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Intersecting Spaces: A Narrative Exploration of Intersectionality and African American Female School Psychologists

Natasha Vannoy

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INTERSECTING SPACES: A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF
INTERSECTIONALITY AND AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS

by

Natasha Vannoy

(Under the direction of Delores Liston, Ph.D.)

ABSTRACT

The roles of School Psychologists practicing within the public school systems are often defined quantitatively. The focus is often how many students are assessed, what assessment measures provide the most useful snapshots of the students and how the psychometric information will be used for educational planning. Moving away from the numerical aspects of the role, this study examines the narrative voices of the few among many. Reflecting upon the shifting demographics within the field of School Psychology, as well as the low number of minority School Psychologists within the field, I am examining how African American women within the field of School Psychology mediate their intersecting identities. The primary research questions were twofold: (1) how do African American women within the field of School Psychology mediate their intersecting identities? (2) How do African American female School Psychologists perceive the concept of intersectionality and how their multiple identities impact the development of their professional practices?

Through the lenses of critical race theory and black feminist thought, I am examining voice as a means of reclamation and redefinition. The stories that are reflected in the narrative voices of African American female School Psychologists are

those speaking about a professional life infused with the personal, inclusive of their own cultural experiences and textured by their positions within the margins.

Keywords: African American woman, School Psychologist, Intersectionality, Narrative Inquiry, Critical Race Theory, Black Feminist Thought, Race, Gender.

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A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION OF INTERSECTIONALITY
AND AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in

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DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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2009

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the generations of women in my family. I must begin with my grandmother, Betty Robinson, who dedicated much of her life to me, and did so with a joyous spirit, a sincere heart and a guiding hand. She has been the biggest influence on my worldview, and my understanding of how to be in the world. I love you and I miss you every day.

There has been no greater supporter of this endeavor than my mother, Linda Cummings. She has reminded me repeatedly that this challenge was indeed possible, and that I had what it took to complete this dissertation. Thank you for the reality checks, funny stories and supportive phone calls that sustained me during this time.

Lastly, I dedicate my work to my daughter, Elaina. She has been patient with me, giving of her love and a reminder to me of how important it is to enjoy every moment. She has generously shared me with this work, waiting patiently for Mommy to graduate. You are an exceptional young lady and I am blessed to be your mother.

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The road toward the attainment of this terminal degree reminds me of a marathon. I began with a sincere and determined spirit, and at various times along the way I have been weary, even stumbling, and then with a renewed hope of getting to the finish line, I would catch my breath, keep moving and forge ahead. With that in mind, there were many people along the way who were my coaches, cheerleaders, and even water-bearers along the sidelines.

I must acknowledge the spirit of my grandparents Norris and Betty Robinson, the people who raised me. Although they are not here to see this day, I know that their love and lessons live on through this work. I must also acknowledge Linda Nuckles, who has encouraged me throughout this time and more importantly has been a constant and loving influence on my daughter while I was taking classes, conducting research and writing. Elaina is very lucky to have you as a grandmother.

Special thanks to Dr. Delores Liston, my dissertation chair. You have challenged me since my first class with you and the level of support you have provided during this time is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your pep talks, tough talks, critical talks and reminders to keep reading and writing.

My committee has also been a source of valuable feedback, encouragement and constructive criticism for which I am thankful. Dr. Meca Williams-Johnson has served as a consistent supporter of my work, and contributed greatly to its development by sharing her time and resources. Your comments and feedback were impactful and gave me new places to begin at times when I found myself stagnant. I am appreciative of the time that she has taken to help cultivate an emerging scholar. I am particularly thankful to Dr.

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INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE

Middle school life is more complicated than elementary school. Today is more complicated than most. I am having a meeting about one of my favorite students; his name is Jamell. This student is by all accounts a challenge. He is disruptive in class, disrespectful to teachers, roams the halls all day, and generally noncompliant. The irony of Jamell's school life is that he is one of the most intelligent students that I have ever been privileged to know. He has an extensive vocabulary, which allows him to engage you in conversation beyond his 13 years. He is a critical thinker and does not take information at face value; he has a desire to know why, know more, and know how it came to be. He speaks fluently of not only of how to hotwire a car before the police respond to the call, but also about the process used to clone animals and the implications cloning will one day have on our society. He is complicated. Our meeting today is to make a decision about special education placement for Jamell. He came into our school system identified as a student with a learning disability. However, Jamell's introduction to the school and his teachers suggested that there were behavioral issues present as well. During an evaluation, I spoke with Jamell about his life, his previous schools and his perception of his own behaviors. He spoke of multiple schools and small classes, all of which were boring to him. He spoke of multiple 'fathers' but no real contact with his biological father. He discussed his relationship with his mother, at best to be described as strained, and her agreement with his schools that he was 'bad'. She will not come to any more meetings at the school; she is frustrated with all of the meetings over the years.

Jamell was not his own cheerleader; in fact, he was not even a fan of himself. When queried about his school life since coming to Creek Middle School, he acknowledged that he is doing what he has always done, challenging teachers while a lesson is being taught; being somewhat impulsive when responding in class, and generally getting under the skin of his teachers. He tells me that his special education science teacher will not even let him into class because he is such a disturbance. Instead he is relegated to the lower functioning classroom to do his work, surrounded by children with autism spectrum disorders. I question him, not really willing to believe, that as a punishment, this bright and articulate child is being made to enter into a classroom with children who are working on functional skills. He explains that he likes the lower functioning classroom, and has actually learned a lot about people and himself. The teacher in the autism classroom perceives him as a helper in that classroom, and he is allowed to work on independent projects while in her room. His last project was on the Underground Railroad and Harriet Tubman. He also states that because he loves science, he skips another class to go to Mrs. Harris' general education science class, in his own words, "if they won't let me have science I will take it". Mrs. Harris is aware of his behavioral issues within the school, but does not see them in her class, where he participates freely, so she lets him stay, even though he is not on her roll. Jamell's spends the majority of his time in the In School Suspension classroom, where students who have gotten in trouble complete worksheets in their individual study carrels. There is no talking allowed and no assistance with the work, just monitoring by a teaching assistant. This is intellectual torture for a student that thrives on discourse and is curious about the world, so instead, you can often find Jamell walking the hallways, or out near the trailers with a book,

avoiding the punishment of intellectual stagnation. Jamell is a student whose reputation has preceded him and he cannot shake it. Our ongoing counseling work focuses on social skills, the ways in which he can as he comically remarks “use his intellectual power for good and not evil” and the ways in which he can work toward making his passions to learn work for him at school. These conversations are meaningful within the confines of my office, or the walks that we take around the school building when the walls seem to be closing in on both of us however, ultimately when the doors of the classroom are closed in his face and he has to choose between freedom and confinement in the ISS classroom, he chooses freedom. This choice is damaging every time, and relegates him back to the reputation that is so hard for him to escape. Telephone discussions with Jamell’s mom gave me the feeling that she would do whatever the school recommended. She was not willing to participate any more and did not seem to think that she could do any more for her son. A subsequent home visit on a Saturday (she works during the week) was conducted at the door; she did not invite me in. I discussed with her what we were working on during our counseling time, as well as the results of the evaluation. She was cautiously optimistic when I told her that he was very intelligent, but the glimmer dimmed when she followed up with a cold “so what’s wrong with the boy?” I understand that her tone is that of frustrated mother, having been through this dance with at least two other schools. She is tired, of school, of the verbal sparing that she does with him at home, and of having to take off work to come to meetings, which ultimately lead up to the same thing...his removal from school. There is no invitation to the educational roundtable that she is likely to accept. She is tired. As I said, today is Jamell’s meeting, and I am going to be called upon to say whether I think that Jamell has a learning disability, an emotional

disorder or is just a kid that makes poor choices. There is a heavy consequence in this type of discourse because for Jamell, my balancing acts as agent and advocate can have long-term consequences for him. Saying that he is a student with a disability keeps him engaged in the struggle of schools, with minimal supports through special or general education. Saying that he is not a student with a disability will automatically send him to a disciplinary tribunal, where the chances of him being expelled from the school are high, and is supported by the administrative staff that have given up on him. What I would like to say as advocate is that we cannot deny this child an education, either legally or ethically; which is what happens every time the special education teachers deny him entrance into the classroom. We cannot and should not be relegating him to work as 'helper' in a low functioning class that does not address his academic needs or skills. We should not, as educators, be participants in the process of intellectual death, which he is resisting tooth and nail, to his own detriment. However, I recognize that to say this will bring about consequences of its own for my professional work and the daily interactions that I have with staff and administrators. His mother could not be convinced to come to the meeting, and gave the lead special education teacher permission to proceed with the recommendation of the committee. So here I am sitting at the junction of professional crossroads, working desperately to figure out how to mediate this work as agent and advocate. (Natasha, 2008, Personal Reflection)

Theorizing Agency and Advocacy

The snapshot presented above is real, although all identifying information has been changed in order to protect confidentiality. This vignette is reflective of the ways in which the roles of agent and advocate can often work both in concert and in direct conflict with one another. This narrative snapshot is also illustrative of the reality of the practice of school psychology and the significant impact that the work can have on individual students. The work is not always clear-cut and the decisions made are sometimes the best of the least desirable. This dilemma highlights that as educators we perceive ourselves to have the best intentions when coming together to make educational planning decisions for children however, even our best intentions are sometimes not good enough.

I am presently speaking from the perspective of African-American female school psychologist reflecting on the roles of agent and advocate which often run parallel to one another and intersect at various times within the scope of the professional practice. The nature of these various intersecting identities and their impact personally and professionally will be explored at length through this research.

Gerken (1978), one of the earliest scholarly references on African American School Psychologists, reflected on the role of Black School Psychologists and the state of desegregation, cautioning that, “as school psychologists, let us change our maxim to one of action in which we will strive to help students see differences among themselves as assets rather than deficiencies” (p. 87). This statement continues to ring true in the way that we perceive our students, and how we go about helping our students, with and without special needs, perceive themselves.

As such, my primary research questions were twofold: (1) how do African American women within the field of School Psychology mediate their intersecting identities? (2) How do African American female School Psychologists perceive the concept of intersectionality and how their multiple identities impact the development of their professional practices?

There lies the underlying knowledge that as an agent of the school, I am representing an institution and expected to conform to that professional role. Liston & Gilpin (unpublished manuscript, 2008) highlight this dualistic role and affirm,

...schools are both preservers of the status quo and agents of social change...schools may enact both of these roles simultaneously and/or consecutively, and that the identities of the players/actors in these school settings impacts which role takes primacy at any given moment (p.2).

The ways in which the role of agent manifests may change from day to day within the professional role, and can be either overt or covert, purposeful or not, and can include maintenance of the status quo by following the expectations of the school which work in opposition to the needs of children. Harry and Klingner (2006) speak to the ways in which the team dynamic can foster a sense of hegemony as a School Psychologist working as part of an educational planning team. At the micro level (within an individual school) a dissenting voice and the perception of working against the team can be powerful, even intimidating, and create the type of agency that manifests in a desire to maintain professional relationships. At the macro level, institutional agency is also a reality of the School Psychologist. Having to abide by district wide policies and/or state

or federal guidelines that are not aligned with adequate levels of support for children also fosters a sense of unintentional agency within the role of School Psychologist.

The role of advocate is more personal, and open to the idea that children are more complicated than the rules designed to maintain the hegemonic balance found in most schools. This type of role conflict contributes both positively and negatively to the ways in which I approach my practice, as I seek to maintain a balance that works toward a convergence between my professional and personal selves.

Advocacy can also manifest in many ways within the context of school. Implicit advocacy can manifest in the School Psychologist moving beyond the designated role of tester and exploring a deeper understanding of children in the context of their family systems, psychosocial support networks, academic/social strengths and community resources. This type of advocacy is often the most uncelebrated and can feel covert because it pushes the boundaries of what School Psychologists are expected to do. Explicit advocacy is more evident in the practice of School Psychology as it often involves the active use of school policy, procedures and legalities as a means of accessing educational services for children, as well as making families aware of their legal and educational options, not just the options that fit well with the agenda of the school. This type of advocacy can use the very policies that make access difficult for parents to their advantage, and use the knowledge of hidden rules within schools as a tool of empowerment for families also advocating for children. There are times when the educational decisions being made are directly beneficial to the institution and not the child. The end result may be an educational service (i.e.: special education, retention, tracking, suspension) that is aligned more with our need as a school for conformity as

opposed to the need to differentiate instructional services for the child. Explicit advocacy is more overt and very clearly places the student's needs before the needs of the school.

My dilemma lies in being torn between working within the school, sometimes on its behalf, and working within the framework of caring educational/mental health practice. The role of employee of the school and advocate for children should work harmoniously together in the most idealistic sense however, the reality of the roles of agent and advocate suggest that they are sometimes at odds with one another. Harry and Klingner (2006) speak to the "complimentary influences of the two contexts that exert the greatest influence on children in their formative years: home and school" (p. 70). The authors (Harry & Klingner, 2006) posit these roles from the perspective of family risk or school risk, leading to me to question whether or not I am, at times, perceived as a risk factor in the process of educational planning for the students with whom I work. My struggle with this conflicting framework also compels me to question how my personal history impacts my current professional practice and the educational decisions that I participate in making.

Acknowledging the dualistic roles of my professional role as agent and advocate, I am also interested in how African American female School Psychologists (like myself) strike the delicate balance between the multiple intersecting identities of the school, their profession, and of their person, all of which converge to impact the educational planning recommendations for students, and the ways in which they choose to practice within the field of School Psychology. Milner (2008) speaks to the importance of examining the reality of life within the world of education when he states,

...it is important for those interested in teacher education to name the multiple realities that exist in the field, and conceptual tools (categorical language and concepts) can be useful to study, analyze, discuss, and explain realities that can contribute to "raced" policy, practice, research, and theory about and in teacher education (p. 333).

I suggest a similar naming is warranted and even necessary as School Psychologists actively working within the field. I agree that much of this naming should come from School Psychology training programs, but in this study I am choosing to focus on the practical reality of the practices occurring in schools on a daily basis in the provision of educational/mental health services for children in schools. Beyond naming the realities of the field, it is also useful to identify those practices, policies and theoretical grounding that would work toward creating barriers for students and parents. Finally, I believe that there is a need to work toward an analysis of our practices in the context of our personal and collective histories as well as how those histories and practices contribute to or detract from those barriers previously identified.

This research involves a level of introspection that gives consideration to the various personal histories of the participants, as well as how these histories impact the way in which their professional practices have developed.

Life within the field

School Psychologists operate in perpetual shades of grey, sitting both within the professional realms of mental health and education. Many of the School Psychologists that practice in schools are mobile, servicing more than one school, and having contact with a vast array of teachers, administrators, students and families. This type of service

provision within schools typically allows the practitioner more access to building relationships. The generally accepted roles and responsibilities of School Psychologists suggest that we are engaged in the school life and school culture at the periphery while also being immersed in the daily work of providing educational/mental health opportunities for children, many of whom have been deemed at-risk. Daily school life and the manifestation of the School Psychologists' job suggest one that is 'the keeper of the bell curve'. Gilman and Gabriel (2004) affirm the idea that the perception of the role of School Psychologists were heavily weighted in their assessment skills, and consequently highly valued by administrators when compared with perceived usefulness by teaching staff. The study also suggested that these perceptions as 'testers', although positively correlated with many of the day-to-day responsibilities of the School Psychologist, also contribute to the lower reporting of job satisfaction from within the field (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004).

The role of the School Psychologist is often one that involves balancing professional duties, with relationship building, straddling the fences of administration and the teaching staff, all while trying to maintain the focus on outcomes for children. Although dissatisfied with the ways in which I am forced to move with the ebb and flow of the advocate and agent pendulum, I would not assert a significant level of professional dissatisfaction. However, I do acknowledge that there is room for change in the way that we perceive our own roles, and how that perception is carried out within the schools. I perceive my role to be one that is multi-dimensional, ongoing, invested, participatory and reliant on my abilities to be a bridge between students, teachers, administrators, parents, general education and special education, all of these domains intersecting at various times

in different incarnations. At times I am one of few sitting at the educational roundtable that has conversed with everyone at the table. Unfortunately too often in education we do not speak to one another as part of a cooperative process. Instead, we are isolated within our own roles, doing what we have been trained to do, without integrating these skills into the larger educational plan. I see myself as someone who has the ability and responsibility to open up the discourse and “be the change that I would like to see.”

Autobiographical Roots of My Study

I am sitting at the crossroads of my professional life as a School Psychologist, being forced through my daily interactions to make a decision; it is the same decision everyday, but oddly, the manifestation is not the same. Within my professional world, I sit as both agent and advocate, making uncomfortable distinctions between the two at critical moments. This position as educational agent of the school as well as my self-defined role as advocate for the children and families is a precarious position. I am often teetering between the two, moving carefully between the expectation of the school and the obligation to the student.

As an agent of the school, I am part of an intricately designed organizational structure that has, over the years, been increasingly concerned with accountability; test scores; placement; and performance both of the teachers and students. As a part of this system, I am expected to navigate my roles and responsibilities with fewer resources and a compliant spirit. A review of my career suggests that I have not been one to be complacent nor compliant, and this brings me to the crossroads. The ongoing battle between my desire to work as a change agent for the benefit of students and their educational success often works in direct conflict to my professional role as agent of the

school. As I ponder how these roles, so often incompatible, manifest in my professional relationships, I have to wonder how I have come to this place and what factors have influenced the way in which I choose to mediate these conflicting roles. I recognize that it is my personal history that informs my professional practice, and I am interested in how other African American women within the field are also mediating their roles, how they define their roles, and if they feel as though they are working in roles that are in opposition to one another.

My current professional work in the role of advocate has its beginnings in my own story of a child born into a working class family. In fact, my research interests are greatly informed by my personal experiences. I am the child of the inner city, reared in the public schools by grandparents who migrated north for a better life.

My grandparents were very similar to the parents with whom I work everyday, and who I seek out in order to understand their children separate from the test scores. My grandparents were working class people, high school graduates, who wanted the best education possible for me within the realm of public school. Private school education was not an option. My grandparents, with what would be perceived as limited cultural capital within the framework of public education, tapped into a variety of programs that exposed me to an array of educational opportunities. This level of determination and advocacy by my grandparents is in great part why I am able to live a life that is engaged in critical study.

Over the years, through many informal conversations, and recollections of my youth, I have come to know that there were people within the organization of the school, who brought my grandparents into the fold. These people were indeed teachers,

counselors and one administrator, who invited my grandparents into the educational dialogue and respected their voices. These educators not only sought to inform my grandparents about the myriad of programs available to poor inner city children, but helped them navigate their way through the maze of information, toward the road of access. So, in many ways, through this study I seek to understand how my role as an agent of the school can work toward this end, moving from the minimalistic requirements of information sharing, and working with them toward accessing educational opportunities for their children.

My grandparents and our cultural/family traditions held that I would go into the world as an extension of them, and education held the promise of a world beyond our working class existence. They looked to education as the gateway for success. As adults engaged in the civil rights movement, they understood the world as one that was not always fair, nor kind however, they knew that education for a young black child could mean a change in the way the child was able to engage the world. For them, there was no instruction manual or model to access the dream. They knew that their curious little black girl, with the big voice and pigtails flying was ready for the challenge, and they took on the responsibility of finding those people beyond the schoolhouse doors who could help them map the blueprint for my educational endeavors. They found the way, and gave me a life that in many ways has exceeded the dream. I have come to the world of education with the lived experience of the inner city child, for better or worse, and know above all else that those people considered to be less educated and on the margins of the social and economic systems in the United States love their children just as much as anyone else. Ladson-Billings (1994) suggests, “these poor economic and social conditions have

traditionally prompted African Americans to look to education, in the form of the integrated public school, as the most likely escape route to the American dream” (p. 2). My experiences tell me that the working poor in America want more for their children than they have but often do not have access to these educational opportunities.

Theorizing Intersectionality

Intersecting Spaces and the Hyphens

I once heard a preacher talk about living in the hyphen. Meaning, it is not the starting point or ending point of life that defines you, but rather all of the things that you contribute to the world in between-the hyphen. I live in the hyphen of my life, both in my personal and professional life. Intersectionality to me is the hyphen that helps define who I am both to myself and to the outside world. I am African-American-woman-mother, working within the field of mental health-education, with students both in general education-special education, as agent-advocate, and operating as an outsider of the school-insider of the system. I am the epitome of living in the hyphen. There cannot be a clear understanding of how I have evolved as a School Psychologist without understanding my life experiences. It is easy, at times, to forget to acknowledge or even contemplate the many hyphens that impact me personally and professionally, taking them as a given or even worse reducing these multiple identities to their smallest parts. Acknowledging all of my hyphens as cohesive rather than disconnected involves the recognition that my experience as an African American is informed by my gender; my gender conversely impacts my life as an African American; the way in which I live as a woman is impacted by my role as a mother; consequently all of these things impact my professional intersecting roles. This is important as a personal reflection, because if I am

really critically examining why I choose to battle the predetermined roles within my personal and professional realms, I have to be honest about all of the things that impact the way in which I make decisions, namely the hyphens. My hyphens inform my mistakes, my successes, my interactions, my worldview, the ways in which I perceive colleagues and students. There is sometimes the pressure of essentializing one part of the hyphen, for example, making it more relevant to be an African-American and minimizing my identification as a woman. Part of my self reflection serves as a form of resistance to this type of reduction and helps to assert that I am greater than the sum of my parts. I can't be fully understood absent of the hyphens, not in a way that is authentic and relevant to me. (Natasha, 2009, Personal Reflection)

Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) speak to the process of 'shifting', which they characterize as:

...a sort of subterfuge that African Americans have long practiced to ensure their survival in our society...they shift to accommodate differences in class as well as gender and ethnicity...shifting is often internal, invisible. It's the chipping away at her sense of self, at her feelings of wholeness and centeredness often as a consequence of living amidst racial and gender bias (p.7).

The process of shifting is almost a requirement for living in the hyphen and a process central to the concept of intersectionality. As a woman navigating my way through cultural, gendered, and professional worlds, often perceived as outsider within, there is a need to shift in order to gain access both personally and professionally. The act of shifting within the professional environment is necessary and well documented by those researchers interested in issues of identity, intersection of race, gender and class, as well

as professional development and people of color (Alfred, 2001; Edmonson-Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Guy-Sheftall, 1995; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Parker, 2004; Pough, 2002; Thornton, 2008). Parker (2004) speaks to this type of shifting navigation in the investigation of race, gender and the development of professional leadership. The author points to the recurring theme within the narratives of the women interviewed through her research, which was “Don’t forget where you come from, referring to the history of struggle, survival, and triumph in African American experience” (p. 60). The alternating view of that statement is remembering where you are in the present, and the act of shifting allows one to balance the need to use one’s personal history as the framework for the present circumstance. Alfred (2001) calls this type of dualism a “bicultural life structure” (p.2) and suggests that “it is the foundation upon which subordinate groups create both a private and public space where they can resist oppression and at the same time maintain their cultural identity and self determination” (p.2). Alfred’s (2001) work with African American tenured female faculty denotes the constant and often imperceptible skill that has been found to be developed through workplace interactions, the development of personal relationships, particularly with those persons outside of one’s core ethnic, cultural, gender, or socioeconomic groups. Similarly, Dixson and Dingus (2008) examine ‘the nexus of multiple identities’ with African American female teachers as it relates to their entry into the profession and the development of their mission statements as teachers.

As I reflected about my own role, as well as the relationships between parents and schools I began to think about the importance of intersectionality. Specifically, how the intersections of race, class and gender can have great impact (either positive or negative)

on how we practice within the field of School Psychology. These intersecting identities as African American, woman, educator, middle class (formerly working class), and mother, have a great deal of influence in the way that I go about working within my chosen field. These identities impact the conversations that I have with staff, students, and parents; they impact the discussions and recommendations that I make as agent of the school; there is an impact in the way that I am able to relate to students; and they impact the way that I perceive families as we sit together at the educational roundtable.

The act of shifting manifests in all of these places, where my history meets my professional role and obligations to the students with whom I work. It is here that I seek to strike the delicate balance between agent and advocate, hoping that the decisions being made are giving thoughtful consideration to the child/family circumstance, leaving my own agenda at the door. Recognizing that although these students, in my purview, reflect my own experiences, they are not my experience; and they deserve consideration that is all their own. Consequently the educational plans that are made to help them should provide the student with the levels of support appropriate for them at the time of need. For these reasons and more, it is important to look at who we are in the context of the students that we serve, and in doing so identify those personal experiences that may contribute to or detract from the level of professional practice that is necessary as advocates of students.

With a reflective spirit I recognize that the history of my chosen profession and its association with the testing movement is one that, to some, contradicts the professional goals that I have discussed. My daily task is to create room for the kinds of practice that works from the ethics of care, cultural plurality and understanding, as well as opening up

the discourse for more than the psychometric value of children. The journey toward this end is one that is personal, and may be different for every person. I believe that these similarities and/or differences will also be reflected in this study as we examine the work of other black female School Psychologists.

Rather than focusing on a study that is external to me, I choose to focus my study on my passions, creating collaborative relationships between home and schools, and the ways in which intersectionality impacts the way that we live our professional lives as School Psychologists. Do we use these personal histories as an impetus for transformative practice, or is there the opportunity to use them as an impediment to the kinds of collaborative relationships between schools and parents necessary in urban schools? Doll (1996) suggests, “school psychology occupies a curious space in between the educational and mental health service systems of American society” (p. 23). The practical role of the School Psychologist is often one that is multidimensional, including acting as an administrator, a special education consultant, psychometrist, etc. In fact, Lasser and Klose (2007) support these multiple roles stating, “as assessors, consultants, counselors, and administrators, school psychologists routinely address complex issues of privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, and multiple relationships when working with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel” (p. 484). So, even within the practice of school psychology there exists the intersection of multiple roles, which can vary from day to day and from circumstance to circumstance and are also impacted by the identities outside of our professional roles.

My motivation for working with my students stems from a deeply personal connection not only to them but also to a family system and circumstance that is

reminiscent of my own. In my work with teachers and families I also see the living embodiment of the barriers to accessing services for these parents and students, and there have been times where my role as agent has contributed to those barriers. I am actively engaged in the struggle to improve my school-based practices and wish to understand how other black women are navigating through the educational red tape and finding peace within the profession.

In my career I have gravitated toward those opportunities that allow me to work with children who mirror my early experiences. I have worked in large school systems with diverse populations, but I have tended to work directly in schools that serve African American low-income students. Part of this has been my own doing, but part of it has been the recognition by those with whom I work that there is a certain kind of practice required to work in these schools, a bit more care, a bit more time, and a bit more understanding of the family dynamic that often accompanies the child into the school. I am often working as an outsider within the context of the school, almost under the guise of subterfuge, seeking to create relationships with the families and students that will hopefully allow them access to educational opportunities often afforded to the few.

Purpose and Significance of Study

Through the lenses of critical race theory, intersectionality theory, and black feminist thought, I am working to tell the stories of black women similarly situated in schools and understand how their stories impact their daily practices as School Psychologists. In doing so I am interested in several points, including: whether or not these women perceive their roles as being multi-layered; how they perceive their personal histories to impact their professional practice; how they navigate the organization of

school and what they perceive their roles to be within the framework of schools. Recognizing that what we share as common threads, our race and gender, will not ultimately create the same stories, practice or outlook on our ways of practice. Cole (1994) says it best in that, “each and every one of us ain’t the *same* black woman, found in exactly the same place, doing exactly the same thing” (p. 182). I am interested in understanding who we are and how we came to be, the similarities and differences in our practice, and in doing so help to create a space for black women within our field to have a voice, tell their own stories and share their experiences.

These women are the racial minority within their fields, as the numbers of African American female school psychologists are low, although, the data (NASP, 2006) reflects significant increases in the numbers of women within the field, specifically white middle class women. This trend is reflective of considerable changes within the field, which was once dominated by the presence of white men (Wilson & Reschley, 1995). The impact of the under-representation of black female School Psychologists in the nation’s schools is certainly one that deserves further consideration, as the field of education faces a national challenge of overrepresentation and disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs. An overwhelming number of these students are African Americans being placed in low functioning programs for the intellectually disabled or in programs serving students with emotional and behavioral disorders, which also have the highest incidences of subjective eligibility determinations (Artiles, Klingner, & Tate, 2006; Frame, Clarizio, & Porter, 1984; O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Skiba, Simmons, Kohler, Henderson & Wu, 2006). Many of the students being disproportionately identified as special education students, have associated cultural, environmental and

socio-economic factors that also impact their performance in school, and which require additional consideration as these educational placement decisions are being considered. This additional consideration moves beyond the role that is defined as an agent of the school, and moves into a role of advocacy. The development of professional practices and negotiated roles for African American female School Psychologists is important as we consider how educational decisions are being made in light of the issues of minority over-representation in special education.

Additionally, many of the schools most impacted by overrepresentation are the nation's urban and poorest schools where the numbers of African American and Hispanic origin students are higher (Artiles, et. al., 2006; Noguera & Wing, 2006; Valdes, 1996). Reflecting on the recruitment and retention of minorities within the field of School Psychology, I recognize that faces of color are limited within the field and, "individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds are still substantially underrepresented in the field of school psychology" (Merrell, Ervin, & Gimple, 2006, p. 109). I believe that this type of under-representation within the field ultimately impacts child outcomes and educational placement decisions. I am not suggesting that racial or cultural similarities between school psychologists and families/students are the key to the problem of over-representation. However, I am suggesting that as minorities within the field we are charged with acknowledging how these cultural and ethnic similarities can work toward more equitable access to educational services for minority children.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is born out of an organic space. I am articulating the voices of African American women within the field of School Psychology and find their voices to

be powerful. In using a narrative format, I am making inquiry into how their lives work, both personally and professionally, through the intersectional exploration of racial and gendered constructions. The reader should note that at times specific information was omitted because of the sensitive nature of the discussion, and the need to protect the identity of the participants of the study.

Chapter One provides the reader with an introduction to the beginnings of the study, gives voice to my life as a School Psychologist and provides a grounding in the personal history that led up to this study. The research questions are also introduced, as I attempted to merge the personal with the professional as a starting point for the discussion of intersecting spaces. I have introduced the reader to the framework of intersectionality, which is being used as the guide for the study, as well as critical race theory and black feminist thought which serve as the theoretical frameworks for the study.

Chapter Two explores the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory, black feminist thought and intersectionality in detail, providing historical insight into the development of each theory, as well as their use within multiple disciplines, but specifically as they relate to work within the field of education.

There is minimal scholarly research available on African American Female school psychologists, ergo; chapter three provides an overview of the literature in the fields of school psychology and professional development; (in) equity discourse in schools; and the development of role and practice in African American female School Psychologists.

Chapter Four explores the methodological framework and description of the study, including the role of qualitative research in educational inquiry, as well as

outlining the purposes and use of narrative inquiry and its usefulness to the current study. The participants are briefly introduced and the data collection process is presented. The method by which the data was analyzed is also presented along with the research questions and interview protocol.

Chapter Five provides the initial presentation of the data with an emphasis on the focus group interview and resulting emergent themes.

Chapter Six continues the data presentation from the individual interviews and provides more in depth unveiling of the participants. They are introduced via biographical sketches and their individual voices provide the narrative through which we hear their stories.

Chapter Seven provides an in depth analysis of the data using the lenses of critical race theory, black feminist thought and intersectionality theory. Emergent themes from the individual interviews are examined.

Chapter Eight summarizes the research, reflects upon the placement of the study within the existing literature; and concludes with a reflection from the researcher.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory presented itself as a theoretical option out of concern for the lack of progress of racial reform. At the time of its inception (in the 1970s), legal activists and those active within the civil rights movement were becoming frustrated with the slow pace of racial and legal reforms. One of the first proponents of the theory was Derrick Bell, an attorney working for legal and civil rights reform. Bell (1980) began to expand his legal discourse to include his personal experiences as an African American man and also as a member of legal academia. The framework for the critical analysis component of critical race theory has its roots in Critical Legal Studies and according to Watkins, (2005), the theoretical framework of critical legal studies “focuses on addressing the class disparities, perpetuated by conservative interpretations of government policy” (p. 201). These existing policies serve to continue the subjugation of the lower classes and minority populations by maintaining the status quo.

Critical race theorists espouse the voicing of multiple viewpoints as a means of adding value to the political, social and economic discourse. I identify with this theoretical perspective because, “critical race theorists are attempting to interject minority cultural viewpoints, derived from a common history of oppression, with their efforts to reconstruct a society crumbling under the burden of racial hegemony” (Deyhle, Parker, & Villenas, 1999, p. 15). Indeed, what is perceived as beneficial to the masses may serve as a tool for oppression when viewed through the lens of those within subjugated racial, cultural and/or gender constructions. Within the field of critical legal studies, this was

evidenced in the ways laws were created and used as tools of oppression and served to maintain the economic and social hierarchies that excluded many minorities.

The feminist movement has also greatly impacted the evolution of critical race theory. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2001) one of the major contributions by the radical feminist movement was that of 'voice'. The feminist movement sought to give women voice by using their stories to combat the meta-narratives being offered by essentialists seeking exclusion of women's voices as a means of keeping them silent politically and educationally. The radical feminist movement's contribution to critical race theory can be illustrated in the encouragement of authors such as Derrick Bell (1980), Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) and Richard Delgado (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) to tell their own stories from the perspective of the minority, giving the reader a keen insight into how race, class and power intersect across disciplines. Critical race theory encourages the individual to use their narrative voice as a means of combating the status quo. Watkins (2005) supports the use of these narratives and suggests using them as a tool to understand and eradicate dysconscious racism. These "stories provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling and interpreting" (Deyhle, et. al., 1999, p. 7), in fact the use of narratives as a means of expressing perspective gives voice to those who have been relegated to the margins of our society, professions, and classrooms.

Critical race theory, initially examined within the context of education by Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), sought "to theorize race and use it as an analytic tool for understanding school inequity" (p. 48). These scholars acknowledge that organized school is a microcosm of society ergo, many of the same issues affecting minorities would continue to play out in America's schools, particularly pertaining to race and

power issues. These authors marked a new beginning for critical race theory in education and have since challenged many educational theorists to broaden the dialogue within the field of education to include the historical impact that race has on contemporary education (Kozol, 2005; Watkins, 2005), educational practices and how they are impacted by racial constructions (Delpit, 1995; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2004; Thompson, 2004; Valdes, 1996), what affect race has on teacher expectations and bias (Gay, 2000; Payley, 2000; Tatum, 2007) as well as the investigation of the achievement gap as it relates to race disparities (Noguera & Wing, 2006).

The goals of education cannot be segregated from the goals of establishing equity in the larger society. The same issues of race, class and gender found as problematic in our communities will also plague our schools indeed, as Watkins (2005) states, “education is politics” (p. 2). We enter into the world immersed in the social problems of class, race and gender, and each of us has been impacted by our histories that precede us. Critical race theories of education challenge each of us to critically analyze these histories, reflect upon the role that race (and class) has upon our experiences and how these experiences have impacted our interactions within society (socially and educationally). I suggest that it is critical knowledge and empowerment as well as the retelling of our history through multiple perspectives, which evokes change and gives hope to the notion of social equity; not academic achievement based on a universal standard.

Critical race theory encompasses several basic tenets, which serve as the foundation for critical questioning across a broad range of disciplines. One of the most

important tenets is the idea that no person is neutral in the discourse surrounding race and class. The idea of colorblindness and neutrality harkens to the liberalist ideology, which is in direct opposition to the goals of critical race theory. We are each impacted, either positively or negatively, by the social constructions of race and have lived experiences that are impacted by racial and cultural perception. The idea of neutrality is not action focused, and it serves to further silence the myriad of voices that contribute to critical race theory. “Critical race theory applied to education offers a way to rethink traditional educational scholarship” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 60), and demands those working for, and within, the systems of education to reflect upon our own practice critically, acknowledging our bias and move toward actively engaging in practice that is inclusive of diverse racial/cultural perspectives.

Critical race theorists in education call for the retelling of history through the perspective of minority viewpoints. Saddler (2005) acknowledges CRT’s use of critical understanding of historical events, “in order to obtain a full understanding of the current state of affairs in education [affirming this is] an essential step in engaging in critical discourse” (p. 42). Through the retelling of historical events as experienced by those groups who were being oppressed, there is the opportunity for greater understanding about the actual event, and the impact of the event upon those persons.

Another important imperative of critical race theory is that “racism is ordinary, not aberrational” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Acts of racism are not the outliers, isolated or natural occurrences. Critical race theorists recognize that acts of racism are often consequences of systemic issues related to race, class and power. To the members of the groups impacted by these offenses, these occurrences are not singular or random.

Hearing the stories from the diverse populations affected by racism gives members of the dominant classes an insight into a world to which they are not privy, but have great influence nonetheless.

Critical race theory takes the stance that race is a social construction, which can be used for the purposes of continued oppression by the dominant classes. In fact, critical race theorists suggest, “race and races are products of social thought and relations...races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7). Critical race theorists challenge the notions of socially constructed racial identifications and stereotypes and resist their service to the dominant group’s power interests. Critical race theorists recognize the intersectionality of culture, race, gender and class, and suggest that all of these are important to the makeup of the individual’s identity, experience and ultimate story. Delgado & Stefancic (2001) examine the ways in which these multiple identities impact the individual and how individuals such as black women navigate the intersecting multiple sites of oppression. There is the question of whether the issues that accompany each identity are considered separately or additively.

Duesterberg (1999) extends the examination of the social constructions of race to the teacher education programs, suggesting “it is imperative for pre-service teachers and teacher educators to engage in efforts to theorize race and understand how constructions of race affect our actions and decisions” (p. 751). Encouraging teachers during the training process to examine their own perceptions about race opens up dialogue and better prepares them to create an environment within their classrooms for discourse with students, other teaching staff and parents. I suggest that there are opportunities for this

type of reflection within the supporting field of School Psychology, particularly those persons working within urban and suburban school settings that are heavily populated with minority students, where the rates of special education identification of minority students far outnumbers that of their non minority peers in the nation.

Harris (1993) examines the issue of whiteness as property, which is also a tenet of critical race theory. She recalls how her own history learning about the civil rights movement and the history of race and racism in this country at the feet of her grandmother, who recounted first-hand experiences with racism both personally and professionally. Harris (1993) acknowledges that her own family history and oral storytelling traditions impacted how she conceived of place within our social, legal and political climate, in fact she stated "...learning about the world at her knee as I did, these experiences also came to inform my outlook and my understanding of the world" (p.1712).

Harris (1993) speaks to the concept of whiteness as property from the aspect of critical legal studies and emphasizes its impact on the ways in which race is conceptualized both in the public and private sectors. Addressing to link between whiteness as property, racial identification, and the early development of property rights, she makes clear the disparities between those who have the opportunity to use their whiteness as property and the people of color that are impacted by this inherent position of power within our society. In our current society, where one can find people of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds who espouse a lens that is colorblind, it is useful to remember that within the purview of critical race theory we are not neutral in our stance and to be blind is to be complicit in either one's own marginalization, the marginalization

of others or both. I posit that as a counter-narrative to colorblindness we recognize that there exists “the valorization of whiteness as treasured property in a society structured on racial caste. In ways so embedded that it is rarely apparent, the set of assumptions, privileges, and benefits that accompany the status of being white” (Harris, 1993, p. 1713), meaning we cannot escape issues of race that impact all of us (either implicitly or explicitly). Milner (2008) concurs with this position and moves it forward within the field of education, when he says, “issues of race and racism are deeply rooted in U.S. society ... they also are ingrained and deeply imbedded in the policies, practices, procedures, and institutionalized systems of teacher education” (p. 332). Reflecting on these positions we can recognize that our society operates in a way that values whiteness as a commodity, and that these assumptions are based on a long held belief system which is imbedded at every level of our social, economic and political worlds.

Making sense of these historical forms of domination compels one to reflect upon the final tenet of critical race theory, which is interest convergence.

Interest convergence stresses that racial equality and equity for people of color will be pursued and advanced when they converge with the interests, needs, expectations, and ideologies of Whites... Inherent in the interest-convergent principle are matters of loss and gain; typically, someone or some group, often the dominant group, has to negotiate and give up something in order for interests to converge or align (Milner, 2008, p. 333).

A concept first pioneered in the work of Derrick Bell (1980) within the field of critical legal studies as well as critical race theory, this concept has been used as an important aspect of understanding race and racism within a broad range of disciplines.

Bell (1980) initially presented the term interest convergence as a way of re-conceptualizing the Supreme Court's decision in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling allowing for the desegregation of the nation's schools. Bell (1980) argued that the decision of the high court was not altruistic, nor solely recognizing that the time for desegregation had come; rather that the decision was made based on the convergence of interests between whites and blacks at that time; in fact he stated, "...this principle of interest convergence provides: The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (p. 523). Bell (1980) further argued that blacks in the United States had been challenging the idea of segregation for many years to no avail, and that it was only when the economic and political interests of those in power converged with the interests of black people that the law was changed to reflect more racially equitable policies in education.

The principle of interest convergence has been used also within the field of education in order to recast the issues of educational (in)equity in schools. Critical race theorists investigate the concepts of interest convergence and what impact it has on all aspects of education including the curriculum, power differentials in schools locally and at the systemic level, as well as the basic resources provided to certain students. Whereas other students (namely poor and minority) do not have access to tangible and intangible 'property' "...only some students will have the property that they will need to develop, acquire, inherit, and earn more elaborate forms of property and, consequently, transcend poverty and racial oppression" (Milner, 2008, p. 334). In essence, addressing the (in)equity found in many of the nation's poorest and minority schools would involve the interests of those in power converging with the interests of those outside of the power

circle. There is the need to eliminate the racial hierarchies that currently plaguing many of our systems, which inherently means giving up significant privilege associated with that power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001).

Black Feminist Thought

“One of the greatest gifts of black feminism to ourselves has been to make it a little easier simply to *be* black and female” (Smith, 1995, p. 263).

The stories that are reflected in the narrative voices of my colleagues are those of the few among many, speaking about a professional life infused with the personal, inclusive of their own cultural experiences and textured by their positions within the margins (hooks, 2000). Within the context of this study I am speaking very specifically to the experiences of several black women within the field of school psychology primarily dominated by white middle class women. As I reflect upon the history within the field I cannot help but make some parallels to the evolution of Black feminist thought (BFT).

Black feminist thought is a framework born out of the marginalization of African American women within both the male dominated black liberation movement and the white dominated feminist movements. Howard-Hamilton (2003) speaks to the need for a theory that encompasses the multiple intersecting identities of black women when she states, “understanding why the experiences of African American women are different from those of other women and those of African American men is steeped in the historical progression and ideology of black people in the United States” (p. 19). With different experiences, the voices, concerns and agendas of black women were not perceived as necessary or relevant to the respective movements. Although black women were participants, diligent workers and leaders within each movement, their status as

outsiders within (Collins, 2000) seemingly invited them into the fray but limited their voice, excluded them from the dialogue and ultimately made them invisible. The exclusion of standpoints relevant to the lives and struggles specific to black women made way for one of the major tenets of what was to become the black feminist movement.

Collins (2000) outlines the basic tenets of the movement with the primary focus being "...to empower African American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions" (p. 22). The four key tenets of black feminist thought include, understanding our lived experiences as knowledge and finding meaning in them; using the dialogical relationship as a tool of empowerment; the understanding and use of an ethic of caring; and finally, reflecting on our own responsibility for who we are and acknowledging our own subjectivity as we articulate our own standpoints. The key concept of intersectionality is revisited in the overriding objectives of black feminist thought, experiencing our social, professional and political worlds as uniquely positioned within the intersecting oppressions inclusive of race, class, and gender. The consideration of oneself and one's place as a convergence of identities, not only black, not only female, not only middle class, but uniquely all of these things with added texture given by individual experience is important to the work of redefining our personal and professional roles. Within the social, academic and political contexts, this convergence is meaningful to me in a way that will differ from the women primarily dominant within my field.

Etter-Lewis (1993) suggests that we resist the temptation to minimize this intersectionality by making either racism or sexism the primary influence on the lives of African American women, instead, "the underlying assumption that life can be divided into discrete components without overlap or interaction is both reductive and misleading"

(p. 104). My desire to learn about the evolution of practice through the eyes of black women within the field of school psychology is in large part driven by the preeminent tenet of black feminist thought, which connects our experiences to our consciousness and calls us to share and support one another on the journey. Black feminist thought does not suggest that our experiences will be the same, however, it does support the common experiences shared by black women within our societal context, shaped by a common history, common challenges within our own communities and outside of those communities.

Collins (1998) suggests that we fall short of creating a static standpoint, but rather open up a dialogue for sharing. Another major component of the black feminist movement challenges members of the movement to form dialogical relationships, which “suggests that changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness” (Collins, 2000, p. 30).

Using black feminist thought within the field of education Ladson-Billings (1994) establishes this type of dialogical relationship as she examines the lives, histories, and professional practices of eight educators. She successfully incorporates the personal histories of African American women into the story of how they have become successful teachers who have impacted the lives of the children they have taught in a way that is reflective and meaningful. Ladson-Billings (1994) values the use of dialogue espoused in BFT. Furthermore, “the give and take of dialogue makes struggling together for meaning a powerful experience in self-definition and self-discovery” (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 155). She moves the conversation with these women from isolated discourse about what

they do, to the collective dialogue exploring who they are, how they came to be and what commonalities and differences there lies between them. The richness of experience is explored in a way that becomes meaningful to these educators as African-American women. Other black female educators (Cole, 1994; Delpit, 1995; Gay, 2000; hooks, 1981/1994/1995) have used the framework of black feminist thought as a way of exploring the relationships between black women, as a way of resisting oppression from dominant groups and marginalization but also as a way of naming their own agendas and political standpoints.

In one of the earlier formal statements of collective thought within the black feminist movement, the Combahee River Collective published “*A Black Feminist Statement*” (Freedman, 2007). Black feminist thought opened the door for black women to redefine their own roles in society, work collaboratively for political and social change, making sure that through their collective voices they advocated for their own agendas. Howard-Hamilton (2003) states, “although the stories and experiences of each woman are unique, there are intersections of experiences between and among black women” (p. 21). I support this assertion and build upon it within the context of this study by acknowledging that although our individual practices within the field may be very different, there are the ties of race, gender and position within the field that bind us...for this reason our stories are relevant and important.

Intersectionality

The origins of intersectionality framework grew out of feminist and womanist scholars of color pressing the position that most feminist scholarship at that time was about middle class, educated, white women, and that an inclusive view of women’s

position should substantively acknowledge the intersections of gender with other significant social identities, most notably race (Smith, 2008, p. 302).

Prior to the use of this analytical approach to identity development and convergence of race, gender and class there was not a framework for understanding the ways in which these issues and more manifested in the lives of women of color, particularly as they were related to the traditional feminist and civil rights movements.

A review of the literature suggests that the term ‘intersectionality’ was initially used by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) within the discussion of critical legal studies and critical race theory. Her work served,

...to illustrate that many of the experiences Black women face are not sub-sumed within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination as these boundaries are currently understood, and that the intersection of ra-cism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those exper-iences separately (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244).

She was one of the first voices to articulate the standpoint of black women and advocate for an agenda within critical legal studies, critical race theory and traditional feminist movements, that was inclusive of the black female voice. Her work in the field of intersectionality has been used in a broader multidisciplinary context, and scholars from the fields of women’s studies, education, and the social sciences have used the concept as an analytical tool as they examine a myriad of intersectional relationships often related to gender, race, class, and sexual orientation (Alfred, 2001; Dixson &

Dingus, 2008; Pimentel, 2003; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Settles, 2006; Thornton, 1983; Thornton, 2008).

Intersectional analyses are “grounded in the traditions of black feminism and critical race theory, which argues that identity is formed at the intersections of race and gender” (Pimentel, 2003, p. 10). The concept of intersectionality as an analytical framework for this study is imperative to the understanding of how African American women within the field of School Psychology perceive their roles, the development of their practice and their conceptions of power (personal and professional).

This analytical approach also serves as a counter-narrative to those individuals or systems that would support essentializing personal and professional identity into race or gender classifications. The use of the term ‘intersectionality’ is meant to deepen the understanding of how multiple interlocking systems and identities can operate in the lived experiences of people from day to day. Jordan-Zachary (2007) confronts this type of essentialism as another form of marginalization, and likens her perception of her identity to a ‘marble cake’ when she states, “my blackness is mixed intricately with my womaness and therefore cannot be separated or unlocked” (p. 261). Although she acknowledges that race and gender identity are social constructions built on the needs to maintain place in our society, she makes clear that her converging identities as black and woman serve to impact her daily both within and outside of her own communities. Jordan-Zachary (2007) through her research begins, “to address the impact of intersectionality on the lives of black women not only in relation to the dominant society but also in relation to their own communities” (p. 257). This is the challenge of working

toward the recognition that although black women share racialized and gendered social constructions, the manifestation of that intersectionality may be vastly different.

The concept of political intersectionality highlights the fact that women of color are situated within at least two subordinated groups that frequently pursue conflicting political agendas... The failure of feminism to interrogate race means that the resistance strategies of feminism will often replicate and reinforce the subordination of people of color, and the failure of antiracism to interrogate patriarchy means that antiracism will frequently reproduce the subordination of women (Crenshaw, 1991, p.1252).

The use of an intersectional lens is necessary to highlight the precarious space that the black woman occupies within the antiracist and feminist movements. Not only should these issues of internal subordination be addressed for the sake of providing an opportunity for black women to name their own agendas, but also to help strengthen the aforementioned groups from within. I maintain that the articulation of the black female voice within the antiracist and feminist movement serves to further legitimize each entity, and creates a space for a coalition through the black woman who occupies an important space in each group.

The study of African American Female School Psychologists creates an opportunity for me to explore through the use of the narrative, how we 'do' intersectionality within our chosen field. In doing so, I believe that another facet of intersectionality research will be uncovered, and that is the ways in which black women form both formal and informal models of support for one another, recognizing that being an outsider often forces one to create coalitions as tools for empowerment. Within the profession of school

psychology, with the low numbers of African Americans within the field, these forms of social and professional supports are sometimes purposeful, and other times happen organically based on shared need for support. The use of an intersectionality approach also affords the reader an opportunity to look at the various ways in which black women perceive their roles within the profession, as well as how their perceptions of their roles develop similarly or differently. As the research develops there is a caution to resist a reductionist perspective of intersectionality which seeks to reduce identity to race, class or gender for, “although these three aspects of identity do not represent the totality of their experience or identity, they do address the embedded element of family and culture” (Dixson & Dingus, 2008, p. 809).

Convergence in Educational Spaces

I do not wear my blackness or my identity as a woman overtly, meaning, I am not always conscious of either of these descriptors as it pertains to my daily life. Of course I know that I am both and much more even, but sometimes, I forget that who I am has a different meaning depending on whom is looking at me. I am doing my boss a favor. We have a co-worker out on maternity leave and members of the staff have been asked to take over her caseload at an elementary school. I have been in her place as a working mother, so I do so with no objections. I am asked to evaluate a student at the beginning of the summer session, so the parent has been contacted to bring the child for testing. I have reviewed the case file, but of course have never met the child. As the hour approaches, I am making small talk with the principal of the school, who happens to be an Indian-American (East Indian) woman. She outlines the different strategies employed by the school to help the student academically, but admits that he continues to struggle even

with a great deal of intervention. The time passes, and I return to the School Psychologists office. Shortly thereafter, the principal brings the child in with his father, where brief introductions are made. I notice a puzzled look on the father's face, but dismiss it as nerves; I know that "testing" can evoke nervousness and anxiety in some parents. I sit down with the father and the student and we begin to discuss what we will be doing that day. As I am going over the information with the father, he interrupts me and says "You're not the lady that I saw at the meeting". I affirmed that indeed he'd met with my co-worker who was now on maternity leave, and we were working together as a department toward continuous services for children, and that I also worked with elementary students, in fact my area of expertise was reading disorders (his child had reading issues). The dad looks at me intensely as I am speaking and excuses himself. Thinking that he will be waiting in the lobby for the student to finish, I begin talking to the very pleasant young man about his summer, his favorite activities and how he feels about his school year. We are establishing a rapport. Within 15 minutes, there is a knock at the door, and the principal asks me to step out for a moment. As I step out of the room, I see that she is embarrassed, almost nervous. She proceeds to tell me that the father has decided not to have his son evaluated. I am still not wearing my racialized or gendered hat, and ask why. We go down the hall to her office and the father explains to me that he is not comfortable having his son evaluated today, in fact he would like to wait until the "other lady" gets back. I explain to him that we both work for the same department, that I am also a certified School Psychologist and that my experience with students with reading issues is extensive. I offer to answer any questions that he may have regarding diagnostics or the evaluation process. I find myself covertly begging him to accept me,

*acknowledge me, and validate me. As I am doing so I am embarrassed also, because we are also standing in front of the principal of the school, who I hold in high regard for her work with children. At the end of that conversation ultimately this white man decided that this black woman was not good enough to help his white son. We asked that he rescind his consent for evaluation in writing, and bid him a good day. After they left, the principal apologized for the time wasted, although she made no mention of what really happened in her office that day. As I approach my car, I am barely holding in my anger, my frustration and my embarrassment. I call my best friend, also a School Psychologist, and recount the story, by this time I am crying. She seems less than surprised at what has happened and reminded me that I am working in a school whose demographics are very different from the schools that I serve on the south side of Atlanta. These parents are not used to seeing Black School Psychologists, much less Black female School Psychologists. Reflecting on this incident, I am sure that there are those who will say that I overreacted to the father's decision, and I recognize that it was his decision to make. However, in that moment, on that day, for the first time in my professional career I was made to feel inferior, I felt the impact of my blackness **and** my identity as a woman, as they converged upon me, making me feel as though the privilege of education and professional training would never be outweighed by the obstacles of race and gender. (Natasha, 2009, Personal Reflection)*

The recall of this incident makes me realize that the forward movement and upward mobility that can result from educational opportunity, does not, in many sectors of our society trump race or gender. As discussed previously, my grandparents perceived education as a key that would open doors for me which were never open to them. With

this expectation, came the idea that there would be a power differential also associated with increased educational opportunities. I have come to know that these power differentials are relative to the time and place both personally and professionally. I have come to know that often this ‘power’ manifests in an implied power which comes with the privilege of upward mobility but also presses people of color more toward an assimilationist perspective. Williams (2001) challenges the notion of implied power, which comes with education and the challenging of hegemony within the academic organization. Although she is speaking of her position within higher education, the point remains the same, that we must recognize “the seduction of that reservoir of privilege, and the illusion of having moved beyond race, gender, and class to the status of academic and/or activist” (p. 90).

There are issues that cannot be avoided in our society, and the issues of race, class and gender are some of the ones that permeate most segments of our social, political and educational worlds. Though I have a desire to work as an advocate for children in my role, there are those times when factors outside of myself or the child work actively against that goal. These are the times when I am reminded that my own personal agenda for change does not supersede the years of societal bias and perceptions based largely on what is seen on the exterior, namely race and gender.

My scenario recounted above exemplifies the need for the discourse within the community of African American female School Psychologists for dialogue about how their racialized and gendered identities impact them. The current literature is very limited in its discussion of African Americans within the field of School Psychology. The literature pertaining to African American women is even more limited. My research

provides another lens with which to view the profession and our place within it. This study is also a contributor to the field of African American and women's studies, as it provides a renaming of ourselves from a viewpoint that considers race and gender identity as significant to the development of professional practice within the field.

Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) speak to the 'dueling isms' of race and sex, particularly related to African American women and their intersecting identities, as well as the burden of being positioned to disentangle the societal oppressions of race and gender. The authors (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) acknowledge the ways in which this expectation of disentanglement can elicit coping mechanisms specific to women of color, including a process they call "walling off" (p. 74) where the women are "shifting cognitively by screening out distressing facts, they are shielded, at least for a time from the emotional impact of these painful experiences" (p. 74). Certainly the authors do not suggest the denial of oppression, but rather they acknowledge that in the African American female's experience of bias, she creates a cognitive system that allows her to deal with it in a way that minimizes the impact of racism and sexism so that she can move forward.

Indeed, the ways in which these identities converge can leave one wondering which one was the most offensive, being black or being a woman. Ethnicity and gender are the most significant aspects of Black women's identities. Yet race has a far greater salience than gender. For many, it seems, gender identity is important yet implicit-they do not actively or consciously think about it (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 39).

Racism as manifested in the historical, social, political and professional lives of people of color has played such an important role in the ways in which I perceive my social placement within our society, ergo, the recognition of my gender is present, but to some extent muted. Additionally, because racism is often not only personal but also engrained in policy and institutional practices it is more readily identifiable.

I believe that there is an invisibility factor related to intersectional identities which serves as a tool of empowerment for the oppressor, but also as a coping mechanism for the oppressed. The deafening silence within the African American female professional realm is palpable, and speaks to the desire not to confront individuals or systems that would marginalize us. However, I believe using this invisibility factor often has the opposite effect and serves as a means of being complicit in one's own domination and silencing. The reduction of a black woman to her gender or sex makes it easier to dismiss her success, makes her less of a challenge, and allows one to ignore the issues and agenda that would be important to her development. Crenshaw (1989) refers to this as a 'single axis framework' and speaks to its use as a tool for marginalization. In fact, I posit, ignoring issues specific to African American women is more convenient than dismissing them, as it is less confrontational, more covert and draws her into the quiet complicity of her own marginalization. The decision to remain invisible by not telling our own stories, and being unwilling to move forward a social and political agenda that is meaningful to us, reinforces the idea that our double oppressive identities are not worthy of critical reflection and consideration. In turn, this makes us, as a small number within the professional realm (particularly in School Psychology) less likely to challenge the status quo, or move against the flow of the system of school, in favor of maintaining a level of

professional invisibility. Again, exemplifying how the positions of agent and advocate work in conflict with one another, and how our own perceptions of our identity contribute to the educational outcomes within schools.

CHAPTER THREE

III. Literature Review

Introduction

There is minimal research available about African American female School Psychologists and the development of their professional practice. As such, I have chosen to build a literature review based on the works available that speak to the development of professional practices among school psychologists, women and African Americans. I have also reviewed the scholarly literature that problematizes issues of educational (in)equity and discourse in schools. I do so in an effort to situate our professional roles and allow the analysis of that role in light of the barriers identified through the literature. Recognizing that none of these in isolation specifically address the work that I am doing regarding negotiating the roles of agent and advocate among African American School Psychologists, there are aspects of each that are salient to my study. As such, I seek to review the data currently available and situate my study as research seeking to fill a void in the literature.

The literature review begins with an exploration of the marked absence of the minority voice within the field of School Psychology. In order to situate our own place within the field, I provide a brief summary of the historical change in demographics within the field. The ways in which the educational landscape is changing is reflective of a more diverse population of students and it is important to recognize where the field of school psychology stands in relation to this change. As minorities within the field, I am providing support for the use of the African American female voice to serve as a tool of empowerment within a field that has not historically included us in the discourse. This

inclusion of our voices leads to the question of how we develop as practitioners, and what impact our own histories have on school psychologists as we develop professionally. Issues of (in) equity in schools are examined; barriers to education identified and our professional roles within the context of equity discourse will be discussed. Finally, the literature review will close with a review of the literature pertaining to African American female school psychologists. The literature in this area is sparse, and reflective of the need for additional research pertaining to the ways in which African American women's intersectional identity impacts the way in which we develop as practitioners.

African American Women...voices excluded

Historically, the field of School Psychology is one that has been dominated by Caucasian men (Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2004). However, within the last three decades the face of the field has started to change and more Caucasian women have been represented. The feminization of the field did not include increased minority representation into the field. In fact, as the student populations' in the nations schools increased at a rapid pace, the professional field designed to provide mental health services in schools did not increase its minority membership accordingly. The research suggests as the numbers of linguistically and ethnically diverse children have continued to rise, professionals, "from diverse ethnic backgrounds and those fluent in languages other than English continue to be seriously underrepresented in the field" (Curtis, et. al., 2004, p. 52). The result of this incongruent match between the diverse student population and minority under-representation within the field may contribute to the disconnection in some urban school related to home-school relationships.

As articulated previously, the act of recognizing one's personal histories and how they impact the social, political and professional realms is important work, particularly when perceived through a critical lens of race and gender. The stories of the women currently dominant within the field are very different from those of black women, who are part of an underrepresented minority. Dixson and Dingus (2008) examine the power that resides in these stories. Although they are specifically reflecting upon the experiences of black female teachers, the concept also resonates within the spirit of this study. As black women we, "have a unique angle of vision on our own lives (and our pedagogy) that may be necessary in understanding exactly what we bring to educational practice (and research)" (Dixson & Dingus, 2008, p. 812). Our stories are as different as each storyteller, however, the dual narrative as woman and African American invites queries into how the textures of these voices impacts the way in which each woman enters the field, operates within the field; and forms relationships with colleagues, families, students, and each other. An issue associated with multiple minority status can manifest in the analysis of the individual construction as the object of interest, rather than putting the subject at the center of analysis. An analysis of black women would certainly analyze race and gender but not to the extent where one is sacrificed at the extent of the other. Hooks (1989) believed, "as subjects, people have the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, and name their history. As objects, one's reality is defined by others, one's identity created by others, one's history named only in ways that define one's relationship to those who are subject" (p. 42-43). Collectively, the women in this study are the subjects of study, the use of narrative as the methodology is the vehicle to name their histories, and the critical analysis of the narrative serves as a way to

examine the personal and professional realities they have articulated. I am certainly not suggesting that our collective minority status as women and African Americans work to create a unified voice representative of 'the black female experience', however I am suggesting that the articulation of the stories, understanding of the personal histories and recognition of the individual experience, is invaluable and a perspective that is lacking within the text that dominates the field of School Psychology.

As we look toward the future of the field these voices are important and necessary, and "for many African American women, how we make meaning of the world around us represents as valid a way of knowing and interpreting the world as other epistemologies that do not include our views" (Merchant & Willis, 2001, p. 46). Indeed, as we reveal ourselves we are opening ourselves up to each other, with hopes of learning, sharing, and growing; we are simultaneously becoming transparent in a way that we have not previously been to the larger community of educational professionals, who have largely become used to our silence. Through this use of voice we are creating an alternative network of support for one another that is often hard to find within our field. The literature suggests that the future of the field of, "School Psychology in the United States will continue to be characterized as primarily Caucasian, specialist-level and female through 2020" (Curtis, et. al., 2004, p. 52). I believe that it is equally important, within the feminization of the field to recognize that as African American female practitioners, our challenges are different, our network of support within the field is more limited, and our perception as professionals is impacted by our dual minority status.

School Psychologists and Professional Development

The roles of School Psychologists are varied and not uniformly defined; in fact Gilman and Gabriel (2004) propose, “the roles of a school psychologist may be specific to local and regional demands” (p. 272). The reality of the practical aspects of School Psychologists’ work involves primary responsibilities for psychometric assessment and evaluation for a wide range of (dis)abilities. This responsibility is intimately connected to the school psychologist’s abilities to consult and dialogue with a wide range of people, including parents, teachers, students, support and administrative staff, as well as community workers. This type of wide ranging consultative work makes the development of professional practice and negotiating roles an essential part of the work that is done within the context of school. “School psychologists must frequently navigate systems’ boundaries, conflicting values and beliefs, and multiple roles” (Lasser & Klose, 2007, p. 484), as such, it is important to begin to acknowledge how our own personal narratives impact our decisions, and to use the recollection of these experiences as a way of acknowledging our own personal biases, value systems and decision making skills. This reflective work is important for every School Psychologist as we work collaboratively with other educators and parents making educational decisions that will impact the lives of children for years to come.

Shriberg, Bonner, Sarr, Walker, Hyland, and Chester (2008) examine issues of social justice within the field of school psychology. The authors recognize the systemic and individual barriers to educational equity within schools, noting the need, “for a cohesive agenda related to social justice within the field of school psychology” (Shriberg, Bonner, Sarr, Walker, Hyland, & Chester, 2008, p. 466). These issues of social justice are

closely aligned with the need to examine the dichotomy between working as agent and advocate.

Lasser and Klose (2007) also speak to the idea of School Psychologists taking, “a proactive, family empowering approach” (p. 488) when discussing special education services with families. Rather than being purveyors of the school agenda regarding special education placement (i.e.: getting the child in smaller classes for the sake of less large group disruption), the authors advocate taking the position that the family should be informed about all of their educational options and parental rights under the law. Skiba, et. al. (2006), affirm that it is often difficult for educational professionals to enter into discussions about race, identify our own biases pertaining to race and acknowledge how race can impact the ways in which we make decisions within the context of schools.

From a critical race perspective I understand that we are not neutral in our positions as minority educators. Certainly from a black feminist perspective I believe that we have an obligation as black women within this field to use our voices for the benefit of understanding our individual positions and the power differentials that accompany the positions, and in doing so, using those voices as a tool of empowerment when called upon to participate in educational discourse. As women emerging from the margins of our field, I would like to use this discourse as a call for action. Our positions of power within schools have farther reaching consequences than the educational roundtable, and as such we must be aware that, “such actions or processes may be driven by individual or institutional habit patterns without ever reaching a conscious level of awareness on the part of those who participate in those institutional actions” (Skiba, et. al, 2006, p. 1425).

Recognition of these factors as they present in a group setting is critical to the ability for the School Psychologist to navigate the roles of agent and advocate, particularly when the pressure from other members of an eligibility team is prevalent. I am suggesting that whatever decisions the individual School Psychologists make, should be driven by their awareness of personal agendas and how those agendas have been formed. Arivett, Rust, Brissie, and Dansby (2007) state, “it is particularly important for school psychologists to work effectively with special educators and general education teachers and to view themselves as parts of the district wide educational program” (p. 378). However, our desire to participate as active members of decision-making teams in schools (agents of the school) should not ultimately override those decisions driven by the best interest of the student and voice of the parents (advocacy). Lasser and Klose (2007) also report on their study of how informal group discussions among team members in “pre-meetings” can inadvertently put pressure on parents to conform to group decisions and recommendations. In fact “when a parent sits in a room with school personnel and listens to the same recommendation endorsed repeatedly, the pressure to conform may motivate the parent to also endorse the same recommendation, perhaps against his or her better judgment” (p. 491).

Within my own professional development I have learned that many of these types of interactions can occur as a part of a well-intentioned effort to develop strategies for consideration to parents prior to a formal meeting. The unintentional consequence may be the presentation of limited options to the parent, and ultimately the, “undermining of the parent’s ethical right to act autonomously on behalf of his or her child” (Lasser & Klose, 2007, p. 491). The myriad of ways that educational professionals can view their positions

greatly impacts the development of strategies for children in educational crisis, the educational placement decisions considered and the way that the children's educational needs are met through school intervention. There is a convergence of personal history that happens at this educational roundtable and participants should be reflective on how their individual decisions are being driven.

Problematizing (In) Equity and Discourse in Schools

Today is a big day in the life of the Jones family. Their youngest son, Johnny, begins school today at the local elementary school. The General Elementary School has been recognized as a School of Excellence and Mr. and Mrs. Jones are excited about their son's first school experience. As they enter the halls of the school on the first day, they are greeted by friendly staff, welcoming them warmly. The walls are covered with beautifully colored bulletin boards, with inviting sentiments for the new students. The school is made up of a racially diverse staff, although the majority of students in the school are African American, and they have a growing Hispanic population as well. Education is very important in the Jones family, and they have instilled a love of learning into Johnny, consequently, he has a curious spirit. He has been socialized to be curious about his environment and loves to learn new things. Mr. and Mrs. Jones both completed high school and Mr. Jones has a technical/vocational degree. Both parent's work and having grown up in the neighborhood they are excited that Johnny will attend the same elementary school that they attended as children. They remember their school experiences well, and many of their teachers once lived in the neighborhood. Never during their walk through the halls of General Elementary School were the Jones' made aware as an African American student, Johnny was twice as likely as his same aged

white peers to be identified as having an intellectual disability or an emotional/behavioral disorder. When identified, Johnny was also twice as likely to spend more than half of his school day within the more restricted setting of the special education class. Last year, although African American students accounted for 39% of the total student population, they make up 74 % of the special education population identified as having an intellectual disability. They also make up 58 % of the population in the program-serving students with emotional disorders. Alas, despite his parents high hopes, Johnny's chances of graduating from high school with a college prep diploma was only 24%, whereas his chances of graduating with a vocational diploma was increased to 58%. Beyond the numbers, the Jones' are not aware that many of the faces they see in the hallways are new teachers and the school consistently has high turnover rates. These are the issues currently facing the Greater Metro School district, of which General Elementary is a part. Unfortunately, these problems are similarly reflected across the state of Georgia in public education, so the Jones' options for school are very limited when these educational outcomes are considered. Knowing this information may prompt Mr. and Mrs. Jones to engage the school in a different manner, or seek information they need to make informed decisions about their child's educational future. These are not the conversations that schools are having at PTA's and Open Houses. These are not the conversations that are taking place a school board meetings or roundtable discussions with the individual board members. This is not something that parents know to be concerned about as they make their way into the classrooms delivering their children to the places of learning. (Natasha, 2009, Personal Reflection)

This is only one story of a family that entrusts the public schools to educate and care for their child, not realizing that there are many social factors that will impact that educational journey. I find it useful to begin with this story as I move into how the collaborative discourse between schools and home can be critical to the educational outcomes for many of the children being served in our nation's schools. Although the setting is fictitious, the quantifiable data is real as are the educational implications for many African American students in contemporary urban schools. As a part of this study I am examining the ways in which our positions as African American Female School Psychologists contribute to or detract from the barriers that often face these families as they converge at the educational roundtable.

The crucial issue in successful learning is not home or school-teacher or student-but the relationship between them. Learning takes place where there is a productive learning relationship (Seeley, 1985, p.25).

I believe that we must move beyond the traditional dyadic relationship between the teacher/student or student/family, moving instead toward the triangulation of the relationship between family, school and student. None of those entities work at optimal levels without consideration for, and assistance from, the other. In developing strategies to increase the academic achievement of African American students we must remember that the student is impacted by the nature of this triangulated relationship. Prior to the development of strategies with students, parents and colleagues, I believe that we must first begin to identify the barriers present in our system of education (locally and systemic) that contribute to some of the issues commonly attributed to public school education.

Issues of equity in education clearly have a great impact in the provision of services for children perceived to be ‘at risk’. The literature shows that schools with higher minority populations have increased drop out rates, lower test scores, higher teacher turnover and more discipline referrals (Baker, 2005; Deever, 1995; Harris, Brown, Ford & Richardson, 2004). These schools often have higher populations of students referred to and made eligible for special education programs in subjective categories such as emotional and behavior disorders and intellectual disabilities, leading to even more damaging issues of inequity related to minority overrepresentation in special education programs and disproportionality (Artiles & Trent, 1994; O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999). Prior to these students ever being placed into a special education program, someone identified them as ‘different’, and my contention is that the way in which the systems of school perceives ‘difference’ has a great deal to do with the way that we perceive the family system. Each of these families come into the school community with a desire for the best educational outcomes for their children, but it is their level of cultural capital and knowledge of the expectations of school that will help them navigate the waters of the system of school, ergo, being more effective advocates for their children. As a byproduct of the lack of educational services available, depleted resources; stereotypical assumptions and bias held by schools, parents are often left out of the fold, and can become disengaged from the educational processes so critical for their children. The literature supports the idea that increased parent involvement is important to the long term academic success of students (Bruckman & Blanton, 2003; Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001; Tam & Heng, 2005). In fact Lott and Rogers (2005) suggest, “this is especially problematic given research

indicating that parental involvement in the schools is an important contributor to children's academic success" (p. 1). Keeping this in mind, we must re-evaluate our role as school consultants, recognizing that the way in which we engage parents at the educational roundtable will become critical to the success of the student. The goal of a dialogical relationship between home and school should be to improve collaborative educational discourse and by default improve the outcomes for many of the children that we serve. Lott and Rogers (2005) support the idea of collaboration and discourse between school consultants and families as a means of re-engaging the process of educational advocacy both for the schools and the family.

As School Psychologists, largely engaged in the assessment of (dis)ability and thought of as 'keeper of the bell curve' in schools, we must problematize the ways in which we engage the educational landscape and the kinds of discourse in which we are involved. Moving beyond the numerical value of our children is difficult within the field of education because of the high levels of stress brought about by high stakes testing and the rhetoric surrounding accountability in schools. Given the emphasis on assessment within the profession, Phillips (1996) ponders the future of school based psychological services and states, "in the practice of psychologists in schools, there has been a preoccupation with technical competence...all too often, the result has been practice by the numbers" (p. 51). In the broadest sense, as we negotiate our intersecting roles within schools as mental health and educator alike, we must move beyond the system of numbers that has driven our profession, instead moving toward a more collaborative dialogue with colleagues, teachers, parents and students. Within a narrower scope the

challenge becomes examining how our own personal agendas and training backgrounds impact our every day service delivery and the educational planning process for children.

Supporting students as an African American Female School Psychologist, working in schools with predominately African American students requires that I also move beyond a 'single axis framework' (Crenshaw, 1989) as I work to understand the students with whom I work. Relying solely on quantitative information as a determinant of ability or social-emotional functioning contributes to the types of educational (in)equity that leads to failing schools, failing students; disengaged parents; high turnover rates, professional burnout; and minimal investment in the educational outcomes of all children. As part of the support staff within schools, I believe that School Psychologists have a unique opportunity and obligation to consider the many variables that work in concert with one another which impact on a child's performance. Rather than perceiving the child as one-dimensional, it is often useful to give consideration to the ways in which their social and environmental settings are also impacting them. Silverstein, Springer, and Russo (1992) remind us, that, "professionals and parents each bring a unique perspective and different type of knowledge and expertise which is not readily available to the other" (p. 384). Actively engaging parents in the pre-referral process brings to the team knowledge about the students home and community along with their interactions within these environments that is invaluable. Parents of all cultural and economic backgrounds are typically able to offer keen insight into their child's social strengths and challenges as well as provide the team with anecdotal information regarding developmental history and the cultural context of the family. This information, coupled with the school teams observations of the child's academic progress and school functioning, can provide a more

comprehensive view of the child across contexts, making the development of intervention more likely to be effective. A review of the scholarly literature reveals several barriers within the system of education that contribute to the relationship between home and school. I situate my own professional role within this context and evaluate my contribution to the home school relationship.

I am rushing from one school to another trying hard not to be late for a Student Support Team meeting. We are discussing the academic progress on a young man that has been struggling all year and I do not want to miss it. The meeting has been rescheduled twice due to the parent's hectic work schedule. I hastily rush past the front office staff, and into the administrative conference room. I just made it. The teachers, counselor and principal are all there already, but no parent. We wait for another 10 minutes, and someone suggests calling the parent, who lives less than five minutes away. I call and the parent answers the phone in a groggy, sleep-ridden voice, apologetic at missing the meeting, she had gotten off work only an hour prior and had fallen asleep. She promises to come right away, because she knows how important this meeting is for her son. While we wait, there is some discussion of the family circumstance, and the mother's variable work schedule. The teacher remarks about the child's homework not being completed consistently, and that his clothes are not always fresh in the morning, in fact, sometimes he smells. Another person at the table tells us that his father was jailed last year for a violent crime against the mother, and that she knows family services is involved with the family. The parent arrives, looking nervous and voicing her apologies to the group. She is dressed in a pair of sweatpants, a headscarf and house-slippers, but she scoots her chair up to the table and is actively listening to the group as we proceed to discuss her son's academic

difficulties. The chairperson of the committee (school counselor) announces that since the parent is so late, the teacher will have to give a brief synopsis of her son's performance in class, since her planning time is almost over. The teacher talks about the student's rate of reading, his oral and written comprehension abilities; his grade equivalent score on the most recent curriculum based reading assessment; and that he is now enrolled in the EIP (remedial) reading group and failing there also. There is no time for questions as the teacher leaves to pick her students up from art class. The parent thanks the teacher and the meeting proceeds. There is no talk of why the homework is not done; what family circumstances may contribute to the student's academic performance; and whether the parent needs any help from the school. The committee suggests that the young man be tested for a possible learning disability since he has lagged so far behind all year long, with no significant progress being made. The principal adds, "The CRCT is coming up and you know third grade is crucial, if he doesn't pass the test, he will be retained". The mother, looking confused, asks if this testing means special education, and is told no, the testing is just to 'see how he learns best'. The mother hesitates just before signing the papers, and then thinks twice, her pen making contact on the signature line. The paperwork to end the meeting is passed around the table and we all sign, including the parent, although her question has not fully been answered. We leave the meeting feeling very accomplished as educators, because we have helped a child today, after all, we are a school of excellence. However, as I leave the building, going to my third school of the day, I see the parent getting into her car, with a very confused look on her face, staring at the copies of the paperwork that have been given to her, and I begin to wonder about the intention and consequences for the work that I am doing.

The snapshot presented above is fictionalized, but is an accurate reflection of the types of interactions that occur regularly in schools across our nation. As educators we perceive ourselves to have the best intentions when coming together to make educational planning decisions for children, however, we must critically analyze the purposes of those interactions and the ways in we consider all of the factors which may have an impact (positive or negative) on the students with whom we work. In doing so, I feel compelled to ask at times, are we encouraging the participatory voice of the parent as a contributor to the educational planning process? From the perspective of critical race theorist, I posit that many of the systemic policies that we have in place work against the idea of full parental participation in a student's education. Making the case for improved practice with a look into how our roles, our bias, our history impacts children, we must first acknowledge that there is more to meeting the needs of families and students than dialogue, there is action, there is the provision of access to language that may be unfamiliar to them; attainment of information that is not readily available; and ideally an invitation to participate actively as an expert in the education of their children at the educational roundtable.

Harry, Allen and McLaughlin (1995) identify the structure of power, and the use of educational jargon, as significant deterrents to parent participation both in the general and special education settings. The authors report "the interpersonal dynamics of these meetings placed parents at a distinct disadvantage and undermined parental efforts at advocacy" (p. 369). Time and again I have found myself sitting in a meeting looking across the table at a parent who does not understand the vernacular of the educators sitting at the table. We are often well meaning, and intent on finding ways to increase the

child's educational success, meaning well but doing little. We speak freely in these meetings, sometimes, with the minimal participation of the parent. In these meetings the parents may smile, or offer a perfunctory thanks, but in a private conversation they may reveal that they did not understand many of the acronyms being used to describe the educational services of their children.

What is EIP and how is it different from an IEP? What is an intellectual disability, as long as it doesn't mean my child is retarded...what do you mean a behavior modification plan? Is he/she just bad?

These are the questions that parents have leaving the educational round table where a plan has been developed, without their participation, to help their child. Often, these students are among the poorest, and their parents are commonly perceived as least participatory or most disinterested in their educational progress. Kunjufu (2002) refers to this as, "class and cultural conflict between African American students and middle class schools" (p. 119). This perception has a direct impact on the ways in which many students are perceived within the context of school. As a black woman working within the field of School Psychology, I can make a choice to participate in the agency and hegemony that the organization of school can replicate, or I can choose to move beyond the basic job description and define my own role; indeed extending it into advocacy for a more inclusive and collaborative kind of practice fostering respectful and thoughtful partnerships.

Issues of cultural capital and the knowledge of the language associated with school manifest in parents being unable to actively participate at the level necessary for support of their children within the school community. The framework for an

intersectional approach to the development of professional practices for African American female School Psychologist implores me to recognize what role my own history plays in my perception of home-school relationships, examine it critically, and move on to the work of advocacy by engaging students and parents in a way that becomes an asset rather than a barrier. There is value in this type of introspective review, and Prilleltensky, Bowers and Rossiter (1999) examined an array of human services clinicians' lived experiences in ethics including the value and challenges they faced working as child advocates within their chosen fields. One of the issues that emerged from the research was the recognition of working within "interlocking systems" (Prilleltensky, Bowers, & Rossiter, 1999, p.328), where one must negotiate the agendas of other professionals within the system while maintaining the focus on providing the best services, which leads to optimal outcomes for the children with whom they work. Lott and Rogers (2005) refer to our training as educators when they state, "professionals are taught to believe that objectively derived knowledge is more valuable than anecdotal or subjective knowledge, and because parents do not share the same accumulated knowledge as professionals, parents are seen as less knowledgeable and informed" (p. 7). As we continue to problematize the discourse surrounding (in) equity in education we must move away from the idea that as educators and staff that supports education, we are fully equipped with the keys to educational success for students.

Gainé & George (1999) reflect upon the skills needed to successfully navigate the world of education. They implore educators to consider the experiences of parents as they look toward their level of engagement within the school community. "If parents were not successful at school themselves, if they do not work in an environment where they need

to read, write and negotiate with texts, then they are unlikely to be confident in this kind of activity” (p. 124). The way in which we, as educators, engage parents should begin with meeting them where they are in terms of skills and communication approaches. This is particularly important as the educational conversation pertains to understanding parental rights; educational programming options; general, gifted, and special education designations; curriculum expectations; and the implications for assessment (both curriculum based and standardized) of their children. Quite often, parents who are not familiar with the rules of school (both implicit and explicit) are entering a world that is at the very least uncomfortable and more likely foreign to them. Hence there is a cultural disconnect related to the levels of cultural capital that many parents have and the expectation of the school.

African American Female School Psychologists

Much of the research related to issues of diversity within the field of School Psychology focuses on cultural competence within the field; and assessment issues related to the growing diversity among the student population. Miranda and Gutter (2002) review the diversity research within the field and note, “cultural diversity literature has primarily focused on assessment practices particularly as it relates to assessment bias...in the past 25 years, a great deal of attention has been focused on culturally appropriate testing practices” (p. 598). There is minimal information in the literature surrounding diversity among practitioners within the field.

While not speaking specifically to the issues of African American female school psychologists, Ingraham (2000) examines multicultural and cross-cultural consultation in schools. In doing so, she acknowledges that identity development is important to the

development of support services in schools. The use of an intersectional framework to examine identity development among black women within this field can contribute to the work on multicultural consultation and Ingraham (2000) posits, “while identity development is not typically the focus of consultation, the saliency of one’s identity in the perception of the consultant or consultee may influence the consultation process” (p. 329).

The research specifically addressing African American female School Psychologists is limited. Coulter (1998) examined these women and the development of professional practices from the perspective of black feminist thought. This mixed methods study examined how these women define their own roles as School Psychologists, through the critical examination of communication styles, overt and subtle forms of racism, perceived versus defined roles, and marginalization within their chosen profession (Coulter, 1998). My work differs from the aforementioned study in that I am seeking to understand how selected African American female School Psychologists perceive their personal histories and intersecting identities to impact the development of their professional practices.

Research in this area contributes to the existing literature of black women and the development of professional practices, the fields of women’s studies and African American studies, as well as the general field of school psychology. Using a qualitative approach to examine our roles within the broad field of education and the narrower field of school psychology I seek to highlight the ways in which intersectionality impacts black women in a field that has not historically represented their voices. I am approaching this study in a way that has not been done before within the field of school

psychology, moving away from the numbers that have traditionally defined our roles. Nettles (2005) referred to this type of deviation as a move toward more ‘humanistic sensibilities’. Instead I am providing narrative reflections of black female experiences within their professions and a critical examination of how these experiences are shaped by their multiple intersecting roles.

Conclusion

The literature review reflects the demographic shifts within the field of school psychology and the increasing diversity within the schools and among the students with whom we work. The literature also reflects the research gaps pertaining to diversity issues within the field. The lack of research pertaining to diversity within the profession is indicative of the need for minority groups within the field to use their voice as a vehicle for understanding how our multiple intersecting identities can manifest as we work with an increasingly diverse population in schools. My work is meant to begin bridging the research gaps previously identified and work toward creating opportunities for reciprocal discourse in a field that has been saturated with research that is quantitative and reflective of the largely homogeneous demographic within the profession.

CHAPTER FOUR

IV. Methodology

Narrative Inquiry

Thinking about the concepts of intersectionality, negotiated roles, and my personal history as an inner city child helped me resolve the issues of ‘how’ this research could be presented in a way that was as multi-textured as the participants. I came to the conclusion that before I can articulate the stories of those around me, I needed to speak in my own voice, processing how I came to stand at these crossroads, and what issues and life experiences have helped shape the person that I am today. Narrative inquiry as a research methodology began to emerge organically from that starting point. The use of narrative inquiry within the context of my study also seems most appropriate because of its alignment with the fundamental tenets of both critical race theory and black feminist thought. Hulko (2009) used a narrative approach to examine the importance of time and context in the examination of intersectionality scholarship.

The use of narrative inquiry as a qualitative research method allows for the research to be situated within a historical, political and social context that is specific to the relationship developed between the researcher and the participant. Vaught (2008) addressed this type of positioning as she examined this relationship stating, “...stories are situated-within the individual, within the institutional, within the societal” (p. 570). As part of my study I posit that each of the women, as participants, bring about a uniqueness specific to her position within the profession, within the society as they seek to make sense of place and identity, and within a system of education where they negotiate the

roles of agent and advocate. Within the context of her study, Sealey-Ruiz (2007) delineates the use of black feminist epistemology as methodological issue and put forth the following:

(a) the researcher should value the concrete experiences of the participants, (b) the researcher should use dialogue as a means of data collection, (c) the researcher should be caring toward his or her participants, and (d) the researcher must take personal responsibility for representing the participants (p.47).

Understanding and incorporating black feminist epistemology into the analysis of the narrative is necessary as I go about investigating the lives of women who are similarly situated as black women school psychologists, but whose lives have manifested in such different ways.

Harris (2005) spoke to the use of the narrative as a process of reclamation and redefinition. She asserts:

Black women are beginning to experience the documentation of their lives as an important way to utilize their experience and knowledge, for the expansion of their knowledge of self and other, as well as for sharing this self-discovery device with others (p. 39).

Rather than having their lives examined from the perspective of outsider or other, black women are entering the discourse and telling their own stories, recollecting and examining their own lives, and sharing with one another in order to differentiate between 'the telling and the told' (Villenas, 2005). The nuances of the stories told in narrative are critical to understanding these women, and cannot be articulated from an outside voice.

Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) examined the lived experiences of African American women via their participation in the African American Women's Voices Project. Their resulting work used the narrative voices of black women as they expressed how their experiences within the interlocking systems of racism and sexism impacted them on a variety of levels, both professional and personal. Moving beyond telling the stories of these women, the authors set about "listening very closely to how black women make sense of their lives, to the words and voices they use to evoke their experiences" (p. 5). In the spirit of Lorde (1995) these women used their voices as a tool to educate those outside of their sister circle in a way that diminished the need to rank oppressions, "but instead demonstrates the simultaneity of oppressions as they affect Third World women's lives" (Smith, 1995, p. 256).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000), early researchers within the field of narrative inquiry, support the use of narrative inquiry as a "dynamic process of living and telling stories, and reliving and retelling stories, not only those of participants but those of researchers as well" (p. xiv). The authors provided a scholarly starting point within the literature, and created space for discourse which is inclusive of more critical approaches to the use of narrative within the field of education. Educational research has used this starting point to move the dialogue involving educational equity; diversity in education and critical analysis of education practices forward.

The use of personal recollections is imperative to the study of these women, as the voices of members of the other groups (neither black men nor white women) similarly situated cannot adequately convey the unique experiences of black women. The reductionist viewpoint of African American women's lives suggests that the issues they

face can be discretely tied to either gender or race, however this perspective is not inclusive of their double minority status and, “the study and interpretation of African American women’s lives typically has been subsumed under African American issues and women’s issues...however their unique experiences in history, language, and culture suggest otherwise” (Etter-Lewis, 1993, p. xiv). The stories of these women are important, not only to their individual work, but to the collective network of informal support that our shared identities provide. Williams, Brewley, Reed, White & Davis-Haley (2005) address the ways in which black women come to understand themselves and each other and reference the act of “reading each other” (p. 182) as one of the ways in which we become aware of our own standpoints. They define this reading of one another as “treating each other with respect and support” (p. 182). This level of collective support for challenges and successes creates space for growth as individuals and elevates the collective understanding of who we are within our personal and professional spaces.

Narrative inquiry as the vehicle for telling the stories is organic and Bambara (1984) references the importance of this method when she writes, “...stories are important. They keep us alive...the storyteller snatches us back from the edge to hear the next chapter. In which we are the subject. We are the hero of the tales. Our lives are preserved” (p. 41).

Negotiating Entry

As previously stated, I began the process of selecting participants by using purposeful sampling. The demographic pool of African American women within the profession of School Psychology is small, and so I began to think about women with whom I have had contact over the course of my career. I contacted Linda, who was one

of the first School Psychologists I met while working on my undergraduate degree. I made initial contact via email, where I briefly outlined the purpose of the study and time commitment required of the participants. We followed up with several emails and phone calls. I knew Catherine from our prior work in a metropolitan Atlanta school system, although she and I did not know each other well or on a personal level. I initially contacted her via email and followed up with conversation on the telephone. My relationship with Andrea is one that is longstanding. She was a former supervisor when I was employed with a large metropolitan Atlanta school system. I initially approached her about her participation in the study at a social function, and followed up with details regarding purpose and time commitment via email, and telephone discussions.

Desiring a participant that was in the earlier stages of her career, I decided to use the snowballing effect to help generate viable participants. I authored an email letter and sent it to School Psychology program directors, persons working in related fields (who are in contact with School Psychologists) such as Speech and Language Pathologists; School Social Workers, and Occupational/Physical Therapists. I had an African American female School Psychologist reply to my snowballed email with a high level of interest in the project, but she was a seasoned member of the profession and understood that she did not meet the demographic of the woman I was looking for. However, she forwarded the email to Tameka as a gauge of her interest in the research. Tameka contacted me via email several days later agreeing to participate. Our initial virtual introduction was followed up with telephone conversations. Tameka is the only participant that I had not met professionally or personally prior to the interviews taking place.

Participants

Five women, including myself, shared their stories for the purposes of this study. They are women that were selected because they represent an interesting cross section of African American women within the field of School Psychology. They all hold the designation of School Psychologist, two have earned terminal degrees, three practice with the Education Specialist designation; three practice within the inner cities; and two within the suburbs. The women are of diverse ages ranging from 31-57, have varying family circumstances (married/unmarried/children/no children) and they also differed in their personal, geographic (place of origin) and cultural backgrounds. One of the women interviewed is multilingual and speaks French, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and English. These women are in different stages of their careers, though the average number of years spent within the field is 16.5; they are also in various places along the organizational continuum, with one woman being a higher level district administrator, three practicing at the school level, and one working as a director at a private school in the metropolitan area. There is a benefit to having a diverse group of women within the profession in that although they are all linked by race and gender, they each have different intersecting identities which impact them in different ways. The diversity among these women cannot be compared to the diversity among all African American women nor all African American female School Psychologists. However, each woman choosing to participate in this research brings an added texture to the research. The ways in which their lives have taken form and how the intersectional identities have impacted that journey is important to the work of mediating our roles within our shared profession.

Data Collection

Using multiple methods of data collection is a way of triangulating the data within the research project. Shank (2006) defines triangulation as the “process of converging upon a particular finding by using different sorts of data and data gathering strategies” (p. 113). The author also reminds the researcher that triangulation can be achieved by using a variety of data sources, multiple theories of inquiry, different methodologies within the research, and multiple researchers. Within the context of this research investigation, I have employed the use of multiple data sources such as the use of a demographic questionnaire; use of an independent note taker during the focus group; video and audio-taping of the focus group and individual interviews; and use of researcher field notes. As an additional check for clarity and accuracy, the audio tapes were transcribed and sent back to the participants for review.

Demographic Questionnaire

Prior to the first interview I gathered the same basic demographic questions of each participant, via a demographic questionnaire, as a way of documenting their information accurately. The questions asked them to give a brief summary of their backgrounds including place of birth, country of birth, citizenship status, age, primary languages, school experiences and educational designations, professional history, marital status, child/parenting status, parents' place of birth, and some information about their parents' educational backgrounds. I used this information as a starting point for discussion and as a tool that would encourage them to begin sharing their lives with me.

Focus Group Interview

The first session with the women was a focus group interview. The goal was to open the discourse for women to share with each other our perspectives of who we are within our shared professions, how our journeys differ, and how they may be the same. I think that we learn from sharing with one another not necessarily how similar or different we may be, but how we each approach our roles and the navigation that ultimately comes with our dual (or multiple) minority status.

The shared dynamic that this group of women brings to this research project has the potential to be very meaningful and insightful. This study brings those private dialogical connections to a more public space of educational inquiry, where multiple women share their experiences as a system of support. I did not have a time frame for the focus group interview nor the individual interviews, and at the conclusion the focus group interview lasted just under one hour.

Audio and Video-Taping

At the onset of the focus group (initial) interview I asked the participants to give her written permission for the interviews to be audio and video-taped, which aided in the analysis during the latter stages of research. Paramount to the task of conducting this research is the researcher's ability to listen with an ear that is appropriately tuned into the person being researched. "Listening to participants informs the research relationship as it informs the nature of analysis" (Vaught, 2008, p. 572), and so, with a nod toward being actively engaged in the time and place with each woman, I believe that an interview documented via audio/video is a useful research tool.

Note Taking and Field Notes

I also employed a note-taker during the focus group interview (with permission of the participants) as an additional way of capturing information that may have been important to the dynamic of the group. The note taker served as an important, objective observer of the group dynamic and was a balance to my own participation as researcher and participant.

Following all of the interviews I took time to review the discussion and used field notes as a way of recording my immediate reactions, thoughts about important themes, and questions. I used these notes, as a way of immediately recording some of the nuances of the conversations, and other details that were identified as important, either to myself, or the woman being interviewed.

Individual Interviews

I believe that part of the intrigue of narrative inquiry and related research designs such as oral histories is the idea of being a voyeur into the lives of other people. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that researchers choosing narrative inquiry are “gossips on a grand scale” (p. xxii). This is indeed true in many ways, but I am also interested in the empowerment that comes with having this type of discourse with women who are at various stages of their lives and careers. I am harkening back to the understanding by black feminists that there is power and empowerment in the collective sharing of voice, learning through the stories of others, listening with purpose and taking a long gaze into the context of each other’s lives as a part of the process of inquiry.

The individual interviews with each woman reflected a continuation of the conversations started in the focus group. The notes from the note taker, review of the

audio and video tape from the focus group as well as my personal recollections and field notes were used to develop additional open ended questions for the participants. Each individual interview ranged from one and a half hours to three hours. The participants were provided with copies of their own interviews transcript as a validity check.

Data Analysis

The task of analyzing the large amount of data that was collected from the focus group and four subsequent interviews was initially intimidating. Coupled with the anecdotal field notes and notes from the note taker, I ended up with a large amount of data, which, while rich in texture and information was initially overwhelming in size.

It is interesting to note that in my early analysis of the initial focus group interview, I reviewed the audio and videotapes as well as notes of the note taker. I realized that my contribution to the conversation within the focus group was more substantial than I would have initially preferred or predicted. Acknowledging that my own voice and subjectivity can impact the dynamics of a group discussion of this nature, I am presenting this level of participation in the research as both a limitation and a moment of importance within the research. The subsequent individual interviews were met with a lingering understanding of the need to mute my own voice for the sake of turning up the volume on the voices of the women participating in this study.

Each audiotape and videotape has been transcribed into text. The transcripts were reviewed in text and video, and then analyzed for any common themes that emerged from the interviews. Following transcription, the interviews were initially hand coded using a color coded charting system. The data was then downloaded into the Nvivo qualitative data analysis software program, in audio, video and textual formats. The text transcripts

were coded based on the emergent themes which were coded within the software program. These recurrent themes emerged from the stories that the women were telling about their lives, and details and in-depth quotations were used to highlight the emergent themes.

Research Questions

As I seek to understand how African American women within the field of School Psychology mediate their intersecting identities, the primary research questions analyze (1) how African American female School Psychologists perceive the concept of intersectionality, and (2) how their multiple identities impact the development of their professional practices.

Interview Protocol

I am asking several questions that are salient to the study. These questions support the primary research questions and will ultimately lead to the deeper investigation of how intersectionality impacts the voice and practices of African American School Psychologists working in schools. Participants will be asked the following questions as part of the interview protocol:

1. How did you come to enter the field of School Psychology?
2. Does your personal history inform your practice as a School Psychologist?

I will use these questions as a starting point. These women will use these questions as the guide for their discourse and specific recollections of their work as School Psychologists. Supplementary questions will be born out of the recalled experiences, which will be shared, and add to their own recognition of their multiple identities.

3. Do you see yourself working as an advocate for children?

4. How do you perceive your role within the school/school system/agency where you are employed?
5. How do you negotiate these roles as you go about participating in educational decision-making teams?
6. Do you think that your status as an African American and/or as a woman impacts the way that you practice within the field?
7. Tell me about your experiences working within individual schools as a consultant and how it impacts your work with individual students and families.
8. How do you perceive your role to differ from the roles of your non-minority colleagues within the profession?
9. As an African American woman, do you feel any additional responsibility to help foster collaborative relationships between the family and schools?
10. What impact does your role within the school have on your professional development?

Conclusion

I believe my research in this area to be significant because of the limited information that we currently have on African American women within the field of School Psychology. As practitioners there is a myriad of quantitative data on what a School Psychologist should do within the context of schools; how our roles can benefit the organization of school and legal implications for the decisions being made (Artiles, et. al., 2006; Blanchett, 2006; O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006). However, there is very little qualitative information about the ways in which the individual practitioner develops, more specifically; there is almost no data available about how African American women

developed as practitioners within the field. If indeed, “the way we are treated in school and society influences the way we view ourselves in relation to others” (Baker, 2005, p. 250) then investigation of the ways in which our educational and social histories impact our professional practices is one that is worth examining.

I recognize that the information derived from this study will not be generalizable to larger populations of women or minorities within the field. Indeed,

...membership in two oppressed groups alone sets African American women apart because they experience double discrimination as a result of their dual status. So what is true for African American men and white women is not invariably true for African American women (Etter-Lewis, 1993, p. xvi).

Although limited in its scope, I believe that the study is a valuable tool for learning how we come to be, as women navigating our intersecting identities involving race, gender and professional roles within the context of the organization of school.

I believe that African American women entering this field would benefit from this study. Understanding how other women similarly situated are able to identify and integrate their personal histories into their professional lives is important, and this viewpoint is not readily available upon exiting many of the graduate programs that provide limited access to African American female School Psychologists. I would have found it useful, even necessary when entering the field to understand that who you are in this profession is profoundly impacted (for better or worse) by life experiences.

The articulation of these women’s stories has several implications for the development of professional practice among African American women but also has a larger impact on the ways in which members of the dominant group that make up the

field of School psychology perceive us. Willis (2001) suggests, “the harsh reality of writing for an audience that did not want to be offended or challenged to address issues of race, class, gender, and power relations in the forming of institutions and policies” (p. 44). I am challenging these hegemonic structures by suggesting that our pasts impact us, and continues to inform our present decision-making.

As African American women working within a field dominated by White women, but serving a population that is often primarily African American, I am suggesting that some of the organizational and policy issues present within the field impact me differently and in ways that demand the development of a much more fluid professional practice. I am challenging our marginalization within the field and ask that the voices of these women be a springboard for dialogue within the professional realm, challenging, “the notion that African American women are an invisible group on the sidelines that easily can be combined with other groups is a convenient function that conceals their power and importance” (Etter-Lewis, 1993, p. xvii). An important part of the framework that encapsulates this study is the use of voice and the telling of one’s own story as a tool for empowerment. Willis (2001) speaks to the importance of presenting one’s research without regret and with a sense of pride. This study presents the opportunity for me to do that and to improve upon myself as I continue to work toward a meaningful integration between what is deeply personal and professional.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION OF DATA: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

Focus Group Interview

The data collection process began with the willingness of this group of women, African American School Psychologists, to come together in order to share their stories. This was done in the form of a focus group. The initial purpose of the focus group was to gather some information about the ways in which we work, and begin a conversation that allowed for the free exchange of ideas, establish a place of comfort when discussing issues that are not present at the forefront of our professional existence. As a researcher, I began the discussion that was not typical of our daily conversations. I asked these women how they felt, about themselves, their pasts, their professions, their daily practice and their futures. The focus group also served another purpose, which was to create a level of comfort between the participant and the researcher. The focus group and the semi-structured questions asked of the participants set the stage for them to reflect critically on their own voices within their chosen professions and how that voice is impacted by their personal histories. Due to the nature of the information that was discussed during the research and the possibility of participant identification, pseudonyms are being used in this research.

The focus group was held on May 30, 2009, at a central location in metropolitan Atlanta. The focus group outline was made up of semi-structured questions. The interview began with a brief introduction of each person, an introduction of the note-taker to the group, and an introduction of the researcher. The consent form was reviewed with the participants and the confidentiality component of the consent form was reiterated.

Focus Group Emergent Themes

Several themes were revealed through the discourse within the focus group. The summation of these themes will follow beginning with the discussion of issues related to professional shifting. The acts and experience of negotiating for advocacy within the context of the school organization is also presented. Important to the ways in which their experiences help to create meaning in their lives was the emergent theme surrounding issues of support, specifically formal and informal networks of support. Finally, the participants provided valuable information regarding their perceptions of their work and the holistic perspective of children that was identified as a thread across their professional roles.

Professional Shifting

“It is exhausting...”
(L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009)

The concept of “shifting” was revisited in the discussion among the women. It is worth noting that the women did not name this phenomenon. However, the discussions of their own behaviors within the precarious space between the personal and professional life, suggested that this term was generally appropriate. Shifting as reported by the group, is an act of professional survival and appeared to be a common theme with each woman acknowledging that this concept was one that they developed naturally within the profession. Each woman acknowledged this ability to shift to varying degrees. Shifting was discussed in different incarnations, including the need to shift from personal to professional in demeanor; the adjustment of voice and speech patterns; and the constant monitoring of language and tone when conveying a salient point. Examined through the lens of black feminist thought I cannot help believe that the act of shifting as a form of

professional survival is an example of the unique ways that we, as black women, have come to cope with the unique challenges that we encounter in the workplace. In fact, I would move the position further and posit that the act of shifting represents a re-naming of ourselves within our profession; another way of naming our own practices. If in fact a central tenet of black feminist thought is “to empower African American women within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions” (Collins, 2000, p. 22) then we are shifting for the purposes of distinguishing ourselves in a field where a place has been established for us on the periphery. Taking charge of our professional images can be a powerful act of resistance.

Interestingly, the women also spoke to the concept of shifting both within a cultural context of being a racial minority and part of the racial majority within a school. They reported the ability to professionally ‘shift’ to be as important in both contexts and necessary in order to maintain the professional acumen that they expressed was so critical to their roles as support staff.

The first concept of shifting involves making sure that the professional role is at the forefront while operating as School Psychologist. This becomes more difficult as one becomes more comfortable with colleagues within a collegial work environment. The ladies discussed the importance of being aware of what they are saying in order to be heard by their audience.

...if you recognize...that you may have a wonderful message but if that message isn't being heard then it's losing its value...and to fight those perceptions of being the angry woman...you have to change your tone just to have it heard and establish those relationships, then ultimately the end result will be what you

want...which is an advocate for the child. To me, that's all part of that navigating your way through the system (L. Miller, personal communication, May, 2009). Responding to the need for and work of professional shifting Linda makes it clear that there is a toll being paid emotionally for the daily rigor involved in this type of professional hyper-engagement.

I think the down side of that though is-it is exhausting...and after 23 years I'm really sort of tired of it actually. But it is a constant balance of how to be clear but not so clear that it's off putting. But I think all the time, probably over thinking at times, what's the best way for this message to be heard. I go home every single day exhausted (L. Miller, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

The second concept related to shifting involved the avoidance of being perceived as aggressive or angry when conveying a point that is important, particularly when doing so in a group that is non-minority (racial or gender). The general idea that as a black woman the stereotype of the angry black woman is haunting, and there was a clear consensus among the participants that this created a sense of hypersensitivity (within themselves) to carefully monitor how they presented information to a group. Catherine makes an important point when she says that she tries not to make everything a racial issue, and as such tries to make sure that she is really listening to what is being said, so that when she does identify the subtext as being racially driven she is clear about the type of response that she deems necessary. She recognizes that the way in which one advocates for kids is just as important as the actual advocacy. The women acknowledged that at times the message can be lost when the listener is preoccupied by the perception of aggressiveness by the speaker, and as such, an almost constant monitoring of tone is

present in professional discussions. Understood from the lens of a critical race perspective, I believe that this type of consistent monitoring of oneself is a response to the ways in which social constructions of race can make us more aware of the ways in which we are perceived by others and call upon us to examine ourselves in order to critically analyze our actions.

Catherine also makes note that one must always be aware of the listener when speaking about an issue within the context of school, particularly those issues involving race or culture, while battling the looming stereotype of ‘the angry black woman’. She states, “...to constantly have to do this dance is absolutely exhausting” (C. Smith, personal communication, May 30, 2009). I found this reference to ‘the dance’ particularly powerful in describing the almost constant monitoring of professional relationships that one must maintain in a school based organizational environment when one is perceived as an outsider of the school, but an insider of the organization. The women describe the challenges of making sure that their roles engage parents, teachers, students and administrators in a way that everyone feels as though their voices are heard, while maintaining their own professional voices and integrity. This theme is again present in Tameka’s recollections of her early professional experiences as she discovers the need to shift professionally in order to navigate the new environment. As a new professional she expressed the need to shift in order to address her youth in the field, having to engage more seasoned members of the school added more anxiety to the dance.

I don’t know if it’s because I’m young, I’m not exactly sure. But I’ve had to check myself on numerous occasions to say how I can best go in here and give her this information and not seem like I’m trying to overstep my bounds. I realize I’m

young but I want you to understand that I do know what I know, so trust me (T. Edwards, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

This sentiment suggests that the process of shifting can be daunting, even tiring, when the end goal is to address the needs of children. Tameka's experience as woman at the beginning of her career adds an additional layer to her story, and creates an additional intersection from which to view her experiences. Using the lens of intersectionality theory we are called upon to integrate her tenure in the field as another converging identity which may impact her practices, but also impacts the ways in which she chooses to use shifting as a professional tool. Moving the discourse forward in this analyses provides an opportunity to examine the ways in which our professional practices and the tools that we use; develop over time, with more experience, and as we gain a level of confidence of who we are as practitioners.

Negotiating for Advocacy

The ability to engage a system, be it a large system as an organizational leader, the smaller system of a school community, or even a microsystem of a school educational planning team, is a critical and constant requirement of the role of School Psychologist. Critical engagement at the micro and macro systems level creates an opportunity to use their professional positions as tools of advocacy and can provide a shift in the differentials of power based on understanding the needs of systems at all levels. The women in this study speak to the ways in which this level of engagement can differ from day to day. The initial engagement of any of these systems does not necessarily happen on an occasion, but yet was regarded as an ongoing commitment at each level, and may require a different approach as the needs of the system and the people within it change.

The idea of negotiating for advocacy was a significant theme that emerged from the focus group discussions. Meaning, the common thread of being advocates for children within schools begins with negotiating the landscape within the school to be positioned as an advocate. Linda reflects on the importance of mapping this terrain:

I think you have to build up enough capital with administrators so that you always have a voice. And I don't think you can walk in the door and be a strong child advocate. I think you have to walk in the door and figure out the system, who are the ones who are the decision makers and you have to be intentional about building relationships with them so that when you have conflict where your personal values and your professional roles clash you need to be able to state what your concerns are-but be heard. And I've seen, I've been in situations early in my career where I didn't understand that and I just went in as the advocate (L. Miller, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

Linda makes a noteworthy point, in that, the message of advocacy can be lost if the people who have power to effect change are deaf to the person trying to advocate. There is more to advocacy than simply stating the truth and facts of a case. Understanding the dynamics of power and the ways in which policy can be used as a tool to maintain the status quo is also a hallmark of critical race theory and is an important point to be considered when choosing the means of advocacy. There is also the reality that advocacy within a system (macro or micro) involves providing a rationale of why that advocacy is in the best interests of the students and systems.

In managing the various roles that Tameka holds as School Psychologist, she admits that as an early career School Psychologist she was initially overwhelmed by the vastness of the role.

I wasn't prepared for the, I don't think anybody really told me about the level of need that the schools have...I joke to my other coworkers all the time that we're (school) psychologists, we're testers, we're conflict resolutionists, we're parent advocates, we're child advocates, we're administrators, we're counselors, we're crisis interventionists. We have so many other roles wound up in our role that I didn't realize I was going to have to learn how to do so quickly. And I think that's the piece that...nobody told me (T. Edwards, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

Gaining an understanding of how one can integrate all of these roles in a way that is meaningful and impactful, is part of the professional development of any School Psychologist. However, from the perspective of black feminisms we must also take into account that our intersecting identities as black woman play a significant part in how these practices mature over the course of our careers. I posit that our positions within the profession also play a significant part in whether we embrace or resist the many roles that come along with our careers.

Networks of Support

Within the context of negotiating for advocacy, the uses of informal networks of support have been an important part of defining her role as School Psychologist for Catherine. As an itinerant support person, moving from school to school, Catherine articulated:

I have my primary school, you know, but...part of what I do is I also go around to various schools within the county outside of my school. So I find that it's much easier for me to advocate in my school because I have those relationships with the administrators and I have the relationship with those people so when I find myself in those situations...it's much easier for me to advocate for children within my building than it is to advocate for the children outside of the building. And it just so happens that the children that I do see in the other schools are actually more needy than the children in my school. So then it becomes a situation that...you have to expand your network with the psychologist that is actually assigned to that school and with the (teachers) assigned to that school. And try to work with them and even just to help them see how it's in their best interest to do this. Sometimes it's not so much to make them see that yes it's going to help the child but it's also in your best interest, I mean if you try this (intervention), it may make everyone's life easier...so yeah...you have to know how to navigate your way through the people that you meet (C. Smith, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

As she spoke about the ways in which her role impacts her ability to serve as advocate and how she negotiates this relationship, it became clearer that Catherine's broader role as one of the only multilingual psychologists allowed her the opportunity to interact with more personnel in a larger number of school buildings and consequently she appeared to rely on those important informal networks of support to supplement her advocacy efforts.

Additionally, Catherine's previous work experiences in another state provided her with an additional layer of support. She recalls that although she was the only black

woman on staff in her previous place of employment she made connections that continue to add value to her professional work because of the cultural connections that were formed.

...it was more in terms of similar cultural backgrounds is where I found people with the same career background. They weren't necessarily, the African Americans but they happened to come from similar Caribbean backgrounds whether it was from Cuba or South American countries...that was more where I found the mentors...and it was always informal (C. Smith, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

Catherine's experiences with informal mentoring is a good example of the ways in which one can resist essentialism by moving outside of the existing systems of support, looking instead to those people who can connect both professionally and in Catherine's case, culturally. One of the ties that bind for her professional consultation was in fact more related to culture as opposed to race or gender.

Tameka speaks to the relationship with her internship supervisor as an initial formal network of support that has morphed into an ongoing informal support as she has developed professionally. She believes this relationship to be an important factor in the development of her confidence as a School Psychologist. As a way of supporting one another Tameka speaks about the way in which her internship supervisor initially nurtured her career and a guided her in the ways of dealing with being one of a few black women in that role.

Linda laments the lack of formal networks of among African American School Psychologists. Recalling her initial entry into field she remembers creating an informal

network within the existing formal networks established by national professional organizations.

I feel like I reached out to people...but it was more informal, that there weren't formal mechanisms for me to connect with other African American women psychologists. I don't think I knew one man when I first started, 20 something years ago... Because I found it very valuable when I was a practicing school psychologist to reach out to others to just have a reality check. What are your experiences; this is what I'm going through, how do you think about this? What do you do in this situation? But I think having some formal mechanisms would be very helpful (L. Miller, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

The lack of more formal networks of support, and the minimal participation by minorities within the upper echelons of leadership within the professional organizations suggests a dynamic that does not actively address the needs of its minority members. The lack of connection to these formal groups may suggest a deeper problem within the organizations with regard to their minority membership. In fact, the lack of address regarding issues directly impacting the professional lives of their minority groups may suggest deeper issues related to access and interest convergence. The unwillingness to provide adequate resources to issues of diversity, cultural competence, minority recruitment and retention as well as developing leadership reflective of minority membership may be perceived as the unwillingness to relinquish existing privilege in order to maintain the existing power structure. It should be noted that even the election of minorities to the national and regional committees or leadership without substantive systems commitment to a more diversity friendly agenda, is not enough to demonstrate a commitment to change. I would

submit that an analysis of this theme would be remiss if it did not include the ways in which the desire by black feminists to be recognized as more than a woman in a man's movement, or a black person in a woman's movement, is closely related to examining others beyond the obvious racial and gendered features.

Holistic Perspective of Children

The work of participating in educational planning for children can be compartmentalizing. There are many people weighing in on the best ways in which to help students improve their educational, social or behavioral outcomes, and each of those people bring a level of expertise and value to the educational roundtable. Within that context, it is possible, at times to compartmentalize the education of the children which we are all charged with helping. The holistic perspective of children appeared to be another common thread that the women in this study deemed important and seemed to be a commitment that they tried to reinforce often. Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley (2005) support the idea that "there are certain experiences that Black women have because of their race that female members of the majority group do not experience" (p.183). I also suggest that the same is true for the experience of black women within the context of race. Our experiences as women in the black community are unique and cannot be adequately compared to those of black men.

Even without naming the holistic perception of children as a phenomenon, most of the participants acknowledged that it is the holistic examination of a child that ultimately leads to the most impactful and inclusive educational plans, and hopefully creates an environment that produces positive educational outcomes.

Moving beyond the numbers of psychometrics the women espoused a healthy respect for the other equally important qualitative aspects of identity that help to shape the children with whom we work every day. Without devaluing the important role that they believe assessment can play in the work of helping children succeed in school, they are also keenly aware of the cultural, societal and environmental factors that contribute to how children are prepared to learn. In fact, the general tone of the discussion regarding holistic perspectives of children suggest that significant change cannot occur without an understanding of what factors outside of the school are also impacting the child. Linda has a unique perspective of this viewpoint in her comparison between public and private school work.

...we struggle to keep the right balance between a qualitative understanding of children's learning and the psychometric part of children's learning so it's definitely a different twist than I experienced in public school (L. Miller, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

Speaking of the shift within the field of education to consider alternative types of assessment and information in the decisions regarding special education placement decisions, Catherine says,

I personally like the shift that we're taking...I think that if we're the clinicians and you have to look at the child holistically, you have to look at all the pictures and to look at all of the elements and all the various factors that are impacting that child's life. So I think that any push that forces people that are sitting at the table, taking into account what may be beneficial to that child and forces them to look at it holistically can only be positive. So any shift that forces the group; and not just

the psychologist but every one sitting at that table to look at all of the components I think it's a shift in the right direction (C. Smith, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

Catherine also brings up a valuable point when she speaks of having to re-educate people about cultural differences and often reinforces to colleagues that there is value in families with strong cultural connections, although those connections may not all look the same.

But then there's a flip side to that. It is the assumption that everybody from that culture behaves that way. See unfortunately the truth of the matter is, that many of the children we test are coming from lower economic backgrounds...and a lot of them may be suffering from things like post traumatic stress disorder depending on the situation, how they got to the United States to begin with (C. Smith, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

She recalls one particular work experience where she was part of an educational team within a school that was very connected to the community, meaning, the culture of the community as well as the families and students. The differences in the ways that this team approached their work as educators had a great deal to do with perceiving culture as a strength, and recognizing that the community in which they were located was made up of families who were also very proud of who they were, and valued the culture and traditions they brought into the school. On being part of the solutions based team at that school she recalls

I'm not saying it was perfect...they truly believed that they really wanted to help these families. They took pride in helping these families and trying to find

different resources for the families...And they remembered, you know if they happened to come from those circumstances they didn't try to pretend like that never existed, that was their goal...like they didn't see it as static. They saw the opportunities (C. Smith, personal communication, May 30, 2009).

Catherine reminds us that we are not neutral in our stance as educators nor can any educators afford to espouse a position of color or culture neutrality. Rather, in her experience she found that acknowledging culture, race, class and family circumstance was valuable as educators connect with families and communities to work toward optimal educational services for the students.

Catherine's perspective as a Caribbean American black woman gave a different dimension to this discussion and moved the conversation beyond cultural understanding as a factor of black and white. She reminded the group of the importance of not making judgments about who a child, or their families, are based on their racial, educational or cultural identification. As a part of a comprehensive analysis of professional practices through the lens of critical race theory, black feminist thought and intersectionality theory, we only gain a real understanding of the complexity of race, culture, economics, and families when we ask questions with a goal of creating partnerships and adding value to the life of a student. The lens of black feminist thought calls for an interpretation of Catherine's stance as she recognized her own subjectivity as a Haitian-American black woman working in the professional position of School Psychologist.

CHAPTER SIX

PRESENTATION OF DATA: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Individual Interviews

The dialogical relationship is important to the work of qualitative research. Dialogue and the use of the narrative was integral to the analysis within the framework of critical race theory, intersectionality and black feminist thought. As a researcher one must certainly be aware of the boundaries and subjectivities involved as we go about interviewing our participants. Moving about in the precarious space of narrative inquiry, particularly using interviews as my mode of data collection, I have come to understand that much of the work involves the understanding of perspective. As a researcher, I come to the work of inquiry with a perspective on what my research may reveal, who the participants are and how their stories will impact the work that has consumed me. As a participant in the research I come to know that what has been shared so graciously by these participants is more complex than I could have anticipated, and has an impact that is greater than originally conceptualized. The research has revealed that although part of a minority within our profession, we are, in our own unique ways, keeping our eyes on the prize, and making the work that we do count in the lives of the kids that we serve. The narratives presented in this work reiterated the importance of reflective dialogue, thoughtful examination, revealing stories and celebratory understanding of ourselves and of each other.

I have chosen to present the data from the individual interviews by introducing the reader to each woman, hearing her voice and getting to know her in a way that is unencumbered by the marriage of voices in the focus group interviews. The time that I

spent getting to know each of these women gave me a discrete perspective on their worldviews as it relates to the ways in which they were reared, their early academic and career experiences, as well as their entrée and continued development in the practice of school psychology. This format allows for the continuation of the conversation that has been started earlier in the research, and I am hopeful that this format honors the parts of themselves that they have chosen to share.

Biographical Sketch

Andrea

Andrea is a woman who is perceived by many as a mentor, in large part because of her managerial and organizational leadership positions over the years. At 57, she is looking at the end of a career that has evolved in a way she could not have predicted. She is retiring this year and offers her experiences not as a retrospective of what the practice and profession should be, but rather, her own journey in a profession which has provided her with rich opportunities for development (both personally and professionally) and to which she has given much of herself (both personally and professionally). Andrea is the only child of divorced parents. Although she was in contact with her parents throughout her childhood, she was primarily raised by her grandparents. Her mother graduated from Spelman College and completed one year of graduate education. Her mother eventually became a teacher when Andrea was a young child. Her grandparents were high school graduates. She reports that in her tight knit residential community many of the families were lower to middle class, but the neighborhood was representative of a variety of blue and white collar professions. It was a strong community where she was always surrounded by an extended family of cousins, aunts, uncles, etc. Andrea was born and

raised in Atlanta, where she also attended Spelman College, a prestigious historically black college for women. She continued her education at Georgia State University where she earned her master's, education specialist and doctorate degrees. Andrea was the second African American woman to earn the Ph.D. in the Georgia State University School Psychology program. She holds Georgia certification in both School Psychology and Educational Administration. Her professional roles have moved progressively up the organizational ladder. She began her career in 1974 as a teacher within the inner city. After completing graduate school she moved into the position School Psychologist, Lead Resource Psychologist, and later Coordinator of Health and Psychological Services within the same county. Her next opportunity took her out of the place where she was raised and educated, moving instead to a position as Director of Psychological Services within an adjacent county serving inner city and suburban schools. Several years later, Andrea would return to the place of her origin to serve out her final professional years as Executive Director of Support Services. Andrea is not married and does not have any children.

Andrea's Voice

Calling her grandparents her 'parents of record during the week', Andrea recalls her life being raised dually by her mother and maternal grandparents, and the uniqueness that the merging of generations had on her experience as a child.

My mother and father divorced when I was very young...one to four basically, my mom was a single mom, but she lived with her parents. And then she remarried when I was about five. She also, by the time I was about four, started teaching out of town. And so, I basically lived with my grandparents all week

long...And then I would hang out with her and my stepdad on the weekend and during the summer. So while she was, you know, the parent per se, my grandparents really were my parents of record during the week. And, I know you asked about educational history. While my mom was a college graduate, neither my grandparents were. So they did not bring the college background there in terms of how they reared us. So it's a combination...Both of them smarter than most of the college graduates that I know (laughter) and much more organized and much more focused. And they were pretty much community advocates and that sort of thing. They didn't have a hard time navigating the school system, per se, but it wasn't a college grad mom talking to a college grad teacher (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Andrea recounts watching her grandparents immersion in community politics and took their level of local advocacy as a given, and even though the advocacy may not necessarily have had a direct benefit to their household, the expectation was that you would be a voice heard in the community for the good of the community.

My granddad was like a voter registration...I remember hearing about their advocating for equity of pay for black teachers because there were inequitable pay scales. I remember hearing about them going to this Judge's courtroom when they were talking about those kinds of issues. Advocacy around equitable services, street lights, paving streets. My granddad was a black Republican (laughter), as were many people. He was born in 1902 so that was the party of Lincoln, and so, I remember going to some political rallies with him. That also shaped my world view to a point because I hope that one of my purposes in life

has been a kind of a community advocate, a professional advocate or an advocate for my people (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Andrea attended the local public schools and found the sense of community extended into her educational experiences from the earliest part of her childhood through the support that she received in high school. She recalls that many of her teachers were neighbors, had knowledge of the families of the children they taught and were familiar with the community in which they served. Her conversation appeared to suggest that the teachers were invested in the children of the neighborhood. Of some of her teachers she said:

They were neighbors. They had known each other for forever. In high school a number of the teachers lived in the community. Not my community per se, but in the surrounding area... So it was a combination. I guess when I was coming of age it was about the time that people were moving from the south-side more...but those areas had been closed. I mean, I went to school in the late 50s, early 60s. So those communities on the southwest side, northwest side had been closed basically to blacks, but they were starting to open up, and as they opened up, then certain of the teachers were the middle class, the black middle class that moved out...But in our neighborhood we had, I said lower middle class...But up the street I remember there was a college professor who taught at ITC. Then you had domestics, day laborers, you know, just, people who worked at the post office. So it was a mixed neighborhood. There were solid churches in the neighborhood where people in the community actually could walk to church...So it was a strong sense of community (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

In addition to being active within the walls of the schools in which they taught, Andrea talked about how the teachers outreach moved beyond the school building, "...that's the safety of a nice little small elementary school and the safety of high school...because several of the teachers were on staff at the Atlanta Inquirer and Atlanta Voice when it was kind of radical in the 60's" (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

At that time the Atlanta Inquirer and the Atlanta Voice were publications that featured local and national news stories targeted at issues impacting black communities. Writers on staff at these publications were often engaged in public dialogue that was controversial, and were advocates and voices for the masses that were living in communities that were shut out of more traditional forms of resistance in journalism. The tagline for the Atlanta Voice is reflective of the use of narrative as resistance to oppression as it read, 'A people without a voice cannot be heard'.

Parental and educational expectations merged within the scope of community. Although she was an only child, she was part of a tight knit group of extended family of cousins and says that the expectation that they would do well in school was automatic.

...So the expectation it was non-negotiable. I mean, I didn't think, I didn't know that people didn't go to college when they graduated from high school (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

As such her academic career led to her decision to attend Spelman College, a historically black college, and the flagship institution of HBCU's (historically black colleges and universities) committed to the education and development of African American women. She attended on a full scholarship, although she speaks about the ever present reality of the time, when the safety of a young black child and student was also an important factor

in where one would go for an education. Recalling her grandfather's reaction to her desire to go away for a summer program while still a high school student:

Well I do remember them shutting me down in the summer of '68 because I was going to go to some summer program...you know, King was killed in April of 68 and so...they would have no parts of me going to some white summer program out of state (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

The security that an HBCU offered extended beyond Spelman's proximity to her childhood home in Atlanta. It represented a place where the sense of community care for the next generation was extended in the university setting, and where cultivating the next generation educationally, socially, and even spiritually was a priority. As the daughter of a Spelman woman, her family was well aware of the kind of nurturing that she would receive in this environment.

While a student at Spelman College she majored in psychology with a minor in education, and her occupational goal was to become an elementary school counselor. Upon graduation she entered the counseling program at Georgia State University. She was simultaneously working as a teacher in the Metro Public Schools. Shortly after starting the program she realized that the school system did not have positions for elementary counselors and she considered the school psychology program as a viable alternative since the academic tracks were similar. She speaks solemnly of her transition from Spelman to Georgia State and vividly recalled an incident where she felt targeted because of her race:

Well it was an interesting transition. I remember 610, which was an introductory

course. I remember the person who was teaching the class. It was one of the huge classes. Standing up there saying something to the effect that many of you would not have been here in the past...And this is day one and that this class would weed out a lot of people. I'm sitting there with my girlfriend from Spelman who was... we were both Sigma Cum Laude graduates of Spelman... But also feeling the racism up close and personal, you know, which for us just made us like, now we'll get out of here, you know. And we aced the classes. But coming from a secure encouraging community to that was a little disconcerting. I mean it was disconcerting (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Although she had some experiences that were perceived as unwelcoming and had interactions with faculty who were resistant to social change, she expressed that her overall training for entry into the field was a good one. With thanks and gratitude in her voice she makes reference to the mentors that made themselves available to her and other students, but particularly African American students.

It was not a nurturing environment, but thank God we had nurturing professors. We had Cliff Carter and Dr. Anderson and, you know, Dr. Hilliard was in another department, but some of us took classes from him. And, it was a little think tank from time to time and, I mean, some of the professors they were good clinical professors. I really appreciate the training that I got at Georgia State across the board. I think they did a good job of balancing out the psychometrics and the clinical practice of school psychology...And then, for me, the added bonus because we did have a black professor who was very focused in helping us to understand the cultural competence piece of it...I got a chance to get the best of

all three worlds (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Recalling Dr. Carter in particular, who served as the chair of each of the first three African American scholars to graduate with the Ph.D. from the program, she is particularly reflective. She recalls that he did not shy away from the role of mentor, advisor, advocate, which could have been a heavy burden to bear with so few African American scholars in residence.

Every black student who came through there, Dr. Carter was their mentor. Every one. Oh, that was his role. Yes, he understood that clearly. (He) was an advocate, not a radical advocate, but an advocate when he needed to be and helped us to figure out how to navigate. So it's hard to imagine what that experience would have been like without somebody to help us all navigate. And when he passed, black and white, there were school psychologists out the wazzoo. I wrote his son and told him that...when the history of school psychology in Georgia is written that his name needs to be stamped. So when you look at the number of black Ph.D.'s in the metro area, and he was all of our chairperson, then that talks about his sphere of influence (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

In doing so, heeding the call of students trying to find their way, and a profession not yet ready to meet the need, Dr. Carter produced scholars and practitioners who would go on to hold major leadership roles in the metropolitan area as well as nationwide. These scholars would also find themselves becoming the president of the Georgia Association of School Psychologists, the National Association of School Psychologists, the

Association of Black Psychologists, and creating opportunities through multicultural outreach and scholarship funding for other minority students entering the field.

As the discussion continued, Andrea revealed that she was the second African American to receive a Ph.D. from the Georgia State University program, with the first and third also being women from Spelman College. She notes that the support of these African American professors helped her navigate the environment of not only a new school culture but also helped shape her research interests and provided her with a model of positive mentorship that would remain with her throughout her career.

Transitioning into the world of work was like going back home, as all of her early professional experiences were within the context of the very school system that she attended. Addressing the reality of her role as School Psychologist against what she thought the role would entail,

The role that I thought I would play would be more of an interventionist, more of a person who could be in a classroom actually doing some of the behavior management and modification kinds of things that we learned about so well, applying a lot of the learning theories that we learned. And the actuality of it, when I started, was unfortunately, almost the reality that we have today. It's that you're so bound by your testing requirements and that takes a lot of precedent over the other more varied skills that you have to offer and to present...when I started I had 13 schools (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Andrea's roles over the next several years reflected her work ethic and consequently after several years of practicing within the ranks she was offered more leadership roles within the department of Psychological services and beyond.

On the subject of professional mentorship, Andrea has had several supervisors that offered her good models for leadership and mentored her up the organizational ladder.

Well, (I) had fabulous bosses. I mean just fabulous bosses for the most part...but I guess I've always been a learning observer. And I just wrote, even though this person wasn't my boss, I said to him in a letter, he was one of my teachers in high school, but he wasn't my boss in (the) public schools, was that even from a far I was influenced by his leadership style. And you could always tell that he was fair, that he was firm, but he was compassionate. You could always tell that he was an intellectual...he always interspersed his speeches with quotes and he was very fluent in a whole bunch of foreign languages and I'm not. You know, and he just could see the whole big picture...so you would see people like that and it was like, that's kind of like the way I'd like to lead even though maybe not saying it verbally, but just so in practice. (I) had a brilliant, when I first started as a school psychologist, brilliant, brilliant female boss, but also learned from her some things I wanted to do and some things I didn't want to do. But when I contextualized where she was in 77, 78 as a major leader, what it must have felt like and looked like for her to be one of the first black female associate superintendents... So I learned from folks like her at my area office, just wonderful bosses who recognized my talent, but not just my talent, the talent of people who were in their building and pushed them toward excellence (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Beyond the role of professional mentorship, she expressed a deep connection to her faith and the church as a source of mentorship and strength for her as her professional and personal lives at times conflicted, connected and overlapped.

Certainly in my personal life mentors like in my church. You know, again, my Minister was a strong, strong, strong civil rights advocate. Not one of the big names, but I remember the stories about him helping to integrate the Atlanta Municipal Auditorium...and just, the whole political piece that they brought as black ministers in the 50s and the 60s (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Believing in the 'each one, teach one' style of leadership, Andrea recognized that as part of her commitment to supporting the next generation of School Psychologists, she was helping to build not just a skill set but also a group of Psychologists who would in turn recruit, mentor, lead, advocate and practice with the integrity that they saw under her leadership. Regarding the weight of mentoring along the way she stated:

It's heavier, but it's also 'he ain't heavy'; he's my brother and my sister. If I had not been a mentor I wouldn't be who I am and it's the reciprocal relationship... You lift as you climb, you mentor, and you help to mediate the world. My world view may not be yours, but I can at least share this has been my journey and this is what I've experienced. I know you're steps will be different, but you might not want to go down that street (laughter) (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Our discussion moves fluidly from mentoring to the recruitment and retention of minorities within the field of School Psychology. Her perspective as leader includes the

mentorship of a very racially, culturally, and gender diverse group of School Psychologists throughout the metro area and beyond, however, she made note that her work in recruitment was also important as she watched the numbers of African American children in the schools increase without a similar increase in the numbers of African American School Psychologists. As to the reasons that African Americans are not entering the field in the numbers that one might expect she said:

Well, unfortunately, it's probably awareness. It's almost the same thing that happened to me that is still being recounted in a lot of the undergraduate schools. So one of the things that I did when I had time, and then I passed the torch to some other folks was, I made the point to go to career fairs, especially in the AU (Atlanta University) Center, since this was where we lived, in the AU Center. To talk about the profession of school psychology; to go to senior seminar classes at Spelman, Morehouse and Morris Brown and Clarke Atlanta University to expose people to the field. And I do have a couple folks, I have at least three psychologists who are in practice now as a result of having had that awareness. So part of it is doing focused recruiting where there are concentrations of African-American or other cultural minority students to say school psychology is a viable place to consider. You know, I do applaud like NASP and (one unnamed Psychologist) in particular for starting the minority fellowship scholarships, but that's for one, two, three, four kids. The issue is how do you make that more systemic and across the board... but, how do you get the energy going where it is purposeful and it's more than the minority psychologist saying this is the need. So that becomes the critical systems change issue... Only when do you do those kinds

of system change things will you at least get the lip service and some degree of commitment to diversifying the profession (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

In addition to recruitment and retention issues within the profession, we began to discuss the issues of cultural competence and the need to increase the professional competencies of all of those School Psychologists within the field regardless of race.

So if I had a best world to paint it would be a world where we recognize that children come with needs and that we need to address the mental, the emotional, the physical, we need to think about Maslow's hierarchy of needs again. You know, that you kids can't get to the actualization academically if they, are worrying about when I go home 'am I gonna get slammed up against the wall?'. That's not **all** educators' responsibilities, but I think we have to have an awareness and that's where we have to help build a community of support. So my ideal world, kind of to your original point, would be a world where, especially as African-American psychologists, we could say these are the cultural issues or the psychosocial or the economic issues that the kids are facing and not let it stop us as an excuse, but these are the interventions that we need to make on their behalf and still understand they still need to get to a standard (of education) (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Regarding issues of cultural equity and service provision within schools, she remarked:

And the majority of kids in urban schools who are referred for psychological services are children of color. So you're setting up another set of inequities there because, again, you don't have cultural lenses through which you need to view

these kids and their behavior. So you've got that going on in terms of how does it directly impact potential services to kids. The bias pieces that are, you know, inherent when there is not any sense of cultural competency or cultural compatibility (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Andrea's practice as a School Psychologist has found her serving as a leader for the better part of her professional career, which offers its own unique purview. Reflecting on the years, she imparted a sense of satisfaction that she practiced with integrity.

So it's interesting, but at no point along the way...did I sell my soul. And when I say sell my soul; I didn't lose who I was as an African-American. I didn't lose who I was as a Christian. I didn't lose who I was as a female or as my grand momma's favorite child. (Laughter) So I don't think I lost who I was. The experiences, of course, brought it all together in some different ways and helped shape and push me in some different ways, but again...I don't understand how people could not bring who they are to the table. And, for me, then that's also bringing understanding culture, understanding socioeconomic status, understanding the need for empathy and the need for advocacy and the need for touching other social systems (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

In response to an inquiry about what she wishes she knew at the beginning of her career, she responded with a few salient points regarding her ascent in organizational leadership:

That systems are really hard to change...they are just really hard to change and that sometimes it really is a slow process and you have to be content with some gradual, incremental improvement and not consider that a failure, but to see it as a

success...Thinking that, in terms of the goodness of humanity, that all people are not good. All people don't have good intentions and that there are some people who don't want to work. (Laughter.) I assumed since I was a workaholic everybody else should want to work...and do what's right. So probably just being a little bit better judge of human characteristics and potential and that sort of thing would have probably served me well. I might have been a little more jaded, but I probably wouldn't have been as happy if I had been a little bit more jaded. But, maybe, you know, sometimes when I got slammed dunked I would have seen it coming sooner (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Andrea also spoke to the dichotomous nature of her role as representative of the school system, and her commitment to helping children within the schools. The lessons learned from her years of leadership were important as she learned that her ability to navigate the systemic layers successfully required her to create some boundaries.

And I think the one thing I had to learn at the next executive level was that the services that I represent are the hard problematic areas. And that some days people just don't want to hear about the problems. And I represent all of the problems. Whether it is a health problem, whether it is an abuse problem, it's a discipline problem, it's a tribunal problem with no other place to send them, but they still have to go to school. It's a special ed. problem. You know, it's a truancy problem. And, I mean, you say, well, in order to address this problem we need to do the following things. And the following things cost a whole lot of money. In order to be able to give all these diabetic kids their insulin, I need about a million dollars more for nurses (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Understanding that representing the problems did not equate to being the problem, appeared to be an important part of how Andrea mediated her role as agent of the school, while maintaining her commitment to advocacy for children.

And one thing that you asked I wish I had known earlier on was sometimes just to present the facts and layout, this is Course A or this is Course B. And not be as emotionally invested when I understood that Course B was a more appropriate course...because early on, you know, you got to do B and this is the reason...so I've learned across time just to say, okay, Option A, Option B. Consequences if we do A, consequences if we do B. Consequences if we don't do A and the real serious consequences if we don't do B (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

She is careful to note that being an advocate and an agent of the school are not mutually exclusive positions, in fact, that as an administrator, "a lot of the work that I do, I try to make sure that I craft my advocacy in what could benefit the organization" (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

She maintains that being a Psychologist helped her in unexpected ways, such as understanding group dynamics; processing what is being said and listening with an open ear. She also said that her ability to be more 'process oriented' helped her when confronted with a more sequentially based process that often exists in schools. The journey has not been without roadblocks and road-bumps, at times compelling her to look outside of her own skill set as a way of continuing to develop her leadership skills. She speaks of a recent experience where she did some work with an executive coach, who helped her "to understand that...in terms of what language I was speaking versus what

language the majority of my team was speaking...or how that could be a disconnect in terms of my style and my bosses style” (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009). Understanding that remaining static is not the portrait of a good leader she stated “I think that’s the piece in terms of leadership is that people have to be flexible in their leadership to see when the dynamics are changing” (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).. Keeping her core values intact has been something that has benefitted her and those that have grown under her tutelage.

...but I think as a professional, the one thing that I’ve learned is that the game keeps changing. And that the thing that you’ve always got to do is change with the game while you keep your core values the same...so, excellence, integrity, trying to have a little degree of compassion (laughter)...Accountability sprinkled with a little compassion, doesn’t hurt. But the game always changes (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Biographical Sketch

Catherine

Catherine currently works in one of the largest metropolitan Atlanta school districts serving both inner city and suburban school populations. Catherine’s parents were originally from Haiti and she grew up in a multilingual home. The primary language spoken at home was French, although both parents and her siblings also spoke English and Creole. Catherine is the eldest child of four children (one sister, two brothers). She characterizes her childhood as “great, stable and happy”. She was born in Queens, New York, although shortly after her birth, the family moved to Puerto Rico due to a job opportunity for her father. Both of Catherine’s parents were college educated, her father

held a professional position as an civil engineer/architect, and her mother earned a masters degree in counseling, although for many years she was a homemaker. She also reported that her grandfather also had advanced education and immigrated to the United States when her mother was eight years old. He worked as a Pharmacist in his native Haiti.

In Puerto Rico, Catherine attended a private Catholic school. Her tenure in Puerto Rico is where Catherine learned to speak Spanish fluently. After several years in Puerto Rico, the family moved to Miami, Florida, primarily because her mother wanted the family to be closer to their extended family. It was here that Catherine learned how to speak English fluently. Catherine was in the 5th grade at this time and she continued to live in Miami through early adulthood. She attended both undergraduate and graduate school in South Florida. She has earned a B.S (Psychology), M.S. and Ed.S. in School Psychology.

Catherine's career began working for a nonprofit Foundation in a social work leadership capacity. Following a return to graduate school she entered the field of School Psychology working with the Miami-Dade county public schools. After several years she moved to the metropolitan Atlanta area with her husband where she currently resides and works. Catherine is 40 years old; she is married and does not have any children.

Catherine is one of a few multilingual psychologists in the metro area and one of three bilingual psychologists in the school district in which she currently works. She holds professional certification at the education specialist level in School Psychology.

Catherine's Voice

From the earliest time that Catherine can recall she has been rooted in culture, reared to be proud and aware of her cultural connections and its importance in her life.

...both my mother and my father made a point of only speaking to us in French while we were home because she wanted to make sure that we maintained our language and our culture. At the time, when I was in school that's when I learned to speak Spanish because I did all of my elementary in the private catholic school so that's where I learned how to speak Spanish...I think I guess around the fifth grade or sixth grade we moved to Miami...and that's when I started to learn how to speak English (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

She characterized herself as “ethnocentrically Haitian” and I was struck by how she seemed to be so connected to a history that is hers through recollection of her family, stories of her parents, and traditions that have become engrained in her life with a sense of love and pride. In addition to the familial sense of pride regarding her cultural history, she is keenly aware of the influence that culture has on her worldview. She described being raised in the Caribbean (Puerto Rico) and moving back to the United States (Miami) where she was then immersed into an American culture that welcomed diversity, and whose immigrant population was strongly rooted in their culturally specific traditions, particularly as it related to Caribbean/South American immigrants. On the topic of her transition from Puerto Rico to the United States she stated:

It was really seamless... you know and I'm certainly not the first person to say this but that's why I ultimately believe that people are truly more alike than they are different. I mean because there are so many similarities. I didn't realize it at

the time but now as an adult looking back and understanding more about the different culture(s), like the Puerto Rican culture and the Haitian culture and the American culture and you know...obviously there are very culture specific things. I mean, past a lot of that, people tend to really be alike than they are different. As far as leaving from Puerto Rico, we're all Caribbean so the food is very similar, when you look at all the food on all the islands from Jamaica from Haiti, from Puerto Rico, from Cuba I mean I start to realize we just call it different (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

The flourishing of culture in her new home seemed to make the transition easier for Catherine. Things that were familiar to her like the languages, food, and other culturally specific ways of being were present in the lives of other families in Miami, which she recognizes now made what could have been a difficult transition less difficult.

Over the course of the interview she spoke about the different perspectives regarding diversity with the change in environments. She compares her generally inclusive and culturally diverse upbringing with her experiences as an adult being exposed to those people and places that are not as appreciative of racial, cultural or ethnic diversity. As she spoke about her cultural progression, which was largely inclusive of her naturalistic acquisition of multiple languages, I sensed that I was learning more about her than just the story of her childhood; I was learning how she has come to view the world.

Moving from Puerto Rico to Miami and entering the public school system gave Catherine more perspective on the issues that were endemic to the American culture. Issues of race and class, even as a child became clearer to her in that setting. It was at this time that she recalled having her first inkling that race mattered in the United States.

...this is when I did recognize a difference when we first moved back to Miami...we moved to this neighborhood and I came in the middle of the year...and I remember probably the first time that I was around more...that was the first time I was around African American children...as opposed to in Puerto Rico; but they were very few (African-Americans), in our school (in Miami)...at that time they had decided to merge two schools together because our school was predominantly a white school so they wanted to basically integrate the schools...and I remember our neighborhood and all, not my parents but you know, a lot of the people we knew at the time, they were having so many **issues** with the fact that the schools are being merged and children in the upper grades were going to end up going to **that** school in **that** neighborhood. I mean and I think that's probably one of my first memories that I became very much aware of how people, one of my first real understandings of the racial issue because in Haiti and in a lot of the Caribbean islands-I mean not that there aren't all types of issues. Obviously there are issues. But the issues tend to be more; it's more in terms of social class. That's when you start finding the different prejudices...so that's the main focus. So this is the first time they were more, it became more of race (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

She discussed the feelings within her neighborhood, that the merging of schools would cross a socio-economic and racial boundary that was not acceptable to many of the residents. In Catherine's recollection she'd previously understood (in a very fundamental way) as a child issues of class, but this was the first experience where race was also a

primary issue, and as it turned out, this desegregation of schools did impact her in the school year that followed.

It was in a lower income area and happened to be on the other side of the railroad tracks of all things. But that experience at the school was fine but definitely that's when you started realizing the inequities in terms of school too. I do remember thinking...before I didn't realize there was a race issue and I'm like, **I don't want to go to the ugly green school**. I want to go to the nice looking school (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

It would appear that the ugly green school became the physical representation of the disparities in education that were fundamentally tied to issues of race and class. Even as this transition was taking place in her neighborhood, as educated and professional people, Catherine's parents transmitted an expectation that she would achieve and academics were important as a core principle in the family.

...it was just understood I mean...you're just expected, when everybody has gone everywhere to college, everybody goes to college, all my cousins, everybody (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

Catherine speaks to her mother's important role in keeping her children grounded educationally and socially throughout her childhood. Through her parental engagement of the schools her mother served as a model of advocacy for her children and a public reminder of parental support for those in charge of educating her children.

I think my mom being aware of that was probably one of the reasons why she decided to become much more active in the school...you know, just to make sure...because I only had one year left but especially because of my younger

siblings that did attend that school... I think matter of fact it was only her and one other parent, they were the only two black parents on the PTA at the time. But I think she would have been involved probably anyway but, that's something she was probably more aware in terms of teacher selection and so forth but I can imagine, she would of done it anyway (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

Catherine's transition to college, although expected by her family, was also one immersed in a family cultural context. She recounts her process by which she made her choice about where to go to college, and makes reference to the close family ties.

Well, I was a coward then. My parents were very overprotective Haitian parents and I was going to the school closest to my house...My parents were definitely too (overprotective), you know since I'm the first one and I was a girl...so it was like this...big issue (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

Beyond the hindsight of being protected by her parents, partially because they were a close knit family and partially because she was a female child, Catherine made clear that her college choice was just that, hers to make. She visited other regional colleges that would have allowed her to live on campus and have more a traditional college experience, but made a decision to stay home because of the comfort of a close knit family.

As a student at the university she did well and graduated with a bachelor's degree in psychology. Her entry into the world of work following graduation led her to begin working at the nonprofit foundation in the clinical field of social work. In that capacity she began to also provide some translation services for the clinical psychologist on staff

who eventually began the first conversation with Catherine about continuing her education in the field of psychology. Catherine went on to earn both her masters and specialist degrees in the field of school psychology from her alma mater.

On diversity within her training program, she affirms that the student population in the school psychology program was diverse. She referenced a diversity recruitment program that pulled from the local population of teachers, specifically, those teachers that were multilingual (French, Haitian Creole, English) and interested in entering the field of school psychology.

Our program would not have been very diverse had it not been for (the local school system) because at that time because they had such a lack of Haitians and Creole speaking psychologists. My program was pretty diverse. I mean because regular South Florida definitely you had your Caucasian but then you had Hispanics and then there were four other Haitians in the program, you know five of them actually, four were part of that program that they basically had to kind of contract where they would get trained and all of their education would be paid by Miami Dade and they would have to commit to working for a certain amount of years (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

Recalling that the faculty within the department was not as diverse as the student population she recalled:

...so student population was exceedingly diverse but the teaching staff was not very diverse. You know and I remember it was even a sense of, even though those (Haitian) psychologists, it was a great program and they had it paid by the local county public schools...it definitely was, probably in some ways a burden

on them because, a lot of people, resented the fact that these...psychologists had their education paid for... there were sometimes comments being made that, did they really qualify...or were they, really, capable you know of being psychologists or were they strictly picked up just because they spoke the language? Like did they have to meet the same admissions criteria (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009)?

I got the sense that as she recalled this time that as a member of the same cultural community as well as the community of psychologists in training, she also felt the burden or pressure to do well in that context-if only to dispel the myth of needs based admissions versus merit based admission to the program. Dealing with this also meant dealing with the subtle text conveyed in classrooms, internship sites and even after graduation with the subtext of preference because of the program participant's status as minorities, and the understanding of once again being an outsider within.

...primarily I noticed it more during my internship you know because I graduated before they did and I remember some comments being made that you were (Haitian), because people realize "oh, you're not one of these four" (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

There were also incidents of more overt racism within the department. At the sites where learning was supposed to take place, she discusses the understanding by some members of the cohort that they would not be seen, be minimally heard, and to her it was clear where they stood. It seems as though during this time Catherine was again caught in between her deeply rooted cultural connections and her status as nonmember of the Haitian group of students in the minority recruitment program.

I remember one time...this professor...out of the blue just decide to start talking about, we had one Japanese American girl...he says to her, “You must have gotten all straight A’s didn’t you when you were in school? You must of gotten straight A’s”...and of course everybody knew why he was saying that. But basically, higher expectations I guess...of her. And you know the Haitians, this group of Haitians and obviously I’m Haitian too but they were obviously (Haitian) in terms of the way they spoke, there was a Haitian accent so they were obviously the Haitian group and you know everybody else like me were sort of like in between, whether it was African American, whatever. And he had a tendency to ignore...he would have a tendency to ignore those, and even me he would ignore. But like I said I was like in between. So he definitely had aspects of racism (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

It was interesting to hear Catherine speak about this time in her life. She discussed her experiences and used the terms “them” and “the Haitians” denoting her underlying outsider experience, although she was a member of the same cultural group. I understood through our discussion that the options for being ‘other’ in this context was very limited, and she recalled either being ignored as an African American woman or being targeted as unqualified as a Haitian American woman. This type of dual isolation from a critical standpoint is in direct conflict with the types of cultural connectedness that had been her early experiences and presents a very real picture of the complexity of intersectionality.

Following her graduation, Catherine began working as a School Psychologist with the local public school system, and found that her multilingual abilities made her a valuable asset within the realm of public education. It seemed that during that time issues

of race were not as pronounced and her focus was on building upon her existing skills and using her diverse experiences for the benefit of kids professionally. She recalled her first school assignments included a school with a high Hispanic population as well as her return to 'the green school'.

I went back to the green school which really changed. Because of course the entire area changed...things ended up back the way they were before. So that green school there was a lot of whites... the green school went back to being the green school before they did the movement...Before they merged the tracks and so I went back to the green school and I worked at the green school then, the other school that I had was, highly Hispanic population...When we sat at an SST table you had Hispanic counselor, a Cuban assistant principal, a Cuban ESE (special education) teacher...white ESE teacher...you know the Haitian psychologist so it was so diverse. It was actually one of the most diverse (staff) and...the group functioned exceedingly well (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

Clarifying her perspective on why she thought the team functioned well together, she intimated that the synergy moved beyond the cultural diversity that made them unique. It worked because they came to know each other personally, became genuinely interested in sharing their own cultural traditions and ways of being, and most importantly they worked together as a team to meet the needs of the students and families as a school community. This was her training ground for inclusive and collaborative support services for children.

...people knew people on a personal level and started to learn more about the different cultures...so I think...that those parents were exceedingly lucky.

Because even though we were very diverse, almost everybody at the table spoke their language (the parents) or on some level spoke their language so I'm fluent in Spanish, the Jewish counselor you know you could tell she had an accent when she spoke but she could communicate quite well in Spanish and then you had the assistant principal who spoke Spanish so they usually came into a situation that they could communicate and felt very comfortable which is, I didn't realize until moving here, how usual that was (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

On a reflective note, Catherine also discussed how she knows now that the early models of collaboration (nonprofit foundation and schools) were not the norm as she continued her career in public education. In fact it seemed that sometimes navigating the terrain of school organizationally means that people may not want a collaborative relationship because of territorial issues. The realization that public education is more compartmentalized (in some places) is one of the stark realities of the profession.

I suppose having worked at the (nonprofit) Foundation where everything was really done more clinically. At the table you had the social worker, you had the psychologist, you had the neurologist and you really worked on it as a team and everything was really approached as a team effort...people become very territorial in a school system. It's like if you want to step so much into the counseling, a counselor sometimes feels threatened (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009)

Catherine implies a high level of satisfaction with what she does professionally, although like any other aspect of life, the work is not without its challenges. Of her multilingual status she reports that sometimes her linguistic abilities are a double-edged sword.

I say it's a blessing and a curse. I go it's a blessing because it helps you...especially because there is a lack, and it also depends on where you live, because like in Florida if you speak Spanish only that really doesn't matter because there are so many Spanish speaking psychologists in Florida. But it gave me the edge the fact that I speak Creole because of the lack of Creole speaking psychologists. So here, it's really more the Spanish, nobody cares about the Creole, but it's great because it helps you in terms of a job-but then it stinks because your assignments tend to be...you end up in situations where sometimes you may get pigeon holed in certain areas where it's something that you may not want to do (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

She expresses a desire to have broader experiences beyond the population of students that are bilingual. Meaning having professional experiences with different racial, socio-economic and disability backgrounds is also an important part of sharpening one's skill set and being a well rounded School Psychologist. Fortunately, she has been able to advocate for herself in this aspect throughout her career, and has taken the time to get the experiences she feels are necessary to grow professionally.

As a part of her duties and responsibilities in her current role, Catherine is working at one school as the primary school psychologist, while simultaneously handling a caseload of bilingual evaluations spread out throughout the large metropolitan county. The in-house role provides her with the time and opportunity to develop collegial

relationships with members of the faculty and staff, as well as participate in team meetings for the purposes of strategy development on behalf of children that may be having difficulty. This immersion in a school involves being engaged in the school culture, which in turn positions her to address issues that may have remained at the periphery as an itinerant staffer. One such issue involved being ‘the only’ minority in the office (as professional-non teaching staff), and ergo, perceived as the diversity component by the administrative team. Responding to the perception of her role by the administration:

...it was twofold...I think one they were very happy that I was a good psychologist or they perceived me as such, but also very happy that, at the time, (now it seems to change) but at the time being the only minority in the office... what I really realize is (I’m like oh), his perception in his mind, he hit the jackpot. He has a minority in the office who also happens to be bilingual, but who also happens to be black, so that’s what I kind of realized. Because I found out- because later on, that when they were at another school they had made a request to have an African American psychologist...I guess he wanted diversity in team. But you know as time went on, I also realized... that there seems to be a habit, it seems like they like to have the (itinerant) people being minorities because you’re not necessarily committed to those people. So if something goes wrong and you’re not happy it’s very easy to request a change. But it’s not in the key position, you’re not really making a commitment to that, to the person (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

And so, it seems as though in working with a different population of students and staff (who is primarily white), she encountered an unintended consequence of being one of the few minorities on the administrative staff. There was the lack of perceived administrative commitment to diversity in situations where the presence of diversity disrupted the existing status quo. This speaks to the idea of interest convergence at the school level and would suggest that the desire to bring an additional perspective into the local school fold, was not as well regarded when the power differential was threatened or when the new perspective is uncomfortable for the old environment. It would appear that being well regarded professionally did not seal the commitment from upper level staff, and although in terms of diversity on the team she was the perceived ‘jackpot’ with her intersecting identities as racial minority, woman, cultural minority and multilingual person, somehow this positioning left her feeling less than appreciated for the professional value that she brings to the school community. She reports that she has learned to navigate the landscape and has found ways that work for her to make her voice heard.

I’m not a member of the administrative team but I definitely think that the things that I’ve had issues with and I’ve addressed have been resolved. I choose my battles but... I’ve gotten support when I needed some changes or thought something would be done (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

Catherine made note that she understood where she fit into the culture of the school and the school team, and as such she was very deliberate and aware of what issues she chose to take on as her own. It appeared that although she had very little control over the types of issues that would present themselves to her, she is purposeful in the way that she chose to address them, and which issues she would decide were worth fighting for.

The question of perception and being the only racial minority in her role, shifted to her interactions with parents within the school community, and the question of whether her race, gender or culture had any impact on her ability to develop relationships with parents.

...I remember one parent called me after her child had been tested and I guess...she took her child afterwards to see a private practitioner and the private practitioner told her that there was absolutely no need for him to reevaluate the child, the report was extremely thorough, she'd be throwing away her money and, there was no point, you know in doing the test. So she called me back...and she told me, 'you know and I just wanted to tell you Mrs. Smith that you know to be honest I took the case...' that's fine, you can always look for a second opinion...and of course she didn't say it, but to me, behind that statement is, she was surprised... (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

Catherine makes clear her understanding of the right of the parents to have another professional opinion as additional information in order to access educational services however, the hidden message from this parent was one that suggested to her a level of surprise that the information initially presented was professionally accurate. Catherine continued to dialogue about the ways in which as we meet as professionals and parents to make decisions for children, the perceptions of one another at that table can either help or hinder the progress made in schools, and that as one of the few minority faces, she is charged with having to meet these perceptions head on but not without some level of frustration and hurt. Catherine acknowledged that some of her own perceptions could be issues surrounding being a racial minority in a predominately white environment.

However, she still feels the sting of a moment of surprise when she has done her job well, worked hard, stated a case articulately, which is a part of her professional responsibility and should be acknowledged as a given. We discussed how she deals with her own 'stuff' pertaining to race and if she thinks that we all bring stuff into the educational room.

Yeah, I think everybody brings in their stuff...and then with the minority you bring in stuff that would be normal stuff like anybody brings and on top of that you bring in your stuff related to race and your experiences. Even if it didn't happen to you, if you are in any way, shape or form aware of what happened in the world and you hear stuff from other people and you have to watch what happens on TV; it happens to you but that's part of your culture, it's your race...so I think that kind of makes you aware and I believe the balance is trying to navigate your way through these situations...using your stuff as a strength but not letting it become a source of paranoia and cloud your judgment (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

There are passive forms of prejudice which are experienced in the places where educational decisions are made on behalf of children as well. Some of these issues include silencing; denial of access to information necessary to discuss issues in a meeting; purposeful exclusion from meetings; and comments generally meant to convey a sense of inadequacy. Dealing with these issues can be a juggling act and she has incorporated an awareness of these issues as a type of professional etiquette that has morphed over the years.

I think it's become part of my professional etiquette. I think in the beginning when I first, when we first moved here from Miami I was definitely much more

aware and much more cautious at that time. So I mean I think now it's become more automatic but it's still something that's always there and I can't say that it's not present. I think it continues to be present because I think your personalities and the people you work with and their belief systems about the world... that you can't stop to a certain degree... So that in and of itself gets exhausting (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

There are times when she recalls being forced to address issues of bias head on, for the sake of advocacy in absentia for parents and children

...one thing that did stand out in my mind and that happened probably my first year, maybe first or second year at the school. Our SST meetings had always been on white children, so this was one of the few, I think, the first or second black child that actually came up at SST...but anyway we're talking and so we get to the meeting, the parents didn't show up. And so the parents didn't show up-at this school, parents are usually there but this was certainly not the first that didn't show up to a meeting. And in the past when a parent didn't show up to a meeting we immediately get to the business, start talking about it, the meeting would go on, we'd talk about the academics and what we can do. ..Now, the meeting has started and they start talking about his address, are they really in our area, do they really belong here. So I decided I'm going to wait, I'm going to see exactly how long we're going to talk about this child's address, not about the fact that the child is having difficulty reading but the child's address. So, they're talking about what does the mom do, what does the dad do, they get up and get the confidential record, they're looking at the address. Fifteen minutes, scheduled

for 30 minutes,...but for 15 minutes I decided...we'll see how long it can go. So finally the whole time we're all sitting..I'm waiting and I'm watching, so after 15 minutes had gone by I said to them, I said, "We've been sitting here for 15 minutes and the only thing that we've discussed is this child's address." I go, "I find it quite (interesting), what is it about **this** child and **this** family that makes us worry about address verification when we haven't done that for any other family that hasn't shown up. So please help me understand why this is the only focus of this meeting?" Of course everybody was absolutely silent...so the teacher starts talking about the reading and (laughter) now we're focused (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

Catherine is cautious however, not to let her own agenda supersede the agenda of the child. In fact she discussed the desire not to let her own heightened awareness be an excuse for the team not to help the student. She is careful about the ways in which she chooses to address issues of racial imbalance.

...what I have to do and my goal is to advocate for the child. So I have to figure out the most intelligent way to, it may not be the same way, it could be different in every school but what's the best way for me to navigate my way through these people so that I can serve the best interest of the child (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

Biographical Sketch

Tameka

Tameka is the youngest participant at 31 years old. She has five years of professional experience and currently works in a public school system in the metropolitan

Atlanta area. She works primarily with suburban low income schools. Tameka is married with two small children under the age of three. She is originally from Indiana, where she was raised by an intact family and has one brother. Tameka's parents are college educated, with both parents earning advanced degrees. Her mother has a master's degree in education and her father has a master's degree in business. In addition to working full time, Tameka is currently pursuing a doctorate in the field of psychology. Tameka entered the field of School Psychology as a detour from law school, where she decided that she was not fulfilled. She completed her graduate training at a historically black college in Florida and began working in a public school system in a central Georgia city. Following a three year work experience, she moved to the metropolitan Atlanta area where she began working in 2007.

Tameka's Voice

With roots in a small town in Indiana, Tameka begins by telling me that her expectations for herself and the expectations of her parents moved beyond those of her small town beginnings.

Well I grew up in Indiana in a small, a pretty small city. Mostly it was...an automotive manufacturing city. And most of the people that lived there worked either for GM or they worked in healthcare or they were in education. My father worked in healthcare and my mother is an educator. And pretty much their goal for me was to (go to college), well, I was never not going to go to college or get advanced degrees because my parents both had advanced degrees. But, it was pretty much emphasized to me to get a professional type of degree. So when I went to college, I went to college with the intention of going to law school (T.

Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

She talks about the correlation between education and career as an important part of her father's emphasis on the attainment of a quality education. As she speaks she is reflective about her mother's message about the pursuit of education and social networks as a journey toward finding what she enjoyed.

You see, I'm trying to remember, like my mother, my mother never really pushed me academically...she didn't necessarily push me socially or with extracurricular activities. I think my mom let us do whatever we asked her to do because she wasn't allowed to do so many things. Like my mother was only allowed to go to school and come home. She didn't do extracurricular activities. She didn't have a lot of friends. So her thing with my brother and I was, I want you to experience as much as you can and that's why we traveled so much. My dad worked in healthcare so, you know, he doesn't have the summers off...So my mom was the one taking us to ballet and tennis and basketball and football and cheerleading and we traveled. My mother would take us wherever and that's pretty much where...I knew I wasn't going to stay in Indiana for as long as I can remember. But she made sure that we had a well-rounded experience...it wasn't more so do your school work, do your school work-it was, I want to give you everything that I can give you and let you experience as much as possible so that you can make a decision about what you want to do with your life (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

Much of Tameka's sharing with me followed along this same vein. As she spoke I could almost see her making connections between the different eras in her life, not as a

revelation sparked from this interview, but as a recall of the series of important events that have lead her to this time in her life.

Her early educational experiences included attending schools that did not have a large population of African American students.

I went to predominantly white schools. I think when I graduated from high school there was maybe five African-Americans that graduated. I think maybe three of us were female and the other two were male (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

Responding to what impact she thought her immersion into a school culture where she was the racial minority may have had on her she responded:

...the city where I grew up I went to the better schools on the better sides of town, which were predominantly white schools. And that's all I knew growing up. That was the only thing that I knew so I didn't really think any differently about it. Not to mention that, I didn't necessarily see myself any different than the Caucasian children. I just thought I was the smartest, if not smarter...so I didn't have all those issues. No, I don't recall having any of those issues. It was just the way we were raised. To do your best regardless...Who cares what you look like. You're going to do what you need to do (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

Looking forward at her college choices, Tameka began to look for a different experience than she had for most of her educational experience. She chose to attend a historically black college in Florida.

And so when I went to (school) I was in culture shock obviously for the first like

six months because I never saw this many (black) people in my entire life. But not even that, it was that there were so many intelligent black people. I did grow up around black people who were smart...I knew that there were more people like me and I knew I needed to just-I missed out on having that complete total black experience (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

Tameka's comment made reference to her limited engagement with other black students who were similarly focused on academics and school related activities. She dialogued about the culture shock of being one of the few black students in her high school to one of many who were also interested in their own education and future at the undergraduate level. There also appeared to be significant socioeconomic and class issues that were impacting her ability to make connections to similarly situated students in her hometown.

Moving from immersion in an educational environment where she was a minority, to one where she was part of the racial majority, was impactful for Tameka. More than just a geographic change, Tameka expressed a sense of finding a place when she went off to college. She recalled feeling enlightened, and during our conversation I got the feeling that Tameka realized exactly what had been missing from her early educational experiences.

But the experience was great. I mean, it just put me in a different place about what I could do with my life when I had a black professor. I had maybe had three black teachers...all the way coming up. You know, my mother was a teacher, but I maybe saw three (other black teachers) and to see a black male professor was like, that was unheard of for me. So just to see so many educated people, and they were comfortable with themselves and they were okay with

themselves. I never saw that in my life. I saw it on TV, but to actually be in that experience and see that and be around it for how many years? Seven years? It completely changed who I am (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

Entering the university, she continued along the path to finding a career, and remembering what her father had subtly communicated to her, she looked to align her career path to an occupation that would provide her with economic and professional stability.

I guess that's why I went the lawyer route. I thought well, lawyers make a lot of money and that's what I'm supposed to do and I'm supposed to have a lot of money so that I can get everything I want so that's what I'll do. But I didn't love it so. I found that out later (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

Spending a month in law school, Tameka realized that her choice, although driven by the reality of wanting to do well professionally, was not the right choice for her. She entered the field of school psychology after contemplating the coursework that appealed to her most as an undergraduate.

...I always loved psychology but... the only thing I knew about psychology was you have to be a clinical psychologist. So once I quit law school I sat around and thought 'what am I going to do'. I don't really know how I got to school psychology to be completely honest with you. I knew I liked psychology and I thought, okay, well what can I do with that? And I started looking at education, because my mother did ...but didn't want to be a teacher. So I started

looking to school counseling and that really didn't interest me and I just kind of fell into school psychology. And when I looked at it I said, well they get to help children and we don't necessarily have a classroom (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

School psychology was not introduced to her as a career option, but rather she recalls having to find the profession on her own, in response to a desire to merge her interests in psychology with her interests in education. She decided to continue her academic studies in the school psychology graduate program at the same historically black college in Florida she attended as an undergraduate. At the end of her program as she was entering the year-long internship phase she began to look for sites where she could be mentored in a way that would sharpen her practical and technical skills. One of her earliest professional mentors provided her with an opportunity to learn the formal and informal training required to become a school psychologist. Tameka recalls being keenly aware of the need to shift once again to accommodate a new school culture that was familiar to her, but in which this time she was operating as outsider.

She actually went through the same program that I went through. And we just met by chance, she just happened to be there the day I went...and she met me and found out where I went to school and so she took me on as my mentor and ended up being my internship supervisor and mentored me those first three years as well. I guess we came from, not necessarily similar backgrounds, but of the school that we went to, the program we went to. And then once I got in and started working she helped me along in terms of balancing the schools. Learning how to deal with, you know, as much as I grew up in predominantly white schools, it's different

when you have to go work at a predominantly white school. And one of my first schools was a predominantly white school which was a completely different experience than going to a predominantly white school and being a young child. (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

Tameka speaks about her initial difficulty with the professional shifting necessary to work in her new environment. As a student she does not recall her race being a significant issue in her interactions with her counterparts; however, in her first professional work experience as a School Psychologist she found herself having to make concessions for other people's perceptions of her in this role. She attributes some of this to the geographic shift that she made moving to the Georgia for her internship. On the differences between being a black female student within a predominately white school and being a black female professional in a predominately white environment she said:

I think growing up in them, maybe I was protected from comments, I don't know. I didn't get the feeling that anybody thought of me differently. And I don't know if that's because I grew up in the...I don't know if the Midwest is different than the South, or obviously it is. But once I got to the South and I was working as a professional in the school in the South it was 'I didn't even think you would be this smart or who taught you this? Or how do you know this?' You know, I got questioned so much about everything that I did. Not to mention it was my first year and I'm young and I'm black and I don't look like you...So I had a lot of those things to deal with. So for me trying to navigate, she helped me through that...I didn't know what to do (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

In her subsequent professional experiences, working in schools where she feels as though she is an insider or outsider, she speaks of the desire to meet the needs of the students and families of her schools. She expresses the need to ‘switch the codes’ as part of her communication style depending on where she was working. She asserts keeping the end goal of meeting the needs of children at the forefront, but says, “I’m doing the same thing, but I’m approaching it differently and I understand how I need to tailor everything with you” (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

Still early in her career, Tameka is continuing to develop those skills necessary to navigate effectively and to shift professionally. She speaks of the ongoing process of developing these skills:

I think I’m still developing the relationship building. At times I forget and I get so focused... I’m here to do this, this, this, this, that I forget to sit down and converse with administrators and that’s just really been hard for me...and I think I’m coming along. I’ve done alot better than I was...I need to keep that ongoing communication between us (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009).

On what she appreciated about her chosen career, she identified the freedom of the role, and the multiple layers that encompass her position. She also said that she enjoys working as part of a team to develop strategies that address the academic, social and emotional needs of students. Tameka is working towards expanding her role in the future, she has returned to graduate school, working toward a terminal degree in psychology. She hopes to open a private practice one day where she can tailor her professional

practices to the needs of students in the community without the restrictions of the public schools.

Biographical Sketch

Linda

Linda is the only participant who works in the sector of private education within this study. In addition to holding certification in School Psychology, she is also the only Psychologist that is licensed through the Georgia Board of Examiners in Psychology, and has private practice experience in her professional repertoire. Linda is 46 years old and was born and raised in the metropolitan Atlanta area. She attended a large state university where she earned her bachelor's, masters and doctoral degrees in educational psychology and school psychometry. Professionally, she began her career as a School Psychologist working in a Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) where she was part of a small team serving fifteen rural counties. She has worked in several school districts both inner city and suburban, serving as Lead Psychologist in the last public school position. Several years after she earned her terminal degree, Linda transitioned into an academic role at her alma mater. During that time she also worked in the private sector as a Psychologist in a well regarded private practice. Linda returned to the metropolitan area in 2003, and took an administrative position with a private school. She has since transitioned into an organizational leadership role which she has held for several years. Linda is the daughter of an intact family unit, she has three siblings. Linda's parents were both high school graduates with no college experience. She is married with one daughter.

Linda's Voice

As the youngest of four children, Linda recalled that education was emphasized in her household. The perception of education as access to opportunity was an assumption that her parents held and transferred to their children through their educational advocacy efforts and via the experiences they provided for their children. Exposure began in kindergarten for Linda and her parents enrolled her in a kindergarten program, although at that time kindergarten programs were neither mandatory nor accessible in every public school.

I guess I grew up in a family where I was the youngest of four children and there was a strong emphasis on education and academics. I think in part because neither of my parents were college educated and my mother clearly had some feelings about being educated in the system that was segregated..And it didn't feel like pressure, it just felt like it's what's you're supposed to do. When I was born, I guess I went to preschool programs, but went to kindergarten at the Unitarian Church because that was the time before public school kindergarten, but it was a group of us from Decatur. Our parents would take us out to the Unitarian Church for kindergarten experience, which apparently was unusual at that time to make that kind of commitment. There were four of us who went from Decatur out there. That just stayed with me and (we) went to elementary school in Decatur and I just felt a strong presence from my family to do well in school, but I was fairly shy, wasn't that athletic, so there was nothing else to do in school...so I did the work (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Linda is reflective when she speaks about her parents and their desire early on to engage the educational system to find options for their children. She references that it was their own experiences in segregated schools that drove their level of engagement with the changing climate of schools at that time. They were keenly aware that social justice and educational equity were complex and interlocking systems, which, as advocates, they would have to meet head on for the benefit of their children. She says “...the other thing that my mom had done during the 60’s was, she was the first black person in DeKalb County to get a library card” (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Realizing that materials, books, supplies, opportunities were different and (they) didn’t want that for us. Matter of fact, she and another woman, in our community in the little city of Decatur were instrumental in the desegregation of Decatur City Schools. That they sat in the superintendent’s office...and refused to leave his office until he agreed to accept a group of students who were enrolled in the black high school, Trinity High School, at that time into Decatur High School. She said it was all day and at that end of that day in that time they (her siblings) were the first group to go to Decatur High School. And so because she was always involved in their schooling, our schooling, instrumental in this desegregation of Decatur City Schools, I think it just created even more family expectations that she...paved the way, don’t blow this opportunity (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

With her family being a considerable support network as she began her educational career it was interesting to hear Linda’s insights into the level of expectation

communicated by teachers in her early learning experiences. Teachers served as bridges to negotiate the system and provided Linda and her siblings with opportunities that allowed their potential to shine. Expectations were high from both teachers and parents. Teachers were perceived as educational bridges and helped parent's access additional resources for their children. She acknowledged that although her parents were genuinely committed to providing the best education possible for their children, it was the help and expectation of teacher mentors that provided the bridge to services that were beneficial for them.

Because I think it was harder for parents to know the intricacies of how schools operated...Like they could have goals for you that were lasting goals, but in terms of know how do you access a gifted program. And that was for all of us...my brother is very smart in mathematics. And it was actually a substitute teacher who told my mom that he's working on the lowest track in mathematics and he gets it. It's the wrong place for him. She was the advocate with my mom to help negotiate the system. And so I think they just didn't understand how processes and systems work even though the expectations were high. (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

To her point, advocacy coupled with access to appropriate educational services was key to the academic success she and her siblings experienced.

Central to Linda's appreciation for the support that she and her siblings received from parents and teachers was an understanding that she had a certain amount of privilege associated with that support. As stated, she and her siblings were generally well-behaved kids, with two parents present and active, with exposure to actively

engaged teachers that worked collaboratively to achieve the goal of educating them. These were also teachers that lived in the surrounding communities, working with children in a social and educational milieu that was changing with the winds of desegregation.

But it was in sixth grade actually, I had a teacher...I'll never forget her, who really was instrumental in making sure that I worked up to my potential because I could have stayed under the radar. Like learning everything, but not feeling the need to communicate that so much, but it was her who encouraged me to talk out more in class, share ideas..I was accepted for the gifted program. It was like they were the teachers who stayed in Decatur, even after the schools were desegregated or they moved from the black schools to integrated schools. When they had to bring in some African American teachers and they made the difference for me in saying, you know, you're smart. I didn't know I was smart, I was the youngest of four kids. And so I feel very fortunate to say I had some great mentors, some of whom are still in my life. I talk to, not on a regular basis, but some. Came to my wedding...knew when I had the baby. You know, it's just a small enough community where they have stayed in touch, especially high school teachers (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

On teacher expectations as an adult learner, she indicated that the level of support diminished when she entered the large regional university as an undergraduate student. She acknowledged that she worked diligently to complete her academic studies in the four year period that her parents agreed to financially support her. As an undergraduate, Linda recalled very little recognition for her academic endeavors even though she

excelled. This changed in graduate school where her academic skills were noticed and acknowledged as a strength.

It was actually one of the professors when I was in the masters program... One of the professors wrote a note on the top of a report I had written, “see me.” Of course, I thought I was in some kind of trouble. And when I went to talk to him he asked had I ever thought about pursuing a Ph.D. and I said no. You know, my first response was, can’t afford it, don’t think I’m smart enough to do that. And he was like, we’ll make sure you get funded to do it and you’re plenty smart to do it. And again, I just never thought about that as a possibility. So I’ll never forget that. Then when I started in the Ph.D. program, of course, my major professor is still a strong professional mentor to me. So I feel like I’ve had good mentoring for my academic life and definitely for my career. And I remember all those people and I never, ever, ever forget what impact they had on me personally and professionally (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

The support and encouragement that Linda received from this professor and subsequent mentors helped her chart a trajectory for her life that would lead her not only to practice as a licensed psychologist but also afforded her many opportunities for a myriad of professional experiences within the field.

Everyone should have a Beatrice in their lives...
(L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009)

Linda speaks in a very caring way about her first professional mentor. She uses words like ‘strong, knowledgeable, advocate, tough as nails’. As Linda recounted her early professional experiences she recalled her entrée into the small rural town in Southwest Georgia, where she (as a city girl) was thrown into the role serving multiple

counties, and multiple schools where the poverty rates were high. Understandably, she recalls being nervous, about her transitioning role from student to practitioner as well as her presence in a new town where the presence of African American professionals was atypical. Then there was Beatrice...Linda's new supervisor and a woman whose professional reputation preceded her in only the most positive ways. Linda reflected that you could tell "Beatrice was one of the first women in the profession" (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009), because of the ways in which she was able to navigate the existing boys club with so much savvy, without being overtly perceived as aggressive. Responding to questions about her entrance into the field professionally she stated:

...I started looking for jobs late. I got that job offer in (city A) and one in (city B). I knew nothing about either, but...this is so interesting. I had heard from people at (the university) that one of the first women who was a school psychologist in the state worked in (this county). And that she was an outstanding supervisor... And so I thought well, I want to work with her. Tough as nails...Honestly. She, you can tell she was one of the first women in the profession because she just, she knew how to navigate a boys club with male superintendents and male Special Ed. Directors with much savvy. I think I learned a tremendous amount from her about how to advocate for kids (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

On the topic of leadership development Linda expressed an appreciation for a model of professionalism that taught her the practical side of what a School Psychologist should be. Additionally, what came across in our discussions was an appreciation for a

female model of leadership which set the tone for what would be a very impactful and rich career as a Psychologist. It was not until later in this discussion that Linda revealed, very nonchalantly that Beatrice was a White woman. Certainly, in our discourse, it was clear that issues of race, socioeconomic status, identity and professional development came to the forefront at times different times during this time in Linda's life. She was not removed from the fact that she was a young, well educated African American woman moving into a small rural town, where overt racism was a fact of life. However, it is also important to recognize that the differences between these two women in terms of race did not overshadow the burgeoning relationship as mentor and mentee.

The thing I learned there from that supervisor was really about advocacy for kids. Because I don't think you really get a full understanding of that as a student. Like what that really looks like. And it was more impressive because it was, like the population was mostly African-American and very poor and she was a wealthy white woman. So to see her kind of navigate that situation, I felt like I learned about kind of how to turn down who you are personally in order to get people to hear you. Cause she definitely had to do that and speak the language in a way that people could understand and follow. And, she was the one too who was just very helpful in helping me translate the academic talk into more plain parent speak (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Of her experiences with her 'hard as nails' supervisor Linda said "I didn't find Beatrice intimidating, I found her strong. And seeing strong women operate was something that I had experienced before in my own family, so that wasn't unusual" (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009). I thought it was interesting that she

spoke of the way in which this supervisor did more than show her the technical side of practicing. As one of the first women in the field she provided Linda a good model for being a strong, yet nurturing School Psychologist and supervisor. The relationship between this strength and the expectation of excellence, to Linda, translated into a nurturing relationship that was familial and reminiscent of the women in her family.

As Linda moved on in her career, it became apparent that she had become 'Beatrice' for many others entering the field throughout her career. Through her style of leadership, in fact, it appears that she has embraced roles which allowed her to provide opportunities to develop the technical and practical skills of the next generation of school psychologists as well as other educational professionals.

And the other thing is I've always tried to be very supportive of colleagues and students in training and especially younger colleagues who worked with me in terms of encouraging, providing opportunities, helping them network, exposing them to areas that they might not have been exposed to had it not been for somebody opening the door for them (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

A common thread in Linda's dialogue about her life and work seems to be the focus on keeping the children with whom she works as the primary professional focus. Hearing her speak made me keenly aware of a practice that is infused with care for the outcomes of students and a desire to help them, through her work and leadership, make the most of their potential. Working in rural counties as a new school psychologist, as a director of a training clinic at a large research institution, working within the ranks of public school

and even as a director at a private school, the mantra remained the same; to keep doing good things for kids.

And I think it's two-fold. One is, I feel like wherever I've been I've always been about providing the best level of service and care for the children. Didn't matter... like they pay thousands and thousands of dollars a year to come to school, but I worked in my first system and it was one of the poorest areas in the state. Service orientation didn't change for me.... So when people come and say they're paying so much we should do it differently. I say no, you should do it the best because they show up here. And so that really has been a strong focus of how I've thought about my own work (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

It was evident in the discussion of her values as a professional that she related the way in which she chose to engage any work experience she's had to a core value system reminiscent of the ways in which she was nurtured educationally as a child. Indeed, it seemed as though she kept at the forefront, the lessons learned from those teachers and educators that served as bridges for her family. She brings to the job a sense of doing what she can, where she is, no matter how much money the systems do or do not have, to make it happen for the children with whom she works. Of her practice she said:

And so it was other people who helped navigate that for us, but, you know, we were kids who didn't get in trouble. You know, we did all the right things so that we could get that assistance. And I think today about those kids who sometimes act out because they need somebody to step in and to support them that way. And sometimes people turn their back on those kids and it's those who are, you know,

they're nice, they're easy, they don't rock the boat, who get the helping hand. And I feel like I was that child, but I think there are so many other children who behave differently, but need as much encouragement and have as much potential...Because I grew up that way, had it where people could have easily said, you know, black child, living in Decatur, low expectations... just not concerned about my potential at all, but they didn't and I won't (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Responding to the query regarding conflicting roles of advocate and agent of an organization, particularly as a leader within the organization of school, Linda discussed her willingness to stick to her basic core values.

I think what it has been for me is I've never been afraid of the possibility of having to walk away. I always felt like I could get another position because my advocacy, it would be strong, but it wouldn't be contentious. I'm not argumentative with people, but I am strong in what I believe and I feel like if you don't burn bridges you can always walk away and find something else. So I've always been confident in the ability to say, you know what, this is not working and I can, I'll do something else (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

In her current role she has come to understand that her perceptions of what is important professionally have changed over the years. Shifting in her career has often aligned with shifts in her family life as well. Her emerging identity as wife and mother greatly impacted her perspective on what she was willing to give to the work. She noted

the difficulty in maintaining a good balance and talks about how that balance is achieved in her current position.

...one of our values here is around balance in life. And we were intentional, we actually about three or four years ago wrote some organizational norms that really put down on paper what our values are. And one of them is about balance in your life. It makes you better as a professional to have that and we're very family focused (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Moving into a professional place that allows for a balance between who you are and what you do has been an important revelation to Linda. Navigating the landscape of her professional life has also meant making sure that she sets personal boundaries in the workplace, in order to keep the best parts of herself intact. I had the impression that although her level of commitment to work was high, it was not all encompassing to the exclusion of her core value system. This was part of another shift that she spoke about with a sense of clarity and wisdom and it seemed that it was not just a skill set that has grown over the years of practice but also a way of living, mediating and negotiating what is important to keep her fully realized as a professional and as a person separate from her profession.

With increased leadership responsibility often brings the winds of change, and Linda's transition into her current role was no different. Moving from a part of a team to leader of the teams was another shift, not only in role, but also in the way that she chooses to engage the people within environment; including those that would seek to halt the winds of change. Speaking about having to address one particularly difficult personnel issue she remarked that she has come to understand that, "you lead with

courage” (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009). The courage of which she spoke, I understood as courage to challenge-both the status quo and yourself when necessary for growth.

Our discussion moved fluidly to one of leadership styles and the business of being a leader in a school organization where she was the only African American woman at the executive level, and dealing with instances of resentment when and if they occurred among the staff. She referred to personnel management as an area that she continued to develop.

I don't want to feel like I lose the part of me that's the humanistic part that cares about people, but I can't be second to everybody's stuff either. And it's a balance that I really struggle with. So that's part of it. And sometimes people, because I'm so egalitarian and I hate rank and all that kind of stuff, but sometimes people need rank and you have to step up there and be the voice. And I can do it when I recognize it and it's always in the right situation, right issue, but that makes me anxious; like I go home with my stomach in a knot. But people need that at times and you have to step up and do it (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

With this statement Linda expressed the impact of black female leadership in a place where her presence is resented by some and representative of a change that disrupts how things have always operated. The articulation of her voice as leader is not clouded by her race or gender, but certainly informed by them. There are times, as she has expressed, when as a leader, she is compelled to address personnel issues despite the

perceptions of who she is based on the socially constructed stereotypes that accompany race and gender.

One of the most salient points Linda expressed learning over the years professionally was that you must speak in the language of your audience. It's just as important to recognize that what you say does not matter if the people to whom you are speaking can't hear you. In response to a question about what she wished she had known at the beginning of her career that she knows now she replied:

Starting the first job, I learned how you have to make plain and speak in ways that people can understand what you mean all the time. That you're, not so heady and so cerebral that people are missing the message. That you've got to think about that all the time. Who's the audience? Where are they in their ability to listen? What is it that you're really trying to communicate? and to try to get that right all the time, because you're not providing the service if they can't hear you (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Another important lesson comes in the way that you choose to work for the benefit of children, remaining focused on the core commitment to the work of helping children was important to her.

So that's one of the things and the other is the way we have to advocate for children never lessens. Regardless of the setting, you have to be a strong advocate for the children. Because there'll be so many programs and initiatives and goals and strategies and at the end of the day, if the children aren't performing better, still we haven't done the work (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Addressing issues of subtle and overt incidences of racism over her career, she was thoughtful about what impact these situations had on her professional countenance, and how her response to these incidents have changed with time. Recalling one instance of racism masked as inappropriate humor within the organization, she said:

...people are always quick to say, well, we don't believe we have any racists on the staff. And I said, one thing you cannot say is what's in somebody's heart and in their mind. You can't say that and you can't know. But somebody has behaved in a way that is unacceptable and I would call it racist. And that behavior cannot be tolerated. So nobody needs to get called out as a racist, you don't know that, but behaving in a way that's racist can get addressed by us senior leaders of this school. And so, I left those conversations surprised by some people's reactions, not surprised by others, good and bad. And I had to think about it a long time (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Acknowledging her feelings about the incident with her supervisor (at the time) was important to Linda, and appeared to mark a significant understanding of how she chose to handle situations where more passive forms of racially biased activity occurred. Affirming to me that incidents of racism still hurt, she was thoughtful, but committed to not allowing these incidents to make her stagnant. She came back to her commitment to her own value systems and her internal compass for what was an opportunity for growth (for her as well as her staff) and those issues that would be considered deal breakers. I got the impression that as she has matured over the years within her profession, she came to understand that her value is not hinged upon other people's perceptions of who she is, but

rather embedded in her own understanding of her ability to be effective and to be respected for her high level of professional integrity.

You know, there probably have been other things and really, I put them away after I deal with them and then I'm done. But, again, it's one of those areas where if it were too overt and I felt like I couldn't be effective in the setting anymore because they had crossed a value for me and I had no respect for them and they were demonstrating no respect for me, I'd have to move on (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Responding to the best parts of her current work she spoke about her natural instinct toward more organizational management. Recognizing that for her, effective leadership embodied the abilities to make connections between the needs of the organization and the practical work of educating children and providing the staff in her care with the resources to educate to the best of their abilities.

I think because I always think organizationally and always think about the most impact. I really think like an administrator. And like some people say that and it's a real negative thing and it's kind of off putting that people think about themselves that way, but my brain is sort of wired that way to think at 10,000 feet when I need to, but then I can get down to 1 foot when I need to too. And making that shift is not hard for me. So that's what I mean when I say that I think like an administrator. I can get above the fray and figure something out that makes sense organizationally, but then when it's time to figure out the carpool schedule, I can weigh in on that too (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Keeping this type of perspective is important as she works toward maintaining her connection to the practical work which at its core benefits so many children, while simultaneously keeping an eye on the long term goals that will help move the organization forward as they continue to develop innovative practices and partnerships that will increase the level of impact they can have as they support children.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DATA ANALYSIS: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

I am reflective of the ways in which a conversation can provide a perspective, the way in which dialogue can transform into the dialectic. I am awestruck at the ways in which getting to know others can be an introspective experience and in the end one can come to know so much more about oneself. As I began to muddle through the enormous amounts of data collected from the women participating in this study, I recognized that their participation reflected a spirit of generosity for which I was unprepared. My own journey through this work and the sharing of my personal and professional experiences serves as the fifth voice within this research. As such, it is important to recognize that the themes that emerged from the research are reflective of commonalities across a very diverse and unique group of women. I believe that I have found my way through the research by following the stories. The stories will be analyzed using the lenses of critical race theory and black feminist thought, two theoretical perspectives which I believe will give testimony to the story, speak what has not previously been spoken for these women, and give a perspective that honors their unique angles of vision. It is important to know that this work has emerged in large part as a dialogue about relationships, including the connections to our mothers, our 'othermothers', each other, our colleagues, communities and to the children that we perceive to be extensions of us in the work that we do. My grandmother gave me the understanding that choosing to share your life with others is an intimate affair, not to be entered into lightly, and not to be taken for granted. And so...the business of communicating the tone of each woman's voice was important to me, the

process was entered into with a sense of responsibility to tell the story in a way that reflects the story yet untold, appreciate each woman's choice to share parts of their lives with me, and to make analyses that move our collective conversations with each other and those outside of us forward. The sharing of our voices as a collective and as individuals served the purpose of naming ourselves, defining who we are and speaking the ways in which we have come to know ourselves by way of the narrative. As esoteric as that may sound to the outside world, it was clear and apparent as we engaged in this research that what we were doing was bringing us into the fold in a way that moved us away from the periphery. There is a sense of honor and responsibility to this kind of work, and so the themes that are presented serve as a summation of what was revealed through our stories (Natasha, Personal Reflection, 2009).

EMERGENT THEMES

My primary research questions were two fold, (1) how do African American women within the field of School Psychology mediate their intersecting identities? (2) How do African American female School Psychologists perceive the concept of intersectionality and how their multiple identities impact the development of their professional practices? As the data unfolded, several convergent themes emerged from the research. Within the context of the research questions I used the theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and black feminist thought as the lens of analyses for the individual interviews. These emergent themes included (1) parental support and 'othermothering' (2) early models for activism and advocacy (3) professional mentorship (4) navigating the landscape of the profession (5) agency and advocacy (6) gender and race as intersecting and converging social constructions (7) issues of racism.

Parental Support and Othermothering

The importance of parental support and expectations in early childhood cannot be overestimated. As part of understanding identity development of each woman, there was significant discussion surrounding their early childhood experiences. Parental support at the earliest levels appeared to be an emergent theme that rang true for all of the women in the study. Without exception, each woman described a familial environment where the expectation was high regarding academics and the pursuit of education as a means of advancement. Although the family constellations looked different, three participants raised in two parent intact homes, one by grandparents, and one by a combination of her mother and grandparents; their importance in transmitting messages that education was an integral part of life was evident. At varying levels the manifestation of a parent's wish for more opportunities for their children was at the core of the early childhood academic experiences and clearly shaped the women's perceptions of what they could do academically.

I am not sure how I ended up in a gifted program. I know that my grandmother made the arrangements for me to attend a junior high school that was outside of my district, while I was at the end of elementary school, but I honestly don't recall how she obtained that information. I know that she was always at the school, making sure that she knew my teachers, monitored my progress, and made sure that projects were being done by the deadlines. She was just one of those women who handled things. Although I lived with both grandparents, my grandfather worked and so she was a full time parent; taking care of me was her job, and as such, she made sure that I was always actively doing something. Without a lot of financial resources, I was always doing something at school

or home that would make me better...debate team in elementary school led to speaking to the school on Martin Luther King, Jr. day; developing a love of books led to participating in the local library's Reading is Fundamental program; giving me journal's to write down my thoughts led to a love for the written word that never left, and down the road would lead to work on school newsletters, yearbooks and participating in writer's workshops. She didn't mind me asking lots of questions, although she would often tell me that she might not know the answers. As a parent now myself, I understand that some of this was by design, giving me access to activities that helped foster those things in me that she saw as strengths, while setting the stage for my strengths to become assets to others that I would encounter along the way. I remember years later, after she died, thinking about her, understanding and appreciating all of those seemingly small things that she cultivated every day and understanding that she made an indelible imprint upon me that is still evident in action, in thought and indeed in the rearing of my own daughter through her lessons. (Natasha, Personal Recollection,2009)

In some of the households the expectation of academic achievement was a given, part of the understood responsibility of the child as a member of the family. Catherine recalled that this expectation was 'just understood' in her family. Being the child of parents who were professional people with advanced degrees, she recalled that her mother was very active in the lives of her children, even choosing to stay at home with them when they were young so that she could participate in their school activities.

The idea of parents as mediators within a cultural context extends to their level of academic expectations for their children. The literature is replete with study's examining the effect of African American parental expectations on the academic outcomes of their

children (Hill & Craft, 2003; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007; Urdan, Solek, & Schoenfelder, 2007), and supports the position that increased levels of parental involvement positively impact the academic success of their children (Fields-Smith, 2005; Jacobs & Harvey, 2005; Koonce & Harper, 2005).

In a cross cultural comparison study, Phillipson and Phillipson (2007) examined the relationship between parental expectations, parental participation in their child's education and the effects on student achievement. The authors noted that, "parental involvement can be seen as part of a larger mediation structure whereby parents are able to transfer their beliefs, aspirations, and expectations to their children, affecting, in turn, their children's academic achievement" (Phillipson and Phillipson, 2007, p.331). Each of the participants reported that their parents (or grandparents) held them to an academic standard within their households, and perceived the attainment of an education as a scaffold for their future successes. Although the Phillipson & Phillipson's (2007) sample populations were not primarily African-American, I posit that the same assumptions could be made for the families represented through these participants.

Interestingly, the women in this study referenced their mothers and grandmothers as the primary caregivers responsible for much of the parental support and encouragement they received. Furthermore mothers (or mother figures) as models for strength and resourcefulness were also noted as salient themes throughout their careers, when stories of their lives were revealed. It would seem that the ways in which these mothers modeled advocacy for their own children permeated the fabric that makes up the lives of the participants. Even when they did not directly reference their mothers by name

as contributing greatly to their professional and personal worldview, the stories that they told of their mothers suggested that this was where those seeds were planted.

Collins (2000) referred to the concept of ‘othermothers’, as a way of providing collaborative opportunities to mother with the hope of enriching the collective experience and well being in addition to passing on cultural traditions. She spoke of the history of black women, activism, familial advocacy and community work as intertwined, not static or discrete. This was community work and served as ‘the basis for power’ (Collins, 2000) among black women who coalesced around issues that directly impacted them and those with whom they are charged with protecting. This concept is expanded upon within the field of education by Dixson & Dingus (2008) when they address to the historical significance of othermothers as a network of support or ‘mothering networks’. The authors went on to state that these types of networks were, “vital to forming and sustaining cultural traditions and Black communities” (Dixson & Dingus, 2008, p. 810). I posit that the early relationships each woman formed with her mother or othermother was significant to the development of their racial and gender identification, role acceptance and level of advocacy they espoused both in their personal and professional lived experiences. Although the participants did not name this phenomenon, their words were ripe with the evidence of their mothers and othermothers rearing. The stories of the women in their lives advocating for themselves, their communities, but especially their children, spoke greatly to the impact that watching these mothers and othermothers had on the participants, and the silent lessons learned from this peripheral view of their foremothers provided them with models of how race and gender identities converge for the purposes of social action.

This research serves as a counter-story to an existing view of how black womanhood develops, and is an example of the ethic of care personified. Black female other-mothers as models, mentors and systems of support are important concepts to recognize within this work.

Early Models for Activism and Advocacy

It appeared that the history of segregation and subsequent desegregation of schools had an impact on the ways in which some of the parents perceived education to be a right well earned by a struggle which they saw unfold in their lifetimes. Ultimately the parents perceived education, for their children, a conduit for access to opportunities which may not have been available to them as children. It was clear in our discussions that Andrea and Linda, both raised by family members who were clearly engaged in civil rights advocacy efforts at the local levels, were deeply impacted by the weight of desegregation and what it meant for them to be first generation children attending desegregated schools. Catherine, as the daughter of Haitian immigrants also delineated a time where the issues of race, class and community came to a head upon returning to the continental United States with her family in elementary school. Even being raised by grandparents whose roots were southern and embedded in the history of Jim Crow, I understood that being educated was not an option, but rather a mandate, because it reflected a level of opportunity born on the backs of so many who fought for equality in education for their children.

Activism also took the form of exposure and broadening of a worldview beyond the narrow confines of our neighborhoods. Tameka's mother made sure that her children were exposed to a variety of activities, people, travel experiences and opportunities so

that they would be ready and able to move about into the world equipped with a life experience that was broad. Tameka references her mother's small town upbringing as the impetus for this type of exposure for her children.

As such, the elements of activism by the mothers recounted by some of the women helped shaped a perspective on the importance of using your educational opportunities, and gave them a reference for the importance that those opportunities represented.

Linda's mother was an example of a parent in a pre-Brown segregated era transitioning her levels of involvement as necessary for a post-Brown educational experience for her children. Being willing to participate in sit-ins for educational equity and integration of schools; transporting her children to private kindergarten when local funding did not support the programs and being the first African American to get her library card from the local library are all examples of the determination demonstrated by a parent determined to access opportunities for her children. Fields-Smith (2005) investigated the ways in which parental involvement morphed with the changing of the racialized guard in education. As schools were integrated, parents who were previously engaged in their children's segregated neighborhood schools, with teachers who came from within the community, found themselves having to engage a school environment that was sometimes hostile to the idea of educating minority children. Fields-Smith (2005) suggested that in a pre-Brown era:

Home-school relationships during the times of segregated schooling, particularly in the South, have been characterized as primarily collaborative and trusting...parent's place in the school included traditional roles of attending

conferences and school programs, but it also involved parents' working on committees that influenced curriculum and policy and participating in activities that supported classrooms (p.131).

In a post Brown era, parents recognized that as the landscape of education changed, so should the ways in which they advocate for the academic success of their children. Catherine's mother was also a source of strength and support, not only in her own home, but her advocacy efforts extended into the community as well. Catherine speaks of her mother fondly as she discusses the nonprofit organization her mother founded to support Haitian women who have immigrated to the United States. Speaking of her mother's penchant for social activism, she ruminates on how the stage was set for the raising of 'strong women' in her family. Catherine notes that her time in Puerto Rico was spent in a private Catholic School, where she was one of few black children. Moving to Miami several years later exposed her to other black children, but also for the first time she entered public school. Moreover, she entered public school at a time when the boundaries of the neighborhood school were shifting and she recalls during that first year a keen awareness of racial tensions in her integrated middle class neighborhood over the changing demographics of the neighborhood schools. She was relegated to the "ugly green school" to finish out her elementary school career. Catherine stated that she remembered thinking "Why do I have to go to the ugly green school?", and not fully understanding the answer, she remembered thinking that there was a shift being made with the merging of schools. During that time, she recalled her mother working even harder to be a presence in her school. In fact, her mother was one of two black parents on the PTA. It is interesting that Catherine said that her experiences at the school were

‘fine’, and she did not recall feeling like the resources were limited, however, the reality of social inequity was evidently clear to her mother and she was resolved to make her presence known as a consistent supporter of her children and their educational endeavors. Catherine’s mother and her level of involvement in the PTA at her children’s schools is another example of the way in which quiet, and participatory advocacy was expressed in a school climate that was changing according to race, class and culture.

I believe that it was also important to critically analyze the ways in which Catherine’s mother, an educated, upper middle class woman of significant intellect made choices based on her desire to actively participate in the lives and education of her children. From the perspective of black feminisms, I put forth the idea that she pursued an agenda of cultural connection in her fervent desire to maintain their native languages; familial connections in the decision to return to the continental United States to be closer to their extended family and the support that came with those relationships; and finally educational parity and advocacy for her children while she maintained what some would perceive as a very traditional gender role as a stay at home mother. The idea of convergence and intersecting identities is clearly found in the balance of these seemingly incongruent roles, and the ways in which she chose to define her own unique stance within her community and her family.

Professional Mentorship and African American School Psychologists

The importance of having professional models throughout their careers was another theme that emerged from the discussions with each woman. Without exception, each woman, has articulated her experiences with mentors that continue to have a lasting impression on them, and helped them set the tone for the kind of professional that they

would like to be. Some of these relationships began in college, others developed later. The mentoring relationships identified were formal and informal, inter-cultural, intra-racial and cross cultural. It seemed less important within the context of the building a professional foundation, whether the mentors were similarly matched in race or culture, but rather that there was a reciprocal desire to dialogue and learn. In fact, Linda regards her first supervisor as a significant part of her professional development even though they were from different racial, social and cultural backgrounds.

Many of the women identified other women as their professional mentors, although they did not name gender to be a defining characteristic of the relationship. Andrea and Linda both referred to male professors who were very supportive of their graduate work, and who played a significant role in the development of their technical skills as practitioners. Unique to the stories of the female mentors was an underlying notion of care associated with the development of each woman as practitioner. There is a clear presentation of each mentoring relationship with a woman as a nurturing role, reminiscent of the othermothers previously discussed, and supports another facet of black feminist ideology in the use of ethics of care as a significant contributor to identity.

More formal networks of support were not necessarily noted in the women's participation in regional or national professional associations. In fact, there was the sense that at different times along the chronology of these stories, the professional organizations were one of the least effective methods of connecting with other minority professionals. At the national level Linda recognized that the agenda for social change in education included issues of cultural competence and reflected a feeling of commitment to inclusive collaboration within the field. Both she and Andrea have been involved at the

local and national levels with recruitment and retention of minority students into the field and have noted that the outreach has improved greatly although the need is still present.

Professional mentorship can also be cross disciplinary, as evidenced by Catherine's first mentoring relationship, and ultimately the influence that brought her into the field. She recounted that after graduating from college with an undergraduate degree in Psychology, and being unsure about what she wanted to do; she took a position with a nonprofit foundation as Director of Social Work Services. In this position she developed an appreciation for a team approach to practice within the human services, and routinely assisted the Clinical Psychologist on staff with translation services when necessary. This mentoring relationship appeared to develop organically as a working partnership, as opposed to a traditional mentor/mentee relationship. Tameka's initial professional mentoring experiences were borne out of a need for supervision during a yearlong internship. School affiliation led to the development of the relationship and they continued to communicate as Tameka developed in her career.

Informal networks of support were also very much regarded as necessary and important to the daily rigor of practice. Dialoguing with colleagues was noted as an integral part of working through the more challenging aspects of the role including assessment issues, consultation regarding educational planning and discourse about special education law. Many of the informal networks of support come out of getting to know those school psychologists with whom the women worked, and these relationships continued as the careers grew, even when colleagues move on to different positions. I got the sense that each participant understood that an effective advocate and practitioner cannot practice in a vacuum. It was the spirit of connectedness that brought the nexus of

support for one another to a place that supported real understanding, meaning, the ways in which our common experiences shape our way of knowing within our profession. This connectedness served to delineate our place in a profession that often times did not see us, and sought to define who we are, and how we should be, within our profession based on an experience that is not our own.

The opinions and ideas of others are important and can sometimes be a necessary part of growth within the profession. This is the essence of the dialogical relationship and how, through the lens of black feminism, we can make connections to each other and create opportunities for change by coalescing through dialogue.

As a mechanism for providing mentorship to the next generation of School Psychologists, Andrea has been an important force in the lives of many School Psychologists that she nurtured early in their careers, hired and trained. The people that she has taken under her tutelage are diverse in their ages, races, cultures and gender. She recalled at her retirement luncheon, being very present in the moment and realizing that her professional legacy ran wide and deep.

I was overwhelmed with the number of people who were there. I mean I was literally overwhelmed with the number of people. You know, I had assumed that my, you know, my special 'birth' children would be there, but I didn't know that (people) would come back out of retirement...But I think the mentoring takes on different roles, different facets with different people. How I had to mentor (one person) was a lot different than I had to mentor (others)...or even the length of time that I would engage in it. But it is about, for me as a professional, because I knew this day was coming, when I wouldn't be sitting in an official seat. It's like

how do you pass on what you know and how do you encourage. And so, I can't even envision the world of school psychology that you guys will have, but hopefully there's a little piece of spirit in me to say, okay, go forward, but don't necessarily slam dunk everybody (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

In this statement Andrea understood that her professional legacy lives on through the works of those she has mentored through the years. Her status as othermother has created space for her to ponder the impact that she has had on the field. Critical analysis of this level of impact suggests the realization of another hallmark of black feminist epistemology in that her concrete experiences have become meaningful beyond the personal. Her life experiences have served as a (not the) model of the journey for others that will follow her.

When questioned about the potential burden of mentorship to so many, Andrea was thoughtful and spoke to the idea of being the change that you would like to see. She was communicating a willingness to share of herself professionally not only to support the individual but also to support the field, the schools; the organization and ultimately children and families.

Linda's legacy of mentorship spanned a career 23 years and counting, and includes mentorship of students in the academic world as they were developing the technical skills needed to provide school based psychological services. She also talked about her support of staff in other leadership roles including her current position, expressing that she has tried to be the kind of leader that was supportive and sometimes

served as a buffer for those School Psychologists who were in need of more support with administrators.

Navigating the Landscape

A large part of the traditional role of School Psychologists involves moving between schools, working with students and staff within the regular and special education settings. Navigating the landscape of schools and the individuals that make up the school community can be isolating. Dixson and Dingus (2008) also suggested, “Black women have developed strategies to resist and cope with oppressive conditions under which many African American women labor” (p. 810). Critical to this concept is the understanding that much of this work will be done through the building and maintaining of relationships. Creating spaces for professional collaborations were manifested in several different ways according to the participants.

Deliberate dialogue emerged as one of the primary ways in which the participants identified sharing their professional knowledge and combated some of the challenges that they faced at the educational roundtable. The kind of dialogue described by the participants was one that involved being keenly aware and conscious of what they were saying at all times, to whom they were speaking and involved heightened sensitivity to the context in which the discussion was being held. Hooks (1989) examines the use of speech and power relations in relation to the audience to whom we speak. She cautions against deviating from the kinds of dialogue that address the issues important to black women, especially out of fear that this type of discourse will be perceived as exclusionary. She makes note of the differences between “direct speech and hostility” (p.

15) when black women use their voices to articulate their own point of view or resist those dialogical relationships that seek to further marginalize them.

I referenced the concept of ‘shifting’ in the discourse involving intersectionality earlier in this research. Jones & Shorter-Gooden (2003) discuss the dualisms of race and gender and the complexity that these identities bring to the black female existence. Indeed, they suggest that black women have to develop specific mechanisms for coping with convergent issues of racism and sexism. The use of deliberate dialogue as a way to navigate the landscape of their professional space emerged as one of these coping mechanisms the participants found useful.

The women expressed an implied level of comfort speaking about the foundational aspects of their work, such as psychometrics, counseling, consultation, and special education law. This is work for which they have been highly trained and use this skill set daily as they move about professionally. The deliberate dialogue enters the picture when the women discussed having to articulate their findings, recommendations, suggestions and/or concerns with an individual or group who, rather than disagree professionally, regarded the women as hostile, unworthy of being heard, and less than qualified to speak. This deliberate dialogue also reared its head in fighting against the more subtle, but equally pervasive, racism that can permeate the walls of schools and taint the lenses through which children and families are viewed.

To an outsider this could seem difficult to understand, except I am not an outsider. I am looking with ‘the view from the inside’ (Collins, 2000). I hear them when they articulate the pain of having to address personnel issues, being one of the few if not the only black woman leaders in their respective organizations, and having to monitor

language, tone, and facial expressions while having a difficult conversation about someone else's inappropriate behavior. The idea of being the 'angry black woman' is even less appealing as a leader in a minimally diverse environment, and again Hooks (1989) concept of direct speech versus hostility is revisited when we are called upon to modify our ways of being and knowing to counter a stereotype that we did not create. I heard the stories of being aware that education or training is not necessarily the most important factor in hiring decisions when the goal was to maintain the status quo. I heard them when they spoke about the issues of diversity at the educational roundtable and all eyes shift toward them as the representatives for the race. I understand the frustration when they are called upon to articulate the findings of a report and at the end someone says '...you are so articulate' as if their communication skills are an outlier, I understand the hurt, anger and as Linda eloquently stated, the exhaustion that comes from being to some the exception rather than the rule. I wholeheartedly agree and understand that challenging issues of racial, cultural and socio-economic bias in schools is great for the soul, but potentially damaging to a career. I was not surprised when I heard the story of a young black girl, in a strange town, working in her first job, and she is turned away from decent housing because there are no vacancies, but when her white colleague inquires there is a unit available. This is the reality of navigating the landscape for professional survival for this small group of very talented and accomplished women. The women in this study did not shirk from what they perceived as their responsibility to name their place, and this level of awareness was a way of maintaining a sense of personal accountability which was another important component of black feminist epistemology.

It is with this knowledge that we develop mechanisms for professional development and growth, while creating spaces to challenge the perception versus reality of who we are.

An additional component of navigating the professional landscape was creating opportunities to construct value in what it is that they do and believe as it pertains to working with schools, children and families. The participants reported a belief that consistently doing a thorough job, behaving in a way that was consistently perceived as professional and making ethical decisions without exception provides for others a model of who you are professionally. At various times several participants made reference to making sure that all of their 't's' were crossed and their 'i's' were dotted as a way of providing a model for their commitment to their professional role. Linda spoke to sticking with her core values, making sure that she was doing her best for children at all times, as a positive reminder to others that she will not be moved by personal agendas or bias at any level. The other women also discussed the need for professional consistency across contexts as a good method of keeping kids at the forefront, and maximizing the positive relationships that they have formed. I thought this was interesting as this concept moves the conversation beyond race, since at least three of the participants had the opportunity to work with high minority populations and staff. In this regard we are speaking about African American female school psychologists working with predominately minority staff and continuing to address issues of bias, related to socio-economic status, or other types of racial or cultural bias.

Agency and Advocacy

This theme emerged in a way that I would not have expected. My initial premise based on my own experiences suggested a conflict between the roles as agent of the

school and advocate for students. Working from a systems based perspective, I believed that it was not possible to fully integrate the two roles, and that a significant part of my intersecting professional identity involved ways to keep the two roles balanced. It was here that I learned one of biggest lessons regarding subjectivity in qualitative research and the ways in which the researchers own perspectives can potentially taint the data. So, as I looked at how this concept evolved through the analysis of the individual interview data, the information did not support my initial premise. Indeed, my own experiences are just those and the stories of the women in this study provided some valuable insight into the ways that these two seemingly incompatible perspectives work in the lives of other similarly situated professional women.

It appeared that the women who have held leadership roles felt strongly that their roles as agent of the organization and advocate of the student worked in concert and were not discrete components of their roles.

...to be a good agent for the school system, I also had to be a good advocate;

because they were not mutually exclusive. And so I think not only in that, but in a lot of the work that I do I try to make sure that I craft my advocacy in what could benefit for the organization (A. Bailey, personal communication, June 15, 2009).

Reflecting on these words outside of the data set, I was moved to reconsider this point and consider the possibility that a solutions-based kind of advocacy may include change from within the organization. I believe that what I heard from my discussions with Andrea was that there is no honor lost in working for and in the system, if your intent is to be a change agent and make a positive shift in the way that the systems operate. Ergo, working for change at the systems level as agent, is a form of advocacy if it makes

processes better for those professionals working with children, and creates new opportunities for access to children and families.

Linda echoed this sentiment in her discussions of her work within her own organization. She spoke proudly of her work creating partnerships with private entities as well as public organizations working toward the goal of improving literacy outcomes for all children. The goal of the partnerships is to create access to literacy education, training for teachers, and research based strategies that improve the education.

And so we had good results in our demonstration classrooms and it's really just transferring the research literature into practice, but doing it in ways that are intentional and systematic and we have facilitators who go into the classrooms and work with teachers either modeling lessons or co-teaching or doing some stand alone workshops. But their job is everyday to come in and think about the language and literacy instruction for children in Pre-K in those two demonstration classrooms...and the goal is, across the next seven years, that this will unfold across the state. But it is very much, at the core of this...about the advocacy for children and how their lives can be enriched (L. Miller, personal communication, June 8, 2009).

Imbedded in this statement is the power, resources and desire to be the change that she would like to see, simultaneously working within the organizational norms developed by the school organization, which support this type of innovative practice. The school has demonstrated a considerable commitment to working toward the educational needs of children within its walls and beyond. Even more striking about our discussion was the way in which Linda articulated the empowerment of those professionals charged

with being expert in their fields. They appeared to be given the time to be reflective in their approach to literacy education, funded to do the research, staffed to transfer the research into practice, and allowed to work the program in order to meet the needs of students. Within this context it was evident that this type of large scale advocacy can only be affected at the organizational level working as an agent of the school. It would appear, from Linda's perspective, there are not competing agendas, but rather an exercise in collaboration. Again, this point reinforces the necessity of creating relationships within your own system and forging new relationships beyond the structure of your organization as a way of partnering for a common agenda. From a critical race perspective I am compelled to examine the role that interest convergence plays into the ways in which the services provided converge within the organizational interests of the school. In doing so, we must examine what is gained and what is given in the reciprocal relationship that this innovative type of practice promises. The complexity of these types of relationships within systems is difficult to untangle, not clear cut, and often shrouded in shades of gray.

Tameka also acknowledged her role as agent of school but delineated a connection to advocacy through her direct work educating teachers, administrators and staff on the ways in which collaborative support for kids is possible and necessary. She saw her skills in assessment as a significant contributor to this effort.

I began this study with a glimpse into the way that agency and advocacy manifests in my own professional life. That introduction gave voice to my own struggle with the desire to advocate for children while maintaining a career which I believe has value and provides me with opportunities to do good work on behalf of children. Conducting this research has provided me with a different perspective on the ways in

which these roles can possibly work together rather than in opposition. I have come to understand more clearly through the lived experiences of this small sample of women, that just as our identities as black women are not static nor compartmentalized, neither is the work that we do. I am also reflective on the way in which critical race theory and black feminist thought have impacted my worldview, which has naturally impacted the way in which I approach my professional role. My introduction to these frameworks positioned me to more critically examine how I have come to be, the experiences that have impacted my decision to enter the profession of school psychology, and the experiences that shape my daily work on behalf of children, families and schools. These multiple ways of viewing the world I understand not to be the same lenses that other people choose for themselves, however, at this time they are appropriate for me. The research that was done in this study is reflective of a journey that was born from a basic desire to more fully understand how I have come to develop as a practitioner. The outcome of the research was far greater than the answer to that question. I have also learned what it is that makes me stay in the profession, realizing the value that I bring as a School Psychologist is one that should be recognized, but also that my position as African American female is one that is consistently influencing this practice.

Gender and Race as an African American Female School Psychologist

There was a notable silence in the articulated discourse surrounding gender, particularly when the participants were queried about the role that gender plays in their professional development. On issues of gender and bias within her own professional experiences Catherine said:

I'm sure some people have that issue but...education is so dominated by women anyway... it could happen sometimes obviously but I would imagine that the frequency with which it happens is an educational system, especially at the school level...it's probably not as much as you would find in a private, you know in business (C. Smith, personal communication, June 24, 2009).

The discourse surrounding issues of gender was, however, significant in the way that it did not emerge as a more obvious and prominent theme. The silence was deafening and spoke volumes beyond the text about the impact that gender has on how they experience life as an African American woman and School Psychologist.

There was an inherent disconnect in the way that each of the women spoke of being impacted by strong women in their personal and professional lives, but did not give voice to the ways in which their gender impacts the professionals they have become. As I began to analyze the ways in which, through story, each woman affirmed being impacted by these powerful relationships with women, I had to wonder why the voices emerged as more of a shadowed dialogue. Thinking about the ways in which race and gender converge within the communities of which the women speak, I was moved to remember how black feminisms emerged as a viable theoretical framework. Black feminism represents the strength of women naming who they are within the communities of African American people, and the communities of women. This type of strength was clear and evident in the personal musings of the participants as they spoke about their own life experiences. Specifically, the ways that their mothers' commitment to bringing the change that was happening around them socially and politically to the children they were raising. This recasting of themselves through their children, particularly the female

children, was evident as the participants spoke about their female caregivers who may not have had education afforded to them because of social, economic, racial or gendered bias, but were determined to give life to this opportunity through their children. Even those parents, who did have advanced education, knew that the price of their privileged stance was high, and worked diligently to actively engage the systems around them. The action of advocating subtly and overtly was also identified within the research as powerful tools of resistance employed by the female caregivers. Each participant through her stories articulated a level of advocacy employed by the primary female caregiver in her life that was substantial, meaningful, and continues to inform the ways in which the women choose to approach their levels of advocacy for their own children and those with whom they work in their careers.

Black feminist thought resists the exclusion of our specialness based on our converging race and gender, and does not regard either as a muted voice. The silencing of the voices of women suggests assumptions of an accepted role within the raced and gendered communities. The history of black feminism is steeped in the exclusion of black women both in the liberation and traditional feminist movements. As such I believe that some black women may feel inherently disconnected from the feminist perspective, and may even be hesitant to align themselves with the movement based on historical and personal exclusions. Hooks (1989) responds to this idea that “sexism was not a political issue of concern to black women, that the serious issue was racism” (p.177), when she asserts the multiple ways in which “sexism wounds us as black women” (p.177). She referenced the gender bias that can also impact black women within educational spaces as students. She also references the patriarchal domination of black women within a

historical and community context, and the desire to mute the issues of sexism as they relate to black women:

Traditionally it has been important for black people to assert that slavery, apartheid, and continued discrimination have not undermined the humanity of black people, that not only has the race been preserved but that the survival of black families and communities are the living testimony of our victory. To acknowledge then that our families and communities have been undermined by sexism would not only require an acknowledgement that racism is not the only form of domination and oppression that affects us as a people... (Hooks, 1989, p.178).

A shallow analysis of my current research might suggest that the absence of gender as an obvious emergent theme would imply that the participant have ignored the ways in which gender impacts their professional development. However, a critical analysis of the research calls upon us to identify the ways in which they affirm how gender impacts their professional development through story. As researchers, we understand that some emergent themes will not be identified by the participant as significant, but when the researcher disaggregates all of the textual data among the participants some common threads will emerge from the narrative. As such, the interlocking nature of gender and race may not overtly manifest in the participants response to a question of how gender impacts them, but when we listen with a reflective ear and analyze with a critical lens we come to understand their own unique perspective on being a black woman. We must recognize that gender informs so much of who we are

as evidenced by our vastly differing experiences when they are compared with the journeys of black men and white women.

Another lens with which to understand the way that gender was understood in the research is the supposition that we have to choose between our race and our gender. In fact, Andrea minimized the impact of gender on professional work within the field because of the proliferation of women within the field of education. I would submit that it is even more important within a field that has large numbers of women as professionals, that our own understanding of our gendered selves becomes that much more important, not just to articulate our own personal ways of being but also to let others know that we do not all operate in the same way based on this single construct of identity.

Historically, there has been the subtle social expectation that race serves as a more prominent factor in who we are because of the history of race and racial discrimination in the United States. We must reflect on the need to minimize other aspects of our identity in order to move forward an agenda that addresses only one part of who we are. Tameka spoke of her experiences with the role that gender plays in a school where she is not the minority.

...I'm in mostly African American schools...that's when the gender part, the females clashing heads came, so now... it's not necessarily my race that's the issue, it's the fact that I'm female and I look, we look alike and I don't know what that does to some of us (T. Edwards, personal communication, June 11, 2009). So, it seemed that for Tameka, the limited racial diversity as it relates to working in schools that are primarily populated by African American students and staff, brought

about more prominent issues related to gender. Her conversation suggested that the working relationships among the leadership and staff were not the most collaborative, and she appeared to attribute some of those difficulties to gender conflicts. I find it interesting that the ways in which we ignore gender as a social construction often fails to stop ourselves or others from using gender as a way of explaining conflicted relationships both personal and professional. Although not intentionally, there is a glimmer of this type of gendered conflict attribution in Tameka's statement, and a subtle subtext that echoes marginalizing themes I have heard before, 'women can't work together', 'angry black woman', 'female bosses are difficult'. I believe that we must be cautious in the way that we as women, as black people, as educators and as researchers, internalize the ways in which our gender attribution is assigned, and we must actively resist using these stereotypes of what a woman is when we analyze our own relationships with each other. The nature of how we work, or do not work, is not steeped in the individual identity of woman, as a compartmentalized construct, and by refusing to ignore that part of ourselves we resist those inferences that ultimately damage us all.

Racial bias and African American Female School Psychologists

More prominent as a pervasive issue facing the women were issues of hegemony and the challenge of the pervasiveness of racism. Analysis of the data through the lens of critical race theory suggested that the stories these women have told were important to challenging the ways in which these issues of race present themselves in the context of schools. The incidents recounted through these counter stories were varied and reflected situations where the participants had to confront both overt and covert acts of racism and racial bias pertaining to their profession.

As previously described, Catherine recalled the situation of an all white school team meeting to address a black students' educational needs, and when the parent did not show up for the meeting, the conversation was diverted to an issue of whether or not the student lived in the attendance zone. As an examination of the incident through the lens of critical race theory, the subtext of that situation read as an issue of educational exclusion and even issues of using whiteness as property regarding the attempts to use school policies for the purposes of educational exclusion. However, further examination suggested that Catherine's unique angle of vision also as a black woman contributed just as much to her reaction to this incident, while also impacting the way that her reaction was perceived by the school team. Hooks (1989) responds to the idea of the "marginal voice" (p. 14) and challenges the idea of silence within a group where we are the minority voice and instead meet the challenge of our minority status as an opportunity to be heard. In fact, she moves the discourse forward when she referenced the use of "liberatory voice" (p.16) and she stated "speaking out is not a single gesture of freedom in a culture of domination...It should be understood that the liberatory voice will necessarily confront, disturb, demand that listeners even alter ways of hearing and being" (p. 16). Speaking directly and using targeted language to her colleagues was an example of Catherine's use of liberatory voice as a means of resistance within the educational space. Indeed, it may have been more comfortable, professionally, for Catherine to ignore what was going on in the meeting with her colleagues, but as she chose to confront the bias through the use of her voice, not only did she redirect the course of how business was being conducted, but she redirected the kinds of discourse that were perceived to be

acceptable in those places where professionals are supposed to be supporting the needs of children.

Issues of hegemony and the attempts to maintain the status quo were clearly seen in Linda's stories regarding the initial entry in the private sector and the resistance to her intersecting roles as leader and African American woman. She reported some subtle resistance in the form of social isolation and shifting attitudes once she transitioned into the role. More overt forms of bias required her to take a stand and advocate for herself, in a way that did not compromise her professionally, but made clear that she would not be a silent witness to racial bias in the workplace. She made clear that the organizational leadership supported her stance and she felt positively about the way in which her assertion was received. The ways in which black women have been depicted, particularly in the media, contribute to the desire to address issues of bias with a considerable amount of controlled advocacy for ourselves, particularly within those systems where the hegemonic structure does not understand or care how these perceptions impact us.

The pervasiveness of racism can extend into consultative relationships with peers, parents and administrative teams. In subtle ways, several participants (myself included) have experienced comments suggesting surprise at the level of professionalism we have displayed; our individual abilities to use professional speak in order to articulate a point; and the suggestion that we are 'angry black women' when we choose to work against the mainstream maintenance of the status quo. We experience this in the challenges that we receive from members of the community and parents when the results of our hard work are challenged, not because of the accuracy of the information, but because we are perceived as less capable, less educated and less trustworthy to assist with the educational

planning of some children. These incidents suggest a collision of the personal and professional that extends beyond our daily interactions and speaks greatly to the ways in which race and racism have infiltrated all aspects of the social, the political and the professional.

I pondered the issues of recruitment and retention of minorities discussed as an ongoing need within the field. This general discussion often moved beyond race and was inclusive of the need for more culturally diverse professionals, as well as the need for more men within the field. As I thought about the efforts being made by the professional organizations regarding this issue, I began to ponder the problems associated with interest convergence and critical race theory. The lack of clearly defined and substantive efforts toward the recruitment of minorities in the field may reflect greater issues related to interest convergence. In fact, the minimal representation of minorities as well as their lack of active participation within the organizations suggest a general feeling of disassociation and may indicate a sense of professional isolation.

Working in a field where one is perceived as other does not provide a safe space for these women to tell their stories, to articulate their vulnerabilities, or to react in a way that would be jeopardizing to their positions and opportunities for advancement. In essence much of the ways in which we work as marginalized women suggests that we have had to become much more concerned with the ways in which we confront these issues that plague us.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY

As I looked around at the group of women, I felt for a moment, overwhelmed by the talent that surrounded me. Reflecting on their contributions to a field to which I am deeply committed, to some extent I see reflections of myself in the room. The day has gone well and the women shared with each other and with me very personal experiences, all of which cannot be shared within the body of my dissertation because of the very personal and identifying way in which the recollections outline their day to day practice within the field. I know that my initial approach to this work was based on what I knew for certain based on my own experiences and what I was able to understand based on the scholarly literature that I'd read. Following the focus group discussion I felt validated in a way that I have never expected in my chosen field. Speaking about issues of race, culture, power, professionalism and to some extent the joy and pain associated with all of those things was something that I did not really know if I would be able to find within this type of study. However, I came away from the group discussion with a renewed sense of who I am within the context of who they have shared they were. Being able to speak about our commonalities and our differences was valuable and impactful, not just for me, but I know for them as well. At the conclusion of our group discussion, one of the participants said to me, "No one has ever asked me how I feel about these issues". That comment summed up, to me, the way in which we work as African American women in a field that regards us as other. There is almost a don't ask, don't tell policy as it relates to issues of bias and professional marginalization. The work that is being done in this

research serves as a counter-story to that unspoken and unnamed silencing that has been perceived as a necessary part of moving forward in the field. I feel as though this research is giving each woman an opportunity to name their own way of knowing who they are, where they stand, and how they choose to move forward within a field where they are significantly invested. (Natasha, Field Notes, 2009)

Naming another person's reality is an impossible task, but the use of storytelling by way of narrative analysis is a very useful way of understanding another person's life and work in a way that is rich, textured and multidimensional. This qualitative study has sought to identify the ways in which African American women School Psychologists perceived their roles, the impact of their personal histories on their professional practices, and how they mediated their intersecting roles as professionals in a field where they are the racial and cultural minority. Using the frameworks of critical race theory, intersectionality theory and black feminist thought I have sought to inform, through research, our understanding of what is important to us as individuals and as a small collective. Hulko (2009) reminded us that

Researching and writing about intersectionality and interlocking oppressions often require a blurring of any remaining lines of distinction between the personal and the professional because identity, oppression, and privilege are not solely abstract concepts; they have real, complex, and often-disputed meanings in our daily lives (p. 44).

This blurring of the personal and professional was a recurrent thread that ran through the research. This journey began as a collective sharing of our experiences through a semi-structured focus group, where we were able to share our thoughts on the topics of race,

gender, power, relationships, decision making, and more. We were beginning to examine ourselves and ask questions of each other that are not typically considered as black women. Harley (2002) responded to the absence of this consideration when she called upon us to consider each other ‘through a new lens’ and called for black women to tell our own stories. This research has responded to this call and was presented as the voices of a few women, but more importantly offered different perspectives on how black women work within the profession of School Psychology.

The focus group and the dynamic of the women in a group setting generated themes that dealt with the acts of professional shifting necessary to gain entry and maintain their positions. Second, the ways in which the participants were able to negotiate aspects of their ideas as tools of advocacy was another important theme that emerged from the focus group research. Third, discourse surrounding the formal networks of support they participated in through regional and national professional organizations, as well as those informal networks of support that appeared to sustain the women professionally was very revealing. Lastly, the group dynamic supported an emerging theme that spoke the holistic perspective of children and the ways in which they could support children through more collaborative partnerships and qualitative reflections of the child.

The individual interviews yielded some similar emergent themes, and several new themes that were specific to the experiences throughout their individual lives and careers. The first emergent theme was related to each woman’s early experiences including the levels of parental support and the development of high academic expectations by the parents. Imbedded in this concept was also the recurring theme of female caregivers as

othermothers, who served as nurturers of the early educational experiences, personal character and significant contributors to the development of their identity.

Secondly, but also related to early familial experiences was the understanding that most of the women spoke about early models for activism or advocacy by the adult caregivers in their lives.

Third, the concept of professional mentorship emerged as another salient point and for many of the participants marked the beginning of relationships that they carry with them today. These mentoring relationships were intercultural, intra-racial, and cross cultural, although many of the early professional mentors were other women in leadership roles. Their stories suggested that the lessons they learned from these early mentors helped shape the kind of practitioners they would later become, and provided them with additional models of leadership when they would later assume the roles of mentor.

As a fourth theme emerging from the data, the women discussed the ways in which they navigate the landscape of organizations (large and small), different school cultures, and the ways in which they've worked collaboratively with school teams and administrators.

The fifth concept that emerged from the research involved a concept that was introduced earlier in this work, the concept of agency and advocacy. However, the information gathered from an analysis of the data suggested that as opposed to the notions of agency and advocacy being discrete and conflicting entities, they were instead regarded as another layer of intersection within their profession. This was perhaps one of

the more surprising results of the research and provided me with a richer understanding of how some practitioners regard their roles.

The data presented an opportunity to examine the social constructions of gender and race as African American female School Psychologists; as such, this concept was examined as the sixth emergent theme from the individual interviews. Interestingly, the women, for the most part, did not name their gender as significant in the development of their skills or practice within the profession. As previously stated, the field of School Psychology is predominately made up of white women practitioners (with a history of white male practitioners) and as such the participants did not generally articulate issues of gender or gender bias as primary to the development of their role. The critical examination of gender was made in the analysis of the narrative, rather than examining what was named by the participants, I examined the relationships and important events that they named in their personal and professional lives. In doing this, gender emerged very clearly as important in a way that was not as obvious, but nonetheless significant. In terms of race and incidences of racial bias, I chose to examine the ways in which these real life experiences could be examined from a critical race theory perspective.

An analysis of the narrative would not be complete without the critical examination of racial bias from the perspective of critical race theory. The stories presented suggested both subtle and overt incidents of racism, as well as the difficulties when race impacts the professional climate in which the participants express making efforts to build collaborative partnerships.

The emergent themes from the focus group and individual interviews do overlap in some areas, in large part because of the fluidity of the subject matter. Examining the

issues of race, gender, class and professional practices through the retelling of our personal histories calls upon us to recognize that there will be overlap in what emerges as critical analysis of the research. As an example, issues of professional shifting as discussed in the focus group, were also discussed to some extent in the analysis of navigating the landscape of the workplace. Similarly, the networks of support identified and analyzed as significant themes in the focus group, was given further study and consideration in the analysis of professional mentorship among African American School Psychologists. The concept of the holistic perception of children within the focus group was revisited as important to the work of individual practitioners as they discussed issues related to agency and advocacy, as well as how they chose to address overt and covert issues related to racial bias.

Retrospectively, I am reminded of Sealey-Ruiz (2007) and her call to the qualitative researcher to use our theoretical frameworks as we move about analyzing the data collected through this very personal research. As such, I believe that through the use of critical race theory and black feminist thought I have done just that within this study. Responding to the tenets of black feminist thought I have presented the voices of these women in a way that honors the sharing of their lives, but also provides a space for their dialogue to be used as tools of empowerment. The ethic of care is manifested in the sharing of the participant's feelings as well as my interpretation of the experiences they have shared. Finally, I am recognizing through my role as participant and researcher, my own subjectivity within the research. Using personal history as the way that we come to understand the development of our professional practices is a critical component of the research presented and in keeping with the framework of critical race theory.

PLACEMENT OF THE STUDY WITHIN THE LITERATURE

Clearly the small number of participants and the uniqueness of our positions within the field of School Psychology were both strengths and limitations of this study. I am not suggesting that the emergent themes found within this research are in any way generalizable to the larger population of African American female School Psychologists. However, I am suggesting that the information contained in this body of this research is an invaluable contribution to the existing literature within the field of school psychology as it relates to African American women, which is extremely limited. I should also note that the use of qualitative research within the field of School Psychology is limited and as such this research provides a different methodological perspective from which to view our practices.

As reported previously, Coulter (1998) examined African American female School Psychologists and the development of professional practices from the perspective of black feminist thought. Her study provided an introspective look at how the women defined their own roles as School Psychologists, including examining the communication styles, various forms of racism and the manifestation of being marginalized within their profession. Although the aforementioned work was an important entrée into the analysis of the African American female School Psychologist, I believe my work moves the discourse forward by integrating into the analysis an understanding of the personal and early professional experiences that helped to shape the participants as black women. The current study sought to understand the complex and interlocking dynamics of the women's lives as told in their own voices. Another important layer of my work that differs from the existing research related to School Psychology in general is the use of

qualitative research methods as the primary research tool, which significantly deviates from our training in psychometrics and serves as a commitment to the evaluation of our selves beyond the numbers that we are so often known for.

One of the common threads within this research was the desire by these practitioners to make an impact on the lives of children, working within our positions to create opportunities for academic, social and behavioral success. Ergo, I also believe that my work is significant to the existing body of literature within the field of curriculum studies, as it offers an alternative view on the ways in which support personnel come to develop those skills which contribute to the broader field of education.

CONCLUSION

As a final thought, the world in which we live is not black and white, and as I have previously stated I feel as though my professional survival depends on my full understanding and acceptance that the role I play as one that is perpetually gray and marked by an existence within the hyphens of life. I am answering the call to name my place in my profession, while giving the reader a glimpse into how I have come to this place. The complex voices of the women presented in this study provide an opportunity to be heard without judgment and create a space where we are no longer professionally isolated. The themes that have emerged from this literature intersect, overlap and converge at times, which further supports the complexity of discourse surrounding issues of identity.

This discourse as a method of resistance means that we are not engaging in silence as a form of professional survival, nor disavowing the very important experiences, both personal and professional, that make up our lives. I have come to understand more

about myself in relation to the ways in which the women in this study have revealed themselves. The research has reinforced the idea that indeed we are more than the sum of our parts and that it is our intersecting identities that make us unique and worthy of study.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Letter to Participants
- Appendix B: Demographic Questionnaire
- Appendix C: Snowball Email to Metro Directors of Psychological Services
- Appendix D: Informed Consent
- Appendix E: Focus Group Outline
- Appendix F: Individual Interview Protocol
- Appendix G: IRB Letter of Approval
- Appendix H: Demographic Chart

Appendix A

Natasha Vannoy
2996 Happy Deer Court
Douglasville, GA 30135
404-644-1817

Dear Colleague,

My name is Natasha Vannoy. I am a doctoral candidate at Georgia Southern University in the department of Curriculum, Foundations and Reading. I am also a full time School Psychologist with a metropolitan Atlanta school system.

The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which African American women within the field of School Psychology mediate their gender and race within the professional realm, and how their multiple identities impact the development of their professional practices. There is minimal information in the scholarly literature reflecting the voices of African American women within this profession. This study seeks to contribute to this literature and provide an avenue for African American women to tell their own stories related to their professional and personal development.

As part of the study, participants will be asked to participate in a focus group interview, as well as one individual interview. Prior to the initial interview, you will be asked to complete a demographic questionnaire (enclosed), which will aid in our subsequent interviews. I am also enclosing a consent form for your review and signature, should you choose to participate in the study.

If you would like to receive results of this research, arrangements can be made to do so upon completion of the study. Please return this information to me as soon as possible. I look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Natasha Vannoy
Enclosure

Appendix B
Demographic Questionnaire

1. Name: _____
2. Contact Info: _____
3. Age: _____
4. Country of Birth: _____
5. Languages Spoken: _____
6. Marital Status: _____
7. Children (ages) _____
8. Education: _____

9. Professional Designation/ Licenses/Certifications: _____
10. Professional Work History (Brief): _____

11. Parents Place of Birth: _____
12. Parents Educational Background (Brief): _____

Appendix C

Snowball Email to Metro Directors of Psychological Services

Good Morning,

My name is Natasha Vannoy and I am writing to ask for any assistance that you can give me with my current research endeavors. I am currently a doctoral candidate in Curriculum Studies at Georgia Southern University. I am also a practicing School Psychologist. I am conducting research on the development of professional practices among African American Female School Psychologists.

I am looking for African American Female School Psychologists who are interested in being a part of this qualitative study (with the promise of anonymity within the study) and would prefer to have women that are in the beginning stages of their careers (within 5-6 years). They would be donating about three hours of their time to one group interview (1.5 hours) and one follow up individual interview (1.5 hours). I believe that there may be women on your staff who would meet these criteria. If so, would you please forward my contact information to them so that they can let me know if they are interested in participating. I am more than glad to provide additional information to anyone interested in participating. My contact information is as follows:

Natasha Vannoy
nlvannoy@gmail.com
404-644-1817

Thank you for your time and consideration.

NatashaVannoy

Appendix D



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM, FOUNDATIONS AND READING

INFORMED CONSENT

1. My name is Natasha Vannoy, a doctoral candidate in the Curriculum Studies program at Georgia Southern University. I am currently conducting a qualitative research study with the primary focus on African American female School Psychologists and the development of their professional practices.
2. The purpose of this research is to examine the ways in which African American women within the field of School Psychology mediate their gender and race within the professional realm, and how their multiple identities impact the development of their professional practices.
3. Participation in this research will include completion of an initial focus group interview, as well as a follow up individual interview.
4. **Confidentiality: Recognizing that the participants in this focus group are within the same professional field, there cannot be any guarantee of anonymity or confidentiality. However, the cornerstone of our ability to be transparent and speak honestly about our experiences begins with confidentiality. The information discussed within the focus group should not be shared with anyone outside of the focus group. You are agreeing not to divulge any information that specifically identifies individual women, schools or school systems in order to address professional liability issues. Within the focus group each woman will be identified by first name only, for similar reasons. Keeping this information in mind, there can be no guarantees (from the researcher) of anonymity within the group, nor can absolute confidentiality be guaranteed.**
5. There is no obvious physical risk to the participants. **Every effort will be made by the researcher to maintain confidentiality, in order to minimize the potential professional or personal risk, professional sensitivity, liability, or**

embarrassment of the participants. All information that has the potential to identify the participant will be held in strict confidence. All identifying information will be changed (pseudonyms used) for publication purposes.

6. The benefits of participation in this study include the opportunity to engage in critical dialogue with other African American female School Psychologists. The benefits to society include participation in research that contributes to the academic literature within the field of School Psychology and other disciplines.
7. The initial formal group interview will last for approximately two hours. The formal individual interview may last between one and two hours.
8. All of the interview transcripts, field notes, audio and video tapes will be stored in a locked storage cabinet within the home office of the researcher. The researcher is the only person that will have access to these documents. The data will be maintained by the researcher, in the secure location for a minimum of three years following completion of the study, per Georgia Southern University guidelines. The audio and video tapes will be destroyed by the year 2013.
9. Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named below or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843.
10. No compensation will be offered for participation in this study.
11. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants may end their participation at any time by telling the person in charge. The participant does not have to answer any questions they do not want to answer.
12. There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study; and participants may decide at any time they don't want to participate further and may withdraw without penalty or retribution.
13. You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study. If you consent to participate in this research study and to the terms above, please sign your name and indicate the date below

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Title of Project: Intersecting Identities: A Narrative Exploration of Intersectionality and African American Female School Psychologists.

Principal Investigator: Natasha Vannoy, 2996 Happy Deer Court,
Douglasville, GA 30135
404-644-1817 (mobile)
nlvannoy@gmail.com

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Delores Liston, Georgia Southern University,
P.O. Box 8144
Statesboro, GA 30460
1-912-478-1551 (office)
listond@georgiasouthern.edu

Participant Signature

Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

Investigator Signature

Date

Appendix E

Focus Group Interview Outline

- I. Welcome-Introduction
- II. Group Members Introductions
- III. Ground Rules
 - a. Confidentiality
 - b. Anonymity
 - c. Video/audio-taping
 - d. Note-taker
- IV. Purpose of the Study
- V. Discussion of the Issues
- VI. Evaluation and Reflections
 - a. Additional questions by participants
 - b. Reflections on the group interview by participants
- VII. Conclusion of the Group Interview

Appendix F

Individual Interview Protocol

Primary research question: How does this group of African American female School Psychologists perceive the concept of intersectionality, and how their multiple identities impact the development of their professional practices?

Interview Questions

1. How did you come to enter the field of School Psychology?
2. Tell me about a time when you reflected on your upbringing as a young African American girl and how that reflection may have influenced a recommendation or impacted an issue in your daily work?
3. What are the demographics of the students with whom you work?
4. What are the demographics among the staff with whom you work?
5. How do you perceive your role within the school/school system/agency where you are employed?
6. How do you negotiate these roles as you go about participating in educational decision-making teams?
7. Do you think that your status as an African American and/or as a woman impacts the way that you practice within the field?
8. Tell me about your experiences working within individual schools as a consultant and how it impacts your work with individual students and families.
9. How do you perceive your role to differ from the roles of your non-minority colleagues within the profession?

10. As an African American woman, do you feel any additional responsibility to help foster collaborative relationships between the family and schools?
11. What impact does your role within the school have on your professional development?

Appendix G

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs Institutional Review Board (IRB)		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Natasha Vannoy
2996 Happy Deer Court
Douglasville, GA 30135

Delores Liston
P.O. Box 8144

CC: Charles E. Patterson
Associate Vice President for Research

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: April 17, 2009

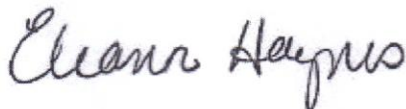
Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered: **H09238** and titled "**Intersecting Identities: A Narrative Exploration of Intersectionality and African American Female School Psychologists**", it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

Appendix H

DEMOGRAPHIC CHART

Participant	Age	Degree	Public/Private Schools	Job Description	Family Status	Languages
Linda	46	Ph.D	Private	Administrator	Married (one child)	English
Andrea	57	Ph.D.	Public	Administrator	Single (no children)	English
Tameka	31	Ed.S.	Public	School Psychologist (School Based)	Married (two children)	English
Catherine	40	Ed.S.	Public	School Psychologist (School Based)	Married (no children)	English, French, Spanish, Creole
Natasha	37	Ed.S.	Public	School Psychologist (School Based)	Divorced (one child)	English