

Exploring the Meaning Making Process of Black Women's
Gendered Racial Identity Development

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to develop a theoretical model for the meaning making process of Black women's gendered racial identity development. A total of 19 Black women at a large public Predominantly White Southeastern University participated in semi-structured individual interviews about their gendered racial identity development. Drawing on intersectionality theory as an interpretive framework and Black Feminist Thought as an epistemology, the data was analyzed using a modified version of constructivist grounded theory. Findings revealed three identity development phases including: Protective Acceptance, Identity Management, and Internalization Phase, each of which contained three identity types, including: Assimilation, Defiance, Adaptation, Humanist, Disempowerment, Resistance, Embodiment, Realist, and Empowerment. These identity development phases and identity types represent Black women's values, beliefs, and attitudes towards the meaning making process of their gendered racial identity. Results also indicated that various critical incidents contributed to an increase in Black women's critical awareness of their intersecting identities throughout the identity development process. This study found that as Black women increased their critical awareness of their gendered racial identity, they developed an ability to challenge societal norms and stereotypes of Black womanhood and internalized their own meaning of being a Black woman. The current study extends previous social identity research and fills gaps in the research literature on understanding Black women's identity development process at the intersection of gender and racial identity.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that experiences of discrimination such as racism and sexism influence an individual's racial and gender identity development (Cross, 1991; Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana, Helms, & Leonard, 1992; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous 1998). Additionally, although research suggests that Black women experience their race and gender simultaneously (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross, 2010; Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996; Watt, 2006; Whittaker & Neville, 2010), missing from the research literature is an examination of the unique identity development process for Black women at the intersection of their race and gender. This exclusion of Black women in scientific discourse has limited our current knowledge and understanding of racial and gender identity among Black women (hooks, 1981; Thomas, Hoxha, & Hacker, 2013). For example, established theoretical models and quantitative measures for both racial and gender identity development have assessed race and gender as separate identities, and thus, have not captured how this identity development process takes place at the intersection of race and gender for individuals who have multiple marginalized social identities, such as Black women (Cole, 2009).

Thus, there is a need for identity development research to apply an intersectionality framework (Crenshaw, 1989) to assess the ways in which intersecting marginalized identities and systems of oppression (racism and sexism) influence an individual's identity development (i.e., gendered racial identity). The current study aims to include the voices and experiences of those who have traditionally been left out of this

discourse, by focusing on Black women's identity development. Below, I provide a brief overview of the existing literature on identity development and highlight how the current study seeks to fill these gaps in the literature.

Absent from the current research literature is a theoretical model of gendered racial identity that explores the unique components of the identity development process of Black women. Previous research demonstrates that social identity development is a complex process that involves an interaction between the self and the environment (Hammack, 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Racial and gender identity models conceptualize identity development as a stage-like process by which individuals gain greater self-awareness of and form their own meaning of their identity despite their experiences of oppression and discrimination (Cross, 1971; Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992). However, more recent research has demonstrated that for people of color and women, the interaction between self and environment, and the meaning making process has added complexities because development is influenced by interlocking systems of oppression in which marginalized individuals develop their identity (Porter & Dean, 2015; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011; Yakushko, Mack, & Iwamoto, 2010). Thus, existing research does not adequately capture these unique differences in Black women's identity development because, traditionally, racial and gender identity has been assessed separately (Cole, 2009).

Existing racial identity models are focused on Black racial identity and do not capture the identity development at the intersection of other marginalized identities, such as gender identity. There are two primary approaches used to examine Black racial identity in psychological research, the Nigrescence theory (Cross, 1971, 2001) and the

Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) (Sellers et al., 1998), both of which differ in their conceptualizations of the identity development process. Cross (1971) proposed the Nigrescence theory, which suggests a five-stage model of identity change through which individuals progress from naive unawareness of the oppression associated with their Blackness to full awareness and acceptance of their racial identity. According to Cross (1971), there is an *encounter* experience of racism that happens somewhere in one's development that causes a shift in one's perceptions of their identity from denigrating their own race to recognizing racism and beginning to embrace their racial identity. Ultimately, individuals with a healthy identity come to embrace their Black identity with their own meaning despite the oppression that they experience. In contrast, the MMRI conceptualizes identity in terms of dimensions, proposing that racial identity has multiple dimensions that influence one's attitudes and beliefs about their race (Sellers et al., 1998). The MMRI emphasizes how contextual factors influence the meaning individuals attribute to their racial identity through racial identity statuses. Racial identity statuses were introduced by Helms (1990) to reflect a non-linear developmental progression through the identity development process. Both the Nigrescence theory and the MMRI focus on Black racial identity, and thus, do not consider intersecting marginalized identities, such as being Black and a woman.

Limited previous research that compared gender differences in racial identity development have assessed racial and gender identity separately, and have revealed mixed results. For example, some research using the MMRI has found that there are no gender differences in Black racial identity attitudes (Sellers et al., 1998). While others testing the Nigrescence theory have found that Black women express greater attitudes

associated with both their race and gender (Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver, Worrell, & Cross, 2010). Others have found that Black men tend to hold greater levels of beginning stages of identity development (Munford, 1994; Parham & Helms, 1985). These mixed findings further demonstrate the need for an intersectional exploration of gendered racial identity for Black women.

Established gender identity development models for women theorize a similar stage-like process that is based on the Nigrescence five-stage model. There are two most widely used gender identity development models for women, the Feminist Identity Model (Downing & Roush, 1985) and the Womanist Identity Model (Ossana et al., 1992). Feminist identity refers to attitudes and beliefs regarding gender, gender roles, and sexism. Womanist identity refers to the meaning of womanhood across different races (Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992). Both models propose a five-stage progression through which women become more aware of their gender and sexism, and ultimately internalize their own meaning of their identity as women. According to both, women begin at a stage of unawareness of sexism and progress to a stage of awareness of sexism and develop their own internalized positive meaning of womanhood. Critiques of the Feminist Identity Model emphasize that it does not account for how gender identity development may vary across race (Moradi, Subich, & Phillips, 2002).

Previous research that explored racial differences across women's gender identity development is sparse, but demonstrates that for Black women, race and gender identity stages are more likely to overlap. Martin and Hall (1992) found that Black racial identity stages were associated with parallel feminist identity development stages and gender role attitudes were associated among Black women. Similarly, Parks, Carter, and Gushue

(1996) found that womanist identity was linked to racial identity for Black women, but not for White women, and that Black women at more advanced stages of racial identity attitudes had greater womanist identity attitudes. Watt (2006) found evidence to suggest that Black women who hold positive attitudes about being Black tend to also hold positive attitudes about being a woman. Taken together, these previous findings demonstrate that Black women's race and gender both simultaneously contribute to their identity development. However, currently there are gaps in the literature regarding the process of gender identity development for Black women.

To fill these gaps in the literature, I apply intersectionality theory as a framework to conceptualize the gendered racial identity development of Black women.

Intersectionality theory posits that social identity is an intersectional construct, and thus, must be explored in ways that account for the unique intersections between multiple identities and interlocking systems of oppression (i.e., racism and sexism) linked to those identities (Crenshaw, 1989). Thus, in the current study, all research and interview questions were intentionally developed based on an awareness of the interlocking systems of power and inequalities that intersect at the social location of race and gender for Black women (Bowleg, 2008; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). Previous research on Black women's gendered racial identity development is limited because research in the field of psychology tends to separate gender and race, and thus, does not yield a deeper understanding of the identity development process at the intersection of race and gender specifically. However, previous qualitative research on gendered racial identity development has demonstrated that contextual factors, such as gendered racial socialization, gendered racial oppression, socioeconomic status, and education contribute

to gendered racial identity development for Black women (Brown, Blackmon, Rosnick, Griffin-Fennell, & White-Johnson, 2016; Thomas, Hoxha, & Hacker, 2013; Wilcox, 1996). For example, previous research has shown that adolescent Black girls and women tend to recognize oppression based on the intersection of their race and gender, indicating that Black girls are aware of their intersecting marginalized identity at a young age (Thomas et al., 2013; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011; Thomas & King, 2007).

Generally, scholars and researchers have theorized that Black women experience an identity development process through gaining awareness of their race and gender and the gendered racial oppression linked to it (Collins, 2000; Settles, 2006; Thomas et al., 2011). For example, Collins (2000) suggests a self-definition process through which Black women begin to reject societal expectations and stereotypes of Black women and define their identity for themselves. Stevens (1997) and Settles (2006) proposed that Black women conceptualize their race and gender either together or separately, which may influence their perceptions of their identity as Black women. Though these trajectories of development slightly align with the racial and gender identity development models, much is still unknown. In addition, there is not currently a theoretical model for how Black women make meaning of their gendered racial identity development.

A few researchers have theorized about the gendered racial identity development process for Black women. For example, Stevens (1997) proposed that throughout Black women's identity development, they gain bicultural competence and learn how to navigate within oppressive environments. Porter and Dean (2015) conducted a phenomenological study of how four Black women developed their identity within their educational setting and found that Black women's identity development is a fluid process

that can change and vary in different situations. Porter and Dean (2015) identified a process of transitioning from an internalization of societal definitions to an outward expression of one's own meaning of their identity. Thus, previous research highlights that there are unique aspects of gendered racial identity development for Black women that are yet to be explored. Though existing gendered racial identity research has helped us gain an understanding of the contextual factors that contribute to Black women's identity, there is a gap in our understanding of the specific process of identity development for Black women.

Rationale and Purpose of the Current Study

Racial identity models conceptualize a developmental process by which an individual successfully makes sense of the complexities of their identity and there are multiple dimensions of identity (Cross, 1971; Sellers et. al, 1998). Gender identity models conceptualize identity development as the process by which an individual creates their own meaning of their identity aside from societal definitions of women (Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992). Both racial and gender identity research lack the ability to assess how this meaning making process of identity development takes place at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. In addition, there are currently no empirical studies that have identified a multidimensional model of the gendered racial identity development for Black women.

The current study extends research on racial and gender identity development by exploring the process of gendered racial identity development for Black women. The purpose of this study is to apply intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991) and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000) as the theoretical framework to develop a

theoretical model of the meaning making process of Black women's gendered racial identity development. I utilize a critical paradigmatic lens by which to acknowledge the unique sociohistorical context of Black women's identity development. I apply a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2015) in this study in order to develop a multidimensional model of Black women's gendered racial identity development that is rooted in the phenomenological experiences of Black women. The current study seeks to answer the following question: What is the meaning making process of gendered racial identity development for Black women?

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Black Racial Identity

Broadly, Black racial identity refers to attitudes that Black individuals hold about themselves and their race (Worrell, Mendoza-Denton, Telesford, Simmons, & Martin, 2011). Though traditional racial identity research does not explicitly assess gender, it is applicable to the study of Black women because it provides a frame for understanding how one's experiences as a racially marginalized individual influence their identity development. In this section, I provide an overview of the two main theoretical models used in the Black racial identity research literature: (1) Cross's (1971, 1991) Nigrescence Theory and (2) Sellers and colleagues (1998) Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) and connect them to our current understanding of racial identity development among Black women. Both of these Black racial identity models emphasize the importance of social context in shaping one's awareness of race and racism. The Nigrescence theory (Cross, 1971) proposes a stage-like progression from complete unawareness of race and racism to an awareness and acceptance of Black identity. The MMRI builds upon the Nigrescence theory with greater emphasis on the multidimensional aspects of the individual experience of Black identity. In this literature review, I provide a brief review of the origins of Black racial identity research, followed by theoretical assumptions and empirical research on Black men and women for the Nigrescence theory and the MMRI.

The focus of Black racial identity research has shifted over time. Prior to the

1960's, a majority of the literature associated Black racial identity with personal identity and forms of self-hatred (Clark & Clark, 1939; Horowitz, 1939). However, during the Black Power Movement of the 1970's, racial identity research shifted to a focus on the Black identity transformation that was taking place during the Black Power Movement (Cross, 1991). The majority of Black racial identity research during the 1970's demonstrated that Black individuals can have different levels of race salience and that they were experiencing an identity *change* toward a more unified racial identity (Cross, 1991). Research also began expanding on concepts from the original works of W. E. B. DuBois (1903), who articulated the unique experience of double consciousness that Black individuals possess as they coexist between Black and American cultural values.

Psychologist William Cross (1971) conceptualized this double consciousness in terms of a developmental process through which Black individuals come to internalize a positive Black identity known as Nigrescence, or the process of becoming Black.

Nigrescence Theory

The Nigrescence theory has gone through three separate iterations including the original theory proposed by William Cross in 1971, a revised version by Cross in 1991, and then the theory was revised and used to inform the development of a racial identity attitudes scale by Cross and Vandiver (2001). William Cross' Nigrescence theory (1971, 1991) conceptualized racial identity as a psychological process by which one experiences a "Negro-to-Black conversion" experience characterized by an increase in awareness of one's identity, immersion in African American culture, and ultimately a growing pride in one's racial identity. This model emphasizes the idea that Blackness is multidimensional and complex. Throughout this process, African Americans embark on an experiential

journey in which they undergo a psychological shift in how they make sense of the complexities of being Black in America.

The Nigrescence theory proposes a five-stage model to exemplify the transition from Negro to Black as an individual's worldview or ideology shifts from pro-White to pro-Black, marked by increased awareness and appreciation for Black culture (Cross, 1991). The stages begin with *pre-encounter* in which the person holds a predominately White, Eurocentric worldview and degrades Black people and Black culture. During the *encounter* stage, an individual experiences a racist event that causes them to feel cognitive dissonance toward the White worldview and they begin to reinterpret the world from their Black identity. The third stage in this process is the *immersion-emersion* stage, in which one sets to deconstruct the old worldview and increase their level of Blackness. In this stage, the person begins to denigrate White culture while experiencing closeness to the Black race and culture. The *immersion-emersion* stage ends with higher critical consciousness and more comfort with self-identity as a Black individual. The fourth stage is *internalization*, when individuals no longer hold anti-White attitudes and internalize their own meaning of Black identity that is no longer limited by racial stereotypes. The final stage is *internalization-commitment*, when the individual begins to engage in activism to help social change in the Black community.

Cross's model of racial identity expanded to include identity types associated with each developmental stage with revisions in 1991 and again in 2001. Cross and colleagues began to assess the multidimensionality of each stage of the model. Cross and Vandiver (2001) conducted a factor analysis and constructed a scale called the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) consisting of six subscales. The identity types are conceptualized

as a lens through which Black individuals view and experience the world and they are exemplified through attitudes and behaviors that shift over time (Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Individuals first experience the Pre-encounter stage in which they can hold one of three identity types: *assimilation*, *self-hatred*, and *miseducation*. Individuals with the *assimilation* identity possess low race salience, but high salience with being an American, whereas individuals with the *miseducation* identity are more likely to accept negative stereotypes about Black people and distance themselves from the Black community. Individuals with the *racial self-hatred* identity hold severe negative feelings about being Black. Following an encounter experience, individuals then experience the Immersion-Emersion stage in which individuals endorse an *anti-white* identity, which includes feeling hatred towards White individuals and increasing involvement in Black culture. Later, as individuals progress through their development they may experience the Internalization stage during which they may endorse the *multiculturalist* identity, which is characterized by an identification with two or more social identities (i.e. race and gender), a *nationalist* identity characterized by an Afrocentric perspective and active engagement with the Black community, or the *biculturalist* identity characterized by equal salience and positive regard toward being both Black and American. Thus, there are many stages and identity types that Black individuals experience throughout their identity development, each of which reflects how their attitudes and beliefs towards their racial identity change from more negative to more positive.

The Nigrescence model is about the process of identity change rather than the stage progression of identity development across the lifespan (Cross, 1991). The

Nigrescence theory and model sparked an increase in psychological research on Black identity and more quantitative measures including the Black Racial Identity Attitudes Scale (RIAS-B) (Parham & Helms, 1981) were developed to assess different aspects of Black identity development. Other scholars shifted focus away from a linear stage-like progression toward racial identity *statuses* to reflect a non-linear developmental process in which racial identity statuses can be experienced more than once and an individual can go through several statuses at different times over their lifetime (Helms, 1994; Quintana, 2007).

Empirical research on Nigrescence theory. Empirical research has found that Black individuals tend to hold more negative attitudes towards their identity in beginning stages of their development (pre-encounter), which has been found to be associated with greater psychological distress (Carter, 2010; Parham & Helms, 1985). In addition, studies have found that Black endorse more positive attitudes in later stages (i.e. internalization), which has been associated with greater Black activism (Stanley, 2014; Szymanski & Lewis, 2015) and less psychological distress (Parham & Helms, 1985; Pieterse & Carter, 2010). However, there are key differences between Black men and women that suggest that racial identity research does not capture the multidimensional and intersectional aspects of identity development for Black women (Lott, 2011).

Racial Identity of Black Women

Researchers have found that the *multiculturalist* identity is significant in Black women's identity development because it indicates that Black women may be more likely to have salience in their race and gender, which is indicative of their simultaneous experiences of racism and sexism (Whittaker & Neville, 2010; Fhagen-Smith, Vandiver,

Worrell, & Cross, 2010). For example, Fhagen-Smith et al. (2010) found that Black women endorsed greater multiculturalist identity attitudes than Black men. Further, Black women who endorse the *multiculturalist* identity were more likely to engage in activism (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015), experience less negative health outcomes such as depressive symptoms (Jones, Cross, & Defour, 2007), and maladaptive eating (Watson, Ancis, White, & Nazari, 2013). Though research in this area is sparse, some research has found that the *self-hatred* identity in the Pre-encounter stage has been linked with maladaptive eating patterns among Black women and that Afrocentricism in later stages was associated with increased activism (Szymanski & Lewis, 2015). Thus, research on racial identity development for Black women has found that identity includes experiences based on both their race and gender; Black women may endorse more negative racial identity attitudes in beginning stages, and increase engagement in activism as they advance through their identity development process.

However, it is important to interpret these findings with caution because a majority of racial identity research does not apply intersectional approaches to examine identity development at the intersection of race and gender among Black women. Consequently, comparative studies have demonstrated mixed findings (Munford, 1994; Parham & Helms, 1985; Hyers, 2001; Sellers et al. 1998) that draw inconclusive conclusions about the developmental process for Black women and reinforce the idea of a hierarchy of social identities, (i.e. race being the dominant identity category across men and women). For example, racial identity research on Black men and women often find that Black men experience more racial discrimination and more negative mental and physical health symptoms associated with race and racism than Black women (Ifatunji &

Harnois, 2016; Kwate & Goodman, 2015; Paradies, 2006; Sellers & Shelton, 2003).

Whereas, racial identity research on Black women often finds that sexism or gender have a weaker association with negative mental and physical health symptoms than race and racism (Greer, Laseter, & Asiamah, 2009). However, research on Black women that focuses on race and gender simultaneously typically find that both contribute to experiences of oppression and negative mental and physical health outcomes (Buchanan, Bergman, Bruce, Woods, & Lichty, 2009; Lewis, Williams, Peppers, & Gadson, 2017; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008). The mixed findings across gender further support the notion that it may be the content of the measures being used in racism and racial identity research that inflate Black men's scores (Ifatunji & Harnois, 2016; Lott, 2011). It may not be that Black women experience less racism or have lower levels of racial identity, but that their experiences are based on a combination of their gender and race in ways that are qualitatively different from Black men (Lewis & Grzanka, 2016; Lott, 2011). This is an important distinction given the integral role of discrimination on identity development.

Taken together, previous research demonstrates that: (1) There are unique experiences of one's Black identity such as racial discrimination that intersect with gender and there is a dearth of research that has explored the unique intersectional identity of race and gender for Black women (Ifatunji & Harnois, 2016). (2) Research on Black men and women tends to focus more on the experiences of Black men based on their marginalized racial identity (Harnois & Ifatunji, 2011; Ifatunji & Harnois, 2016). (3) There have been mixed findings concerning gender differences in racial identity attitudes among Black men and women, which have contributed to the false notion that Black men

experience greater distress due to racism than Black women. Though Nigrescence theory captures Black racial identity development in the context of consciousness and attitudes, subsequent research and measures using the Nigrescence theory have illuminated the need for an approach to Black identity that accounts for the multidimensional nature of racial identity.

Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity

MMRI research can help explain changes in race salience between stages and statuses as shifts occur in Black individuals' awareness of their race and racism. This is an important aspect of identity development to explore as it relates to Black women because this may also increase our understanding of the role of racism and sexism on changes in Black women's identity throughout their development. Sellers and colleagues (1998) proposed the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) as a conceptual framework that examines the cultural, historical, social, and individual aspects of racial identity. Overall, the aim of the MMRI is to examine what it means to be Black and how important being Black is to an individual's self-concept (Sellers et al., 1998).

The MMRI is based on the following assumptions: (1) identities can be both contextually influenced and stable, (2) multiple identities are hierarchically ordered based on importance, and (3) an individual's self-perceptions of racial identity most accurately indicates identity status. Four dimensions of racial identity are proposed in the MMRI, each of which is thought to influence perception, appraisal, and responses to perceived racism. *Salience* refers to the extent to which race is a significant component of one's self-identification (Sellers et. al, 1998). Identity salience is highly influenced by context such as social queues in the environment, which influence the likelihood that an

individual will recognize or appraise an incident as racist. For example, for a Black individual, race may be more salient to them when in a public space that has majority White individuals in it. *Centrality* refers to the extent to which race is an important aspect of one's identity (Sellers et al., 1998). Unlike salience, centrality is thought to be quite stable across situations. Centrality is based on one's hierarchical ordering of their multiple identities; higher centrality would mean that they rank race as higher or as a more important part of their self-identity than other parts of their identity. For example, a Black individual with high racial centrality may be more likely to describe their race as a part of their identity when asked to describe themselves. *Regard* refers to how an individual feels about being Black, positively or negatively. There are two types of regard including *Public Regard*, how positively or negatively a Black individual feels other people view Black people and *Private Regard*, how positively or negatively a Black individual views being a Black person. For example, an individual with low public regard may believe that White individuals have negative views of the Black race. An individual with high private regard may have more positive personal beliefs about the Black race. *Ideology* refers to beliefs, opinions, and attitudes about how Black individuals should interact within an oppressive system. For example, a Black individual's ideology could be linked to their belief that other Black people should be cautious around White individuals.

Similar to the Nigrescence theory, the MMRI postulates that individuals also endorse different ideologies or beliefs about how members of one's race should behave and act within an oppressive environment that are associated with each stage of the Nigrescence model (Sellers et. al, 1998). According to the MMRI, it is possible to hold

several of the four different ideologies simultaneously (Sellers et. al, 1998). The *Assimilationist* ideology sees similarities between Black individuals and everyone else in society and attempts to be a part of mainstream culture as much as possible. This is not necessarily due to lack of importance of being Black or recognition of racism, but the assimilationist believes that Black individuals have a lot of work to do to change the system and thinks that it is important to interact with Whites. The assimilationist ideology is conceptualized as a beginning stage of identity development in the Nigrescence theory; however the MMRI places no value on whether or not an ideology type is at the beginning, middle, or end of identity development. The *Humanist* sees similarities among all humans and does not think about race, gender, class or other identities, but rather views everyone as belonging to the human race (color-blind) and is concerned about larger humanity issues, such as peace and hunger. The *Oppressed Minority* ideology recognizes the oppression of Black people, but sees similarities between the oppression that Black people experience and the oppression of other minority groups. The oppressed minority believes that social change should be created through collaboration and is intellectually interested in the nature of oppression. Someone who holds the *Nationalist* ideology is pro-Black, embraces the uniqueness of being Black, and supports mostly African American organizations. The nationalist ideology can be expressed in the form of resistance to the marginalized status of Black people, or the deep appreciation and awareness of the culture and accomplishments of Black people (Sellers et al., 1998).

Empirical research on the MMRI. Past research utilizing the MMRI supports the idea that individuals at later stages of identity development or who recognize their race as a central component of their identity are more likely to attribute racism to external

systems of oppression rather than to internalize it or self-blame (Sellers et al., 1998). For example, greater racial centrality is associated with more positive mental health as it buffers against negative mental health outcomes (Banks & Wood, 2007; Neblett, Shelton, & Sellers, 2004; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone, & Zimmerman, 2003). Similarly, Shelton and Sellers (2000) found that when individuals experience situations that make race more salient (i.e. racism), they are more likely to attribute the event to racism. Situations that make race more salient such as racism resemble the encounter experiences in the Cross (1991) model. Therefore, it is likely that Black women's simultaneous experiences of racism and sexism may influence their identity salience causing shifts in their gendered racial identity development.

Several studies have either attempted to examine differences between racial identity dimensions for Black men and women (e.g., Rowley, Chavous, & Cook, 2003) or to examine the specific intersectional nature of gendered racial identity for Black women. However, these studies have measured race and gender separately and have not specifically explored gendered racial identity and gendered racial experiences (Cole, 2009; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011). The MMRI does not address the intersectional nature of an individual's multiple social identities. Instead, according to the MMRI, social identities are hierarchical and racial identity is the most salient (Sellers et. al, 1998). This assumption greatly reflects the ways in which Black individuals have been socialized to view their race as being the dominant identity, especially for African American men. However, this hierarchal conceptualization of identity does not reflect empirical qualitative findings that demonstrate that Black women report salience in both their racial and gender identities and experience them simultaneously as it is often

difficult to tease apart experiences based on race or gender (Thomas, 2011).

An in-depth review of Black racial identity theory and research demonstrates that there are several strengths and weaknesses in the literature that can be applied to exploring the gendered racial identity development of Black women. Black racial identity theory and research to date has formed the basis of our understanding of the identity meaning making process. Decades of research have shown us that racial identity is complex, multidimensional, evolving, and linked to experiences of racism and societal worldviews. From past research, we have a better understanding that Black individuals form their identity by grappling with socialization messages and experiences with racism, and incorporate a critical awareness of Blackness and oppression into their own meaning of what it means to be a Black individual in America. However, Black racial identity research does not capture the identity development process at the intersection of race and gender because race and gender have been conceptualized as two separate identities. The current study aims to fill this gap in the literature by assessing the identity development process of Black women at the intersection of their race and gender.

Gender Identity

Women's gender identity refers to a developmental process through which women's beliefs and attitudes about womanhood and gender roles change over time (Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992). Developmental theories that emphasize how one's social environment influences perceptions and expressions of one's gender form the foundation of gender identity research (Bem, 1981; Buss, 1995; Bussey, 2011; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Kohlberg, 1966). In this section, I provide a brief review of the literature on existing theoretical models and measures of women's gender identity

development including: (1) feminist identity development, (2) womanist identity development, and (3) gender identity development for Black women. I will present an overview of the stages and relevant research findings for each model. In addition, since a majority of women's identity development research focuses on the identity development of White women, this review will focus particular attention on the contextual factors that influence Black women's gender identity attitudes and development.

Feminist Identity

Most of the research on feminist identity development has been modeled after racial identity development models with a similar progression from complete unawareness and negative attitudes towards one's gender to awareness and positive attitudes towards one's gender. Downing and Roush (1985) proposed a Feminist Identity Development model that was modeled after Cross' (1971) Nigrescence Theory of Black racial identity development. Like the Nigrescence model, the Feminist Identity Model was proposed in response to a social movement in which there was a shift in identity among women in the United States during the Feminist Movement (Moradi, Subich, & Phillips, 2002). Downing and Roush (1985) conceptualized feminist identity development in five stages, but hypothesized that women can recycle through these stages many times throughout their life. The model also proposed that women begin to incorporate aspects of their feminist identity into their own personal identity and that advanced stages of feminist identity development are associated with a healthier and more positive identity (Downing & Roush, 1985).

Each stage of the feminist identity development model is associated with attitudes and beliefs about women, sexism, and gender roles. The first stage, *passive acceptance*, is

characterized by an unawareness or denial of sexism. Downing and Roush (1985) suggest that a woman in passive acceptance is more likely to engage in traditional gender role stereotypes and to hold more negative attitudes toward their gender. The second stage, *revelation* resembles the encounter stage of the Nigrescence model, such that, upon experiencing events that contradict previously held beliefs about women and equality, the individual becomes more aware of inequality and sexism and begins to get more involved in consciousness-raising efforts and re-evaluating their own life. The third stage, *embeddedness-emanation*, is characterized by a period of cognitive dissonance where a woman develops greater gender consciousness and awareness of the dominant male culture. As women work through this stage they begin to develop greater emotional connections with other women and reflect on this newfound awareness. Emanation in this stage refers to the increasing openness to perspectives of womanhood other than previously held rigid beliefs. The fourth stage is *synthesis*, which is when women come to a place of acceptance of the sexism they have experienced and begin to incorporate the positive attributes of being a woman into their personal identity. In this stage, women may also begin to adhere to non-traditional gender roles. Stage five, *active commitment*, involves the process of putting this new identity into action. Women in this stage are committed to actively participating in social change for women's rights.

Empirical research on feminist identity. Feminist identity research has demonstrated that experiences of sexism influence the feminist identity development of women. For example, Moradi and Subich (2003) found that feminist identity attitudes buffered the relations between experiences of sexism and psychological distress, such that greater levels of passive acceptance (more denial and unawareness) were associated

with greater experiences of sexism and greater psychological distress, and that more advanced stages of feminist identity were associated with more perceived sexist events and less psychological distress. Thus, more advanced stages of feminist identity are associated with better mental health (Moradi & Subich, 2003) and higher collective self-esteem (Carpenter & Johnson, 2001). These findings indicate that encounters of sexism may cause shifts in women's feminist identity development and that the attitudes of women in later stages of their development may help protect them from adverse affects of sexism. However, one limitation of this research is that it has been focused on predominantly White women samples and does not account for race.

There is a dearth of feminist identity research on Black women so little is known about the relation between racial identity attitudes and feminist identity attitudes. There is some preliminary evidence that some stages of Black racial identity development are positively associated with parallel stages of feminist identity development and gender role attitudes among Black women. For example, Martin and Hall (1992) found that racial identity immersion-emersion attitudes were associated with traditional gender role attitudes for Black women. White (2006) conducted a study on racial identity and feminist activism with Black men and Black women, and found that Black feminists were more likely to hold strong racial identification attitudes, accept non-traditional gender roles, and be more involved in feminist activism. These findings show that there is some overlap between racial identity and feminist identity, which provides evidence that Black women may experience their race and gender development simultaneously. Feminist identity research has been widely critiqued for its tendency to not account for the experiences and perceptions of Black women (Moradi, Subich, & Phillips, 2002). As a

result, the concept of womanist identity emerged in the literature to conceptualize gender identity consciousness of women from diverse racial backgrounds (Ossana, Leonard, & Helms, 1992).

Womanist Identity

The term womanist was first used by Alice Walker, a prominent writer in Black feminist literature to refer to Black feminists or feminists of color (Walker, 1983). Ossana et al. (1992) constructed a model for womanist identity to capture the overall meaning of womanhood across race and other intersecting identities for women. Womanist identity research is also based on the Cross (1971) model of racial identity, but is focused on the gender attitudes associated with each stage of the model. According to Ossana et al. (1992), the developmental progression of womanist identity is a progression from external socialized definitions of womanhood to one's own internalized personal definition of womanhood. It does not refer to or measure the same construct as womanist consciousness, which focuses on awareness of the unique experiences of oppression that Black women face based on their intersecting identities (King, 2003; Walker, 1983). However, both approaches would agree that womanism is experienced differently for Black and White women because of the intersections of identities.

Ossana et al. (1992) proposed five stages of womanist identity. Stage one, *pre-encounter*, a woman accepts stereotypical views about gender and women's roles. A woman at this stage is more likely to place more value on men. Stage two, *encounter*, an event or experience sparks an increase in awareness of womanhood leading them to question previously accepted stereotypical beliefs. Stage three, *immersion-emersion*, a woman begins a search for a more positive definition of womanhood. Women in the third

stage are also more likely to seek strong relationships with other women. Stage four, *internalization*, a woman rejects external definitions of womanhood and develops her own positive definition of womanhood based on personal attributes.

Empirical research on womanist identity. There are significant differences between White and Black women's experiences of womanist identity development that indicate an overlap between womanist identity and racial identity among Black women. Parks, Carter, and Gushue (1996) found that womanist identity was linked to racial identity for Black women, but not for White women, and that Black women with greater internalization racial identity attitudes had greater womanist identity attitudes. Similarly, *pre-encounter* and *internalization* racial identity attitudes were positively correlated with womanist identity attitudes for Black women (Watt, 2006). These results indicate that Black women who hold positive attitudes about being Black tend to also hold positive attitudes about being a woman (Watt, 2006), which further emphasizes that gender and race intersect and influence an individual's perceptions of their identity. In a diverse sample of White and Black women, Hoffman (2006) found that women in more advanced stages of feminist identity development and womanist identity development were also more accepting of their womanhood.

While research demonstrates that womanist identity development has significant links to aspects of Black women's identity development, much of this research cautions these interpretations due to methodological issues with the theory and measurement of womanist identity development (Moradi, Yoder, & Berendsen, 2004; Moradi, 2005). Moradi (2005) points out that the Womanist Identity Model claims to be consistent across intersecting identities, such as race and class, but the model and measure do not explicitly

address intersectionality of race and gender. Rather it emphasizes womanhood in general and does not capture gender and race. Most of the research on womanist identity has been comparative and does not develop a deeper understanding of Black women's identity attitudes. Womanist identity development attempts to capture the similarities between women in their gender identity development despite the many differences that exist across race (Ossaan et al., 1992). Therefore, the womanist identity development model does not accurately capture how other intersecting identities, such as race may influence gender identity development for Black women (Moradi, 2005).

Gender Identity of Black Women

Racial identity has a strong influence on Black women's gender identity (Hill, 2002; Skinner et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2011). According to previous literature on Black women's gender identity, Black women tend to have more flexible gender role attitudes (Duggar, 1988; Kane, 2000) and to be aware of gender bias at a young age (Brown, Huyn, & Masten, 2011; Thomas, Hacker, & Hoxha, 2011; Thomas, Hoxha, & Hacker, 2013). These findings are theorized to be related to conflicting socialization messages that Black girls receive about being both masculine and feminine through parenting and media (Hill, 2002; Varner & Mandara, 2013, 2014; Thomas & King, 2007). In addition to race, socioeconomic status, and education level contribute to Black women's gender identity, such that, Black women with higher socioeconomic status and education levels are more likely to have greater awareness of their gender and power inequalities (Wilcox, 1996). The research on Black women's gender identity is scarce yet emphasizes the influence of both racial identity and gender identity for Black women. Missing from the current research literature is a focus on identity development at the

intersection of race and gender to gain an accurate understanding of Black women's gendered racial identity.

Intersectionality

Due to the gaps in the racial and gender identity literature, more research on Black women is needed that uses an intersectional approach to examine how simultaneous interlocking forms of racism and sexism influence Black women's gendered racial identity development. Intersectionality refers to the critical analysis of the systems of oppression and structural inequalities that are created and perpetuated by socially constructed marginalized identities (Bowleg, 2008, Crenshaw, 1989; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). Thus, using an intersectionality approach requires one to critically examine Black women's experiences of simultaneous oppressions, such as racism and sexism (Cole, 2009). In this section, I will provide an overview of the following: 1) the origins of intersectionality theory and research, 2) past intersectional approaches, and 3) empirical research using the intersectional framework with Black women.

Intersectionality has its empirical and theoretical roots in Black Feminist scholarship (Cole, 2009; Collins, 2000). For decades, Black women social activists and scholars have continued to call attention to the exclusion of Black women from advancements in the feminist and Black liberation movements. In 1977, a Black Feminist organization called the Combahee River Collective made a public statement about the importance of addressing the unique simultaneous oppressions that Black women experience based on their gender, race, and class. The Combahee River Collective emphasized that the Black Feminist movement was not new, but that it was rooted in the previous historical movements and Black feminist activists, such as Sojourner Truth,

Angela Davis, Ida B. Wells Barnett and countless others. Following the publishing of their statement, in the 1980s, more scholars began to publish literature on Black women's experiences based on their race and gender.

The term *intersectionality* was first coined by critical legal scholar Kimberle Williams Crenshaw (1989) in reference to the intersection between multiple systems of power and oppression that Black women experience based on their race, gender, and social class in the legal system. Crenshaw (1989) urged feminist theory to expand beyond conceptualizing marginalization as one-dimensional and emphasized the complexity of Black women's experiences. Intersectionality is a framework used to acknowledge the systems of power that influence Black women's experiences, which often go unacknowledged (Crenshaw, 1989; Cooper, 2015). Furthermore, intersectionality acknowledges that systems of oppression are not established or experienced independently, but that the socially constructed context in which these are experienced is equally as important (Collins, 2000; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016; Rosenthal, 2016).

The use of intersectional approaches in social science research has evolved over time and several different approaches have been utilized. Though the approaches aim to gain a more accurate analysis of the intersections of gender and race, many researchers still tend to parcel out race from gender, and therefore do not gain an accurate understanding of what it means to be Black and a woman (Cole, 2009; Silverstein, 2006). Furthermore, analyzing race and gender separately has resulted in several methodological issues in psychological research. For example, separating race and gender has contributed to a growing body of comparative studies that compare the experiences of Black women to White women rather than gaining a deeper understanding of Black women's identity

(Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Comparative studies have further perpetuated the notion that Black women's identity should be compared to White or European women's identity as the standard. In addition, research that does not conceptualize multiple identities as simultaneous implies a hierarchy of social identities and that race is a more primary identity than gender (Sellers et al., 1998). The assumption of a hierarchy of social identities has led to mixed and misleading results indicating that either racism or sexism contributes more to Black women's mental health (Greer, Laseter, & Asiamah, 2009; Lewis & Grzanka, 2016; Moradi & Subich, 2003; Szymanski & Stewart, 2010).

Previous Approaches to Intersectionality

Researchers have also used the additive and interactional approaches to intersectionality research, which tend to measure race and gender (or racism and sexism) as separate constructs. The additive approach is used to assess the *combined* effects of racism and sexism on mental health by dichotomizing them as separate experiences and adding the outcomes of each together (Beal, 1970; Thomas, Witherspoon, & Speight, 2008; Collins, 1993; p. 28). Some identity development research uses an additive approach by measuring racial identity and gender identity separately and then assessing the amount of *overlap* between similar stages of racial identity and gender identity (Ossana et al. 1992; Downing & Rough, 1985). The interactional approach examines how race and gender *interact* and influence each other by analyzing race and gender as separate categories and then creating an interaction term (Cole, 2009). For example, quantitative studies that utilize the interactional approach often examine whether the interaction between racism and sexism accounts for more variance in the outcome than racism and sexism alone (Moradi & Subich, 2003; Szymanski & Stewart, 2010). Some

qualitative studies parcel out race from gender in interview questions (Settles, 2008). Bowleg (2008) argues that parceling out the identities in the interviews effects how the interviewees perceive race and gender in relation to one another and thus negatively affect the study's ability to capture the intersectionality of identities. Thus, using these approaches is problematic because research has demonstrated that being Black and a woman are experienced simultaneously for Black women (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Moradi & Subich, 2003; Settles, 2008). However, race and gender identity theoretical models do not conceptualize or examine the intersectionality of gender and race. The current study fills this gap by applying intersectionality as a framework to examine the gendered racial identity development of Black women at the intersection of their race and gender.

Gendered Racial Identity

Gendered racial identity refers to identity at the intersection of race and gender (Thomas et al., 2011). Black women's identity development is both contextual and social (Brown et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2011; Thomas & King, 2007). Therefore, contextual factors such as socialization and gendered racial oppression rooted in negative historical stereotypes influence Black women's attitudes towards their identity throughout their identity development. In the following section, I highlight research on the contextual factors that influence Black women's identity development, including: (1) gendered racial socialization, (2) gendered racial oppression, and (3) components of gendered racial identity.

Gendered Racial Socialization

Black women receive conflicting gendered racial socialization messages that are rooted in the gender roles that were enforced upon enslaved Black women. Historically, enslaved Black women were forced to take on multiple roles that seemingly contradicted each other and did not fit in with traditional gender roles as enslaved Black women were forced to do the same labor as Black men and to also care for their families (Collins, 2000). Black women integrated these roles of laborer and mother, which conflicted with the traditional ideals of White womanhood that said a woman couldn't be a mother and worker outside of the home (Collins, 2000). The roles of slave laborer and home caregiver have contributed to the enduring negative stereotypes of Black women and the conflicting cultural messages that are passed down to young Black women from their mothers (Thomas & King, 2007). According to Collins (2000), Black mothers teach their daughters dual messages about how to survive in an oppressive environment and resist stereotypes at the same time, with hopes that they would afford a different life with more opportunities. Even further, contemporary conflicting messages that Black girls receive tend to emphasize the importance of being both strong and feminine, which can cause distress for Black women (Abrams, Maxwell, Pope, & Belgrave, 2014; Settles, 2006). Taken together, previous research demonstrates that these conflicting socialization messages are a way that Black mothers prepare Black girls for resisting and overcoming the Black woman stereotypes that affect the gendered racial identity development of Black women.

Empirical research on gendered racial socialization. In the gendered racial socialization literature on Black women, there are two prevailing messages that Black

women are socialized to believe about themselves: (1) they are taught to acknowledge the inequalities and hardships associated with their identity and (2) they are taught to view themselves as strong and resilient in the face of discrimination. In addition, Black girls and women report an awareness of inequalities (Brown et al., 2016), power differentials (Settles et al., 2008), and racism and sexism (Thomas et al., 2011). This acknowledgment of the hardships associated with their identity demonstrates that Black women recognize that part of the reality of living with their identity means that they are going to experience discrimination and that they are aware of their marginalized status in American society. In order to deal with this inevitable discrimination, Black women are taught that they are supposed to be strong and overcome their “double jeopardy” and various forms of discrimination (Brown et al., 2016; Shorter-Gooden, & Washington, 1996; Settles et al., 2008; Thomas & King, 2007; Thomas et al., 2011). In the literature, this particular message has been referred to as the “Strong Black Woman” stereotype or the “Superwoman” schema (Watson & Hunter, 2016; Woods- Giscombé, 2010; Woods- Giscombé, & Black, 2010).

Generally, research has demonstrated that being strong can be a source of empowerment and a source of stress for some Black women (Abrams et al., 2014; Donovan & West, 2015; Nelson, Cardemil, & Adeoye, 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016; Woods- Giscombé, 2010; Woods-Giscombé, & Black, 2010). Qualitative studies have identified that Black women primarily view the Strong Black Woman in terms of being independent, assertive, nurturing, overcoming adversity, and having constricted emotionality (Nelson, Cardemil, & Adeoye, 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016). Though being strong for Black women can serve an adaptive function, many studies have

demonstrated the Strong Black Woman paradox, which highlights the ways in which being strong can be adaptive and maladaptive. Qualitative studies among Black women have identified that the Strong Black Woman schema can be adaptive in increasing self efficacy, yet harmful in reducing self care and exacerbating negative mental health (Donovan, West, & Daniel, 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016). Black mothers utilize strong Black woman socialization messages as a way to help prepare their daughters to deal with the demands and hardships of being Black and a woman. However, some Black women report that the strong Black woman schema is linked to negative mental health outcomes and increased stress because they feel as though they should never ask for help or show weakness (West, Donovan, & Daniel, 2016).

Gendered Racial Oppression

Black women experience forms of discrimination based on historical stereotypes of their race and gender. Collins (2000) identified four stereotypes of Black women that are based on the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexuality that affect how Black women view their identity. Collins identified the “Mammy” stereotype as the obedient servant and the Black mother figure in White homes. The mammy stereotype served to maintain racial differences between Blacks and Whites, and the Black woman’s deference to White authority. This image is seemingly benevolent in that it depicts Black women as caring, but marginalizes and degrades the Black woman as big and dependent on her close relationship with White families (Collins, 2000). For example, the character from the acclaimed film, *Gone With the Wind* was depicted as physically big, kindhearted, and unwaveringly devoted to her White oppressors (St. John, 2001). The “matriarch” or the “failed mammy” is the negative image of the Black mother in Black

homes who is an aggressive, masculine, non-submissive, hardworking, and wife that does not have time to care for her family. Historically, the matriarch has been criticized for her gender roles that do not fit with the traditional roles of White womanhood. The matriarch was critiqued for not fulfilling her roles as mother while she worked outside of the home. The “welfare queen” stereotype is the poor working class Black woman who is a single mother utilizing social welfare. This stereotype was popularized in the 1980’s during the Reagan administration when government funding for assisting low-income families were cut. The welfare queen was deemed as lazy and blamed for her own disadvantaged socioeconomic position (Collins, 2000). The “jezebel” is the sexually loose and sexually deviant woman often referred to as slutty or “hoochie” (Collins, 2000). The jezebel stereotype particularly served to control the sexuality of Black women by deeming Black women slaves as sexually deviant. In addition, the jezebel stereotype was used to justify sexual assaults by White slave owners (Collins, 2000). Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight (2004) developed a scale to measure the stereotypic roles of Black women. In addition to the stereotypes defined by Collins (2000), Thomas et al., (2004) found two more stereotypes, “sapphire” and “superwoman.” The “sapphire” is the aggressive, angry, harsh, loud Black woman that feels the need to be loud to be heard by others (West, 1995). The “superwoman” comes from the perception that Black women are always strong and deal with adversity without asking for help so as to not reveal weakness (Thomas et al., 2004).

Empirical research on gendered racial oppression. Black women experience subtle forms of discrimination based on these stereotypes that are associated with negative mental health outcomes for Black women (Lewis & Neville, 2015; Lewis et al.,

2017). Lewis and Neville (2015) termed this as gendered racial microaggressions, which are defined as subtle, behavioral, environmental, and verbal forms of discrimination at the intersection of race and gender. Lewis and Neville (2015) developed the Gendered Racial Microaggressions Scale (GRMS) to assess the frequency and stress appraisal of four types of gendered racial microaggressions including: *Assumptions of Beauty and Sexual Objectification* (negative comments about a Black woman's natural hair or facial features), *Silenced and Marginalized* (not being heard or listened to by others in workplace, school, or other professional settings), *Strong Black Woman Stereotype* (being referred to as "sassy"), and *Angry Black Woman Stereotype* (being accused of being angry when speaking calmly). These gendered racial microaggressions are linked to stereotypes and prejudices based on Black women's race and gender which serve to silence, degrade, and invalidate their experiences (Lewis & Neville, 2015; Lewis, Mendenhall, Harwood, & Hunt, 2013).

Gendered Racial Identity Components

Although there is not currently a model for the process of identity development for Black women, some research has illuminated several components of the process. The components identified in the research literature include: perceptions, behaviors, and meaning making. Taken together, research in these areas suggest that Black women may incorporate all of these components into how they conceptualize their identities (Porter & Dean, 2015; Stevens, 1997). Below, I provide an overview of each component while highlighting their implications for the current study.

Perceptions. The unique experiences associated with the process of Black women's gendered racial identity development contributes to Black women's perceptions

of their identity. These perceptions influence how Black women feel about their identity and how they believe they should act and interact in society. For example, previous research has identified several themes in Black women's perceptions of their gendered racial identity including, identity interference (Settles, 2006), perceived oppression and inequality (Settles et al., 2008), and the value of strength and resilience (Jones & Day, 2017; Settles et al., 2008; Thomas et al., 2011). These themes indicate that Black women perceive difficulties that come with their marginalized identities such as having to make sense of conflicting parts of their identity and experiencing gendered racial discrimination (Settles, 2006). However, these themes also indicate that Black women perceive some positive aspects of their identity, such that, they are strong and resilient in spite of the difficulties they experience in relation to their gendered racial identity. Settles (2006) suggests that Black women may experience identity interference when they must sort through what it means to be a woman and what it means to be Black, because they are incongruent. While Black women perceive themselves to be strong, they also tend to acknowledge that they have to work harder than men and White women, their hard work is undervalued by others, and that power differentials exist between themselves and men and White women (Settles et al., 2008). These findings indicate that Black women tend to perceive both positive and negative aspects of their identity based on socialization messages that they receive.

Behaviors. Black women's perceptions of their identity may influence how they behaviorally express their identity. Black women seem to negotiate identity conflict in their environment by navigating and shifting within certain spaces. When negotiating and navigating spaces, Black women essentially are choosing to accommodate or downplay

certain aspects of their identity or assimilate into the dominant culture of the space in order to avoid conflict or discrimination (Johnson, Gamst, Meyers, Arellano-Morales, & Shorter-Gooden, 2015; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2009; Marsh, 2013). Johnson et al. (2015) developed the African American Women's Shifting Scale to assess Black women's attitudes towards accommodating aspects of their identity in social situations and identified three ways of *shifting*: (1) the strong Black woman shifting type is when Black women must be strong in any space, (2) awareness of shifting includes altering self image to fit a specific context through code switching or biculturalism, and (3) sensitivity to perceptions of Blacks includes adjusting to fit in with their own community so as to not seem like they are selling out or not Black enough. In addition, Johnson et al. (2015) found that higher levels of acculturation were linked with greater expectations of racism and sexism and higher levels of shifting. This indicates that Black women may use *shifting* as a way to buffer against the negative effects of racism and sexism that they experience. Marsh (2013) conducted a qualitative study with Black adolescent girls and found that the participants were able to "stay Black" in White spaces by interacting with other races without fully assimilating to the dominant culture (e.g., accommodating). While accommodating and interacting with others, Black women kept their racial awareness, expressed their womanhood, and conceptualized themselves as a part of a larger united group of other Black women and girls going through similar experiences. These behavioral changes are important to consider for the current study because it helps explain how Black women express their identity differently at different phases of their identity development.

Meaning making. Though very little research has focused specifically on how Black women make meaning of their identity, there is some preliminary evidence to suggest that Black women's gendered racial identity development may include some similar components as racial and gender identity development (Porter & Dean, 2015). Porter and Dean (2015) conducted a phenomenological study with four Black women to explore how participants made meaning of being a Black woman at a predominately White institution. Porter and Dean (2015) identified a fluid meaning making process with five components that depict a process of transitioning from an internalization of societal definitions to an externalization of one's own meaning of their identity through outward expression. Black girls initially received socialization about what it means to be a Black woman from their mothers, and then internalized these messages in order to make their own meaning. This internalization helped Black girls articulate their identity through self-awareness, empowerment, or overcoming stereotypes. Porter and Dean (2015) also found that then Black girls were able to refine their own meaning by testing out their attitudes and beliefs in their interactions with others, followed by an outward expression of their identity as a Black woman. Collins (2000) describes a similar process in which Black women make their own meaning of their identities through a journey of finding their own self-definition. This self-definition process involves personal growth as Black women challenge external definitions of womanhood to make their own (Collins, 2000). Thus, self-definition is a tool that aids in making sense of the contradictions between external and internal definitions and expectations, aids in lessening the impact of internalized oppression, and empowers themselves in spite of their marginalized identities. Considered together, previous theoretical and empirical research indicates that there is

some process by which Black women make meaning of their identity, which shifts from internalizing oppression to a redefinition of the meaning of one's identity.

Taken together, research has demonstrated that gendered racial identity development for Black women is closely associated with socialization messages passed from mothers, and intersectional forms of oppression (Brown et al., 2016; Thomas & King, 2007; Collins, 2000). From an early age, Black women learn what it means to be a Black woman and tend to be aware of racism and sexism (Thomas et al., 2011). Overall, the identity development process includes components that are similar to the racial and gender identity development models. Black women also go through a process by which they internalize messages about their identity and eventually come to their own definition of Black womanhood (Porter & Dean, 2015). However, missing from the literature is a multidimensional model that depicts the process of gendered racial identity development for Black women.

Rationale and Purpose

Existing social identity development models emphasize the identity development process by which individuals make meaning of their identity. Racial identity models suggest that Black individuals go through stages or statuses that influence their perceptions and centrality of their racial identity (Cross, 1971; Helms & Carter, 1991; Sellers et. al, 1998). Cross (1991) articulated the complexities of Blackness and the ways that Black individuals grapple with this complexity when developing an awareness about what it personally means to identify as Black. Part of this process involves an internal psychological process as one develops their identity (Cross, 1991). Gender identity models suggest that women experience stages and statuses that influence their

development of their own meaning of womanhood (Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana, Helms, & Leonard; 1992). In both cases, a healthy identity is conceptualized as a process whereby an individual successfully makes sense of the complexities of their identity within an oppressive society and essentially creates their own meaning of their identity. Typically, researchers measure the attitudes and behaviors associated with one's identity to evaluate their stage or status of identity development (Martin & Hall, 1992; Moradi & Subich, 2002; Parks, Carter, & Gushue, 1996; Parham & Helms, 1981; Pierterse & Carter, 2010; Watt, 2006). Racial and gender identity research lacks the ability to assess how this meaning making process of identity development takes place at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities. Therefore, it is likely that this process looks and feels different for Black women.

According to research in the areas of both racial identity and gender identity, how individuals develop and make meaning of their identities is influenced by the sociopolitical context within which they develop their identity (Cross, 1971; Cross, 1991; Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992; Sellers et al., 1998). More specifically, this means that individuals with marginalized identities often experience oppression based on their marginalized status which influences their perceptions of their identity. The current study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning making process of gendered racial identity of Black women by using an intersectionality framework to examine what factors contribute to their perceptions of their identity and how they have developed their own meaning of their identity. The current study seeks to answer the following question: What is the meaning making process of gendered racial identity development for Black women?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Philosophical Assumptions

My theoretical framework for this study is intersectionality theory and Black Feminist Thought (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality theory is used as a paradigm to capture the complexity of Black women's experiences, including interlocking systems of racism, sexism, oppression, and power that shape their intersecting marginalized identities (Cooper, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989; Syed, 2010). Black Feminist Thought is an epistemology, which expands on feminist theory by addressing the unique experiences of women of color at the intersection of race and gender (Alinia, 2015; Collins, 1986). Black feminist epistemology conceptualizes Black women's experiences within the context of oppressive systems (i.e. racism, sexism, and classism) that silence and denigrate Black women (Collins, 2000). Applied together, Intersectionality theory and Black Feminist epistemology allow for a more rigorous and contextual examination of how the interlocking social inequalities and marginalized identities of Black women contribute to their gendered racial identity development. Next, I provide information about how an intersectionality paradigm and Black Feminist epistemology were applied to the current study.

Intersectionality is a framework from which to conceptualize the sociohistorical context of intersecting marginalized identities and structural inequalities (Bowleg, 2008; Cooper, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989). Applying an intersectionality approach means to recognize the inherent power inequalities and systems of oppression that are embedded in

the interactions between multiply marginalized social identities (Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1989; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). Within this framework, experiences of individuals with multiple oppressed social identities are captured. Black women experience the world within an oppressive patriarchal system from a low position of power due to their marginalized identity statuses (Crenshaw, 1989). For Black women, this means that self-perceptions are often influenced by recognition of the need to respond to and/or navigate simultaneous discriminations such as racism, sexism, and classism. Within this oppressive system, Black women are typically responding to the gendered racial expectations and assumptions that society places on them in the form of stereotypes (Stevens, 1997; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2009). The intersectionality paradigm and Black Feminist Thought epistemology are applicable to the current project because it allows the researcher to gain awareness of this sociohistorical context of Black women's gendered racial identity.

The researcher of the current study approached the study design, data collection, and data analysis from an intersectional perspective with an understanding of the historical devaluation of Black women in order to contextualize and acknowledge the realities of Black womanhood. In particular, I used intersectionality theory to shape my research questions and interview questions, to specifically capture the identity development at the intersection of race and gender and to examine the ways in which systems of oppression affect Black women's identity development (Bowleg, 2008; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016). I began by addressing three important questions proposed by Cole (2009). Cole (2009) urges psychology researchers to address three main questions when utilizing intersectionality as a methodological approach: 1) "Who is included within this

category?” 2) “What role does inequality play?” 3) “What are the similarities?” The current study addressed these important questions by identifying that individuals in this category have marginalized identities that intersect with racism and sexism, by considering the unique aspects of structural inequality that Black women experience based on their gender and race, and by assessing for similarities in experiences, attitudes, and beliefs associated with the meaning making process of gendered racial identity development for Black women.

Research Design

Modified constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2015) was used in the present study to develop a theoretical model of the meaning making process of Black women’s gendered racial identity development. For this reason, it is important to note that the methodology used in this study is not purely grounded theory, but rather, the constructivist approach of grounded theory was applied to the research design and data analysis process of the current study. Grounded theory is a method of carrying out critical inquiry of data and requires acknowledgment of researcher positionality in relation to the data (Charmaz, 2017; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2015) fits best with the aims of the current study because the underlying assumptions align with the subjective nature of the data being collected through personal interviews about identity development.

Constructivist grounded theory postulates three main assumptions: (1) Analysis is an iterative and flexible process focused on action and meaning, (2) Subjectivity is an inherent component of reality that informs data analysis and should be addressed through reflexivity, and (3) Reality is constructed through an interactional process rather than

discovered. Reality is constructed through the interaction between the subjective reality of the participants and the subjectivity of the researcher who is analyzing the data. According to Charmaz (2015), researchers have knowledge and perspectives that influence their interpretation of the data, which is contrary to positivist assumptions. In the current study, during the analysis process, I utilized my knowledge of racial and gender identity research as a tool to understand and situate the data. In order to address this subjectivity, Charmaz (2017) emphasizes the importance of obtaining methodological self-consciousness through reflexivity of a researcher's personal and ethical considerations and critical questioning of the data.

These assumptions align with the current study given that the data are in-depth personal interviews of Black women's identity development with a researcher who identifies as a Black woman. Since there is great variability within Black women's experiences and given the depth of the interview content, using a flexible iterative analytical process is imperative to ensure that there is a thorough and rigorous examination of reality that lends to the construction of reality grounded in the data. In addition, given that the researcher identifies as a Black woman who conducts research on Black women's gendered racial identity, it was also imperative that all previous research and personal knowledge about Black women's identity development was addressed because it influences the analysis process. In the current study, a flexible, iterative, reflexive, and constructivist analytical process was implemented, such that, data collection and data analysis were conducted simultaneously through theoretical sampling and a rigorous triangulation process between the primary researcher, two research coders, and an expert in intersectional research on Black women. Insight gained through the data

analysis aided the construction of a theoretical model grounded in the personal accounts of how Black women make meaning of their gendered racial identity throughout their development.

Reflexivity Statement

My sociocultural development as a Black woman can have an impact on my cultural competence as a researcher. As a middle class Black woman from the Southwest region of the United States, my process of identity development may differ from the participants in this study who were recruited from the Southeast. Thus, my own experiences of inequalities based on my race and gender may have influenced my identity development differently than the participants in this study. I acknowledge that I am privileged to have access to higher education and resources that have aided my own identity development as a Black woman, which could cause blind spots in my understanding of the participant's experiences. Therefore, while conducting this study, it was very important for me to be self-reflective and to continuously challenge the messages and assumptions that have been a part of both my privileged and marginalized identities.

As a Black woman conducting research on the experiences of Black women, I have an interesting position as a researcher. My positionality as a researcher intersects with my personal background since I possess similar characteristics and experiences as the population that I wish to study, namely our identities as Black women. Therefore, there may have been a smaller power differential between the participants and myself than if I were a researcher who identified as White or male. However, simultaneously, as a researcher, I have knowledge and awareness of gender and racial identity development

that I bring with me. I am aware that this is something that has the potential to be a strength, but without careful awareness and reflexivity, this could also be a barrier. This could be helpful in the sense that members of this population may feel more comfortable disclosing information about their development with a Black woman rather than someone of another race and gender due to concern of power differentials or judgment. However, because I identify very closely with this population on a personal level, it was extremely important that I be aware of biases that I may have based on our similarities. It was important for me not to assume that I understand everyone's individual experiences as Black women solely because we share similar racial and gender identities, as it could have prevented me from gaining a true sense of gendered racial identity development for other Black women.

I also recognize my biases about this population that have formed due to my knowledge and skills in the area of Black identity and gendered racism research. I entered this research project with knowledge about what is considered a "healthy" identity and how that impacts everyday experiences for marginalized populations. Therefore, I may be susceptible to making assumptions about members of this population based on how "healthy" their identity development seems to be. To safeguard against these assumptions, I regularly wrote memos of my interactions with participants and discussed my thoughts and reactions with the research team. By doing so, we were able to differentiate between our personal interpretations and what the data was truly demonstrating to us about each of the Black women in this study. Rather than searching for only similarities, we actively assessed for differences to safe guard against overgeneralizing or applying our own assumptions to the data analysis. The intent of

capturing participants' gendered racial identity development was not to compare the information they provided with previous research, but to gain a deeper understanding of their identity from their perspective.

Ethical research considerations. There were several important ethical considerations that needed to be addressed in terms of constructing research questions, ensuring sensitivity to intersectional identities, and my own theoretical approach to qualitative research. First, I established a theoretical basis for my approach to qualitative research (constructivist grounded theory) and used that to inform every component of the methods from constructing interview questions to data analysis and conceptualization. Charmaz (2003) highlights that constructivist grounded theory methodology is based on the assumptions that there are multiple realities, which interact with each other. I approached this study based on the assumption that ultimately the information gained from the individual interviews would reflect participants' subjective interpretations of their identity development as Black women. Furthermore, in order to ensure cultural sensitivity and emotional safety of participants, *what* questions that I asked and *how* I asked them was very important to consider (Agee, 2009). My aim was to gain an understanding of the simultaneous experience of race and gender for Black women. Intersectional approaches in qualitative research are appropriate for studies such as this. Qualitative intersectionality researchers state that intersectional approaches require thoughtful consideration about how identities are discussed in interviews in ways that are sensitive to power dynamics and simultaneous membership in multiple marginalized identities (Bowleg, 2008; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016).

Participants

Participants in the study included 19 Black women students at a predominantly White public University in the Southeastern United States ranging in age from 18 – 41 ($M = 23$ years, $SD = 1.5$ years). The current study used purposeful-criterion-specific sampling and theoretical sampling. Purposeful-criterion-specific sampling is a process by which individuals who have experienced a specific phenomenon are chosen in order to gain rich information about their experiences (Morrow, 2005; Patton, 1990). Theoretical sampling is a key component of grounded theory methodology, which entails collecting data during the analysis process and using it as a guide to continuously refine analytic categories. I used theoretical sampling (i.e. continuing to collect data) to address unanswered questions from earlier codes (Charmaz, 2015). By doing so, I was gradually able to make definitive conceptualizations of the data as the richness of the data continued to increase with new data. Participants were recruited through SONA, the online psychological research recruitment system, and via email recruitment. Email recruitment was conducted by sending an IRB approved recruitment letter to department heads, professors in Africana studies, and to leaders of Black student organizations on campus. For the purposes of this study, only individuals 18 years of age or older and who self-identify as Black women met the inclusion criteria. The researcher's role was to conduct the interviews by asking the participants questions while audio-recording their responses.

Sources of Data

The researcher conducted 19 individual interviews each lasting between 60 – 90 minutes. Individual interviews were appropriate for the current study because they allow

for more in depth participant responses (Morgan, 1997; Morrow, 2005). The personal nature of the questions being asked best fit the format of an individual semi-structured interview method, which allowed the participants to comfortably discuss their identity development without the influence of other participants' responses. After a brief introduction and informed consent were obtained, eighteen interview questions were asked (see Appendix B). After each interview the participant was debriefed about the purpose of the study and asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. The interviews were audio-recorded and saved as a password protected file. The majority of interviews were transcribed using the transcription service, *Rev.com*. Additionally, the researcher and an undergraduate research assistant also transcribed audio files and saved them as a password-protected Microsoft word document.

Semi-structured interview protocol. First, the researcher developed a clearly stated research purpose statement about gaining a deeper understanding of the meaning making process of Black women's gendered racial identity development. The researcher prepared broad research questions that captured the purpose, content, and context of the study. Next, the interview questions were formed using the knowledge from past racial and gender identity literature, While developing the interview questions, the researcher focused on questions that pertain specifically to the intersectional gendered racial identity experiences of Black women. The questions went through several iterations. After each of the iterations, a research expert in intersectional research on Black women reviewed the questions and provided feedback, which informed the final questions.

Data Analysis

The researcher used a modified version of constructivist grounded theory data analysis methods and a triangulation process for this study. The primary characteristics of grounded theory methodology are flexibility and focus (Charmaz, 2015). The data analysis process is both an iterative and comparative process in which the researcher constantly and simultaneously goes back and forth between data collection and analysis in order to ensure that the collection and analysis inform each other (Charmaz, 2015). Throughout the grounded theory analysis process, it is important that the researcher asks critical questions of the data reflecting on their own pre-existing knowledge and positionality. Next, I will provide a detailed overview of the grounded theory data analysis and triangulation process for this study.

To ensure rigorous analysis of the data, two research coders and myself as lead researcher analyzed the data together. All three researchers were Black women who had completed a graduate qualitative research methods course prior to the data analysis of this study. In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the data, all research coders applied the same theoretical approach, critical lens, and data analysis methods to the data. Each researcher completed the same modified grounded theory analysis process separately for each transcript and met weekly to discuss the data together. This process allowed the lead researcher to check her own understanding of the data against two other individuals to ensure that conclusions drawn from the data were grounded in the data from the participants and not from the researcher's own personal interpretations.

The lead researcher first read through each transcript without writing any notes to get immersed in the data and get a sense of the overall content contained in the

interviews. Then, the lead researcher and the research team began initial coding by reading the transcripts and conducting a line-by-line analysis by coding responses that stood out and gave descriptive accounts of ways that the participants think about or conceptualize their identity. The research team met weekly to discuss the data through an iterative process. In these meetings, we first worked together to obtain an understanding of each individual participant's developmental process considering unique contextual factors that influenced their development. Next, we compared each participant's reported experiences with the previously coded transcripts by identifying how each participant's process of identity development was different or similar to previous participants. When gaps in the data analysis emerged regarding identity development, I, as the lead researcher, utilized theoretical sampling to fill these gaps and gain more understanding of the data, by adding or restructuring interview questions and conducting more interviews in order to account for those gaps. For example, after analyzing several transcripts we realized that more in depth information was needed regarding the participants' distinctions between ways that different types of environments caused shifts in their identity, so I reworded that interview question to better capture this distinction and conducted more interviews with this new question.

After identifying preliminary codes and comparing participant experiences, the research team then began focused coding by placing similar responses together into categories. Once categories of the data were identified, we then began to look for broader connections and meanings of the categories through direct comparison of the participants' overall developmental process. After connecting and drawing meanings from the data, I read through the transcripts again. While reading through the transcripts,

I searched for direction and patterns emerging from the data that reflected the overall psychological process of identity development for the participants. During this process I examined how well the emerging process of identity development fit for each participant's experiences looking for disconfirming evidence. Once coding was completed, I consulted with a research expert in intersectional research on Black women to finalize the codes. Together, we further assessed for any disconfirming evidence and examined the sufficiency of the findings.

Throughout the data analysis process, all three researchers wrote memos to document their reflexivity and identify areas of the data where more information was needed for analysis. If there were gaps in the data coding (i.e. areas where the researchers needed more information), we used theoretical sampling by making necessary alterations to the interview protocol and conducted additional interviews to fill in gaps in the data. We also assessed memos, codes, and categories together to look for connections and themes in the data. In addition, the memos were used to help ensure the researchers were mindful of their own biases, assumptions, and overgeneralizations throughout the data analysis process.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Researchers utilizing constructivist grounded theory build an understanding of the data that is grounded in the realities of the participants (Charmaz, 2015; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In the current study, this was done through a Black Feminist Thought and Intersectional lens to capture the realities of Black women in regards to their identity development. I used several strategies to ensure trustworthiness, credibility, and a rigorous analysis of the data that align with Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, and

Ponterotto (2017). I first noted my awareness of my positionality to the population of interest and wrote memos after each interaction with participants. I utilized my theoretical frame to inform my construction of interview questions that were intersectional, specific to Black women, and allowed for in-depth open responses from participants. The philosophical assumptions of Intersectionality theory and Black Feminist Thought provided the context within which the research questions were formulated and the data were analyzed with acknowledgement of the realities of racism and sexism's influence on Black women's identity. I conducted individual interviews to respect the intimate content of the data and to safe guard against outside influence from other participants. I attended weekly meetings where I checked my thoughts, reactions, and interpretations against a research team of researchers who specialize in psychological research on Black women. I searched for disconfirming evidence and continuously compared differences between participants to safe guard against my own assumptions. Since there are not any pre-established models for gendered racial identity, the constructivist grounded theory research design allowed the researcher to have an intimate immersion into the data to formulate a multidimensional model that best fits the data and captures this unique process for Black women.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Identity Development: Process Model Overview

Black women's identity development refers to how Black women make meaning of their identity through a complex interaction between the self and their environment (Porter & Dean, 2015; Thomas, 2011; Yakushko, Mack, & Iwamoto, 2010). As Black women develop their identity, they interact with racial and gender socialization that comes from their family and from the gendered racial oppressive environment in which they exist (Thomas et al., 2011). The findings of the current study illuminate a phase-like identity development process that is based on the unique ways that Black women form meaning based on their responses to societal stereotypes and expectations (See Figure 1). This process is not necessarily linear as the data indicated that participants can be in more than one phase simultaneously and that for some individuals, phases can re-emerge over time (i.e. you can experience the same phase more than once). Due to the phase-like nature of this developmental phenomena, the results do not definitively reflect the exact phase or identity type where each participant is in their overall identity development, but rather it reflects which of the identity types and phases was most salient to them at this time in their development. Specifically, during the data analysis process, I identified the most salient identity types and phases for the participants based on the attitudes and beliefs they endorsed during the interview. However, for clarity, I will highlight the developmental process through which Black women progress from endorsing greater internalized gendered racial oppression and accepting negative stereotypes of Black

women, to internalizing one's own meaning independent from external expectations and stereotypes. Critical awareness of one's intersecting identities and gendered racial oppression seemed to increase at later phases of the identity development process for Black women.

Utilizing a constructivist grounded theory data analysis methodology, three distinct phases of identity development were uncovered: (1) Protective Acceptance, (2) Identity Management, and (3) Internalization, each of which includes three different identity types. The study also found that a critical incident occurred between identity phases. The critical incidents were characterized as experiences of gendered racial microaggressions or environmental shifts that caused Black women to rethink their previously held notions about their identity and consider their identity in the context of the larger racist and sexist environment. Within the Protective Acceptance, Identity Management, and Internalization phases, there were three identity types for each phase. Identity types under the larger phase categories represent the different attitudes, beliefs, values, and meanings that Black women hold toward their identity. Overall, the phases and identity types that participants endorsed were greatly influenced by the extent to which the participants have internalized gendered racial oppression and their level of awareness of their gendered racial identity as Black women. During the data analysis process, I made distinctions between the different phases and identity types based on several differential markers that emerged for participants, which included: (1) an internal versus an external pressure to express their identity, (2) participants' level of internalization of gendered racial oppression, (3) participants' level of critical awareness,

and (4) the level of impact of critical incidents on participant's perceptions of their identity. These aspects vary greatly across each of the phases and identity types.

Protective Acceptance Phase

Participants who endorsed the Protective Acceptance phase internalized negative societal stereotypes about Black women and felt an external pressure to alter themselves in order to protect them from gendered racial oppression. Though participants who endorsed this phase expressed some awareness of their intersecting identities and negative stereotypes, they internalized attitudes about Black women based on the negative societal expectations, assumptions, and biases without critically questioning the oppressive nature of these stereotypes. Thus, these participants had some awareness of their identities, but lacked a critical awareness. The protective role of this acceptance for participants is complex. Participants perceived that their ways of altering themselves served to *protect* them from being stereotyped, though they all expressed ways that this self-alteration came with a distressing external pressure to constantly prove themselves to others. Thus, the internalization of gendered racial oppression may be *protective* for Black women because they utilized the negative stereotypes of Black women to inform how they interacted with others in ways that seemingly protected themselves from the negative effects of gendered racism through: a) Assimilation, b) Defiance, or c) Adaptation to societal expectations of Black women. Another key component of the Protective Acceptance phase is that Black women were more likely to describe their identity in terms of superficial emblems of Black womanhood, such as physical features (e.g., hair, skin color). The use of physical features to describe their identity indicated that they had not yet formed a critical awareness of race and gender. During data

analysis, I identified the different identity types of the Protective Acceptance phase by differentiating between the various ways that the participants chose to protect themselves from gendered racial oppression (i.e. assimilation, defiance, and adaptation).

Assimilation. Black women who endorsed the assimilation identity type, recalled experiencing a period of time when they were younger when they internalized negative stereotypes of Black women based on beauty and character traits (e.g., being loud or angry). As a result, many participants expressed feelings of inferiority, and chose to alter themselves to fit the societal expectations of Black women based on Eurocentric standards of beauty and aesthetics. The participants recalled examples that indicated how their assimilation served to protect them from experiencing negative stereotypes associated with Black women's appearance. To illustrate this, Teyanna¹, a 22-year-old undergraduate student stated:

So definitely when I was younger like in elementary school or something... I more so wanted to conform, so it's like I didn't want to be myself. Then when I got to middle school I started having a lot more pride in being a Black girl. But then I kind of accepted that I wasn't a desirable person or something...

Teyanna later expanded on this stating that she "wanted to wake up and be a White girl" and referred to this past perspective as a form of "self-hate." These examples highlight the protective acceptance that Black women may engage in at earlier phases of identity development when they lack a critical awareness of the historical significance of these stereotypes of Black womanhood. In this particular case, Teyanna demonstrates that due to negative stereotypes about Black women being perceived as less desirable, she

¹ Pseudonyms were used in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

internalized that to mean that she was also less desirable and therefore needed to assimilate into European standards of beauty as a way to escape her negative experiences as a Black woman. This is indicated by her words: “I more so wanted to conform, and “I didn’t want to be myself.” Here, Teyanna felt an external pressure to alter herself in order to fit into Eurocentric standards of beauty without an awareness of the history of how stereotypes dating back to slavery have denigrated Black women’s hair, skin, and body type as less desirable compared to Eurocentric standards of beauty. Although Teyanna is aware that these stereotypes exist, she is unaware of the unique intersectional nature of the stereotypes based on her gender and race.

Other participants described past examples of altering their appearance by straightening their hair in order to fit European standards of beauty and to avoid negative stereotypes about Black women’s hair. For example, Brianna, a 22-year-old undergraduate student recalled an earlier time in her life when she defined her identity based on her hair and how that related to her desire to alter her appearance. In the following quote, she compares how she used to feel about her identity as a Black woman with how she feels now based on how she chooses to wear her hair:

I used to straighten my hair a lot, and then I did the “big chop,” and big chopping my hair was a big part of me coming into who I am, cause even when I did interviews for Black organizations on campus, I was still scared to go with the Afro still, to straighten my hair just cause I didn’t know how it would be taken.

This quote further demonstrates how some Black women may attempt to protect themselves by accepting and internalizing negative stereotypes at earlier phases of identity development. Although Black women who endorsed the Assimilation identity

type expressed some awareness of negative gendered racial stereotypes, they felt an internal responsibility to alter themselves. Altering themselves served dual purposes of allowing them to fit European standards of beauty so that they were perceived as more desirable and to avoid experiencing negative stereotypes about their appearance. In contrast, some Black women identified an alternative meaning that was based on altering themselves in order to *defy* stereotypes rather than to assimilate to them.

Defiance. Participants who endorsed this identity type expressed beliefs based on feeling an external pressure to challenge all preconceived notions of Black womanhood. In particular, participants reported a strong desire to defy all negative stereotypes in order to prove others wrong and to change their perceptions of Black women from negative to positive. Thus, their defiance was based on the belief that Black women must alter themselves to be the opposite of societal expectations. Participants indicated ways that their defiance of Black woman stereotypes served to protect them from experiencing oppression and being stereotyped. However, some participants who endorsed this identity type also made comments that implied that this external pressure and self-alteration was in response to an external pressure to fit Eurocentric standards, indicating that it may not be as protective as they perceived it to be.

Felicia, a 20-year-old undergraduate student, shared how central defying stereotypes was to her identity as a Black woman stating: “So being a Black woman, I feel like I just have so much to prove. I always feel as if every move I make, I feel like somebody's watching out for me to slip up, or just anything.” In addition, she discussed several ways that she hopes to challenge stereotypes and change other’s perceptions about Black women:

My main goal in life is to break every single stereotype that I had to live with growing up... But I was out here trying to break stereotypes and just be different... if someone says Black woman, I don't want them to have the negative connotation about it. I want them to always think of something positive . . . I want them to think, oh Black woman. That eccentric girl that always tries to befriend us.

As Felicia expressed, challenging and defying stereotypes is central to her identity as a Black woman. Her explanation shows that she chooses to defy stereotypes by doing the opposite of what others expect of her as a Black woman. In this particular example, Felicia strives to be the opposite of stereotypes that have labeled Black women as angry and unfriendly by being “eccentric” and intentionally presenting herself as friendly to other people. The purpose of Felicia’s defiance is to change others’ perceptions of Black women so that she does not have to experience being negatively stereotyped. Though Felicia demonstrated awareness of negative societal perceptions, she accepted a personal responsibility from an external pressure to alter these societal perceptions and stereotypes of Black women. Felicia’s defiance is an example of how some Black women may respond to negative stereotypes in earlier phases of their identity without a critical awareness of historical forms of oppression that are rooted in stereotypes that label Black women as angry and unfriendly. Here, Felicia is aware of the stereotype at the intersection of her race and gender, but is unable to explicitly label it as such and connect it to the historical oppression that is linked to these stereotypes that Black women are more aggressive and less feminine. She lacks a critical awareness about how Black women have been compared to standards of White womanhood about how to act and

interact with others (i.e. being quiet and submissive). In the next identity type of the Protective Acceptance phase, rather than attempting to change outside perspectives, participants stated that central to their identity is the belief that Black women must remain strong in order to *adapt* to gendered racial oppression.

Adaptation. Black women who endorsed this identity type expressed an awareness of their lowered position of power in the social hierarchy, but internalized societal pressure and expectations that Black women should always remain strong. This idea of being strong is rooted in a historical stereotype of the “Strong Black Woman.” Thus, participants expressed the belief that Black women must be strong because they have to “work harder” and “just deal” with the hardships that come with being a Black woman. Participants’ responses reflected ways that they utilized their strength as a way to *adapt* to the gendered racial stressors they experience in pursuit of success. Zahra, a 23-year-old graduate student discussed how she internalized a pressure to work harder as a Black woman into her identity as a *strong* Black woman:

There’s especially eyes that look at you because you are a Black woman. So there’s more expectations for me not to mess up, to do my job well. For example, I feel like in terms of when I’m going to a class, like I have to prepare myself a lot harder than other students cause I don’t want them to have the image that Black women aren’t capable of achieving all of these goals. When I’m teaching I have to be on top of it when students ask me questions. I have to be responsible.

In this quote, Zahra exemplifies her idea of strength as a Black woman through her need to “work harder than other students” because the expectations are different for her than they are for other students. This example highlights the protective, yet limiting

role that the Strong Black Woman stereotype plays in the meaning of her identity. Zahra's identity type is protective because it allows her to adapt to difficult situations and be successful within an oppressive system. However, her internalization that she has to "be on top of everything" is rooted in her feeling an external pressure to work harder and a belief that Black women must be strong to overcome hardships and gendered racial oppression. Thus, the stereotype that Black women must always be strong limits the meaning of her identity to be dependent upon her level of strength as defined by societal standards.

Other participants viewed strength in terms of adapting to hardships and obstacles that they face as Black women by internally dealing with them and restricting emotions. Amaya, an 18-year-old undergraduate student, gave an example highlighting the key role of emotional restriction in her identity as a strong Black woman:

Lastly, I would have to say my strength overall. I never cry... I don't... They say because I'm just as strong, just as independent, and just blatantly out there with people, that's why they compare me to her [in reference to Cookie, a lead Black woman character from a popular Black television show called *Empire*].

Similarly, other participants shared that their view of Black women's strength was based on the idea that they have to "just deal" with their hardships. The ideal of strength as dealing with hardships and restricting emotion demonstrates an acceptance that the only way for Black women to be able to get through tough situations is to not let it bother them (although, they shared that it does). This indicates a belief that there is an internal responsibility to deal with these hardships and that there is not much that can be done about this reality of being a Black woman.

Overall, participants who endorsed the Adaptation identity type articulated beliefs and attitudes based on societal expectations of what it means to be a strong Black woman. They expressed an awareness of the expectation for Black women to work harder, deal with hardships, and they accepted a personal responsibility to adapt to gendered racial oppression without critically questioning the oppressive nature of the Strong Black Woman stereotype. Thus, they were unaware that the Strong Black woman stereotype is specific to the intersection of their gender and race, based on assumptions that Black women are able to withstand extraordinary hardships. Participants perceived that their adaptation served as a protective function because it allowed them a way to adapt to their stressful environment, but it indicated that they have accepted an external definition of what it means to be a Black woman, which is rooted in the Strong Black Woman stereotype.

Critical Incident

The Critical Incident is a transitory component of identity development that contributes to changes in one's gendered racial identity. Participants in this study reported experiencing some critical incident that significantly influenced how they viewed their identity. There was no set time period that these events occurred for the participants as they reported experiencing multiple incidents across their identity development. As a result of these critical incidents, participants seemed to gain a more critical awareness of their identity as these events forced them to consciously reflect on the role of gendered racism and systems of oppression on their identity development. Many participants described this result as a "shift" in their view towards their identity.

Participants described incidents where other people in their environment made derogatory remarks about their gender and race that reduced them to stereotypes of being loud, angry, sassy, or “not like other Black women.” In addition, participants reported experiencing some type of environmental shift when they moved between White and Black environments either in school or in their neighborhoods growing up. Many participants also reported observing their mother’s experiences of gendered racism at work and in intimate relationships, which opened their eyes to the impact of gendered racism on their identity development. Experiencing gendered racism, moving between predominately White and Black environments, and observing their mother’s experiences with gendered racism contributed to thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs about their identity as they grappled with these experiences. Critical incidents caused shifts in participants’ identity development through three different processes: a) Hyperawareness, b) Reflection, and c) Rejection.

Hyperawareness. Many participants shared experiences of gendered racial microaggressions that caused them to become hyperaware of their identity as Black women and how others negatively perceived them, causing them to be “cautious” about what “image” they portrayed of themselves in public. For example, Solange a 20-year-old undergraduate student, shared a story about when she was in elementary school, when a young White boy accused her of being “a mean Black lady” because she did not share her piece of gum with him. Solange stated that this incident caused her to become aware that Black women are perceived as angry whenever they stand up for themselves. She then shared how this gendered racial microaggression contributed to her hyperawareness of

her identity, which impacted her ability to fully express herself around others. Solange stated:

I still feel, like with my own personal identity, it's just kind of awkward because I feel I can't all the time be myself without thinking about it because of everything I've explained to you so far. I'd love to just be able to, and technically I can do this, but it stresses me out, like wear my hair however I want to, whenever I want to or express my opinions without having to be mindful of how people perceive me, and that kind of thing.

In this example, Solange articulated how gendered racial microaggressions based on negative stereotypes of Black women have caused her to be very aware of how other people perceive her, which causes her to feel uncomfortable expressing herself as a Black woman. During the interview, she often referred to feeling “awkward” or “weird” about expressing her identity as a Black woman around others.

Reflection. Other participants expressed feelings of “inferiority” as they asked themselves critical questions like “What’s wrong with me?” in regards to whether or not they fit Eurocentric standards of beauty and aesthetics and Black woman stereotypes. In the midst of these critical incidents, many participants endorsed an importance in exploring different types of environments and gaining exposure to other cultures as they grappled with understanding their own identity. Toya, a 30-year-old graduate student shared how gendered racial microaggressions caused her to reflect on her identity as a Black woman by questioning how she fits the stereotypes of Black women. Toya stated that she’s “never felt like a typical Black woman” due to a lack of representation of Black women in the media and because of comments that others have made to her. She stated:

I get it a lot, you're not like most Black women. I've asked for explanation not all the time but sometimes, and usually it's like "oh you're not ghetto, you're not loud, you're not ratchet like fill in the blank whatever descriptor, and I'm like but... why, I don't know, I'm just like why is that a... issue or why does that differentiate me from the rest of my group you know.

In this example, Toya expressed how others have communicated to her that she does not fit the stereotypical Black woman characteristics such as being ghetto or loud. Here, she shows that these comments have caused her to question what it means to be a Black woman and what it means for her if she doesn't fit the stereotype. This example demonstrates how these critical incidents about how these stereotypes and expectations have shaped the way that she views herself as not being the "typical Black woman."

Other participants shared how an environmental shift between predominately Black and White environments made them aware of the stereotypes that they were expected to fit in both environments. For example, Teylor, an 18-year-old undergraduate student shared that she switched between a predominately White environment to a Black environment, which caused her to feel culture shock and increased her awareness of others' expectations of her to talk and dress a certain way as a Black woman. Teylor stated:

For me, personally, growing up in a predominantly White community, I think I've taken on maybe some of their culture as well. I understand we come from a Black family, so I have my culture that I grew up around, but I've also had that. Then, going into a predominantly Black community, it's almost like shock... It's like you struggle within the two communities. It was like, "Why are you talking like

that? You're Black. You're supposed to be like this and like that." The way I dressed was different, so that is ... It's a cultural shock sometimes.

Rejection. Critical incidents also caused participants to begin picking and choosing pieces of what they had learned about Black women from their gendered racial socialization about how Black women should act and interact with others. A major component of this picking and choosing that emerged from the data was the act of rejecting socialization messages and stereotypes that they did not feel were accurate for them as Black women. Participants expressed that they began to think through what their parents and grandparents taught them about being Black women and contrasted that to what they've learned in their environment. For example, Terri a 31-year-old graduate student shared that her view on gender roles changed after she was exposed to other Black women outside of her family who did not endorse traditional gender roles. Below she shares her thought process of rejecting socialization messages that limit the role of Black women in relationships:

She [My mother] taught me that Black women should know their place, especially when it is involving a relationship or a marriage. My mother is very old school and traditional and so regardless of what dad does, she always maintains and holds it down and doesn't complain. I learned that, now did I take that piece into my future and now? No... some of the things I learned I wanted to re-write for my future, like the family dynamic. In my house now with my husband, we definitely have a lot of give and take. I have a profound voice, and I feel and I have the space to share my opinion and share what I think should happen.

In this quote, Terri is sharing that she rejected traditional gender roles and gender socialization messages about women being subservient that she learned from her family, stating that Black women do not have to submit to their husbands and that they can make their own decisions despite external pressures to fulfill stereotypes or societal expectations.

Participants endorsed having an increased awareness of their identity, stereotypes, gendered racial microaggressions, and gendered racism that they chose to reject for themselves as a result of these different types of critical incidents (i.e. hyperawareness, reflection, and rejection). During data analysis, I paid close attention to what participants did with this new increased awareness following critical incidents. Following these critical incidents, participants indicated that they then began to *manage* their identity by incorporating their new awareness into their meaning making process of what it means to identify as a Black woman.

Identity Management Phase

Black women who endorsed the Identity Management Phase reported different ways that they have grappled with an increased awareness of their intersecting identities and experiences of gendered racism. Following a critical incident, many participants articulated a burgeoning critical awareness as they more explicitly identified their experiences of gendered racism (in their own words) and endorsed less external pressure to fit Eurocentric standards or expectations. Participants who endorsed this phase expressed feeling like they were still “trying to figure it out” as they continued to grapple with inconsistencies between socialization from family and from their environment. Thus, these participants reported being in an in-between phase where they had not yet

formed their own internalized meaning apart from the societal expectations and stereotypes of Black women. Following a critical incident(s) that increased one's awareness of their intersectional identity and oppression, participants varied in the ways that they incorporated this new information into their identity as Black women. For example, some participants experienced cognitive dissonance and felt very overwhelmed by the new information that contradicted previous socialization messages, leading them to avoid defining their identity based on their race or gender. While others, either felt stuck in their disappointment or they rejected negative influences on their identity as a Black woman. For the Identity Management phase, participants expressed identity types including: a) Humanist, b) Disempowerment, and c) Resistance, each of which represent attitudes and beliefs based on ways that they manage incorporating a new awareness of gendered racial oppression into their identity as Black women.

Humanist. Participants who endorsed the Humanist identity type expressed feeling hyperaware of their intersecting race and gender, and overwhelmed by the contradiction between previous messages that Black women must look and act a certain way and their new awareness of the diversity among Black women. These conflicting feelings led some participants to manage their identity by choosing not to define being a Black woman based on their race or gender. Participants shared that viewing themselves as humans allowed them to avoid being limited by a label that tells them how they should act as Black women. These participants have chosen not to define either their gender or racial identity to avoid being limited by external definitions or societal expectations. Participants endorsed ideals of being human and being free to express their identity any way that they would like. Participants' responses indicated that they have not yet formed

their own internalized meaning because their choice to avoid being labeled was described as a response to the societal definitions that are placed on Black women rather than on their own meaning of their identity. For example, Misha, a 19-year-old undergraduate student shared that she views herself as a human rather than viewing herself in terms of her race and gender. Later, when asked about her definition of being a Black woman, Misha stated, “I feel like maybe there's not a definition.” Misha’s responses indicated that she takes a humanist perspective of her identity that does not place any label or assigned characteristics to her identity. It is evident that Misha’s humanistic perspective of her identity was influenced by critical incidents she experienced that caused her to feel hyperawareness of her identity. For example, Misha also described experiencing a gendered racial microaggression where she was labeled as a “sassy diva”, which increased her awareness of how others label and limit her based on their expectations of her. Misha shared her response to this gendered racial microaggression by stating:

It's lighthearted, and it was funny, or whatever, but I feel like it kinda ... There are way sassier people in this group. There are bigger divas in this group. I feel like my race plays into it, you know? ... They want me, so badly, to be a thing that they think I should be.

Thus, in order to relieve herself of being limited by what other people expect of her, she chose not to define her identity based on her race and gender. Similarly, Solange, a 20-year-old undergraduate student, described her choice not to define her identity as a Black woman based on her desire not to be limited by assigned characteristics. First, when Solange was asked what her definition of being a Black woman was, she paused for a while with a puzzled look on her face and said that it would be “weird” to define her

identity as anything beyond the biological traits that she possesses as a Black woman. She then further explained her choice not to assign characteristics or labels to her identity:

I mean, I don't know. I guess the reason why I didn't give any adjectives when describing what the definition of being a Black woman is because I feel like this for anyone. We should be able to, you should be able to totally identify as what we want to identify as and take pride in that... but it also shouldn't, there shouldn't be characteristics that are assigned to that, that are forced upon anyone, I guess.

In this particular example, Solange expressed that she chooses not to assign any specific characteristics to what it means to identify as a Black woman in order to avoid being stereotyped and labeled by societal definitions. Thus, Solange takes a more humanistic view of her identity by conceptualizing it in a way that is more general and not specific to her gender and race.

During their interview, both Solange and Misha expressed feeling hyperaware and confused about how to manage this new information in relation to their previously held beliefs about being Black women. Both of these participants alleviated themselves from this confusion by choosing not to develop their own internalized meaning of being a Black woman, but rather to reject any meaning specific to their gender and race. These examples demonstrate the humanist identity type that Black women may endorse during phases of their identity development where they are wrestling with how to make sense of the limitations of societal definitions and the vast diversity in what it means to be a Black woman. In contrast, other participants in the Identity Management phase seemed to

struggle more with forming their internalized identity despite the *disempowerment* that they feel as Black women.

Disempowerment. The Disempowered identity type was characterized by a heightened awareness of the devaluation of Black women in society, which contributed to participants feeling the heavy burden of being a Black woman. Black women who endorsed the Disempowerment identity type expressed that they were still grappling with this burden and trying to figure out how they fit into the images of Black women that they learned through gendered racial socialization in their family and external environment. The weight of the gendered racism they experienced defined their identity and contributed to their disempowering attitudes towards their identity. To illustrate this identity type, Yolanda, a 30-year-old graduate student, described her gendered racial identity as a burden based on feelings of isolation, being overlooked, silenced, and sexualized, all of which have contributed to a loss of hope:

Oh, being the backbone of almost every movement, but not getting the credit for it. You know... basically being everyone's tool... I feel like we're the ones who are supposed to have hope, right. And that goes back to Black women basically starting almost every movement that the Black community has had, but people don't see hope in us, but we're supposed to have hope for the country. Like, we're supposed to see, you know, the possibilities that this country can have... yeah, and we're just supposed to hold that burden and consider it a privilege.

This quote highlights the impact that the burden of being Black and a woman can have on Black women's personal feelings towards their identity. In this quote, Yolanda seems to be in the Identity Management phase because she has not yet formed her own

meaning, and her increased awareness of gendered racial oppression has contributed to the burden she carries currently to make up what her identity means to her. This identity type exemplifies that Black women can experience a period of time when they view Black womanhood as disempowering due to the gendered racial oppression that they experience. In contrast, other participants expressed great disdain for gendered racism and instead endorsed an identity type based on their need to act against it.

Resistance. This identity type is primarily based on the belief that Black women must resist against all external expectations and stereotypes of Black womanhood. Participants shared that they resisted societal influences on their identity in order to “remain” true to their identity as Black women. Participants who engaged in resistance endorsed an internal drive to remain connected to their Black womanhood regardless of societal expectations of Black women to fit Eurocentric standards. Participants in the Resistance identity type endorsed a greater critical awareness of the oppression they experienced as they are expected to adhere to Eurocentric ways of dressing and acting. Though participants who endorsed the Resistance identity type had a greater awareness, their responses were indicative of an in-between phase because their meanings were based on ways they can *manage* their identity in response to the societal expectations rather than to form their own meaning. To illustrate this, Carmen, a 28-year-old graduate student, described the role of resistance in her identity as a Black woman through her “rebellion” against societal standards:

...’Cause we live our life like outside of societal expectations so for me I think being a Black woman is like being in constant rebellion to everything that society

says you should be or should do. And that's kind of how I live out my Black womanhood.

Carmen later describes more about how she exemplifies this identity type in her everyday life:

I feel like knowing that people expect me to dress professionally as a PhD student and when I go to conferences I should dress a certain way. I'm very specific about not doing that, like when I go into those spaces I'm very specific about, no I'm going to wear my traditional clothes and I'm gonna do my hair in bantu knots, or whatever like that.

This example highlights how many Black women may incorporate their resistance to societal pressures and expectations into the meaning of their identity. This act of resistance for Carmen has served as a way for her to remain connected to her identity as a Black woman in the midst of an oppressive environment. She has expressed that she lives out her Black womanhood through her opposition to Eurocentric norms. It is also apparent that Carmen has an awareness of the Eurocentric standards of beauty and aesthetics that are projected onto her as a Black woman. Carmen is aware of this and begins to question why Black women are expected to alter themselves to be deemed professional and presentable according to Eurocentric standards of womanhood. The Resistance identity type differs from the Defiance identity type in that the resistance is done in order to preserve and stay connected to one's identity as a Black woman despite what society expects them to do. In contrast, Defiance is done in order to prove others wrong and change societal perceptions. The Resistance identity type was also characterized by greater critical awareness of one's intersecting identities and gendered

racial oppression than those who endorsed the Defiance identity type. In contrast, other participants who had developed an advanced critical awareness of their intersecting identities, described identity types that reflect their own *internalized* definitions of being a Black woman.

Internalization Phase

Black women who endorsed the Internalization phase developed their own internalized meaning of their identity and expressed a strong sense of awareness of the intersection between their marginalized identities and systems of oppression (i.e., gendered racism). More specifically, the participants' internalized meanings tended to be positive and were not rooted in the external pressures and expectations to fit a certain stereotype of Black women or to fit in with Eurocentric ideals of how women should look and act. Participants in this phase also endorsed greater critical awareness of their intersecting identities and oppression indicated by their rejection of societal stereotypes and redefinition of their Black womanhood. Participants who endorsed this phase also placed an emphasis on investment in the development of other Black women in various ways. In the Internalization phase, individuals expressed the following identity types: a) Embodiment, b) Realist, and c) Empowerment.

Embodiment. Black women who endorsed the Embodiment identity type had gained a broadened awareness and knowledge of their intersecting identities. Participants in this identity type also expressed greater awareness of the diversity among Black women and felt less pressure to fit standards and stereotypes. More specifically, Black women with this identity type described ways that they embody their identity in regards to their beauty, appreciating the diversity of Black women, and acknowledging that being

a strong Black woman does not have to be limited to societal definitions of strength. Thus, participants in this phase expressed ways that their identity had become a part of who they are and how they see themselves. To illustrate this, Brianna, a 22-year-old undergraduate student, shared her meaning of being a Black woman:

... Being a Black woman is being strong in whatever way you think that being strong is ... it's being unapologetically yourself and learning how to be unapologetically yourself. Understanding your natural beauty and understanding where you come from.

In this quote, Brianna demonstrates how she challenges the meaning of being strong in her identity as a Black woman. Similarly, other participants shared that their identity means more than just physical features and that there is not one way of being a Black woman. For example, Kyrah, an 18-year-old undergraduate student stated:

Like, you don't have to, 'cause I always thought you had to look a certain way. I've learned over time, that there's not a certain way a Black woman looks. You can look any way you want to look. You're still a Black woman, and you're still great.

These examples highlight ways that Black women may internalize their own meaning of their identity by embracing parts of their identity that are not valued by others. They have expressed meanings that no longer rely on societal expectations and stereotypes. In addition to embracing their identity beyond physical appearance, many participants spoke more about ways that their meaning was not restricted by the Strong Black Woman stereotype. For example, Jordan, a 20-year-old undergraduate student shared how her identity was based on more than being strong:

Now that I learn more about being a Black woman and more about our traits and not us having to always be strong, but it's like different layers to us and we're different, I think it brings more confidence when you know yourself and know more about you being a Black woman.

This quote highlights how some Black women incorporate their own definition of being strong into their identity as Black women. Jordan has expressed that there is not one way to be strong as a Black woman, which indicates that she is no longer restricted to being strong based on societal standards. Other participants endorsed meanings based explicitly on their realistic view of their identity including both their own positive internalized meaning and the negative aspects of their identity related to gendered racial oppression.

Realist. Black women who endorsed the Realist identity type expressed having positive internalized attitudes towards their identity, but also greater awareness of gendered racial oppression. This identity type is indicative of realism, such that, their attitudes and beliefs towards their identity now reflect their full awareness of the intersection of their identities, which contains both positive and negative realities of being both Black and a woman. Thus, the participants' meanings were representative of their pride in their identity *and* their awareness of the gendered racial oppression that they experience as being an integral part of their identity. In this identity type, Black women made realizations about their identity that illuminated an ability to have a critical awareness of their intersectional identity without internalizing the negative societal stereotypes of their identity. To illustrate this, Teyanna, a 22-year-old undergraduate student shared her positive and negative feelings toward her identity:

I feel it's divine to be a Black woman. I feel beautiful being a Black woman. I feel underappreciated a lot. I feel like Black women are underappreciated. It makes me sad and frustrated too. I feel like I'm ultimately happy about being a Black woman, but sad again that we're not appreciated or recognized or listened to as much as we should be.

In this example, Teyanna expressed her overall positive regard toward her identity in the context of an awareness of the hardships that she experiences based on her gender and race. The fact that she is able to form a positive meaning about her identity despite also feeling underappreciated by others, demonstrates that she has internalized her own meaning within the context of her reality as a Black woman in an oppressive environment. Monica, a 41-year-old graduate student also described her identity in similar terms:

What it is to be a Black woman is to be an influencer, to be intelligent, to be a fighter, and an innovator. Black women are an overall key to the universe. What it means to be a Black woman is challenging... sometimes it's lonely, what it is to be a Black woman, but an overall key to the universe.

Monica demonstrated her identity in terms of the "duality" of both her overall positive meaning and her awareness of the hardships that come with being a Black woman. Later, Monica highlighted all of the roles that she plays as a Black woman that contribute further to the challenges that Black women experience and expressed both her pride in her identity *and* her feelings of exhaustion. She exemplifies a Realist identity type because although she is aware of the exhaustion due to gendered racial oppression,

she still holds a strong internalized identity that she takes pride in. Similarly, Terri, a 31-year-old graduate student, spoke about both sides of her identity:

I couldn't imagine identifying as anything BUT a Black woman. Like, I am proud to check the box, Sis! Because I am Black and a woman (hits table with fist for emphasis). I am, a lot more comfortable with being who I am, and I think that just has come with age, and experiences, and having other mentors in my life that, you know, they loved their Black skin, they're empowered by who they are and their experiences. I mean there are instances where I do feel still insecure especially if I'm entering a new space and there isn't anyone or people who look like me, but I'm kinda used to it now.

She later described how her navigation in certain spaces allows her to coexist and continue to grow in her identity. These examples highlight an advanced phase of identity development that Black women may experience in which they are able to form their own positive internalized meaning while holding a critical awareness of gendered racial oppression. Both of these participants' descriptions exemplified that their internalized meaning remains consistent despite their experiences with gendered racism.

Empowerment. Black women who endorsed the Empowerment identity type expressed feeling an obligation to model self-love, and to empower and advocate for other Black women as a part of their identity. Some expressed using their own experiences and hardships as a model for how to navigate and succeed within an oppressive system. For example, Melanie, a 24-year-old graduate student shared her belief that activism is an integral component of her identity as a Black woman:

I think that being a Black woman and being an activist are not mutually exclusive. Like, I don't think that they can exist without one another. You can be "ignorance is bliss" all your life but at some point, as a Black woman, your experiences, and because of what you see around you, what you see reflected from other Black women, there is some point where there is an activist or an activation of activism, for lack of better phrases. And it's something that exists, I think, in all Black women. I don't think I'm a very unique case.

She later describes specific ways that she and other Black women use activism to empower others. In this example, Melanie described activism as being an inherent component of her identity as a Black woman due to the oppression that she has experienced.

Zahra, a 23-year-old undergraduate student shared a similar view on her identity as a Black woman and endorsed a "responsibility" to set an example for others. She first described how this responsibility is a part of her identity as a Black woman in general. Zahra stated, "Something unique about Black women is that we always have a drive to help others, to move forward despite the disadvantages that we face." Then she described how she has taken on this responsibility for herself as a part of her identity:

...I understand that I have to be an example for certain people I influence. I guess not only my siblings, but, my nieces and nephews. I always have to show them an example. Like, be an example to them during this time in my life.

These examples demonstrate the action-oriented identity type that some Black women may form in later phases of their gendered racial identity development. The Empowerment identity type represents ways that Black women make meaning from their

hardships and utilize them to aid in the development of other Black women. These examples indicate an advanced ability to not only acknowledge those hardships as part of their reality, but also to use them to help others as they build their own identity as Black women.

Taken together, these findings describe a multidimensional model that highlights a developmental process of Black women's gendered racial identity development. Identity types emerged from the data that were indicative of the influence of internalized gendered racial oppression on Black women's identity development. This was demonstrated through the ways in which participants' responses to gendered racism informed their attitudes and beliefs about how they interact in society and form their own meaning. The data illuminated a process by which Black women gained a critical awareness of their intersecting marginalized identities and gendered racism, and incorporated that awareness into forming their own definition of Black womanhood. In sum, based on the results of this study, Black women identified three distinct phases of gendered racial identity development, including a protective acceptance in which they internalized gendered racial oppression, a critical incident, which caused a shift in their identity perception, a middle phase where they managed their identity formation by grappling with their new critical awareness, and an internalization phase where they formed their own meaning of their identity despite the gendered racism that they experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The gendered racial identity development process for Black women in this study was informed by the extent to which women internalized gendered racism and developed an increased awareness of their intersectional identities as Black women. The data revealed that Black women's attitudes and beliefs towards their identity change through a phase-like process, consisting of three phases, critical incidents that cause shifts in identity, and nine identity types. The identity types represent different attitudes and beliefs that Black women hold towards their identity in regards to how Black women should act and interact in society. Black women's identity development has previously been explored (Thomas & King, 2007; Thomas et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2013; Porter & Dean, 2015), and a general linear process for racial identity development and gender identity development, separately, has been found (Cross, 1991; Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992). According to Porter and Dean (2015) Black women go through a process of first internalizing negative stereotypes of Black women and they gradually begin to externalize their own redefinitions of Black womanhood through their own self-expression.

However, the current study extends previous research by exploring the identity development process at the intersection of race and gender, and uncovering the unique process through which Black women gain a critical awareness of their intersecting identities and gendered racial oppression. The current study conceptualizes identity development in terms of phases rather than stages as previously used in social identity

research because the data have indicated that these phases are not permanent or linear. The data suggest that this phase-like process is iterative, non-linear, and contextual. Below, I discuss the process, phases, and identity types while situating them within the research literature.

Protective Acceptance Phase

The Protective Acceptance phase is an early phase of development where Black women felt external pressures to respond to societal stereotypes in various ways. Black women who endorsed this phase internalized negative stereotypes about Black women without questioning their origins (i.e. systems of oppression), and altered themselves to protect them from the negative effects of gendered racial oppression. In addition, Black women who endorsed this phase were more likely to have less critical awareness of the intersection of their identities and to hold stereotypical views of Black women. The Protective Acceptance phase included three identity types: (a) Assimilation, (b) Defiance, and (c) Adaptation.

The Protective Acceptance phase is similar to the Pre-Encounter identity stage of the Nigrescence theory, characterized by a lack of awareness and acceptance of negative stereotypes of Black individuals (Cross, 2001). However, the current study illuminates a beginning phase that is more specific to intersectional experiences of Black women in regards to an acceptance of European standards of beauty and how women should interact with others. The participants who endorsed the Protective Acceptance phase shared how the stereotypes of Black women that they encountered informed how they view their identity. Stereotypes about Black women's aesthetics are inherently intersectional as they are targeted towards Black women's features of being both Black

and a woman. At that specific intersection, Black women have been labeled as having hair that is too kinky, skin that is too dark, and bodies that are too thick; all of which are stereotypes that are not specifically targeted at women and men of other races (Collins, 2000; West, 1995).

In addition, participants did not explicitly articulate an understanding of the intersection of their gender and race. Participants in this study had some level of awareness of their identity from an early age, similar to the Black women in Thomas et al.'s (2011) study of gendered racial identity development. In contrast, participants in the current study acknowledged that the stereotypes about Black women as angry, strong, loud, and less desirable affected their perceptions of their identity and they were more hesitant to label the stereotypes as gendered racism or discrimination. Their hesitation indicated that they had not formed a critical awareness of their intersectional identity.

The Protective Acceptance phase differs from the pre-encounter stages in previous feminist identity development research. The Feminist Identity Model conceptualizes the beginning phase as a *passive* acceptance of societal standards of womanhood (Downing & Roush, 1985). In this stage, women exhibit an unawareness and denial of oppression against women. In contrast, what has emerged from the current study on Black women is the *active* and *protective* role of Black women's earlier acceptance of oppression. This further highlights how Black women, as multiply marginalized people, cannot passively accept the societal standards, but rather must develop ideals about their identity that allow them to survive in their environment. If Black women were to passively accept societal standards, they would continue to be pushed further down the social ladder. Instead, these findings suggest that Black women

develop ways to form and utilize their identity to protect themselves from gendered racial oppression.

Each of the identity types in the Protective Acceptance phase differed in how Black women chose to alter themselves in response to gendered racism. Those in the Assimilation identity type internalized negative gendered racial stereotypes that Black women were less desirable and inferior so they altered themselves to fit European standards and avoid being stereotyped. Black women's assimilation in this study was similar to assimilation in the Cross Racial Identity Scale (CRIS) characterized by more negative views towards Black culture and assimilation into White culture (Cross & Vandiver, 2001). These findings indicate that some Black women may assimilate in earlier phases of identity development, but in ways that are at the intersection of their race and gender in regards to how Black women should look and interact in society. It is important to note that assimilation in the current study differs from the act of shifting or navigating that has been highlighted in previous research. Shifting and navigation are strategies through which Black women are able to effectively survive in oppressive environments by temporarily altering their self-expression (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2009; Marsh, 2013). Instead, Black women with this Assimilation identity type expressed feeling an external pressure to "conform" because they were inferior to others.

Instead, participants with the Defiance identity type, accepted negative stereotypes about Black women's personal characteristics and altered themselves to be the opposite of the stereotypes so that they could change others' negative perceptions of them. The Defiance identity in this study is partially supported by self-determination (Thomas et al., 2011). Thomas et al. (2011) found that *self*-determination worked as an

internal motivator to help Black women overcome stereotypes throughout their development. In contrast, the Defiance identity type in this study was driven by an external pressure to prove other people wrong and to change negative perceptions. This is an important finding because it highlights that although defiance can be instrumental in helping Black women overcome adversity, it does not necessarily mean that Black women are not being negatively affected by gendered racism. More specifically, when Black women engage in defiance because of an external pressure to prove themselves, it may be more indicative of an earlier phase of identity development when there is lower awareness of one's identity. Though participants who endorsed the Defiance identity type had an awareness of stereotypes of Black women as angry and unfriendly, they were unable to label them and did not critically question their relation to historical oppression of Black women.

Scholars have articulated the unique intersectional oppression that exists for Black women rooted in historical stereotypes, such as the “Sapphire” stereotype that label Black women as having an attitude based on assumptions that Black people are more aggressive and because Black women's communication styles differ from Eurocentric expectations of femininity (i.e., being quiet and submissive) (West, 1995). These stereotypes originated during slavery when enslaved Black women were perceived to not fit Eurocentric standards of femininity and they served to oppress and marginalize Black women (Collins, 2000).

In contrast, individuals who endorsed the Adaptation identity type accepted the stereotype that they must be strong and altered themselves to remain strong in order to overcome gendered racism and societal pressures. The data highlighted three

characteristics of the Adaptation identity type: a) working harder, b) dealing with hardships, and c) restricting emotions. The Adaptation identity type is supported by previous Black feminist research that has highlighted the origins of the Strong Black woman stereotype as a historical phenomenon that dates back to slavery and influences how Black women perceive their gendered racial identity (Collins, 2000). In addition, previous gendered racial socialization research has demonstrated that Black women receive socialization messages from their families about Black women being strong and resilient against oppression (Brown et al., 2016; Nelson, Cardemill, & Adeoye, 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016). Interestingly, participants in the current study endorsed the “paradox” of the strong Black woman stereotype (Nelson et al., 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016). For example, Black women who utilized their strength to adapt and overcome also acknowledged the detrimental effects of the pressure to always remain strong (Nelson et al., 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016). The strong Black woman stereotype was also harmful to Black women’s identity development because it proved to be limiting to participant’s definitions of their identity. For example, Black women who endorsed the Adaptation identity type defined strength based on societal definitions of strength. Further, as indicated by the participants, although the adaptation served to protect them from oppression, they were still being negatively affected by the external pressures to remain strong.

Among all three of these identity types in the Protective Acceptance phase is an underlying protective function of their level of internalization of gendered racism. Due to the lower awareness of their intersecting identities they were more likely to accept negative stereotypes of Black women without questioning the systems of oppression

associated with them, and thus altered themselves as a form of protection from being stereotyped or experiencing gendered racial oppression. However, in reality, the protective function may not be as protective as they intend for it to be due to the external pressure they felt to prove themselves to others.

Critical Incident

The data demonstrated that the process of gendered racial identity development was heavily driven by the occurrence of critical incidents that incited increased critical awareness. Participants gave examples of gendered racism and environmental shifts that caused them to question these experiences as oppression based on their gender and race. Following the critical incident, their awareness expanded into a critical intersectional awareness of their gender and race as they compared and contrasted societal messages. How and when the critical incidents happened varied across participants with no particular pattern signifying the fluidity of the developmental process.

The critical incident aligns with previous identity development research, all of which have identified some sort of critical incident that causes a shift in identity perception (Cross, 2001; Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992). However, the current findings extend previous racial and gender identity research because it illuminates the process for Black women becoming aware of their intersectional identity. The critical incident in the current study closely resembles the process of identity interference when Black women become more aware of the incongruity between what it means to be Black and what it means to be a woman (Settles, 2006; Settles et al., 2008). The current study highlights that for Black women, this process entails making sense of and integrating the meaning of both of these identities and multiple forms of oppression (i.e. racism and

sexism) into their own understanding of being a Black woman. Critical incidents are an integral part of the identity meaning making process because these gendered racial experiences contribute to a significant shift in identity that then gets incorporated into their own meaning. Thus, these critical incidents incite a more conscious thought process about identity through which Black women go from low intersectional awareness to a more critical intersectional awareness of their identity and experiences of gendered racial oppression.

Identity Management Phase

Identity Management Phase is a post-critical incident phase where Black women have an increased awareness of gendered racism and their intersecting identities so they begin to incorporate their new awareness into their definition of being a Black woman in various ways. The meanings that participants endorsed in this phase were not their own internalized meanings independent from societal definitions because they described their identities as a response or reaction to societal expectations. In addition, participants indicated that they were “still figuring out” what their identity means to them. The Identity Management phase included three identity types, including: (a) Humanist, (b) Disempowerment, and (c) Resistance.

Previous racial and gender identity research has identified a similar middle stage of identity development during which individuals incorporate their new awareness into their identity. According to Nigrescence theory, Black individuals in the Immersion-Emersion phase either connect more with their own racial group or intentionally disconnect from the European race (Cross, 2001). According to the Feminist identity model, women in the Embeddedness-Emanation stage seek out more meaningful

relationships with other women and endorse greater gender consciousness of sexism and power dynamics (Downing & Roush, 1985). These findings are important because they emphasize that there is an inherent process within identity development in which individuals process their awareness. This phase demonstrates how Black women manage aspects of their identity during a critical shift in their worldviews of gendered racial identity and gendered racial oppression.

Black women who endorsed this phase expressed grappling with inconsistencies between socialization from their families and from their environment by picking and choosing which parts they felt applied to themselves. This process of “still trying to figure it out” closely resembles the identity interference that Settles (2006) described as a process of making sense of the inconsistencies between socialization messages from family and from the environment about what it means to be a Black woman. Similarly, Collins (2000) discussed a period in Black women’s development through which they try to make sense of the contradicting messages that Black women must be both strong and submissive. Gendered racial socialization research has demonstrated that Black women receive messages from family that they should be both feminine and strong, but then are scrutinized in other environments for not fitting the stereotypical roles of womanhood (Brown et al., 2016; Thomas & King, 2007). The Identity Management phase in Black women’s identity development exemplifies the process through which Black women begin to critically examine what their roles as being both Black and a woman mean to them within an oppressive system.

Each of the identity types in the Identity Management phase represented different ways that Black women managed their identity by incorporating their new awareness. For

example, some individuals endorsed a Humanist identity type who did not define their identity in terms of being Black or a woman. These participants incorporated a new increased awareness of the contradicting socialization messages and diversity of Black women, which led them to view identity labels as limiting to their identity as Black women. Humanist individuals viewed themselves as human to avoid the limits of societal labels that are assigned to their race and gender, similar to the humanist racial ideology of the MMRI (Sellers et al., 1998). It is important to note that the Humanist identity type of Black women is not synonymous with having low racial salience because those who endorsed the Humanist identity type expressed being very aware of their identity in public environments due to experiencing critical incidents of gendered racism and environmental shifts. In addition, the Humanist identity type in the current study differs from an internalized identity meaning in the internalization phase because they have chosen not to form a meaning based on their race and gender.

Other individuals, who endorsed the Disempowerment identity type managed their new awareness of gendered racism and conflicting societal messages by defining their identity based on the burden that they feel as Black women. The influence of conflicting societal messages on negative perceptions of identity is supported by gendered racial identity research that has found that conflicting messages can contribute to distress among Black women (Abrams et al., 2014; Settles, 2006). Black women expressed feeling overwhelmed and hopeless due to the oppression that they experienced at the intersection of their race and gender. This burden is heavy because Black women who endorsed this identity type are grappling with a new awareness of the simultaneous experience of racism and sexism, or gendered racism (Essed, 1991; Lewis & Neville,

2015). The Disempowerment identity type is also consistent with the oppressed minority ideology of the MMRI which refers to a viewpoint of racial identity based on the awareness of racial oppression that one experiences (Sellers et al., 1998). However, as the data indicated, the impact of this awareness may be heightened for Black women who endorse a Disempowerment identity type because they are beginning to realize that gendered racism also applies to themselves and their own experiences as Black women. These findings highlight a unique aspect of Black women's identity development that is different from other identity models. In particular, for individuals with the Disempowerment identity type, the two main components of their identity that are most salient are gendered racism and the conflicting messages they receive about what it means to be a Black woman. Therefore, the culmination of the two causes them to feel disempowered towards their identity.

In contrast, individuals who endorsed the Resistance identity type had an increased awareness of systems of oppression (i.e. sexism and racism), which caused them to resist any outside influence on their gendered racial identity by explicitly not trying to fit societal standards. It is important to note that the Resistance identity type is different from the Defiance identity type in the Protective Acceptance phase because resistance was used so that they can "remain" themselves and stay connected to their identity as Black women (not to prove others wrong). In addition, the Resistance identity differs from individuals in the Internalization phase because their identity is based on a response to societal expectations rather than their own internalization of their identity, and because the resistance still places a considerable amount of pressure on the individual. The Resistance identity type aligns with the Anti-White identity in the

Immersion-Emersion stage of the Nigrescence theory (i.e. an oppositional attitude to anything connected to White culture) (Cross, 2001). Relatedly, Sellers et al. (1998) identified the Nationalist racial ideology, which refers to a “pro-Black” stance toward the Black race exemplified through resistance and appreciation of Black culture. Cross (2001) suggests that individuals enter into this stage after an encounter experience increases their awareness of racial oppression and is often accompanied by an intensive immersion into their own culture. Similarly, Black women who endorsed the Resistance identity type expressed intentionally opposing any influence of expectations based on their race and gender (i.e. hair and appearance). Resistance identity women also consciously immersed themselves in their own culture as Black women by wearing natural hairstyles and African attire. The gender identity development models have not identified an identity component that is similar to the Resistance identity, perhaps because they have not assessed the identity development process of intersecting identities for Black women.

Internalization Phase

The Internalization phase is an advanced phase of identity development where Black women who view their race and gender as intersectional and hold a critical awareness of gendered racism form their own definition of their identity as Black women separate from societal definitions. The Internalization phase includes three identity types: (a) Embodiment, (b) Realist, and (c) Empowerment. Each of the identity types represent different ways that Black women internalize their own definition of what it means to be both Black and a woman.

Previous models theorize that as individuals gain more critical awareness of their identity and oppression associated with it, they are able to question it, reject parts of it, and form their own meaning (Cross, 2001; Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992; Sellers et al., 1998). The Internalization phase is aligned with the self-definition that Black women experience in which they begin to question external definitions of Black womanhood and redefine it for themselves (Collins, 2000; Porter & Dean 2015; Watson & Hunter, 2016). In the current study, Black women who endorsed the Internalization phase also redefined stereotypes specific to Black women on beauty, character traits, and being strong. Black women who endorsed the Internalization phase also expressed statements about their new appreciation for being Black and a woman coupled with their realization that holding these two identities together was something that gave them pride. This is most indicative of a shift in their gendered racial identity centrality (Lewis et al., 2017; Sellers et al., 1998) in which their race and gender are central components of their identity. In particular, participants were less likely to discuss situations where their race and gender was not a central component of their identity than participants in earlier phases.

The Internalization phase is different from internalization stages of previous gender and racial identity models because for Black women, internalization entails an inherent process of synthesizing their conceptualization of race and gender as simultaneous components of their identity. In other words, Black women begin to conceptualize their race and gender together as well as interlocking systems of oppression. This synthesizing of intersecting identities has not been observed with identity models that focus on race or gender alone.

Some participants who endorsed the Internalization phase formed positive definitions of their identity that became a part of who they were. Thus, they began to embody their identity by embracing and expressing all parts of their gendered racial identity despite whether or not they fit societal standards of beauty and strength. Previous research supports this idea that people's views of their identity become less rigid at later stages of development. For example, a similar process occurs in the Embeddedness-Emmanation stage of Feminist identity development during which women used their new awareness of their gender and sexism to reject sexist definitions of womanhood and form their own meaning (Downing & Roush, 1985). In addition, gendered racial identity research has identified a similar process through which Black women begin to incorporate their own ideals of their identity and outwardly express it amongst others (Porter & Dean, 2015; Stevens, 1997). Similarly, Black women who embodied their identity expressed that they were proud to express themselves in any way that they wanted (i.e. being loud, wearing natural hair, or crying publicly) without much concern for how others would perceive them or whether or not they fit a stereotype.

The Embodiment identity differs from Black women in earlier phases of identity development because they were no longer responding to an external pressure to prove themselves or fit stereotypes, and their identity was no longer dependent on societal definitions of being a Black woman. This was especially evident in regards to the Strong Black Woman stereotype in the Internalization phase. Black women redefined what being strong meant to them to go beyond the limitations of emotional restriction and dealing with hardships. They also described their strength as not necessarily being the central part of their identity acknowledging that there are many layers and varieties of Black women.

These redefinitions of strength align with previous research that has found many Black women redefine their own less rigid definitions of strength and feel less pressure to *always* be strong (Watson & Hunter, 2016). Together, these findings indicate that Black women at later phases of identity development are able to recognize the external definitions of Black womanhood and redefine them for themselves.

In contrast, participants who endorsed the Realist identity type in the Internalization phase acquired an advanced critical awareness of their identity that allowed them to hold both positive and negative aspects of their identity in their own internalized definition. Black women who endorsed this meaning type expressed positive perceptions of their identity, but also the frustration that they felt towards their lowered social position. Though they expressed feeling frustrated, sad, angry, and sometimes insecure due to gendered racial oppression, they still shared that they were very happy and proud of their identity overall. In addition, several participants described their meanings in terms of how they were able to navigate different environments to help relieve them from some of the gendered racism.

Previous research has demonstrated that a key component of identity development is the awareness of oppression that is linked to one's identity, and previous models all discuss how this awareness impacts one's perceptions of their identity. MMRI proposes that more awareness contributes to more recognition of oppression (Sellers et al., 1998). The Nigrescence theory and the Feminist identity model propose that more awareness of identity and oppression ultimately lead an individual to connect more with their identity and reject external ideals connected to oppression (Cross, 2001; Downing & Roush, 1985). Similarly, in this study, Black women who endorsed a realistic meaning expressed

a higher awareness than participants at earlier phases. The realistic meaning is also supported by the synthesis stage of Feminist Identity development; during which women accept the discrimination they have experienced and incorporate the positive attributes of being a woman into their identity (Downing & Roush, 1985). Black women in this study shared how the positive attributes of Black womanhood, such as the diversity among Black women, the Black woman community, and the intelligence of Black women were all incorporated into their meaning even though they were aware that society does not view them in this same way.

The navigation aspect of the realistic meaning type is consistent with “shifting” their speech or temporarily altering the way that they dress because of societal standards (Johnson et al., 2015). Stevens (1997) proposed that Black women also obtain bicultural competence through their identity development suggesting that Black women have an ability to coexist in oppressive environments through navigation. Through navigation and shifting, they are able to survive in society and remain connected to their identity as Black women. Black women in this study endorsed this ability as they did not wish to change themselves for external assumptions, but instead used their awareness of expectations to navigate their environments. The Realist identity type is important because it represents an advanced identity process by which Black women specifically grapple with the positive and negative aspects of their intersectional identity. This finding shows that some Black women are able to hold both a critical awareness of gendered racial oppression and still feel positively about their identity as Black women.

Black women who endorsed the Empowerment identity type reached an action-oriented level of their identity development. A key component of the Empowerment

identity type was that these women wanted to aid in the development of other Black women. Empowering other Black women as a part of one's identity is supported by later stages of Nigrescence theory and the Feminist identity model characterized by a commitment to the advancement of others in one's social identity group. The Empowerment identity in the current study differs from previous research because Black women shared ways that they wish to empower Black women that are specific to their experiences as Black women, such as how to engage in self-love in the midst of a gendered racial oppressive environment, how to speak up about the injustices that Black women experience, and the importance of educating oneself about the history of Black women.

Contextual Influences on Gendered Racial Identity

Contextual factors such as socioeconomic status, environmental demographics, content of gendered racial socialization, age, and awareness level of gendered racial oppression all influenced where participants were in their identity development. The data indicated that many participants held more than one identity type simultaneously. This non-linear progression is similar to how the MMRI and Feminist identity model conceptualize identity development as a fluid non-linear process (Downing & Roush, 1985; Sellers et al., 1998), but differs from the Nigrescence theory linear process (Cross, 2001). For example, some participants endorsed the Embodiment identity type in regards to their redefinition of the Strong Black Woman stereotype, but also endorsed the Assimilation identity type in regards to their physical characteristics as Black women. Given that different types of critical incidents occurred periodically throughout their development, it seems possible that women can experience an identity shift in one aspect

of their identity progressing them to an advanced identity phase in one aspect, while they are still in an earlier phase in another aspect of their identity.

Overall, there was a developmental trend in the data, such that, older women in later phases had an increased awareness of gendered racial identity, oppression, and their ability to form their own meaning of their identity. Though not always the case, the older participants (22 years old and older) who were in graduate school tended to be at later phases of their identity development and younger undergraduate students (between 18 and 19 years old) tended to be at earlier phases. Thus, this pattern could also be related to intersections with education and not just age (Wilcox, 1996). In addition, every participant in this study expressed some level of awareness of identity-based oppression at early ages, which aligns with previous qualitative work on Black women's identity development (Thomas et al., 2011) and is different from Feminist identity and Womanist identity models that do not capture identity development for Black women (Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992).

In the current study, a majority of the participants in the Protective Acceptance phase were younger in age and had received more stereotypical socialization messages about what it means to be a Black woman (i.e., Strong Black woman stereotype and Black women as less desirable) similar to the gendered racial socialization messages identified in previous on gendered racial socialization (Brown et al., 2016). The younger age and stereotypical nature of their gendered racial socialization indicated that Black women in this phase may lack awareness of their gendered racial identity because they may have not yet experienced critical incidents that have significantly shifted how they view their identity.

Though all participants self-identified as Black women, several disclosed that they had parents from various racial and cultural backgrounds. For example, one individual had a White mother, one was originally from the Dominican Republic, and several others had parents from various African countries (e.g., Camaroon, Nigeria, Liberia). The individual who had a White mother shared that she identifies as a Black woman because others perceive her to be Black based on her phenotypic features. Her identity development closely resembled the other participants because she also had similar experiences of gendered racism that shaped her identity as a Black woman. The participant from the Dominican Republic and the participants with parents from African countries, shared ways that their parents' rigid views of Black womanhood greatly reflected the expectations that Black women should adhere to traditional gender norms, which also aligned with a majority of the other participants with American parents. Most of the participants with immigrant parents were more likely to reject their parent's traditional views of Black womanhood. These findings further emphasize the great variability across Black women that is often overlooked or not captured in identity research.

Several participants in this sample identified as lower socioeconomic status at some point during their childhood. Two participants in particular described times when they were homeless or lived in undesirable living conditions with their mother and siblings. A common sentiment shared among these participants was the way that the strong image of their mother through their financial hardships was incorporated into their identity meaning. These participants shared their observations of their mothers during this difficult time, revering them as strong and invincible to be able to provide for them

despite their circumstances. Both participants who had experienced homelessness endorsed an identity type in the Protective Acceptance phase at the time of the interview, indicating that perhaps their economic hardships significantly contributed to their ideals of protecting themselves from gendered racial oppression in ways that resembled their mothers' protective strategies. Through their struggle, they formed a mentality that Black women must either adapt to oppression by way of remaining strong or alter themselves in order to defy stereotypes.

Environmental shifts were also a common contributing factor amongst the participants. Similarly, the MMRI acknowledges that racial salience can change depending on the situation or environment of the individual (Sellers et al., 1998). Every participant in this study mentioned some experience of shifting environments either from predominantly Black to predominantly White spaces or vice versa. They shared how these environmental shifts increased their awareness and shifted how they viewed their identity. For example, moving from Black environments to White environments prompted an increased awareness of stereotypes for Black women, which led participants to question if they fit the stereotypes. Individuals who shifted from predominantly White environments to predominantly Black spaces shared having similar experiences of gendered racial microaggressions, such as being labeled as not fitting the stereotypical images of Black women. This increased awareness of societal perceptions contributed to the participants' understanding of their own identity by causing them to become more consciously aware of their identity as Black women. This may be indicative of why many participants who were in the Identity Management phase at the time of the interview had

experienced more recent environmental shifts. Hence, why they were actively figuring out how to incorporate their new awareness into their identity.

Similarly, home environment and content of socialization messages from family members greatly influenced the participants' meaning making process. Some participants in this study received more negative or stereotypical messages about Black women from family members. In sum, those who received more negative or stereotypical messages of Black women from their mothers and grandmothers also endorsed attitudes and beliefs that reflected more negative perceptions of Black women at some point in their development. Others who received more positive messages from family about Black women did not express having negative perceptions of their identity throughout their development, but expressed having more positive internalized meanings of their identity from an early age. These findings extend gendered racial socialization research by demonstrating how these different types of messages can affect Black women's identity development (Brown et al., 2016).

Due to the overwhelming research support for the Strong Black Woman schema being a central component of Black women's identity, it was not surprising that every participant in this study indicated strength as a part of their identity as Black women (Donovan et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2016; Watson & Hunter, 2016). However, it was interesting to find that participants differed on where their determination to be strong came from. Participants in the Protective Acceptance phase with the Adaptation identity type endorsed strength based on an external societal pressure to be strong. Whereas, participants in the Internalization phase with the Embodiment identity type endorsed an internal desire to be strong based on their own less rigid ideals of strength. Redefining

their strength and relying on their own internal disposition allowed them to feel liberated to express their sadness, anger, and frustration.

Three other factors that were mentioned among the participants as contributing to their gendered racial identity development were dating experiences, social media, and the value of the Black woman community. A majority of participants specifically spoke about how their dating experiences with Black and White men increased their awareness of the devaluation of Black women in society. Social media helped increase awareness in a positive way for some participants by connecting them with empowering groups of Black women. In contrast, participants also reported the negative effects of social media, such as exposing them to forms of gendered racial microaggressions. Many participants also spoke about how much they valued the community and support of Black women in their lives regardless of where they were in their identity development. This was interesting because it indicates that Black women who are at earlier phases of development or who are feeling disempowered by their identity still have some desire to connect more with their identity and other Black women.

Conclusion

The current study identified an iterative, non-linear, contextual meaning making process of Black women's gendered racial identity development. A phase-like identity development process emerged with identity types that represent how Black women make sense of the intersections between their identities and systems of oppression. The findings demonstrate that throughout their development, Black women become increasingly more critically aware of their intersectional identity and form their own meaning through

integrating their socialization, rejecting the influence of oppression on their identity, and personally redefining what it means to be a Black woman.

These findings are consistent with previous identity research that has demonstrated a general process of internalization of oppression to internalization of one's own personal meaning (Cross, 2001, Downing & Roush, 1985; Ossana et al., 1992; Porter & Dean, 2015). This study extends previous research by illuminating how this meaning making process occurs as Black women grapple with intersecting oppressions and competing socialization messages about what it means to be a Black woman. Much of the results of the current study differ widely from previous models that have claimed to address an identity development process for all women or all Black individuals. Many previous studies have not utilized qualitative methods to better understand the nuances and complexities of gendered racial identity development. Thus, the current study is a significant advancement in the research literature because it emphasizes the importance of utilizing intersectional methodological and analytic approaches when exploring the experiences of multiply marginalized individuals, such as Black women.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study has several strengths and fills gaps in the literature, there are still a few limitations. Specifically, the current study had sampling and methodological limitations. The participants of the current study were Black women currently attending a predominately White institution in the Southeastern United States. Therefore, this sample is limited in age range, socioeconomic status, environment, and education level. It is likely that participants' education level and college environment influenced their knowledge and awareness of their identity. Although the sample ranged in age from 18 to

41 years old, and several participants reported experiencing some poverty in previous time periods, the majority of this sample was in good educational and financial standing at the time of the interview. As indicated in the results, contextual factors such as these are likely to greatly impact individual experiences through identity development. Future researchers should examine identity development among Black women in a variety of contexts outside of college institutions and in other regions of the country. Given the time-span that is being discussed across the development, it is possible that the participants are not able to give the most accurate recollections of their past development. Thus, future research should collect data on a variety of ages beginning with adolescence and perhaps conduct a longitudinal study to further explore the developmental process for Black women.

In addition, though the individual semi-structured interviews worked well with the intimate nature of the data, multiple interviews could be beneficial due to the complexities and nuances of the identity development process for Black women. Future researchers could schedule multiple interviews with participants in advance to account for the time and accommodations needed to gain more in-depth information in interviews. This study extends the literature in illuminating a multidimensional model of Black women's gendered racial identity development. Future researchers would benefit from utilizing this model with other samples of Black women to create an intersectional quantitative measure to assess aspects of gendered racial identity development for Black women.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

Project Title: Exploring the Meaning Making Process of Black Women's Gendered Racial Identity Development

Responsible Project Investigators: Marlene Williams, M.A.

Introduction/Purpose:

Hello, my name is Marlene Williams, and I am a 3rd year doctoral student at the University of Tennessee in the Counseling Psychology program. You are invited to participate in a study that is examining the experiences of Black women. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of Black women's gender and racial identity development. More specifically, I will ask you to discuss your personal current and previous experiences pertaining to your race and gender.

Procedures:

As a participant in this study you will be asked questions about your identification as a Black woman. The interview will last for approximately 60 to 90 minutes and take place on campus at an agreed mutual location between you and the researcher. This study is completely voluntary and you can stop participating at any time. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped, and I may take notes during the interview in order to accurately record the information you provide. The audio file will be used for transcription purposes only, and your identity will remain completely confidential. I expect to conduct only one interview; however, a follow-up conversation may be needed for further clarification. If so, I will contact you by phone at a number that is most convenient to you. Also, if you have any questions about the nature of the interview, you are encouraged to ask at any time. Data will be stored in a password-protected computer on the University of Tennessee, Knoxville campus.

Risks:

Participation in this interview should not cause some discomfort outside of what is normally encountered in daily life. It is possible you can become upset or offended by some of the questions. You may choose not to respond, you can choose to discontinue your participation at any time during the study or you can contact the researcher after the interview who will refer you to the counseling center. In addition, if you experience any psychological distress during or after this study you can contact the Counseling Center at (865) 974-2251 or Knox County Health Department at (865) 215-5400.

Benefits:

A potential benefit of your participation is that more issues specific to Black women may be explored. Your participation in this study will help identify some unique concerns that may impact the overall well being of Black women. We hope that this study can be applied to better understand and address mental health issues of Black women that are related to their identity.

Alternatives and Subject’s Rights:

There will be no negative consequences if you decide not to participate. You have the right to discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can choose not to participate in this research study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, I will immediately erase all audio files. You can also skip any questions that you prefer not to answer.

Confidentiality:

Interview data generated for this study including individual names or any additional identifiable information will be given pseudonyms or will not be used. Data will be stored securely on the researcher’s passcode protected computer. The data will be made available to me, my supervising research professor Dr. Jioni Lewis, and researchers conducting data analysis. All audio recordings will be destroyed once the project is completed (December, 2018).

Incentives:

As a token of our appreciation for you taking the time to participate in this study you will be awarded a \$20 gift card.

Contact Information:

Any questions you may have about this study may be directed to me, Marlene Williams by email: mwill179@vols.utk.edu. For additional information regarding the rights of human participants in research, please contact either my supervising research professor, Dr. Jioni Lewis at jalewis@utk.edu or the University of Tennessee IRB Compliance Officer at utkirb@utk.edu or (865) 974-7697. The IRB is a review board which monitors the research process and ensures the ethical and legal conduct of human subjects’ research at UT. In addition, if you experience any psychological distress during or after this study you can contact the University Counseling Center at (865) 974-2251 or Knox County Health Department at (865) 215-5400.

Consent:

I am at least 18 years of age and I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. If I have additional questions, I have been told who to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above, and I agree to be audio recorded.

I understand that I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Participant’s Signature

Date

Researcher’s Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

SCRIPT:

Hello, my name is Marlene Williams, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am currently conducting a study on Black women's experiences. The interview will last 45 - 60 minutes and is completely voluntary. If at any time you are uncomfortable or wish to stop, please let me know, and I will terminate the interview immediately. I want to remind you that I am recording the interview for transcription purposes, but your identity will remain confidential. Do you understand what I have said to you? Are you ready to begin?

Intro: We all have personal and social identities. Personal identities are how we self identify. Social identities are how we identify with a group of people with similar characteristics, such as race and gender. We often have multiple social group identities that influence each other and people often make sense of their different social identities in different ways. Today, I will focus on asking you about your social group identity as a Black woman.

1. Discuss a time/situation that influenced your development as a Black woman.
2. What have you learned about being a Black woman?
3. How did what you have learned influence your identity, development, or how you feel about your identity?
4. What does it mean to identify as a Black woman?
5. What does it mean to identify as a Black woman in the United States society?
6. How did you come to this definition? What has contributed to this definition? (Has this always been your definition?)
7. How has your definition of being a being a Black woman evolved as you have developed?
8. How do you express your Black woman identity?
9. What are advantages or disadvantages to expressing your Black woman identity?
10. How do you feel about being a Black woman? How did women in your family feel about being Black women?
11. Are there unique, different, or special things about being a *Black* woman?
12. What are the ways in which dominant culture has influenced your identity as a Black woman? (To what extent do you feel as though racism and sexism have affected your life experiences as a Black woman? (*What are your views on racism and sexism?))

Anything else?

Script: Thank you for your time and thoughtful reflections. Please contact me if you have any concerns or questions about this study.

APPENDIX C

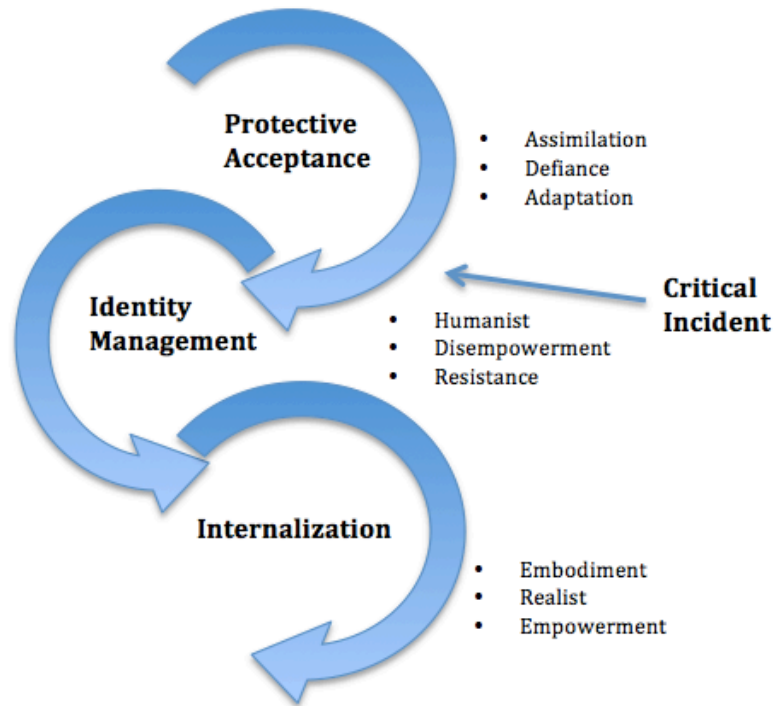


Figure 1. Process Model of Black Women's Gendered Racial Identity Development

APPENDIX D

Table 1
Demographics

	<i>n</i>	% of total
Age		
18 – 21	9	47
22 – 25	5	26
26 – 41	5	26
Gender		
Woman	19	100
Race		
African American	16	84
Bi-racial	3	16
Ethnicity		
Nigerian and Sierra Leonean	1	5
Dominican	1	5
African, European, Native American	1	5
Afro-Dominican-American	1	5
African American	12	63
Classification		
Undergraduate	11	58
Graduate	8	42
Sexual orientation		
Heterosexual	14	74
Bisexual	2	11
Demisexual	1	5
Socioeconomic Status		
Working class	10	53
Middle class	2	11
Upper Middle class	2	11

Note: *N* = 19

APPENDIX E

Table 2
Summary of Phases and Identity Types

Phase	Identity
<p>Protective Acceptance Phase: Limited awareness of intersectional identity and gendered racism; external (societal) pressure of stereotypes cause them to accept responsibility to alter themselves for protection from gendered racism; lack critical questioning of systems of power and origins of gendered racism and stereotypes of Black women stereotypes.</p>	<p>Assimilation: Alter self to assimilate to Eurocentric standards of beauty and characteristics (i.e. straightening hair, talking styles).</p> <p>Defiance: Do the opposite of stereotypes to change other people's perceptions of Black women (i.e. overtly being more friendly to break stereotype that Black women are angry and unapproachable).</p> <p>Adaptation: Restrict emotions and remain strong to adapt to GRO. Strength defined by societal standards (i.e. Black women should not cry or ask for help and should show others that they are strong).</p>
<p>Identity Management Phase: Post critical incident; increased critical awareness of intersectional identity and gendered racism; manage identity by incorporating new awareness into their beliefs and attitudes about what it means to be a Black woman; less external pressure to change self; has not formed own internalized identity meaning.</p>	<p>Humanist: Manages identity by choosing no label for identity based on gender and race to avoid being limited to labels. Views self more in terms of being a human.</p> <p>Disempowerment: Manages identity by incorporating new awareness of GRO, which contributes to feeling disempowered. Burden of Black womanhood predominates identity meaning.</p> <p>Resistance: Manages identity by striving for perseverance of identity as a Black woman through active resistance and challenging of Eurocentric norms.</p>
<p>Internalization Phase: Form own meaning of Black woman identity; no longer affected by societal norms or expectations for Black women; possess critical awareness of intersectional identity and gendered racism; critically question and identify experiences of gendered racism.</p>	<p>Embodiment: Embrace and express own positive meaning of intersectional identity despite societal norms.</p> <p>Realist: Able to hold critical awareness of both GRO and own positive internalized meaning.</p> <p>Empowerment: Identity as Black woman inherently includes empowering Black women.</p>

APPENDIX F

Table 3
Summary of Critical Incidents

Critical Incident Types	Critical Incident Impact on Development Process
Microaggressions based on intersection of gender and race	Hyperawareness: Black women become extremely aware of the diversity among Black women, their intersectional identity, external negative perceptions of Black women, gendered racial oppression, and origins of Black women stereotypes.
Environmental shift between predominately Black and White environments	Reflection: Black women begin to question how well they fit or do not fit stereotypes of Black women. Black women begin to challenge gendered racial socialization messages about Black women from family and external environment.
Observations of mother's strength in opposition to gendered racism	Rejection: Black women begin to reject socialization messages and stereotypes that they have learned about Black women (i.e., traditional gender roles in Black culture, Black women are angry/strong/inferior, Black women have to adhere to Eurocentric norms of femininity).

VITA

Marlene Williams was born in Houston, Texas. She obtained her Master's degree in Psychology at Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas in 2014 and then studied Counseling Psychology at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee from 2014 – 2018. She defended her dissertation on October 1, 2018. She is currently completing a predoctoral psychology internship at Florida International University Counseling Center and will graduate with her doctoral degree in Summer 2019.