A Necessary Shift? A Qualitative Exploration of Black Women’s Experiences with Altering Self-Presentation for Job Attainment

Dorothy Rachael Kemp
A NECESSARY SHIFT? A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF BLACK WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES WITH ALTERING SELF-PRESENTATION FOR JOB ATTAINMENT

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

The Department of Leadership and Human Resource Development

by
Dorothy Rachael Kemp
B.S., Louisiana State University, 2007
M.B.A., Louisiana State University, 2009
May 2022
Acknowledgements

This has been a long journey that, admittingly, many times I did not believe I would complete. I have had to overcome unforeseen circumstances, untimely setbacks, a staff that never seemed to be in full capacity, and a global pandemic. The biggest hurdle that stood in my way, however, was ME. It is only for the grace of God and the assistance of so many that have helped me to prevail over these obstacles that I can claim this momentous accomplishment.

First, I would like to thank my dissertation committee, Dr. Lori Martin and Dr. Shinhee Jeong. Your input, guidance, and support have been indispensable during this process. I hope to one day rise to you level of scholarship. To my committee chair, Dr. Petra A. Robinson, I cannot thank you enough for everything you have done to support and encourage me through this process. You have endless patience and an inspiring commitment to student success.

Thank you to my family, Brenda Kemp, Barbara Terance, Leroy Kemp Sr., and Leroy Kemp Jr. There are not enough words or enough pages to adequately thank you for everything you have done for me. I say often (but not often enough to you) how blessed I am to have you. You have given me everything I could ever need or want. It is truly because of you, your direction, and your sacrifices that I have made it to where I am today. I would be remiss if I did not give a special thank you to my fur children, past and present, who kept my hands full, but also filled my heart and home with love and laughter.

Thank you to my friends Shannon Knox, Kenyetta Reid, Chris Diggins and Toussaint Webster. Regardless of where you are in the world, I know that I can always depend on you for a good laugh, some hot tea, or a much-needed distraction. You stood by me as I dedicated more and more time to my studies. That is an indication of true friendship. I hope to be half the friend to you as you have been to me. To my travel partners, Jen O’Connell and Ashley Bubna. Thank
you for including me on your global adventures. I have missed the last few but after this… I am so ready. Thank you to my Kiwanis friends and mentors including Gary Graham and Bruce and Joy Hammat for keeping me grounded and emulating true service to the community. Noel Hammatt, I will forever remember your passion for education and social justice; your memory impacts my dedication to this work to this day. Thank to my friends in BSoBR, especially David Steele. I could always count on you for support, encouragement, and of course a good pour. I could not have made it through the last leg of this journey without you and I look forward to many more great times ahead.

Thank you to my current and former team members at ACSA. You have been so supportive and so sweet to me during this journey by covering my student sessions, checking on me during stressful times, and providing me with much needed caffeine and snacks. Special thank you to Lori Robinson, Brad Jones, and Lydia Treadwell. You have all been specifically helpful during this doctoral journey. Thank you, Walt Holiday, for your friendship and flexibility. Thank you to Kenneth Miles for your guidance and support. You are missed every day and your impact and influence will have a lasting impression on my life.

And finally, thank you to my participants. I thoroughly enjoyed your meeting you. Thank you for your transparency, honesty, and willingness to assist.
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment, including their perception of identity, and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) How do Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment? (2) How do Black women interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting? (3) How do Black women perceive their identity in terms of their experiences with shifting?

Ten participants shared their personal experiences shifting throughout their job attainment process. Each participant self-identified as Black and female, held a professional level position, and interviewed for employment within the last 5 years. The following themes emerged from data analysis: (a) perceptions of Black women and their intersectional identities, (b) methods of shifting, (c) motivations for shifting, (d) signals of safety and danger, (e) the burden of shifting, and (f) the shift from shifting. These interview findings were supported through document analysis of participant résumés and job postings.
Chapter I. Introduction

During my junior year of my undergraduate program, I was chosen to attend a selective summer program for business students sponsored by one of the major online job search firms at the time. The program featured representatives from several prestigious companies from all over the country. Participants were able to practice interview skills, network, and have their résumés reviewed by representatives from these companies. During my résumé review, a reviewer stated that I should remove an award I had received from the Black Faculty and Staff Caucus at my university because it allowed employers to identify me as Black. I had never considered my Blackness as a hinderance during the job attainment process before; I had never been formally pressured to shift to gain employment. This was my first experience realizing that Black women professionals, like those featured in this study, may feel pressure to shift to avoid potential bias and discrimination in the job attainment process.

Shifting (or identity shifting) is the conscious or unconscious process (Dickens & Chavez, 2018) of altering one’s worldview or cultural behaviors to “reduce their distinctiveness and increase their perceived belonging” (Dickens et al., 2019, p. 154). It occurs to mitigate differences in race, class, gender, and sexual-orientation (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Shifting in the workplace can include altering one or several aspects of self, including how one looks, in what activities one engages, and how one speaks (Dickens & Chavez, 2018; Dickens et al., 2019). The methods and rationale for shifting are many and will be further explained later in this study.

This study explored how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting. The job attainment process is defined as “the series of activities aimed at finding a [new] job” (Wanberg et al., 2020,
p. 316). Associated activities include clarifying one’s goals regarding the type of job they would like to attain, preparing a résumé, formally or informally searching for relevant jobs through online search engines or through social networks, networking, applying for open positions, and interviewing (Wanberg et al., 2020). While it is expected for job seekers to exhibit enhanced levels of professional behavior during the job attainment process, the expectations for Black females during this process can exceed those of White or male counterparts.

**Background**

Exploring the shifting behaviors of Black women in particular is of utmost importance as Black women have been traditionally hindered and excluded from the workforce in America. While many point to World War II as the pivotal moment for American women entering the workforce (Lockhart & Pergande, 2001), Black women have been a part of the American labor system since their enslavement. Although through force and without pay, Black women served as laborers for their captors conducting household and service work. After slavery, Black women continued in these roles, but for low, exploitative wages. During World War I, Black women were allowed to work in factories, but were only given menial tasks for low pay. During World War II, Black women could work in additional occupations in schools, hospitals, and other industries. After the war, any advancements made in these areas were lost during the Jim Crow era and Black women returned to domestic labor positions. The Civil Rights movement, affirmative action, and subsequent legal abolition of hiring discrimination allowed for Black women to gain employment in industrial and professional positions; however, they earned considerably less than their White and male counterparts (Spaights & Whitaker, 1995). Currently, Black women earn 62 cents for every dollar compared to White men (Jones, 2020). Black women have been encumbered from equal participation in and equal benefits from
employment. It is for this reason that it was important for this study to center how Black women experience shifting as a barrier to job attainment.

To fully understand the experiences of Black women who shift, one must first explore the motivations for shifting in existing literature. One must also understand how identity is constructed and specifically how Black females construct their identities within the context of their environment and daily experiences.

**Shifting to Signal Professionalism**

Professionalism refers to an “individual possessing specialized knowledge, character, and capacity to meet the technical and social demands of their profession.” (McCluney et al., 2021, p. 2). Those deemed professional share similar characteristics with those in their profession and are judged on more than just productivity and work output (McCluney et al., 2021). Perceived professionalism is affected by physical appearance, how one speaks, interest, and activities (Essed & Goldberg, 2002; Ibarra, 1999; McCluney et al., 2021). Because White men have historically been over-represented in managerial, white-collar occupations, they hold the power to shape and determine what is considered professional and what is not (McCluney et al., 2021). Western standards of professionalism are normed to Whiteness and to maleness. Professional standards are explicitly and implicitly discriminatory against modes of dress, speech, work style, and timeliness that do not align with the White male norm (McCluney et al., 2021; Okun, 2000). For many Black women, their authentic style of speech, appearance, interests, and organizational participation are juxtaposed to the commonly accepted White male standards. They are pressured to concede to these standards by shifting. This study takes a critical look at concepts of professionalism through the lens of shifting.
Shifting to Avoid Effects of Stereotypes

In addition to shifting to avoid heightened standards of professionalism, Black women professionals may shift to avoid gendered-racial stereotypes that persist about Black women. The perception of Black women has historically been and continues to be affected by several stereotypical tropes. One such persistent stereotype is that of the Mammy. The Mammy stereotype was created by White people in the post-Civil War period. This character is often depicted as an overweight, asexual, grandmotherly Black woman whose only source of joy and fulfillment is service to the White family (Turner, 1994). The Jezebel stereotype depicts Black women as promiscuous with an insatiable sexual appetite (Collins, 2002) while the Sapphire depicts the angry Black woman who is loud, argumentative, emasculating, and verbally abusive (Harris-Perry, 2011). These and other stereotypes such as Blacks are “lacking in intelligence, lazy, overly-sexed, loud, irrational, musical, emotional, and superstitious” (Smedley, 2007, p. 7) are historically rooted in racism and perpetuated in the media (Robinson et al., 2021). Stereotype threat from these depictions may present itself in the job search for Black women. Black women applicants may shift to seem either more or less subservient to their employer (the Mammy), increase or reduce their sexuality (the Jezebel), or adjust their natural level of assertiveness (the Sapphire).

Another stereotype is the strong Black woman or the super woman complex (Harris-Perry, 2011). It was created from the positive attributes of the previously mentioned stereotypes by Black women to combat other Black stereotypes. Although it has a more seemingly positive connotation, it can be just as damaging to Black women in the workforce. The strong Black woman is self-sacrificial; supportive; and does not require financial, emotional, or physical support from men. To their detriment, the strong Black woman sees emotion and help-seeking
behaviors as a weakness (Harris-Perry, 2011). Further, as Robinson et al. (2021) explain, as Black women enter marginalized spaces, “they are faced with questions related to their legitimacy and worth” (p. 86) which can shape and inform one’s identity.

**Identity**

Defining identity is a critical component to understating shifting. Identity can be understood as multifaceted; in addition to one’s personal identity it encompasses an individual’s sense of belonging within their race, gender, social class, religion, culture, and ethnicity as well as in relation to others (Robinson et al., 2021). Identities are comprised of group identity, a relational role within the identity, and a self-reflective component where individuals compare themselves to others (Ting-Toomey, 2015). Based on this definition of identity, Black women professionals build their identities based on a sense of self, a sense of belonging within their race and gender, as well as comparisons between who they believe they are and who society wants them to be. It is important to understand how their identities develop as well as what influences their identity development.

**Influencers of Identity.** Individuals create their identity through “sociocultural conditioning, processes, individual lived experiences, and the repeated intergroup and interpersonal interaction experiences” (Ting-Toomey, 2015, p. 791). For Black women this means attitudes about race and gender are influenced by peers, family, and the media (Bennett, 2016). According to Hughes et al. (2006), when parents incorporate cultural socialization practices such as socializing their children with messages of ethnic pride and an appreciation for appreciating diversity, children reported stronger and more positive ethic identities. Hughes et al. (2006) also found that African American parents, more than parents in other racial groups, often socialized their children to prepare for bias and to cope with discrimination. Thomas and King
(2007) found that for African American girls in particular, family socialized messages regarding their status being oppressed because of both their race and gender. African American girls received messages from their family about physical beauty, relationships with men, premarital sex, financial independence, and how to be strong in the face of adversity. Family may be an influencer of the identity development of Black female professionals, but it is important to also note the influence of peers in the early stages of their development.

Peers serve an important influencer on values, beliefs and behavior as well as racial, ethic, gender, and sexual orientated identity development (Renn, 2020). According to one longitudinal study, over time, youth attitudes about their ethnic and racial identity start to more closely resemble that of their peers, regardless of familial influences (Santos et al., 2017). In another qualitative study, African American young women ages 15-22 noted the importance of peer support while navigating racial issues that may affect their identity development (Thomas et al., 2013). While the messages Black women professionals receive about their identity may be significant, understanding how messages from the media about intersectional Black and female influence identity is essential.

Media is an essential vehicle “for exploring the embodiment and management of identities, and how the process of identification is marked by conflicting desires and representations” (Crymble, 2012, p. 64). Media creates an alternate specific version of reality, and constant exposure to media and its portrayal of what is real can lead to views adopting the portrayals as actual reality (Gerbner et al., 1994). This can lead to the internalization of racial stereotypes (Ward, 2004) and negative beliefs about body image (Schooler et al., 2004) including issues related to skin color and hair (Robinson et al., 2021).
One quantitative study which investigated the relationship of media exposure and self-esteem found that a lack of representation and negative representation among African American high school students can affect identity creation among marginalized populations. African American youth that identified more with positive fictional Black characters in media had a higher self-esteem that those that identified with positive popular White characters (Ward, 2004). Another quantitative study aimed at determining the relationship between music video exposure and gender role attitudes found that frequent media use among African American high school students, specifically music videos and popular music, was associated with holding more stereotypical gender roles and beauty standards (Ward et al., 2005). How Black women are portrayed in the media may affect the identity creation processes of Black women professionals and these portrayals may have implications on how they navigate shifting for job attainment.

**Gendered Racial Identity Development.** Because Black professional women experience the world as both Black and female simultaneously (Fhagen-Smith et al., 2010; Whittaker & Neville, 2010), understanding Black women’s gender and racial identity development is important. Gendered racial identity is “the simultaneous membership of an individual’s marginalized race and gender” (Williams & Lewis, 2021, p. 1) as well as the process through which members of marginalized racial and gender groups make meaning of their intersectional identity (Williams & Lewis, 2021). Williams and Lewis (2021) have developed a conceptual framework to explain the developmental process of gendered racial identity of Black women, as well as several gendered racial ideologies that Black women may adopt throughout the developmental process. The gendered racial identity developmental process as well as the resultant ideologies may provide further insight on how Black women professionals navigate the hiring process.
A Conceptual Framework for Positive Black Female Identity. As the media may portray Black women negatively (Brittian, 2012) or fail to represent Black women entirely (Ward, 2004; Ward et al., 2005) there becomes a need to combat this imagery to create or repair their positive self-image. Robinson et al. (2021) developed a framework for positive Black Female Identity that encourages us to “interrogate negative messages and inaccurate portrayals of Black females in the media through critical media literacy” (p.85). This framework allows Black women to decode, analyze, and deconstruct negative media portrayals and subsequently reject negative messages, replace them with positive representations, and reframe them to relate to Black female identity. Because our perception of our identities influences how we interact with others (Ting-Toomey, 2015), having a full understanding of how Black female identity is created, influenced, and positively reframed is important for understanding the motivations for and the deterrents to shifting.

Statement of the Problem

Shifting for Black women may pose a conundrum; there are negative effects of deciding not to shift, as well as negative personal and organizational effects of shifting. When Black women do not shift, they may face the effects of discrimination and biases in the applicant screening and hiring processes. This may preclude Black applicants from progressing to the subsequent level of the process based on racial cues. Discrimination can take place during the résumé review process, phone interview process, or the in-person/live streamed interview phases (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Kang et al., 2016; Nunley et al., 2015; Purnell et al., 1999). Details regarding discrimination within each of these phases are subsequently discussed.

During the résumé review process, applicants are subject to bias based on their name or the inclusion of activities or organizational affiliations (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Kang et
One quantitative study which utilized actual résumés with traditionally White and traditionally Black pseudonyms indicated that when reviewing résumés of similar quality hiring managers are 50% more likely to call back applicants with traditionally White names over those applicants with traditionally Black names (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). A similar quantitative study that utilized 9400 résumés focused solely on early career job seekers. In this study Black applicants were 14% less likely to receive callbacks than their White counterparts were. This disparity increased for client facing job opportunities, jobs that required employees to interface with clients or other stakeholders (Nunley et al., 2015). Résumés may encumber Black applicants’ employability, but those that do edge through face additional barriers during the interview process.

Black applicants are subject to discrimination during the phone interview phase as well. Linguistic profiling occurs when inferences about applicants are made solely on the sound of their voice. This occurs frequently during the phone interview portion of the hiring process (Hughes & Mamiseishvili, 2014). While an interviewer should only make judgements of a person’s employability based on the quality of their answers, judgement about their employability is made based on how the person sounds. Research suggests that people attempted to racially identify speakers after only 16-28 seconds of hearing their voice (Anderson, 2007; Hughes & Mamiseishvili, 2014; Rahman, 2008) and 70% of people were correctly identified after short periods of speech (Purnell et al., 1999). Since it is difficult to tell if hiring decisions were based solely on the interviewee’s responses or influenced by their speech patterns, this form of discrimination is easy to conceal.

In-person or live streamed interviews also present a challenge to Black applicants. Even with legal protections such as the Equal Employment Opportunities Act, there have been
instances of applicants progressing through the preliminary stages of the hiring process only to seemingly not be selected for the position because of their race. In a blog post Bee (2013) recounts one such experience.

I had a phone interview for a good-paying job and spent almost an hour on the phone with two women. I knew I nailed it when I was invited to interview in person. When I went to the company, I checked in with the receptionist and then went to the ladies’ room to make sure the summer heat hadn’t melted off my makeup. Anyway, I went back to the sitting area to wait. I saw a woman peek her head out several times, and then she spoke to the receptionist who pointed to me. The interviewer came over and asked me my name a couple of times, even asking if I was sure if I was who I said I was. I laughed politely and joked, “As far as I know.” We went into her office where we spent less than 10 minutes together. She was cordial but wasn’t as enthusiastic as she had been on the phone. Needless to say, I didn’t get the job. (para. 1)

It is difficult to say whether Bee’s race was a sole determinant in the hiring decision, however; one should not automatically discount her lived experiences because it is difficult to prove.

Legally, race is a protected class in the United States. This means that employers are barred from utilizing race as a factor in hiring decisions. There are, however, several race-based traits that are legally acceptable to include in hiring decisions. Employers can legally prohibit many Afrocentric hairstyles, textures, and colors from their organizations. Natural hairstyles such as afros, braided styles, and dreadlocks are most prohibited. The 11th U.S. Court of appeals recently ruled that refusing to hire an applicant due to the applicant’s dreadlocked hair was legal. Their justification was that even if a hairstyle was culturally associated with a particular race, it is excluded from protection because it is not an “immutable characteristic” ("EEOC v. Catastrophe Management Solutions," 2016). While more Black women are embracing natural hairstyles, they experience pressure to conform to Eurocentric standards within the workplace (Dawson et al., 2019). For Black women, there is a strong relationship between hair and identity
(Dawson et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2021) and since Black hair is perceived as unprofessional and less beautiful, these perceptions can be internalized into the self-concept of Black women (Dawson et al., 2019). Hair, while an insignificant employment factor to many, can be an insurmountable challenge to employment for Black applicants.

While Black women who choose not to shift subject themselves to the penalties of bias and discrimination, those that shift face consequences as well. Significant emotional labor is exerted to suppress their identity and sustain the shifted self-presentation. This level of exertion can be emotionally, physically, and psychologically exhausting (Hewlin, 2009; McCluney et al., 2021). In addition to negatively affecting the well-being of Black women professionals, this could lead to decreased employee engagement and commitment (McCluney et al., 2021; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Shifting has been shown to result in decreased workplace initiative, collaboration, and extra role behaviors; decreased decision-making capabilities; emotional exhaustion; stress; burn out; and decreased cognitive capacity for organizational role performance (DeJordy, 2008). The consequences of choosing whether to shift provide cause for further exploration of the experiences of Black women during the job attainment process.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic interpretive study was to explore how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment, including their perception of identity, and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study draws from the perspectives of intersectionality, Black feminism, and Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD) for its theoretical framework. These perspectives are influenced by the foundations of critical theory. Critical theory seeks to critique questions of
language and assumptions of arguments, the validity of how things are currently done, dominant authority, and objectivity (Mingers, 2000). Critical theory critiques dominant society and seeks to educate the marginalized in ways that will lead to freedom from their oppressor (Brookfield, 2005). Utilizing multiple theories will allow for a richer exploration of the Black women professionals with shifting in the workplace.

**Intersectionality and Black Feminism**

Intersectionality is a tool of critical analysis that allows for the examination of the combined influence of different dimensions of oppression and power (Crenshaw, 1989, 1990). Intersectionality examines how social divisions of race, gender, age, and citizenship status, among others, intersect and affect one’s privilege or oppression (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality draws from Black feminism which distinctly elevates the voices and experiences of Black women (Williams & Lewis, 2021). Proponents of Black feminism reject the essentialist view that members of identity-based groups such as Black women are monolithic and all share immutable characteristics (Stone, 2004). As a critical theory, there is a connection between Black feminist theory and Black feminist practice (Collins, 2019). Employing the lenses of Black feminism and intersectionality will help explain how power and oppression play a role in motivating Black women professionals to shift for employment.

**Critical Human Resource Development**

Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD) breaks from traditional Human Resource Development (HRD) by focusing on the experiences of those marginalized within the workforce (Bierema & Cseh, 2003). CHRD is challenged by being both bound by and co-existing within traditional HRD practices and objectives (Baek & Kim, 2017; Fenwick, 2004). CHRD seeks to understand how stakeholders within the HRD system either benefit or are
exploited (Burrell, 2001). In traditional HRD research issues of equity and diversity are largely resisted, ignored, or only deemed important when discussing their outcomes on performance (Bierema, 2010). Utilizing CHRD theory allows for critique of the systems that subjugate employment and hiring protocol and thus create the environment that cause Black women, among others, to feel obligated to alter their self-presentation to succeed.

The selected theories work collectively to provide comprehensive insight on how the participants’ Black and female identities influence their shifting behaviors within the context of the work environment. They also allow for examination and critique of the powers within organizations that create and sustain environments that necessitate shifting for job attainment. Utilizing the lenses of intersectionality and Black feminism to understand how shifting influences and is influenced by identity while concurrently utilizing CHRD to examine the interplay of power and oppression during the job attainment process provided a powerful tool of analysis for this study.

**Research Questions**

1. How do Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment?
2. How do Black women interpret and negotiate any adverse outcomes of shifting?
3. How do Black women perceive their identity in terms of their experiences with shifting?

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant for several reasons. Shifting causes adverse effects for Black women as well as the organizations that seek to employ them. Shifting behaviors contribute to workplace stress (Hall et al., 2012; Hewlin, 2003; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004) and can cause Black women who engage to suffer other damaging outcomes. Black women who utilize shifting as a coping strategy to gendered racism are more likely to experience increased risk of poor
health, obsessive-compulsive symptoms (Greer et al., 2009), sleep deprivation, anxiety, weight gain, emotional eating, and, in extreme cases, hypertension and diabetes (Hall et al., 2012; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). These conditions could lead to absenteeism and increased healthcare costs for the organization (Peart, 2019). In addition, Black women who shift may feel devalued (McCluney et al., 2019) which leads to lower organizational commitment and higher intention to leave (Hewlin, 2009). By understanding how Black women experience shifting during the job attainment process, Black women job seekers can further inform their decisions of whether to shift or not during the process. Organizations who are concerned with the overall wellbeing of their Black employees should seek to understand the motivations and outcomes of Black women shifting strategies.

In addition, this study is significant because it could inform organizations about what they are doing to signal that shifting is a necessary strategy. Organizations that do not recognize compounding effects of racism and sexism add to the pressure that Black women face to assimilate via shifting (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). Black women that shift in the workplace for job attainment, do so to increase chances for advancement (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004) or to reduce or eliminate the negative effects of racial and gendered discrimination (Dickens et al., 2019). There are previous indications in the literature that organizational composition and philosophy toward diversity may affect whether and how Black women choose to shift.

Organizational composition may also influence shifting among Black women professionals. In organizations with low Black or Black female compositions, Black women may also switch to place more emphasis on the shared values with the dominant group and down place any racial differences (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; McCluney et al., 2019). It is theorized that in color-blind organizations, organizations that believe that race does not matter (Beeman,
shifting may occur to avoid being treated differently while in organizations that strongly embrace diversity, Black women may fear that any stigma associated with Black female stereotypes that they may exhibit may then be associated with other Black women in the organization (McCluney et al., 2019). For organizations truly committed to reaping the benefits of having a diverse workforce, having Black women who feel the need to switch is an area of concern. Black women who switch are not being their true, authentic selves in the work environment. Organizations are missing out on unique and valuable perspectives and approaches because Black women who switch feel that those aspects of their identity will not be valued, or even worse, will be punished.

This study also addresses important gaps in existing scholarship related to the outcomes of shifting for those that chose to or chose not to shift. There are several studies that examine the methods of shifting as well as the discriminatory motivations of shifting; there have been studies regarding ‘résumé whitening’, linguistic profiling, and appearance altering for job interviews (Baugh, 2003; Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; "EEOC v. Catastrophe Management Solutions," 2016; Greene, 2011; Hughes & Mamiseishvili, 2014; Kang et al., 2016; Nunley et al., 2015). However, there is a need for more extensive exploration of the topic--not only investigating both the breadth of the adverse effects of shifting on the professional workforce, but also the lasting personal effects on the individual applicants. In addition, the intersectional effects of gendered racism on Black women and on Black women shifting for job attainment has been largely ignored in the literature. By exploring how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment, this study aims to add insight regarding how both race and gender create real and perceived barriers to success for Black women during the job attainment process.
Operational Definitions

The following terms have been defined using scholarly literature and are operationalized as such in this study:

1. Covering - occurs when an undesirable attribute cannot be concealed. When a stigma is already apparent, a person may make an effort to downplay that attribute as a way to signal conformity (Goffman, 1963).

2. Discrimination - that act of treating individuals unfairly because of group membership or association (Dovidio et al., 2010)

3. Gendered Racial Identity - “the simultaneous membership of an individual’s marginalized race and gender” (Williams & Lewis, 2021, p. 1) as well as the process through which members of marginalized racial and gender groups make meaning of their intersectional identity (Williams & Lewis, 2021).

4. Gendered Racism - Gendered racism is oppression faced because of dually marginalized status of both race and gender (Essed, 1991; Spates et al., 2020; Williams & Lewis, 2021)

5. Identity dissonance - the internal conflict that people experience when they are committed to two or more conflicted identities. Resolution of this conflict involves removing one of the identities, identifying strategies to deal with the tension, or adjusting how they conceptualize the identities to make them seem congruent (Crymble, 2012).

6. Intersectionality - explores how different dimensions of power work together to influence one another. Intersectionality can be explained as an analytic tool that explains how “Organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but as many axes that work together and influence each other.” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2)
7. Job attainment process - “the series of activities aimed at finding a (new) job” (Wanberg et al., 2020, p. 316). Associated activities include clarifying one’s goals regarding the type of job they would like to attain, preparing a résumé, formally or informally searching for relevant jobs through online search engines or through social networks, networking, applying for open positions, and interviewing (Wanberg et al., 2020).

8. Linguistic profiling - linguistic discrimination based on speech or writing (Baugh, 2003).

9. Microaggressions - “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group” (Sue et al., 2008, p. 273).

10. Passing - occurs when an undesirable characteristic or stigma is concealed to allow one to appear as a member of the non-stigmatized group (Goffman, 1963).

11. Résumé whitening - phenomenon whereby Black job seekers seek to conceal or minimize racial cues on their résumés (Kang et al., 2016).

12. Self-presentation - is the attempt to control images of self before real or imagined audiences (Schlenker, 1975).

13. Shifting - a form of self-presentation alteration where one adjusts their outward expressions to placate others (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

14. Stereotype threat - fear of being prejudiced and discriminated against based on pervasive stereotypes (Roberson & Kulik, 2007).

15. Style switching - the phenomenon of speakers switching between dialects of the same language depending on situation and audience. This is closely related to code-switching which involves switching between the usage of two distinct languages (Baugh, 1983).
Organization of the Study

The first chapter of this qualitative basic interpretive study presented the background and purpose of the study that explored the ways in which Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting. A synopsis of the theoretical orientation was presented. The statement of the problem and the significance of the study were also addressed in this chapter.

Chapter II provides a review of relevant literature. This includes a more thorough examination of CHRD, Black feminism, and intersectionality and the chapter further explores the concepts of self-presentation and shifting. An examination of existing research on racial and gender-based discrimination in the workforce as well as the prevalence of self-altering efforts to negate the effects of discrimination is also provided. Further, this chapter examines Black female identity, gendered racial identity development and gendered racism.

A comprehensive description of the study’s methodological perspectives and procedures is presented in Chapter III. This includes a full description of the research design, data collection, and analysis processes. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study, including a profile of the participants who were interviewed based on their experiences with shifting for job attainment. The chapter also includes descriptions of the themes that emerged from the data. The findings are organized according to these themes in relation the major research questions.

Chapter V presents a summary of the findings. The themes that emerged from analysis were: (a) perceptions of Black women and their intersectional identities, (b) methods of shifting, (c) motivations for shifting, (d) signals of safety and danger, (e) the burden of shifting, and (f) the shift from shifting. A discussion of the study’s implications for policy, research, and practice
follows. Chapter V concludes with a chapter summary which includes recommendations for future research.
Chapter II. Review of Literature

The purpose of this basic interpretive study was to explore how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment, including their perception of identity, and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting. Chapter II clarifies the relationship between this study and previous work on this topic and is organized as follows: (1) an examination of gendered racism, (2) a synopsis of the theoretical frameworks utilized in the study, (3) review of the literature regarding racial and gender-based hiring discrimination, (4) and an exploration of theoretical motivations for shifting.

Gendered Racism

Because Black women exist as both Black and female simultaneously, they face gendered racism. Gendered racism is oppression faced because of dually marginalized status of both race and gender (Essed, 1991; Spates et al., 2020; Williams & Lewis, 2021). Black women continuously face gendered racism throughout the entirety of their lives. Because of gendered racism, Black women experience issues with the societal expectations of being concurrently Black and female, difficulty navigating relationships, as well as a lack of opportunities and resources (Spates et al., 2020). Gendered racism effects how Black women see themselves and lens they utilize to interpret their life experiences (Williams & Lewis, 2021). The following section will further explore how Black women create their gendered racial identities and how that identity informs their ideologies.

Black Women’s Gendered Racial Identity Development

Gendered racial identity is “the simultaneous membership of an individual’s marginalized race and gender” (Williams & Lewis, 2021, p. 1) as well as the process through which members of marginalized racial and gender groups make meaning of their intersectional identity (Williams...
& Lewis, 2021). To further explain how Black women create and assign meaning to their
gendered racial identity, Williams and Lewis (2021) developed a conceptual framework of the
developmental process of gendered racial identity of Black women, as well as several gendered
racial ideologies that Black women may adopt throughout the developmental process. The
gendered racial identity developmental process as well as the resultant ideologies may provide
further insight on how Black women professionals navigate the hiring process.

Black women are marginalized because of both their race and gender and undergo a four-
phase development process. This process is not linear; participants may cycle through different
phases at various parts of their developmental process. The first phase is hyperawareness, where
Black women become more aware of the perceptions of the dually marginalized identities of race
and gender. In this phase they feel as if they need to “watch how they portray themselves in front
of other people.” (Williams & Lewis, 2021, p. 6). The next phase is reflection. In this phase
Black women reflect whether they fit into the stereotypes of Black women through critical
introspection. In the rejection phase Black women reject all or parts of the stereotypes that did
not align with their definition of Black womanhood. This included evaluating messages from
family and the environment. The fourth phase is the navigation phase. In this phase Black
women navigate certain environments by shifting aspects of their Black or female identity to co-
exist in spaces where their authentic identity may be affected by gendered racism. Black women
professionals explored in this study may move through these identity phases to make conclusions
about who they are, and who they are comfortable being in front of others.

Williams and Lewis (2021) also described six gendered racial ideologies that describe the
“attitudes, beliefs, values, and meanings that Black women hold toward their identity” (p. 8). These ideologies are assimilation, defiance, humanist, strength, pride, and empowerment.
Individuals could identify with more than one of the ideologies, as well as change ideologies at different points of their development. The first gendered racial ideology is assimilation where Black women identity with more Eurocentric standards for acceptance and characteristics. Defiance occurs when Black women behave in ways that are counter to negative stereotypes. They intend to prove others wrong about their perceptions of Black women. Those who subscribe to the humanist ideology choose not to be defined by racial or gendered labels. They feel as though labels are limiting and choose to see themselves as human rather than Black or female. The strength ideology is one where Black women use strength to overcome the effects of gendered racism. This involves restricting emotions in the face of hardships and working harder than their male or White peers. Black women who subscribe to the pride ideology are proud of their identity. They are less confined by the standards of dominant society. The empowerment ideology is where Black women model self-love, empower each other and support social justice. Understanding how and when Black women professionals endorse each of these ideologies is important for understanding their personal motivations for shifting.

While the model developed by Williams and Lewis (2021) describes identity formation based on persistent gendered racism, the Conceptual Framework for Positive Black Female Identity developed by Robinson et al. (2021) “disrupt[s] dominant narratives that subjugate Black females as it relates to their identity” (p.80). The model is constructed using Black feminist theory, critical consciousness, and critical media literacy. Within this model, Black feminist theory is utilized as way to support the use of critical consciousness and critical media literacy as conduits to refute the negative narrative of Black womanhood (Spates et al., 2020). Critical consciousness is an in-depth awareness of the forces of power and oppression within society. One works toward critical consciousness by progressing through advancing stages of
reflection and action. The first stage, semi-intransitive consciousness, is characterized by unawareness, while in the second stage, naive consciousness, one begins to recognize their problems and the problems of society, but in a superficial, oversimplified way. The third level is critical consciousness where one understands the interplay of forces of oppression and how these forces affect people and society. Once reaching this stage, individuals can transform and take action against the systems of oppression (Freire, 1973, 2018; Robinson et al., 2021). The third component of the framework is critical media literacy (CML). CML calls for the evaluation and critique of pervasive media messages that may be motivated by the continued oppression of marginalized groups for economic benefit (Robinson et al., 2021; Tisdell, 2008). By utilizing Black feminism, critical consciousness, and CML, the model centers and reframes the experiences of Black women toward an emancipatory rejection of the negative narrative of Black womanhood consciously perpetuated through the media.

The Conceptual Framework for Positive Black Female Identity is useful as a means for Black women to decode, analyze and deconstruct negative images of Black women from the media, and then subsequently move through the process of rejecting the negative images, replacing them with positive images, and then ultimately, reframing their Black female identity more positively (Robinson et al., 2021). As the perceptions of Black women regarding their identity are revealed through this study, the conceptual framework for positive Black female could become a method of reframing them.

Theoretical Framework

Shifting for Black women is a survival mechanism against oppression and marginalization. As critical theories seek to highlight inequalities in society (Brookfield, 2005) and emancipate and liberate the oppressed from systems that perpetuate unequal systems of
power (Robinson, 2020), it is appropriate to utilize theories rooted on Critical theory to develop the theoretical framework for this study. This study will draw from the perspectives of Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD) and intersectionality, Black feminism. These perspectives draw upon the foundations of critical theory.

**Critical theory**

Critical theory draws upon Marxism; it seeks to highlight the inequalities that exploit the masses for the benefit of the few (Brookfield, 2005). However, critical theory is not true Marxism; critical theorists do not automatically view capitalism as an “irrevocable evil” (McLaren, 2015, p. 192). Scholars tend to view capitalism as flawed, but complex. Capitalism still allows for the “non-conformity and personal latitude” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 19). This complexity leaves way for systematic social change.

Mingers (2000) developed a framework that described four different dimensions of skepticism that further define the aims of critical theory: (1) critique of rhetoric - questions language used and assumptions of arguments, (2) critique of tradition - questions the validity of current ways of doing things, (3) critique of authority - questions the acceptance of one dominant or privileged view point, and (4) critique of objectivity - recognizes that arguments are not value free and knowledge is based in power-structures.

Brookfield (2005) contends that critical theory contains elements of positivist theory but describes several important differences. First, critical theory is grounded in political analysis that explores the conflict between those seeking emancipation from some power structure and those that yield said power. Another important distinction is that critical theory is concerned with providing people knowledge, which can then be used to free themselves from oppression. In addition, critical theory involves a separation of the researcher and the focus of the research,
human beings. The subjects themselves must wish to attain circumstances different from those they currently possess. Critical theory also differs from positivist theory in the sense that it criticizes society and seeks to create a more equitable world. Finally, unlike positivist theory, the verification of critical theory can only be attained once the world that is envisioned under the theory is realized. These distinctions from positivist theory are also the basis for critical theory’s influences intersectionality, Black feminism, and CHRD.

**Intersectionality**

Intersectionality is a concept that explains how social identities overlap and intersect and how they are affected by interdependent systems of power and oppression (Crenshaw, 1989, 1990). It can be explained as an analytic tool that explains how “organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but as many axes that work together and influence each other.” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). This tool explores how different dimensions of power work together to influence one another. “Rather than seeing people as a homogeneous undifferentiated mass intersectionality provides a framework for explaining how social divisions of race, gender, age, and citizenship status among others positions people differently in the world especially in relation to global social inequality.” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 15). For the purposes of this study, it is important to examine how the intersection of both race and gender influence Black women’s decisions regarding altering their self-presentation.

Collins and Bilge (2016) explain that power can be better understood as four separate but interrelated domains: (1) interpersonal, (2) disciplinary, (3) cultural, and (4) structural. Interpersonal power is concerned with how people relate to each other, as well as how it is determined who is advantaged and disadvantaged within these personal interactions. Disciplinary
power explains how rules are applied differently depending on one’s group identity. Cultural power is concerned with the message. Those in power create the illusion of equality and fairness so that their power status is not questioned or overthrown. Structural power explains how power dynamics are reinforced in our organizations and institutions. Together these four interrelated domains are called a matrix of domination (Collins, 2002). Understanding the domains of the matrix of domination could prove important to understanding the rationale for shifting for the Black female professionals in this study.

There are six core ideas that occur frequently among works that utilize intersectionality: inequality, relationality, power, social context, complexity, and social justice. Inequality is concerned with how there is not one single force; be it race, class, gender, or citizenship; that can explain the social hierarchy on its own. Similarly, power is explored within and across the domains previously mentioned. Relationality is the practice of rejecting binary thinking and examines the interconnectedness of entities such as race and gender, rather than the difference between them. When examining phenomenon through the lens of intersectionality, one is concerned with social context by being aware of the historical and political context in which the phenomenon takes place. Intersectionality contends that there is a complexity associated with examining inequality through the intersecting power relations in a particular social context. Finally, as with most philosophies derived from the critical perspective, works concerned with intersectionality often utilize social justice as a main idea and strive, through their work, to dismantle the inequalities associated with the status quo (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Although all six core principles are rarely ever used in conjunction, the researcher was mindful of these principles as the experiences of the Black women professionals of this study are explored.
Black Feminism

Black feminism is a critical social theory that “encompasses bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing US Black women as a collectivity” (Collins, 2002, p. 9). As with other critical social theories Black feminism is concerned with social justice of not only Black women but other similarly oppressed groups as well. Collins (2002) contends that Black feminism is the process of “self-conscious struggle” (Collins, 2002, p. 15) that empowers women and men to actualize a humanist vision of community. Collins further explains that Black women’s political and economic status provides them with a distinctive set of experiences that offers a different view of material reality than that available to other groups. These experiences stimulate a distinctive Black feminist consciousness concerning material reality. As this study examined the experiences of Black women professionals, utilizing a lens that is specifically able to discern the unique reality of Black women was critical.

There are several critical social theories that utilize intersectionality as a major construct, but there are five distinguishing features of Black feminism. First, there is a particular matrix of domination that affects Black women in the US that involves gender, class, race, and national origin. Second, oppression and resistance shapes Black American womanhood in the US; that is, oppression of Black women is a ‘lived reality’ and once people begin to become aware of their oppression, many begin to resist against it. The third feature is that although Black women can be organized as a collective, there are several internal divisions within this population which attest to Black women’s individualism regarding class, education, region, religion, and sexual orientation. Fourth, even though there are differences among Black women, there is a collective consciousness based on shared history and experiences. The final distinguishing feature of Black
feminism is that there is a commitment to enacting social change through Black feminist practice (Alinia, 2015; Collins, 2002). As Black feminist consciousness is unique to the reality of Black women, this concept is when important Black women professionals’ experiences with shifting are explored.

**Critical Human Resource Development**

Another important lens through which one should examine Black women’s experiences in job attainment is Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD). While the field of Human Resource Development (HRD) generally focuses very little on the experience of marginalized groups and social justice within organizations (Bierema & Cseh, 2003), CHRD’s key defining attributes are challenging contemporary practices, exposing assumptions, revealing illusions, questioning tradition and facilitating emancipation within the work place. Reflective practice is of utmost importance in CHRD (Bierema & Cseh, 2003). Some contend that the challenge with successfully pursuing a CHRD approach in practice is that CHRD objectives co-exist within the broader HRD objectives of maximizing performance and learning outcomes (Baek & Kim, 2017; Fenwick, 2004). In alignment with these theories, this study aims to shed light on oppression in organizations’ hiring processes and promote emancipatory action toward equity.

Components of CHRD can be framed through the six strand framework of the critical approach developed by Burrell (2001). The political strand explores the stakeholders and influencers of HRD and how each benefit or exploited. The iconoclastic strand seeks to identify alternatives to the dominant imagery and icons of HRD. This could include exploring how players perform with the HRD function as well as how the right words, phrases, and images are valued over others. The epistemological strand reflects what is considered as knowledge and how it is constructed. This strand promotes the use of interpretivist approaches such as qualitative
methods, exploring the relationship between the researcher and participants, as well as understanding the role of morals, values, and ethics in HRD research and practice. The investigative perspective looks at human concerns of HRD that may be intentionally or unintentionally suppressed because of the dominant power structures. The revelatory strand is concerned with how HRD reveals itself; it questions whether HRD should be defined and if current and future definitions should be accepted. The final strand is the emancipatory strand. It is connected to the political function and questions whether if, and if so how, HRD should serve to emancipate its players from existing oppressive structures of power (Sambrook, 2007).

Utilizing CHRD theory will allow for examination and critique of the forces within the work environment that encourage or require Black female professionals to shift.

**Gendered Racial Hiring Discrimination**

Although preventative laws exist, research suggests that hiring discrimination based on race and gender has persisted through the 21st century. According to a quantitative study conducted in 1983, a person’s proclivity toward racial prejudice affected hiring decisions. The study was aimed at using the concept of racial ambivalence, ambivalence between negative feelings and behavior toward race, and the desire to live up to the ‘American creed’ to demonstrate the construct validity of the Modern Racism Scale. Participants were initially given the Modern Racism Scale. Two weeks later, the participants were asked to score sample résumés based on aesthetics and quality of the candidate. They were then asked whether or not they would hire the candidate. Pictures of either a White male candidate or a Black male candidate were included at the top corner of the résumé. The study found that when race was not relevant, because the participant and the candidate were both White, race did not influence hiring decisions. However, when the race of the participant and the candidate differed, participants who
scored as more prejudiced scored Black candidates significantly higher on negative aspects than Whites, but significantly lower on positive aspects (McConahay, 1983). The study’s findings indicate that one’s prejudiced inclinations influence their decisions in hiring.

Later in another quantitative study, it was determined that African American applicants for employment were treated less favorably for hiring than equally qualified members of non-marginalized groups more than 20% of the time. The study utilized data from the Fair Employment Council of Greater Washington, Inc.’s race-based test. In these tests, six pairs of testers were recruited from upper-level undergraduate students and recent graduates; each pair consisted of an African American research assistant and a White research assistant of similar age, gender, appearance, articulateness, and manner. Each received coaching on effective application and interview strategies. Each pair was given a fictional biography specifically designed to make the testers strong candidates for employment. Testers were then instructed to apply for jobs randomly selected from the Washington Post, other employment listings, as well as employment agencies. The six teams completed a total of 149 audits. Success was measured by determining (1) who proceeds furthest in the job interview process and (2) job offers (Bendick et al., 1994). The study resulted in very interesting findings.

The results of this study utilized comparison of the discrepancies between job search success for White applicants versus Black applicants. White applicants received opportunities to interview 48.3% of the time, while African American applicants at a rate of only 39.6%. White applicants were also given job offers 35% more frequently than African Americans. The researchers also noted evidence of steering to lower level positions; while this occurred for 2% of the White applicants, African American applicants experienced this 5% of the time (Bendick et al., 1994).
A meta-analysis of 24 field experiments conducted since 1989 involving hiring discrimination against African American or Latino candidates for employment found that White applicants received callbacks 36% more often than did African Americans and 24% more often than Latinos. Over the 25 year timespan, there was no evidence that hiring discrimination for African-American candidates has decreased and only modest evidence that discrimination toward Latino candidates has decreased (Quillian et al., 2017). Other studies continue to make apparent the discrimination that exists in the job search process.

In a quantitative case study, Fernandez and Greenberg (2013) aimed to determine if there was distinction between taste-based discrimination, where employers actively avoid hiring members of a particular group, and statistical discrimination, where the lack of information about the person being screened causes the screener to rely on stereotypes of people from backgrounds. The study utilized data for a Telephone Interviewer position at a call center in the western United States. It found that African Americans were offered jobs at the lowest rate of any of the racial groups. While White applicants were hired at a rate of 71.1%, African Americans, in contrast, were hired at a rate of 53.9%. Hispanic Americans were hired at a rate of 62.9% while Asian Americans were hired at a rate similar to White applicants (71.1%). One may ask how the participants in the study were able to determine the applicant’s race. Hiring managers can determine and make decisions based upon an applicant’s race through cues submitted in résumés as well as linguistic profiling.

**Résumé Based Discrimination**

A quantitative study aimed at determining if White applicants were favored over Black applicants when reviewing only a résumé used résumés from job search websites from sales, administrative support, clerical services, and customer services positions in the Boston and
Chicago areas. Thirteen hundred employment ads were targeted. Employers were sent both a high-quality and a low-quality résumé from their sample résumé bank with both a White name and an African American name. Almost 5000 résumés were submitted in total. Based on name manipulation alone, African American respondents to job postings would have to apply to 50% more jobs than Whites to receive a call back from an employer. The researchers benchmarked the value of having a White name as adding eight more years of additional experience to applicants of similar quality (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). A more recent study aimed at exploring discrimination in hiring practices for college graduates resulted in Black-named job seekers receiving callbacks 14% less often than those with White names. The study did find evidence that the gap in interview rates diminished with perceived productivity characteristics such as business degree and intern experience (Nunley et al., 2015). These studies make it apparent that names are used as racial identifying cues in résumés.

Résumé whitening is a tactic job seekers from marginalized populations use to conceal or downplay racial cues on hiring documents. A qualitative study aimed at examining the résumé whitening experiences of Black and Asian job seekers found that 31% of Black participants and 40% of Asian participants personally engaged in résumé whitening in the past. Twenty-nine Black and 30 Asian college students that were actively seeking employment were interviewed. Two-thirds of respondents also admitted to having family or friends that whitened their résumé. Participants whitened their résumé in two ways. The first way is through changing the presentation of their name by either altering the first name or using an additional name. The second is through altering their professional and extra-professional activities by either omitting experiences, changing the description of experiences, or adding ‘White experiences’. The study also was able to explore several motives and deterrents for résumé whitening. Those that chose
to conceal or play down racial identifiers on their résumé did so in order to get a foot in the door or to signal assimilation. Those that chose not to whiten their résumé valued their experiences too much to remove them from the document; saw it as a way to screen potentially discriminatory employers; held identity-based objections for doing so; believed that the strongest candidate would be selected, regardless of their race; or believed in the organization’s commitment to diversity (Kang et al., 2016). Black female professionals may choose to shift by altering their résumé in one of the ways outlined in this study.

**Linguistic Profiling**

Linguistic profiling is based on auditory cues that result in the confirmation or speculation of the racial background of an individual (Baugh, 2003). African American Vernacular English (AAVE) refers to the language used by some (but not all) African Americans. Many linguists consider AAVE a dialect (or variety of dialects) of Standard American English (SAE), as they share many rules and linguistic patterns. AAVE often varies from SAE in terms of verb marking, noun inflections, pronouns and demonstratives, and comparative and superlative markers, negation, and questions (Champion et al., 2012). AAVE has also been referred to as Black English Vernacular, Ebonics, Black English, and Black Street Speech. (Baugh, 1983; Champion et al., 2012). While some value the usage of AAVE as a part of cultural identity, many feel as if its usage impedes the success of its speakers (Baugh, 1983).

Although AAVE exists as a dialect of SAE, problems persist for its speakers. AAVE usage is equated with “illiteracy, poverty, and other trappings of prejudicial isolation” (Baugh, 1983, p. 34). Baugh (1983, p. 9) recounts antitodally the motivations of some to adopt SAE, at least situationally to avoid the stigmas associated with its usage:

During the years that I have studied the topic, I have talked to Black college students who felt an urgent need to acquire standard English so they would be
treated as equals in their classes. Others have expressed the frustrations of knowing that they were qualified for advanced positions, only to be rejected because they didn't speak properly. It is on this personal level that the tragedy of dialect insensitivity takes his greatest toll.

Speakers of AAVE tend to vary its usage. Some speakers use AAVE exclusively, but more often than not, AAVE speakers vary its usage depending on situation and audience (Baugh, 1983; Champion et al., 2012). While some may refer to this phenomenon as “code switching”, John Baugh (1983) calls this fluctuation between AAVE and SAE as ‘style switching’. The distinguishing feature between the two phenomenon is that code switching involves switching between two distinct languages while style switching indicates a shift between dialects. Style switching has been an essential tool many speakers of AAVE have utilized to avoid the negative connotations associated with the dialect.

Purnell et al. (1999) detailed several experiments regarding linguistic profiling racial discrimination in the housing market. In their quantitative first experiment, Baugh called prospective landlords in five different locales. In each call to the landlord Baugh used a different dialect: Standard American English (SAE), African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and Chicano English (ChE). While the SAE speaker was invited for an interview 60-70% of the time, regardless of locale, the AAVE speakers and ChE speakers invitation rates were dependent on the population density of the Black population and the Hispanic population respectively in each area. The fewer Blacks or Hispanics were physically present in an area, the less likely they were to receive an invitation for a housing interview (Purnell et al., 1999). This is indicative of landlords’ reluctance to increase the diversity of areas that maintained their White majority status.

In their second quantitative experiment, the researchers aimed to explore ethnic identification. Twenty speakers of the three dialects of interest (SAE, AVE, and ChE) from
varied racial and ethnic groups were recorded saying the phrase “Hello, I am calling to see about
the apartment you have advertised in the paper” (Purnell et al., 1999, p. 19). Listeners included
421 undergraduate and graduate students at Stanford University; 382 of the listeners were native
speakers of English. They were asked to identify the gender of the speaker as well as the race
and ethnicity. Listeners were able to correctly identify the speaker’s race or ethnicity more than
80% of the time for each racial/ethnic category (Purnell et al., 1999). This finding is critical as
there can be no assertion of discriminatory practices if there was no evidence that race can be
distinguished through vocal cues.

In their third quantitative experiment, the researchers aimed to see if listeners could
identify race at a phonetic level from a short, recorded passage. For this experiment, the word
‘Hello’ was extracted from the recordings of the longer statements in the previous experiment.
Participants in this study were able to correctly identify the speaker’s race or ethnicity more than
70% of the time (Purnell et al., 1999). The second and third study exemplify how racial
identification is possible through hearing both long and short passages, while their first study
provides evidence that discrimination based on race exist in this context. These are important
considerations as the existence of racial discrimination as well as people’s ability to distinguish
race through vocal cues justifies Black women professionals’ choice to switch by altering their
voice.

Appearance-Based Discrimination

Women of all races shift for job attainment in many ways. Bartky (1997) suggests this is
due to the socialized disciplined regimen dictated by the demands of living in a patriarchal
society. They describe three disciplinary mechanisms that reinforce the notion of the idealized
female. These practices are both socially and culturally embedded. The first is the aim to produce
a female body of a certain idealized shape and size. The second is to glorify bodily actions by females that align with acceptable feminine values (such as modesty) and to condemn expressions that align with unacceptable values. Finally, there are certain social practices that women must master to be perceived as feminine. In addition, organizations reinforce these themes so that women’s professional career successes are subject to not only judgement against the competence of their male counterparts, but are also reliant on their ability to manage corporate beauty standards (Wolf, 1990). Understanding the effects of these mechanisms on how and why women alter their self-presentation for job attainment will be important for this study.

For women seeking employment, attractiveness can be an asset or a detriment, depending on the context of the position. Several studies indicate that physical attractiveness has a positive effect on hiring decisions, including higher perception of being qualified, more favorable hiring recommendations, and higher compensation (Quereshi & Kay, 1986). A metanalysis of 27 studies found that although over time the importance of attractiveness has seemed to decrease, attractiveness is still an important consideration in hiring (Hosoda et al., 2003). However, for female applicants, context matters.

The beauty is beastly effect is a phenomenon of documented discrimination against attractive women when applying for stereotypically masculine jobs (Johnson et al., 2014). An early quantitative study of this phenomenon found that when women who are perceived to be attractive apply for positions in male dominated fields or managerial type jobs they are hired and promoted less often than their female counterparts who are perceived to be less attractive or males of any level of perceived attractiveness (Paustian-Underdahl & Walker, 2016). For Black female professionals, adhering to typical standards of beauty may be detrimental if applying for managerial positions in male dominated fields.
While it may be harder for women who are perceived to be more attractive to be hired into stereotypical male dominated positions, there is evidence to suggest that the pressures to increase or sustain high levels of attractiveness persist once hired. One quantitative study examined appearance-related discrimination for women that challenged gender norms. The study found that those that rated higher on the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), made especially high appearance related investment demands for women in high power positions in male oriented careers as compared with male employees in lower power positions (Ramati-Ziber et al., 2020). This appears to suggest that in addition to the wage gap for similar positions between male and female employees, there is an increased cost for women to attain and sustain their jobs. It would be a reasonable conclusion to believe that there is pressure for women to alter their self-presentation in terms of attractiveness for job attainment. Noting the frequency of the incidents of hiring discrimination presented in the literature, Black female candidates for employment may feel warranted in altering their self-presentation for job attainment.

**Skin Color and Hair Type-Bias**

Colorism or skin color bias is the preferential treatment given to people of color that have a skin tone or other physical characteristics more proximal to White features than others in their racial or ethnic group (Hunter, 2007). The ideal model of beauty for women is a Eurocentric model of beauty, one in which fair skin, long straight hair, and thin bodies prevail. Black women are constantly exposed to the preferences of the ideal model of beauty through media and other cultural references (Chen et al.; Robinson, 2011; Sekayi, 2003). There are real world implications for colorist preferences. Black people with lighter skin attain higher education (Hughes & Hertel, 1990; Monroe, 2013; Saperstein & Penner, 2012) and have higher family incomes (Hochschild & Weaver, 2007; Hughes & Hertel, 1990) than those with darker skin.
Because those with higher educational attainment face lower unemployment rates and have higher earnings (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021), Black professional women with darker skin are at a disadvantage.

There are also implications for job attainment. Harrison and Thomas (2009) conducted a quantitative study in which White participants reviewed résumés accompanied by pictures of applicants of varied skin hues. They found that darker skinned applicants with higher educational attainment and qualifications were rated lower than light skinned candidates with fewer accolades. Another study found that fair skinned African American applicants were rated more employable than their dark-skinned counterparts. In this study, male raters were more likely to score both fair skinned males and fair-skinned females higher on an employability scale than female raters (Wade et al., 2004). While there are negative implications for both darker skinned Black men and women, darker skinned Black women professionals may face even more difficulty in the job attainment process.

While darker skinned Black men may be disadvantaged for job attainment because they are perceived as more violent and more criminal than lighter skinned Black males, Black women are disadvantaged because of pervasive Eurocentric beauty standards (Hall, 1995). Black women who have attributes phenotypically closer to features commonly associated with White women are perceived as more beautiful (Fears, 1998). Thompson and Keith (2001) noted that Black women face intersectional “triple jeopardy” where oppression stemmed from their race, gender, and skin color. A study surveyed Black women from Fortune 1000 companies and found that light skinned respondents were more satisfied with pay and opportunities for advancement than dark skinned respondents (Catalyst, 2004). Colorism affects job attainment for Black women.
professionals because of skin color bias, but other forms of colorism can be equally as detrimental.

Darker skinned Black women may feel pressured to shift by altering their skin color through skin bleaching or skin lightening. Skin bleaching is the process of using cosmetic creams or procedures to lighten one’s skin (Lindsey, 2011; Russell et al., 2013). The process of skin bleaching can be dangerous to the skin as well as to other organs and functions (Robinson, 2011), for example, liver and kidney damage, cancer, and psychosis (Rao, 2019). Many topical products contain hazardous ingredients such as mercuric compounds, corticosteroids, and hydroquinone (Faye et al., 2005). Skin bleaching in the U.S. is a taboo topic. Although African-Americans are reluctant to admit that they bleach their skin (Hall, 2016), America’s skin bleaching industry was estimated to be worth $5.6 billion in 2013 (Russell et al., 2013). American companies often market their products as products that “even out skin tone” or “smooth out texture” (Hall, 2016; Pollock et al., 2020). Black women professionals with darker skin tone may be putting themselves at risk to conform to standards that may make them more successful in job attainment.

Black women also feel pressured to shift because of Black hair texture bias. Hair texture bias is “negative stereotypes or attitudes that manifest unconsciously or consciously, towards natural or textured hair” (MacFarlane et al., 2017, p. 3). A 2019 study commissioned by Dove surveyed 1017 Black professional women and 1050 non-Black professional women to determine the magnitude of hair discrimination for Black women. The study found that Black women’s hair is 3.5 times more likely to be deemed unprofessional; Black women are 1.5 times more likely to be sent home because of their hair in the workplace (JOY Collective, 2019). Black women alter their hair to decrease the likelihood of being subjected to negative stereotypes and
perceptions associated with Black hair; there is a perception that Black hair is unkempt, unprofessional, and messy (Dawson et al., 2019). An additional study required 200 participants of varied races and genders to rate images of Black and White women on professionalism and ability to succeed in corporate America. The study found that the Black models with Afrocentric styles were rated as less professional and less likely to succeed in a corporate environment. The study also found that Black male and female participants judged the models with Afrocentric hair more harshly than White participants (Opie & Phillips, 2015). The negative perceptions associated with Black Afrocentric hair provide motivation for Black professional women to switch.

Dawson et al. (2019) found that there is pressure for Black women to switch via embracing Eurocentric hairstyles and that those that resist the pressure to switch face real professional and economic consequences. The study found that in the workplace, Black hair styles were considered deviant. Even when Black hair was styled in a Eurocentric way, the difference in texture elicited negative comments and consequences. One participant noted,

Today I walked into the office wearing office attire and my natural hair up in a professional bun. I was quickly told by operations that I too would have to adhere to the dress code. I looked at her and stated that I was dressed professional today. I then asked by professional do you mean that my hair needs to be relaxed. She stated yes that is exactly what I mean. So apparently if I do not have my hair relaxed by July 1st I’m not allowed to go to work (Dawson et al., 2019, p. 394).

This participant’s statement makes apparent the pressures for Black women to not only conform by altering physical aspects of themselves, but also to chemically alter themselves physically to be deemed acceptable in the workplace.
Exploring Why Black Women Shift

Black women may shift to conform to the expectations of dominant culture, while also managing the expectation of their role in Black community (Dickens & Chavez, 2018). Black women may also shift to avoid the hypervisibility of being the only, or one of few, representatives for their group (Dickens et al., 2019) or to protect themselves from intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). As racism today is more likely to be expressed covertly rather than overtly (Dovidio et al., 2002), Black women professionals involved in this study may also have shifted during the job search to reduce stereotype threat (Roberson & Kulik, 2007; Steele, 1997) and gendered racial microaggressions. Dookie (2015) posits that stereotype threat, microaggressions, and identity all shape and are shaped by each other. The interplay of these phenomenon may provide insight on the motivation for Black women professionals shifting for job attainment.

Theoretical Motivations for Shifting

Black women may choose to shift to align more closely with the dominant group and avoid the negative consequences of being different or othered (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004; McCluney et al., 2021). Attempts to shift can be either categorized as passing or covering. Passing occurs when an undesirable characteristic or stigma is concealed to appear as a member of the non-stigmatized group. While all stigmatized characteristics are not readily concealed, one can temporarily pass by changing aspects of themselves such as “in writing letters or making telephone calls, projecting an image of self that is subject to later discrediting” (Goffman, 1963, p. 93). In contrast, covering occurs when an undesirable attribute cannot be concealed. When a stigma is already apparent, a person may make an effort to downplay that attribute as a way to signal conformity (Goffman, 1963). Passing, covering, or otherwise altering one’s self-
presentation, can affect both the individual attempting to conceal racial identity attributes as well as the organizations that employ them under this guise.

The internal conflict that people experience when they are committed to two or more conflicted identities is called identity dissonance. Resolution of this conflict involves removing one of the identities, identify strategies to deal with the tension, or adjust how they conceptualize the identities to make them seem congruent (Crymble, 2012). Those who address identity dissonance by altering one’s perception of self may do so by identifying with multiple groups simultaneously or identifying with another group all together. This strategy “reframes the act of passing as one of selective identification thereby reducing or eliminating the dissonance” (DeJordy, 2008, p. 522).

Another tactic one may employ is impression management. Impression management involves behaviors that one may use to create and maintain desired perceptions of themselves. One conceptual model of impression management views the construct as two discrete processes. The first process is called impression motivation or “the degree to which people are motivated to control how others see them” (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34) and is comprised of three factors: the goal-relevance of the impressions one creates, the value of desired outcomes, and the discrepancy between current and desired images. The second process, impression construction, is involved with the type of impression one wants to make as well as the method that they will deploy to make the impression. It is comprised of five factors: the self-concept, desired and undesired identity images, role constraints, target's values, and current social image (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Impression motivation for Black women professionals is concerned with the pressures within the workplace that lead to shifting, while impression construction is concerned with their methods of shifting.
One that chooses to address dissonance by altering their belief and value system would do so by “denying, suppressing, or deemphasizing the identity itself” (DeJordy, 2008, p. 522). The research notes that such behaviors however, “may not be possible or desirable” (DeJordy, 2008, p. 522). Ultimately, dissonance associated with passing or altering self-presentation leads to an altered perception of the organization or increase boundary management between organizational and personal domains (DeJordy, 2008). Employees who pass by altering their values may further develop façades of conformity within their organizations.

Façades of conformity are false representations of self that make employees appear that they embrace organizational values. One reason for the creation of façades of conformity is minority status within an organization. While people from marginalized populations may fall within this category (dependent on the organization’s population), those with conflicting belief or value systems from the majority group could also be included. Those in the minority may believe that they must conform in order to receive the full benefits of the majority group (Hewlin, 2003). This can be viewed as a form of strategic essentialism, or alternating performance of identity between one social context to another (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Black female employment candidates may feel motivated to deploy a façade to receive the benefits of full inclusionary status within the organization once hired.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to review research that provides insight to the reasons and means for how Black women shift for job attainment. Through reviewing the literature, the need to conduct more research to fully determine the effects that altering self-presentation has on those that engage in it is apparent. Black feminism, intersectionality and Critical Human Resource Development were explored as the theoretical frameworks that have shaped this study.
These frameworks inform the study by allowing for the examination of privilege and power that motivates Black women professionals to shift, the examination of influences of overlapping marginalized identities, as well as highlight the unique experiences of Black female professionals. As data was collected and analyzed, the theoretical motivations for shifting as well as the methods of shifting should were considered.
Chapter III. Methodology

The purpose of this basic interpretive study was to explore how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment, including their perception of identity, and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting. This chapter provides an overview of basic interpretive design as well as the philosophical assumptions that accompany this chosen design. It also provides an overview of the methods of the study including participant selection, data collection, and data analysis.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions of an interpretive study help to frame how the researcher understands how problems are developed and their approach to seeking answers to those problems (Huff, 2008). This study utilizes the lens of several critical approaches including Critical Human Resource Development (CHRD), Black feminism, and intersectionality. The critical nature of this study lends itself to particular ontological and epistemological assumptions that inform the study.

Ontology aims to describe the nature of reality. Qualitative research supports the view of multiple realities. The realities of the researcher and the subjects of the study are independent from each other (Creswell, 2012). Critical theorists support historical ontology where reality is shaped by “social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). These structures impose a reality that is taken as ‘real’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It is the aim of critical theorists to comprehend this historical reality and ultimately work to transform it.

Critical theorists often utilize transactional and subjectivist epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Where epistemology is concerned with deciphering what counts as knowledge as
well as the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched (Creswell, 2012),
transactional and subjectivist epistemology contends that the researcher is unable to separate
themselves from their own knowledge. This means that the researcher and the participants are
interactively linked (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, axiology for critical research, which
explores the role of values (Creswell, 2012), is value mediated. The researcher’s values are
included and help form the outcome of the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These assumptions
affected the methodological approaches of critical research studies. The implications of the
philosophical assumptions for this study are that although researcher and the participants are
separate entities that view the world differently based on their experiences, they are linked
through the experiences of the study itself. Because of this link, the conclusions of this study are
not value-free; the researcher was required to take care to not purposefully interject their
experiences as a Black female professional into the data. This is achieved through thoroughly
examining and disclosing the role of the researcher and taking the necessary steps to ensure
credibility and trustworthiness.

Research Design

The design selected for this study is basic interpretive design which is a type of
interpretive research. Interpretive research does not assume a single reality, rather it assumes that
there are multiple realities that draw from individuals’ interpretation of the world around them
(Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). These realities are shaped by interactions with others, as well as
social and historical forces (Creswell, 2012). Meaning is “not simply imprinted on individuals
but [is] formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through
historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives” (Creswell, 2012, pp. 24-25).
There is no one reality, rather multiple realities or interpretations of single events (Merriam &
Tisdell, 2015). The researcher creates a bricolage – “pieced together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p. 4). Researchers within this paradigm are tasked with not finding knowledge, but constructing it (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) by thoroughly examining and then intricately weaving together the experiences of their participants. A basic interpretive design was chosen for this study in order to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of Black female professionals and their experiences with shifting.

The critical lens of this study lends itself to additional design considerations. Critical research does not only try to uncover meaning from the multiple realities of individuals, but also attempts to examine inequities in power, how that power is negotiated, and how the power of one group is used to marginalize and oppress members of others. In addition, critical research aims to transform those power dynamics through exposing these dynamics so that they can be challenged (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Unlike action research which aims to change a social system during a study (Swanson & Holton, 2005), critical research only aims to critique and make visible, and through that visibility bring about change (Patton, 1990). By utilizing a critical lens, this study aimed to unmask systems that encourage, reward, or punish Black women for shifting or not shifting by allowing them to tell their stories and determining if there is commonality among their experiences.

**Basic Interpretive Design**

Many research designs can be utilized in critical research as it is not a research design, rather a world view (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Basic interpretive design was chosen as the research design for this study. Although interpretive design is the umbrella category for all qualitative research designs, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) categorize basic interpretive design as a
research design in its own right. Basic interpretive studies seek to understand “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 24). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) state that other qualitative research designs do have these characteristics, but also add an additional dimension.

Basic interpretive design is an appropriate research design to study how Black women describe and interpret their experiences with shifting during the job attainment process due to the exploratory nature of this study. There was no assumption of a shared universal experience with shifting among the participants or a shared cultural experience that would have made other research designs appropriate. It was also not the intent of this study to derive a potential theory from the findings that would have made another research design appropriate.

**Role of the Researcher**

Critical research addresses interrelated issues when considering the role of the researcher and interactions with participants: bracketing, insider/outsider issues, positionality issues, and reflexivity. Addressing these issues did not only ensure a rigorous qualitative study but may mitigate any uncertainty or discomfort for the Black women in my study, related to disclosing such sensitive information.

**Bracketing**

Bracketing refers to the “process in which a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the phenomenon” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1430). There are several types of bracketing, but all types include three distinct phases: abstract formulation, research praxis, and reintegration. Abstract formulation includes the disclosure of the researcher’s orientation standpoint and qualitative
theoretical framework (Gearing, 2004). The orientation position includes the researcher’s epistemological and ontological position (Gearing, 2004). As described earlier in this chapter, the researcher’s ontological position as historical ontology where reality is shaped by “social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110) and utilizes transactional and subjectivist epistemology where the researcher and participant are linked because of the inability of the researcher to separate themselves from their own knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The researcher’s epistemological and ontological position and qualitative theoretical framework hold important implications for the second phase of bracketing, research praxis.

Research praxis captures the major practical elements of bracketing. It consists of five elements: foundational focus, internal supposition, external supposition, boundary composition, and temporal structure (Gearing, 2004). While all bracketing philosophies possess these elements, they differ on how each element is addressed. These differences can be attributed to the application across different qualitative traditions. Due to the critical nature of this study, existential bracketing was deployed.

Foundational focus of bracketing philosophies is concerned with whether the researcher chooses to set aside preconceptions as well as which they choose to make explicit during the research process. Internal supposition and external supposition are concerned with which aspects are to be suspended (Gearing, 2004). Internal supposition includes aspects such as “personal knowledge, history, culture, experiences, and values” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1433) whereas the external supposition refers to aspects of the larger world environment of who or what is being studied. Studies that deploy existential bracketing sets aside presuppositions of research theories to ensure that the lived experiences of the participants are not clouded by preconceived
assumptions of how they align with a particular framework. However, existential bracketing rejects the researcher’s ability to suspend their personal consciousness or personal assumptions. The larger world environment is also unable to be bracketed out for the researcher or participant (Gearing, 2004). Regarding this study, neither the researcher’s experiences nor the participants’ experiences as Black women can be eliminated from this study. However, by deploying existential bracketing, the researcher was charged with listening to the experiences of the participants with an open mind and refraining to align their experiences with a framework while bracketing is in place.

Boundary composition is concerned with “how rigid, specific, or porous the bracketing boundaries are to be in keeping out and/or suspending the suppositions” (Gearing, 2004, p. 1443). Boundaries in existential bracketing are defined, brackets are for specific tasks and some researcher assumptions. Due to the nature of existential bracketing some internal and external suppositions will flow through. While it is noted that the researcher’s experiences and bias cannot be fully removed from the study, it is important to know that qualitative research best practices contends that the researcher must refrain from unnecessarily interjecting their voice and experience into the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For these reasons, the researcher bounds the participants’ experiences with shifting within the context of seeking employment. These experiences can relate to race, gender, and other intersectional identities that are disclosed by the participant. The researcher utilized bracketing strategies to refrain from interjecting their personal experiences with the subject as well as their knowledge of informing theories outside of the bracket.

The final component of the research praxis is temporal structure. This is concerned with when bracketing begins and ends. Existential bracketing is temporally unstructured, but the
researcher disclosed when the bracket will begin, how long it will be deployed, and when it will end. While bracketing can have effects through all stages of the research project (Tufford & Newman, 2012), this study deployed bracketing throughout the data collection phase as well as through some of the writing stage. Bracketing during data collection can mitigate emotional reactions from the researcher which could influence the respondents’ responses. It can also aid the researcher in focusing on the research question. Bracketing during the data analysis phase ensures that the researcher is hearing what the participant says and not unconsciously projecting their own voice onto the data. Bracketing during the writing stage can prevent the researcher from prioritizing some voices and minimizing others (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Bracketing ceased in the writing phase, during the discussion portion of the writing process. This is where the third phase of bracketing, reintegration, took place.

Reintegration allows for the researcher to unbracket and reinvest that data into the larger investigation (Gearing, 2004). During this phase, the researcher examines how the participants’ experiences align with or converge from the theories that informed this study. The researcher also determines future implications for research and practice.

The bracketing strategies that were utilized by the researcher are reflective journaling, memos, and disclosure in the final research report (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Reflective journaling began prior to the data collection phase. In this phase, the researcher recorded apparent biases including those involving race, gender, and prior experiences. The researcher also created memos during the data collection and data analysis phase. Memos noted instances of bias when they arise. Noting the researchers bias in the final report will allow for transparency in the results.
Insider/Outsider Issues

In examining insider/outsider issues, the researcher considered the issues that arise from the condition of being an insider or an outsider from the groups that participant belongs to which affects the research process. Insider/outsider issues could have affected access to participants as well as the type of information the participants might tell the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In reference to this study, the researcher was cognizant that they present as a Black female. This alignment with the participants in her study may have allowed for more participant disclosure. However, there may be other intersectional identities for which the researcher is an outsider. For example, there may have been be participants that are transgender, homosexual, or non-Christian. These identities may richly inform the outcome of the study, but because the researcher is an outsider, the participants may be more hesitant to disclose the effects of those aspects of their identity. The researcher will take care to create as safe of an environment as possible. The researcher will be sure to fully explain the aspects of confidentiality as well as the use of pseudonyms.

Reflexivity

In addition, one considered reflexivity when conducting critical research. “Reflexivity is generally understood as awareness of the influence the researcher has on what is being studied and, simultaneously, of how the research process affects the researcher. It is both a state of mind and a set of actions” (Probst & Berenson, 2014, p. 814). Research affects both the researcher and the participant. The researcher will be instantly affected by the stories told by the participants. To prevent unnecessary effects of researcher bias, the researcher will employ the bracketing technique of memos and reflexive journaling during the data collection and data analysis phase.
Positionality

Positionality refers to how a study may be affected by researcher’s race, gender, background, sexual orientation or other experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Interpretive research is value-laden; the study is affected by the values and the bias of the researcher. The goal is not to remove the values of the researcher from the study, but rather clearly state them (Creswell, 2012). The researcher has disclosed aspects of their identity that may affect positionality in the next section. Positionality may also affect a researcher’s rapport with, and thus the quality of information from participants. Participants from marginalized groups are often weary of members of dominate culture conducting research on them (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Critical researchers must also be aware of any unintended power differentials created by the research process as well.

Researcher Identification

I am a Black cis-gender woman. I consider myself a professional as I work full-time in administration at a predominantly White Research 1 University in the southeastern United States. Although I was born in the United States, my father is an immigrant. This is one of the reasons why I was not interested in limiting my study to only Black women that identify as African American.

Early in my career, it was recommended that I remove any traces of my race from my résumé. I refused. I have not been actively job searching in over 8 years and I have worked exclusively in a University environment during this time. I currently work in a department that has an African American/Black staff percentage of 41% while the current university undergraduate enrollment of African American/Black students is 12.6%. I believe that these points are important to note because I have not explicitly whitened my résumé and I work in a
department where résumé whitening may not seem as important because of the higher percentage of Black staff members. However, I admit to utilizing other forms of shifting in situations where I have deemed appropriate and/or necessary.

Participants and Setting

This study utilized a purposeful sampling strategy, where it is assumed that the researcher “wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 96). The researcher sought out information rich cases, cases where one can learn a great deal about the phenomenon of interest (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher made decisions regarding the participants of the study, the sampling strategies, and the size of the sample being studied (Creswell, 2012). The researcher selected five Black professional women as participants and increased the sample size through chain sampling until saturation was reached.

Participants

To promote the goal of finding information rich cases, criterion sampling was utilized for this study. The selected criteria reflects the purpose of the study and drives the researcher in the identification of information rich cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To participate in this study participants had to: (1) self-identify as Black and female, (2) have worked in a full-time position for at least one year (employment does not have to be consecutive within the same organization), (3) must be categorized as either an Executive/Senior Level Officials and Manager, First/Mid-Level Officials and Managers, or Professional employee in accordance with the U.S. Equal Employment Commission’s description of job categories and (4) must have submitted a résumé, and participated in an interview process (phone, in person, or both) for employment within the last five years.
Female participants identified as either cisgender or transgender if they self-identify as female, as it is the intent of this proposed study to explore the experiences of all Black women, regardless of their gender assignment at birth. Full-time and salaried were selected as criteria because they align with criteria of corporate or administrative positions.

The length of employment was selected to be at least one year because of the possibility of reviewing information about their experiences in their current position. In addition, one year was selected because research suggests that it takes over 90% of people at least a year to be their authentic selves at work (Boute, 2016). The U.S. Equal Employment Commission’s description of job categories was selected as a method for determining the criteria for professional. By utilizing this criteria, participants were either currently in a management position or in a position that requires a bachelor or graduate degree (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission). To determine participation eligibility, potential participants completed a pilot survey.

**Sampling Strategies**

The sampling strategy that was utilized for this study is purposeful, criterion-based, chain sampling (also called snowball sampling). Chain sampling occurs when the researcher selects the initial information rich potential participant, and then asks for additional potential participants from people they may know that also meet the criteria (Creswell, 2012). The researcher established an initial set of potential respondents by utilizing referrals from personal networks and contacting Black professional organizations for referrals. Potential participants were asked to complete a brief survey to determine study eligibility and collect demographic information prior to the study. The survey is included in the Appendix.

**Sample Size.** Selecting a sample size for a basic interpretive study is as much of an art as it is a science. The literature provides some guidelines for sample size selection. The minimum
sample size should be selected “based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon given the purpose of the study” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 314). From this minimum sample size, the researcher added additional cases until a point of saturation or redundancy is reached. This occurs when no new information is gleaned from adding additional cases. It is recommended that data collection occur simultaneously with data analysis to recognize when this point has been reached (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Sample sizes in qualitative studies vary widely. Creswell (2012) contends that sample size should depend on the research design of the study. Another study found that the number of samples to saturation for qualitative critical research PhD dissertations ranged from 21-42. However, in this study only six of critical research dissertations were examined to determine the range. In addition, it was found that many researchers increased the number of participants beyond the point of saturation to increase the credibility of their data and to feel more confident in the examination of their data (Mason, 2010). According to Patton (1990) there are no rules for determining a sample size in qualitative research. Considering this information, participants were utilizing the previously mentioned sampling strategies and the researcher request that each participant thereafter identify two to three other information-rich participants. The researcher also continued to identify first point of contact participants through personal networks, posts on social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram), and by emailing Black professional organizations. Data collection continued until saturation was reached. Reaching saturation means that the research is no longer obtaining new information from the interview responses; the responses have become redundant among participants. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher sought out and interviewed Black female participants until no new information was garnered from their efforts. Saturation was reached at ten participants.
Data Collection

This study utilized participant interviews and content review of résumés as the data collection methods. Utilizing multiple forms of data collection is a form of triangulation and advances the trustworthiness of the study.

Interviewing

The study employed semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a mix of more or less structured questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Prior to the interview, an interview protocol was developed that included a set of loosely structured questions and a set of themes and ideas to be explored. Utilizing a semi-structured interview allowed for greater flexibility in exploring respondent answers and probing more deeply on ideas of interest that come up during the interview. This interview protocol was developed based on the following overarching research questions:

1. How do Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment?
2. How do Black women interpret and negotiate any beneficial and/or adverse outcomes of shifting?
3. How do Black women perceive their identity in terms of their experiences with shifting?

The interview protocol is included in the Appendix of the final report.

Consideration was given to crafting the interview protocol based on the philosophical orientation of the study. The critical nature of the selected theoretical frameworks of CHRD, Black feminism and intersectionality guided questioning to uncover modes of oppression based on covert and overt gendered discrimination in the workplace. Roulston (2010) proposed a topology of interview quality based on the research perspective of the researcher as well as further noted the transformative conception as aligning with the critical perspective. The
transformative conception assumes that the interviewer aims to advance social justice and critically challenge the understandings of the interviewee through the research process. This conception incorporates two strands: the therapeutic strand that focuses on healing while the critical strand that focuses on transformative dialogue. While the goal of this research project was to explore and more deeply understand the experiences of the participants, it would be naïve to believe that the research process itself did not cause some levels of transformation for both the participants and the researcher. As the participants verbalized their experiences with shifting, it may have caused a change in behavior in the future. As a result of their participation, they could increase or decrease their likelihood to shift, and they may become more aware of the societal, institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal motivations to shift.

During this study steps were taken to ensure quality and ethics during the interview process. Roulston (2010) recommends several techniques to ensure quality in the transformative interviewing process. Participants were given assurance of authentic input and full participation in the research process. This was achieved by thorough and complete disclosure of the research process and procedures as well as member-checking. Roulston (2010) also suggests being consciously aware of researcher bias and reflexivity during the research process. During the participant interview the researcher utilized memos to note times when bias arose as prescribed by bracketing and reflexivity best practices.

Interview timing and setting are important considerations in any study. This study was conducted during a time of global uncertainty due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic, face-to-face interviews are not only impractical, but may have been impossible for some potential interview respondents. It is for this reason that the interviews were conducted via the web-conferencing software Zoom. Utilizing Zoom web-conferencing software is in
accordance with the institution’s Policy on Return to Human Subject Research (LSU Office of Research & Economic Development, 2020), Institutional Review Board’s Zoom Best Practices (Cohen, 2020), and Data Security Policy Statement (LSU Information Technology Services, 2009). Video and audio recordings were utilized, and the recordings were saved to Zoom’s cloud storage. Each participant was sent a unique password protected link. All recording and storage settings were disclosed to the respondents prior to the interview. Respondents were given pseudonyms and had the option of opting out of video recording and cloud storage. They were asked to disable their web browsers cookies prior to the interview as a means of additional data security. Zoom-generated transcripts were thoroughly reviewed and cleaned by the researcher for accuracy.

Respondents were encouraged to use a private, quiet place where they felt comfortable to speak for their interview but were allowed to choose their specific location. “Participants who are given a choice about where they will be interviewed may feel more empowered in their interaction with the researcher” (Elwood & Martin, 2000, p. 656). In addition, the respondent’s space may allow for another level of artifact review during the interview. Observations of interview locations “can both generate new information and give the researcher a stronger understanding of issues explicitly discussed in the interview” (Elwood & Martin, 2000, p. 653). Social geographies exist in interview locations that exhibit multiple intersections of spatial and social meaning. “Careful observation and analysis of the people, activities, and interactions that constitute these spaces, of the choices that different participants make about interview sites and of participants’ varying positions, roles, and identities in different sites can illustrate the social geographies of a place” (Elwood & Martin, 2000, p. 649). Examining the interview space during the video interviews allowed for greater analysis as well as an additional layer of triangulation.
**Content Analysis**

As another source of data, this study utilized content analysis. The most recent, unaltered résumé was requested and reviewed from all participants. Job postings for each participant were also reviewed when available. Job posting submission was not required for participation. Content analysis is an important component of this study because résumés as documents contain important knowledge about the social context. They are one way that the participants make sense of the world. “They draw upon and conform to various genres, in terms of style, structure and language. They employ visual signs, literary devices and other symbols to present and display meaning.” (Flick, 2014, p. 371). It was important when analyzing these documents to be concerned with the document’s intended meaning, the intended and unintended audiences, and the received meaning. Résumé analysis is concerned with the document’s language and form, its purpose and function, and its relationship with other observable aspects of the participants’ social context (Flick, 2014). The use of résumés and job postings as data allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants’ methods and motives behind altering self-presentation.

The content analysis was conducted in a four-step process (Bengtsson, 2016).

1. **Decontextualization** - The researcher familiarized themselves with the data by reading and reviewing the data holistically. The entirety of the text was reviewed. After the researcher had a sense of the documents, the researcher determined smaller aspects of the text such as phrases or sentences that are related to Black female experiences with shifting. Each of these aspects of the text was labeled with a code. A list of codes was generated.

2. **Recontextualization** - The researcher re-read the final text alongside list of codes. Any noncoded text was reevaluated to determine if it should be included in the analysis.
3. Categorization - the codes were condensed into broad groups based on how they related to the study. These broad groups were further condensed into themes, categories, and subcategories.

4. Compilation - The findings were considered in relation to the findings of the participant interviews. The researcher considered if any distinct or contradictory findings regarding Black women shifting was determined through the review of résumés.

Data Analysis and Management

Although discussed in separate sections, data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data analysis in qualitative research involves (1) sensing themes, (2) constant comparison, (3) recursiveness, (4) inductive and deductive reasoning, and (5) interpretation to generate meaning (Swanson & Holton, 2005).

To sense themes, the researcher was immersed in the data and was open to sense emerging patterns. “A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection.” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 13) In order to discover emerging themes, the data was reviewed and coded (Creswell, 2012; Saldaña, 2009) through an emergent process; this means that new codes emerged as the data analysis phase continued (Creswell, 2012). A key-strategy for coding is constant comparison, where once a unit of meaning is derived from the data, it is compared to all other units and then grouped and categorized.

As suggested by Saldaña (2009) a two cycle coding process was utilized. During the first cycle, a method called theming the data was utilized. Theming is appropriate for almost all qualitative studies. It involves allowing the themes to emerge organically from the data. During theming, the researcher read through each transcript three times and noted any noteworthy
potential themes. In the final iteration, the researcher watched the video recording while reviewing the interview transcript to pick up any visual or audio cues.

Second cycle coding involved fitting categories developed in first level coding together to form a coherent synthesis of the data. Axial coding was used in the second cycle coding. It involved relating categories to subcategories and specifying the subject and dimensions of the category. The researcher utilized Atlas.ti web coding software to associate the themes with associated quotes within the transcripts. The quotations of each theme were reviewed together and then regrouped based on similarity. By utilizing two levels of coding, saturation can be achieved, and thick descriptions of participant experiences emerged.

Recursiveness is addressed when data collection occurs simultaneously with data analysis. It begins with the first interview or observation. The benefits of recursive data analysis include having the ability to narrow or widen the scope of your study in real time, being able to create meaningful metaphors, and being able to increase the breadth of your literature review (Swanson & Holton, 2005).

Qualitative data interpretation requires both inductive and deductive thinking (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) describe the logic of data analysis, where in the beginning, the process is almost exclusively inductive. The researcher examines pieces of data and creates tentative categories. Further along in the process both inductive and deductive thinking was used as some initial categories no longer fit, and others are developed for consideration. In the final stages of data analysis, deductive reasoning was used much more heavily as you look for evidence to substantiate the final set of categories.

Finally, one generates meaning from their findings. It is important to go beyond the data and offer one’s own perspective of what is occurring by “engaging in the creative and
intellectual work of interpretation” (Swanson & Holton, 2005, p. 239). During this stage, the researcher moves into generalizing and theorizing. The researcher took care to make sure claims are supported in the data and provide rich thick description of the support. The researcher took care to adhere to the principles of sensing themes, constant comparison, recursiveness, inductive and deductive reasoning, and generating meaning.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is many times explained as a juxtaposition of its related concepts from quantitative research, validity and reliability. Although these terms are not congruent (there is no expectation of generalizability in qualitative research), they all address the rigor of a study (Creswell, 2012). Trustworthiness or rigor of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that trustworthiness is key to evaluating the worth of a study. They contend that to establish trustworthiness, the researcher must establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability within their methods. Credibility in this study was established using peer debriefing.

Although qualitative studies are not generalizable to larger populations like quantitative studies, qualitative studies should address transferability. Transferability is concerned with providing enough detail of a study such that consumers of the study can then decide if the outcomes of the study are applicable to other situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Transferability was addressed using rich, thick description within the presentation of the data and the findings. Inquiry audits, where a researcher not involved in the research process examines both the process and product of data collection to evaluate for accuracy in procedure as well as support for the findings, were used to establish credibility. Audit trails and triangulation were
used to establish confirmability. Audit trails are detailed records of raw data, data analysis, data synthesis, and instrument development that are used to give a clear description of the path or research. Triangulation involves using multiple sources to increase the understanding of the case being examined (Anderson et al., 2014). To establish triangulation, this study utilized participant interviews and content review of résumés.

Summary

The purpose of this basic interpretive study was to explore how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment, including their perception of identity, and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting. The study employed a basic interpretive research design. These strategies allowed the researcher to reveal the experiences of the Black women in this study without confounding it with their own. The researcher began with an initial sample of Black female professionals and increased the number of participants purposeful, criterion-based, chain sampling until no new information could be gathered through further interview. Participant’s eligibility was determined by a pre-study survey. Ten participants were selected and interviewed for this study. The researcher collected data by conducting semi-structured interviews and content review of résumés for each participant. To ensure a rigorous study, trustworthiness of the study was addressed through peer debriefing, utilizing of rich, thick description within the presentation of the data and the findings, inquiry audits, audit trails and triangulation.
Chapter IV. Findings

The purpose of this basic interpretive study was to explore how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment, including their perception of identity, and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting.

Chapter IV presents the findings that emerged from the analysis of the study’s data. The first section of this chapter provides a profile of each of the participants of the study. Each profile provides basic demographic information as well as some insight to their shifting behaviors. The second section describes the themes that emerged from the data. Each theme is accompanied by relevant direct quotes from the participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings of the study.

Participant Profiles

Ten women participated in this study. The participants resided in different locations throughout the United States. All the participants identified as Black females and held professional level positions within a wide variety of fields. Four of the participants were in the 25 to 34-year age range; four were 35 to 44 years old. One participant was between 18 to 24 years old and one participant was between 44 to 55 years old. All participants held at least a bachelor’s degree. Four of the participants are married, while the remaining six participants are not and have never been married.

All the participants were very forthcoming about how they believe Black women are perceived within professional spaces. They all described experiences in which they engaged in various degrees of shifting, but all recognized the pressures to shift that stem from racial and gender bias in society. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym by the researcher. The participant profiles are presented in alphabetical order by pseudonym.
Aniyah

Aniyah is an accountant between the ages of 25 to 34 years old that characterizes herself as a first/mid-level manager. She recently started new employment in September 2021 and works remotely from home. She worked at her previous company for three years and has been employed full-time for a total of five and a half years. Initially she did not admit to engaging in shifting behaviors at all during the job attainment process but as discussions progressed, she admitted that she sometimes unconsciously alters how she speaks based on the audience. She identifies as a straight Black female and is now married.

Annette

Annette works in a clinical toxicology field as a chemist. She runs LCMS instrumentation and although she's only been at her current employer for few months, she has been employed in the field for 15 years. She identifies as a Black heterosexual cisgender female. She's between the ages of 35 and 44 years old and her current position is at the first/mid-level manager level. With having a position in the science field, Annette recognizes the compounding issues that arise that from being a Black woman in a STEM field. However, she has admitted to participating in more shifting behaviors earlier in her career than she does now. She has never been married.

Ashleigh

Ashleigh is an auditor with a government agency. She is new at her current position but has spent 12 years in the workforce working full-time. She no longer feels pressured to shift but has in the past by making sure she had straight hair for interviews. She was not concerned about playing down her race during this most recent round of interviews for her current position. She identifies as a married, heterosexual Black female between 35 to 44 years old.
Celeste

Celeste identifies as a first/mid-level manager who is between the ages of 25 to 34 years old. She works in university administration as a staff member at a large Research 1 institution. She has been in her current role for one year but in the workforce for a total of six years. She is the only woman of color on her office leadership team and believes that most of her shifting behavior is unintentional. She noted that earlier in her career she was more concerned about her identity as a female but as she has progressed, she has grown to become more aware of the intersection of race and gender and workplace. She identifies as a never married, heterosexual Black female.

Dimitria

Dimitria identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual, married female who is between the ages of 45 and 55 years old. She is employed full time as an attorney but is currently on medical leave. She was very forthcoming with her opinions on racial and gender dynamics and workforce and her experiences with shifting throughout her career. One major experience that she played down during their job attainment process was how she raised her nephew.

Joanne

Joanne has worked in the legal field for one year with her current employer and within the field for a total of five years. She admitted to shifting to appear more desirable for positions throughout the job attainment process. She identifies as a bisexual, never-married, Black female who is between the ages of 18 to 24 years old.

Kelly

Kelly is an audiologist between the ages of 35 to 44 years old. She has worked for a government agency for three years but has worked full time in her field for 15 years. Her field is
90% women, but she is one of only two African American women at her workplace. She admits to engaging in shifting behavior throughout the job attainment process in various ways. She identifies as a married Black female.

**Latasia**

Latasia works in facilities management for a large athletic department. She categorizes her position as first/mid-level manager. She's been employed at her current employer for one year but has worked the total of five years full-time. She is between the ages of 25 to 34 years old and has never been married. She's the only African American female in her office and one of only three women in her entire department. She categorizes her field as male dominated. She recognizes that there is pressure to shift but is very resistant due to her strong positive connection with her Black female identity. Her main concern is not appearing to be too angry or unapproachable during the job attainment process.

**Pauline**

Pauline works in the non-profit field. She is between the ages of 25 to 34-year-old years old and is currently in the process of looking for employment. She spent a total of seven years in the full-time workforce within her field. She admitted to shifting by hiding information including her picture and name on her LinkedIn profile and engaged in other shifting activities throughout the job attainment process. She identifies as a heterosexual Black female. She also identifies as never having been married.

**Ronisha**

Ronisha has been an attorney at her current law firm for six years. She identifies as a heterosexual female between the ages of 35 to 44 years old who has never been married. She is the only Black and female attorney in her office. She stated that she currently does not actively
engage in shifting behaviors but has admitted to changing her voice and straightening her hair in the past. She recognizes the challenges of being a Black woman professional but is adamant about not personally working for a female manager.

Presentation of Findings

This section examines and presents common themes and subthemes that emerged from the interviews during analysis. Each theme and related subthemes are supported with direct quotations from the participants’ narratives. The themes discussed are: (a) perceptions of Black women in professional spaces, (b) methods of shifting, (c) motivations for shifting, (d) signals of safety and danger, (e) burden of shifting, and (f) the shift from shifting.

Perceptions of Black Women in Professional Spaces

Throughout the study the participants noted several ways they believed Black women were perceived in professional spaces. While most participants depicted negative descriptors such as angry, emotional, incapable of being leaders, less capable, and less committed, some participants did note some positive perceptions of Black women in the workplace. The respondents noted perceptions that related to their racial identity, gender identity, or gendered racial identity.

Too Emotional. A pervasive theme among the participants is that Black women are emotional and irrational. While the participants noted that this belief was associated with all women in general, they noted that this belief was intensified for Black women. Ronisha noted, “sometimes we're perceived as controlling, emotional. Very emotional.” Similarly, Kelly stated, “I think they still consider women as being very emotional beings even though men usually are, the more, in my opinion, are the more emotional ones.”
Several participants linked this perception of being too emotional to not being perceived as being able to lead. Pauline notes, “I don't think [Black women are] trusted to actually lead… kind of be the thought leader. And sometimes, just like the leaders as well. When it comes to big decision making, I really don't see where Black people are trusted.”

Celeste expands on the perception that a Black woman's assertiveness and decisiveness may automatically be perceived as aggression. That perceived aggression may prevent Black women from being considered as leaders within their organizations. She comments on how similar actions made by men would not be interpreted the same way:

I think some of the perception is the ability to execute decisions when it may be emotionally charged. Like to stick with the fact versus your emotions. I think also you know the… I don't know how to say it in a professional way, but I think that some people think of us as bitches when we're leaders and I hate to say it in that way, but I think that's what it is. You know we're strong and out in the forefront and able to make decisions and very decisive and clear and aggressive or assertive, if you will. It's taken in a different way than if it was a man, and so I think we are criticized more in the leadership roles on things that they wouldn't traditionally criticize men on. Again, I think it's more about assertiveness is not received the same way and the ability to have emotion, but also make decisions separate from those. I don't think that we are seen as having that ability to do so.

Celeste connects this perception to the lack of Black female leaders in upper-level leadership positions:

In my experience, have seen that there are a lot of Black women that are on the front lines in their entry level positions, mid-management, but when we get to administrators, I feel like I don't see as many, so I don't know if there is an actual perception that we aren't able to lead, but I feel like I don't see a lot of us going for those positions or even in those positions.

The belief that women, especially Black women, are too emotional is so pervasive one of the participants of this study actively refuses to work for a female manager. Ronisha quips, “I do not work for females… bosses… at all. So, I only prefer to work for males.” She continues,
“You know just certain aspects of us as being women… emotional. I was like I can't deal with another me, and I can't deal with another my mom. So, I was like nope, male it is.”

**Less capable.** Another common theme among the participants was that Black women are perceived as not as capable as their male or non-Black counterparts. Ashleigh put it simply. She noted that Black women in professional spaces are not seen as “knowledgeable or dedicated, committed, and not a team player.”

Dimitria connects this perception of not being capable to a possible reason why Black women’s input is not welcomed or accepted in many spaces. “My sense is not only are they viewed as less capable, they're not necessarily welcome. Their ideas aren't welcome and they're just not welcome in the space.”

**Unprofessional.** Joanne expressed frustration regarding the perception that Black people are perceived as generally unprofessional:

Many times, we’re seen as being unprofessional. We're stigmatized saying they were working on CP time, colored people time. We’re late to everything. You know, we don't do things in a professional manner. It's so many different things, And that's just extremely inaccurate. Because I know, several business owners. I know, several Black people in professional programs who are professional and do an amazing job. And it's just like, why are you assuming that, you know, I’m not professional just because of the color of my skin.

**Less credible.** Some participants noted that Black women were perceived as being less credible than their counterparts. Annette noted that she is perceived as not being as experienced as she is. She notes:

I have 15 years of experience. The biggest thing that I run into I think is people not… I mean, you see my résumé, like I’m telling you this, and still not like connecting that or respecting like my background.” She continues, “I think that they're just are like cultural differences that I’ve run into that way where I think that they just automatically look at me, as someone who does not have the experience that I have.

Kelly also shared experiences with being perceived as less credible in the medical field:
Before doing a procedure, I explain like what I'm doing. What it's measuring, like what, like really explaining everything you're doing and why you're doing it. Sometimes I've seen when I've shadowed other people, they would just did say we're doing this, and there will be no question about it. I have to say I'm doing this, because. This is what I'm looking for. This is what we're checking here. So other people can just kind of go ahead and do what they're doing or say this is what I recommend. I explain why I'm doing this, why I'm doing that, what this is looking for, what this test shows.

She continued:

Sometimes when White men, younger White men even go in and say whatever they have to say. [The patient will] take it, they'll take it on. I remember having, in my field I've had precept students as well. So, I've had situations where I am the actual supervisor and I will be with the student, the third-year student, and they want to hear it from him even though I am the actual authority. I am the supervisor. So, it just points back to that credibility thing. Because people don't question White men as much as they question Black women. They're not going to question, he's automatic[ly] the authority. That, that's just known basically in society.

**Less committed.** As one of the participants that has experienced providing care for a child while being in the workforce, Dimitria mentioned the perception that women are less committed because of their familial care responsibilities. She says that women are perceived to be, “not as serious. You know they might get pregnant and leave. They're going to follow their husband somewhere if they're if they're married. You know their commitment and their capabilities are question.” She goes on to explain her experiences with not disclosing her childcare responsibilities in interviews:

I just didn't want in my interviews for people to think that one, I wasn't committed to my job. That I was going to be the type of person who had emergencies and this that and the other. Had to run off all the time, you know.

She further relents about how men are held to different standards:

So, I’m a woman with children. I didn't want to seem like I was less committed. Where... I mean I...I knew, you know, the... the Black guys, I mean the White guys and you know the men at the office would leave anytime during the day and clearly, they were going to a meeting.

She gestured air quotes when stating *going to a meeting.* She continued:
They weren't going to pick up their kids… maybe they weren't going to pick up their kids. Maybe they would walk up the block to have a drink (laughter). Um, but I knew that the assumptions about what I was going to be doing, um, was that I, it was some crisis with my you know picking up kids from school and so on.

Coming from Broken Families. Another stereotype that emerged from the study is that Black families are broken. One participant, Dimitria told of her rationale for why she was careful not to disclose that she was taking care of her nephew during the job search process:

[H]e was my nephew. He wasn't my child and I did not want in an interview of any kind for my interviewers, oh how do I put it, to think, ‘Oh, why is she taking her nephew. Is it because you know her brother/sister whatever, insert whatever Black stereotypes there are?’ You know, why is my family not able to take care of my nephew and he's with me. I just didn't want to get into that, and I didn't want to have, take the chance that my interviewers were going to be thinking about that. And then it was going to be like, ‘Oh yes, and, and that's right… she's Black?’ And you know, let's not talk about that. Let's not have that interfering with the thought process.

She continued:

I just didn't want any stereotypes, no potential negative implications to bubble up about why my family wasn't taking care of my nephew or my sister or my brother wasn't taking care of my nephew and why I had to do it, and what that said about me as a Black person, as we all know about those Black people.

Positive perceptions. Some participants did note positive perceptions of Black women in the workplace. These perceptions were stated as their own opinions regarding Black women in the workplace. Latasia mentioned how she loved her identity as a Black woman. Pauline perceived Black women as effective leaders. Aniyah noted when asked of the perception of Black women, “I would definitely say super women.” She said that there was a perception of Black women as powerful. She continued:

We pretty much do a lot. We can attain further education and you know, degrees beyond what's necessary. As well as maintain our household, maintain our husbands or significant others, maintain the kids, all of the above. So, I would say super women, because we can get it done on the job, as well as in life and at home, as well as maintaining friendships.
Similarly, Latasia felt that, “Black women are the backbone to everything of everything is country stands on.” She further stated, “We can be women and we can have lives and we can have husbands and we can have children, but we can also be great at our job.”

Ronisha recounted a time when she believes her Black womanhood contributed to the success of her organization. This was due to her ability to relate to a Black female client more easily:

I was at work and one of my colleague said, ‘Hey I need your help talking to one of my clients’. And I’m like okay. So, I go in a room and it's a Black girl. And you know, he was like, ‘cause she’s just not getting it’. And so, I explained. I took what he was trying to tell her and explained to her in my own in my language, and she was like ‘Okay, I get it now’. And so, I was like. Oh, my God, so the whole time I was thinking in the past I was like who I was wasn't great enough, but honestly who I was is a benefit. Yes, especially in my organization, because they can't… they don't know our language. You know, say we all speak English, but as a Black, as a Black female, as a Black person, we have a different language. From the way we walk, the way we talk, the way we explain things. So that's when I realized how huge the benefit was.

Because of the barriers to job attainment, Ashleigh believes that “if they're Black and they're present, they are that much smarter, that much more qualified.” This could be interpreted as those who are present in these spaces had to be exceptional to even gain access to these spaces in the first place.

**Methods of Shifting**

The next theme that emerged from the data were various methods of shifting. The participants in this study identified several ways they either actively shifted or recognized a method of shifting for others during the job attainment process. Two participants in the study notably shifted by altering or omitting their names. Pauline disclosed that she commonly only used first initial and last name on her résumé to not disclose her race or gender. Dimitria
commonly goes by a shortened version of her name that is racially ambiguous. She believed that her name would reveal that she was a Black woman. She said:

I had to play that down and then I wanted to be as vanilla as possible, so that no one would find a reason to not hire me. Of course, I show up and I’m Black, so I mean like I don’t know (laughter), like what it what am I trying to prove?

While most participants did not actually change their name, most were aware of the effect that having an Afrocentric name could have on the job attainment process. Aniyah commented that her name “screams Black female” but chose not to alter her name during the job attainment processes. She; however, does realize the potential consequences of having a Black name:

[My name] is definitely something that shows. You never know who’s on the other side reading the résumé, so you never know if they have any hesitancy or any reservations about, you know, accepting the résumé to go to the next level. But that’s I know a barrier for me. I wouldn't change my name at all. Ugh, but you know just one of the things that comes with being a Black female.

Some participants saw having a racially ambiguous name as a benefit or a privilege. Kelly said:

I don't look like my name. So that's one thing I definitely use. I tried to hold off until as long as I can, or make sure they won't see me as long as I can until I'm all the way at the end.

Annette felt that if she did have a name that could identify her as a Black woman, she would consider changing it:

I think my name is like a flip of a coin. Annette, you know, like so I have not had to think about that. But I think if I did have a name that would signify like race and I don't know. If, I mean, if I was doing a job hunt, and I was having trouble that definitely, I would be open to changing it because I know that's a possibility.

In addition to name, some participants changed how they spoke. Some participants, such as Joanne, avoided using African American Vernacular English. She said, “to code switch my voice in every aspect, especially when I go into interviews, I definitely have to change my voice.”
She continued:

We tend to talk in slang with our African American Vernacular English. And you know a lot of people see, see that as being a professional. Me personally, I don't see it as being unprofessional. I feel that if you're talking the way that you learn how to talk.

Ronisha shifted by attempting to remove vocal indications of her heavily Black populated geographic region. She said, “I tried to hide my [city] accent as much as I could.”

There were also several aspects of appearance that participants mentioned as ways to shift. Several participants mentioned straightening their hair or wearing wigs to appear to have straight hair during the job attainment process. Joanne wears wigs and weaves to interviews. She stated, “I have to change my hair. I am afraid to go to an interview with my natural hair, because I feel like they'll believe that my hair is unprofessional.” Similarly, Ronisha changed her hair for a job interview. “My first real job when I went on an interview, I changed my hair. So, I added hair in my hair, made sure it was straight. You know straight, straight bob.”

Annette, who admitted to straightening her hair in the past for interviews now wears it natural. She did, however, continue to express concerns about her hair being too big for those settings so she is careful to make sure she has “the front like as flat as possible.”

Dimitria admitted to straightening her hair earlier in her career. She no longer straightens her hair for interviews and wears it natural. Her main concern is no longer her hair texture, but the added age bias she faces due to her gray hair. She quipped, “A couple of years ago, my hair really started going grey. And I also… I had already decided that wasn't gonna dye it. So I’m like great. Now I’m a Black woman and I’m old (laughter) with not straight hair.”

Two participants mentioned their places of education as a method of shifting. Kelly noted that she does not include her school on her résumé because, “It's in Louisiana so, they're going to
know, kind of basically, what schools are what. So, my school was a predominantly African American school. So, if you know that, you know what I am immediately.” Conversely, Dimitria, a graduate of Harvard Law, highlights her school as a way to off-set any negative biases about her race or gender:

Once they figure out you’re Black, or you know, once they figured out you’re not White, the only thing they really want to know is, where did you go to law school. That's only thing they want to know, or that's at least the first thing they want to know. [...] That's what they want to know because they assume you went to some 15th tier law school and then they look at it and go, ‘Oh, Harvard. Black chick coming from Harvard. Okay, well, I guess, I should look at her résumé.

Another identifier that was removed by one participant was location. Joanne, removed address from her résumé when she lived in Mobile, Alabama to avoid being identified as Black. She believed that you could, “Google [her city] and you're going to see a whole bunch of Black people. So I would leave [it] off.”

Motivations for Shifting

Another theme uncovered in this study were the varied motivations each participant had for engaging in shifting during a job attainment process.

A Necessary Evil. One prevalent theme among participants as a motivation for shifting is that shifting is a necessary evil. Dimitria mentions discussions she had with other Black women and other women of color regarding the necessity of shifting. She says, “this is what we have to do. This, this is what we have to deal with, and […] we just do it because we don't have any other choice.”

Annette comments that people’s biases are its root cause and that is a brutal, but common part of the Black female experience:

People have biases and I cannot help that. And if I want to be successful, you know, like pay my bills, I need to be able to like play that game. It's not fair but it happens. And I think that how it aligns with my identity as a Black woman. There
is a lot of things that we face, that you know, like is not fair, but we will
persevere. And because, if we wouldn't, we would be broken, there are things at
every corner coming at us and. I mean, although everything listed in this
interview on what we go through just searching for jobs and in our careers is hard.
Like it's something I talk about with people sometimes but it's just something I
know, you know, is just a part of life.

Kelly feels similarly. She states, “until things shift it's a necessary evil.” She notes the
struggles of attempting not to shift. “So, you can say, ‘Oh I’m going to be different’ and
sometimes that will work out, but for the majority of people, it just doesn’t.”

In addition, she also comments on how society perpetuates and upholds the norms that
make shifting necessary for Black women:

I feel like as long as there are particular norms that are available, and as long as
society looks at things a certain way... I mean you're just kind of like fighting
towards... you're just swimming towards a current in a way.

When commenting on why society tends to uphold these norms, she says, “there's a
superiority complex […]. They want to feel like they can stay in charge.”

Conversely, Ashleigh does not believe that shifting is necessary. She noted that now, “in
2021, call me naïve, but I think no.” She did; however, note that in a past position, she does not
believe that she would have been hired without shifting. This belief stemmed from some
comments at her previous place of employment.

I was privy to hearing some of the comments that they had about some of the
other women Black women there. I think looking back, I think, if I had not been
able to shift, think they probably wouldn't have been interested in me.

Avoiding Stereotypes. Another common motivation for shifting was to avoid stereotypes
or negative perceptions of Black women.

The Angry Black Woman. The most widely mentioned stereotype among the participants
was that of the Angry Black Woman. Some participants noted that Black women are perceived
as being angry, having an attitude, and complaining all the time. Joanne noted, “We're, seen as
kind of standoffish. A little stuck up. [...] Like we're always angry.” Ashleigh said plainly, “I went out of my way to not have the ABW label, Angry Black Woman.” Annette mentioned shifting by appearing more chipper in the job attainment process than she would normally. She noted that this was due to more than the normal interview pressures; she was actively trying not to play into the stereotype by appearing angry or upset. Celeste discusses her experiences with changing her voice, “I have to just do a little bit of code-switching just dress it up a little bit, so it doesn't come off, as I said, like assertive or aggressive.”

Dimitria shares a similar sentiment. She notes, “There's a perception that Black women are too everything. They're too loud. They're too angry. They're too ungrateful.”

She goes on to describe how these perceptions may create an expectation for Black women to exist in the background of their workplaces and be grateful for the mere fact that they are present. She believes that the existence of Black women in professional spaces causes frustration, especially in instances when they speak out:

Just in addition to why are you here, maybe I’ll tolerate you. Not only do, not only should you sit in the corner and be happy and shut up and you just… you shouldn't make waves. And oh my God, why are you making waves? In the workplaces I’ve been in, it's been [perceived] that Black women are less competent and they're always complaining. They're not grateful to just be somewhere in the building or be somewhere in the office or be somewhere with the job.

She notes that when others speak out, their criticisms are not perceived the same as those of Black women. However well intentioned, when Black women speak out, they are perceived as angry:

It's not that other people don't complain. It's just that Black women's complaints are seen as making them ungrateful […] And then their complaints are interpreted as being angry. Whether they're just saying, could we turn the, you know, the air conditioning down or whether they're saying someone said something really inappropriate to me.
Latasia mentions similar experiences with being perceived as complaining too much:

Just because I have an issue doesn't mean I’m complaining where I’m upset. It’s that I’m bringing you an issue. And it's not just an issue particularly to a female in the workplace, it could be an issue for everybody. But because it's coming from my mouth [rather than] coming from my male counterpart, it's something different. That we're seen different and taken not as serious.

Kelly’s response added the notion of appearing more submissive to ward off the Angry Black Woman stereotype, even when interacting with other Black people. She says:

[A]nd that's when I kind of lay on the submissive role. Oh, little ole [me] role. So as long as I do that… I don't like that I have to do that, I wish I could go in and be like “Oh I’m strong. I can do things and I can be a leader”, but I know it's going to be perceived as like, the strong Black woman or the aggressive Black woman trope. So, I wish I can come, can show up in those spaces like that, but I know, I probably cannot. And to be honest, like one of my interviews that I had before this, the supervisor was African American, but I still feel like I couldn't… just because of societal norms. I couldn't show up as aggressive leader, to a Black woman either.

**Being Sexualized.** Another stereotype of Black women that the participants were hyper aware of is that Black women are hyper-sexual (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Several participants noted instances of dressing or considering dressing modestly to hide aspects of their body during an interview to avoid being sexualized. Latisha noted that she usually questions:

Do you have on too much makeup like, why do you dress so modestly, because this us Black women we look curvy like. What do you have on that day? Like just certain things you have to be so conscious and mindful to.

Celeste adds, “I’m not super curvy but I got curves. I’m not straight up and down. And so [I’m] thinking about, ‘Oh, I need to put on a cardigan or a blazer to hide this’ or thinking about the dress.”

Joanne experienced a few instances of oversexualization during the job attainment process that caused her to subsequently shift. The first occurred during networking events:

I’ve been to a couple of networking events that I’ve gone to [where I] was made uncomfortable. And it was not because of me meeting new people is more so that
I’ve had a few males actually approach me inappropriately. So, the event was mainly to network for like different jobs and everything, but I had different males approach me trying to just have sex. I’m like this is very inappropriate and it made me uncomfortable. So, I was like yeah, it's time for me to go. So, I actually ended up leaving both events.

She subsequently avoids networking events or chooses to dress very modestly, which is not her normal style of dress. Her second experience as during the interview phase. She discusses why she is hyper-aware of how she dresses during interviews:

It's to the point where I don't even wear a pencil skirts to interviews. I wear pants and a blazer or a long sleeve shirt. Because I tried to cover up my assets because I don't want that to be like the focal point. Because I’ve noticed that even with me with me wearing skirts, they won't pay attention to my mouth and what the word is coming out of my mouth. They’ll look more towards my legs, things of that nature. I’m like okay, let me just switch this up. Because I want you to focus on what I’m saying not what you see and also with the way I talk. Definitely have to change that up.

**Comfort of Others.** There were several themes that emerged as motivations for shifting outside of avoiding stereotypes. One of these themes was shifting to ensure the comfort of others. Participants in the study felt that aspects of their Black womanhood were troublesome enough, that they should shift. While shifting early in her career, Latasia questioned, “So how do I make these White men feel comfortable? How do I make these White men feel like I can be a part of their team?”

One participant noted how she makes people in the job search process feel comfortable by making a little joke to help them remember how to pronounce her name. Aniyah says:

I also give a kind of a help to how to pronounce it, [redacted joke to pronounce her name], so I think that helps. And it's a little corny joke. [...] I feel like it makes the other person kind of chuckle and laugh, but it also helps them remember how to pronounce my name.

Pauline and Kelly commented how aspects of their existence and Black womanhood are the root cause of the discomfort of others. Pauline noted:
I will make people uncomfortable because sometimes I feel like our very existence challenges the realities of other people, because their experiences are totally different. Um, and they're because they're experiences totally different their beliefs are totally different.

Similarly, Kelly feels as if:

You can't really, fully sit in your Black identity; you have to wear some type of mask to make people feel comfortable. Like in… I feel like it's been that way since the beginning of the time. We're always trying to make everyone else comfortable for having us around.

**Being Threatening.** Beyond feeling uncomfortable, participants felt that they needed to shift to avoid appearing as a threat to others. When describing her experiences with pretending to like country music when asked on job interviews, Latasia noted, “they already felt that I was sort of a threat, because I was Black, so I had to downplay it to make it seem like I was approachable and wasn't dangerous to them.” Annette described speaking in a higher pitch than her natural voice to appear “chipper and happy and as non-threatening as possible.”

Celeste described her experience about not gaining access to spaces where she could potentially expand her personal social network which could ultimately help her in the job attainment process. She said, “I think it's the perceived threat of people seeing and getting to know who I am and what I can offer. […] I see some of my peers getting additional access that I don't.”

Latasia connects being perceived as threatening to her Blackness:

I’ve been told, many times that I have resting b-word face, right. So, you subconsciously try not to look so threaten[ing] or you are… people are automatically intimidated by you, because of whatever perception or experience they've had what other Black people. They now projected that on you. Where they don't even know where you're from your background is and not comprehending or understanding that all Black people aren't the same.

**Safety and Protection.** Some participants in the study alluded to shifting being a mechanism of protection or safety. Annette stated that for her, shifting is “a layer of protection.”
She says of being quiet and reserved during the job attainment process, “I’m protecting myself, you know so yeah it can be very difficult.” She continues:

I think I protect myself from not knowing what someone will say or ask that is like out of pocket and putting myself in a position of not knowing, especially I mean, in an interview. You’re nervous enough trying to think about what you need to say, you know, just pulling from your experience and answering the questions hopefully in the right way to you know get the position that you want. And possibly if you show your full self like something like a curveball [will be] thrown at you. But it’s like okay, I was only here to answer questions about my experience and here we are now where you just said something that I just have to blink, smile and hope that we can move past.

Joanne believes similarly. She stated that she shifts because:

We’re misunderstood as being negative [people]. […]. And you know we never want to communicate with people in professional settings. When in reality it’s more so that we’re trying to protect ourselves and our integrity to ensure that, in this professional job that I’m in, I don't lose my job or get penalized for saying something that can be misconstrued.

Pauline spoke about how ensuring that organizations are safe for Black women throughout the job attainment process and beyond is a benefit to all that currently or potentially work there. “Design [an] organization that is safe for Black women and that organization is going to automatically be safe for everyone and that's kind of how I look at it”, she said.

**Minimize Cross Cultural Differences.** Some participants expressed that their motivation to shift was to minimize cross-cultural difference. This most often appeared when making small talk during the job attainment process regarding leisure activities. Celeste noted that these attempts were made to find commonalities where there may otherwise not be any:

I know we don't have a lot of the same interest or commonality, so I try to find something that pulls them back into the conversation versus like my default. Like yeah, I like rap, or I like R&B. I try and find something to connect with them, so we can rally around it. I think, for example, … they asked me what was my favorite TV show, and I was like The Office was one of my favorite shows or Parks and Rec because I figured they had seen it versus you know, Living Single or Girlfriends like the shows that I actually like.
After stating that she is usually the only Black woman in the room, Aniyah discusses the struggle of trying to find something to talk about. “I have to, you know, still find that connection, so we can at least have something to talk about, you know.” She continued:

I can find something to relate to if it's, something that we would like to watch… if it’s a sport or what have you. But you know we can't talk about certain TV shows that we like or certain artists are songs that we like that would, you know, make me feel super comfortable.

Dimitria noted that she avoids networking events because she no longer wishes to shift due to cross cultural differences. She said:

They're talking about whatever it is they're talking about that's very mainstream, and it just doesn't apply to your life. So, it's it just gets really difficult, especially like me in particular. I’m not paying attention to whatever is the big thing in the mainstream world. I’m paying attention to what I’m doing so I feel like I don't have anything to talk about.

**Signals of Safety and Danger**

The participants in the study disclosed what signals they used to determine whether they should shift, or to what degree they should shift. Several participants said they felt less of a need to shift if the organization they were attempting to gain employment with was more diverse.

Ashleigh evaluates organizational safety by looking at:

…how many different people are present. I remember one time, I went on the interview, and it was a panel interview, and it was five White men and one White woman and everyone, this is just my assessment, I have no clue, everyone looks to be older than 50 years old. And at the time, I was under 30 and I’m a young Black woman. So it was, it made me wonder is this a place, that they will value my contributions that they will use my strengths in a way that's beneficial to me.

Dimitria told of her process of looking for jobs in the San Francisco Bay Area, where many of the open positions are with tech firms:

And you're not going to find a lot of Black women in tech firms. You're not going to find a lot of Black women in the legal department of, you know, software companies, startups whatever. And if you have a startup you're probably applying for one of two if, if not the only you know, the first and only position in their legal
department. And so I’m looking at those thinking eh, you know, do I want to be the sole lawyer. Which makes me, the only Black lawyer, the only female lawyer the only Black woman lawyer? Is anybody even going to hire me walking in looking like this? And even if I were to get hired, I’m looking at, because it's usually very easy to go online with a small company and see who the employees are. And they think they're very diverse but they're very diverse because they have White men, some White women, maybe an Asian American person two or three and a few Indian people. That's their diversity.

Ronisha told of an instance when she believes that her interviewer alluded to her not getting the job because the organization was not open to diversity. She said:

I got this job I interviewed to be a clerk. And the woman straight up told me… [...] she said, I want to take you for a walk so you can see everyone in the office. So she took me for a walk and I did not see no one who looks like me. And she straight up told me, she said with most jobs is not about how well you interview it's about whether or not you're going to fit in. And promise you on everything and that, she was basically letting me know that I wouldn’t fit in, because there was nobody there that looked like me.

Dimitria, Pauline, Joanne and Aniyah utilized company websites to determine the diversity of potential employers prior to the interview phase of the job attainment process.

Celeste utilized the organization’s website and determined her strategy for shifting during the phone interview. She noted:

I looked at the website and the website… I was like oh snap, this team is primarily Black. There's a lot of women and I got excited and I felt like okay like this is an environment where I might, you know, really fit in.

Later during the Zoom interviews, she realized that the website has not been updated for quite a while and readjusted her shifting strategy.

I started going through the interview process I realized I didn't see any of those faces that were on the website. And I’m like wait a minute, let me back it up a little bit because I don't know. So the first one, I was like really excited and going into it. But then, when I got to meet some of the team members, I was like there's not one person of color on this call and I thought everybody in this office was Black. So, you know, I think that made me switch in the moment to kind of change my answers to tailor to them the second time. I was like OK, they enjoy me but I gotta make sure they really want me and I fit into this environment for the second one. So, I definitely adjusted as I went for that one.
Annette, Pauline and Joanne discussed reviewing company review sites. Joanne noted; however, “sometimes it's kind of hard to navigate that because you know, most people aren't going to say out loud that oh, this company they don't like Black people. Like if you're Black avoid the job at all costs.” Pauline however experienced an instance where she shifted during a job interview, was offered the position, but ultimately declined because she “read the [company] reviews and it said like not safe for Black women. It boldly says that.”

Utilizing body language or other cues from the interviewers was also mentioned as a way to determine if or to what intensity to shift. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many interviews that may have been in person were held via web-conference. Celeste noted that this removed the ability to pick up some of these signals.

With a zoom interview or the zoom process that I went through this past time… not being able to physically come to the space I think was something that I now know I really value. Because I think there's a lot of things that are unsaid when you're able to look around and really see the unspoken things that are in the room. Not having that opportunity, I think, really hurt me in the long run, because I wasn't able to see the things that I would just naturally pick on, pick up on in an actual in person experience.

**Burden of Shifting**

Several of the participants that participated in shifting mentioned ways they were personally burdened by the pressure to shift or their shifting behavior.

**Authenticity.** Several participants mentioned the psychological toll that of not being able to be authentic. Dimitria said, “it's just really hard not to be able to be yourself.” She later goes on to say:

You're always having to worry in the back of your head about how not to be who you are because, at least for me, I assume that who I am is not what they want. And that probably has, as you know, an unconscious impact. If you walk into a room and you, you have to, assume that you're not what they want.

Joanne expressed frustration that she was not able to be authentic and still be accepted:
I should be able to be my authentic self in any, I mean, regardless of how I talk I am a professional person. So I feel like regardless of how I talk and things of that nature, That should be... that shouldn't even matter in a sense. What really should matter is, you know, am I capable of doing the job? Am I qualified for the job? You know how I talk, things of that nature, that shouldn't really matter.

Pauline told of an experience when working with recruiter. She had removed most racial and gender identifiers from her LinkedIn page. The recruiter noted that companies wanted to see real people, they wanted authenticity. However, she still felt like she needed to shift for successful job attainment. She said of the experience, “I feel like you kind of fall into this character that you can't get out of. […] I conformed in the interview.”

**Confidence.** Participants that participated in shifting also mentioned feeling the need to temper their confidence. Kelly noted some of the consequences of appearing too confident:

Because if I come off being too… braggy about my accomplishments or if I come off, as saying that I'm a strong… I don't know. In my, in my experience, the times that I have like, come off being strong where I've questioned things even during the interview process it has not… and they’ve detected kind of my race, it doesn't go off as well.

Dimitria explained instances where she felt her confidence during the job attainment process costed her the positions:

It was a senior management position and that would have been running the legal department and I was probably going to get that job if I hadn't withdrawn a name for various reasons. But at the end of the interview, I asked why wouldn't you hire me? You know that was my first question, I was like when do I start? (laughter) I’m like this, this job is mine and I, I don't know what ya’ll talking about. Why are we even here? I said yeah, so why wouldn't you have me right now. And there was much stuttering and stammering. And I was like yeah you have no reason other than the fact that you have to interview, the other people right and that was the answer. That turned a couple people off. Really, they were really, really offended by it. And I could tell who they were immediately.

In the second experience, Dimitria asked the hiring manager for feedback sometime after the interview:
And she said, you know we asked you at the end of the interview, you know, you summed up, you know, you, you summed up and you said you would be the perfect candidate for that interview, and that struck me as... I can't remember what the word was that she used. But she said no candidate is perfect. And I thought oh that White guy ya’ll hired was perfect, um huh. Yeah, and if he had said he was perfect you'd have been just fine with that. So she was really turned off by the fact this little Black woman would roll up interview in here committee say she were perfect for the position.

As a result of these experiences, Dimitria says, “I have gotten, to the point of being enormously confident in any, in like exuding confidence. But I’ll tell you as a Black woman, that is not a smart thing to do, in an interview.” Of how she chooses to shift now she says, “Now I face I put the face on and then read the room and decide how much confidence I think I can exude or what this particular group of people are going to want from a Black woman candidate versus from a White male candidate?”

**Having to be More.** Some participants mentioned having to do more or be more than their counterparts. They must be more for successful job attainment. Celeste believes that Black women:

…have to work a lot harder than most people. Again, I think it's like that being judged harsher. Um, in some cases, I feel like I find myself at least doing more than my counterparts but getting the same affirmations or compensation or benefits but I’m doing like twelve times more.

Ronisha and Joanne recounted their considerations when compiling job attainment written submissions. Joanna noted that her résumé, “has to be top notch for them to even consider you for a position.” She continued, “it's hard being a Black woman, because I have to work so hard, I have to be the best at everything that I do just to get the opportunity for a position that I’m interested in.” Similarly, Ronisha said:

But I know for sure I made sure I had no grammatical errors on my résumé and stuff. So, in my, in my experience, I always felt that I had to go over and beyond to prove in anything that I submitted. Whether it was a writing sample, a résumé, or recommendations, I felt like I always had to go over and beyond.
Aniyah acknowledged that Black women must be more than their counterparts, but viewed these expectations as a challenge:

[We] have to go a little bit further to, you know… get the same treatment or same experience as others. However, we can do it. We're doing it. And we're going to continue doing it, you know. In my personal life, I always go the extra step. If there's… if I'm in you know, an industry and I need a certification I’m going to get that certification. If I fail two times, for example, in real life I’m going to keep going. I won't give up.

**Self-minimization.** While some participants mentioned exceeding expectations, others mentioned that they needed to minimize themselves or appear small for successful job attainment. Pauline noted, “I feel like have to play small, I have to you know minimize myself, I have to you know, be in this, you know world, um, like I have to conform.”

Kelly adds how in the job attainment process she downplays any leadership qualities or aspirations:

So, I find with my method of being as… small, but talking about what I can do, but saying, oh I'm just here to fill in. And, you know, fill in whatever cracks you need me to fill this comes off as a better approach and they're going to be more open to taking that in, opposed to, oh I'm going to lead and stand beside you. People don't necessarily… people say they want a team player, but they don't necessarily want you to stand beside. They just want you to kind of be what they need you to be just okay. They want you to come on in here and do we need you to do.

**The Shift from Shifting**

While all the participants admitted to shifting to some degree at some point in their career, many of the participants discussed reducing or eliminating shifting as a job attainment strategy. They noted several reasons for their shift from shifting.

**Career Advancement.** Some participants noted that as they advanced further in their careers, they felt more comfortable with not shifting during the job attainment process. Ronisha, who said she hardly ever shifts now said:
In the beginning, you know, I was a newbie. The only thing I felt I had was a JD and a Bar license behind my name. So, I didn't, you know, I wasn't as confident as I am now. So, you know as I've grown in my profession.

Joanne noted that she shifted more out of the need to survive in the beginning of her career, “I honestly really needed a job. But at this point in time, I was starting to realize that my mental health is more important than me just trying to hurry up and find a job to pay bills.”

Kelly discusses her decision to keep her hair natural as being influenced by her position in her career:

What kind of pushed me to go start the locs… well it didn’t push me to start the locs… but to be okay with having them, I feel like I’m finally at a place in my position where, you would have to… like to take somebody instead of me, you would have to… it will be like a really big problem. Like you would really have to explain it because I’ve done all this now, so I don't feel like I have to bend as much.

**Being Comfortable with Who They Are.** Another reason stated by some participants for reducing or resisting shifting during the job attainment process was that they have become more comfortable in their Black female identity. Latasia stated that her decision to wear her hair in natural styles in job interviews was influenced by, “growing up, once again growing into who I am and be an acceptable and more comfortable with who I am inside and just understanding that this is, who I am, and this is going to be.”

Aniyah states that it is her love of being a Black woman that allows her to resist shifting in certain circumstances, “I love being a Black woman [laughter]. I mean.. I feel great about it. You know it’s, who I am. It's my background I’ve never wanted to be anything or anyone else. No, I love it.”

**Being Exhausted.** Some participants noted changing, reducing, or eliminating shifting because it was exhausting or tiring. Annette after mentioning there are ways in which she actively no longer shifts, Annette said:
I think, I mean as society changes and as I get older there's certain things that I’m like this is me, you know, or like, it's a balancing act. Or I guess even how exhausted I am just as a person where it's like, you know, that is not something I’m gonna put energy into, and or at least something that I don't feel like needs to be hidden.

Dimitri mentions ‘a dance’. This refers to how she varies the method or intensity of shifting based on the audience. She says:

I just do more of a dance now. Before it was just completely interview face on, like I said I’m just a White woman up in here. Pretend I’m a White man as a matter of fact. And I’m not I’m not gonna, I’m not going to vary or deviate from the script. And now I’m like, well, the script is done. I’m super awesome and if you don't see that I guess I’ll be staying at my current job or quitting and doing something else. So, I’m more willing to deviate from the script because I’m… I’m tired I’m tired of lying. And but having to do all of that is a double, triple burden. It makes the interview process even more exhausting.

**Work Environment.** Some participants cited that they no longer shift because they refuse to work in an environment that requires them to shift for job attainment. Aniyah said of her refusal to not change her hair from natural styles, “I feel like [my hair] represents me, and if you can't respect me, you know, with who, I am, then you don't deserve me to be on your team or work for your company.” Dimitria said of struggling with the decision to abbreviate her name, “And I feel I feel like if you're going to not want me because I’m Black, then I don't want to work for you.” She goes on to say, “And I’m like well if that's the reason you're not going to hire me that's fine, because I can do my job and your job and get eight hours of sleep at night. That's your problem.”

**Societal Changes.** There were also some participants that cited that the pressure to shift has been reduced by societal changes that have fueled the need for companies and organizations to become more diverse. Aniyah says, “So you know, nowadays, diversity and inclusion… and equity, you know is pretty big with organizations, so I feel like it shows how I bring something… something different to the table.” Lataisia noted that in her field of collegiate
athletics, there is a push to hire more people that have similar racial background to their
student-athletes. “We learned from COVID and everything within the Black Lives Matter
Movement and all that wrapping up. Athletics as a whole, collegiate athletics, even professional
sports have learned we don't have any Black people that work here.”

Dimitria recounts a conversation she had with a colleague where she was told that she
needed to have racial identifiers on her résumé:

I knew a person in the company and I was having her look at my résumé. She
said, I can’t tell you’re Black. And I said exactly. And she said, that’s problematic.
She said if you want… what you want to do is let people know that you're Black
because all of these companies’ diversity numbers are miserable. And if you're
trying to get into companies that are at least pretending you know, want to want to
have people like you, you have to let them know that you're Black.

Document Analysis and Management

Participant résumés and job postings (if available) were analyzed as an additional
form of data collection as well as an effort toward triangulation. Résumés were reviewed
for evidence of shifting or shifting avoidance. Job postings were analyzed for
organizational indicators for applicants to shift or avoid shifting.

Résumé Review

All the participants of this study submitted a résumé for review. Every participant
noted their full, unabbreviated first name; for this reason, it is presumed that employers
speculated and assumed that the participants that submitted these résumés were female,
as all of the participants had traditionally female names. Three participants also included
other gender identifiers other than their name on their résumé. While one participant
included include female oriented professional organizations and awards, the other two
only noted their sorority membership. For these two participants, their sorority was also a
racial identifier. The frequency of racial identifiers in the participants’ résumés also
varied. Two résumés did not have any indicators that could identify the participants as Black. Interestingly, these applicants were two that stated that they no longer participated in shifting activities during the job attainment process. Even though this is a noteworthy mention, one cannot deduce that the lack of gender or racial identifiers correlates to the presence of shifting behaviors; the applicants that do not include these identifiers on their résumé may not personally engage in any race or gender-based identifying activities that are appropriate to include on a professional résumé.

Eight résumés included one or two potential racial identifiers on their résumés. These identifiers included degrees from Historically Black Colleges or Universities, participation in recognizably Black organizations (like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or Blacks in Technology), or awards given by Black organizations (Top 40 under 40 given by National Black Lawyers). One frequently seen potential racial identifier was sorority membership. Within the study, three of the four participants that noted that they were a member of a historically Black sorority specifically stated that they did not remove this from their résumé because they felt as if the experiences gained from membership were too important. They also believed that listing their historically Black sorority would not automatically identify them as Black to most reviewers. Celeste noted in her interview, “I do keep my sorority on there, because that has been the space where I have found the most comfort and it has not been something that they can automatically assume like oh she's a Black woman.”

One participant, Dimitra, listed racial identifiers far more frequently than others. In her interview, she was emphatic about the need to strategically shift for successful job attainment, but she also noted an impactful conversation with a colleague that said that
being identified as Black allowed her opportunities within organizations that are concerned with the appearance of diversity. Dimitri noted the following advice from her colleague, “if you're trying to get into companies that are at least pretending you know, want to want to have people like you, you have to let them know that you're Black.” Examples of potential racial identifiers listed on Dimitra’s résumé include membership in a Black alumni association, participation in diversity centered panels, and her interest in “First-Person Narratives of African-American Enslaved Persons”.

Job Posting Review

Four of the ten participants submitted job postings for review. None of the job postings explicitly noted an Equal Employment Opportunity Statement or a company crafted diversity statement but two of the postings had language that could be interpreted as the organization valuing diversity. One organization listed within their benefits, “an opportunity to work with a diverse, global community of 1000+ [company] team members across multiple countries, united by our values of open, direct, and kind.” Another organization noted as part of their purpose to deliver, “comprehensive healthcare that is accessible, culturally and linguistically competent, community directed, and patient centered for all.” This review of job postings discovered no consistency among included organizations in clearly stating any values of inclusivity. This inconsistency and lack of clarity may have caused participants to look elsewhere for signals indicating whether to shift; participants noted utilizing company websites for staff photos as well as company rating sites for more potentially helpful information.
Summary

Several important themes and subthemes emerged from analysis of the data. Participants noted that they believed there were persistent perceptions that Black women were too emotional, too angry, less capable, less credible, less committed, and unprofessional. The participants disclosed varying degrees of shifting and methods of shifting among themselves. Methods of shifting included altering their name on their résumé, adjusting their speech, avoiding natural hair styles, concealing their address, and either highlighting or omitting their educational background.

Various reasons were noted for shifting including shifting is a necessary part of the job attainment process, shifting to avoid stereotypes, shifting to make others comfortable, shifting to appear less threatening, shifting as protection, and shifting as a way to reduce the appearance of cross-cultural differences. For the participants, shifting was a burdensome endeavor; they felt they could not be authentic or confident, they felt the need to exceed the performance and expectation of their peers, as well as the need to minimize themselves. However, many participants either completely discontinued or reduced shifting because they were further along in their careers, changes in work environment and society over time, they became more comfortable with their identity as a Black woman, or they were just tired of shifting.
Chapter V. Discussion and Implications

Overview of Study

*Exploring How Black Women Navigate Shift for Job Attainment* was a basic interpretive study that sought to further understand how Black women navigate employment and hiring. The purpose of this study is to explore how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting.

The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) How do Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment? (2) How do Black women interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting? (3) How do Black women perceive their identity in terms of their experiences with shifting?

Data was collected by utilizing semi-structured interviews. There were ten participants in the study, each of whom self-identified as Black and female, held a professional level position, and interviewed for employment within the last 5 years.

The following themes emerged from data analysis: (a) perceptions of Black women and their intersectional identities, (b) methods of shifting, (c) motivations for shifting, (d) signals of safety and danger, (e) the burden of shifting, and (f) the shift from shifting. These findings were supported through document analysis of participant résumés and job postings.

Discussion of Findings

The narratives gathered in this study have provided insight on how Black women explain their experiences with and the outcomes of shifting during the job attainment process. Their responses provided examples of how they chose to shift, rationales for why they believe that shifting was an effective and necessary strategy, as well as resulting outcomes of shifting.
**Relation to Theoretical Framework**

Critical human resource development (CHRD), Black feminism, and intersectionality have provided the lenses for which the data for the study has been analyzed. As CHRD’s key defining attributes are challenging contemporary practices, exposing assumptions, revealing illusions, questioning tradition, and facilitating emancipation within the workplace (Bierema & Cseh, 2003). The findings of this study made apparent the need to question, examine and confront the existing power structures and underlying bias that upholds organizational environments that necessitate shifting. Creating work environments where Black women can be their authentic selves affects more than the Black women in that environment. As one participant Pauline said, “design organization that is safe for Black women and that organization is going to automatically be safe for everyone.”

This study also utilized Black feminism and intersectionality as a conceptual framework. Black feminism in conjunction with intersectionality examines oppression and power while placing Black womanhood at the center of analysis, recognizes the collective Black experience shared by Black women, while recognizing the differences among Black women within the group in regard to their other intersectional identities (Alinia, 2015; Collins, 2002, 2019; Collins & Bilge, 2016). These frameworks have allowed for further examination of how the participants’ gendered racial identity effects how they navigate the job attainment process. The study highlighted the experiences Black women have when they are often ignored in studies framed around race or gender. By utilizing qualitative interviews participants were able to share their unique experiences of how they navigated the job attainment process.

Interestingly, while the participants in this study were aware of the implications of both their Black and female identities, their race was the most prominent. Identity prominence is
defined as the identity that one finds most important for themselves among their other identities (Boyle & Rogers, 2020). This was noted in many of the participants’ responses. Many of their responses centered on their Blackness, more than their womanhood. It is important to acknowledge that although one can have several intersectional identities, there may be one that holds more importance.

**Experiences with Shifting**

Participants describe their experiences which shifting within the context of explaining how they shifted, their motivations for shifting, as well as why they ultimately reduced or stopped shifting. The findings of this study regarding the methods in which Black women shift coincided with the findings in previous literature. Black women shift for job attainment by résumé whitening, style-shifting, and altering their hair. While only two participants noted that they had altered their name for previous job searches, six of the participants noted during the interview that they either currently or previously omit racial identifiers from résumé. This finding is interesting as eight of the ten participants’ current résumés indicated racial identifiers. This is an indication that at least two of the Black participants of this study who formerly shifted by utilizing this method, have since chosen not to. None of participants noted that they omitted gender identifiers during the interview.

As some participants also noted that they consciously or unconsciously altered how they spoke during the interviews. When asked for the reason behind the alteration, they noted one of two reasons; most mentioned to mask their race, but one mentioned to mask her geographic origin. The finding of masking their geographic origin is of particular interest as I believe that their response is heavily influenced by avoiding racial associations that may lead to linguistic profiling. She specifically noted that she had an accent associated with her city of origin, and
later noted that her city of origin was predominantly Black. Even though she may not intend to, she may be shifting to mask her race.

While hair was noted by every participant as a past method of shifting, it was also indicated as one of the most prevalent ways the participants now refuse to shift. For Black women, hair can be important to identity (Dawson et al., 2019; Robinson et al., 2021). Only one participant said she wears her hair straight during interviews; the other participants were aware of the perceptions of natural Afrocentric hair and the potential associated consequences but still chose to wear their hair in a natural style during the job attainment process. This can be argued as another way the participants of this study are refusing to shift.

These modes of shifting are attempts add impression management which is when one engages in behavior to create a desired impression of themselves. Impression management involves two processes. The first is the degree to which one is motivated to alter aspects of themselves. The second involved the method they use (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). The participants of this study all experienced different intensity of motivation to shift; some shifted frequently and utilized many methods, and some explained that they no longer feel the need to shift at all.

The Black women participants of this study also described their motivations for shifting. One finding related to the motivations for shifting was that Black women believed that there were several negative perceptions of themselves in the workplace. They believed that they were perceived as too emotional, too angry, and inherently unprofessional. In relation to their counterparts, they believe that they are perceived as less capable, less credible, and less committed. These perceptions signaled how aspects of their gendered racial identity would not be accepted in the workplace. This lack of identity acceptance, as well as avoiding other
persistent stereotypes of Black women, was a strong motivation to engage in shifting during the job attainment process.

In alignment with the literature, the some of the participants noted that they in part engaged in shifting to reduce stereotype threat (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004; McCluney et al., 2019; Roberson & Kulik, 2007; Steele, 1997). The participants mentioned several motivations for shifting that aligned with stereotypical caricatures of Black women explored in the literature. Some participants noted that they recognized that Black women were perceived too angry, too emotional, and they were motivated to shift to appear less threatening. These motivations and perceptions align with the stereotype that is prevalent in the literature of the Sapphire, who is depicted as angry and aggressive.

The perception of being too emotional was mentioned as one that afflicted all women regardless of race. This perception was so pervasive that it has been internalized by one participant. Ronisha noted that she refused to work for a female employer and cited her belief that women, including herself, are too emotional to co-exist in an employer-employee relationship. This is an important finding, as Black women professionals like Ronisha, could be self-limiting their opportunities based on internalized racism and sexism.

Another common caricature is the Jezebel who is depicted in the literature as an oversexed temptress (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004). Participants depicted being affected by this stereotype with their concerns about being oversexualized and fetishized by potential employers as well as being hyper-concerned about dressing to hide their figures during the job attainment process.

An additional stereotype that emerged from the data was the stereotype that Black families are broken. While mentioned in other disciplines, this stereotype is not as readily
explored in HRD literature as the ones that were previously mentioned. Participant Dimitria relented that she shifted by not disclosing her caregiver status for her nephew because she did not want to perpetuate the stereotype of Black people are not capable of parental caregiving. There is a belief that Black biological parents often relinquish caregiving duties to relatives because of instances of child neglect, child abuse, unemployment, or incarceration (Peterson, 2018).

Additionally, of note, several participants mention that they shifted for safety and protection. Participants that described this motivation cited fearing real and perceived outcomes of gendered racial bias in the workplace and in the hiring process. Some participants feared not getting an interview because their résumé (Kang et al., 2016; Kang et al., 2016; Nunley et al., 2015) or voice (Baugh, 1983, 2003; Hughes & Mamiseishvili, 2014; Purnell et al., 1999). Some participants feared that their natural hair would be a barrier for being hired ("EEOC v. Catastrophe Management Solutions," 2016). While each of the participants of this study participated in shifting to various degrees, all participants understood the motivations for shifting as well as societal and organizational indications that signaled that aspects of their identity as a Black woman may not be accepted in the workplace.

**Adverse Outcomes of Shifting**

The findings that address the adverse outcomes of shifting noted that shifting was a burden. Some participants noted the psychological effects of shifting. They described having to shift ‘a weight’ or ‘being heavy’. Other participants described having to present as small or muted. While participants recognized these adverse outcomes, some participants believed that shifting was a necessary part of the job attainment for Black women. They believed that the consequence of not shifting, specifically not getting hired, were worse than the personal effects that they would face.
Refusing to Shift

The Black women professionals that participated in this study also described experiences with reducing or refusing to shift, either completely or in certain circumstances. Some participants noted that they were far enough in their careers or had accumulated enough achievements to where they believed shifting was no longer a necessary or as important job attainment strategy. Other participants stated that they reduced or eliminated shifting as a job attainment strategy because they are comfortable with who they are, or they do not want to work for an environment that will not accept them for who they are. Other participants cited the changing climate that is more acceptable of diversity in the workplace.

Ultimately some participants reduced shifting as the result of the emotional labor required to shift. They expressed that they were tired and exhausted of having to mask their authentic selves by shifting. This exhaustion could be an effect of or an additive to racial battle fatigue. Racial battle fatigue is the emotional and mental stress that results from having to perpetually fight against racial microaggressions, discrimination, and overt violence faced by people of color (Quaye et al., 2020). The findings that noted that participants were tired or exhausted are possibly a result of racial battle fatigue as it plays out in the workplace.

This study took place in a time of heightened publicity surrounding racial injustice in America caused by the frequent murders of Black people by police and the lack of consequences for those officers that murder Black people. On May 25, 2020, Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd by kneeling on his neck for 9 minutes and 29 seconds (1 minute and 20 seconds after paramedics had arrived). The murder was captured via cell phone video and was a catalyst for global protest against police brutality against Black people (Hill et al., 2020). Unfortunately, Floyd was only one of many. In 2020 there were only 18 days in that year where police had not
killed anyone, 28% of those killed by police were Black (Mapping police violence, 2021). The emotional labor of having to shift for job attainment is only additive to that of the constant threat of violence, discrimination, and injustices that Black women face daily.

**Gendered Racial Ideologies and Framework for Positive Black Female Identity**

Several of the findings demonstrate alignment with several of William and Lewis’ (2021) Gendered Racial ideologies. These ideologies describe “attitudes, beliefs, values, and meanings that Black women hold toward their identity” (p. 8). Participants in the study described experiences and beliefs that exhibited four of the six ideologies: assimilation, defiance, strength, and pride. Some participants in the study attempted to assimilate into dominate culture by participating in shifting behavior. Participants showed defiance in their refusal to shift or present as anyone other than their authentic selves. Some participants expressed pride in the Black womanhood by expressing how they love their Black womanhood.

The finding of those who expressed pride in may indicate that they have moved through the components of the conceptual framework for positive Black female identity, as indicated by their responses. The participants that indicated pride were aware of the negative stereotypes and perceptions of Black women in the workplace. While it could be that these perceptions were actively rejected after critical reflection, further investigation would be necessary for this to be determined definitively.

**Contributions of the Study**

This study provides meaningful insights to existing literature. While not a new finding holistically, this study examined the stereotype of being from a broken family within the context of the HRD literature. This is important to note as this may be an unseen area of bias and discrimination during the job attainment process that Black women professionals should be cognizant of.
Another important finding that is not extensively covered within the HRD literature is the resistance to shifting for many of the participants. Several participants noted that they have reduced or eliminated shifting as a job attainment strategy. Some participants noted a refusal to work for organizations that required them to shift to be hired. This finding is particularly timely as the United States is undergoing a phenomenon that has become known as the Great Resignation. Many Americans have left their jobs and employers are struggling to find employees to replace them. As of July 2021, there were over 10.9 million open positions. Employees aged 35-40 have had the greatest rates of resignations (Cook, 2021). The drivers and lasting effects of the phenomenon are yet to be seen as this is a recent development in the U.S. economy, but Black women professionals’ refusal to work for a company that requires that they shift may be an important factor to explore. As the employment market becomes more heavily driven by the needs and demand of employees, Black women professionals may have more leeway in choosing employment opportunities. Conversely, the need for employers to understand shifting behaviors for job attainment become even more important as they compete for talent.

**Implications**

The follow sections discuss the implications for theory, research, and practice as highlighted by the findings of the study.

**Implications for Theory**

The experiences of the Black female participants of explored in this study make apparent the need for robust theoretical analysis of the intersectional impact of race, gender, and other identities within the workplace and beyond. The theories of Black feminism and intersectionality allowed for examination of the effects of explicit and implicit bias of employers affects the perceptions of how Black women view themselves as well as how they choose to approach the
job attainment process. Using these lenses to examine, while incorporating frameworks such as the Robinson et al. (2021) Framework for Positive Black Female Identity, can help Black women resist internalizing the messages of themselves perpetuated by society and create a more favorable perception of Black womanhood among themselves and others.

Additionally, proponents of CHRD have contend that traditional HRD ignores the impact of inequitable systems of power (Bierema, 2009, 2010; Bierema & Cseh, 2003). The findings of this study illustrate that there are barriers created within society and perpetuated by those that hold power within organizations that create pressure for Black women to shift for employment. Continued utilization of these critical models could help guide policy and practice toward equitable outcomes for Black woman and others that are marginalized.

**Implications for Policy Development**

Racial discrimination in hiring for Black Americans has not decreases since 1989 (Quillian et al., 2017). To make meaningful change for Black women professionals, organizations must establish and prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within all organizational functions and processes. Black women within the organization must have a seat at the table as these initiatives are being created and reviewed. Among the charges of these initiatives should be to create an organization specific DEI statement as well as a code of conduct. Organizations must commit to upholding the values established from these initiatives, hiring others that believe in these values, and terminating those that do not.

There should be policy that requires recruiting and hiring committees be comprised of a diverse representation from within organizations. Organizations should also promote and incentivize implicit bias training. Organizations should consider mandatory implicit bias training for hiring manages and hiring committee members. To signal importance to those within the
organization, data regarding DEI initiatives should be tracked and shared periodically. Of utmost importance is creating policy that creates a sustainably safe environment for Black women and others to speak out and share their experiences without fear of retribution.

**Implications for Practice**

While policy change on the organizational level is critical, there must be an effort to confront bias on an individual level as well. Individuals within organizations must be committed to listening to the experiences of their Black female colleagues and recognize their own biases and privileges within the context of the work environment. If not offered through the organization, employees should seek out opportunities to explore how their bias affects others through formal or informal training opportunities.

To promote this change Black women who feel safe once they are within their organizations should call out instances of bias and discuss their experiences within workplace. It is understood that not every Black woman professional will feel safe enough from consequences to call out biased and discriminatory practices. However, those that find themselves within this privileged position should consider speaking out for the benefit of other Black women professionals and those from other marginalized communities.

**Limitations of the Study**

While the findings of this research provide insight into the experiences of Black women as they navigate the job attainment process, there are factors that must be considered as limitations. My insider view as a Black woman researching the experiences of other Black women will be viewed as a limitation by some. I was aware of this limitation and employed several techniques to address reflexivity.
This study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic of the early 2020s. At the time of the study the Center for Disease Control (2020) recommended that in order to reduce the spread of the virus face-to-face contact should be limited. The pandemic has affected the data collection methods, as meeting face-to-face during this time was highly discouraged because it was potentially unsafe. This was addressed by conducting meetings via the web-based video conferencing platform, Zoom. While this limited the potential for situational observation during the interview, this did allow for a greater range of participants. The ten participants resided in five different states. These interviews would not have been economically or logistically feasible without the use of a web conferencing platform.

In addition, when considering the heavy topics that may be discussed during this study, one must consider how the pandemic has affected the mental health of the general population. The general population has experienced stress, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress syndrome at significantly higher rates than before the pandemic’s outbreak (Cullen et al., 2020; Mukhtar, 2020). There is evidence to suggest that women are more susceptible to these adverse mental health outcomes than their male counterparts (Xiong et al., 2020). It is reasonable to assume that those that have experienced mental health challenges due to the pandemic may have an altered outlook on their experiences; they may view these experiences more negatively due to the combined effect of pandemic related mental health issues. Participants’ willingness to engage in the study or even their responses may be affected.

An additional limitation of the study is the inclusion of a definition for shifting in the interview protocol. Since shifting is not a generally understood term in common lexicon, it was necessary to provide participants with a brief definition and examples of shifting. Without providing this definition, participants may have not provided the breath of examples and
situations. As the crux of this study was for the participants to describe their experiences with shifting in different contexts rather than to note the occurrences of shifting, providing a brief definition did not have a significant impact on the findings.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Although the research questions for this study were addressed by the findings, there were several areas of additional research uncovered by the exploration of this topic. The participants of this study frequently mentioned examples and instances of shifting once they were hired. This notes an opportunity for the post-hire experiences of Black women who shifted during the job attainment process to be explored. Additional studies could track the evolution of shifting behaviors overtime. Efforts could be made to explore how shifting effects employee performance, retention, career advancement, and organizational culture.

Future research topics could also further explore identity and shifting. Future research could examine varied intersectional experiences by examining and comparing the experiences of Black men, other men and women of color, White women, and White men. Examining shifting among other marginalized identities communities would also advance the topic. Additional research could also focus on utilizing the Framework for Positive Black Female Identity to explore the experiences of women that reduced or refrain from shifting.

**Concluding Remarks**

This study explored how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting. The findings indicated that several negative perceptions of Black women exist in professional spaces, Black women have several motivations for shifting and utilize various methods toward this end, they look for signals during the job attainment process to indicate whether they should or how to deploy shifting strategies, Black women that shift are burdened by shifting, and many participants either
now refrain from or have strategically reduced shifting for job attainment. The persistence of gendered racism continues to uphold an environment where Black women feel that they must shift to gain desired employment. While the study met its purpose, more research as well as successful transition of research to practice within organizations is critical.
Appendix A. IRB Approval

TO:           Kemp, Dorothy Rachael
LSUAM | Acad Affairs | Academic Center for Student Athletes
FROM:         Alex Cohen
Chairman, Institutional Review Board
DATE:         20-Jul-2021
RE:           IRBAM-21-0589
TITLE:        Exploring How Black Professional Women Navigate Identity Shifting for Successful Job Attainment
SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial Application
Review Type:   Expedited Review
Risk Factor:   Minimal
Review Date:   20-Jul-2021
Status:        Approved
Approval Date: 20-Jul-2021
Approval Expiration Date: 19-Jul-2022
Expedited Categories: 07
Requesting Waiver of Informed Consent: Yes
Re-review frequency: Annually
Number of subjects approved: 20

By:           Alex Cohen, Chairman

Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects.
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

*All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www lsu.edu/research

Louisiana State University  O 225-578-5833
131 David Boyd Hall  F 225-578-5983
Baton Rouge, LA 70803  http://www lsu.edu/research
Appendix B. Sample Consent Form

Consent Form for a Non-Clinical Study

1. Study Title: Exploring How Professional Black Women Navigate Shifting for Successful Job Attainment

2. The purpose of this qualitative, basic interpretive study is to explore how Black women describe their experiences with shifting for job attainment and how they interpret and negotiate any outcomes of shifting. The study will take place in three phases. In the first phase, participants will complete a prequalifying survey via Qualtrics to determine if they meet criteria for the study. In phase two, participants will be interviewed by the researcher via Zoom, utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol. Zoom interviews will be recorded. Recordings audio and video recordings will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. After this point, no versions of the recordings will be saved locally or on the cloud. The third phase will involve a content analysis of participant résumés and job postings for their current position.

3. Risks: The only study risk is the inadvertent release of sensitive information with the questionnaire or interview process. However, every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of records including utilizing an automatically generated Meeting ID with passwords and recording the interview on the cloud.

4. Benefits: Participants will not be compensated for participation in the study; however, the study may yield valuable information about why Black women utilize identity shifting for job attainment.

5. Alternatives (if applicable): There are no alternatives for this study.

6. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study, M-F, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Dorothy Kemp, 504-343-7083; Dr. Petra Robinson, 979-402-1535

7. Performance Site: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

8. Number of participants: 20

9. Inclusion Criteria: Participants must (1) be 18 years or older, (2) self-identify as Black and female, (3) have worked in a full-time position for at least one year (employment does not have to be consecutive within the same organization), (4) must be categorized as either an Executive/Senior Level Officials and Manager, First/Mid-Level Officials and Managers, or Professional employee in accordance with the U.S. Equal Employment Commission’s description of job categories and (5) must have submitted a résumé, and participated in an interview process (phone, in person, or both) for employment within the last five years.

10. Exclusion Criteria: Participants cannot (1) be younger than 18 years of age, (2) identify as any race other than Black or gender other than female, (3) worked for less than a year in a full-time position, (4) be categorized as anything other than an Executive/Senior Level Officials and Manager, First/Mid-Level Officials and Managers, or Professional employee in accordance with the U.S. Equal Employment Commission’s description of job categories. Any participants that have not submitted a résumé, and participated in an interview process (phone, in person, or both) for employment within the last five years.

11. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.
12. **Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Participant identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

13. **Signatures:** The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. For injury or illness, call your physician, or the Student Health Center if you are an LSU student. If I have questions about subjects’ rights or other concerns, I can contact Alex Cohen, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, info@lsu.edu, or www.lsu.edu/research. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator’s obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Participant Signature: __________________________ Date: ______________
Appendix C. Sample Invitation to Participants

Seeking Participants for a Qualitative Study

Study will explore the experiences of Black female professionals in the job attainment process

Participants should:
• self-identify as a Black female
• be at least 18 years old
• have worked in a full-time professional level position for at least 1 year
• have submitted a resume and participated in an interview within the last 5 years

Interested?
Go to: https://bit.ly/3kHfc64

RESEARCHER: DOROTHY KEMP
Doctoral Candidate, Louisiana State University
Email dkemp2@lsu.edu with any questions
Appendix D. Prequalifying Survey

Default Question Block

This survey is part of a study that will examine how Black women professionals navigate the job attainment process. The job attainment process includes everything one does in order to pursue and attain a new position. Examples include resume submission, interviewing (in-person, phone, virtual), networking, etc. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants' identities will be kept confidential.

Please answer the following questions to determine your eligibility for the study. If eligible, you will be contacted by the researcher to schedule an interview time.

Demographic Information

Race/Ethnicity [check all that apply]
[ ] White
[ ] Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish origin
[ ] Black or African American
[ ] Asian
[ ] Native American or Alaskan Native
[ ] Hawaiian Native or other Pacific Islander
[ ] Other race, ethnicity, or origin
[ ] Prefer not to answer

Gender Identity [check all that apply]
[ ] Female
[ ] Male
[ ] Transgender
[ ] Non-binary
[ ] Prefer not to answer

Sexual Orientation

Please describe your educational background (include degree programs and educational attainment)

Current marital status [check all that apply]
[ ] Married
[ ] Widowed
[ ] Divorced
[ ] Separated
[ ] Never married

Age
[ ] Under 18 years old
[ ] 18–24 years old
[ ] 25–34 years old
[ ] 35–44 years old
[ ] 55–64 years old
[ ] 65–66 years old
[ ] 65 years old or older

Work History

Are you currently employed
[ ] Yes – Full-time
[ ] Yes – Part-time
[ ] Yes – Self-employed
[ ] Not currently employed – retired
[ ] Not currently employed – currently seeking employment
[ ] Not currently employed – Not currently seeking employment
[ ] Other

Does your currently employment position fall within one of the following categories [check all that apply]
[ ] Executive, senior level (CEO, President, etc.)
[ ] First or mid-level (Manager, Director, etc.)
[ ] Professional (typically require a tertiary qualification or certification, such as a bachelor's degree)
[ ] None of these
Length of Employment at current employer (number of years)

Length of Total Employment in the work force full-time (number of years)

Last Interview/Resume Submission (enter year)

Please describe the racial and gender composition of your current workplace?

During the job attainment process did you do or feel pressured (either internal or external pressure) to do anything to hide or play down your race (including but not limited to changing how you look, adding/removing items from resume, straightening your hair, lightening your skin)?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Please describe your experience with hiding playing down your race during the job attainment process. Please include any information about any internal or external pressures if applicable.

During the job attainment process did you do or feel pressured (either internal or external pressure) to do anything to hide or play down your gender (including but not limited to highlighting activities that are assumed to be more masculine, hiding marital/relationship/or parental status)?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Please describe your experience with hiding playing down your gender during the job attainment process. Please include any information about any internal or external pressures if applicable.

If eligible for the study, you will be contacted by the researcher to schedule a zoom interview. If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact Dorothy Kemp at 504-343-7083 or dkemp2@lsu.edu.

Name

Location (City, State)

Email Address

Phone Number
Appendix E. Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Provided definition for the job search and attainment process.

The job search process is defined as “the series of activities aimed at finding a (new) job” (Wanberg et al., 2020, p. 316). Associated activities include clarifying one’s goals regarding the type of job they would like to attain, preparing a resume, formally or informally searching for relevant jobs through online search engines or through social networks, networking, applying for open positions, and interviewing (Wanberg et al., 2020).

Provide a definition of shifting and examples

code-switching involves adjusting one’s style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression in ways that will optimize the comfort of others in exchange for fair treatment, quality service, and employment opportunities.

General

• How would you describe the perception of women in professional spaces?
• How would you describe the perception of black people in professional spaces?
• How would you describe the perception of black women in professional spaces?
• What barriers do you believe black women must overcome in order to achieve successful job attainment?
• When considering the whole job search and attainment process in what ways can you remember trying to play down your race?
• In what ways can you remember trying to play down your gender?
• Were there aspects of your race or gender that you tried to play up?
• Can you describe in detail was the purpose of these efforts?

Networking

• How important do you are personal social networks for professional job seekers?
• What barriers have you personally come across that have hindered black women professionals from building or utilizing personal social networks for job seeking?
• When participating in networking activities, describe how race and gender play a factor?
• Describe your experiences with altering how you present to different audiences during the networking process?

Job selection
• Can you tell me a little more about your thought process during this time?
• In particular, when you were initially selecting positions to apply for, did how did you take race or gender into consideration?
• What on the job posting or company website indicated that you should play down your race or gender?
• Can you describe the experience of selecting a job to apply for?

Resume
• Let’s move on to your resume, what things did you leave off or play down on resume. Things can include personal identifiers such as your name, organizational affiliations, accolades, achievements, and activities that may signal race.
• What things did you include on your resume that could signal that you wanted to assimilate more into their dominate culture of the organization
• How did you go through the process of deciding what to include and what to not include on your resume?

Interviewing
• During the interview, describe your experiences with changing how you look, speak, or otherwise presented?
• What do you believe was the reception regarding aspects of your presentation that you did not choose to alter or couldn’t alter?

Conclusion
• How did the demographics of the organization in which you were pursuing a position influence if and how you played up or played down aspect of your identity?
• How did you make different decisions about shifting based on who you were interacting with?
• How do you believe these experiences with shifting align with your perception of your identity as a black female professional?
• In your experience, how has shifting been a successful strategy for job attainments?
• What are the drawbacks of shifting during the job attainment process?

• Would you describe shifting in some form as necessary or critical for success in your experiences with job attainment in professional fields? Why or why not?

• Do you feel race or gender was most important to play up and play down? Why?

• How do you believe this is similar or different to the experiences of Black men, White women, other women of color?

• How do you feel making those adjustments have helped or hindered your current experiences once you were employed?

• Ultimately, how did these experience make you feel about the perception of black women professional positions?

• What would you change about how you handled the job attainment process?
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Vita

Dorothy Rachael Kemp (she/her/hers) is a candidate to receive her Doctor of Philosophy from the Louisiana State University. She was born in New Orleans, Louisiana. She has previously earned a Bachelor of Science in Business and a Master of Business Administration from Louisiana State University. Upon graduation, Kemp worked in the tech industry before returning to her alma mater as a Student-Athlete Academic Support Services professional. Kemp’s anticipated graduation date is May 2022. Upon graduation she hopes to expand on her dissertation research.