Building
College Park, Maryland 20742
(301) 405-4546
hmawhinn@wam.umd.edu

Contact Information of Institutional Review Board: If you have questions about participants' rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:
Institutional Review Board Office
University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland 20742
(e-mail) irb@deans.umd.edu
Telephone: (301) 405-4212

Your help by referring the names of African American women who are the first persons of their race and gender to assume their positions within four different workplace realms to me or forwarding this letter to African American women who are perceived as pioneers in four different workplace realms will be greatly appreciated. If you have questions about my request, please contact me at the following address.

Elnora V. Saunders
Street Address
City, State, and Zip Code
Telephone Number
Email Address

Sincerely,

Elnora V. Saunders, M.Ed.

Elnora V. Saunders
Street Address
City, State, and Zip Code
Telephone number
Email address

May 26, 2005

Name
Street Address
City, State, and Zip Code

Dear   ,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. Enclosed please find a three page
Participants' Informed Consent Form that you must sign before the research process can
continue. Also enclosed is a two page *Demographic Form for Participants* for you to
complete. Please review, complete, and sign the documents. Please return the two forms
to me in the enclosed self-addressed and stamped envelope. After this part of the process
has been finished, I will contact you to arrange a date and time for our initial face-to-face
interviewing session. I look forward to meeting you soon.

Gratefully,

Elnora V. Saunders

ENCLOSURES

Appendix A - Demographic Form

I. Title: (Circle one)
Dr.
Mrs.
Ms.
Miss
Other _____ (Please specify)

II. Personal Information (Please provide requested information).
Name:
Street Address:
City, State Zip Code:
Telephone Number including area code:
Best time of day to call:
Fax Number:
e-mail:
Marital status:
Number of children:
Highest level of education attained:

III. Information applicable to research study (Please provide requested information).

_____Name you wish to use for confidentiality purposes.
Consider a nickname or a name you would have preferred other than your given name.
If a name is not provided, I will assign you a name.

Date of Birth: Age:

Circle your preference for your racial identity: African American
                                                  Black
                                                  Black, not of Hispanic descent
                                                  Other _____(Please specify)

Circle your preference for your sex identity: Female
                                               Girl
                                               Woman
                                               Other _____(Please specify)

Employment:
Present Title:
Number of years you have held title:
Present Position:
Number of years in present position:
Number of years you have worked for your present employer:

Please provide preferred dates, times, and location for your interview.

What is your relationship to the investigator, Elnora V. Saunders? _____

IV. In the space remaining at the bottom of this form, please briefly and concisely provide a written personal portrait of yourself. A personal portrait is not a resume. A personal portrait describes the essence of who you are.

Appendix B – INITIAL INTRODUCTION SCRIPT

Greetings –

- Say, "I am Elnora Saunders." (Seek assistance in determining the best place to set up tape recorder). Start icebreaking conversation about some general topic of interest such as photographs, food, décor of room, travel, etc.
- After a few moments, begin the introduction unless participant is providing some narrative description related to the topic under study.
- "I am a doctoral candidate under the direction of Dr. Hanne Mawhinney at the University of Maryland. At the present time I am working on a doctoral dissertation researching how African American women describe events experienced in the workplace."
- "Thank you for agreeing to be a participant in my research project, Black Feminist Analysis of How African American Women Construct Knowledge from their Lived Experiences."

Purpose, Procedures, and Findings

- "I plan to explore and investigate through qualitative research how African American women who are the first persons of the gender and race to assume their positions within four different realms of the workforce construct meanings of self-definition and self-valuation from their life experiences. Self-definition is defined as one's own perceived positive image of oneself that empowers one to take social action to eliminate the negative perceptions that society might have about that identity. Self-valuation is defined as displaying one's perceived authentic image or identity, even though society may malign those qualities."
- "Your anonymity is assured and ensured. The informed consent form with the participant's name on it will be kept separately from all participant responses. Participant responses and data will be kept confidential, which means that no identifying information, such as a participant's name, will be on any of the information given by the participants. This means that none of the participants' responses or data can be identified as coming from any participant once the study has been completed. All of the participant responses and data will be kept in my locked cabinet and only I will have access to this information. Identifying information about any participant will never appear in any public form. All records will be destroyed one year following completion of the study."
- "I want to conduct 4 interviews with you that will last from 60-90 minutes each. The interviews will be taped and you will have the opportunity to review the transcribed recordings. I will make every effort to meet your scheduling requirements. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. If you would like, I will forward you a copy of the completed dissertation."
- "The narratives (stories, data) collected will be analyzed. The findings will inform the theory of Black feminist thought. In summary, Black feminist thought is a theory. This theory proposes that African American women, because of the external societal conditions that shape their lives, produce unique ideas that clarify a standpoint of and for Black women. Also, readers might apply information about the issue of focus to other settings because of some shared characteristics."

Establishing rapport with Participants

- "Even though I am completing this project as research for my dissertation, as a Black woman, I have a keen interest in the topic of how and what meanings African American woman make about and from their workplace experiences related to gender and race."
- "You have been nominated by … because you were the first African American woman who held the position of … in the field of …   I want to understand what it is like to be the first African American woman who held the position of …I believe you have a wealth of experience that would benefit researchers and interested readers. That is why I have come to see you. I want to understand how you experienced one particular situation that was related to race and gender in the workplace."
- "Please be assured that this is not a project to determine right or wrong. It is a search for understanding, not making judgments."
- "So far, I have done most of the talking. But, now that the preliminaries are completed, I will ask you to **relive an event by describing a particular situation in which you were involved as the first person of your gender and color who had assumed the position of … at …** This described event within its particular timeframe will be continuously revisited during our interview sessions. Feel free to start anywhere in the story that you would like and use your own words."
- **USE PROMPTS AND CUES OR ASK QUESTIONS IF NECESSARY.**

Appendix B - Guiding Interview Questions

Time of Interview:
Date:
Place:
Interviewer:
Interviewee:
Position of interviewee:
Purpose of research study: Explore how African American women who are described as
                            pioneers within four different realms of the workforce
                            construct meanings of self-definition and self-valuation from
                            their life experiences.

Questions:

1. Tell me about your workplace experiences as an African American woman
    who has been described as a pioneer.

2. Do you use any strategies to cope with situations that involve stereotypes or
    discrimination of African American or Black women?

3. Tell me about one specific incident that you perceive of as oppressive or
    discriminatory. Describe the location, other actors involved, your behavior,
    others' behaviors, and results.

4. Do you think that only your race played a role in that experience? Why?

5. Do you think that only your gender played a role in that experience? Why?

6. Do you think that race and gender played roles in that experience? Why?

7. What has happened since the event occurred?

8. What has been the impact of those experiences on you? Others around you?
    The organization?

(Thank informant for participating in this interview. Assure participant
of confidentiality of responses and potential future interviews.)

NODE LISTING

Nodes in Set: FreeNodes8~1~07
Created: 8/3/2007 - 1:07:05 PM
Modified: 8/3/2007 - 1:45:01 PM
Number of Nodes: 8

1   Activism2
Description:
This action is not related to the original described incident. But, as an independent opinion, it is important in understanding this participant's thinking. Political actions (group and/or individual) that are the results of self-determination (power to decide an outcome for oneself) and Black women's relationships with one another within the community.

2   Experience + Consciousness
Description:
Interdependence of experience and consciousness, i.e., what one does and how one thinks.

3   On Leadership
Description:
Process used to persuade constituents to pursue and to achieve objectives, including relationships (establishing trust, motivation, management of performance), communication (sharing values, vision, and assignments), and accountability.

4   Response2
Description:

5   Self-definition2
Description:
Power to name one's own reality; rejects controlling images.

6   Self-valuation2
Description:
Self-valuation2 refers to opinions not directly related to the described incident. But, these self-described acts stress the content of Black women's self-definition, especially self-respect, respect for others, and respect from others, or advocate replacing externally derived images (negative controlling images) with authentic images of African American women.

7   Sexual Politics2

Description:

This action is not related to the original described incident, but is an independent opinion about other situations. This opinion is important in understanding this participant's thinking. Sensitivity to the set of ideas and social practices that are shaped by gender, race, and sexuality, which frame how Black men and Black women treat each other and how African Americans are perceived and treated by others.

8   Spirituality

Description:

Issues of faith; tenets of religion as basis for action; belief in higher power; religious values.

Appendix C – Listing of Tree Nodes and Descriptions

Project: Dissertation   **User**: Administrator   **Date**: 8/22/2007 - 11:55:51 PM

NODE LISTING

Nodes in Set: TreeNodes8~1~07
            Created: 8/3/2007 - 12:56:58 PM
            Modified: 8/3/2007 - 1:04:31 PM
Number of Nodes: 24

1   (1) /Legacies of Struggle
Description:
Situations of struggle are the core themes that Black women have historically used to identify their realities, especially in their response to continuing forms of violence. Black women continue to persevere, despite strenuous or violent acts of oppression based on societal markers of difference.

2   (1 2) /Legacies of Struggle/Locations of oppression
Description:
Identifying interlocking nature of race, gender, sexuality, class, etc. oppression, i.e., dominant societal group's markers of differences for other groups within the same society.

3   (1 2 1) /Legacies of Struggle/Locations of oppression/age
4   (1 2 2) /Legacies of Struggle/Locations of oppression/education
5   (1 2 3) /Legacies of Struggle/Locations of oppression/gender
6   (1 2 4) /Legacies of Struggle/Locations of oppression/race
7   (1 2 5) /Legacies of Struggle/Locations of oppression/marital status
8   (1 2 7) /Legacies of Struggle/Locations of oppression/job position
9   (1 2 9) /Legacies of Struggle/Locations of oppression/politics
10   (1 3) /Legacies of Struggle/Self-valuation
Description:
Self-described acts that stress the content of Black women's self-definition, especially self-respect, respect for others, and respect from others, or advocate replacing externally derived images (negative controlling images) with authentic images of African American women.
11   (1 4) /Legacies of Struggle/Activism
Description:
Political actions (group and/or individual) that are the results of self-determination (power to decide an outcome for oneself) and Black women's relationships with one another within the community.

12   (1 5) /Legacies of Struggle/Sexual politics

Description:

Sensitivity to the set of ideas and social practices that are shaped by gender, race, and sexuality, which frame how Black men and Black women treat each other and how African Americans are perceived and treated by others.

13   (2) /Support Systems

Description:

Those individuals or groups of people who promote the interest of and defend the actions of participant.

14   (2 1) /Support Systems/Rolemodel1

Description:

Individual or individuals whom participant(s) choose to admire and emulate because these people exemplify success, potential, excellence, etc.

15   (2 2) /Support Systems/Rolemodel2

Description:

Participant sets an example (achievements, work skills, ethics, etc.) for others; fashions self or understands that her actions are/will be imitated by others.

16   (2 3) /Support Systems/Mentoring

Description:

Participant received encouragement, urging, guidance, training, opportunities, etc. from an interested party (parties) in order to attain the skills necessary to become eligible for promotion or to perform certain jobs in a particular manner.

17   (2 4) /Support Systems/Mentoring-others

Description:

Participants voluntarily helped others succeed either at a particular job or to refine their skills by volunteering their time and expertise.

18   (2 5) /Support Systems/Upholders

Description:

The people who offer emotional support or advocate for or provide guidance to or give advice to participants in an effort to ensure their success or to sustain their efforts.

19   (2 5 1) /Support Systems/Upholders/colleagues

Description:

People with whom one works who may have the same title or same rank who backs the participant in their endeavors.

20   (2 5 2) /Support Systems/Upholders/family

Description:

Members of participants' immediate or extended family who backs the efforts of the participants.

21   (2 5 3) /Support Systems/Upholders/friends

Description:

People who have interpersonal relationships with the participant and who also backs the participant's work efforts.

22   (2 5 4) /Support Systems/Upholders/supervisors

Description:

The participant is a subordinate to this person who backs their work efforts.
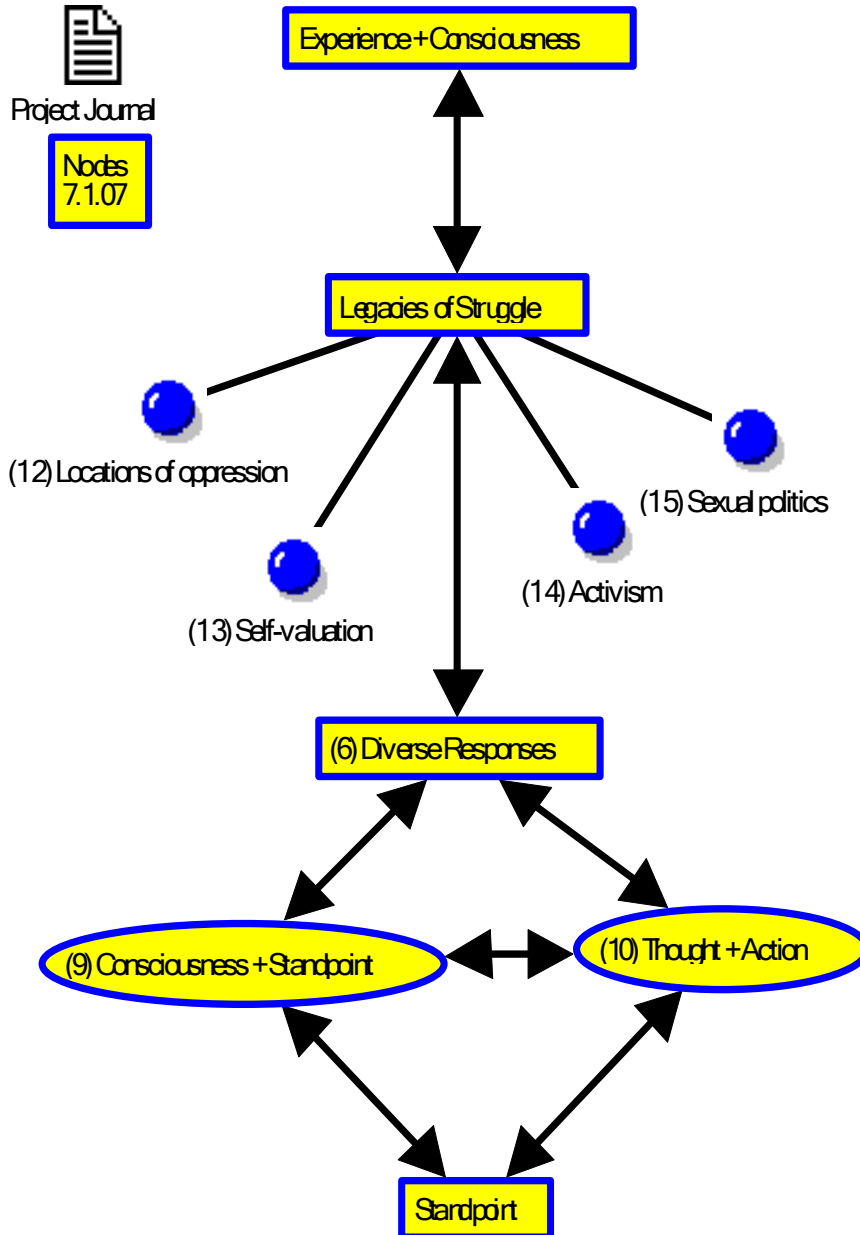
23   (2 5 5) /Support Systems/Upholders/community member~s~
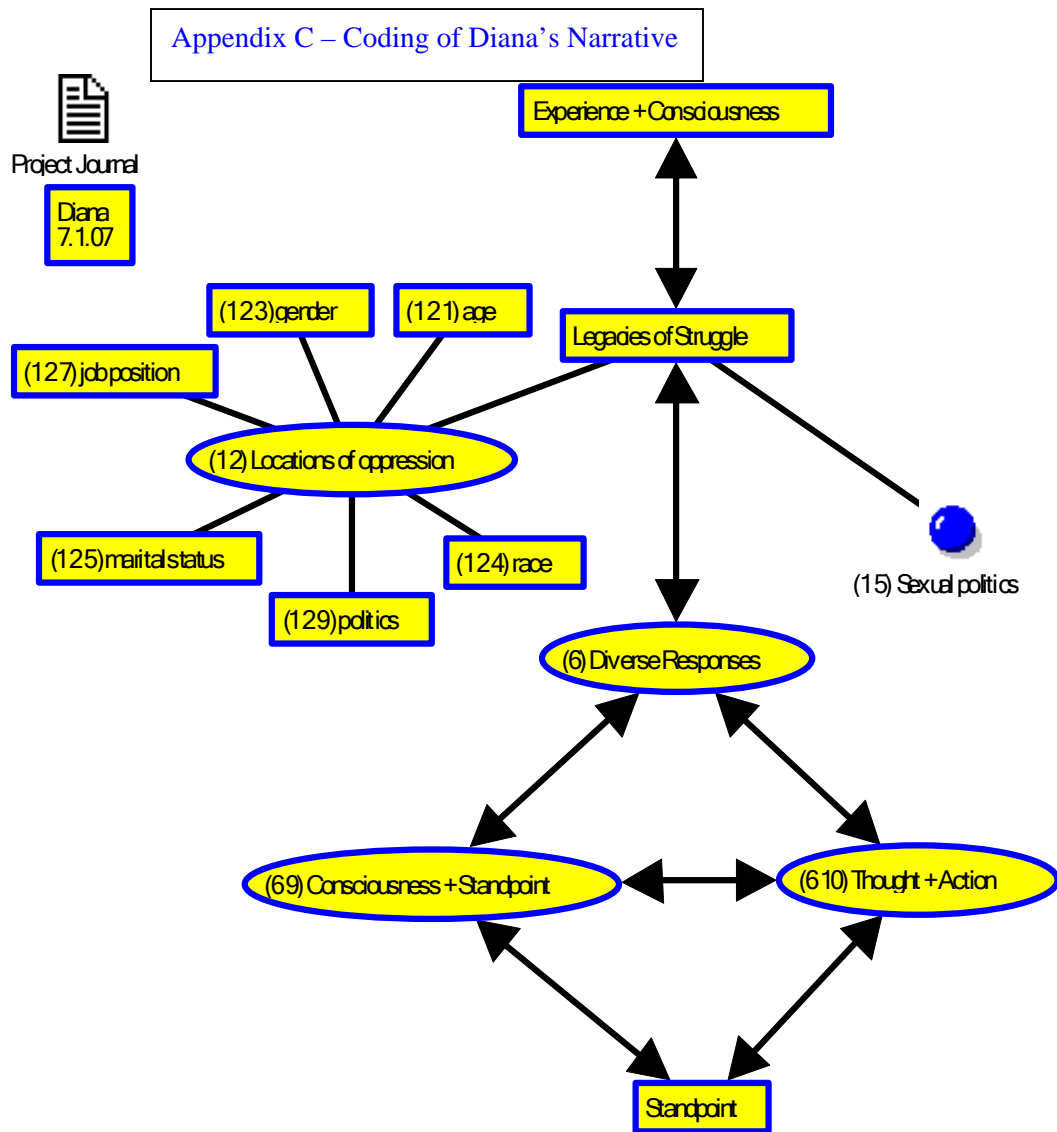
Description:

People who live within the same geographic area or are not connected in a work capacity with the participant and who backs the participant's work efforts.

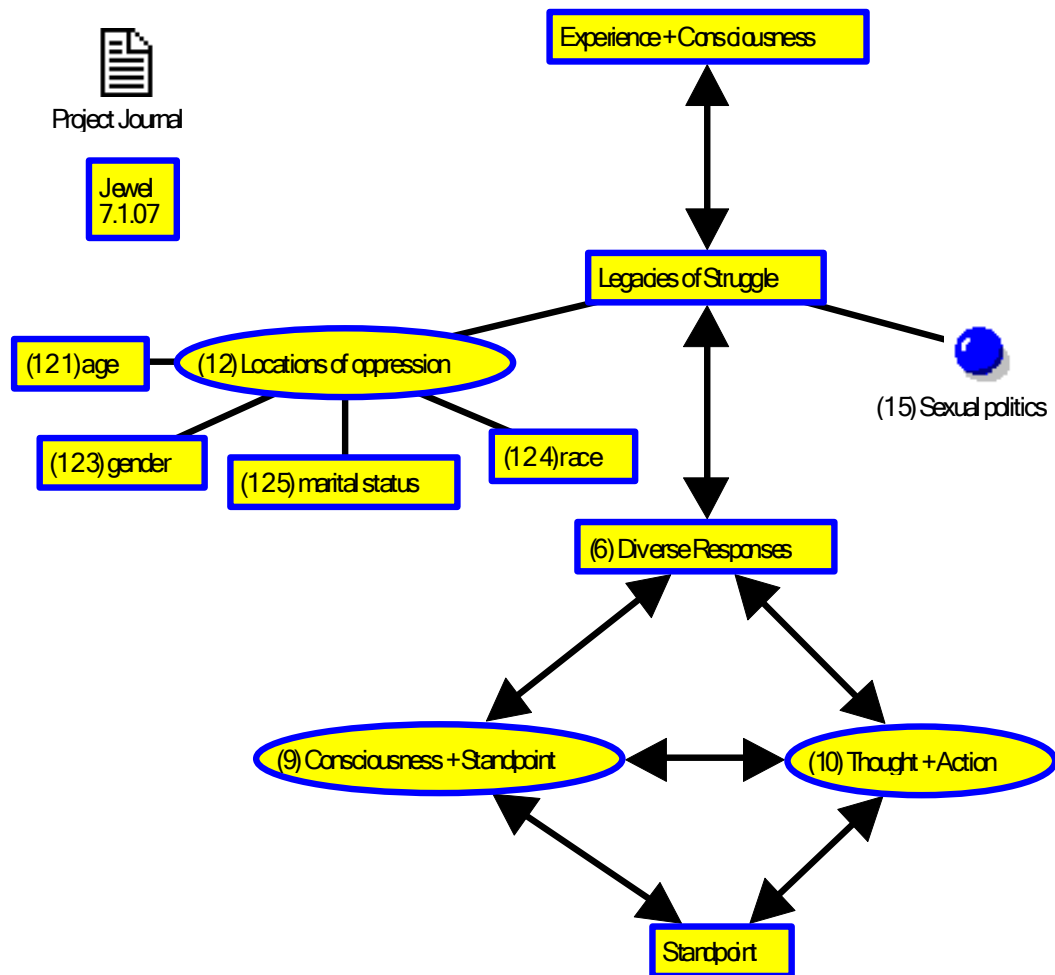**24**   (6) /Diverse Responses

Description:

Black women act or respond (resist) in a variety of ways in response to oppressive situations. Responses are influenced by factors such as class, sexuality, and ethnic and citizenship status.

Project Journal

Nodes
7.1.07

Experience + Consciousness

Legacies of Struggle

(12) Locations of oppression

(13) Self-valuation

(14) Activism

(15) Sexual politics

(6) Diverse Responses

(9) Consciousness + Standpoint

(10) Thought + Action

Standpoint

Project Journal

Diana
7.1.07

Experience + Consciousness

(123) gender

(121) age

(127) job position

Legacies of Struggle

(12) Locations of oppression

(125) marital status

(124) race

(129) politics

(15) Sexual politics

(6) Diverse Responses

(69) Consciousness + Standpoint

(610) Thought + Action

Standpoint

Appendix C – Coding of Jewel's Narrative
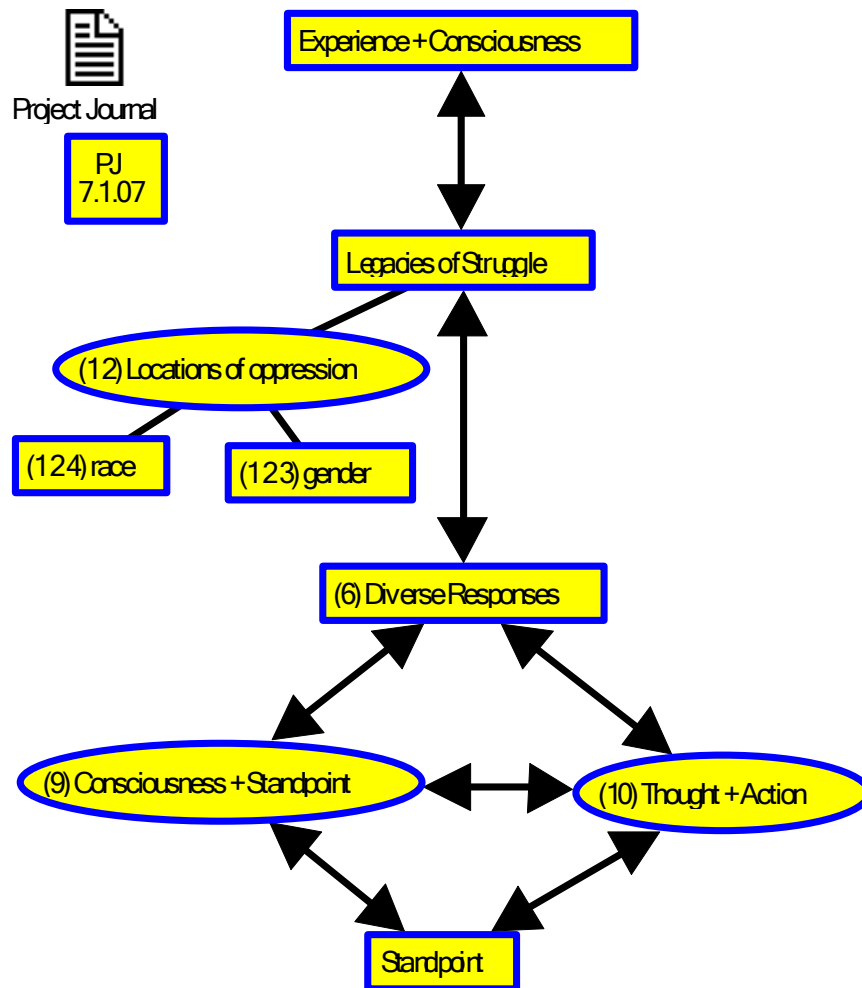
Experience + Consciousness

Project Journal

PJ
7.1.07

Legacies of Struggle

(12) Locations of oppression

(124) race

(123) gender

(6) Diverse Responses

(9) Consciousness + Standpoint

(10) Thought + Action

Standpoint

Appendix C – Lexical Search
Step 1

Appendix C – Lexical Search
Step 2

Self-definition

Self-valuation

STANDPOINT

Diverse Responses

EXPERIENCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS

Location of Oppression
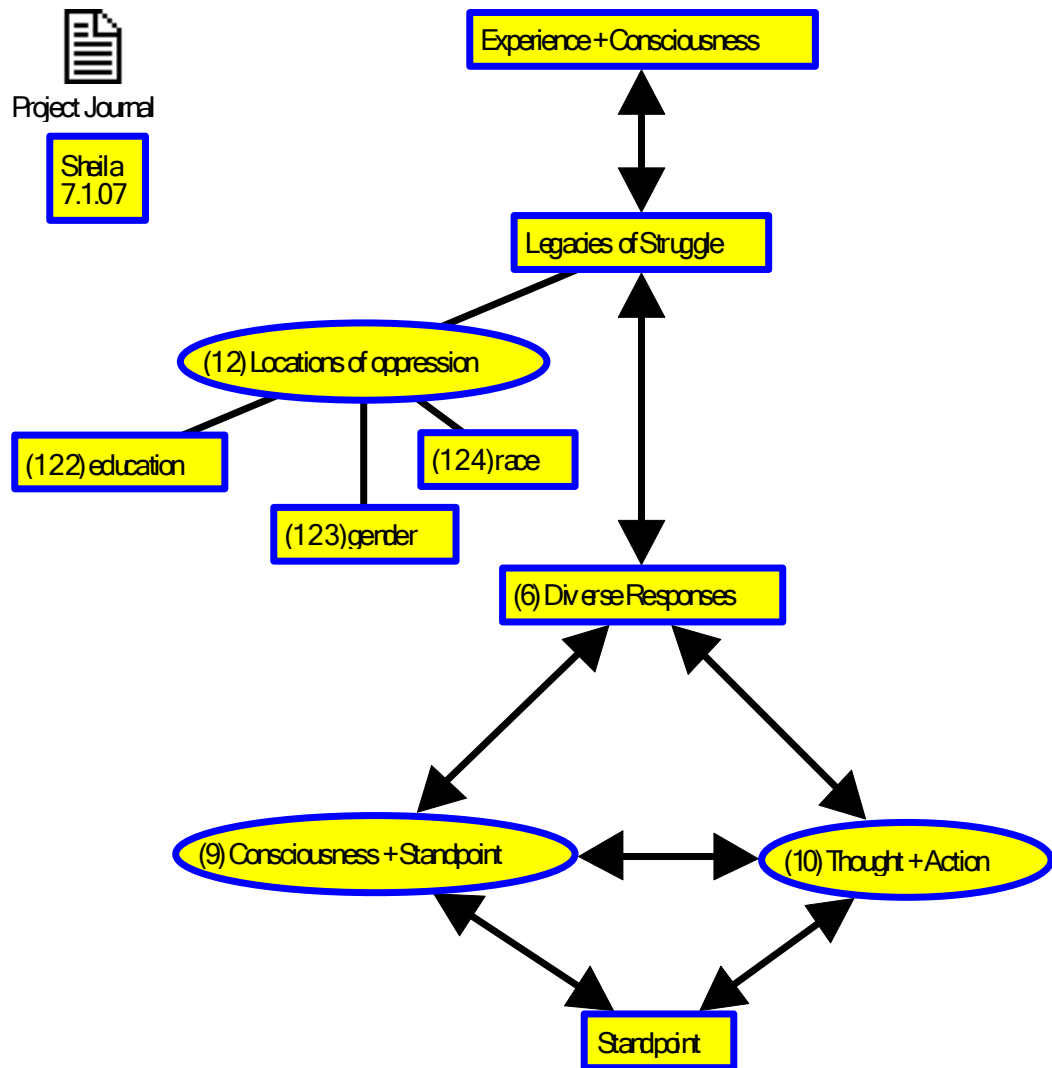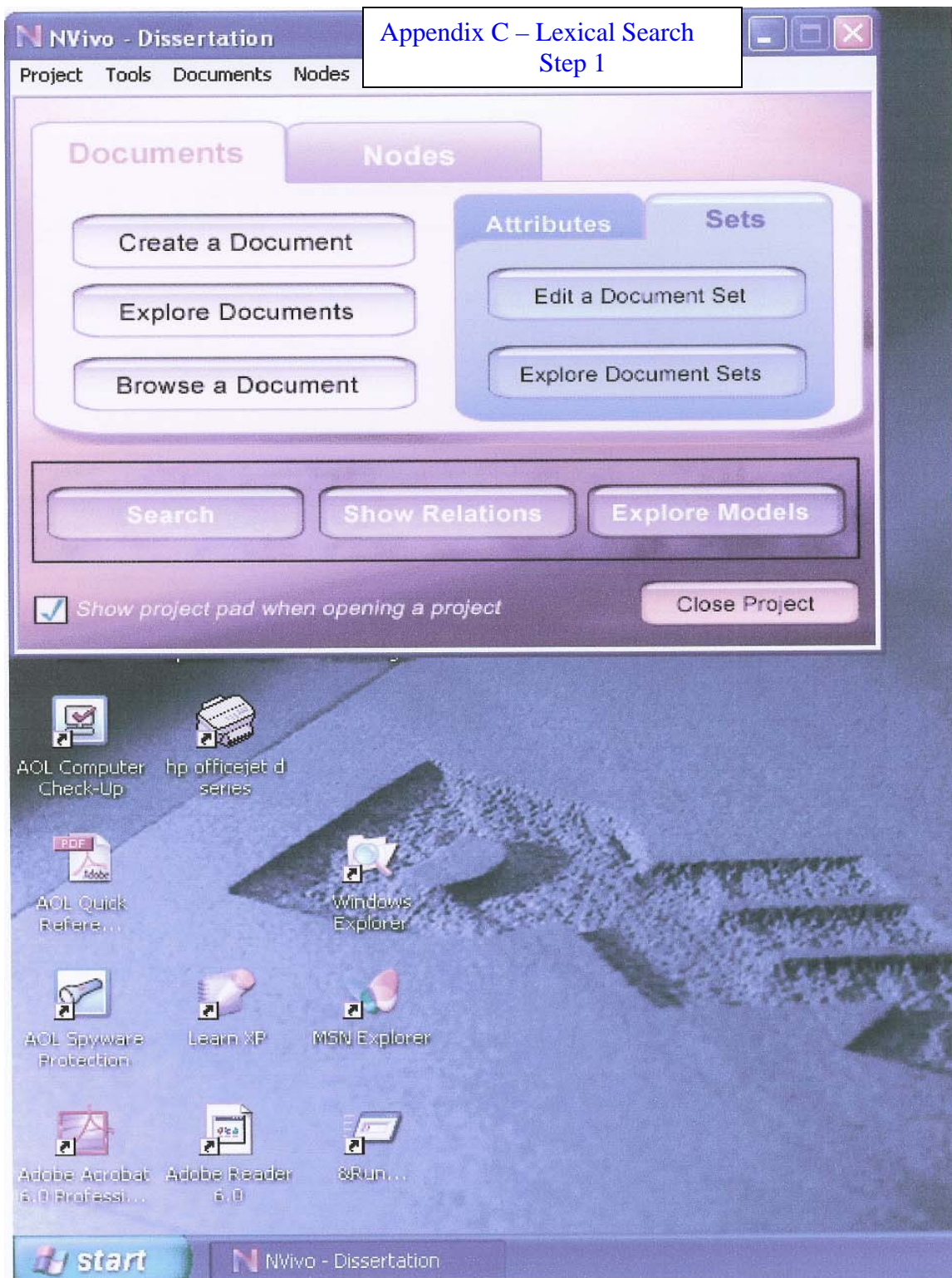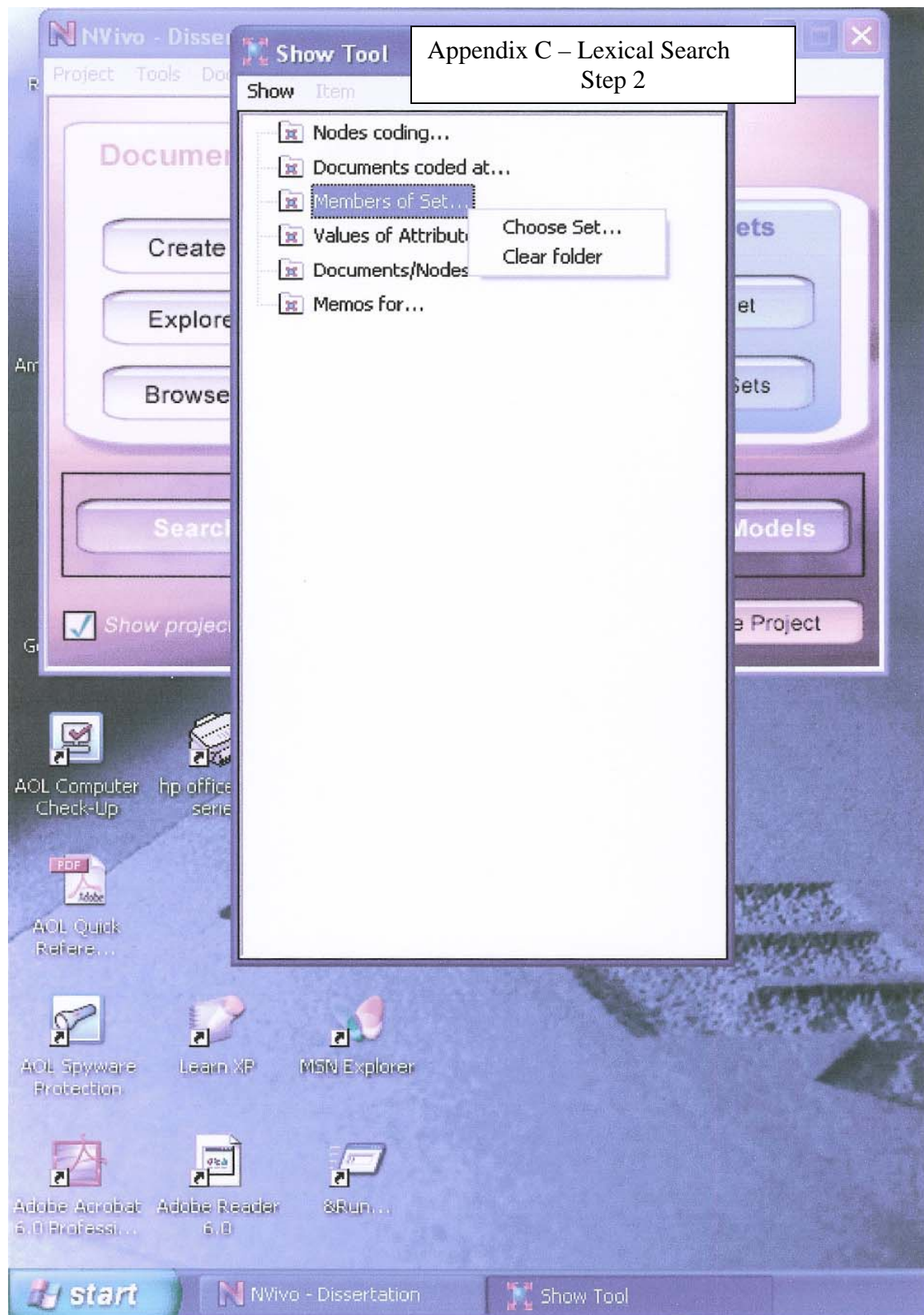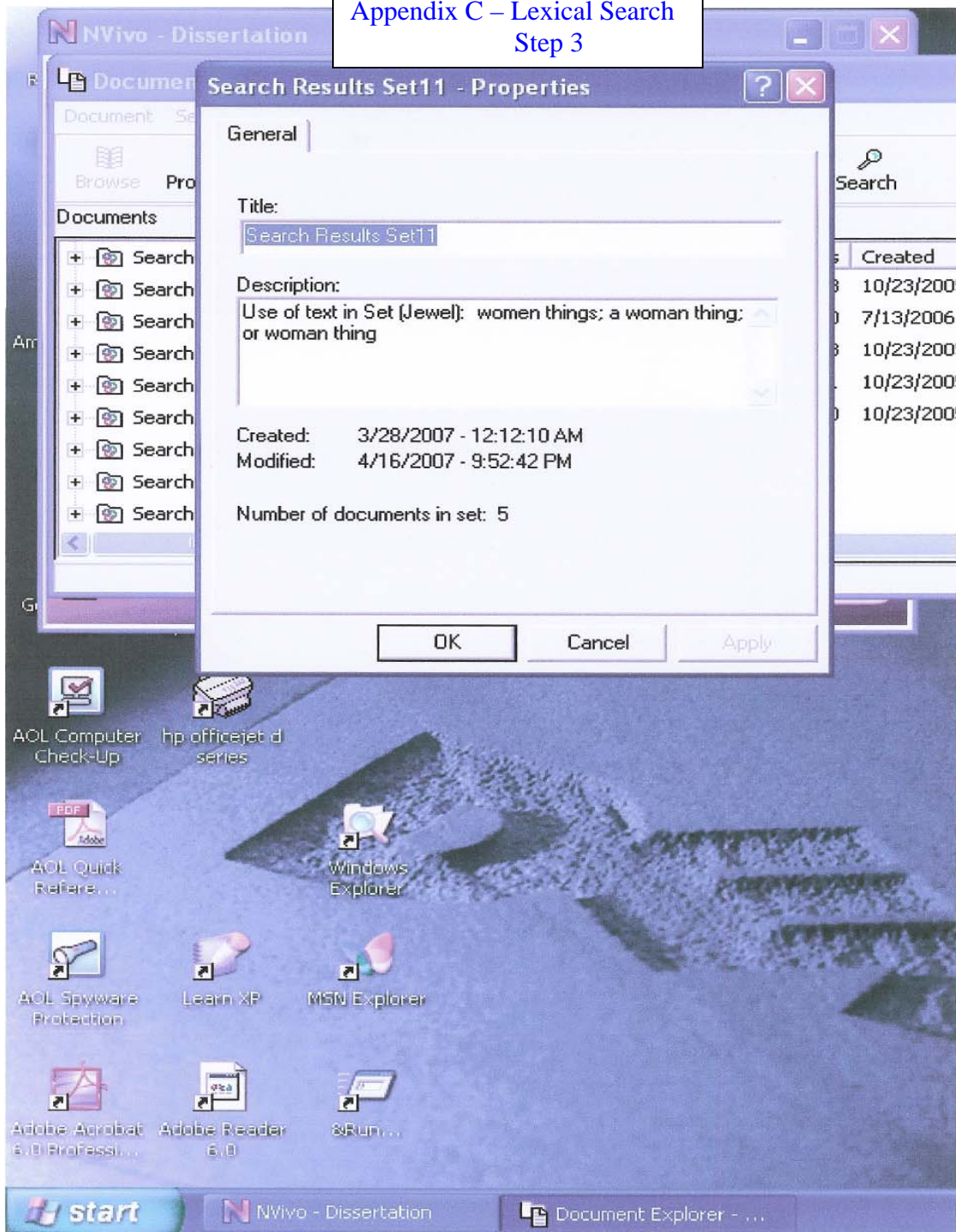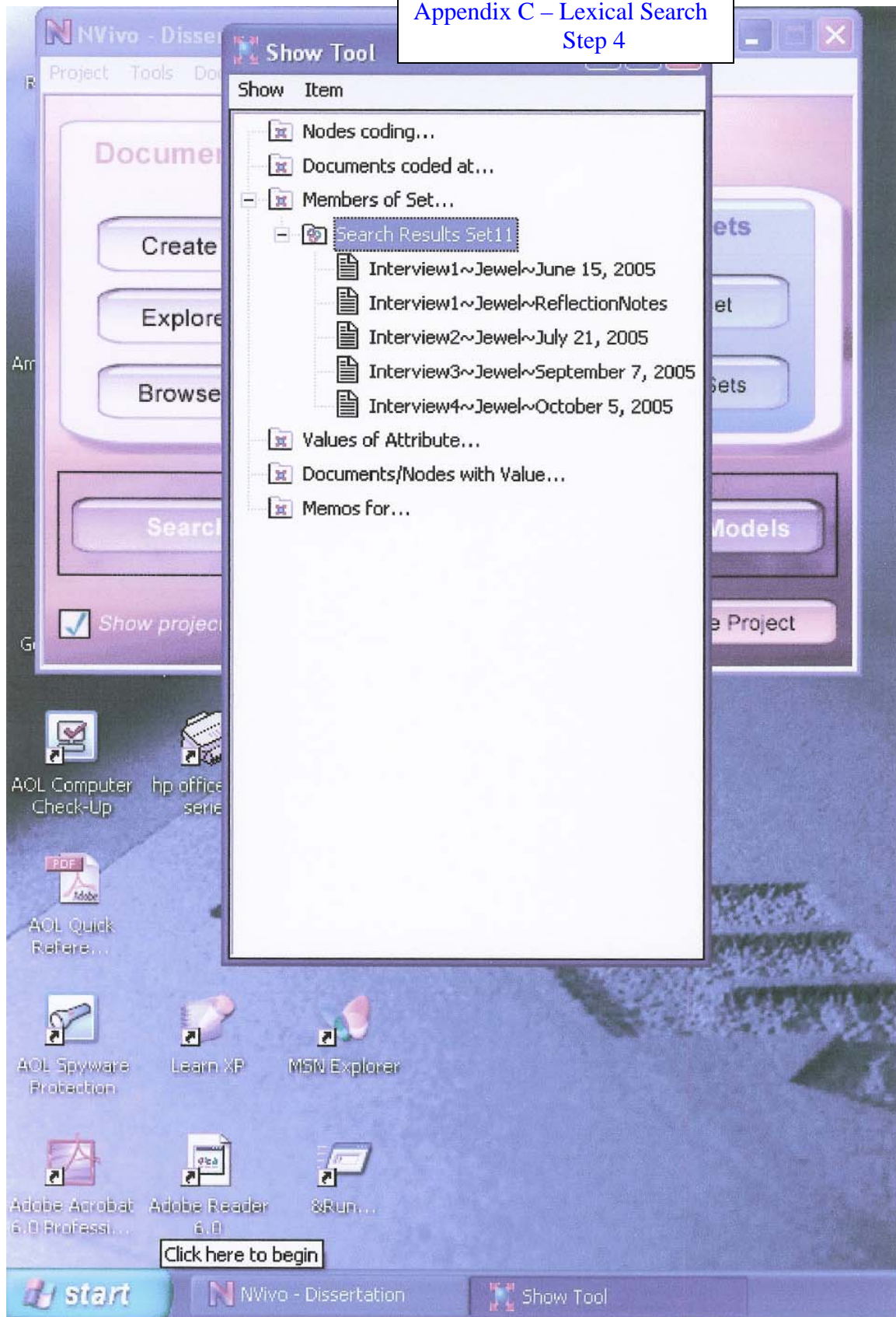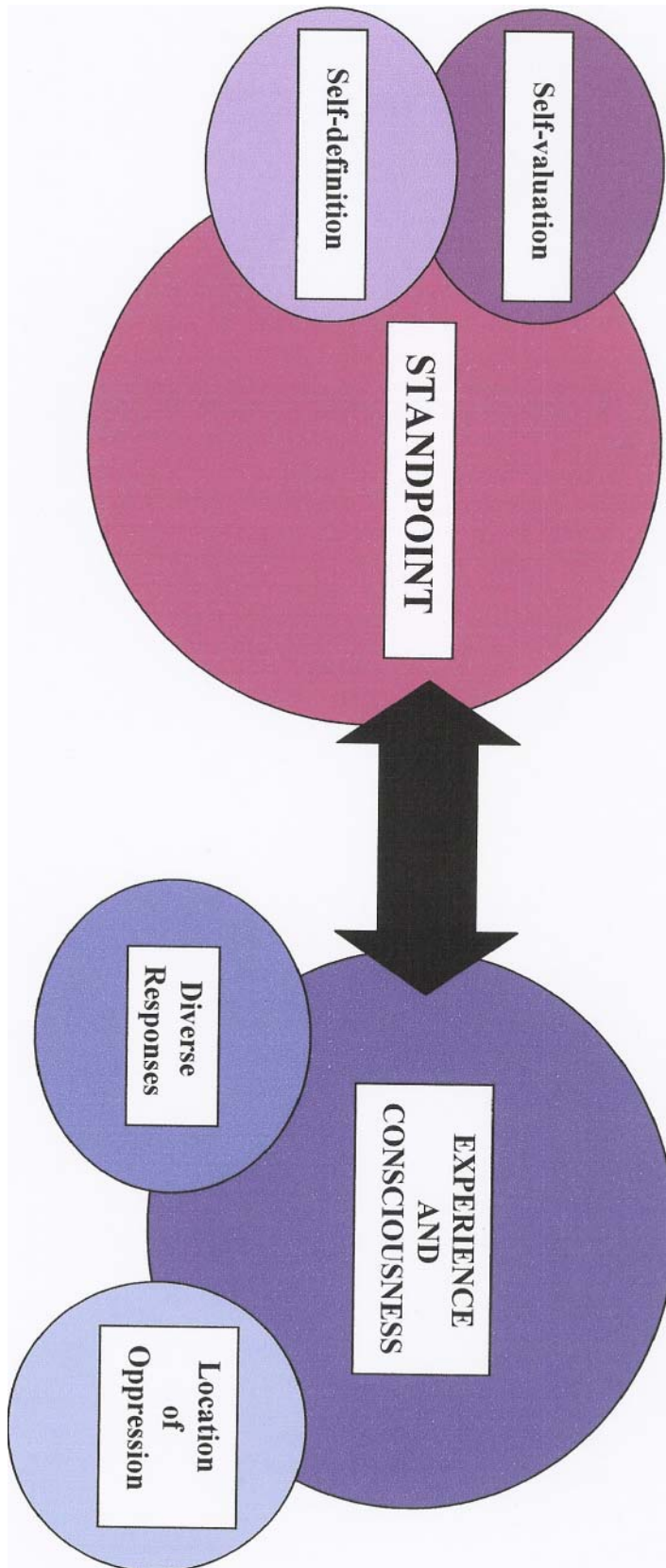
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