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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Navigating the Workplace: The Costs and Benefits of Shifting Identities at Work among Early Career U.S. Black Women

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Abstract Although much progress has been made in race relations in the United States, discrimination still persists in the workplace. As a result, Black women, among individuals from other underrepresented groups, develop coping strategies, such as identity shifting, to diminish the negative consequences of discrimination. We used the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory to examine shifting racial, gender, and class identities among early career (recent college graduates) U.S. Black women working in predominantly White environments. Drawing on ten semi-structured interviews with college-educated Black women, data were analyzed with an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The results revealed two major themes: (a) benefits of identity shifting and (b) the costs of identity shifting, the latter with five subthemes: (a) managing interpersonal rejection: frozen effect, (b) assimilation to the dominant culture and inauthenticity, (c) confronting and dismantling stereotypes, (d) model Black citizen, and (c) mixed feelings toward identity shifting. The findings indicate that Black women vacillate between the benefits and costs of identity shifting, altering their dialect and behavior to meet social norms. Our study's implications suggest the necessity of a multicultural approach by employers to affirm their workers' social identities, strengthen employee relationships, and lessen the need for shifting identities.

Women face a number of institutional barriers in the workplace, including, most notably, gender discrimination and unequal pay. However, like other Women of Color, racism often poses an additional barrier for Black women (Bell et al. 2003; Sanchez-Hucles and Davis 2010). Thus, sexism and racism, this double-marginalization (Bell 1990), constitutes a unique experience for Black women in the workplace. A combination of educational and professional obstacles, including racism and sexism, all exact psychological tolls on Black women. As a result, they often feel compelled to present to the world a different self or an image they perceive will be more acceptable to others (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004). This process is referred to as *identity shifting*, also known as identity negotiation, which is the alteration of one's actions, speech, and appearance to adjust to cultural norms within a given environment (Jackson 2002). Identity shifting involves changing not only how one speaks, but also one's behavioral patterns and other factors that compose an individual's sense of self. At times, identity shifting is a conscious act, given that the individual often is fully aware of her reactions. Other times, shifting is done unconsciously in an automatic manner by changing one's thoughts and ways of thinking to fit in with a dominant social group (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004). Thus, Black women may shift their identities to conform to the professional standards and dominant cultural values of the workplace among colleagues who do not identify as Black or

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as a woman, while also managing the expectations and values associated with their roles in Black communities (Bell 1990).

An example of this identity shifting can be seen in Issa Rae's HBO show *Insecure,* which highlights racial politics in the U.S. workplace, as well as the frustrations Black individuals experience in corporate offices (Ajayi 2016). For example, in one particular episode, a confident young Black lawyer named "Rasheeda" refused to code-switch (altering between two or more languages) in the workplace; she spoke in a loud tone and used casual talk with her co-workers. As a result, her behavior raised concerns among her colleagues, who subsequently questioned her work ethics. Black women often report that their White counterparts question their credibility and authority on the job, and they consistently encounter race, gender, and class-based stereotypes in the workplace (Catalyst 2004). Working while being a Black woman in a predominantly White workspace may elicit the accusation of being angry and difficult, and many Black women feel pressured in their behavior and speech to represent all Black people as a race (Pollak and Niemann 1998). For example, in a study on racial solo status, a situation when only one member of a racial group is present, Sekaquaptewa et al. (2007) found that Black women were more likely to feel like race representatives, believe that their work performance would be generalized to their race, and believe that they would endure greater self-handicapping (e.g., attributing external factors as responsibility for poor performance) relative to their White women counterparts. These findings suggest that when Black women are considered tokens at work, early in their career, this may cause them to become concerned about the reputation of their racial group and their job performance.

Exploring Identity Shifting among Black Women

Situational factors (e.g., identity) can dictate whether one uses or downplays certain abilities or whether one adopts or suppresses behaviors in different environments, such as the workplace (Spencer et al. 1997). As such, the primary theoretical framework utilized throughout our research is the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST). Combining a phenomenological approach with Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems, the interaction between qualities of an individual and their environment, PVEST illustrates how an individual's ability to understand societal expectations, stereotypes, and biases influences how one will adapt to different cultural contexts across one's lifespan (Gordon and Gergen 1968; Spencer et al. 1997). We contend that the dominant European culture historically has shaped and continues to shape U.S. Black women's identities in particular contexts, such as the workplace. Furthermore, PVEST framework posits that individuals may experience stress (e.g., discrimination or isolation) due to risk contributors

(e.g., race, SES, gender) and subsequently may develop reactive coping methods, such as altering one's behaviors to fit a given cultural environment. Moreover, these reactive coping behaviors may become stable coping responses to make up one's self concept (Spencer 1995). The components of PVEST propose a framework for understanding both the shared and unique experiences of Black women in the United States. This theoretical framework assists in exploring the influence of a cultural context on the identity development and formation among Black women in the workforce. Additionally, the model scaffolds one's understanding of how Black women navigate life situations that shape their identities across career stages.

To confront the historically-imposed stereotypes of being angry, sexually promiscuous, and strong (West 1995), Black women engage in identity shifting by adopting dual identities that appease both White and Black communities (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004; McDowell 2008). Previous literature (e.g., Jackson 2002; Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004) supports the notion that identity negotiation among Black women is multidimensional and has significance primarily because it occurs in the daily lives of Black women. Additionally, the concept of intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008) purports that individuals with multiple subordinate identities (e.g., Black women) do not usually fit the prototype of their respective subordinate groups, and thus they will experience subtle or invisible forms of discrimination. As a result, Black women may use different coping strategies, such as identity shifting, in the workplace to protect themselves against experiences of discrimination, invisibility, and marginalization. Because of the daily engagement in identity negotiation, work-life can become psychologically exhausting and stressful. For this reason, investigating this shifting among early career Black women is vital given that the impact of discrimination on stress has implications for well-being and work outcomes (O'Brien et al. 2016).

Identity negotiation theory consist of negotiating sociocultural membership identity in intercultural and interpersonal communication settings (Ting-Toomey 2005). Shih et al. (2013) further define identity shifting as deemphasizing a negatively-valued identity and replacing it with a positively-regarded identity. Collectively, Ting-Toomey's (2005) and Shih et al.'s (2013) theories of identity shifting are useful and shed insight on the conceptualization of identity shifting as altering cultural behaviors and languages to deemphasize a negatively-valued identity. For example, when prompted by environmental cues, a member of an underrepresented group who engages in identity shifting makes their negatively-valued identities less prominent or stereotypical (Clair et al. 2005). Moreover, Black women may receive societal messages that their Black vernacular language is not appropriate for their work or academic environments. Consequently, they may feel compelled to "talk White," a phrase oftentimes used

within Black communities to represent "proper" English. Due to the prevailing stereotype of Black women as less intelligent than their White counterparts, language choices in different contexts, such as predominantly White workplaces, can challenge or increase Black women's credibility among her colleagues (Scott 2013). For instance, Rasheeda in *Insecure* maintained her Black vernacular language in the predominantly White workplace and thus her credibility was questioned by some of her colleagues (Ajayi 2016).
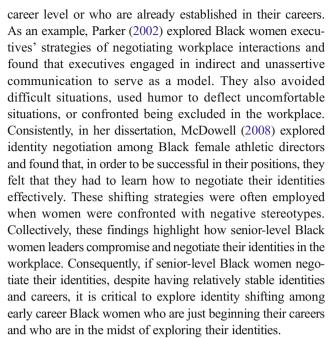
In addition to altering language, shifting identities can take place in the form of altering one's behavior. In exploring identity shifting among Black women, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) revealed that 58% of their 333 respondents reported that at times they changed the way they acted to "fit in" or be accepted by White people. Commonly, shifting identity was done in an effort to increase White people's comfort level around Black people. The aforementioned studies imply that there are differences in the negotiation of multiple-oppressed identities based on concerns with being judged. Differences in altering one's cultural behavior and language as a strategy for identity shifting will be the focus of the current work. In conclusion, the complexity of identity shifting among Black women merits further examination.

Costs and Benefits of Shifting Identities

The shifting of one's identity can be regarded as adaptive, which allows Black women to explore different aspects of their self-concept and aid in their interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds. In this sense, identity shifting can be understood as a source of strength (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2004; Jackson 2010). However, the pressure to negotiate identities, particularly in the workplace, can be burdensome for Black women. Having to shift identities often produces internal conflict and contributes to distorted perceptions of the self. In their study on identity shifting, Bell et al. (2003) included examples of Black women who expressed that they did not want to conceal or deny their racial identity. Further, focus groups conducted by Scott (2013) suggested that among some young Black women, emotions arise when they tried to resist portraying stereotypical actions by altering their behaviors. Given these differences in the positive and negative perceptions of engagement in identity shifting among Black women, the current study will address the need to determine the extent to which identity shifting is perceived as being beneficial or problematic for early career U.S. Black women.

The Influence of Career Stage on Identity Shifting

A substantial amount of research (Harris 2007; McDowell 2008; Thomas and Hollenshead 2001) exists that is related to identity shifting among Black women who are at the mid-

career level or who are already established in their careers. As an example, Parker (2002) explored Black women executives' strategies of negotiating workplace interactions and found that executives engaged in indirect and unassertive communication to serve as a model. They also avoided difficult situations, used humor to deflect uncomfortable situations, or confronted being excluded in the workplace. Consistently, in her dissertation, McDowell (2008) explored identity negotiation among Black female athletic directors and found that, in order to be successful in their positions, they felt that they had to learn how to negotiate their identities effectively. These shifting strategies were often employed when women were confronted with negative stereotypes. Collectively, these findings highlight how senior-level Black women leaders compromise and negotiate their identities in the workplace. Consequently, if senior-level Black women negotiate their identities, despite having relatively stable identities and careers, it is critical to explore identity shifting among early career Black women who are just beginning their careers and who are in the midst of exploring their identities.

Understanding how Black women shift their identities early in their career adds to literature on the impact of shifting in the career trajectory to upper-tier positions among Black women. Although the number of Women of Color leaders in the workplace has increased, the underrepresentation of such leaders remains prevalent (Sanchez-Hucles and Davis 2010). Consequently, Bell and Nkomo (2001) argue that Women of Color experience the *sticky floor*, barriers posed by racism and sexism, which provides challenges for advancing to and maintaining leadership positions. With respect to Black women, shifting identities early in one's career may be a developed skillset to negotiate the sticky floor to reach leadership positions. Focusing on the population of early career Black women who are recent college graduates can add to the experiences of Black women in achieving advanced leadership positions. At the time of our study, there is little-to-no research on the consequences of shifting for early stage relative to senior-career level Black women.

The Current Research

The recent literature on identity formation and presentation has addressed structural racism and sexism faced by Black women in the workplace. However, few studies have explored the perceptions of involvement and influence of context on identity shifting among early career Black women. The post-baccalaureate period is a segment period among emerging adults (generally ages 21–25 years-old) characterized by exploring their life options and identities (Arnett 2000). Past research suggests that, although some emerging adults view the time period after graduation as exciting and empowering, others may become psychologically distressed as they leave

college in search for meaningful careers (Kenny and Sirin 2006; Murphy et al. 2010). A study conducted by O'Brien et al. (2016) explore the effects of interpersonal discrimination on physical and psychological well-being and performance on early career STEM academics. The results show that perceptions of interpersonal discrimination led to greater levels of stress. However, if early career STEM academicians had supervisor support, this buffered the effects of interpersonal discrimination. Although significant, their study's sample consisted of primarily White women and male participants, while neglecting a consideration of race and gender discrimination. Exploring how career stage impacts participation in identity shifting or outcomes associated with identity shifting among early career Black women is necessary because it has implications for career trajectory and job promotion.

Consequently, there are conflicting ideas between whether an early career Black woman should engage in culturally-endorsed shifting identities for professional advancement or rather resist assimilating to the dominant culture to portray one's authentic identities in the workplace. We sought to understand the lived experiences toward the development of identity shifting of early career young Black women in a predominantly White U.S. workplace. Through such understanding of experiences of early career Black women, workplace dynamics for employers and employees can be more cooperative.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Semi-structured and audio-taped interviews were conducted with ten college-educated Black women who were in their early career stage between October 2013 and January 2014. In 2016, a chapter explored the perceived race and gender identities and involvement in identity negotiation among Black women (Carter-Sowell et al. 2016). Specifically, this current article advances the findings to focus on the benefits and costs of identity shifting among Black women. Ranging from 22 to 28 years of age ($M = 25$, $SD = 1.84$) and hailing from six states across the United States, the women all lived in or near a predominantly Black community, but worked in a predominantly White work environment. Participants worked in predominantly White spaces, but lived in majority Black urban spaces because the semi-structured interviews were a part of a larger study that explored identity shifting in both predominantly White and predominantly Black environments.

Each of the women was employed in their current workplace for 3 years or less ($M = 1.67$ years, $SD = .75$). In addition, each participant self-identified as a Black/African American woman and reported that her biological parents also identified as Black/African American. All participants attained at least a bachelor's degree in the past 5 years. Participants worked in a variety of professions, including student affairs in higher education, case management, family services, physical therapy, and healthcare. Six of ten participants possessed a Master's degree and one participant has a doctoral degree. One of the ten was married, whereas the other nine were single, and each identified as heterosexual. Each participant was interviewed once for approximately one hour (range = 60 to 90 min) via video chat (e.g., Skype, FaceTime, or Google Chat). All participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity.

To reach a diverse sample of participants from different regions of the United States, emails were sent to professional and personal networks and were posted on social media websites (e.g., Facebook). We also employed the snowball technique, in which an identified respondent who was eligible to participate in the study was asked to identify and recommend another eligible participant. To be eligible to participate in our study, participants had to: (a) self-identify as a Black/African American woman, (b) hold a bachelor's degree that was earned in the past 5 years, (c) work in a predominantly White environment in the past year, and (d) live in a majority-Black urban area or cities where the Black population percentage ranged from 10% to 49% ($M = 31.28\%$, $SD = 14.69$) (e.g., Atlanta, Georgia). All participants were treated in accordance with APA guidelines and ethics, and the Institutional Review Board at Colorado State University approved the study. All verbal and written communication explained that the goals of the study were: (a) to learn about ways in which Black women may or may not alter their language/dialect or behavior to fit the norm of work, social, and familial environments and (b) to explore how Black women interpret these experiences. All participants were compensated $10 after completion of the interview.

Prior to the data collection process, pilot interviews were conducted to determine if the questions were appropriate and effective in eliciting responses from the participants. A pilot interview was conducted with one Black woman, who, as a recent college graduate, resided in the Atlanta metro area and worked in a predominantly White environment. The purpose of the pilot interview was to determine which questions needed restructuring or omission. A few questions were restructured in order to improve the interview questions. Some of the original questions that were excluded from the final interview questions include: "How do you define the term identity?," "What is the importance of being Black/African American?," and "What is the importance of being a Black/African American woman?" (The full interview schedules for both the pilot and actual study can be accessed as an online supplement.)

For the final interviews, before asking about their involvement in identity shifting, as the first author, I asked more general questions about the participants' career trajectories and the importance of their race, gender, and class identities.
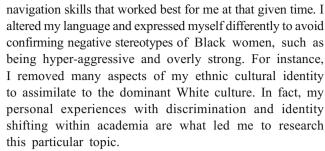
Participants were encouraged to speak about their perspectives on how they describe (a) their identities, (b) self-concept, and (c) interpersonal and institutional relationships as well as (d) their identity shifting in work and social environments. In addition, a script was provided containing broad interview questions that allowed the participants to lead the interview. A semi-structured interview is guided by a set of questions that are administered to all participants; however the flow of the interview may vary depending on how the participant responds to the questions. This informal interview process allows the interviewer to go where the data and respondent lead (Patton 2009). The interview questions were informed by previous research (e.g., McDowell 2008), and the pilot study and each question was developed to gain insight into the various identities and experiences of identity negotiation/shifting among Black women.

Some of the final interview questions include: (a) If you were in a professional setting with majority White people and you are the only Black woman in the room, would you or have you ever changed your behavior or language to fit in or to accommodate others?"; (b) What are the positive results of changing and altering behaviors in the scenarios discussed?"; and (c) What are the negative results of changing and altering behaviors in the scenarios discussed? All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim using specialized computer software. To maintain confidentiality, all identifying information was removed from each transcript. In accordance with APA ethical guidelines, all identifying information, such as transcripts and demographic surveys, was kept secure. After each interview was transcribed, a copy of the transcription was sent to each participant for review with the option of adding anything new or clarifying information in her particular transcript. This enabled an ongoing co-construction of the data with participants. This process is important to provide a second step in constructing a complete and accurate transcript when conducting phenomenological research.

Interviewer's Background, Experiences, and Biases

All interviews were conducted by the first author. For this reason, critical self-reflexivity also was used throughout the research process. This method measures the researcher's subjectivity related to experiences with the participants, and it extends how one's position and interests as a researcher affect all stages of the research process (Primeau 2003). As the first author, my identity as an educated Black woman who engages in identity shifting influenced the data collection process. As the interviewer, I shared my demographics with regard to age, ethnicity, and sex of majority of the participants. The experiences of racism and sexism in graduate school forced me to navigate through the institutional system as a modified self. In order to survive psychologically and physically in a predominantly White institution and environment, I developed

navigation skills that worked best for me at that given time. I altered my language and expressed myself differently to avoid confirming negative stereotypes of Black women, such as being hyper-aggressive and overly strong. For instance, I removed many aspects of my ethnic cultural identity to assimilate to the dominant White culture. In fact, my personal experiences with discrimination and identity shifting within academia are what led me to research this particular topic.

Additionally, my role as a researcher was influential because I determined the interview questions and the participants' experiences were filtered through my lens. I began most of the interviews by telling participants about the purpose of the study and by emphasizing that participants were also experts in their experiences as a Black woman. Despite my role as a researcher, my experiences with identity shifting, and my shared racial and gender identity with the participants, I strived not to allow my perspective and experiences to overshadow the voices of the Black women who participated in our study.

Coding

Data analysis was guided by interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The primary researcher openly coded one transcript, adding in the left margin comments that conveyed the meaning of the particular sections of the transcript relative to the language and similarities, differences, amplifications, and any contradictions in what the participant described (Smith and Osborn 2003). Initial notes were grouped into emerging themes. The themes were then listed separately in another Microsoft Word document. Next, common links were identified between the themes and similar themes were grouped together. After a list of ten themes was created, a color-coding scheme was used for each theme. Next, the primary researcher returned to the transcript to check the emerging themes against specific quotes from the transcript. This step was repeated by checking the themes against the text with the interview transcripts until the themes were distinct and completely representative of the text.

For final coding, the primary researcher triangulated the transcribed interview with a second coder (a research assistant who also identifies as a Black woman) to ensure that the coding categories were reliable. The second coder first coded two masked transcripts with the generated themes. Then, the second coder reviewed the primary researcher's eight coded transcripts and noted any discrepancies between the primary researcher's and the second coder's coding. To reconcile any differences in coding, the primary researcher and second coder talked through the coded transcripts. Deciding upon which themes to focus was dependent upon not only the frequency of each theme, but also the richness of particular passages,

especially ones illustrating explicit negotiations of intersectional identities. The researchers also took into account the ways the themes helped illuminate other aspects of identity shifting (Smith and Osborn 2003). With the assistance of the second author and two qualitative experts, the themes were narrowed down to the highest number of prevalent topics among the participants (Creswell 2009).

Results

More information about each participant quoted in the following section can be found in Table 1, which is organized by each participant's pseudonym. The following section critically explores constructed themes from the interviews with the participants. These themes describe and relate to the experiences associated with the long overdue recognition of identity shifting of race, class, and gender identities among early career and college-educated U.S. Black women. As summarized in Table 2, the themes constructed from the data include two major themes: (a) the benefits of identity shifting and (b) the costs of identity shifting, with the latter encompassing five subthemes: (a) managing interpersonal rejection: frozen effect, (b) assimilation to the dominant culture and inauthenticity, (c) confronting and dismantling stereotypes, (d) model Black citizen, and (e) mixed feelings toward identity shifting. The two constructed themes and five constructed subthemes consisted of common narratives (e.g., themes had to appear four or more times) and important information that emerged from the data. These benchmarks were relevant to better understand each participant's experiences of negotiating their race, class, and gender identities in social, cultural, and professional environments. After the themes were finalized, the primary researcher reviewed each transcript again, using the themes and sub-themes to synthesize common data elements.

Benefits of Identity Shifting

A prominent theme constructed from the data is shifting identities to build and maintain personal and professional relationships, which are essential for social and professional advancement. Seven participants discussed the need to build relationships to thrive in social and professional environments. For example, Harriet discussed how shifting identities has allowed her to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds: "The positive result is that my interaction with various groups of people and cultures has allowed me to become culturally competent. Therefore, I am able to interact with a diverse group of people without being offensive or degrading."

In a similar example, Jasmine described how she avoided social environments where she was the only Black woman to prevent being uncomfortable. However, Jasmine recognizes that this avoidance can hinder her ability to develop relationships with co-workers: "It probably interferes and stifles or adds challenges to my professional relationships because I am not relating to them during downtime in fun and genuine ways." Because Jasmine decided to remove herself from different situations to avoid having to shift her identities, this represents a form of defiance and resistance in an effort to avoid experiences of discrimination by her colleagues, which is consistent with previous research (Thomas and Hollenshead 2001). Collectively, many participants believed that shifting their identities in order to create and sustain professional relationships is critical to the career development of early professional Black women, and those who resisted assimilation to the dominant culture were aware that it stifled their professional relationships.

Several of the participants specifically identified altering their behaviors and speech as a benefit that would enhance their career development. In another example, Brittany stated: "I think it helps us get to where we want to be at work

Table 1 Participants' demographic information

Pseudonym	Age	Education	Job sector	Job tenure (years)	U.S. region	% of black pop. in urban area	Marital status	Social class
Angie	26	Masters	Family Services	<1	Southwest	30%	Single	Lower Middle class
Brittany	24	Bachelors	Education	1	Mid-Atlantic	49%	Single	Working class
Claire	26	Doctorate	Physical Therapy	1.5	Southeast	30%	Single	Lower middle class
Harriett	23	Bachelors	Education	NP	Northeast	11.8%	Single	Upper middle class
Jasmine	28	Bachelors	Student Affairs	3	Southwest	10%	Single	Middle class
Jessica	26	Masters	Student Affairs	1	Mid-Atlantic	30%	Married	Middle class
Kara	26	Masters	Student Affairs	1.5	Midwest	51%	Single	Working class
Levi	27	Masters	Case Management	NP	Southeast	22%	Single	NP
Nicki	22	Bachelors	Health Care Policy	<1	Southeast	30%	Single	Lower middle class
Nicole	26	Masters	Non-profit	2	Mid-Atlantic	49%	Single	Middle class

NP Not provided

Table 2 Theme clusters of the meanings, process, and strategies of identity shifting

Themes subthemes	Definition	Example quote	Frequency of theme n (%)
Benefits of Identity Shifting theme	Discussion of the perceived positive outcomes associated with altering one's behavior and language in the workplace.	"I think it helps other people become more comfortable around you and you can relate to people more, assimilate more, you can just get along with co-workers more by doing that and it can help you in your career goals because you are identifying with people and connecting with people." (Jessica)	7 (70%)
Costs of Identity Shifting theme	Discussion of the perceived negative outcomes associated with altering one's behavior and language in the workplace.	"A negative outcome would be that the people that you are altering your behavior to will not know the different sides of you. There will be just this one side of you that's it…they won't know more about the other languages and cultures because you are assimilating to theirs." (Jessica)	9 (90%)
Managing interpersonal rejection: Frozen effect	A description of a situation where participants remove themselves from situations to avoid discrimination by becoming silent and psychologically paralyzed by mentally "checking out" or remain silent to avoid confrontation.	"I check out of the conversation because of that [experiences of discrimination], then I get questioned if I am engaged or if I am passionate about being here." (Harriet)	4 (40%)
Assimilation to the dominant culture and inauthenticity	The process of ascribing to the codes of conduct by changing one's actions and way of speaking in professional settings and presentation of an inauthentic version of self.	"When you have to try to curve your behaviors in social settings; it's almost dreaded going into situations and knowing what it is going to be and when you leave those situations you're like I am kind of tired." (Angie)	Assimilation 4 (40%) Inauthenticity 6 (60%)
Confronting and dismantling stereotypes	The process of altering one's behavior and way of speaking to defend against Black women stereotypes, such as, to not be labeled as a Black woman stereotype (e.g., aggressive, bougie, Jezebel, Sapphire, mammy, strong Black woman).	"I probably tried not to be as aggressive and threatening sounding and acting because I don't want to be labeled the mad Black woman or something." (Jessica)	10 (100%)
Model Black citizen	Due to the pressure to represent Black people in the workplace, one may alter her behaviors and way of speaking.	"You don't want to be that person in the room that sounds ignorant or uses slang, or maybe what they would call 'talking ghetto.'" (Jessica)	5 (50%)
Mixed feelings associated with identity shifting	A cognitive dissonance associated with shifting identities, where one may recognize the benefits but also suggesting that there are negative outcomes associated with this experience.	"To some extent like on a personal level it is a little bit trying because you're constantly, I feel like sometimes when you change situations like that very quickly you're like okay well I am this person for you and I am this person for you, so who am I when I am by myself and I think that can be kind of hard." (Nicki)	8 (80%)

professionally." Meanwhile, Jessica believed that shifting identities helped her connect with different people: "It can help you in your career goals because you are identifying with and connecting with people." On the other hand, Kara focused on how altering her behavior changes other peoples' race- and age-based perceptions of her, allowing them to relate to her more readily.

> It's also helpful when it came to how professional people view you, especially if you are young like me, or just how White people feel like they can relate to you, even outside of the workplace. If people do not feel like they can relate to you, then it's harder for them to open up to you. (Kara)

This philosophy aligns with past research conducted by Thomas et al. (2004), wherein they explored the association between stereotypes of Black women (e.g., overly sexualized Jezebel) and their self-esteem. The findings showed that participants who internalize "Mammy" stereotype feel the need to serve and care for others, often setting aside their own needs. Additionally, women who internalize the "Sapphire" stereotype may fear being perceived as overly aggressive and have difficulty expressing their anger in the workplace. Thus, these perceptions point to the pressure of speaking more articulately and refraining from aggressive behavior in the dominant culture, as described by Kara and other participants. Similarly, Levi asserted that altering behaviors and languages is something that Black women have to do to survive: "Black

women–we have to know how to adapt to our environments no matter what situation we are thrown in. We have to be able to act accordingly. You can't allow someone else to catch you slipping up."

On the other hand, Angie argued that a Black person in America has to maintain a level of stigma consciousness in order to thrive: "To survive as a Black person in America is having this double consciousness, being aware of who you are and also being aware of everything around you." Jasmine implies that there is a strategic process associated with altering one's behaviors and speech patterns: "I think strategically in order to get the things that you are seeking, whether it's related to your career, academically or in a social setting, you may need to code-switch or change your behaviors."

The theme's findings are consistent with the consequence of *cultural imperialism*, "the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm" (Young 1990, p. 59), which has distorted and defined what is considered the norm and everyone who is not part of the dominant group is considered to be atypical. For instance, "dominant group members stigmatize minorities' food, clothing, music, values, behaviors and language or dialect as bad and inferior to theirs" (Ogbu 2004, p. 4). This dismissiveness of Black culture began during slavery, with the myth that slaves came from a dark continent that was less civilized (Becknell 1987; Ogbu 2004). As a result, Black women may alter and change their behaviors, language, and culture when it is not in accordance with the dominant culture in order to move up in their career or to avoid being labeled as the stereotypical Black woman. Their stories are consistent with PVEST (Spencer 1995) in that they reveal the ways in which some Black women understand societal expectations and stereotypes of Black women. Thenceforth, the participants use stigma consciousness to their advantage of learning how to strategically navigate through a predominantly White workplace while having double marginalized identities.

Costs of Identity Shifting

Managing Interpersonal Rejection: Frozen Effect

Another prevalent theme that emerged from the interviews entails the idea of remaining silent about discriminatory experiences. After experiencing discriminatory situations, four participants discussed becoming silent and psychologically paralyzed, mentally "checking out" in conversations in predominantly White social or professional environments. Jasmine described how, within a predominantly Euro-centric professional environment, she began to question her sense of voice: "Mostly I just won't talk…I would just kind of answer questions yay or nay." Due to past experiences, Jasmine developed a coping mechanism that works best for her in this type of environment. Jasmine's behavior is a form of invisibility

because she retreated into isolation and responded with concise replies when communicating with her colleagues to avoid being visible in the workplace. According to Franklin (1999), invisibility syndrome is described as an inner struggle with the feeling that one's abilities are undervalued or ignored because of prejudice and racism. More specifically, invisibility syndrome is also used as a conceptual model to understand factors determining adaptive responses to racism and invisibility (e.g., lack of recognition). For example, as a result of racism, participants in our study discussed how they began to shut down and remove themselves from certain situations and conversations to avoid the internalized effects of racism.

Likewise, Nicki's personal experience with aversion exemplifies such encounters. At her job, most of the Black women work in the customer service department; however, she has a managerial position in another department. One day she was visiting a colleague who works near the customer service department. Nicki and her colleague, who is an Asian male, were wearing headphones as they were completing their work. At least two other employees who walked by asked Nicki, and not her Asian male colleague, to take out her headphones because customer service representatives are not allowed to wear them. Nicki stated:

> Have you seen me before? I don't even work in your department. So that pissed me off. I mean it really, really pissed me off, and especially because my co-worker and friend said no one had ever said anything to him about his headphones, ever. So I was really upset about that. I really didn't do anything about it. I honestly just took my headphones out and I chalked it up to, well it sucks that these adults work in a really stressful environment as customer service professional, yet they don't get these sentiments. So I tried to chalk it up to well when in Rome I will take my headphones out and get back to my corner of the building. (Nicki)

In response to this differential treatment, Nicki was nevertheless conflicted, but stayed silent and did as she was told. Her behavior is equivalent to the *frozen effect*, which is described as the process of mentally removing one's self from a situation to avoid further experiences of discrimination by becoming silent. The frozen effect is also consistent with the self-silencing concept, which suggests that to create and maintain safety within relationships, women may silence certain feelings, thoughts, and actions. It is possible that Black women who face discrimination silenced themselves to prevent further experiences of discrimination and to reduce being viewed as threatening (Bryant et al. 2005). Over time, self-silencing may contribute to a decline in self-esteem and feelings of a losing one's self (Jack and Dill 1992). In Nicki's case, it can also be understood as maintaining a sense of solidarity with the other Black women who were working as customer

service professionals. By not reacting negatively to her co-workers' comments, Nicki further stated that she did as she was told to prevent negative experiences from occurring for the Black women working in customer service. In this situation, it is assumed that Nicki weighed the costs and benefits of responding to her colleagues and instead chose to respond in a way that would benefit other Black women coming behind her, although her decision may have come at a psychological cost of internal conflict. In alignment with PVEST, due to the stress and experiences of discrimination, some early career Black women develop a coping strategy of remaining silent, hoping to avoid confrontation with their senior colleagues.

Assimilation to the Dominant Culture and Inauthenticity

Another theme identified in the transcripts was shifting identities to ascribe to codes of conduct and professionalism, thereby assimilating to norms in predominantly White work environments. Four participants discussed the need for Black women to assimilate to whatever situation that confronts them. In particular, according to Angie, her involvement in negotiating her identities exemplifies not being one's self in social and/or professional environments, which can inhibit authentic relationships.

> I mean our world is kind of based off of relationships, professional relationships and social relationships. So, I think that can be a negative downfall being able to create actual, genuine connection with somebody, so [failing to create authentic relationships] could be a downfall. Yeah, because it could really cheat you out of, whether it be a professional or social setting, real connections. (Angie)

In centering identity shifting, the women also drew upon discourses of feeling inauthentic when assimilating in the workplace. Six participants acknowledged that a negative outcome associated with shifting their identities was presenting an inauthentic version of themselves. Although there are benefits to shifting identities, some participants feel as though they are not true to themselves when they attempt to assimilate to the dominant White culture. For instance, Angie discussed her internal struggle with not being true to herself:

> You feel like you are not being your true self and you know when you're not being yourself…you know when you are out of character in whatever situations. You know those things and when some things are off with you; we all have an internal instinct whether we do something about it or not is another story, but we all know when something is off… I don't know if it's kind of being desensitized to it or thinking it's normal and that's just what you have to do you know. (Angie)

Also, in our many discussions about assimilation in a professional setting, participants characterized professionalism as "acting White." Acting White is analogous to a standard etiquette and way of speaking in professional settings. According to Ogbu (2004), Black professionals who choose to assimilate abandon their Black culture and dialect, and they try to speak primarily in Euro-centric frames of reference. As an example, in the workplace, Brittany shifted her dialect and actions to be "professional":

> When I am around my friends, I can be myself, but I think that within a professional setting, I feel as if I have to tone it down and tame it and be very careful with how I do things or say things. [Stereotypes] really have affected me, but I didn't think that it did, but it has affected me and made me more aware of how to conduct myself in a professional setting, especially, and even sometimes in my personal life. (Brittany)

Altering one's language can be both an empowering and an assimilatory act. Several of the participants discussed the internal conflict associated with being professional, "acting White," and retaining their true and authentic identities. The dynamics involved with identity shifting in predominantly White environments includes the pressure to be professional, even when confronting racism and negative stereotypes associated with Black women. There is a professional identity that Black women have to negotiate in their workplaces and other social spaces in order to be taken seriously.

Confronting and Dismantling Stereotypes

One of the unifying reasons for shifting identities among all of the participants was to resist stereotypes associated with Black women. Presently, due to societal expectations and images of Black women wherein they are classified as aggressive, sexually promiscuous, dominant, and strong (Bell 1990, Mitchell 1998; Thomas and King 2007), all participants shifted their identities to avoid sounding "ignorant" and "aggressive" in the workplace. This finding is consistent with stereotype reassociation, where individuals may disassociate with a negatively-valued stereotype and strengthen their association with a positive stereotype (Shih et al. 2013). Participants cited various prevailing stereotypes against which they feel they have to defend their identity: being loud and angry Black woman (5 participants); over sexualization—the Jezebel stereotype (5 participants); welfare queen (4 participants); ghetto (5 participants), and bougie (3 participants). In each of these stereotypes, race, gender, and class identities intersected, forging a triple identity shifting that these women undergo daily. Jessica intentionally changed her language to avoid conforming to the aforementioned stereotypes. Similarly,

Harriet discussed the stereotypes of being overly sexualized and loud:

> Some of the other stereotypes include the image of Sarah Baartman, the Hottentot Venus. This involves the idea that our bodies are meant to constantly be displayed for the enjoyment and/or curiosity of others. We are seen as sexual objects of very little value. We are assumed to be loud and only educated by the streets. The stereotype is that African American women are argumentative, moody, and evil because we lack the ability to express ourselves using any other approach. There is also the reality-show stereotype that depicts us as crabs in a barrel that only get ahead by demeaning other women. (Harriet)

Another prevalent stereotype that the Black women in our study confronted was being labeled as "the angry Black woman." To not be labeled as the domineering Sapphire, some participants discussed how they might report shifting their language more to not appear as aggressive.

> I find that a lot times when I want to react to the situation, I have to be very careful with how I react because of that [stereotype] and it makes me feel uncomfortable. Sometimes I just want to do whatever, but because of how I am looked at as an African American woman, I can say something like "I did not like the way you said that" and somebody can be like "Oh my gosh she is being hostile," but I guess I am supposed to say it like (in a soft nice voice) "Oh I did not like the way you said that" and then they would be like "Oh she is not being hostile." (Brittany)

In this instance, Brittany discussed changing the tone of her voice to avoid confirming the stereotype as the aggressive, angry Black woman. This adds to the difficulty of having to negotiate both of those lines of perceptions and indicates that there is not a model for a middle-ground professional identity among the participants.

Stereotyping all Black women as being overly sexualized or angry can negatively affect the career mobility of early career Black women. Every participant in the current study discussed the need to deal with stereotypes of Black women by altering their behaviors and speech. According to Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008), if Black women are too aggressive in the workplace, they can become marginalized on the job, which can create a stressful work environment. Further, Black women who are aware of the domineering stereotype may become soft-spoken (Bryant et al. 2005). This subsequently may result in cultural adaption (Kim 2001), the process by which an individual modifies his or her personal habits and customs to fit in to a particular culture. By engaging in the process of identity shifting, one attempts to minimize the impact of the changing salience of various elements of identity within given environments and cultural contexts.

Model Black Citizen

Half the participants described what can be called "the model Black citizen," wherein they discussed the need to be mindful that they are representing other Black people, such as family members, in professional environments. Angie, for example, related this phenomenon to a pre-established "bar" that every other Black person must maintain in the workspace and in academic environments:

> It's like one Black person sets the bar for how other Black people are supposed to be. So I don't know if that was an internal thing you know like, or to be this representation or the Black token, or sometimes to be the only Black person in class. It's also like if something racial comes up, how you are expected to know all of the answers and guide everybody. So I think in that way I feel like rather than changing; I was uneasy. (Angie)

In addition, Jasmine discussed how she had to be conscious about what she was saying or doing to make sure that her behavior did not undermine what Black people have fought against in the United States. Because of this history, she felt the need to be a model citizen for Black people.

> All of my ancestors who just, you know, went through incredible amounts of sorrow and pain, but were strong and able to ride through that enough to the fact that we are still here. So, I always think: "Am I doing enough?" Then also what I am doing that is representing or beneficial to my people—is it counter or hindering them? Does it add to the negative stereotypes? Then I think about my race in terms of how people see me. In terms of how I have to be careful when navigate the world, as I walk through it. Especially here when I am at work, I don't always feel like comfortable to speak. I don't have any mentors here and there's nobody that I see that I would say "there's somebody who is helpful to me" and there's nobody who has taken an interest in me either. (Jasmine)

Similarly, Levi discussed how professionalism was associated with being a representative for others: "I define professionalism as you're keeping in mind that you are an ambassador for not only yourself but for your family. .." The interview excerpts articulate a collective racial identity that seems to be emerging and the tension between having an independent professional identity and being a community-minded Black woman.

The model citizen idea seemed to serve both as pressure to be a representative for other Black women and used as an advantage to change stereotypes associated with Black women among the participants. This ideology is consistent with previous research suggesting that being the token Black woman in the workplace adds to the pressure of being a representative on behalf of all Black people (Pollak and Niemann 1998). Significantly, Nicki used the concept of the model Black citizen to her advantage. If she had to negotiate her identities to make life easier for another Black woman coming after her then she did not mind.
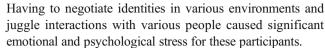
> So, I think that if I can do my best to be a model Black citizen then hopefully, somebody who has a negative perception of Black people or Black women that we are loud and uneducated and ghetto and all of that other stuff, then maybe if they meet me then the next woman they meet they won't be like that and will be a little bit more open to seeing her as an individual. (Nicki)

Nicki focused on the positive aspect of shifting, where it may not have served her direct purpose, but she hoped to make experiences better for other Black women coming after her. The model Black citizen is consistent with the out-group homogeneity effect (Quattrone and Jones 1980), which argues that the dominant culture may have a misperception that underrepresented groups are more similar to one another than they are to people who are part of the dominant group. As a result, out-group members (in this case Black women) are at risk of being seen as interchangeable or expendable, and thus they are more likely to be stereotyped. Because of being stereotyped, this can affect their chances of getting job promotions or moving up in their career due to the unfortunate stereotypes of Black women being unreliable and not having credibility.

Mixed Feelings Associated with Identity Shifting

The subtheme of mixed feelings toward shifting shows the complexity of identity shifting and the diverse feelings that arose among some participants. Some struggled with identity shifting because they believed that it was necessary to navigate through different cultural worlds while simultaneously being aware of the anxiety and frustration of having to consistently negotiate their identities. Three participants specified that this process was stressful. Nicki said:

> To some extent, like on a personal level, it is a little bit trying because you're constantly changing. I feel like sometimes when you change situations like that very quickly, you're like "Okay well, I am this person for you and I am this person for you, so who am I when I am by myself," and I think that can be kind of hard. (Nicki)

Having to negotiate identities in various environments and juggle interactions with various people caused significant emotional and psychological stress for these participants.

Additionally, Angie discussed how she is "just doing it to survive," though it is stressful: "Having to curb my behavior, I'm just doing it to survive and to get to where I need to be, kind of like survival of the fittest, but it is difficult." Four participants discussed how altering their behaviors and language/dialect was actually part of their identity. For instance, Jessica said, "I grew up in a predominantly White environment, so you do not see it as changing, because it's a part of who you are." It is possible that Jessica either feels a stable sense of self when she negotiates or that the shifting itself is constant for her.

Moreover, Angie stated that she does not think she has altered her behaviors or changed her language "because a lot of the times, I act White anyways." Intriguingly, these participants suggested that they "act White" and so they do not see themselves as altering their behaviors and speech. This points to the fact that some Black women may not see that they are changing their behaviors or languages in particular contexts; instead, the participants perhaps are constructing their own meaning of Black womanhood that is multifaceted. Similarly, the two participants who stated that altering their behaviors and languages is a part of who they are, also said that they felt like they could not be their true selves. The inconsistencies in perceptions of identity shifting add to the complexity of understanding identity shifting among early career Black women in our sample and suggest that identity shifting is not always a conscious process. This inconsistency also illustrates the complexity of the intersectionality of identity shifting among oppressed groups (Crenshaw 1991), like the young professional Black women in our sample. Overall, the complexity of identity shifting can cause paradoxical behaviors and mixed feelings toward identity shifting among early career Black women.

Discussion

The current study provides a critical analysis of the perceived benefits and costs associated with shifting one's identity among early career Black women. Thomas et al. (2013) argue that early career employees who belong to underrepresented groups and have racial solo status in their workplace may be treated as pets (cared for and treated in a child-like fashion) rather than as professionals. As such, the pet status suggests that early career professionals, who belong to underrepresented groups, are not equal to their senior colleagues and thus are ignored or disregarded for their accomplishments. It is possible that identity shifting has stronger consequences for early career Black women relative to senior career level Black women, due to this pet phenomenon. In general, the current

study illustrates the need for early career Black women to shift their identities to manage their early career stage and the stereotypes of Black women.

Additionally, due to double jeopardy (King 1988) and the experiences of being inauthentic, participants also discussed the advantages of negotiating their identities. The psychological costs and benefits experienced by the individual is context-driven. Once identity shifting occurs, psychological costs and benefits increase, depending on the context. This behavior is consistent with the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (Spencer et al. 1997), suggesting that societal expectations and stereotypes influences how one will adapt to various cultural contexts. As an example, on the one hand, acting White incurs a cost by triggering feelings of betrayal and abandonment to one's allegiance to the Black community; on the other hand, acting White may result in a benefit toward professional advancement. However, if a Black woman decides not to assimilate to the White dominant culture in the workspace, she may incur a cost toward professional advancement, but she may simultaneously experience the benefit of feeling connected to her Black culture in the workspace. Consistent with Brannon et al. (2015) research on double consciousness, being Black and American can function as a gift of two self-schemas, and it can serve as a cognitive resource that supports flexibility in self-construal across different cultural contexts. As proposed by the phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (Spencer et al. 1997), the social context is a fruitful site for exploring normative expectations and cultural messages regarding identity shifting.

The present results also provided noteworthy, but mixed, responses related to perceptions of one's participation in identity shifting. The theme of mixed feelings toward shifting shows the complexity of identity shifting and the diverse feelings that arose among participants. Several participants struggled with identity shifting. Some believed that it was necessary to alter one's behavior and language to navigate through different cultural worlds while simultaneously being aware of the anxiety and frustration of having to consistently negotiate their identities. On many occasions in the interviews, some participants stated that all identities are authentically theirs and did not see their behaviors as negotiating their identities. These varied perceptions support the notion that it can be demanding for some Black women to manage bi-cultural experiences of living and working in two different cultural words (Bell 1990). These behaviors are also consistent with the literature on cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), the excessive mental stress and discomfort that is experienced by an individual who holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time. This cognitive dissonance may allude to the difficulty of discussing experiences of negotiating identities, while being cognizant of the careful navigation required through White America and Black America.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although our study's findings contribute to our understanding of U.S. Black women's experiences in the workplace and social environments, there are some limitations that are important to highlight, such as issues with member checking, distractions during video interviews, and generalizability. One limitation is that the sample of ten women in the current study is non-representative, raising limitations in generalizability. Future research may sample more representatively and may explore the longitudinal outcomes of shifting among Black women, specifically, if shifting identities within one's early career has implications for career trajectory and job promotion for Black women. It is possible that identity shifting might have stronger consequences for early career level Black women than for senior career level Black women. In addition, research exploring how the length of time working in a predominantly White workplace influences identity shifting is critical to better understanding this phenomenon among Black women.

Another limitation of our study regards extending participants the opportunity to review their transcripts, also referred to as member checking. This process allows the respondents to review their transcripts and/or allows the researcher to elicit feedback on emerging themes from some of the people who were interviewed (Merriam 2009). Although this process does add to the veracity of the study, there were some shortcomings. One participant completely changed her response to one question from the initial interview, which made it difficult to decipher her true, genuine responses. For instance, during the interview, she mentioned that it was difficult for her to negotiate her identities: "It's definitely difficult and stresses me out to the point where I am like telling myself to stop it, you are doing the best that you can." However, after reviewing her transcript, she said, "It is easy for me to code switch." Although it was difficult to determine the participant's true response, this ambivalence surrounding identity shifting is consistent with participants mixed feelings associated with identity shifting.

Lastly, although video interviewing was a convenient method to both the investigator and participants, there were some problems with this method of interviewing. For instance, all of the interviews took place at the home of each participant, and some of the participants were distracted by other activities, such as texting on their phone or watching the television in between questions. In the future, it is best to remind the respondents at the beginning of the interview to put away all electronic devices so that they can focus on the subject at hand. Despite the limitations, video interviewing did allow for respondents to be in the comfort of their home when answering questions about their personal lives, and it also allowed the researcher to survey a wider geographical demographic of women than would have occurred otherwise.

The present study focused on the experiences of early career and college-educated Black women in professional environments. In addition to exploring a predominantly White workplace, future research might include a comparison of Black women who work in White male- or female-dominated workplaces to explore how gender balance of the workplace might impact identity shifting. Such a study may better highlight the distinct differences in shifting identities that result from different cultural contexts. Another area to consider would be quantitatively studying the role that parental upbringing and gendered racial socialization (Thomas and King 2007), that is, the process by which Black girls and women develop a healthy racialized gendered identity, may play in the decision to shift or not shift identities among Black women. In speaking with each of the participants, most stated that their parents had a huge influence on their racial/ethnic pride, and participants identified this pride as something that helped them deal with their perceived experiences of racism and discrimination. The findings from the current study can also be extended to explore identity shifting among other marginalized groups, such as Black men, other Women of Color, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Individuals of Color to explore the shifting of visible and invisible identities in different spaces.

Practice Implications

The implications of our study suggest that, although there are benefits to identity shifting, it can also take a psychological toll on the psyche of Black women because it can be a very stressful process in which to engage. Previous research argues that long-term use of identity shifting can cause an unstable sense of self, and this unstable self may be associated with poor psychological well-being (Campbell et al. 2003; Shih et al. 2013) and may influence one's work performance (Sekaquaptewa et al. 2007). Similarly, O'Brien et al. (2016) explored discriminatory experiences of early career academics and found that negative work performance outcomes were associated with higher levels of psychological stress. The present study provides vital insights regarding some of the unique challenges of individuals who belong to multiple oppressed groups, as well as the need for workplaces to incorporate a work policy that celebrates group differences and individual identities.

Our research also highlights the importance of work environments creating inclusive cultures that welcome different cultural values. Research indicates that diversity initiatives in the workplace often address blatant forms of discrimination rather than subtle microaggressions (Shih et al. 2013), many of which were apparent in the experiences of the present participants. It is suggested that employers take a multiculturalism approach toward creating an inclusive organization. Research suggests that fostering a work environment where individual differences are not ignored and employees engage in open and honest discussions about differences is effective (Stevens et al. 2008). More specifically, the all-inclusive multiculturalism (AIM) model acknowledges differences among all employees, promotes maintenance of subgroup identities (e.g., ethnicity, gender, religion, age) and overarching work identity, diminishes perception of social exclusion, affirms individual's social identities, and strengthens employees' relationships (Hogg and Terry 2000; Stevens et al. 2008). In all, a multicultural approach acknowledges and supports differences between individuals and could potentially minimize the use of identity shifting strategies (Shih et al. 2013). The present research speaks to the importance of creating a workplace environment that fosters acceptance of different cultural behaviors and practices so that there is no need to shift the identities that are central to an individual.

Identity shifting research on Black women can also help Black women develop healthy navigation strategies. Some strategies for navigating the workplace for early career Women of Color include remaining culturally grounded in identifying with one's own sense of self and speaking up strategically with an understanding of the political stakes involved rather than remaining silent (Thomas et al. 2013). Another way to assist early career Black women in navigating the workspace is by obtaining a mentor. It is important for Black women to have informal or formal mentors, especially for Black women who are in male- or White majority-dominated environments. Research suggests that many Women of Color lack access to mentors (Thomas and Hollenshead 2001), which can possibly impede their job performance and satisfaction. One can seek out mentorship within their department or another department on the job.

Additionally, it is encouraged for Black women to understand how to navigate different workspaces and to develop an authentic self in the workplace by constructing a positive work identity (Dutton et al. 2010). Research shows that the promotion of authentic leaders in the workplace leads to more meaningful relationships and greater well-being (Gardner et al. 2005). Leadership identity development programs should be designed by Black women to assist with positive identity development of young Black women to foster an authentic self in the workplace, to encourage positive professional and social relationships, and to promote economic and political commitment to the Black community (King and Ferguson 2001).

Conclusion

Overall, the promising contribution of our study is the enhanced understanding of the shifting of identities among early career and Black millennial U.S. women in the workplace. Past work on identity shifting/negotiation theoretically informs the behaviors associated with identity shifting, but it

does not include discourse on the costs and benefits related to the outcomes of shifting one's identities. Identity shifting requires psychological resources and, depending on how often one has to negotiate, an individual can be depleted of those resources. Once those psychological resources are eliminated or depleted, one may develop strategies to avoid shifting, through signs of resistance and denial, such as being silent in conversations, limiting professional contacts, and restricting participation in social environments. Research on the experiences of Black women in the workplace has focused primarily on more seasoned Black women (Harris 2007; Parker 2002), not taking into account Black women who are recent college graduates who are new to the workforce and who may be at the early stages of engaging in workplace identity negotiation. Therefore our study is also significant because it addresses a void in the psychological literature on the experiences of Black women who are recent college graduates and contributes to the overall knowledge base in identity research among Black women. It is evident that there are complexities associated with the shifting of the intersection of race, gender, class, and other identities. By understanding the issues that Black women face relative to their identity formation in the workforce, our research can provide information for protocols or changes that employers can implement to improve the work environment for Women of Color and other marginalized groups.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest   The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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