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BLACK FEMALE JOURNALISTS: EXPERIENCES OF RACISM, SEXISM AND
CLASSISM IN THE NEWSROOM

By

Amber Genile Duke
B.S., New York University, 2004

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Louisville
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Pan-African Studies
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2009

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A Thesis Approved on

April 1, 2009

By the following Thesis Committee:

Thesis Director

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Grandpoppy

Paul W. Eddie
January 1925-May 2007

You always joked that my smartness was from you. You were more right than you ever knew.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to give special thanks to my Thesis Director Dr. Theresa Rajack-Talley. Over the past few years you have challenged and encouraged me, helping me create some of my best work.

I would also like to thank Dr. Cate Fosl and Dr. Kaila Story for their assistance with this project.

Many thanks to my parents Derrick and Teejan Booker and my grandmother Margaret Eddie for their patience and encouragement through the years.

Finally to my best friend and partner in all things, my wonderful Brent. I wouldn't have survived the past few years without your editing skills, tech support, shoulder rubs and cups of hot tea. I'm so lucky to have your love.

ABSTRACT

BLACK FEMALE JOURNALISTS: EXPERIENCES OF RACISM, SEXISM AND CLASSISM IN THE NEWSROOM

Amber G. Duke

April 1, 2009

This thesis analyzes the experiences and challenges Black female journalists encounter in the newsroom. Using oral history interviews and writings from Black female journalists about their experiences, the researcher identifies a unique set of barriers these women faced in assignments and career advancement. Black Feminist theoretical perspectives aid in understanding how the interlocking oppressions of racism, sexism and classism impacted Black female journalists on three distinct levels: personal level, group or community level and institutional level.

The findings reveal Black Female journalists' personal experiences with discrimination propelled them into careers in the media. While on the job, many of them took on the added responsibility of educating their colleagues about Black people in an effort to change and enhance mainstream media coverage of Black issues. The study concludes Black female journalists were able to resist and overcome discrimination in story assignments, job promotion and criticism of their physical appearance, in part, by creating support networks.

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Chapter 1

BLACK FEMALE JOURNALISTS: EXPERIENCES OF RACISM, SEXISM AND CLASSISM IN THE NEWSROOM: AN INTRODUCTION

Television does more than simply entertain or provide news about major events of the day. It confers status on those individuals and groups it selects for placement in the public eye, telling the viewer who and what is important to know about, think about and have feelings about. –“Window Dressing on the Set” Report from U.S. Commission on Civil Rights¹

Descriptions of the newsroom made my eyes twinkle as an undergraduate. I was convinced I was going to have the most exciting job anyone could possibly have. I was becoming a journalist. I was going to spend my days in an oppression free space where people of all different races, creeds, backgrounds and interests came together and worked hard towards reporting on the important issues facing the community. Once I landed my first job as a television producer, it only took me a few hours to learn the real newsroom environment was much different than the idea of the newsroom that my professors talked about in my courses. My colleagues were not representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the community. I was one of only three people of color, and one of only a handful of female employees.

My experiences as a Black, female journalist are not unique as thousands of Black women have written, edited and published in newspapers or for television in the United States. These Black women who have recorded American history through their

¹ United States. Commission on Civil Rights. *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. Washington: August 1977, Pg. 1

reporting have largely been ignored in the history books and by scholars of American journalism.

Mass Media Research

Mass media research is a large field of study with almost unlimited types of inquiry into individual media industries which include, but are not limited to: commercial music, film, commercial and noncommercial radio, commercial television, public television, print news, broadcast news, advertising and the emerging areas of electronic communication.² As in many other fields of study, early activities in the field were dominated by white men, with women and minorities receiving little attention.³ For some time many scholars and historians did not consider African Americans as having strong participatory roles in the creation and development of American mass media because they were shut out of mainstream media organizations for so long. For example, in 1955, there was not a single Black person in radio or television newsrooms above the caretaker level in a U.S. mainstream news organization.⁴ Since that time there has been remarkable progress in the employment of African Americans in the media, and in their inclusion in communications research.

One study in particular helped lead to a flurry of mass media research on women and minorities. In 1977 and again in 1979, the United States Commission on Civil Rights released a study on women and minorities in television titled, *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. The groundbreaking report was the

² Samuels 1996; Butler & Paisley 1972; Gans 1979; Shaw 1990.

³ Dates and Barlow 1993; Wilson and Gutierrez 1985 and 1995; Kern-Foxworth 1994

⁴ Dates, Jannette L. and William Barlow. *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media*. Washington: Howard University Press, 1993, pg. 19.

government's first official acknowledgement of barriers women and minorities working in the news and entertainment industries had faced for years: racism, classism, sexism and unfair representation. Two of the major findings of the 1977 study were: minorities and women, particularly minority women, were underrepresented on the news and their portrayals were stereotyped; and minority women were underrepresented on local station work forces and were almost totally excluded from decision making positions.⁵

Since the *Window Dressing Report*, a significant body of research on the television industry has been done around portrayals of women and minorities in the media. A good number of these studies critically examine the portrayals and the effects of the performances of Black women on primetime television.⁶ A substantial amount of research has been collected about print news and the Black press.⁷ It is in this area of print journalism that the contributions of Black women to the field and detailed analyses of their work is covered most in the literature.⁸ Despite progress in these areas of research, studies on Black women's employment in the broadcast news industry, particularly their on the job experiences, are scarce.⁹

Research on Black, female broadcast journalists is limited in both breadth and scope. Most research on the topic falls into three broad camps: Quantitative data on where these women are working and in which positions;¹⁰ Qualitative data that consists of interviews with Black, female journalists and their own writings about their

⁵ United States. Commission on Civil Rights. *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. Washington: August 1977.

⁶ Rhodes 1991; Matanbane 1982; Dates 1987; Stroman 1983; Barnouw 1982; Miller 1989; Moore 1980.

⁷ Rhodes 1992a, 1992b and 1995; Streitmatter 1990, 1993, 1994; Garland 1982; Wolseley 1971.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Kern-Foxworth, Gandy, Hines and Miller 1994; Bramlett-soloman 1991; Northcott, Seggar and Hinton 1975; Laffy 1993

¹⁰ U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1977, 1979; Editor & Publisher 1994; Hunt 2005; Johnson and Bullard-Johnson 1985; McGowan 2001; National Assoc. of Black Journalists 2007; Papper 2007; Stein 1972; Wilson 1985.

experiences;¹¹ and historical studies that lift up the stories of pioneering Black women in journalism that have been left out of the grand narrative of the field.¹²

Research Approach

This thesis topic seeks to fill in some of the gaps in the literature concerning Black female broadcast journalists' experiences within media organizations. It adds to Black Feminist scholarship by exploring how racism, sexism and classism operate inside media organizations and how Black women negotiate these interlocking oppressions on three different levels, the personal level, group or community level and the institutional level.

A number of themes emerge from the limited, but significant, literature on Black female broadcasters; each will be addressed in this study. They include: limited assignment opportunities, barriers to management positions, battles over on-camera appearance, communication breakdowns with colleagues, and perceived responsibilities to, and education of, Black communities.¹³

The specific research objective of this thesis is to examine the experiences of Black female journalists in the newsroom and in the field primarily through oral history interviews and their own writings about their experiences. Answering the following research questions will provide a greater understanding of Black female journalists'

¹¹ Ferguson 2007; Gelfman 1976; Hill 1986; Larson 2006

¹² Creedon 1989; Dates and Barlow 1993; Entman 1997; Streitmatter 1994.

¹³ Johnson, Ben and Mary Bullard-Johnson. *Who's What and Where: A Directory of American's Black Journalists*. Detroit: Who's What and Where, 1985.

Stein, M.L. *Blacks in Communications: Journalism, Public Relations and Advertising*. New York: Julian Messner, 1972

Dates and Barlow 1993, Wilson 1991; Streitmatter 1994; Unidentified Black Female Journalist. Personal Interview. 29 Nov. 2007.

contributions to their field, the barriers they faced in assignments and career advancement, and their influence on how news is covered:

1. Why did these women choose to become journalists?
2. What were some of the unique challenges these journalists faced as Black women in the newsroom?
3. Did these women encounter racism, sexism or classism? If so, how did they respond to and cope with these challenges?

Structure of Thesis

Chapter 2 of this thesis reviews the literature on Black female journalists. This chapter provides context to the study by locating it within the literature of communication/media studies, female journalists and minority journalists.

Chapter 3 explores Black Feminist Perspectives. This chapter takes an in-depth look at the emergence of Black Feminist theory, including its recognition of the interlocking nature of oppressions: racism, classism and sexism.

Chapter 4 clarifies the methodological approach to the study. It includes discussion about the researcher's approach to the thesis which falls under the concept of engendering research. It examines the types of data sources that were used to answer the research questions. The chapter also defines some key terms and concepts that are important to understanding the research findings.

Chapter 5 presents the research findings. Chapter 6 analyzes those findings by tying them to the theoretical base. It also notes the major conclusions that can be drawn from the findings and suggests avenues for further inquiry on the topic.

Chapter 2

WHERE ARE THE BLACK WOMEN? LOCATING BLACK FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN MASS COMMUNICATION LITERATURE

Although research on African Americans and mass communication has shown progress over the years, it is clear that communication researchers have devoted little attention to African American women and communications [...] A massive bibliography on African Americans and the media, which lists sources published since 1978, contains more than 300 entries (Williams, 1990), but less than 10% focus specifically on African American women –From “African American Women and Mass Communication Research.”¹⁴

As a student of journalism, my notes from lectures are filled with such names as Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. Next to their names are phrases like, “pioneering,” “considered the greatest,” and “changed the way we think.” While it is clear these men deserve an esteemed place in the history books for their work, there are many others who were not white and were not male who also made significant contributions to the field. Part of the focus of this research is to situate Black, female journalists within this history.

This chapter reviews the literature on mass communication. It begins with a broad survey of the various areas of study in the field, and documents the changes in technology, ownership patterns, and news products over the past few decades. It then looks specifically at the literature on broadcast news and journalists. The chapter continues with an examination of studies on women and minorities in the media

¹⁴ Dates, Jannette L. and Carolyn A. Stroman. “African American Women and Mass Communication Research.” *Women Transforming Communications: Global Intersections*. Eds. Donnal Allen, Ramona Rush and Susan Koffman. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc. 1996.

(including changes in the composition of the newsroom along lines of race and gender, and changes in the portrayals of racial minorities in the media). This section of the chapter includes an in-depth look at the first major, federal study of women and minorities in television published in 1977 and subsequently updated two years later. The chapter ends by identifying the major themes and discourses emerging from the literature on Black female journalists.

Mass Communication Research

Mass communication research is the academic study of the various means by which individuals and entities relay information through mass media to large segments of the population at the same time.¹⁵ Mass communication studies cover various mediums including newspaper and magazine publishing, radio, television and film.¹⁶ With the increased role of the Internet in delivering news and information, mass communication studies are currently expanding to focus on the convergence of publishing, broadcasting and digital communication.¹⁷

Research in the field is generally organized around what have been identified as the four characteristics of mass communication:

1. Technical and institutional methods of production and distribution-These vary throughout the history of the media and differ from medium to medium.
2. Commodification of symbolic forms-Time and space are “packaged and sold” to consumers and advertisers. For example, radio and television stations make revenue

¹⁵ McQuail, D. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory: 5th Edition*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2005.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Mackay, H and O'Sullivan T. *The Media Reader: Continuity and Transformation* Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1999.

from commercial time sold to advertisers; newspapers sell space in their pages to advertisers.

3. Separate contexts between production and reception of information.-Messages are produced by one set of individuals and transmitted to others who are typically situated in settings far from the original context of production.

4. Information distribution- Production of materials for consumption of large audiences depends on the ability to manufacture and sell large quantities of the work.¹⁸

Many academic mass communication programs lean toward empirical analysis and quantitative research from statistical content analysis of media messages to survey research, public opinion polling, and experimental research.¹⁹ Little attention is given to the internal workings of media organizations and the social forces that influence the production of media messages.

Media studies can fall under the bracket of mass communication research. It is a field of research concerned with the content, history, meaning and effects of various media.²⁰ Media studies scholars vary in the theoretical and methodological focus they bring to mass media topics, including the media's political, social, economic and cultural roles and impact.²¹ In early media studies, scholars debated the real power of mass media. They studied questions like: Do the media make things happen, or do they merely report what happens? Do they make us act? Do they influence our opinions?

¹⁸ Thompson, John B. *The Media and Modernity*. Boston: Polity, 1995.

¹⁹ Hartley, J. "Mass communication." Eds. O'Sullivan and Fiske. *Key Concept in Communication and Cultural Studies* New York: Routledge, 1997.

²⁰ "Mass Communication versus Mass Media." New York: Insight Media, 1996.

²¹ Ibid.

How?²² Now most media scholars and social scientists agree that mass media have powerful effects that can be measured and predicted on a case-by-case basis.²³

At one time Americans would turn to their families, friends, neighbors, religious organizations, or other social institutions for news and information about themselves, their communities and the world. Many scientific studies have confirmed that most of us now turn to the mass media, especially television, for these answers.²⁴ These studies fall under the category of “cultivation analysis” and are based on the theory that the messages we see on television have a cumulative effect, ultimately creating the culture in which we live. George Gerbner’s work has covered this shift in the impact of television. He writes:

Television is the overall socializing process superimposed on all the other processes. By the time children can speak they will have absorbed thousands of hours of living in a highly compelling world. They see everything represented: all the social types, situations, art and science. Our children learn—and we learn ourselves—certain assumptions about life that bear the imprint of this most early and continued ritual. [...] Those who tell stories hold power in society. Today television tells most of the stories to most of the people most of the time.²⁵

Media studies are in a state of flux as mass media grow and change. Until the late 20th Century, newspapers, publishers and radio and television stations were small, locally and family owned enterprises.²⁶ In 1979, for example, there was an increase in the number of Black owned television stations. During that year five VHF stations were

²² Hiebert, Ray E. “The Growing Power of Mass Media.” *Impact of Mass Media: Current Issues 4th Edition*. New York: Longman, 1999, p. 7.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Altshull 1984; Barbour 1994; Bennett 1996; Czitrom 1982; Kellner 1995; Kerbel 1990; Mazzocco 1994; Parenti 1993.

²⁵ Gerbner, George qtd. in “Society’s Storyteller: How Television Creates the Myths by Which We Live.” *Media & Values*, Fall 1992, p.9.

²⁶ Hiebert, Ray E. “The Growing Power of Mass Media.” *Impact of Mass Media: Current Issues 4th Edition*. New York: Longman, 1999, p. 11.

purchased and a license was obtained to construct a new UHF station.²⁷ Udayan Gupta attributed the boom to new FCC procedures, activism on the part of Black business people and increased capital sources available to minority entrepreneurs.²⁸ Until the late 1970's, the sale and trade of television stations was in the hands of a very small group of white-owned companies and brokers.²⁹

Deregulation in the industry started during the 1980's. It was totally overhauled in 1996 when communications law changed.³⁰ (Among the changes: no limits at all on the number of radio station an individual or corporation can own). According to Robert McChesney, "only about 50 firms control the overwhelming majority of the world's mass media."³¹ As media conglomerates have taken shape, scholars have been studying shifts in the purpose of mass communication, the phenomenon of cross promotion across media platforms within corporations, and the orientation toward the "bottom line."³²

The nation's newspapers, once the dominant form of mass communication, are now in serious trouble. Declining readership has been spurred by the accessibility and popularity of online news, which is free and constantly updated, unlike the static pages of a newspaper.³³ As newspaper revenues decline, major cuts are being made to newsrooms, which are downgrading the quality of the product they can provide which, in turn, leads to more people canceling subscriptions and less circulation.³⁴ Newspapers are currently

²⁷ Gupta, Udayan. "How They Did It: TV Station Ownership." *Ebony Images: Black Americans and Television*, Ed. Dr. George H. Hill, APR. Carson, CA: Daystar Publishing, 1986, p. 9

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 11

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ McChesney, Robert W. *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics in the 21st Century*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004, p.20

³² Ibid.

³³ Underwood, Doug. "Identity Crisis of Newspapers." Hiebert, Ray E. "The Growing Power of Mass Media." *Impact of Mass Media: Current Issues 4th Edition*. New York: Longman, 1999, p. 23.

³⁴ Ibid.

working on their presence online, offering stories updated by the minute and additional information that there wasn't space for in their print editions. While the transition to online reporting was necessary it has set up a cow-milk scenario where many readers wonder why they should pay for a subscription to the newspaper when they get it online, anytime they want it for free.³⁵

Television audiences are becoming more and more fragmented as specialty networks, such as the Food Network, Animal Planet and the Travel Channel proliferate. The networks provide targeted programming for the interests of specific viewers while at the same time delivering a targeted audience to advertisers.³⁶

Media History & Journalism Research

Journalism is broadly defined as the collection, writing, editing and presentation of news over a spectrum of media, including television, newspapers, radio, and the internet.³⁷ The history of journalism varies widely around the world. The concern of this research is professional journalism, which developed in the United States at the beginning of the 20th Century when formal journalism schools opened and professional codes developed.³⁸

In the United States, journalism, specifically freedom of the press, is viewed as an essential element of democracy. Students of the craft are taught the ten elements of journalism. These are considered guidelines for journalists to follow as they work

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Subramanian, Anand. "Audience Fragmentation Challenges Media-Buying Process." Online Media Daily Commentary. 28 July 2008.

<http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticle&art_aid=87413>.

³⁷ Pew Research Center. *Project for Excellence in Journalism*.

<<http://www.journalism.org/resources/principles>>.

³⁸ Ibid.

towards their ultimate goal of providing citizens with the information they need to know in order to be free and self-governing. The elements are:

1. Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
2. Its first loyalty is to the citizens.
3. Its essence is discipline of verification.
4. Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5. It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
6. It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7. It must strive to make the significant interesting, and relevant.
8. It must keep the news comprehensive and proportional.
9. Its practitioners must be allowed to exercise their personal conscience.
10. Citizens must recognize their own rights and responsibilities as they use new technology to edit their own news and information³⁹

Contemporary scholars argue that mass media outlets in general have become more entertainment-oriented in nature in their quest for higher ratings and resulting higher profits.⁴⁰ Researchers have traced the trends of media outlets providing information as a community and public service of what people need to know, to now providing information that emphasizes “the bloody, the sexy and the emotional.”⁴¹

Researchers of media and journalism also approach their studies from an historical angle. They consider a wide range of topics that include, but are certainly not limited to: the creation and maintenance of codes of ethics for the industry, why some media outlets failed while others have succeeded; the role of the media in a democratic society and the study of individual broadcasters to uncover their motivations for joining the field and exploring their contributions to the media industry.⁴²

³⁹ Kovach, Bill and Tom Rosenstiel. *The Elements of Journalism*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007.

⁴⁰ Parenti 1993; Asamen and Beery 1997; Baughman 1997; Bryant and Zillman 1994.

⁴¹ Hiebert, Ray E. “The Growing Power of Mass Media.” *Impact of Mass Media: Current Issues 4th Edition*. New York: Longman, 1999, p. 12.

⁴² Media History Monographs: An Online Journal of Media History. <
<http://facstaff.elon.edu/dcopeland/mhm/mhm.htm>>.

Women in Broadcast Journalism Research

The historical study of women journalists, images of women in the mass media, and their presence as members of mass media audiences really began to take shape in the late 1970's.⁴³ In the past 30 years, the field has attracted a number of scholars who have unearthed the long-forgotten and never told stories of women journalists. Historical studies of media consumed primarily by women have been carried out. Women's media images over different periods of time have been looked at and the ways in which women's issues have been covered by the media have also been considered.⁴⁴ In addition to uncovering women's roles in the history of journalism, researchers have also been instrumental in making sure their work is not considered to be on the fringe, but integrated into the overall history of American journalism.⁴⁵

After the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which makes job discrimination for reasons of sex illegal, a growing group of women reporters began to appear on television news. But as the barriers were breaking down, deep-rooted ideas about the social status of women were keeping many of them from fully participating in the newsroom.⁴⁶ Through oral history interviews, such as The Washington Press Club Foundation's Oral History Project or the Maynard Institute's Black Journalist History Project, researchers have uncovered some of the prevailing sexist attitudes about newswomen that prevailed in the 1960's and 70's. They include, but are not limited to:

⁴³ Henry, Susan. "Changing Media History through Women's History." *Women in Mass Communication*. Ed. Pamela J. Creedon. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989. p.34.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Marzolf, Marion. *Up From the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists*. New York: Hastings House, 1977.

⁴⁶ Gelfman, Judith. *Women in Television News*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1976.

1. Worry over wombs: if women weren't married, employers believed they would be one day. Once they got married it was believed they would eventually have children and after that they would want to quit their jobs.
2. Since employers didn't consider women as long-term employees, some were kept in positions where they trained men who would later be promoted.
3. Women were seen as fragile, and weak and in need of protection from some of the dangers that journalists faced in the field.
4. Women's voices were not deep enough, or their faces serious enough to deliver the news.⁴⁷

In addition to the sexist attitudes and opinions of the time, historians have found that many media outlets were making token efforts at meeting federal hiring guidelines. In many cases one woman of a racial minority was hired to fit the bill. In 1971, Black reporter Nancy Dickerson said, "Every station in America feels it must have one black and one woman. With a black woman they are taking care of their tokenism in one fell swoop."⁴⁸

Research on Minorities in the News Media

The first published study of the employment status of minorities and women in the media was conducted by the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ

⁴⁷ Simpson, Peggy A. "The Washington Press Club Foundation's Oral History Project: Getting Women Journalists to Speck of Themselves for Themselves for Herstory's Sake." *Women Transforming Communications: Global Intersections*. Eds. Donna Allen, Ramona Rush and Susan Kaufman. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996, p. 290.

The Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalist Movement: How they Got Their Start History Project*. <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement>.

⁴⁸ Dickerson, Nancy qtd. in *Newsweek*, August 30, 1971. p. 62.

in 1972. The study concluded that while things were improving, television was still dominated by white males.⁴⁹

A few years later in 1977, the federal government took up a similar, yet larger study of the status of women and minorities in the media. The study had its origins in the race riots that broke out across hundreds of U.S. cities a decade before. President Lyndon Johnson created the Kerner Commission in 1967 to explore what was behind the riots and what could be done to prevent such an outbreak ever again.⁵⁰ The Kerner Commission's findings were numerous and most are beyond the scope of this research. But for the purposes of this study, it is important to note that Kerner Commission members believed strongly that the nation's broadcasters shared in the responsibility for the "racial crisis" and were therefore key players in helping resolve the situation. According to the final report:

The nation is confronted with a serious racial crisis. It is acknowledged that the media cannot solve the crisis, but on all sides it has been emphasized that the media can contribute greatly in many significant respects, particularly to understanding by white and black of the nature of the crisis and the possible remedial actions, and that such understanding is a vital first and continuing step.⁵¹

The Kerner Commission ultimately found the world of television was "almost totally white in both appearance and attitude"⁵² and charged the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) to develop an action plan that would ensure mass media in the U.S. would truly serve the masses, which included minorities and women. The FCC responded by adding equal employment opportunity rules to its broadcast renewal license

⁴⁹ Jennings, Ralph M. and Tillyer, David A. *Television Station Employment Practices: The Status of Minorities and Women*. New York: Office of Communications, United Church of Christ, 1972.

⁵⁰ United States. Commission on Civil Rights. *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. Washington: August 1977, p. 1.

⁵¹ Kerner, Otto. *Report on the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*. New York: Bantam Books, 1968, p. 774.

⁵² United States. Commission on Civil Rights. *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. Washington: August 1977, p. 2.

process. Broadcasters were required to fill out employment reports which included detailed questions about their employees' gender and racial makeup. The FCC essentially said that if a particular broadcast outlet was found to be discriminating based on "race, color, religion, national origin or sex" it faced the loss of its license since this raised "questions of whether the licensee is making a good faith effort to serve his entire public⁵³,"

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, whose mission is in part to "study and collect information relating to discrimination or a denial of equal protection of the laws under the Constitution because of race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin," examined the employment of women and minorities at broadcast outlets and the portrayal of them on television.⁵⁴ The results of the study were released in their August 1977 report, *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*.

The Civil Rights Commission's study concerned itself with commercial television and began by examining the portrayal of women and minorities (Blacks, Native Americans, Asian Americans and some reporting on Mexican Americans) in programming in the 1950's, 60's and 70's. The Civil Rights Commission also considered network television news, and looked at the topics of news stories and the racial and gender makeup of broadcast station's workforces. Finally, the Civil Rights Commission made policy recommendations to the FCC on the regulation of programming and employment in the public interest.

The Civil Rights Commission found improvements had been made in the portrayal of women and minorities since the days of early television; however, elements

⁵³ Ibid., p. 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

See also "Mission" at <<http://www.usccr.gov/>>

of racism and sexism still existed in entertainment programming (specifically dramas and situation comedies).⁵⁵ An examination of network news stories found women and minorities rarely made the news agenda, and none of the stories aired during the study period focused on their achievements or accomplishments.⁵⁶ Of most concern to this research are the Civil Rights Commission's findings on the employment of women and minorities in television. What at first appeared to be promising reports from broadcast outlets indicating more women and minorities on staff and more of them making employment gains, further examination of the data revealed misleading information was being reported.

There were some faults in the collection of the data. Minority female employees were being counted twice in some cases (as females and as minorities) which made increases for both groups to appear larger than they really were.⁵⁷ The broadcast outlets employment reports showed a pattern of an increase in upper level jobs for women and minorities, but their reports did not show a subsequent increase in support staff positions which would normally be the case if new departments were really being created. One researcher asked, "Are some broadcasters reclassifying low level workers into the upper job categories while keeping them on the same old jobs at the same low salaries?"⁵⁸ The Civil Rights Commission looked behind the numbers to find out whether these upper level jobs were actually decision-making positions; in most cases they were not. Joel Dreyfuss described the status of Blacks and other minorities in television merely as window-dressing:

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 54.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 87.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Numbers alone are misleading. There are indeed more blacks than ever in television—but at one time there were none. And few have reached decision making positions at either the networks or at local stations. The blacks and other minorities on television are generally in very visible positions—on camera—but most of the decisions about what they say and do are made behind the scenes, by producers, news directors and executives, almost all of whom are white.⁵⁹

The FCC responded strongly, telling broadcasters tokenism would no longer be enough. The Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice supported the FCC, issuing a statement in 1968 that said in part:

Because of the enormous impact which television and radio have upon American life, the employment practices of the broadcasting industry have an importance greater than that suggested by the number of its employees. The provision of equal opportunity in employment in that industry could therefore contribute significantly toward reducing and ending discrimination in other industries.⁶⁰

However, the Civil Rights Commission chastised the efforts of the FCC, saying it ignored questions about potential flaws in employment reporting, and didn't implement suggestions which may have produced more accurate data.⁶¹ The Civil Rights Commission found the FCC policies were designed for licensees to self-regulate. In the report's recommendations, the Civil Rights Commission asked Congress to empower the FCC to regulate the equal employment opportunities of their licensees. The Civil Rights Commission suggested the penalty for non-compliance should ultimately be the revocation of a broadcaster's license.⁶²

⁵⁹ Dreyfuss, Joel. "Blacks and Television Part III: Presence Without Power," *Washington Post*, Sept. 3, 1974, p. B1, qtd. in United States. Commission on Civil Rights. *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. Washington: August 1977, p. 108.

⁶⁰ Stephen J. Pollack, Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, Department of Justice, letter to Rosel Hl. Hyde, Chairman FCC, May 21, 1968.

⁶¹ United States. Commission on Civil Rights. *Window Dressing on the Set: Women and Minorities in Television*. Washington: August 1977, p. 130.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 152.

Window Dressing on the Set: An Update

In 1979, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released an update to their 1977 report titled *Window Dressing on the Set: An Update*. The Civil Rights Commission wanted to know whether their findings and recommendations (which, by this time, had received a lot of attention from groups like the United Church of Christ, the National Organization for Women, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Department of Justice) had had any immediate effects in programming decisions or hiring practices in television. The Civil Rights Commission found continued race and sex stereotyping in the portrayal of women and minorities in entertainment programming,⁶³ few network news stories dealt with minorities and women,⁶⁴ and despite the FCC's release of a 10-point model program of steps for licensees to follow to development equal employment opportunity plans, few women and minorities worked in important decision making positions.⁶⁵ Since little had changed in the television industry since the Civil Rights Commission's first report, it once again asked that its original recommendations be implemented.

Black Broadcasters

About a decade after the *Window Dressing* update report, a survey of the media showed a considerable number of white women had moved into key decision-making positions as network news vice presidents and executive producers, but Blacks had not.⁶⁶

⁶³ United States. Commission on Civil Rights. *Window Dressing on the Set: An Update*. Washington: January 1979, p. 20.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.24

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 34

⁶⁶ Levine, Richard. "Unconscious Racism in the Newsroom." *Black Americans and Television*. Ed. George Hill. Carson, CA: Daystar Publishing, 1986, p. 25

According to the literature, just as women faced a set of sexist attitudes when they entered newsrooms in greater numbers, Blacks faced their own set of racist attitudes.

They included:

1. Lack of respect from white peers, some of whom believed good paying positions were being handed to them just because of their race.
2. They were considered convenient Black faces to cover urban unrest in the 1960's when white reporters were too scared or refused to go into Black neighborhoods.
3. Some were called "Spy," "Turncoat" or "Uncle Tom" by residents when they reported in Black neighborhoods.
4. Lack of Black producers and Blacks in upper management positions handicapped networks' coverage of Black communities⁶⁷

The Ford Foundation created a summer program at Columbia University to train more minorities in broadcasting to address these issues. While the program turned out some impressive journalists, many complained that it contained a built-in failure factor. Many of the students that were enrolled in the program did not have high-school diplomas. The result--they would leave the program for jobs at television stations and would be laid off because of incompetence, or worse, they were kept on staff, leaving more qualified minorities jobless.⁶⁸

The first Black network correspondent was Mal Goode, who was hired by ABC in 1962.⁶⁹ Ten years later, there were only a few others at the network level, but an

⁶⁷ Levine 1986; Dates and Barlow 1990; Clarke 2001.

⁶⁸ Levine, Richard. "Unconscious Racism in the Newsroom." *Black Americans and Television*. Ed. George Hill. Carson, CA: Daystar Publishing. 1986, p. 28

⁶⁹ Thornton, Lee. "Broadcast News." *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media*. Eds. Jannette L Dates and William Barlow. Howard University Press, 1993, pg. 389.

increasing number of Black journalists were being hired at the local level in large markets with significant African American populations.⁷⁰

Other important “firsts” for Black journalists include: Max Robinson-the first Black man to anchor a primetime, network news program, and Ed Bradley-the first African American to regularly report for “60 Minutes.” Bradley also anchored a weekend newscast. Bryant Gumbel was the first Black host on the “Today” show. A few years after CBS News hired its first Black correspondent, George Foster, the network became the first of the big three commercial networks (CBS, NBC, ABC) to assign a Black woman to a regular beat covering the White House.⁷¹ Bernard Shaw became the first Black anchor at CNN.

It is clear from this brief list of important “firsts” for Black journalists that Black men were being hired in greater numbers for on-air positions than Black women at the network level. The problem with lists of this sort is that they don’t include information about other Black journalists working in broadcast news, such as news directors, producers, editors and writers. But as Lee Thornton argues, it’s not really until the early 1980’s that many Black journalists were in these positions. He writes, “Blacks suffer from a split image-in this case being considered good enough to be seen up front and on camera but not to be trusted to “do the thinking” and hold the reins of power.”⁷²

Black Female Journalists: A Brief History

If one subscribes to the strict definition of journalist as someone who writes, edits and publishes on news events, the first black female journalists emerged around the

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., P. 390.

abolition movement. Maria W. Stewart's anti-slavery essays, published in the *Liberator* around 1832, helped fuel the abolitionist movement.⁷³ Her work was soon followed by Mary Ann Shaad Cary who wrote articles in support of the Canadian fugitive slave movement during the mid-19th Century.⁷⁴

Most certainly there were women well before these who gathered facts and information and shared them with the community. There are some that argue the roots of Black women's involvement in this type of "citizen" or "untrained" journalism stretches all the way back to the Middle Passage, where African women from different tribes and cultures were able to communicate information and build bonds with each other in spite of their differences.⁷⁵

The status of Black slaves in the colonies (later the United States) as property meant they were nearly invisible in the early newspapers of the time. They most noticeably appeared in advertisements for runaway slaves, and were certainly not invited to write material for publication in these newspapers.⁷⁶ Free Blacks were also unable to enjoy full citizenship in the U.S., and were denied access to the mainstream press. In the 18th and 19th Centuries, these African Americans started forming their own presses, often through or in conjunction with Black Churches.⁷⁷

⁷³ Streitmatter 5.

⁷⁴ Streitmatter 5.

⁷⁵ Wilson II, Clint C. *Black Journalists in Paradox: Historical Perspectives and Current Dilemmas*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1991, pg. 6.

⁷⁶ Dates, Jannette L. and William Barlow. *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media*. Washington: Howard University Press, 1993, pg. 370.

Of course the emergence of any Black journalists during this time period was nearly impossible in light of legislation in slave states which made it illegal for anyone to teach a slave how to read or write.

⁷⁷ Dates and Barlow 371.

The first Black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, was founded by Rev. Samuel Cornish and John B. Russwurm.

By 1890, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that there were 300 Black journalists in the United States.⁷⁸ Among them was Ida B. Wells, who in 1892 fled her home and newspaper office in Memphis after her equipment was destroyed and her life threatened because of her crusade against lynching.⁷⁹ Comparable census data is not available today for the subjects of this research, Black women working in television news. However, a recent survey of the minority television work force shows nearly 18% of people employed in broadcast media identify themselves as African American.⁸⁰

While more of the history of Black female journalists still needs to be uncovered, there are mechanisms in place now that track women and minorities in the media closely, namely the annual “Women and Minorities in the Newsroom” survey that is compiled by the Radio and Television News Directors Association and Ball State University. The survey is well respected within the media industry.⁸¹

The most recent survey found that while minorities make up 34% of the U.S. population, they represent only 23.6% of the TV workforce and 11.8% of the radio workforce. More specifically, in the television broadcast news workforce, 10.1% are African American and only 7.8% are African American in the radio workforce. The researchers noted that there are currently 10% more African American men employed in television news than African American women.

The survey also examines the number of minorities and women in newsroom leadership positions, like broadcast news director. Right now 3.7% of the nation’s

⁷⁸ Winston 176.

⁷⁹ Winston 176

⁸⁰ “Women and Minorities in the Newsroom” survey <http://www.rtnda.org/pages/media_items/the-face-of-the-workforce1472.php>

⁸¹ The Women and Minorities in the Newsroom survey can be found online at <http://www.rtnda.org/pages/media_items/the-face-of-the-workforce1472.php>

television broadcast news directors are African American. In radio, the number is only 1.7%. Television positions were broken down by gender and race as the following table illustrates.⁸²

⁸² Per the focus of this research, I have only included the information on women and African Americans. The study also includes information on Hispanic/Latino, Asian American and Native American journalists.

Table 1: Women & Minorities: TV Positions by Gender and Race⁸³

	Female Total	Female White	Female Black	Female Hispanic	Female Other
News Director	71.7%	28.3%	84.5%	15.5%	3.7%
Assistant News Director	51.3	48.7	81.2	18.8	11.1
Managing Editor	69.5	30.5	87.8	12.2	3.7
Executive Producer	44.8	55.2	85.5	14.5	7.0
News Anchor	43.2	56.8	75.3	24.7	11.9
Weather-caster	78.4	21.6	91.3	8.7	3.3
Sports Anchor	92.2	7.8	86.0	14.0	7.6
News Reporter	43.3	56.7	70.8	29.2	12.4
Sports Reporter	81.3	18.7	83.8	16.2	5.2
Assignment Editor	51.3	48.7	72.5	27.5	13.8
News Producer	35.8	64.2	80.8	19.2	10.0
News Writer	36.6	63.4	76.2	23.8	11.6
News Assistant	25.0	75.0	70.5	29.5	14.7
Photographer	93.2	6.8	77.4	22.6	10.3
Tape Editor	68.3	31.7	70.1	29.9	13.1
Graphics Specialist	68.0	32.0	79.0	21.0	5.0
Internet Specialist	54.9	45.1	82.9	17.1	6.3
Art Director	65.8	34.2	81.6	18.4	<0.1

⁸³ Table from "Women and Minorities in the Newsroom" survey
http://www.rtnda.org/pages/media_items/the-face-of-the-workforce1472.php

The data in this table could be examined from several different avenues. For the purposes of this research, it is important to note that the largest percentage of African Americans represented in one position is that of News Assistant at 14.7%.⁸⁴ The findings show double digit percentages for Black journalists in the decision making positions of Assistant News Director, Assignment Editor, and Producer.⁸⁵ However, as online news continues to grow in influence and scope, it's important to note that nearly 83% of Internet Specialists in the nation's newsrooms are white.

Research on Black Female Journalists

Although the literature on women journalists and Black broadcasters contain elements that also apply to the study of Black female journalists, there are many things that are unique to Black female journalists that are important to take note of. In general, "studies of black women as workers has lagged far behind the study of Black men's or white women's labor for most of the 20th Century."⁸⁶ As Sharon Harley points out, important works on Black women have been isolated by disciplinary traditions, since the 1970's, meaning studies fail to "speak to and connect to" each other.⁸⁷ Unfortunately, one of the areas where scholarly research is lacking is in the examination of the day-to-day experiences of the Black women working at broadcast news outlets.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Harley, Sharon, Editor. *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002. p. xvii.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

The majority of mass communication research on African American women is concerned with issues of portrayal in various films and television programs⁸⁸ A number of these studies on portrayal have given attention to Black women in their examinations of gender and race.⁸⁹ Other studies have included small caveats about Black women as part of larger examinations of African Americans in the media in general.

A few studies have begun to delve into Black women's employment in the media, but don't look beyond trends in employment numbers, job appeal or general job satisfaction.⁹⁰ In fact, one of the most recent pieces of empirical research whose sample was comprised *solely* of Black women in a professional, communications setting was a 1994 study of public relations practitioners.⁹¹

In spite of the small amount of literature available that is specific to Black female journalists, five themes emerge that will be examined in this study. They are:

1. "Window Dressing the Set" or the "Illusion of Inclusion." As outlined in the Civil Rights Commission's 1977/1979 reports, these phrases have developed to describe the practice of news organizations hiring of a few minority journalists for positions that receive visibility (like reporter or anchor), but employing few Black female journalists

⁸⁸ Dates and Stroman. "African American Women and Mass Communication Research." *Women Transforming Communications: Global Intersections*. Eds. Donna Allen, Ramona Rush and Susan Kaufman. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996, p. 249.

⁸⁹U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1977, 1979; Northcott, Seggar, and Hinton 1975; Seggar and Wheeler 1973; O'Kelly and Bloomquist 1976; Donager, Poulous, Liebert and Davidson 1976; Lemon 1977; Brown and Campbell 1986; Dodd, Foerch and Anderson 1988; Riffe 1989; Cowan and Campbell 1994.

⁹⁰ Bramlett-Solomon 1993; Kern-Foxworth et al. 1994; Stone 1988; Lafky 1993.

⁹¹ Kern-Foxworth, Gandy, Hines and Miller. "Assessing the managerial roles of black female public relations practitioners using individual and organized discriminates." *Journal of Black Studies*, 1994 vol. 24, p. 416-434.

for producer or management positions, which have greater influence in shaping coverage.⁹²

2. "Covering the 'Black Beat' or 'Woman's Beat.'" In many of their testimonials Black female journalists complained of the difficulties of being seen in their newsrooms as well rounded reporters who are capable of covering more than issues about Black people and women.⁹³

3. Educator on Black people and the media industry: Many Black female journalists have reported finding themselves playing the roles of both journalist and educator inside the newsroom and out in the field. So few minorities work in newsrooms Black female journalists often are responsible for clarifying or giving information to White colleagues about Black people. At the same time, when Black female journalists are out in the field, working in the Black community, it is not uncommon for them to meet with resistance because of rampant misrepresentations of African Americans in the news media. It then becomes the journalists' task to educate Blacks about the power of the media, and the importance of Black community voices being heard in order to counteract negative, misrepresentations.⁹⁴

⁹² Johnson, Ben and Mary Bullard-Johnson. *Who's What and Where: A Directory of American's Black Journalists*. Detroit: Who's What and Where, 1985.

Stein, M.L. *Blacks in Communications: Journalism, Public Relations and Advertising*. New York: Julian Messner, 1972

Dates and Barlow 1993

Wilson 1991

Streitmatter 1994

⁹³ Stein 1972, Dates and Barlow 1993, Wilson 1991, Streitmatter 1994

⁹⁴ Stein 1972, Johnson 1985, Dates and Barlow 1993, Wilson 1991, Streitmatter 1994

4. Insider/Outsider Status: Black female journalists report their colleagues view them as “acceptable Blacks” (educated, middle class) that are somehow different from African Americans in the community.⁹⁵

5. Physical Appearance: Black female journalists whose skin tones and hair textures do not fit society’s standards of physical attractiveness are often victims of biased employment practices.⁹⁶

The literature available on women in television news and general literature on Blacks in the media industry offer us incredible insight into the environment Black female journalists were working in, particularly in the late 1960’s and 70’s when they were joining the journalism field in greater numbers. Studies like the Civil Rights Commission’s *Window Dressing* report provide detailed information on broadcast outlets’ hiring practices, promotion practices and programming decisions that help us to understand the structural barriers to true advancement to decision making positions that could lead to change. But the questions remain: How did these women function day-to-day? What were some of the job-related issues they struggled with? How did these issues affect their job performance? How were some Black women able to break through the barriers and have successful careers? This study will address these questions.

⁹⁵ Unidentified Black Female Journalist. Personal Interview. 29 Nov. 2007.

⁹⁶ Personal Interview 2007 and Ferguson, Renee. “A Dilemma for Black Women in Broadcast Journalism.” *Nieman Reports*: Summer 2007, pg. 80-81.

Chapter 3

FEMINIST AND BLACK FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

Sorely needed are studies [on African American women journalists] that use an African American womanist/feminist research perspective. As Saunders cogently noted: The use of feminist theory will move communication scholars toward a more accurate understanding of African American women's communication within a framework that is grounded in their communication experience and world of meaning. -From "African American Women and Mass Communication Research."⁹⁷

How does one begin to study a group of women like Black female journalists?

While the focus of this particular project has been narrowed to those working in television, the sample still consists of a large group of women from different backgrounds who worked in a variety of newsrooms (some on the network level, others on the local level) in various positions.

Since this study is concerned with questions of gender, race and class, it was important to use a theoretical lens or perspective that addressed these issues. Feminist perspectives guide the researcher as to the people who need to be studied and the issues that are important to examine.⁹⁸ This chapter begins with an examination of Feminism, including its major tenets and perceived weaknesses. It examines the oppressions of racism, classism and sexism. Finally, the chapter takes a look at the development of Black Feminism and the core elements of a Black Feminist theoretical perspective.

⁹⁷ Dates and Stroman. "African American Women and Mass Communication Research." *Women Transforming Communications: Global Intersections*. Eds. Donna Allen, Ramona Rush and Susan Kaufman. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996, p. 255.

⁹⁸ Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003, p. 131.

Feminism

A basic definition of feminism would be the belief that there should be social, political, and economic equality between men and women.⁹⁹ Social and cultural movements have been organized around this belief, as well as theoretical and philosophical perspectives in the academy.¹⁰⁰

The history of Feminism has been divided into distinct periods or waves: First-wave, Second-wave, Third-wave and Post Feminism.¹⁰¹ While each of these periods can be examined in its own right, this study is concerned with the development of Second-Wave Feminism. Second-wave feminism started taking shape during the time period many Black female journalists in this study were starting their careers. It is also important to examine because it can be cited as one of the precursors to the development of a distinct Black Feminist perspective that is used as a tool of analysis in this research.

Historians generally agree that Second-wave feminist activities began in the early 1960's and continued through the late 1980's.¹⁰² The tenets of Second-wave feminism included the belief that women's cultural and political inequalities were linked and that aspects of women's personal lives were deeply politicized and reflected sexist power structures.¹⁰³ Millions of women organized around these ideas, encouraging other women to look at their personal lives more critically. Carol Hanisch popularized the slogan "The Personal is Political" which became synonymous with the second wave.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Humm, Maggie. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990, p. 278

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., These periods have been further subdivided and expanded by some researchers.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Hanish, Carol "The Personal is Political." 1969. Available online at <<http://scholar.alexanderstreet.com/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=2259>>

A key text which identified and expanded on these ideas was Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* which was published in 1963. Friedan argued that patriarchy had created a system in which women were forced to find identity and meaning in their lives through their husbands and children.¹⁰⁵

Patriarchy is a system that places more value on males and masculine social characteristics than on females and feminine social characteristics.¹⁰⁶ According to Lisa Schrich, "patriarchy places males at the head of their families, elects men to most political offices, and creates opportunities for men to rise to the tops of most businesses, government agencies, religious institutions, and educational organizations."¹⁰⁷ This patriarchal hierarchy sets up a conflict where many men are granted cultural, social, economic, and political permission to meet their needs at the expense of women's needs.

Sexism

The term "sexism" has emerged to describe discrimination based on gender in a patriarchal society. Audre Lorde describes sexism as the "belief in the inherent superiority of one sex over the other and thereby the right to dominance."¹⁰⁸ While differences in biology exist between males and females, social and political constructs have been attached to those differences.¹⁰⁹ Simone de Beauvoir famously noted in 1953,

¹⁰⁵ Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997, p. 43

¹⁰⁶ Schrich, Lisa. "Women Transforming Patriarchy: Feminist Ritual as Peace-Building." *Canadian Women Studies*. Fall 2002/Winter2003 Vol. 22, Issue 2; pg. 142.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Lorde, Audre. "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference." *Race, Class and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study 4th Edition*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, p.533.

¹⁰⁹ Hubbard, Ruth. "Rethinking Women's Biology." *Race, Class and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study 4th Edition*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, p. 32.

“One isn’t born a woman, one becomes a woman.”¹¹⁰ Beauvoir explained the social construction of the concepts of “woman” and “man” and examined how decisions from what we eat and how much to what we wear are all related to our attempts to fit into these categories.¹¹¹

“Sexism” emerged as a term to describe the belief that one sex is inferior to, or less valuable than another.¹¹² In most examples around the globe, sexism has manifested against women, but men have also occasionally been a target.¹¹³ The focus of this research is sexism against women, which has taken a number of forms in the United States including: legal sexism (It was once legal for a woman and her children to be considered the property of her husband. This category also includes the denial of voting rights to women.), violence against women (domestic violence and rape), the sexual objectification of women, and employment discrimination.¹¹⁴

The Emergence of Black Feminism

Ultimately, Friedan and other Second-wave feminists were criticized for solely focusing on the plight of the middle-class White woman, and not giving much attention to the differing situations encountered by women in less stable economic situations, or women of color.¹¹⁵ Black Feminism emerged, in part, as a critique and response to “mainstream Feminism” that did not address issues of racism and classism that affect non-white and poor women’s lives just as much as issues of sexism do.

¹¹⁰ Beauvoir qtd. in Ibid.

¹¹¹ Since Beauvoir’s work in the 1950’s theory on gender has expanded immensely to further complicate the categories of “man” and “woman.”

¹¹² Humm, Maggie. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990, p. 278

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Hull, Scott and Smith 1982; Collins 1990; Imam 1997; Sow 1997.

The key tenet of Black feminism is the re-conceptualization of racism, classism and sexism as interlocking systems of oppression.¹¹⁶ According to Patricia Hill Collins, “Black Feminist thought sees these distinctive systems of oppression as being part of one overarching structure of domination.”¹¹⁷ Black women are in the peculiar societal position that exposes them to racism, classism and sexism because they deviate from the dominant (white, male, and middle-class) norm.¹¹⁸ At the same time they also face sexism within the Black community because of the unique form of patriarchy that has been adopted.¹¹⁹ This understanding of the Black woman’s position in society has led many Black feminists to argue that the liberation of Black women from these interlocking oppressions will bring about the liberation of all oppressed peoples.¹²⁰

In 1977, the foundational Black feminist group, The Combahee River Collective released a statement on their political position and the evolution of Black Feminism. It articulated a commitment to understanding the experiences of Black women and the importance and value of responding to their needs. The statement also alluded to some of the key concepts that differentiate Black Feminism from mainstream Feminism. For

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Collins, Patricia Hill. “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination.” *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

¹¹⁸ Grant, Jacquelyn. “Black Theology and the Black Woman.” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995, pg. 323.

A larger discussion about forms of patriarchy is beyond the scope of this research. However, I would like to note the argument presented by Naomi Zack and others about the unique form of patriarchy in the Black community. Since Black men did not have the power and authority of White men because of racism, they have not been able to fully participate in the patriarchal system.

¹²⁰ Wallace, Michele. “Anger in Isolation: A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood.” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995. 219-227.

hooks, bell. “Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory.” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995. 269-282.

Smith, Barbara. “Some Home Truths on the Contemporary Black Feminist Movement.” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995. 253-267.

Jones, Claudia. “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman.” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995. 107-123.

example, Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* called for women to reject the roles of "wife" and "mother" and embrace the roles of "citizen" and "worker" as a means of achieving gender equity.¹²¹ The statement implied women were not part of the workforce, but Black women worked alongside men during slavery and continued to work outside of their homes to provide for their families.¹²² As the Combahee River Collective's statement pointed out, a Black feminist perspective allows one to complicate the idea of women's labor, taking into account the class position of Black women and the effects racism and sexism have on their working lives.¹²³

Another difference between Black and mainstream Feminism is the varying responses to sexism. Some Second-wave feminists were separatists who chose to and advocated for separating from male-defined, male-dominated institutions, relationships, roles and activities.¹²⁴ The women of the Combahee River Collective announced their deep "solidarity with progressive black men" as they "struggled together with black men against racism" and "also struggle with black men about sexism."¹²⁵

Black feminist research has complicated the male/female dichotomy of mainstream Feminism by examining the role race plays in the social construction of gender. Evelyn Higginbotham argues this is very evident when examining protections of white womanhood during slavery. Higginbotham points out the ways in which white law and public opinion "idealized motherhood and enforced the protection of white women's bodies" at the same Black women's bodies were exploited sexually and for physical

¹²¹ Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997, p. 368

¹²² Harley, Sharon and Francille Rusan Wilson and Shirley Wilson Logan. "Historical Overview of Black Women and Work." *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002., p.9

¹²³ The Combahee River Collective. *A Black Feminist Statement*. 1977

¹²⁴ Humm, Maggie. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1990, p. 278

¹²⁵ The Combahee River Collective. *A Black Feminist Statement*. 1977.

labor.¹²⁶ Because of this history, Black feminists have argued against the idea of a shared female culture or female essence that mainstream feminists argued for and rallied around. Black feminist research points to the role of race within the social and power relations of gender.¹²⁷

Defining Racism

Debates over race and whether it is a biological fact or social construction have waged on for years.¹²⁸ One perspective argues that race is a social construct and that racism is built on the belief that there are differences in character and ability among racial groups, which make a particular race superior to others.¹²⁹ Further, if we consider race to be a social construct, it is easier to understand why ideas about race and the social realities of race have changed dramatically over time.¹³⁰

For hundreds of years African Americans endured enslavement, rapes, lynching, beatings, murders, unequal access to housing and education, and unfair treatment in the criminal justice system in the United States.¹³¹ While this type of discrimination is now illegal and considered morally wrong by most, whites are still the dominant racial group in the United States. The social reality of being the dominant racial group means better access to money, material positions, education, steady employment, and leisure time.¹³²

Racism takes on many forms that can be examined on different levels. Important to this study is the concept of institutional or structural racism which can be defined as

¹²⁶ Higginbotham, Evelyn. "African American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." *Signs*. Winter 1992; 17, 2, pg. 251.

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 258.

¹²⁸ Appiah 1990; Outlaw 1996; Adelman 2003

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Zack, Naomi. *Thinking About Race*. Albany: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998, p. 38

¹³² Ibid., p. 44

racial discrimination by governments, corporations, educational institutions or other large organizations with the power to influence the lives of many individuals.¹³³ Naomi Zack puts forth the segregation of public facilities before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and state laws prohibiting interracial marriage as examples of overt, institutional racism.¹³⁴ But more covert forms of institutional racism also exist. For example, job promotions may depend in part on social contacts outside the workplace that nonwhites may not have. Gaining admission to an Ivy League school may be made easier by having a relative who attended the institution, but because of past discrimination it is less likely nonwhites have these sorts of connections.¹³⁵ Sexism can also be examined at the institutional or structural level.

Race, Gender and Social Class

It is hard to discuss issues of race and gender in the United States without also considering social class. The American ideal or dream is that “everyone is equal in the eyes of the law; all have the same opportunities for material success and the same rights to respect and privacy from others.”¹³⁶ But in reality, one’s race is a determining factor in social class group membership. Being a person of color in the United States is a direct barrier to gaining full access to middle and upper class advantages.¹³⁷ White Americans make up the majority of the middle and upper class, which allows them to own homes, procure steady employment, seek college educations and maintain fairly stable nuclear

¹³³ Cashmore, Ellis and James Jennings. *Racism: Essential Readings*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001.

¹³⁴ Zack, Naomi. *Thinking About Race*. Albany: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998, p. 44

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Zack, Naomi. *Thinking About Race*. Albany: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998, p. 97.

¹³⁷ Darde, Joe T. “Blacks and Other Racial Minorities: The Significance of Color in Inequality.” In. *Racism: Essential Readings*. Eds. Ellis Cashmore and James Jennings Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001, p. 237.

families.¹³⁸ Studies have shown that Black members of the middle class do not earn as much, own less property, and have a harder time sending their children to college.¹³⁹

Historically, issues of class and race were used to discriminate against women. According to Ruth Hubbard, in the 19th century White women were denied access to higher education and were discouraged from working outside the home because their brains were considered too small, and there was fear “if energy was diverted to their brains by studying, their reproductive organs would [shrivel], they [would] become sterile, and the race [would] die out.”¹⁴⁰ However the same logic was not extended to working class, poor or Black women. In fact, their ability to work hard and still have children was considered a sign they were not as highly evolved as upper class White women and were closer to animals for which breeding was natural.¹⁴¹

Class politics were one of the main contentions between mainstream and Black Feminism. While Friedan and other liberal feminists called for equal employment opportunities for all women, the emphasis seemed to be “on the professional careers of White women who were already economically privileged and college educated.”¹⁴² Economic issues of most concern to poor women and women of color including welfare and poor housing and health care (often consequences of racial oppression and class position they were born into) were ignored or given little attention in the mainstream Feminist movement.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 102.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Hubbard, Ruth. “Rethinking Women’s Biology.” *Race, Class and Gender in the United States: An Integrated Study 4th Edition*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998, p. 33

¹⁴¹ Ibid, p. 35.

¹⁴² King, Deborah. “Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of Black Feminist Ideology.” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995, p. 294

Core Tenets of Black Feminist Studies

As Black Feminist ideology started taking shape, some of the women who were part of the movement worked to develop scholarship that became the foundation of Black women's studies. Research, art and other activities done under this umbrella have the following elements at their core:

1. Making Black women visible: By making Black women the central focus, Black Feminist research pulls Black women out of the shadows.
2. Confers special status: Black Feminist research acknowledges the literature on race and the literature on women, but it declares being Black and female constitutes a special status that is unique and worthy of study. At the same time, Black Feminist researchers recognize the variation in experiences amongst Black women as individuals.
3. Empowerment: Black Feminist research frames Black women as much more than 'objects' to be studied. It empowers Black women by asserting the right for them to interpret their own realities and define their own objectives on their own terms.
4. Intersectionality: Black Feminist research examines oppressions Black women experience such as racism, sexism and classism, not as separate phenomenon, but as intersecting elements in a larger system of domination.
5. Resistance: Black Feminist research does not label Black women as victims. Black Feminist research recognizes the turmoil racism, classism and sexism cause in Black women's lives, but it also explores everyday acts of resistance as Black women strive toward liberation.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ King 1988; The Combahee River Collective 1977; Smith 1979; hooks 1984; Lorde 1984

A Black Feminist Perspective as a Tool of Analysis

Black Feminist perspectives can be used as a tool to help interpret the reality that Black women negotiate. If we regard history not as series of disparate events, but rather ideas and concepts that change over time; we can understand the Black Feminist perspective comes out of the tradition of activism by Black women.¹⁴⁴ This tradition includes Black female journalist Claudia Jones who explored the “super-exploitation of the Negro woman worker” back in 1949, to Amy Garvey who encouraged women to be ready to lead the struggle for racial uplift if men were not up to the challenge in the 1920’s. Black female journalists have been writing and thinking about the intersections of racism, classism and sexism generations before our time. Patricia Hill Collins points out the importance of the contributions of all Black women in this process. She writes about recognizing the everyday acts of resistance by ordinary women which created a foundation for Black feminist activism.¹⁴⁵

Because of the importance of the experiences of ordinary women in the development of the Black Feminist perspective, it naturally follows that these experiences are important areas of study when considering what it means to be Black and female. In this way, the different experiences of Black women (which can vary widely, even when only one society is being considered) can be compared, contrasted and discussed to give a better understanding of how the forces of oppression play out in different women’s lives and to identify different strategies of resistance. It is this aspect of Black Feminism that Barbara Smith calls one of the perspective’s “greatest gifts.” She points out, “A Black

¹⁴⁴Mohammad 2003

¹⁴⁵ Collins, Patricia Hill. “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995, p. 338

Feminist analysis has enabled us [Black women] to understand that we are not hated and abused because there is something wrong with us, but because our status and treatment is absolutely prescribed by the racist, misogynist system under which we live.”¹⁴⁶

Patricia Hill Collins challenges researchers to not only consider the intersectionality of racism, classism and sexism, but to understand them as a part of a larger structure of domination that can be divided into three levels: the personal level, group or community level and the level of social institutions.¹⁴⁷ Collins goes on to assert that not only are oppressions experienced simultaneously, they are experienced simultaneously on multiple levels. She argues a Black Feminist perspective can examine the ways in which racism, classism and sexism are manifested and resisted on each of these levels.¹⁴⁸

Collins describes the personal level as the space of our individual “experiences, values, motivations and emotions.”¹⁴⁹ Since we each occupy different social spaces, experiences of racism, classism and sexism are unique to each individual. But Collins also points out these individual experiences overlap with the experiences of people who are of the same “race, social class, age, gender, religion and sexual orientation.”¹⁵⁰ In this way, Collins argues, Black women experience and resist domination at the group or community level. Finally Collins writes about a third site to examine, the level of social institutions. Institutions such as schools, churches and the media expose us to the

¹⁴⁶ Smith, Barbara. “Some Home Truths on the Contemporary Black Feminist Movement.” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995, p. 262

¹⁴⁷ Collins, Patricia Hill. “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination.” *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

dominant group's stance and interest¹⁵¹ Now Black women have brought Black Feminist thought within many of these institutions in a move that has challenged Eurocentric, masculinst thought.¹⁵² It is at these three levels the experiences of Black female journalists are analyzed in Chapter 5.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

The intersection of race and gender, as it is manifest in the experiences of all women of color, has not been integrated into the research agenda. These trends are equally evident in quantitative and qualitative research. Recent discussions of gender, race and class rooted in critical theory have sought a framework for discussing women of color and low-income women in communication studies. But little original research has been published to put this developing analysis into practice.-“Strategies on Studying Women of Color in Mass Communication”¹⁵³

This chapter describes the research methods and data analysis tools used to complete this study of Black female journalists. The chapter begins with a discussion of the epistemological stance I took as a researcher while conducting this study. It goes on to explore the concept of engendering research and its helpfulness when examining the experiences of women of color. It continues with an explanation of the research approach including, the data collection technique and sources of data that were tapped during the research process. The chapter concludes by defining key terms and journalistic jargon that are essential to understanding the findings.

Epistemological Concerns

The concept of epistemology is important for every researcher to consider. At the most basic level, we can understand epistemology as a concept that is concerned with knowledge. Epistemological issues consider the nature of knowledge by questioning

¹⁵³ Rhodes, Jane. “Strategies on Studying Women of Color in Mass Communication.” *Women in Mass Communication*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1989, p. 112-116.

what kind of knowledge is possible, the general basis of knowledge, who can know what, and under what circumstances knowledge is possible.¹⁵⁴ Answering these questions, and understanding the ways in which other researchers answer them, is part of forming an epistemological stance. This stance is critical for the researcher because it will guide him or her throughout the entire research process, informing everything from the formation of a research question, the relationship between the researcher and the subject of study, to what kind of theory will be used for study.

For the purposes of this study Feminist and Black Feminist epistemologies are at the forefront of this researcher's concerns. This study raised epistemological issues like: What is the relationship between a feminist epistemology and women's experience? What is the role of gender theory in a feminist epistemology? What does a Black feminist epistemology consist of? What does it allow the researcher to do?

As we begin to answer these questions, it becomes clear that knowledge is not something that just comes to us in books, but that it is something that is carefully constructed by human beings. Miranda Fricker argues that because of this we can consider any claim of total objectivity in social science research as a false ideal or a myth.¹⁵⁵ She asserts that in order to understand women's experiences one has to have a feminist epistemology, and in so doing, the researcher is holding up women's experience as something that is, and should be, considered valuable.

I turn now to the epistemological questions raised earlier. It is clear that part of the feminist project is to pull women's experiences from the annals of history to make

¹⁵⁴ Lazreg 1995; Fricker 1994.

¹⁵⁵ Fricker, Miranda. "Knowledge as Construct: Theorizing the Role of Gender Knowledge" *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*. Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, Eds. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 97.

them visible. Accepting this, we must examine the role of women's experience in a feminist epistemology. Marina Lazreg argues that experience is a valuable tool for critical analysis in the social and natural sciences, but she cautions feminist researchers that its use may also "reinforce what it has set out to combat" because of the privileged position it gives women; meaning it somewhat mirrors the privileged position men were given in these arenas previously.¹⁵⁶ She challenges the researcher to find a balance between highlighting the unique experiences of women and using women's experiences as an exercise in discovering the effect of social forces on different groups of women.

Epistemological issues like the role of gender in feminist research must also be carefully examined. Eudine Barriteau argues that gender analysis, when done correctly, is a tool that allows feminist researchers to examine social relations of power. Scholars are not calling for the study of men to cease; most believe a feminist epistemology includes room to examine both men and women. As Mohammad states, "I want to constitute gender theory as a member of the family of feminist theory. The two are often conflated because they are interconnected and arguably inseparable."¹⁵⁷ Barriteau agrees writing, "Shifting to gender as an analytical frame certainly does not mean that the study of women is abandoned or that one cannot maintain an exclusive focus on women in research. Neither does it mean that gender studies must automatically include men."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Lazreg, Marnia. "Women's Experience and Feminist Epistemology: A Critical Neo-rationalist Approach" *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*. Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, Eds. New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 45

¹⁵⁷ Mohammed, Patricia. "A Symbiotic Visiting Relationship: Caribbean Feminist Historiography and Caribbean Feminist Theory." *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*. Ed. Eudine Barriteau. Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2003, p. 109.

¹⁵⁸ Barriteau, Eudine. "Theorizing the Shift from "Woman" to "Gender" in Caribbean Feminist Discourse: The Power Relations of Creating Knowledge." *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*. Ed. Eudine Barriteau. Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2003, p. 43.

Putting all of these ideas together, the form of a Black Feminist epistemology begins to take shape. At its core a Black Feminist epistemology uses both women's experience and gender analysis as tools to recognize the intersections of racial, sexual and class oppressions in Black women's lives and considers their experiences unique and worthy of study. In the words of Gloria Jospheh, "it can be assumed that a unique, self-defined black women's consciousness exists concerning black women's material reality and that this point of view on reality has been authentically articulated in a body of knowledge that can be labeled BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT."¹⁵⁹ If, as Fricker suggests, there is a strong role for values and political argument in epistemology, a Black Feminist epistemology can proudly proclaim emancipatory elements that seek to raise political consciousness, create social change and the creation of a more just society. In these ways, a Black Feminist epistemology is not just about women as subjects and researchers, but can be adopted by people of any race or gender as a way to better understand the human condition.

Engendering Research

Adopting a Black Feminist epistemology is essential to engendering history. The concept of engendering research emerges from a critique of traditional social science research. The dominant white male perspective that informs traditional research leaves out the experiences of women and people of color.¹⁶⁰ Through the process of

¹⁵⁹ Joseph, Gloria. "Black Feminist Pedagogy and Schooling in Capitalist White America." *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995, p. 465, emphasis in the original.

¹⁶⁰ Imam, Ayesha M. "Engendering African Social Sciences: An Introductory Essay." *Engendering African Social Sciences*. Eds. Amina Mama and Fatou Sow, 1997.
Sow, Fatou. "The Social Sciences in Africa and Gender Analysis." *Engendering African Social Sciences*. Eds. Amina Mama and Fatou Sow, 1997.

engendering research, scholars are able to make these exploited groups visible. It recognizes their power by showing the ways in which they resisted domination. Most importantly, it helps shape a more complete view of history that can help us understand how the actions of all people (men, women, whites, blacks, etc.) contributed to the various societies we live in today.

Engendering research is a multi-layered concept that begins quite simply with changing the way that we think. Often traditional social science research frames the experiences of women and people of color as “other” or somehow deviating from the norm. Part of the process of engendering research is moving these experiences from the fringes of our studies, closer to the center.¹⁶¹

Engendering research also requires us to change our understanding of what history is. We often think of history as disparate events taking place over time and space. For example, a cultural enrichment approach to history often pulls out exceptional experiences of women and people of color. Approaching history under the concept of engendering research challenges us to consider the lives and actions of ordinary people as important to study, move beyond names and dates to understand history consists of ideas and concepts, and to recognize that these ideas and concepts are not fixed, but change over time as part of the historical process.¹⁶²

Higginbotham, Elizabeth. “Designing an Inclusive Curriculum: Bringing All Women Into the Core.” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995. 474-488.

Joseph, Gloria. “Black Feminist Pedagogy and Schooling in Capitalist White America.” *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*. Ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: The New Press, 1995. 462-471.

¹⁶¹ Higginbotham 1995, Joseph 1995.

¹⁶² Mohammed, Patricia. “A Symbiotic Visiting Relationship: Caribbean Feminist Historiography and Caribbean Feminist Theory.” *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*. Ed. Eudine Barriteau. Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2003. Higginbotham 1995.

Complicating the idea of history further, we are forced to be aware of the fact that there isn't just one historical narrative we all have to pull from. There are in fact as many different women's experiences to study as there are women.¹⁶³ It is also important to note that being male doesn't always equal being in a position of power. Men of color and men of working class status, like women, are often left out, or on the fringes, of traditional social science research. These concepts have led scholars to two, interrelated subsets of engendering research: the study of women's history and the study of gendered history.

Women's history is based on the idea that women and their experiences are important and legitimate areas of study that have been neglected by traditional social science research and history. Women's history places women at the center of analysis, recovering their experiences and contributions to their societies from the historical texts they are buried in or absent from.¹⁶⁴

Scholars have now taken the data collected from women's history and are using gender analysis as a tool for evaluation in an area of study known as gendered history. Ideas about what "gender" is and the role that it plays in research vary among scholars.¹⁶⁵ Patricia Mohammed puts forward a definition of gender that clarifies its use for the task at hand. She defines gender as "an order by which human society takes sexual difference and shapes it into recurrent cultural practices and social relations between men and

Lazreg, Marnia. "Women's Experience and Feminist Epistemology: A Critical Neo-rationalist Approach." *Knowing the Difference: Feminist Perspectives in Epistemology*. Kathleen Lennon and Margaret Whitford, Eds. New York: Routledge, 1994.

¹⁶³ Imam 1997; Sow 1997; Higginbotham 1995.

¹⁶⁴ Brereton, Bridget. "Gender and the Historiography of the English Speaking Caribbean." *Gendered Realities: Essays in Caribbean Feminist Thought*. Ed. Patricia Mohammad, 2002.

¹⁶⁵ Barribeau 2003; Mohammad 2003.

women.”¹⁶⁶ Gender analysis emerges then as a methodological approach and framework that allows us to examine social relations of power in relation to being male and or female.

For the purpose of studying Black women, gender analysis becomes an invaluable tool of examination. As previously discussed, one thing women’s history from a Black feminist perspective has uncovered is that different forms of oppression often intersect in one body.¹⁶⁷ So combining a Black Feminist perspective with gender analysis allows the researcher to examine the intersectionality of race, class and gender oppressions, further expanding our knowledge of Black women.

Research Approach and Design

This thesis studies the experiences of Black female journalists using a qualitative research approach. A qualitative approach allows the researcher to investigate the multiple meanings of individual experiences, examine the social and historical construction of meanings, and find patterns in open-ended, emerging data.¹⁶⁸ Data from several sources (oral histories, autobiographies, and interviews) were collected and analyzed.

In the tradition of Black Feminist research and in step with the concept of engendering research, oral histories and writings from the journalists themselves about their experiences were given special attention. In this way, the journalists (the subjects of the study) are speaking directly to the reader of this research, telling their own stories.

¹⁶⁶ Mohammed, p. 101.

¹⁶⁷ Imam 1997; Sow 1997.

¹⁶⁸ Creswell, John. W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd Ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002, p. 18.

According to a group of Black female scholars and researchers who published a group of essays on Black women and work, this type of research that works to right past omissions by allowing Black women themselves to break the silence provides a new lens on history:

Too often, stereotypes and misinformation—images, stories, and historical records presented to others—obscure existing representations of black women. The storyteller's identity and history often interfere with his or her willingness and ability to tell the story of black working women. [...] Stories of black women's labor much recognize the connections between their work in the marketplace, in their communities and organizations, and in their homes. There are also connections between work and personal identity, relations with others, and historical and social conditions such as racism and sexism.¹⁶⁹

This research project is exploratory, descriptive and explanatory in nature. It can be considered exploratory because it gathers information and develops ideas about an under-researched topic area.¹⁷⁰ In the tradition of descriptive research, this thesis describes a social context, in this case the experiences of Black female journalists within the newsroom. While statistics and numerical data can be used to ascertain some of this information, qualitative data yields a more in-depth description.¹⁷¹ This research can also be thought of as explanatory because it seeks to explain how the interlocking oppressions of racism, sexism and classism affect Black female journalists on the job.

The research sample consists of Black female journalists who worked in mainstream, professional newsrooms from the late 1960's through today. The data available on this group of women is so small, any and all pertinent materials the

¹⁶⁹ The Black Women and Work Collective. Ed. Sharon Harley. *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*. Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, 2002. p. xvi.

¹⁷⁰ Creswell, John. W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 2nd Ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002, p. 182.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

researcher found were examined for possible inclusion in the study. The unit of analysis for this research was individuals that comprise the group Black female journalists.

The Researcher's Role

Qualitative research allows the researcher space to explain his or her personal values and assumptions at the outset of a study. Within a qualitative framework the researcher's contribution to a study can be considered useful and positive.¹⁷² In light of this, another source of information for this research is my own experience as a Black, female journalist. At the time of this writing, I am a news producer at the CBS affiliate in Louisville, Kentucky. I have worked in my current position for nearly five years, and prior to that worked in paid and for-college credit positions in New York City. I believe my work in several different newsroom environments equips me with unique insights about the newsroom environment a non-journalist would not have. The depth of my experience has also influenced how I've framed this study.

While many of the struggles of the Black female journalists in this research have been my own, I have chosen to leave detailed descriptions of my own experiences out of this piece, save for anecdotal information used in a couple of chapter introductions for reasons of confidentiality. For that same reason an interview conducted with a colleague for prior research is cited here without revealing her identity.

Data Analysis

The review of the data collected from these various sources reveal several themes and common experiences among Black female journalists for researchers to examine.

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 200

The goal of this research is to unearth the experiences of Black female journalists and explore the ways in which they dealt with and resisted racism, classism and sexism on personal, group and institutional levels throughout their careers. This thesis takes the position that their experiences can be more fully understood when looked at through a Black Feminist lens.

Key Terms and Concepts

Most readers will be somewhat familiar with the basic duties of newsroom employees. However, many of the findings of this study refer to very specific mechanisms and functions of the newsroom. These key terms and concepts are defined here.

The anchor is the main broadcaster on a news program.¹⁷³ He or she delivers most of the news stories and introduces reporters, weather talent, etc. during a newscast. Reporters investigate, edit and report news stories for broadcast. Producers write and edit material for broadcast, place stories in the order they will be presented during a newscast, select graphic elements and coordinate production of newscast with production staff (directors, technical directors, and camera persons). The assignment editor selects, develops and plans reporting assignments. The news director is in charge of the entire news department staff. He or she has final say in the stories that are covered and the angle that is taken.

¹⁷³ I would like to note here again that my understanding of the inner workings of newsrooms is shaped by my professional experience working in 3 different television newsrooms (one in the Louisville, KY market and two in the New York City Market) as an intern, and in 2 different television newsrooms (one, currently, in Louisville, KY and another at a cable news network in New York City) as a paid journalist.

Since this study is concerned with television news journalists, I feel it is important to briefly explain the inner-workings of a newsroom and how news stories move from idea to their on-air presentation. Each day journalists have the task of filling time and space, whether it is the columns of the newspaper or a television newscast. The shaping of the day's news begins with a meeting of the assignment editor, reporters, producers and newsroom management. During this meeting, the assignment editor goes over the events happening throughout the day. These events consist mostly of scheduled court hearings or trials, government organized press conferences, and staged public relations events. Then reporters and producers pitch their story ideas and tips on other stories they've gotten through sources. Newsroom managers (often both the news director and the assistant news director) then decide what the top story of the day is going to be, assign the various stories to reporters, and discuss the particular slant or angle they would like to see covered.

After the reporter writes the story, it is submitted to a producer or an editor who then makes several changes. It is first read over for clarity. It is then re-read and edited to include statements and action words. In television news writing, when pictures aren't available to show people an event, words are used to capture the action and emotion surrounding events. On top of all of these issues, the ultimate element for journalists to consider is their deadline. Even if an event is ongoing, reporters have to stop covering it at some point to prepare for a newscast.

Organization of Findings

As this brief discussion of the newsroom environment illustrates, the work can be intense and the hours very long. The next chapter reveals my findings on how Black female journalists function in the newsroom environment and the field. The findings are organized into experiences on the personal, group and community levels around the following questions:

1. What were the factors that influenced these women to become journalists?
2. What were some of the unique challenges these journalists faced as Black women in the newsroom?
3. Did these women encounter racism, sexism or classism? If so, how did they respond?
4. How did these women balance personal career goals with larger commitments to the Black community?

As with all studies that are qualitative in nature, the findings could be subject to other interpretations.¹⁷⁴ The data collected skews heavily towards Black female journalists who began their careers in the late 1960's through the 1970's. This is because many of the stories of Black female journalists have only been recorded after they've retired or won significant recognition (such as an Emmy Award or Pulitzer Prize) and are asked to look back at their careers during interviews. It is also difficult for working journalists to record their own stories while they are still telling the stories of others full-time. Therefore the findings should not be considered generalizable to all Black female journalists.

¹⁷⁴ Ryan, Gery and H. Russell Bernard. "Data Management and Analysis Methods." *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*. Eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2003.

Chapter 5

BLACK FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THEIR OWN WORDS: FINDINGS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF BLACK FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWS INDUSTRY

Make sure you develop yourself, develop your craft and know your craft very well. Don't let anyone define you, you must define yourself. –African American News Anchor, TaRhonda Thomas¹⁷⁵

This chapter utilizes interview excerpts, oral histories, autobiographical sketches, periodicals, and the scholarly texts written on Black female journalists to discuss their experiences in the newsroom and in the field. Throughout the chapter, these experiences are analyzed to uncover the ways in which these women dealt with oppressions on the personal, group and institutional levels.

Becoming Journalists-The Personal Level

Patricia Hill Collins argues the personal level is a place to explore how an individual's experiences, values, motivations and emotions can create new knowledge that can ultimately lead to change.¹⁷⁶ Experiences of racism, classism and sexism on the personal level propelled many Black female journalists into their careers. Many Black female journalists in this study recalled pivotal events during their childhood which

¹⁷⁵ Thomas, TaRhonda qtd. in "Black Female Journalists Share Struggles in Industry." The Rocky Mountain Collegian Online
<<http://media.www.collegian.com/media/storage/paper864/news/2008/02/22/News/Black.Female.Journalists.Share.Struggles.In.Industry-3228136.shtml>> Feb. 22, 2008.

¹⁷⁶ Collins, Patricia Hill. "Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination." *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

raised their level of consciousness and planted a seed for future change. These personal experiences changed the course of their lives and helped form the basis of their professional careers.

Nancy Maynard, who in 1968 was the only Black Female reporter covering news at a mainstream news outlet in New York City (at the *New York Post*), said she decided to become a journalist as a teen.

My former grammar school, PS 46 had burned down and I read about this in the local paper. And I became so outraged at the negative, inaccurate description of my neighborhood, that I decided right there I needed to fix it.¹⁷⁷

Audreen Buffalo, an Editor at *Redbook*, says she spent lazy afternoons in her father's bakery business reading the *Philadelphia Daily News*.

I grew up understanding the power of the press and its potential for misinforming rather than educating the public. My father taught me to read the paper with a critical editorial eye, questioning the subtext of every story. I came to believe the press should always be proxy for the people. If it's not doing that, it isn't doing its work.¹⁷⁸

Other Black female journalists were inspired to begin their work by the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements of the 1960's. Jane Tillman Irving said a Black student takeover of her New York City's college's administration building was what got her involved with the school's student newspaper. When fire was set to the newspaper's offices she met Ed Bradley of CBS, who came to cover the story. Bradley became a lifetime mentor and friend.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Nancy Maynard." <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/nancy_maynard>.

¹⁷⁸ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Audreen Buffalo." <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/audreen_buffalo>.

¹⁷⁹ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Jane Tillman Irving." <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/jane_irving>.

After graduating with a degree in English and Art, Lenore Jenkins-Allen was looking for a job with decent pay and flexibility so she could be active in the Civil Rights Movement. She took a job as a mail clerk at *Newsweek* and moved up to reporter where she interviewed Martin Luther King, Jr., Muhammad Ali (then known as Cassius Clay), and many others.¹⁸⁰

Others ended up in journalism completely by chance. Charlayne Hunter-Gault sat beside her grandmother as she read each evening from the three daily newspapers she subscribed to. While her grandmother kept up with the news, Hunter-Gault read the comic strips and decided that she wanted to be like her favorite comic hero Brenda Starr. Though Brenda Starr was a white, red-headed journalist Hunter-Gault wanted to go on the adventures Starr did to get the story.¹⁸¹ The fact that she was Black did not discourage her from having this dream, nor did her family tell her this would be a barrier. In 1959 she attempted to enroll in the journalism program at the University of Georgia, but was denied admission because the school was an all-white institution. After a three year legal battle (which included an African American male classmate who wanted to enroll in the school's medical program), Hunter-Gault won the right to enroll and eventually became the first Black woman to graduate from the school.¹⁸² Her career included an internship at the *Louisville Times* (now *Louisville Courier Journal*), a decade at the *New York Times*, and a move to television where she earned a Peabody Award for her work on PBS' *MacNeil/Lehrer Report*.¹⁸³

¹⁸⁰ Washington Press Club Foundation. "Women in Journalism: An Oral History Project." <<http://npc.press.org/wpforal/ohhome.htm>>.

¹⁸¹ Streitmatter, Rodger. *Raising Her Voice: African-American Women Journalists Who Changed History*. Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1994, pg. 130.

¹⁸² Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Charlayne Hunter-Gault." <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/charlayne_gault>.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

Reporter and anchor Melba Tolliver started out as a registered nurse, but later took a position as an assistant for an ABC executive because she felt like it would better suit her “perky personality.”¹⁸⁴

Another example is Marquita Pool-Eckert, who never thought of producing as a career possibility. She was planning to follow in her father’s footsteps and become a lawyer. When she graduated from college she took a job with Time/Life Books to earn money as she applied for law schools. She quickly discovered she preferred journalism to the law. “I didn’t want to spend all that time in the library. I would rather be out talking to people and having more of an immediate effect.”¹⁸⁵

Newsroom Experiences-The Institutional Level

While each Black female journalist’s personal story of getting into the news business is unique, each, ultimately, had a desire to be a part of the larger structure of the news media. Patricia Hill Collins considers the media, along with schools and churches, part of the dominant social institutions in the United States.¹⁸⁶ Though people of minority status are part of these social institutions, the institution’s overall message is that of the dominant group (in the case of the United States--white, male, middle-class, heterosexual). As newsroom employees, Black female journalists are subject to scrutiny under the dominant group’s standpoint and interests.

¹⁸⁴ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. “Melba Tolliver.” <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/melba_tolliver>.

¹⁸⁵ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. “Marquita Pool-Eckert.” <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/marquita_eckert>.

¹⁸⁶ Collins, Patricia Hill. “Black Feminist Thought in the Matrix of Domination.” *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990.

As these women entered the newsroom to begin their careers as journalists they fought hard to not be relegated to non-power positions, and they challenged their managers and colleagues on issues of racism and sexism. With the Civil Rights Act of 1964 making job discrimination for reasons of sex illegal and new FCC licensing requirements to have women and minorities on staff, Black female journalists found themselves in high demand in the late 1960's through the 1970's. Many Black women were hired as reporters and anchors. Their respective media organizations were making token, yet very visible, attempts to demonstrate they were adhering to the new regulations on women and minorities. While in visible and high-paying positions, these on-air journalists did not have much of a say in how the news was covered.

Black female journalists found themselves constantly working to prove themselves to colleagues and managers, many of whom believed they were handed their positions and did not have the necessary skills and abilities to do the work. These women spent considerable amounts of time convincing their editors and producers they could do stories other than those about women or so-called Black issues.

As the statistics earlier in the study showed, minorities in general, especially African American women have made few inroads into middle and upper management positions available in newsrooms. After spending 12 years at National Public Radio (NPR), Phyllis Crockett said:

NPR now has four Black reporters, including two Black men. And there's a Black editor. But still no black senior producers or anchors on the daily shows. At this stage I am still willing to give NPR's management the benefit of the doubt, perhaps because I want to believe that eventually there will be enough of us to force them to do the right thing.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Phyllis Crockett qtd. in Dates and Barlow 445 (The source does not indicate the date Crockett prepared these statements).

Television broadcast journalist Barbara Rodgers said she used to talk to young, aspiring African American journalists about the importance of considering off-camera careers as assignment editors and producers, but she spoke of rethinking that approach, "That's because, although greater numbers of blacks are entering and excelling at these jobs, I don't see us moving into the management ranks with any great frequency."¹⁸⁸

Janet Johnson is a producer at WFAA-TV in Dallas; she said she once thought she could be a news director, "I've grown tired of the constant battles. I'm weary of having to keep proving myself, of having to remain ever-vigilant."¹⁸⁹

While many Black female journalists have been unsuccessful in their attempts to move into more powerful positions, some have succeeded, but by working much harder than their white peers had to when they moved up. Producer Marquita Pool-Eckert described her rise in the ranks as the result of "working harder, faster and smarter than my white male colleagues."¹⁹⁰ She added, "The woman thing was big. Race was always a consideration. I know I never had the benefit of the doubt. I had to work hard to establish a reputation. I couldn't make a mistake. I couldn't be wrong."¹⁹¹ Pool-Eckert made headlines and history when she decided to air an uncut, jail interview of Angela Davis a short time after she was taken into custody after going underground. Despite colleagues and viewers labeling her a "communist" for airing the interview, Pool-Eckert went on to win five Emmy Awards for her work, and now is the Senior Producer for the *CBS Sunday Morning Show*.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Barbara Rodgers qtd. in Dates and Barlow 450

¹⁸⁹ Janet Johnson qtd. in Dates and Barlow 446

¹⁹⁰ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Marquita Pool-Eckert." <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/marquita_eckert>.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Marquita Pool-Eckert." <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/marquita_eckert>.

Black female journalists not only faced problems as they tried to build their careers. Most faced race and gender issues in their day-to-day assignments. Melba Tolliver said she often felt her status as a Black female meant she had to make an effort to not be the reporter that was relegated to always covering the “Black Beat” or the “Women’s Beat.” In an interview before her retirement, she said:

I had to discourage editors, producers and others from assigning me to a certain story because I’m Black or because I’m a woman and someone thinks the story needs a ‘feminine touch’ -or keeping me off a story because I’m black or because I’m a woman and the assignment is a man’s story.¹⁹³

In an interview decades after working at the *New York Post*, Nancy Maynard said she often felt like her editors were trying to hold her back when she approached them with story ideas. After one such incident she left the paper for the *New York Times*. She described it this way:

In the spring of that year [1968], I had the opportunity to cover the garbage strike in Memphis where New York unions were sending a delegation. Martin Luther King was to be there and I requested to go. But the editor denied my request saying it would have been a conflict of interest for me to travel with the delegation free of charge. The editor said the *Post* didn’t have the money to cover my travel expenses. That week, King was assassinated on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. With my editor’s decision, I knew it was time for me to move on to another paper.¹⁹⁴

Battles with superiors over issues similar to these were so common Barbara Rodgers advised young Black female journalists to “tread carefully” in the newsroom. Rodgers told them to balance their pitches to get more issues about minority communities covered so they don’t “get painted in the minority corner.”¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Melba Tolliver qtd. in Stein 118

¹⁹⁴ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. “Nancy Maynard.” <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/nancy_maynard>.

¹⁹⁵ Barbara Rodgers qtd. in Dates and Barlow 449

Physical Appearance-The Institutional Level

For Black female journalists who appear on camera, their hairstyle is often something that is negotiated with their news directors. Many industries, including television news, have established so-called “neutral grooming requirements.” These policies dictate standards for dress, hairstyle and makeup for male and female employees. Time and time again American courts have upheld these grooming requirements when employees have filed lawsuits about hiring, retention and promotion decisions that were made using these rules.¹⁹⁶ According to Taunya Banks:

Black women experience a distinctive and subtle form of employment discrimination embodied in so-called neutral employer-imposed appearance or grooming requirements. Courts, when applying federal antidiscrimination law, fail to acknowledge that these grooming standards rely heavily on notions of physical appearance predicated on white aesthetic norms. Employers justify grooming requirements by saying they contribute to the company’s image, a transparent cover for their pandering to the preferences of white customers.¹⁹⁷

As the following experiences of Black female journalists will show, many have experienced racist and sexist attacks at the hands of managers because of their physical appearance.

In 2007, Chicago investigative reporter Renee Ferguson wrote, “I have had more discussions about my hair with news managers over a 30-year-career than I ever wanted to think about.”¹⁹⁸ When Ferguson wore an afro on-air during the 1970’s, her news director said she needed to get rid of it, saying, “We’re getting a lot of calls from our viewers. They say you look militant, like Angela Davis. You’re scaring them!”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Banks, Taunya Lovell. “The Black Side of the Mirror.” *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002., p.25

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ferguson 80

¹⁹⁹ Qtd. in Ferguson 80

One of the pivotal arguments over hair happened in 1971 and involved Melba Tolliver of New York's WABC. Tolliver said she had been thinking of changing it for some time because she was tired of processing her hair and using wigs. She ultimately decided to go natural wearing a short afro and made the switch the week of her assignment to go to Washington D.C. to cover the wedding of President Nixon's daughter, Trisha.²⁰⁰

Tolliver says her newsroom colleagues said things like, "Oh, you changed your hair," and "What did you do to your hair?"²⁰¹ Her managers were not as subtle. The news director called her to his office after the evening news and said, "I hate your hair. You've got to change it. And you know what, you no longer look feminine."²⁰² Though her managers threatened to keep her off the air if she didn't change her hair back, Tolliver went to Washington D.C. for the wedding and covered it while wearing her afro. She wasn't told while she was out of town, but any stand up shots of her herself in the field were covered by editors in New York when she fed her stories back to the station.

When she returned, Tolliver says management was insistent that she had to straighten her hair or she'd have to wear a hat or scarf if she wanted to get back on air. The *New York Post* had gotten wind that something was happening at the station, and people were beginning to wonder why they hadn't seen Tolliver on air. When the *Post* began calling people at the station, including the news director, the station backed down and put her on the air.²⁰³ Once word got out about what had happened Tolliver says,

²⁰⁰ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Melba Tolliver." <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/melba_tolliver>.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Ibid.

people wrote letters supporting her right to wear her hair as she pleased, even if no one liked it.

Nearly 40 years later, debates over hairstyles are still part of Black female journalists on the job struggles. The unidentified Louisville journalist mentioned earlier said she has been interested in shaving her head down to a close, natural coif for years. However, her contract includes a clause that “basically says drastic changes to [her] physical appearance are terms for the immediate termination of the contract.”²⁰⁴ Attorneys have tried unsuccessfully to overturn employer-imposed appearance and grooming requirements in lawsuits filed by women of all races and in many different industries. In some cases sex discrimination cases have been filed, in others race discrimination, still others have cited both race and sex discrimination to no avail.²⁰⁵ According to Banks, “Employers have successfully argued that business decisions based on women’s physical appearance simply reflect societal or community norms.”²⁰⁶

Natural hair, braids and locs are considered distractions from the news product, and in some cases, in the newsroom in general. Phyllis Crockett said her NPR colleagues started relating to her differently when she straightened her hair after years of wearing it naturally. She said, “I know who I am. I know that straightening my hair after 25 years of wearing it naturally is not selling out. I still think it’s a shame that it makes a difference.”²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Unidentified Black female journalist, personal interview.

²⁰⁵ Banks, Taunya Lovell. “The Black Side of the Mirror.” *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002., p.24

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Crockett qtd. in Dates and Barlow 445

Group or Community Level

Black female journalists battled with white colleagues on their misconceptions about race and how those misconceptions affected the news product. While they were working hard to educate their colleagues on the history and nuances of the Black community, many Black female journalists faced strong feelings of mistrust from Black community members since they were now part of media organizations that had covered the communities poorly, or simply ignored them, for years. In light of these challenges Black female journalists created networks in their newsrooms, regions of the country, and eventually nationally to support each others efforts to change the way news about Black communities and Black issues were reported.

An unidentified African American reporter in Louisville said the concerns of viewers that call the newsroom from West and South Louisville are not considered as seriously as viewer concerns called in from other areas of town. She feels it is her “responsibility as a Black female to be receptive to the concerns of the Black community when many of [her] colleagues are not.”²⁰⁸

The findings revealed many Black female journalists had to act as the “go between” between the Black community and their newsrooms. Many described their professional lives as being comprised of two roles--journalist and educator. Melba Tolliver described this dual role in detail:

My primary role, as I see it, is the same as that of any other reporter: to gather and organize facts and information that constitute a news story. [...] My auxiliary roles, on the other hand, are more difficult to define because they shift and change according to the temper of the times and the needs of others. Most of the people I work with--assignment editors, producers, news directors, station

²⁰⁸ Unidentified Black female journalist, personal interview 29 Nov 2007.

vice-presidents and public relations personnel-seem to have very little real knowledge or understanding of black people.²⁰⁹

Audreen Buffalo, as associate editor at *Redbook* in the late 1960's, said she suggested running a companion piece to the profile on ballet dancer Rudolph Nureyev., profiling a comparable black artistic figure. When asked who she thought would be good, she suggested Nina Simone. Buffalo said none of the white editors knew who the singer was. According to Buffalo, "There was a huge cultural divide. We had to explain simple things. Like should we capitalize Black or not. A lot of blood was on the floor in publishing about whether to capitalize Black or not."²¹⁰ Anchor /reporter/producer Valerie Coleman said she considered these dual roles of journalist and educator to be more of a special mission, especially in the Black community. She said she worked hard to change the bad image of the news media many African Americans have, to show them its positive potential. In an interview Coleman said:

Young Blacks should seriously consider television journalism as the only way we can inform Blacks of the power they possess. [...] I have found that while it's fashionable to call for more minority reporters, producers and directors, it's not so fashionable for the one who holds such a position. You are held responsible for mistakes made by television. Your commitment to the community from which you came is questioned.²¹¹

Reporter Carol Jenkins said the mistrust of the media in some predominantly Black communities in New York City where she worked for some time, put her in a difficult position. She said, "I know there are some black people who think I'm a sell-out. And in some ways I guess I am."²¹²

²⁰⁹ Tolliver qtd. in Stein 117

²¹⁰ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Audreen Buffalo." <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/audreen_buffalo>.

²¹¹ Valerie D. Coleman qtd. in Stein 121

²¹² Carol Jenkins qtd. in Stein 112

Black female journalists' commitment to their communities is something that is often not understood by their white colleagues. Janet Johnson said her colleagues asked her why she spent so much time outside of the newsroom doing things they consider work, like sitting on the boards of various organizations, speaking or volunteering at schools, or meeting with community leaders. She said, "I try to explain that I don't consider it a chore, but rather a part of my life. It is sometimes difficult to make them understand this commitment that most African American professionals have to their community."²¹³

Leandra Abbott viewed her job as a reporter as more of a cause than a career. She said, "We [Black journalists] all had the unspoken or spoken responsibility that we felt to make sure stories presented African Americans accurately, properly and were handled well."²¹⁴ One incident Abbott recalled vividly was during the urban riots of the late 1960's. A story her white boss edited about the latest issues to emerge in the Civil Rights Movement crossed her desk just before it was to be sent to a layout editor who was placing it in the upcoming edition of *Newsweek*. Abbott said several points of the article were "simply wrong." She showed it to a senior, African American colleague who agreed there was a problem. The two questioned their boss about it, and Abbott said he became defensive saying, "I have nothing up my sleeve. I'm a good guy." Abbott's colleague replied, "You do have something up your sleeve. You have white skin up your sleeve." Abbott said after a few seconds of silence he picked up his pencil and asked the two of them to help make the necessary changes.²¹⁵

²¹³ Johnson qtd. in Dates and Barlow 447

²¹⁴ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Leandra Abbott." <http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/leandra_abbott>.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

While Black journalists were working hard in the late 1960's and 70's to establish their careers and move ahead in the business they had each other's support in negotiating problems they experienced in the newsroom. Just as Abbott turned to a senior colleague for support when approaching her boss about the article, Black journalists had similar informal networks of support in their various newsrooms. Larger, more formal networks were also established, like New York's Black Perspective group which was founded in 1967.²¹⁶ Journalist Audreen Buffalo joined the group in 1969. She recalled, "At that time all of our heroes were each other. We needed to be around people who understood what we were going through. We needed to find a way to be comfortable with ourselves."²¹⁷ In December of 1975, 44 journalists of color (men and women) founded the National Association of Black Journalists in Washington, D.C.; the organization is now the largest for journalist of color in the nation.²¹⁸

The Balancing Act

The experiences of the Black female journalists recounted in this chapter illustrate the oppressions they had to deal with on multiple levels at the same time they tried to manage deadlines in the highly competitive newsroom environment. The stories of these women are also evidence that oppressions can (and are) resisted. These Black female journalists cannot be labeled as simply victims of racism, sexism, and classism. Time and time again they were victimized by managers and colleagues on a range of issues, but

²¹⁶ Discussed in Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*.

"Audreen Buffalo." < http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/audreen_buffalo>.

²¹⁷ Maynard Institute. *The Black Journalists Movement: How They Got Their Start*. "Audreen Buffalo." < http://www.mije.org/black_journalists_movement/audreen_buffalo>.

²¹⁸ NABJ. "About NABJ." < <http://www.nabj.org/about/index.php>>.

they refused to compromise—they asserted themselves and supported each other in their attempts to create change in the media, both in news coverage and the work environment.

I end this chapter with an extended quotation from Barbara Rodgers, who eloquently described this balancing act during an interview about her award winning career:

We [Black female journalists] have to be feminine sometimes to get the story and at other times have to have more balls than the toughest guy in the newsroom to hold our own. We must be militant enough to make the kinds of changes that need to be made for Blacks in broadcasting and yet conciliatory enough to get the people who have the power to change things to listen. We must be able to relate to and get along well with our nonblack managers and colleagues without giving other blacks the feeling that we've sold out. [...]

We must be excellent journalists, as measured by the highest industry standards, while not losing our ability to "get down" with the people. Because of the salaries we earn, we must hobnob with folks in the upper classes while still keeping our ties to the inner cities where we came from. [...]

We must learn how to enjoy our "celebrity" and high income status without scarring off any of the scarce supply of marriageable black males, especially those whose jobs give them less celebrity or income. [...]

We must learn how to cry alone for fear we will be perceived as not being tough enough to do the job while letting everyone else cry on our shoulder, so that we're not thought of as being too aloof and not "one of the gang."

In short, we are expected to be all things to all people, and I often wonder, if my white colleagues were dealing with all the same pressures we are dealing with, and the worries about racism to boot, would they be able to do their jobs as well as we have done ours under these circumstances?²¹⁹

²¹⁹ Rodgers qtd. in Dates and Barlow 449

Chapter 6

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

This study represents just a small piece of the possible inquiries into the experiences of Black female journalists that can be explored. While the sample of this study was comprised mostly of Black female journalists who began their careers in the late 1960's through the 1970's, an examination of journalists beginning their work in other decades would provide insight into experiences unique to the social context. For example, Black female journalists working in the 1980's covered news stories about the effects the poor economy, developing war on drugs, and emergence of HIV and AIDS were having on Black communities. Often times the journalists' view on the situation was very different from that of their white managers, causing friction on how stories were going to be framed.²²⁰ At the same time, Black journalists saw corporate programs, to develop their talent or train them for management positions, get cut from newsroom budgets as revenues fell along with the tanking economy.

By the 1990's most major news organizations had re-instituted diversity goals and programs to get more minorities and women involved in the news business. The hope was that diversity of employees would mean a variety of different stories from varying points of view. William McGowan describes it "as a sort of equivalent of a

²²⁰ Dates, Jannette L. and William Barlow. *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media*. Washington: Howard University Press, 1993, pg. 412.

representative democracy.”²²¹ But many researchers now question whether hiring women and minorities really changes the nature of news coverage. Stephanie Larson argues that most journalists receive the same training, professional socialization and are required to be college educated. Larson says, minority reporter’s “familiarity with new immigrants, non-English speakers and the lower class may be similar to that of white middle class journalists.”²²²

In this way, issues of racism, classism, and sexism in the newsroom still exist, but are harder to identify. A comment or a decision that would have been called discrimination in the past may now be ascribed to the personal failings of an individual. As more African Americans become college educated and part of the middle class, the idea of a color-blind society where racism doesn’t exist, has taken hold. Some refer to it as “the new racism.” Paraphrasing W.E.B. Du Bois, Patricia Hill Collins writes, “The problem of the twenty-first century seems to be the absence of a color line.”²²³ She goes on to argue:

It is important to note that the new racism of the early twenty-first century has not replaced prior forms of racial rule, but instead incorporated elements of past racial formations. As a result, ideas about race, gender, sexuality and Black people as well as the social practices that these ideas shape and reflect remain intricately part of the new racism, but in changed ways. The new racism thus reflects a situation of permanence and change.²²⁴

Collins points out disparities between Black and White Americans in areas such as housing, health care, and unemployment are “new variations” of the results of

²²¹ McGowan, William. *Coloring the News: How Crusading for Diversity has Corrupted American Journalism*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001, 225.

²²² Larson 87.

²²³ Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Sexual Politics: Black Americans, Gender and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge, 2004, 32.

²²⁴ *Ibid.* 32-33.

“colonialism, slavery and traditional forms of racial rule.”²²⁵ For example, State supported, racial segregation is no longer legal in the U.S., yet African Americans as a group are still socially subordinated and at the bottom of the economic ladder. To that end, job discrimination for reasons of sex and race has been illegal for decades. Despite this, Black female journalists are still few in number on newsroom staffs, and while some inroads into management positions have been made, as the statistics show, there is still quite some way to go.

This research does not stand alone. It should be considered a study of just a small part of a long history of Black female journalists. While not specifically referenced by the women in this study, modern Black female journalists stand on the shoulders of great journalists such as Daisy Bates, Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Claudia Jones, Amy Garvey, Mary Shaad Cary and Ida B. Wells. While the work of many of these Black female journalists has been analyzed, their experiences as journalist have not been so closely examined.

The focus of this research was Black female journalists working in mainstream news organizations, but for hundreds of years Black entrepreneurs and journalists have created alternative media products. These newspapers, magazines, television stations and programs, radio stations and programs and now websites and blogs, target the interests and needs of Black audiences and consumers. While some of these ventures have been wildly successful, others have failed in their attempts to go against the corporate current and they are no longer in business.²²⁶ This realm of the Black press is largely unexplored in mass media research.

²²⁵ Ibid. 55.

²²⁶ Dates, Jannette L. and William Barlow. *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media*. Washington: Howard University Press, 1993, pg. 456.

While the findings of this study found much evidence that pointed to the balancing of racism and sexism in the personal and public spheres of life for Black female journalists, less was uncovered about classism. Further studies in this area may be able to uncover more on this issue.

As hard as it is to locate information on Black female television journalists, it is even more difficult to find material on the Black photojournalists, clerks and secretaries who work behind the scenes in newsrooms. An examination of their day-to-day experiences, and those of Black female producers and those who worked their way into management positions would provide a more complete understanding of the newsroom environment.

The current time also provides unique opportunities of study. The campaign and election of the first Black president, Barack Obama, has expanded media coverage of issues relevant to the Black community and increased the number of Black analysts news networks employ. It would be interesting to explore how Barack Obama's election has changed the way race is conceived in the newsroom.

As referenced in chapter 2, electronic journalism is now a huge part of the field. The statistics showed 89% of the journalists working in this area are white. Future studies need to examine the importance of this growing area to suggest programs and training needed for Black journalists to avoid being shut out.

The experiences that Black female journalists have in the newsroom reveal it is not the idyllic space celebrated in some of the nation's journalism schools. All young journalists, especially Black females, deserve to be educated about the reality they face once they leave the four walls of the classroom. This education process would be helped

if there was more information readily available on Black female journalists about their accomplishments, their struggles and resistance to racism, classism and sexism on the personal, group and institutional levels.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Name:

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New Albany, IN 47150

Date of Birth:

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Education:

New York University, Steinhardt School of Education, New York, New York
Bachelor of Science, Communication Studies, magna cum laude

University of Louisville, College of Arts and Sciences, Louisville, Kentucky
Master of Arts, Pan-African Studies, Expected May 2009

Awards:

University of Louisville's Women's & Gender Studies Dept. 9th Annual Carolyn Krause Maddox Prize for Paper: "Black Female Journalists: Negotiating Racism, Classism and Sexism in the Newsroom and in the Field"

Paper Presented March 20, 2008

Campus Positions:

U of L's Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research, Graduate Research Assistant: January 2008-Present

One year research position on project titled, "New Media and Empowerment of Communities of Color in the U.S. Urban Heartland" sponsored by the Social Science Research Council.

Responsibilities:

- Organizing research materials: Coordinated ordering of addresses and survey materials with outside vendors
- Coordinated mailing of 1,800 surveys and reminder postcards
- Research Collection: Conducted interviews and moderated 5 focus groups for the project
- Data entry: Used SPSS software to input data gathered
- Organized tasks for 3 project interns
- Coordinated community conversation about project results
- Assisting Principal Investigators (Dr. Cate Fosl and Dr. Jennifer Gregg) with final report of findings

U of L's Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research, Graduate Intern: Fall 2007

One semester internship with the Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research

Responsibilities:

- Development and implementation of community outreach project for new Institute at U of L (Project consisted of meetings with social justice organizations outside of the University to build relationships and determine their research needs)
- Gave presentation to the Louisville Coalition of Neighborhoods about Institute activities: October 2007
- Wrote and edited material for Institute newsletters
- Assisted Institute Director with planning and execution of programming

Current Professional Employment:

***WLKY-TV*, Producer: June 2004-Present**

Responsibilities:

- Line produce daily, live Noon newscast
- Compose and edit scripts for broadcast
- Coordinate elements of broadcast with news team, production staff and online editor
- Guide anchors, reporters and production staff through breaking news situations

Volunteer and Service Activities:

U of L's Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research, Community Council Member: Fall 2007-Present

- Student representative on council designed to assist the Institute director with promoting the mission of the Anne Braden Institute

Chestnut Street YMCA Black Achiever's Banquet Committee, Committee member and production coordinator: February 2005, 2006, 2007

- Assisted with planning of annual scholarship banquet
- On day of banquet, coordinated production with Insight communications crew for later broadcast

New Albany-Floyd County Redevelopment Authority, Vice-President Summer 2005-Fall 2007, President Fall 2007-Present

- Representing citizens of New Albany on board overseeing the construction of \$20M YMCA in downtown New Albany
- Attends monthly meetings with construction managers and New Albany city officials on progress of project
- Authorizes and signs affidavits for payments and change orders on project

New Albany Floyd County Parks and Recreation Dept. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration, Participant annually since 1995

- 2005 and 2006: Acted as Mistress of Ceremonies for the celebration, lead community members in discussion on Dr. King's impact
- 2007: Attended as representative of New Albany-Floyd County Redevelopment Authority
- 2009: Introduced keynote speaker, Dr. J. Blaine Hudson

References available upon request