Intersectional Identity Entrepreneurship: Historic Case of Viola Turner Pursuing Legitimacy Acquisition in Insurance Industry

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Abstract

In this historical organizational study, I examine how Viola Turner, a pioneering African American female business professional, managed to climb to the board membership of a black-owned insurance company. I propose that she managed her identity entrepreneurially fitting it to match the leadership role identity in the all-black men board. To assess the veracity of this proposition, I unpack how she exhibited her identity entrepreneurship given that her social identity was perceived as ambivalent by the board that was not conducive to accepting women as members in a leadership role. I chose the case of Viola Turner because I want to capture the historical roots of professional identity that, in a culturally distinct and prototypical way, this pioneering female African American business professional had to enact identity management to gain access to board membership as a legitimate leader. I focus my research on examining specific venues of her participation in collective actions as an emerging leader aware of her prototypicality.

In this thesis, I use the methodological approach of critical biography to analyze intersectional identity entrepreneurship of Viola Turner. This biographical approach to writing and analyzing a life story is focused on the critical moments of and events in the subject’s life that are analyzed to uncover the nature of the studied phenomenon and the context that shaped it (Jacobs, 2007; Gibson 20014).

The text analysis revealed the clear percentage changes in Turner’s moral foundations from her childhood, when she was molding her personal identity, to her adulthood, when her personal identity merged with her professional identity influencing her ability to gain legitimacy from her peers.

Viola Turner’s life and shifts in moral foundations exemplify how, even in a predominantly black firm, her gender identity, coupled with her racial identity, created both barriers and opportunities that her black male peers and white female peers did not recognize. Throughout her professional career, Turner entrepreneurially maneuvered the barriers because she actively tailored her identity to the context. Her experiences exemplify the prevalence of barriers to Black females in attaining leadership positions even when racial barriers are held to a minimum by working in an African American firm.
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Chapter I: Introduction

“Identity entrepreneurs did not choose the society in which they live, nor did they choose the system of identity capitalism that governs the society. Their choice is simply how to respond (Leong, 2016: 87).”

As of March 1st of 2016, the number of African American CEOs of Fortune 500 companies will have been reduced to four, representing just 0.8% of companies. The number of black female CEOs is even more alarming with only one black woman, Ursula Burns, acting as CEO for Xerox. Almost half a century since the start of the civil rights movement, how do we account for this massive discrepancy that still exist in leadership? Aside from this problem, however, there is an even more disturbing trend becoming apparent beyond this race-based discrepancy.

In 2015 there are only twenty-four female CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, 4.8%, another seemingly positive step in the upward trend experienced since the first female CEO in 1998. This figure looks good for women leaders on the surface but only one of those twenty-four positions is held by a black female. These figures beg the question why is the gap between white and black female CEOs so wide? This phenomenon is increasingly examined through the lens of intersectionality, the theory which posits that multiple identities (i.e. gender, race, and class) intersect to produce complicated identities and unique experiences (Fertemp, 2015).

The challenges keeping African American women from achieving executive professional positions have become such a high barrier to entry. They are so high that black women have been selecting an alternative path to career success and have become the fastest growing group of entrepreneurs in the U.S. What this shows us, in conjunction with the almost nonexistent number of African American CEOs, is that the traditional corporate barriers African American women
face, commonly referred to as the “sticky floor”, in trying to attain positions of leadership, and in turn attain legitimacy, are so high that is more worthwhile to take the risk of opening their own business rather than take traditional paths to executive leadership. By examining this issue in the light of intersectionality, the challenges African American females experience in attaining legitimacy on the path to business leadership positions can be unpacked in a more fine-grained manner. This will bring to light the latent experiences African American challenges women encounter in the world of business leadership (Betters-Reed & Moore, 1995).

Tackling the understanding of these experiences through the lens of intersectionality is likely to uncover that the challenges encountered are not simply the sum of the black identity and the female identity. Their respective interplay, is effectively accentuated by Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) who argue that “Black + Woman ≠ Black Woman.” This simplified illustration of how intersectionality views racial and gender identities holographically reflects the way complex identities combine race and gender (i.e. black and female). This is used to differentiate these amalgamated identities from those of a black male or a white female because these factors of these different identity segments build upon each other differently. Although today’s emphasis of businesses has been on attaining healthy diversity in the workforce, African American women are still feeling invisible because they are not perceived to fit into either the “whiteness of women [or] the maleness of all people of color” that seems to permeate common stereotyping (Risman, 2004). This insight is important because, as black men and white women gain an advantageous foothold in business leadership, black women are falling behind the curve (Sanchez-Hucles and Davis, 2010).

The insurance industry is an appropriate context to examine intersectional identity changes that black women experience in their entrepreneurial pursuit of gaining legitimacy as
professionals and prospective executive leaders because the role of black women in insurance from the historical perspective has been documented (Garrett-Scott, 2011; 2016). However, their progression and fit into the ranks of top management have been largely unexplored in management history research and theory development (Chemers, 1997). This historical examination especially relevant to today’s insurance industry where only one woman was a Divisional CEO out of sixty-five Group and Divisional CEO positions in the top thirty-eight global insurance companies in June of 2015. A relationship-dependent industry, such as the Insurance industry, therefore provides an appropriate context to study the nuanced effects of multiple aspects of identity on individual relationships among subordinates, superiors, and other stakeholders. This is particularly important when these relationships are the gateways to leadership positions based on social capital accumulation. As it pertains to professional and executive leadership positions, studying the effects of intersectional identities can shed light on how these complex identities are manifested in different leadership styles and collaboration techniques (Collins, 2015).

In this historical organizational study, I examine how Viola Turner, a pioneering African American female business professional, managed to climb to the board membership of a black-owned insurance company. I propose that she managed her identity entrepreneurially fitting it to match the leadership role identity in the all-black men board. To assess the veracity of this proposition, I unpack how she exhibited her identity entrepreneurship given that her social identity was perceived as ambivalent by the board that was not conducive to accepting women as members in a leadership role. I chose the case of Viola Turner because I want to capture the historical roots of professional identity that, in a culturally distinct and prototypical way, this pioneering female African American business professional had to enact identity management to
gain access to board membership as a legitimate leader. I focus my research on examining specific venues of her participation in collective actions as an emerging leader aware of her prototypicality.

I am particularly interested in identifying the way in which she recognized the opportunity to create her credentials as an emerging leader. This is impactful because she had to negotiate her incongruent social identities (i.e., gender and professional identities) while striving to preserve her foundational moral values when shifting from the role of a follower to the role of a leader. I was curious to investigate how she managed to enact morally these contradictory social identities to gain legitimacy as a member of the board comprised only of African American men.

I also wish to assess how she functioned in the new social reality of the board having her as a legitimate member. Specifically, I want to uncover how the board members’ shared masculine identity was affected by her membership and her participation in the board’s functioning in terms of granting her informal legitimacy and endorsing her in the leadership role. It is of my particular research interest to identify the relevant contextual factors that both created constraints and enabled opportunities that led to her promotion and impacted her participation. By analyzing her interviews and other archival and documentary materials, I want to explain how these factors were mapped in a foundationally moral way onto her “sense of selfhood” (Haslam & Reicher, 2007). I am interested in uncovering whether she felt that her social identity was incongruent with the board’s culture of the established distinctly African American male norms and values. Specifically, I want to evaluate the extent to which Viola Turner’s moral foundations, as a function of her personal identity, interact with and change because of her participation in a gender biased business environment. I also want to evaluate if these changes enable a new social identity to evolve from the intersection of her personal identity and her professional identity that
was critical for her legitimacy amongst her peers. Therefore, I have formulated the following research question, which I have contextualized to the historical case of Viola Turner, “How can an intersectional identity be entrepreneurially leveraged within an organizational context?"

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The theory applied to the Violet Turner case is the moral foundation theory, developed by Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, Sena Koleva, Matt Motyl, Ravi Iyer, and Sean Wojcik (2012). The theory is based on the following four cornerstones of evaluation: nativism, cultural learning, intuitionism, and pluralism. Nativism refers to the notion that human behavior is organized, at least at a base level, ahead of experience that shapes behavior, a core thread running through cultural learning. Based on cultural learning, both culture and individual psyche mutually reinforce each other to form a person’s moral foundation. Intuitionism and pluralism imply that people both make decisions without deliberation and are simultaneously influenced by multiple moral senses, hence the theory title. The four conceptual cornerstones support five moral foundations.

The five moral foundations being evaluated by an external evaluator are authority, fairness, harm, ingroup, and purity. These five foundations inform the evaluator about a number of triggers that affect the subject’s perception and reaction to their environment. The authority foundation determines the subject’s ability to understand complex social relationships encompassing both dominant and subordinate roles. A subject’s high authority rating would suggest the subject can navigate hierarchies well and thrive in competitive environments. A high fairness rating would mean an innate sensitivity to evidence of both cheating and cooperation but also leave them vulnerable to “tit for tat” actions (Trivers, 1971). The harm foundation was
historically triggered by visual and auditory signals of filial distress. This has evolved, however, to include “feelings of compassion for victims, an experience that is often mixed with anger toward those who cause harm” (Graham et al. 12). The ingroup foundation is of higher consequence in a highly developed society where “intergroup competition [becomes] far more decisive for survival” (Graham et al. 14). While our society obviously does not need group loyalties for survival, they are required to maintain personal and business relationships. The purity foundation, also known as Sanctity/Degradation foundation, is perhaps the most fundamental, even more so than care. Purity encompasses the basest instinct as determining what is physically acceptable versus disgusting. This foundation determines the “behavior immune system” that the subject cultivates and determines feelings about foreign objects, people, and actions (Schaller & Park, 2011).

The five moral foundations, as the fundamental building blocks of personality, are likely to be relevant factors influencing perceived legitimacy in leadership roles. This is particularly true for women in general, and black women in particular. I argue that the perception of race and gender had an impact on Viola’s strategy for attaining legitimacy. The appropriateness of her strategy can also be assessed by using moral foundations lens, and by applying insights from extant literature. To examine this argument critically I will perform the following analytical steps.

First, I will perform a comparison between Turner and male and female CEO respondents of a study performed by Vial, Napier, and Brescoll in 2015. Upon determining the differences between not only Turner and male CEOs but also Turner and female CEOs, I will compare them to differences appearing between Turner and both women and men who are successful. This is performed in order to assess the extent to which Turner is an outlier in the pool of successful
female and male business leaders. The comparison will be performed by examining all of the characteristics discussed in the related studies in order to outline the individual characteristics that are related to her original moral foundations. The assessed differences reveal her eventual shift in moral foundations as the business experience reshaped her moral foundations.

Secondly, the shifts in Turner’s moral foundations may be associated with specific binary variables that influenced her profession as she moved from passively managing her identity, as a child, to actively managing her identity as a business professional. The discussion of these binaries in regards to active and passive identity management is derived from an article entitled, 
invoking Cleopatra”, by Sally Riad (2011). In the article, Riad, using the historical figure Cleopatra, illustrates how the authority power binaries can influence perceptions of legitimacy. Binaries discussed include male/female, leader/follower, adult/child, etc. These binaries and one’s position in them create a predetermined power distortion through which the dominating member of the binary, male, follower, and adult, has power over the subordinate member, female, follower, and child. These binaries are thus setting a foundation for perceived authority and power. By acknowledging her position in the binaries like Cleopatra did, Turner took control of her identities entrepreneurially in an effort to reassign their binary positions. This redistribution of perceived authority and power through reassigned binary shifts may be related to Turner’s moral foundations.

Finally, I examine whether Turner’s change in moral foundations resulted in a shift in her power, status, and authority, as perceived by her subordinates. I will follow Vial, Napier, and Brescoll’s (2015) paper, in which the tenuous relationships between power, status, and authority, and the effect of those relationships on legitimacy, as perceived by subordinates, are examined in regards to female leaders and their attainment of legitimacy. I will apply their insights to
Turner’s interview to shed light on the evolving nature of gender bias in her case. This will provide a baseline from which to start evaluating how effectively her moral foundation shifted in the environment in which Turner thrived. This will also highlight whether or not Turner used one of the leadership styles discussed in Vial, Napier, and Brescoll’s paper which are effective for female leaders to attain legitimacy.

In my assessment I will address the following research question: does a woman change the moral foundations of her personal identity in the process of developing her professional identity? To identify possible changes driving Viola Turner’s identity entrepreneurship, I examine her moral foundations. Specifically, I apply moral foundations theory to assess whether Turner did change her moral foundations to gain legitimacy as a pioneering black woman acquiring a leadership role in an all-men board of a black-owned insurance company at the onset of the 20th century.

To verify the above assessment, I review relevant schools of thought on women in leadership and discuss how they apply to Viola Turner’s case. Intersectionality of gender and race is at the heart of these schools of thought that supplement moral foundations. It provides a bridge theory positing that social phenomena, and more specifically social inequalities, are an outcome of the complex relationship between social identity constructs and a subject. Therefore, the insights from the schools of thought are applied to identify the multiple aspects of Turner’s identity. Once the Moral Foundation Theory is applied, it is used to assess if and to what extent Turner’s foundations of her intersectional identity shifted to help her attain legitimacy in her professional career. This change in moral foundations is assessed by using computer aided text analysis of her moral foundations. Turner’s assessed changes are compared to insights from
relevant schools of thought with the objective of explaining why and how female leaders adapt to
the business environment to attain legitimacy.

In summary, I examine in this thesis how the configuration of Viola Turner’s moral
foundations changes from the time period before to the time period after she enters the
organizational context. The case of Viola Turner is chosen to be analyzed in this thesis because
of rich information available in her autobiographical interview describing her life and the specific
nature of her employment. The use of her interview is conducive to employing the method of a
critical biography.
Chapter II: Method

In this thesis, I use the methodological approach of critical biography to analyze intersectional identity entrepreneurship of Viola Turner. This biographical approach to writing and analyzing a life story is focused on the critical moments of and events in the subject’s life that are analyzed to uncover the nature of the studied phenomenon and the context that shaped it (Jacobs, 2007; Gibson 2014).

The critical incidents of Viola Turner’s life story are collected from a rich transcribed autobiographical interview that was conducted with her by Weare (2006). The collected data is analyzed by the computer-aided textual analysis, which is complemented with a theory-based narrative analysis. The results of the analyses are interpreted in a contextualized manner.

In this way, the interpretive autobiographical approach helped me to illuminate deeper aspects of intersectional entrepreneurship of Viola’s identity. Both her personal and professional identity are examined “by constructing a study out of stories and epiphanies of special events, situationally then within a broader context, and evoking the presence of the author in the study” (Creswell, 2008, p. 88). In applying the method of critical biography to the case of Viola Turner, I followed the recommendation of Jacobs (2007, p. 105) to research the “subject’s values and background, important roles he or she held, contextualized to theory and practice, and the social and historic context.”

2.1 Critical Biography of Viola Turner

Viola Turner was born in Macon, Georgia on February seventeenth of the year 1900. Her mother coming from Clinton, Georgia was sent to Macon to attend school and live together with her older sister. At the age of fifteen, Turner’s mother married her father, from Fort Plains,
Georgia. At age sixteen her mother gave birth to Viola. Her father worked as a cotton sampler through fall and winter and as a hotel man through the spring and summer. Her mother’s primary job was work at home, but she sometimes took temporary jobs during Viola’s school hours. While her father was the primary source of steady income, Mrs. Turner was the main decision maker because she was known for being determined and fiery in contrast to her husband’s sweet and easy temperament. The fact that neither of her parents had a prolific education most likely encouraged her mother to tirelessly encourage and pay for Viola’s academic interests.

Turner grew up in a happy home, rich in social interactions where she enjoyed exclusive attention from her parents and even indulgence as her childhood imagination dictated.

“And, of course, they were my brothers and sisters and another day, they may be my cousins. And I would get up in the morning and announce, "Cousin Fanny, what are we going to do?" And they indulged that. They would be the cousins all day. Cousin Philip. Or they might be my brother and my sister. And they went along with those fantasies and junk” (Weare 24).

Viola had the opportunity to attend minstrel shows and plays. As the only child and a female, she never experienced physical berating from her father while her mother, a tenacious and driven woman, “whipped” to discipline Viola frequently although never severely (Weare 3). Her mother’s drive to garner respect was mirrored in Viola. For example, Mrs. Turner worked for a white an Ear, Eye, Nose, and Throat Specialists, Dr. Cunningham, for an extended period of time and garnered respect enough to be sent to help care for an infant patient of his. Her report was exemplified again when impressed by her care the family asked her to stay on after the child was cured. These jobs that she performed with commitment were still second to being a mother, as Viola emphasizes, saying that her mother always saw her off to school and home again. She worked at intervals for the benefit of Viola, such as working when she wanted her to have a piano
and music lessons. Often musicians would ask to play on their piano, as having a piano at all was effectively a status symbol in their neighborhood. Lonny, a regular at their piano, was a ragtime pianist who Mrs. Turner would often shew out of the house for influencing Viola to love ragtime over her classical lessons. Her father’s work was steady but any luxuries desired for Viola were paid for by Mrs. Turner through her out-of-home work. The joy of their household was sometimes derailed, however, by Mrs. Turner’s illness. Often finding herself home alone with her mother when her father had to travel to cotton centers, Viola would be responsible for getting to the one phone available in the neighborhood to call the doctor if her mother woke her up. This happened frequently enough to make Viola extremely nervous.

In spite of her illness, Mrs. Turner managed to allocate the one-dollar monthly tuition for Viola to attend an American Missionary Associations Congregational Church. Although racial segregation was a part of Viola’s life from a very young age, she credits her parents with consciously protecting her from realizing the external racial segregation occurring the South however. She was always aware how skin color and appearance were determining factors for all social states. For example, she noticed how a childhood friend, May, with her weight/stature and darker coloring created perceptible behavioral changes in others. Being larger framed, May was only ever chosen for choirs when a talented voice was absolutely required, although May was an accomplished vocalist and pianist. Both the choir director, Bess Whittington, and Mrs. Turner were prejudiced against the child. This intra-gender comparison struck Viola because both women were very dark skinned, “the darkest brown, as May [was]” yet still were prejudiced, preferring light skinned and thin children for both the choir and Viola’s playmates. This awareness of skin color engendered an unusual skill in Viola who, after realizing the importance of nuances in skin color, became especially adept at describing the complex
nuances in appearance of the human complexion. Her very light skinned lifelong friends said she “[could] describe more shades of black than anybody I have ever seen in my life” (Weare 10). Viola responded saying “you light folks…. you look at all of us and call us all black. We’re not all black; we’re every shade under the sun; and I try to tell you the shade of everything” (Weare 11).

In realizing her mother’s and others’ prejudices at a young age Viola became keenly aware of how both her and other’s peoples color influenced their social acceptance. While her father was absent to influence of these prejudices, according to Viola, his sister was not. Also, her aunt, Viola Dodd, worked for white families and was often given things by them, was an especially vehement judge of the color hierarchy relating it even to feet. This environment of internal prejudice, rather than inculcating Viola, was a source of resentment for her especially as she became aware, in her late teens, of the extent of external prejudice existing as well.

Viola describes the very tenuous white and black racial environment that she encountered in her childhood neighborhood. Children, both white and black, would meet in the street to play together while women, white and black, would meet and have conversations, as if the segregated nature of life had not been reflected in this internal neighborhood. The segregation present in businesses, churches, and other external social structures reflected, however, the true nature of racism in her town and social environment. As a child, however, she was not consciously aware of the physical boundaries of segregation around her. She specifically recalls riding the streetcars on Sunday afternoons for entertainment:

And I don't recall ever feeling a feeling of where I had to get. Now, I don't know whether I was so indoctrinated that I just automatically went to a back seat. I can't believe that,…if it only picked up passengers coming up Chestnut and then down Patenaude, probably by the time I would get on it, it would be filled up and you'd just go on to the seat wherever you're at. Otherwise, I
cannot understand why I wouldn't have known something about it. I can't recall anything about going to the back of the bus.

Viola is confident to state “I could have been being discriminated against all the while, and not the least bit aware of it. Nothing in life pointed to it” (Weare 25). Crediting her parents for this unawareness, she says “I never had anything that spoiled my childhood” (Weare 25).

Some of Viola’s relationships were not tainted by prejudice. Like her father was, her maternal grandmother, living on a farm in Clinton, Georgia was, seemingly also unconcerned by the social impact of racial differences. Her grandmother’s farm served as a haven for Viola because it was isolating her from instances of racial prejudice in everyday life. The benefit of this isolation is illustrated by her interactions with her best friend while visiting Clinton who was a white girl named Cassie. They spent their days playing, lunching, and napping together during the summers she was in Clinton. Their friendship was childish, sincere, and involved raising silk worms for fun free from the racial tensions of life in Macon because both her grandmother and Cassie’s mother ignored difference in race letting the girls become very close friends. However, around when Viola turned twelve, Viola’s grandmother suffered a stroke and therefore Mrs. Turner had to move her to Macon after Cassie’s mother had informed her of the grandmother’s bad health. As a result, Viola never returned to the farm and consequently lost touch with Cassie. The loss of this friendship was at first saddening to her, but upon reflection, Viola felt that the relationship would have anyway eventually been trodden under racial pressure, as it would have had to conform to the extant social norms. Just as she never went back to the farm, she never developed another friendship free from racial tensions.

At the age of sixteen she suffered the terrible loss of her mother. Stubborn until the end, Mrs. Turner, while being determined about positive things, like schooling and cultural education, was also determined about her own will and refused to take prescribed medicine this
unintentionally accelerating her death that occurred during Christmastime in 1916. Following her mother’s death at age thirty-two, Viola went to school at Morris Brown in Atlanta, Georgia where she discovered her natural aptitude for finance. Her social awakening about racial inequality also occurred while Viola was attending Morris Brown. She specifically recalls that she was seventeen when speakers coming to the school discussed an upcoming vote about Civil War display. Their paper ballots that they used to show the students how to vote, and to inform the students to know that they did have rights awakened Viola from her “dream world” (Weare 17).

This awakening was not, however, her only transformative experience at Morris Brown. In particular, while studying there Viola met the head of the department Mrs. Thompson, who became her role model. She strove for excellence and believed in education as strongly as Mrs. Turner did, advising Viola to acquire more education and pushing her to achieve and to be recognized for her ability. She told Viola that Morris Brown was “a stepping-stone and [she’d] go on from here” and that in order to move on she needed additional education (Weare 7). This advice along with her mother’s influence, undoubtedly imprinted the theme of self-education that ran through her adult life.

Following her two years at Morris Brown, Viola was requested by the president of Tuskegee, on referral from a former classmate, to join this institution and begun work in Mississippi. Her father, however, having experienced the racism present in Alabama was very concerned about the move and for Viola’s safety. Turner states that shared the concern of black people in Georgia who felt that Mississippi was the worst place for them. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1919, Viola took her first job as a typist at Tuskegee making fifty dollars a month.

She did not stay at Tuskegee long, however, and moved to Jackson to work for the Department of Education in the early months of 1920. Upon arriving in Jackson, Viola met Mr.
George Cox, an executive of the North Carolina Mutual, at the place of Mr. Grossly, the superintendent of Negro Education in the state of Mississippi. This was a destined meeting as Mr. Cox hired Viola only 6 months later in June of 1920. She worked as a secretary for North Carolina Mutual and then helped open a North Carolina Mutual office in Oklahoma City. It was fated that Viola found her way to North Carolina Mutual because Mr. Merritt and one of the Spauldings, who both worked at North Carolina Mutual, had lodged in her home as a child. This was custom practice due to the difficulties that accompanied traveling in the Jim Crow South.

This job move was not just of economic significance to Viola Turner, however, as she fell in love and married the young man, Mr. Taylor, who went to open up the Oklahoma City office. When he moved to Oklahoma City in June, Viola followed, as both his wife and his coworker, in September. They were married from 1920 to 1923. During their marriage he was transferred to Alabama and Viola followed him. It was not long, however, until she decided to leave Mr. Taylor and applied to a law firm for a job. She was accepted by the firm and left to inform Mr. Cox in Jackson, Mississippi that she was resigning. After brief interludes in both Arkansas and Oklahoma, Viola finally returned to North Carolina Mutual in Durham, North Carolina in 1924 where she started her professional relationship with C. C. Spaulding. Mr. Spaulding who was affectionately known as Poppa and often acted like the great grandfather of the employees, disapproving of how the younger employees engaged their time. While he disagreed with many entertainments including dancing, drinking, and gambling, he took the modern freedoms he gained very seriously. Viola recalls him taking mutual employees down in groups of three and four to get registered to vote. As a pillar in the community and known to both white and black businessmen, being taken to register by Mr. Spaulding cut down on the multitude of ways officials kept black citizens from passing the knowledge tests. A fiery tempered man, Spaulding
was careful in these situations protecting both his employees and himself from the long arm of Jim Crow while taking full advantage of the rights gained so slowly.

While The Mutual was a predominantly black firm, no business can operate in a racial vacuum and Viola had unpleasant experiences with white businessmen aside from social and legal environments. These unpleasant experiences revolved around a general lack of respect, not only for the secretarial staff and black women in the building, in general, but also for executives like Mr. Spaulding. Victor Bryant, a white attorney kept on retainer by The Mutual, was a prime example. Because The Mutual felt compelled to have a white attorney, Mr. Bryant felt entitled and would walk into Mr. Spaulding office without acknowledging the secretarial staff or announcing himself first and would ask for Viola’s secretarial help without so much as a legitimate thank you for her efforts. This type of behavior was common from white businessmen but was mitigated with direct acknowledgement and for personal gain, as in the case of Mr. Bryant who became respectful after decided to run political office. On top of Mr. Bryant’s change in attitude, one other event created a particularly searing realization for even him. As legal representation for the Mutual, Bryant was asked to hold a dinner for some examiners that had come to Durham and held the dinner at a white Club he was a member of. Very quickly he understood his mistake as the president of the company, Mr. Spaulding, couldn’t even be presented because of segregation, a glaring and embarrassing oversight that seemed to stem from his new respectful tones.

Durham in general provided a bright cultural canvas on which Viola painted her personal life thanks to the North Carolina Mutual, or The Mutual. Like Mr. Spaulding’s push for voter registration, the strive for social justice was strong in Durham thanks to the prolific business environment. The Algonquin, a tennis club founded in Durham, is an example. Lead by Beth
Whitted, head bookkeeper at the Mutual, and W.D. Hill, the Mutualities, a short hand for the businesses in Durham, and prominent citizens supported the club which acted not only as an athletic outlet for youth but also a meeting space for co-ed clubs and even hosted NAACP meetings. The Durham Committee is another example of the social activism of the city whose attendance included all walks of African American life all pushing for progress and improvement. Viola didn’t just participate in social activism but attended parties with a wide array of people and enjoyed the many social groups available including church groups, bridge clubs, and party groups who all worked to bring entertainment to Durham. Many of these events were put on to raise scholarship funds by groups Viola was involved in and often tickets were sold to white people who mixed into the crowd without segregation. Obviously this was an odd occurrence considering that black people segregated themselves when attending white events. In the midst of adjusting to Durham, Viola met and married her second husband, Lawyer Thompson, in 1925. Mr. Thompson was a lawyer in Durham but their marriage did not last long and she left him in 1929.

Her personal and professional lives, as evidenced by her romantic entanglements alone, were varied and diverse thanks to her spunky attitude and self-driven nature. While some of the duties inherent in her secretarial position, like being sent to purchase corsages for special guests, irritated Viola she was aware of the gender biases of business. She did her best to work around them, excelling when and where she could but being cognizant that women “can be smart, as long as you’re not obviously smart” (Weare 39). It was in this theme that Turner strategically worked her way up in North Carolina Mutual, saying that “sometimes I was a whole lot smarter than they were…but I was also smart enough not to have acted like I was smarter than they were” (Weare 39). Viola was careful and diligent and was promoted to assistant to the Treasurer along with
another young man and was again promoted to assistant Treasurer, again along with the young man. After their second promotion, Viola discovered, inadvertently, that the young man was making more than she was for the same work. Upon the realization, Viola took the evening to think over her best course of action and the next day went to speak with each of her superiors to discern the reason for her wage gap, known now as the wage gap. Turner says that this was the most egregious form of sexual discrimination she faced but she took it head on, and received her fair pay raise.

After her divorce from Mr. Lawyer Thompson in 1929, Turner moved in with the Coxes and then into the Clerk’s Home operated by The Mutual. It was while living at the Clerk’s Home that she experienced a more insidious form of gender bias while sitting on her own front porch. Poppa came across Ms. Turner wearing a pair of overalls and was irate and planning on having her fired. Having worn pants as a child Viola could not understand the fuss and eventually Mr. Spaulding was talked down by Mr. Kennedy, the office manager, but this along with the following incident stuck with Viola and enforced the importance of appearance, especially for women. Turner wore a red dress to work and was, again, berated by Mr. Spaulding and informed that it was inappropriate for the business environment. While Viola resented Poppa’s sense of entitlement in determining what she could and could not wear, she took his comments and began dressing almost exclusively in suits. While this represented a moral defeat for Viola, it was also proved a valuable lesson that increased her professionalism and kept her from falling prey to ‘sexualization’ based on her clothes.

Viola not only recognized the bias towards her but also towards other female coworkers, however. Most notably Bess Whitted, as mentioned previously, worked at The Mutual for over 25 years but did not make the advancements that Viola did and when Viola inquired about this,
Bess’ financial affairs appeared to be the source of her stagnation. This perplexed Turner as she knew, from personal experience, and almost none of the male executives could handle their money to any better degree. Bess’ temper also was used as an excuse when Mr. Cox was known to have a similar, if not worse temper. Viola’s distinct awareness of these biases, as when she was a child recognizing racial bias, helped her navigate her professional environment and climb the ladder. Ironically, though she said she “never had any thought of promotion...it never entered [her] mind; never thought about until well after it started happening” (Weare, 43). Perhaps it was her focus on personal improvement rather than a focus on recognition that made her a natural leader and well positioned to rise within the firm. Unlike some coworkers, a man in particular, who worked to make sure others didn’t succeed because it imposed on their potential success, Turner focused on internal improvement.

More so than her relationship with male coworkers, her relationship with female coworkers was tainted by gender bias. Viola cited multiple incidents where subordinates were very concerned about working under her, only to find that they were misguided in their worries. Overall, however, she had the feeling that many women have even in today’s business environment that the highest potential for discontent and discord came from female coworkers, rather than male. This female and female bias, reminiscent of the internal racial bias she witnessed as a child, confused Turner as she noting that “they were at each other’s throats...women against women instead of being darn glad to see one woman making it” (Weare 45). She credited this to an air of intense competitiveness among females in the professional environment that she had to work against with female subordinates to create healthy professional relationships. She expected the same respect from female coworkers as well as male coworkers, however, and would go so far as to formally request male superiors to address her by her last
name rather than to assume familiarities and use her first name. While this grated on some, it reinforced Viola’s reputation as a serious coworker to be respected rather than dismissed, which actually earned her respect in Poppa’s.

As Viola rose in the company, travelling became an important part of her job. In 1936, she recalled two eye-opening train rides. Even after the strides that had been made, Viola came across a dining car porter who sat her with someone she could only assume was a “hardened prostitute” (Weare 3). Although his racism was tempered with an experience with a black porter who treated Viola with the utmost respect and pride for being a successful black woman. This seemed to be the most extreme case Turner experienced but this type of racism affected all African Americans trying to travel in the Jim Crow south. This reinforced the importance of personal network that many business people used to find housing arrangements when traveling. It was clear that travel arrangements could be upset thanks to personal prejudices so the community of hosts and their homes represented a safe haven that these professionals could rely upon.

When she became attached to and eventually the head of the treasury department, Viola’s travel mostly took her to New York and Wall Street, specifically. Her time working with investment bankers from New York exemplified just how adept she was at navigating the gender biases she faced. These predicated from not only working with these men but also simply being present in the male dominated field of finance. Viola was always open and honest about asking for and/or needing guidance, which investment bankers were happy to give to a willing pupil, regardless of her sex. Playing off of her notion that businessmen always want to be the smartest in the metaphorical room, she found that not only did she get the information she needed but also created good relationships with these professionals. This benefitted her throughout the rest of her career as Treasurer of North Caroline Mutual. She also ordered books on investments reading
them cover to cover and used that knowledge in the relationships she built on Wall Street to learn and get advice from businessmen who respected her honesty and never felt threatened, thanks to her strategic behavior exhibited when addressing them. Thanks to this vein of self-improvement, Viola started by taking it on herself, as the assistant to the Treasurer, to learn about investments when the Mutual deciding to start investing and then eventually managed the shift from a mutual fund portfolio to a stock portfolio based on her knowledge, both studied and garnered from other professionals.

As Viola gained professional success, she also found personal happiness in 1946 with her third husband, Pops, to whom she was married for twenty-seven years until his death in February of 1970. He was a calm man with a background in professional sports. He was, according to Turner, proud, rather than envious, of her success and protective of others treating her fairly. As a result of her tireless drive to educate herself in her field of finance, Turner was appointed Treasurer of the Mutual in 1957 and secured a seat on the board of directors. She shared five years of retirement with Pops from 1965 until his death in 1970 and her death eighteen years later in 1988. Turner remained in Durham, the place that became the epicenter of her professional and personal triumph until her death rather than returning to her childhood home of Macon. She remained active in her Durham social circles even at the age of seventy-nine, hosting parties, playing bridge, and enjoying the friendships she made over her tenure at North Carolina Mutual.
Chapter III: Literature Review Contextualized to Viola Turner Case

I applied to Turner’s case the Moral Foundations Theory as the primary theoretical frame for addressing the general research question of this thesis. It is supplemented with intersectionality, which is the theory positing that one’s identity is, to some degree, a function of many socially constructed identities. These identities are applied to any person based mostly on their race, sex, and class. Intersectionality is used here to interpret the subject’s (i.e. Viola’s) moral foundations with the social theories explicated by three schools of thought addressing intersectional identity entrepreneurship and leadership. The first school of thought addresses differences in leadership skills between men and women. This is applicable to evaluating the childhoods of modern CEOs that I use for a comparison between them and Turner. The second school of thought addresses the active management of one’s identity, as illustrated in Sally Riad’s (2011) article “Invoking Cleopatra”. Riad examines how women in general, and Cleopatra specifically, are subject to power binaries that put them at a disadvantage and how a woman needs to reassign her position in these binaries to attain legitimacy. Finally, the third school of thought addresses the typical characteristics of women, in terms of effects, both positive and negative, on legitimacy attainment. In the context of gender bias, this is discussed in Vial, Napier, and Brescoll’s (2015) article “A Bed of Thorns.” I am examining Turner’s environment and her characteristics, revealed through moral foundations text analysis, to make a comparison between Turner and other accomplished female leaders.

Intersectionality is a bridge across the three schools of thought. Patricia Hill Collin’s (2015) article entitled “Intersectionality’s Definitional Dilemmas” examines the shifting and amorphous definition of intersectionality in modern sociology. Collins cites a general consensus surrounding intersectionality as “the term intersectionality references the critical insight that race,
class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities” (2015, p.37). Intersectionality is particularly sensitive to power relations and social inequalities due to its emphasis on socially constructed subsets of identities into which people are divided. Intersectionality, at its heart, is a knowledge project in and of itself growing in response “to social formations of complex social inequalities” and finding the ties between these inequalities and the broader social forces that create them (Collins, 2015, p.6). Collins also draws attention to a growing theme in sociology of studying how identities that intersect across multiple forces, like race, class, and sex, create distinctive social experiences (Goldberg 2009).

As it is so critically tied to finding and examining social inequality, intersectionality has been long applied to racial inequalities and its resulting power relations. This makes it very effective in the case of Viola Turner and helpful in relating how gender, race, and class play into her personal and professional identities. It acts as an extension to Turner’s moral foundations that can bridge the shifts in her moral foundations that she reconfigured to gain legitimization by aligning her personal and professional identities with the social forces at play. However my interpretation of intersectionality with moral foundations theory is informed by both support for and critical of moral foundations theory, which are described in subsequent sections.

3.1 Support for Moral Foundations Theory

In the 2012 article written by Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, Sena Koleva, Matt Motyl, Ravi Iyer, Sean Wojcik, and Peter Ditto, the authors bring together the foundations, uses, and criticisms of the Moral Foundations Theory (MFT). The origins of MFT lie in “the idea that human morality is derived from or constrained by multiple innate mental systems, each shaped by
a different evolutionary process” (Graham et al. 5). Four claims act as the corner stones for MTF: nativism, cultural learning, intuitionism, and pluralism. Nativism is an integration of the evolutionary and cultural learning explanations of human behavior explaining human nature as innate, as defined as “organized in advance of experience” (Graham et al. 7). These pre-organized behaviors are then revised based on experience. Personified as a book going through an editing process, innate human behavior is a first draft provided by Nature, which is then edited by cultural learning experienced as a child and then an adult. Cultural learning embodies the idea that “Culture and psyche make each other up” reinforcing Nativism because without it, only culture would inform human behavior leaving groups “free to invent utopian moralities” (Shweder, 1990, pg. 24, Graham et al. 9). Using the concept of a foundation, cultural learning can be described as identical foundations scattered across the globe and left to the indigenous people. While the foundations remained identical, the architecture of the structures constructed on top of the foundations would still reflect the indigenous people’s culture.

Intuitionism deals with making moral evaluations and asserts that these evaluations are most often made without deliberate processing, referred to as System 1 thinking (Stanovich & West, 2000). System 2 thinking is initiated by a demand to “explain, defend and justify our intuitive moral reactions to others” (Graham et al. 11). The combination of these two systems of thinking is part of the Social Intuitionist Model. This model represents the notion that moral reasoning, System 2 thinking, is initiated primarily for social purposes rather than discovering the truth behind a moral reaction. As it relates to MFT, SIM supports that idea that these automatic moral evaluations are related to cultural and social development and fall into groups that MFT attempts to identify.
These described cornerstones of MFT, have been explained by two different mental systems are in play in shaping human morality: monism or pluralism. Pluralism is evolutionarily based and, like physical evolution, holds that individuals whose minds had an innate behavioral foundation would have an advantage of individuals making decisions individually. A multitude of pluralist theories exist ranging from two, three, and four system theories. An attempt to unify two theories, the three ethics and four relational models theories, was undertaken by Haidt. However, this project was undertaken only to conclude that they could not be merged because “they are solutions to different problems: categorizing explicit moral discourse…and analyzing interpersonal relationships” (Graham et al. 5). This highlights the problem of having a theory with such a broad application that needs to be reduced to its sparsest form and spurred a solution that constitutes the modern MFT. Haidt and Joseph identified five moral senses to act as foundations: Care/harm, Fairness/cheating, Loyalty/betrayal, Authority/subversion, and Sanctity/degradation. Haidt and Joseph did not imply that this was an exhaustive list and even suggested a sixth foundation, Liberty/oppression (Haidt, 2012).

3.2 Criticism of Moral Foundations Theory

Many critiques of MFT exist but a majority of the criticisms cannot be substantiated. Critics of nativism, for example, expect genealogical or physiological proof to confirm the presence of a “first draft” but this would be nearly impossible considering the limitations on today’s technology to discover simple physical differences in populations. Critics of cultural learning argue that morality is self-constructed rather than a semi-product of the surrounding culture. Intuitionism, however, does represent a dilemma as the critique argues that the scale between intuition and deliberate reasoning should be more even than implied by MFT, and the
authors agree with this critique. Pluralism’s critics descend on two fronts where some follow a monist theory and others claim that important foundations have been left off. Even considering the critiques present for MFT, it still remains the most applicable theory with which to examine Viola Turner’s case study as the foundations relate closely to the factors that affect organizational legitimacy.
Chapter IV: Computer Aided Textual Analysis of Viola Turner Case

The analytical method of applying MFT to Viola Turner’s case is computer aided textual analysis. Based on an established moral foundations dictionary, the word choice used in her 1979 interview with Walter Weare is counted and analyzed to assess the change in the configuration of her moral foundations during the time periods of her childhood and her professional life. This analysis can reveal information regarding her ideological orientation and how she perceives and judges others, but more importantly it can reveal why intergroup discord may occur based on changing moral foundations. This analysis can help establish the relationship between Turner’s moral foundations and her professional success in attaining legitimacy in her position as a female leader.

Therefore, using computer aided text analysis, a change in the configuration of Viola Turner’s moral foundations was assessed over two time periods of her life—before and after acquiring her professional identity. The changes in the configuration of her moral foundations are discussed in terms of theories explaining the process of regarding women gaining legitimacy in management positions. The primary goal of this assessment is to evaluate the degree to which Turner changed her moral profile in order to gain legitimacy and how those changes are reflected in her behaviors.

To assess whether or how Viola Turner’s moral foundations changed in order to attain managerial legitimacy, computer aided text analysis was performed using CATScanner. This is the appropriate research approach to provide inputs for the qualitative analysis addressing the research question. Computer aided text analysis is characterized by high test-retest reliability thus providing more accurate results than those attained using human coders to perform the analysis (Schnurr, Rosenberg, Oxman, & Tucker, 1986., Rosenberg, Schnurr, & Oxman, 1990).
In this thesis, I used the CATScanner, a computer aided text analysis software developed by Dr. Aaron F. McKenny and Dr. Jeremy C. Short. With the use of this software, the two interviews conducted by Walter Weare with Viola Turner were analyzed in the form of selected excerpts that are specifically discussing both her childhood and professional life. For my analysis, I assessed the count of the terms used in the previously developed dictionary for Moral Foundations.

The interview used in this analysis was conducted on April 15 and 17 of 1979 by Walter Weare with Viola Turner, aged 79, for the Southern Oral History Program based at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill since 1973. The interview is separated by the dates conducted, the 15\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th}. The contents of the interview include events spanning Turner’s entire life, from childhood to retirement from North Carolina Mutual, thus making it a prime document that could serve as a basis to evaluate her moral foundations.

The text excerpts, analyzed using CATScanner, a computer aided text analysis program developed in 2009, were selected to capture a Moral Foundations dictionaries for authority, fairness, harm, ingroup, and purity, the dimensions developed by Graham, Haidt, and Nosek in 2009. The analysis contrasting moral foundations for her childhood and her professional life. Was performed in order to determine if a shift in Viola Turner’s moral foundations occurred for the purpose of Turner’s attainment of legitimacy and subsequent professional success.
Chapter V: Results

5.1 Analytical Examination of My Research Question

My inductive research required an abductive development of guiding provisional hypotheses. I hypothesized that the shift in Turners moral foundations would be a function of the relationship between Turner’s hunt for legitimacy and her time spent in the business environment. Turner’s moral foundations would change as the professional environment creates a demand for legitimacy which will, in turn, demand a higher authority rating. As I did for a higher authority rating, I hypothesized that Turner would have a lower fairness and harm ratings. As Turner matured, she became more aware of the gender bias prevalent in the professional environments of the emerging black-owned insurance companies. Therefore, she would become more aware of the fairness foundation but less sensitive to it as she understood, to turn a phrase, that the world was not fair. Her harm rate decrease would most likely occur as a result of being an emerging leader and trying to attain legitimacy from subordinates. This process is referred to as “backlash” by Vial, Napier, and Brescholl, describing how female leaders starting from a low legitimacy position actively try to reduce trademark “female” traits like harm. I also hypothesized Turner would show a higher ingroup rating, and a higher purity rating. The specific format of the business environment of insurance companies often requires a higher sensitivity to loyalty and therefore a higher ingroup rating. In addition to her loyalty and ingroup rating, her higher purity rating, also known as sanctity, could be an outcome of her entry into a male dominated organization such as North Carolina Mutual.

The text analysis revealed the clear percentage changes in Turner’s moral foundations from her childhood, when she was molding her personal identity, to her adulthood, when her
personal identity merged with her professional identity influencing her ability to gain legitimacy from her peers. Those percent changes identified are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Changes in Viola Turner’s Moral Foundations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral Foundation:</th>
<th>Childhood</th>
<th>Professional Life</th>
<th>%Δ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority:</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>-68.5489%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairness:</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>-61.4278%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harm:</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24.3952%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingroup:</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>-23.0676%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purity:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>145.8975%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results shown in Table 1 indicate that the moral foundations of authority and ingroup dominated Viola Turner’s identity during her childhood and youth. However, during her professional life, the dominance shifted to ingroup and the most changed occurred to the moral foundations of authority, fairness, and purity. This is discussed in the subsequent section of this paper.

5.2 Narrative Analysis Complementing Results of Computer-Aided Text Analysis

Fitzsimmons, Callan, and Paulsen’s (2003) article analyzes the backgrounds of C-Suite executives in order to assess what characteristics and experiences make female executives successful in a male dominated position of power. Five comparisons were made between Male and Female CEOs: mother and father roles, the role of schooling and early work experiences, the role of other important childhood experiences, the role of mentors, role models, and networking, and the role of visibility in progression and the source of the CEO appointment opportunity.
Based on these comparisons, I found that Viola Turner shared many traits with the Female CEOs based on my analysis of the interview conducted in April of 1979 by Walter Weare. My analysis of Turner’s interview, which included the findings of the interviews conducted with male and female CEOs, revealed not only many shared characteristics between herself and female CEOs but also some diverging characteristics.

In regards to Turner’s early childhood development, she shared almost identical experiences with the female CEOs in regards to their mother’s role in their development, with the exception of a strong sense of support for males that Turner experienced. Like the mothers of most female CEOs, her mother exemplified the traits listed in Figure 1, but she also perpetuated the male dominance stereotype, despite Turner’s belief that her mother retained the dominant control over the family unit (Weare, 45).

Her father, however, played a smaller role in her development of leadership traits, which is a large divergence from the fathers of female CEOs. Turner only cited the major influence of her father being his work ethic and integrity. Unlike the CEOs, she did not feel she was treated as a boy would have been and expressed the exact opposite impression (Weare, 3). This perception of her father’s small role in her leadership development places Turner outside of the norm for the female CEOs that may have contributed to her diverted rise into leadership. This difference represents an interesting paradox because Turner was not obtaining social capital in a typical way, through being raised as if she were a male child. This represents another diverging experience between Turner and the female CEOs as Turner knew that she was treated differently than a male would have been treated (Fitzsimmons, Callan, and Paulsen, 254).
Turner had almost identical responses to the female CEO respondents in regards to the role of schooling in developing leadership traits, Figure 2, diverging only on the role school had on her development of leadership. Her experiences at Morris Brown, specifically, nurtured her leadership skills when she was a teaching assistant for some of her mentor’s classes (Weare, 10).
It is difficult to pinpoint the difference this one trait development environment had on Turner’s success but the confidence stemming from experiences like these can certainly be seen throughout her career (Weare, 59).

Figure 2. The Role of Schooling and Early Work Experience
Other childhood experiences represent a singularly major divergence of Turner in comparison to both the female and male CEO respondents. This divergence could be attributed to mitigating circumstances surrounding Turner’s childhood including low income, racial stigma, and sexual discrimination, all of which precluded her from participating in sports and leisure travel with the exception of her grandmother’s farmhouse (Weare, 30). She did participate in choir, which, due to the aforementioned reasons does fill the role of a structured pastime. This activity potentially contributed a similar experience as team sports due to the nature of the task and requirement of teamwork. This team experience along with the death of her mother at the age of sixteen, a major disruption, encouraged the development of her self-efficacy.
Due to the aforementioned mitigating circumstances that impacted Turner more than they did the CEO respondents, it is difficult to ascertain the comparative benefits of these influences. Therefore, Figure 3 does not carry the same weight in regards to comparing Turner’s development of leadership skills and places heavier weight on the previous Figures exhibiting the effect of other childhood experiences.

The role of professional experiences is examined exclusively within the career context in Figure 4, including the roles of professional mentors as role models, networking, and promotions.

![Diagram of professional experiences](image)

**Figure 4. The Role of Mentors, Role Models, and Networking**
The presence of mentors was important for both male and female CEOs but with different implications for either gender as Figure 4 shows. Females claimed their mentors gave them “clear guidance…, integrity, and stewardship” (Fitzsimmons, Callan, and Paulsen, 2013, p. 256). Male CEO respondents echoed these claims but only half of them claimed to have had influential mentors (Fitzsimmons, Callan, and Paulsen, 256). Turner mentioned several mentors and role models, but the head of her business school, Mrs. Thompson, was mentioned as particularly influential in pushing her forward, having integrity in her work, and developing integrity and self-efficacy in her work (Weare, 49). Aside from developing business skills, the CEO respondents also had to develop social capital in order to be effective in their executive roles. Mentors aid this process by providing roadways to more accessible social capital than it is accessible in closed office environments and in tiered industry conventions. Turner diverged from both genders of CEO respondents in respect to networking. She neither kept in touch religiously with old acquaintances nor participated actively in industry or professional conventions. Her involvement, rather, centered on social and religious clubs but even within these groups, Turner seemed to be relatively private, actively keeping her business and personal associations separate.
Figure 5. The Role of Visibility in Progression

In regards to role visibility and progression, it is noticeable in Figure 5 that female CEOs often held more jobs and moved outside of their original industries, some moving several times, in order to bypass “blockages” in their career path (Fitzsimmons, Callan, and Paulsen, 256, 2013). Male CEO respondents did not encounter these blockages and could follow clearly focused career development plans. The result for females was “less specific industry experience, but a broader range of experience across similar issues in different industries” (Fitzsimmons, Callan, and Paulsen, 256, 2013). Turner did change industries, moving from education into insurance, but she experienced the bulk of her training and advancement in the insurance industry. This specialized industry experience could account for her great industry success despite her slower start.
As a whole, Turner had similar experiences to the female CEO respondents in regards to their early experiences and adult habitus, forming a common pool of experiences from which successful leadership skills are forged. Additionally, Turner’s cemented sexual identity was a product of her era, indicating that women’s success is irrevocably tied to accumulating social capital as with male professionals. These differences in acquiring social capital, however, could be the origin of Turner’s divergent path to success.

In her article, Riad (2011) examines the shifting nature of Cleopatra’s reputation deriving its implications for the modern concept of a leader. The reason for researching Cleopatra was her role as a “different” leader that is relevant to modern female leaders that act as “outliers.” While the differences between Cleopatra and Viola Turner are pronounced, with Cleopatra reigning over Egypt and its far-flung kingdom and Turner occupying a Vice Presidency position in Finance, they both challenged the masculine archetype for leadership and shook up their male dominated environments.

Raid’s explanation of how Cleopatra could have had such a contradictory historical leadership role centers on the presence of binaries in regards to assigning power in human relationships. These binaries revolve around the basic power relationship between humans and include male/female, follower/leader, and adult/child. These binaries were common in highly structured societies, such as Ancient Egypt who framed female power in regards to “the other” (Raid 834). Relevant binaries to Viola Turner include leader/follower and male/female, where leader and male hold the position of higher power. Power comes into play with binaries as it is used to fix the meaning of one side of the binary in a more favorable position by giving them authority over the other.
This binary structure does not relate only to social relationships, however, but also to spiritual relationships, as evidenced in the case of Cleopatra. She leveraged her power to reassign her position in the binary from male/female to that of the religious symbol/follower by playing down her femininity in the eyes of her people. Using her influence, she reassigned her power position using coins and religious iconography. These were stamped with purposely unattractive images to stress her role as the leader over her image as an attractive woman in domains where she needed to legitimize her rule and the rule of her nation (Riad, 2011). By doing this, she was able to take charge of Egypt’s political affairs and distance herself from the sexually charged male/female binary, therefore legitimizing her power. This type of leveraging one’s binary position requires a strategic representation of the self. Turner exemplifies this strategic representation in her subtle rebellions against female stereotypes by refusing to allow a male superior to leverage his power in the gender binary over her self-expression in the form of selected clothes.

Both outside and within the professional environment, Turner was often reprimanded for her unconventional apparel but with different cultural subtexts. The first instance occurred when she was seen by Mr. Spaulding, a male superior of North Carolina Mutual, wearing denim pants on her front porch. He tried to have her fired when the office manager ignored his complaint as did Turner, who continued to wear pants outside of the office (Weare, 90). In another incident Turner wore a red dress to work one day, “the dress that wasn't fancy or anything, but it was red” was quickly reprimanded by Mr. Spaulding, who was affectionately known as Poppa (Weare, 90). She never wore the dress again. The different reactions to these two instances highlight the different perceptions of masculinizing dress versus feminizing dress. Turner leveraged her power as an independent woman that didn’t require a man to tell her what to wear when she projected
herself on an equal footing with men by wearing pants. In contrast, however, she grudgingly accepted her subordinate role in the power dynamic related to feminizing herself through a provocatively colored dress and did not repeat this sexualization of her appearance again. Mirroring Cleopatra’s strive to legitimize her rule, Turner sought to legitimize her identity as an equal opportunity employee and citizen by protecting her right to masculinize her appearance but also avoiding an overly sexualized feminine appearance.

As evidenced in both Cleopatra’s and Tuner’s cases, the main binary a person embodies is based on a gender schema, and that initial binary of male/female majorly shapes the interpretation of leadership ability. Both Cleopatra and Turner embodied a gender schema that differed from the stereotype of a leader. This difference nudged them to escape their binary, Cleopatra with her strategic marketed image and Turner with her quiet refusal to accept a stereotyped gender-based appearance requirement. There are, obviously, vital differences between the two of them outside of their obvious power differentials. Cleopatra was extremely sexualized by almost all historical accounts, with the exception of Arab scholars who credited her with great academic prowess. This was done in order to strip her successful legacy of legitimacy and reduce her intellectual influence because of her successes as a woman in a male dominated world and what that meant for challenging Greek and Roman egos (Riad 2011). Turner did not face the same kind of sexualized environment as backlash to her success most likely because of her slow rise to power, enlightened time period, in comparison, and selective rebellions against particular gender schema. While these differences are pronounced, both women’s attempts to work against their gender binary took a similar course.

Vial, Napier, and Brescoll’s paper discusses the persistence of gender bias in leadership positions despite the educational advances accomplished by women. The issue is not in finding a
path to attaining leadership positions but in the continued bias that women face about their ability to perform leadership tasks in the position. The authors proposed a theoretical model that hypothesized lower legitimacy perceptions of female leaders in relation to male leaders. This model posits that women are likely to exhibit backlash avoidance behaviors, in interactions with their subordinates leading to their lower legitimacy perceptions. Backlash refers to the self-reinforcement cycle that maintains the status quo and reinforces gender bias, which is not limited to male bias towards females, however, but persists across both genders (Vial, Napier, and Brescoll, 2015). Turner experienced an intra-gender backlash, as she noted, “I think that I had more potential resentment coming from the girls. Girls don't like to work with women” (Weare, p. 65). Viola recognized that this backlash was the product of power, status, and authority. In her view, the professional experience and interpersonal talents of the leader, influence the degree to which the leader is respected and admired. Therefore legitimate power had to be deserved and justified in the eyes of the leaders’ subordinates. The resulting power differentials reflect the perception of the difference in power between the subordinates and the leader. The ideal leader that has attained legitimacy and high status in the eyes of the subordinates, does not rely on formal power, and keeps power differentials low. This is problematic for female leaders because subordinates may create backlash and allot their female leaders lower status. Thus, forcing them to increase formal power and power differentials that will yield to subsequently lower legitimacy perceptions. In effect, this combination of low status and high power differentials leads to backlash avoidance behaviors in female leaders.

This backlash avoidance creates three different behavioral issues for women leaders (Vial, Napier, and Brescoll, 2015). As leaders, females are seldom unaware of the biases they face, and this unawareness exacerbates the perception of illegitimacy creating “precarious leader
psychology” of an ineffective leader focused on “avoiding losses and mistakes, and maintaining his or her powerful position” (Vial, Napier, and Brescoll, 2015, p.11). “Aggressive leader behavior” is also a common result of backlash avoidance where a female leader concerned with her legitimacy will act in a “explicitly dominant” manner to assert her authority. This was even an expected leadership behavior of Turner when she confronted a subordinate who assumed “after she had made quite an error in my department and expected me to explode” (Weare, 64). There is also a problem with the flip side, however, called “tentative leader behavior” in which females give up face time and lower status by appearing incompetent rather than unobtrusive. In other words, there seems to be no winning formula for a female leader to simultaneously address these biases and also rise above them to reach a similar level of status and power differentials as their male counterparts.

All of these expected stereotypic behaviors create a circular reference in which the female leaders are trapped, and therefore face illegitimacy (Vial, Napier, and Brescoll, 2015). The problem of illegitimacy also intersects with race biases but this curiously does not necessarily create lower legitimacy. Black women are often viewed as more competent and better aligned with the stereotypically masculine leadership prototype in relation to white women. This could apply to Viola Turner’s case as race and gender were both issues for her when networking in Wall Street. It is important to note, however, that not all stereotypically feminine characteristics create higher illegitimacy concerns. Warmth and communality, for example, serve to attenuate power differentials and contribute to legitimization (Vial, Napier, and Brescoll, 2015). This means that there is an entrepreneurial solution to the illegitimacy question for women that does not mean dissolving all feminine identity and conforming to a male gender schema. This intersecting identity entrepreneurship could be the transformational approach as it is the most
effective at encompassing stereotypically female characteristics while simultaneously increasing legitimacy. This approach embraces female characteristics and “may allow female leaders to sidestep behaviors that highlight power differentials” by being more encouraging and positive in opposition to a more masculine approach (Vial, Napier, and Brescoll, 2015, p.12). Turner exemplifies the transformational leadership style in several instances but most specifically in the aforementioned incident where she had to confront a subordinate about a mistake. Turner’s reaction in that situation was to nothing “but help her correct what she had done” (Weare, 64). This isn’t the only instance in which Turner used honey instead of vinegar, per se, engaging her feminine characteristics instead of working against the tide and taking on masculine characteristics.
Chapter VI: Discussion of Findings Uncovering a Shift in Turner’s Moral Foundations

Viola Turner is a single case used to address the research question examined in this thesis. Although single case studies have been atypical, they are known for aiding reflexivity “by revealing normative assumptions about appropriate sites of study and methods” (Chen, 2016). While using typical cases has come into vogue in historical research, using extreme cases, such as Turner’s, is more applicable for the inductive research approach employed in this thesis. Becker (1998) argues that researchers must first “identify the case that is likely to upset thinking and look for” a phenomenon before a deeper understanding can be gained. The approach used in this thesis is to employ an extreme case because a typical case, as Stinchcombe states, “does not afford the depth of rich data offered by extreme cases” because straining data to find “average” cases often inadvertently narrows the focus and limits claims (Chen, 2016, p.34).

The time period of emerging “black capitalism” in which Turner lived and her pioneering professional success qualifies her case as extreme. It was included as such in an ongoing verbal history collection called the Southern Oral History Program collection preserved by the University of North Carolina. One of the main reasons Viola Turner is the single case used in this thesis is that the amount of text necessary to run an effective text analysis is difficult to locate for other historic black businesswomen who attained a similar level of success in business. Typically, most of the archival documents related to these businesswomen are generally only business documents. In contrast, the textual richness of Viola Turner’s autobiographical interview allows for the examination of her moral foundations both before and after entering the professional environment. This text of her interview encompasses her childhood as well as her professional life. However, the lack of similar source documents prevents a comparison between Turner and other historic cases of successful black women.
Because extreme cases can be valuable in uncovering how successful intersectional identity entrepreneurs deal with unprecedented dilemma that they faced. Turner’s case is particularly well suited due to her work within a predominately African American company as it allows to virtually control for the intersection of race with gender within the organization (Chen, 2016). Racism created and exerted its own pressure on Turner’s legitimacy, but Turner’s work in an almost exclusively African American firm allows to control partially for the general effects of racism on legitimacy of a professional African American woman as a leader. Turner’s extreme case of acquiring legitimacy while dealing with these social pressures exemplifies “how organizations concentrate and wield power” without the explicit participation of “the market and state and civil sectors” (Chen, 2016). But yet, they allow windows of opportunity for intersectional identity entrepreneurs to succeed, even at the cost of shifting their moral foundations.

This shift in Viola Turner’s moral foundations shows that Turner experienced a decline in her authority rating, which impacted how Turner was granted legitimacy by others (Graham, Haidt, Koleva, Motyl, Iyer, Wojcik, Ditto, 14). This rating suggests that Turner had placed a high degree of focus on gaining legitimacy with superiors, leaders, and industry institutions. The acquisition of legitimacy could be attributed to not only Turner’s focus on self-education but also, to the overall changing landscape of opportunity for African American leadership brought about by the civil rights movement. The challenges related to the traditionally stationary power binaries of white/black and male/female required an increase in power differentials to overcome a lower legitimacy perception of leaders (e.g. Viola Turner) by subordinates (Rial, 835) (Vial et al., 3).

Turner’s shift towards lower fairness rating could have been a function of the social environment. She specifically says in her interview that she was not aware of the extent of
segregation until she moved away from home, when she began her professional career, saying “well, to tell you the truth, I had to leave home before I really became aware of how segregated I was, and the things you couldn't do and could do” (Weare, 57). Turner became aware of gender bias in the business environment interactions, however, when she was passed over for a raise in deference to a male who was not her professional equal (Weare, 41). While she knew how to react in that situation with minor forethought, as her career progressed she learned to diverge away from the “tit for tat” behavior in order preserve relationships with superiors. In contrast, she made sure that her own relationships with subordinates and coworkers were fair and just (Graham et al., 14). The best example of this type of behavior is exemplified in her a recollection of an incident with a subordinate in which the subordinate worried about the backlash and she recalled saying “The important thing was correcting your error. The only thing I can think about is what can we do to get that corrected? And we corrected it, didn't we?” in order to calm the worried subordinate (Weare, 45). It appears that while Turner recognized the politics of fairness in her relationships between herself and superiors, she actively worked to ensure sincere fairness in her relationship with her subordinates.

In her professional career, Turner had an increased sensitivity to harm. This could be due to Turner being an only child. Before becoming active in the professional world, Turner seemed to only be mindful of a very small circle of friends and mentors. When she started working, however, she was forced to be aware of many others. Gossip was especially important, and prevalent in large offices, as it impacts harm as the foundation behind making moral judgments on the subjects of gossip. Turner became increasingly sensitive to the proliferation of gossip both within the insurance industry and in Wall Street, which surely influenced her increase in the harm rating.
Turner’s ingroup rating decrease, as a percentage of the total words analyzed, shows Turner’s decrease in attention towards forming “cohesive coalitions” (Graham et. al., 14). I argue that this is due to Turner’s self-drive to learn and advance her position. She formed these cohesive coalitions but did not rely upon them as the only resource to attain success. While she does discuss forming relationships with people on Wall Street, as she learned how to entrepreneurially manage her subordinate identity in power binaries, such as teacher/student and male/female, in order to get access to knowledge without restricting the flow of information. Much like Cleopatra in her relationship to foreign leaders, Turner entrepreneurially managed her intersectional identity with regards to specific relationships in order to gain access to information. In doing this, the need for cohesive coalitions to advance was secondary as Turner relied on herself rather than relationships. Turner recognized this in her interview, saying:

And the other thing is, in the instances of these other women that I have named or know about, their relationship put them more or less where they were, or their investment in the company—they had some hold in the company, something like that. Of course, with me, I was just a little stray that came along. So that probably makes a difference (Weare, 46).

This statement is instrumental in understanding Turner’s attainment of legitimacy as she relied less on ingroup and more on herself.

The increase in Turner’s purity rating could be attributed to several developments. As she matured, the nature of the purity foundation became clearer and more important. I believe the process of maturation played a role in the increase in Turner’s purity, especially as she became aware of the gender biased business environment. Multiple instances are recollected in Turner’s interview surrounding sexually-based stereotyping norms for women. The most notable of these instances of gender-biased norms occurred when:
one day [she] went to the office in a red dress. The dress wasn't fancy or anything, but it was red. And Poppa met [her] in the hall and informed me that I couldn't come up there dressed like that. He proceeded to tell me that my dress was not proper for the office (Weare, 62).

While Turner admitted she had a temper, this experience wasn’t just an explosive moment between herself and her boss but also a turning point in her stance on purity saying:

He did bring a realization to me that I don’t think I really had before, that you should dress a certain way in business. That was the first real awareness. I don’t think I had ever gotten out of line particularly, but I was doing it probably on the basis of what I had to wear. I never had just really thought about it. I’d often thought that he may have been responsible for that without his knowing or my knowing it. Because, in a short while, I had gotten to the place—especially when I’d gotten to the place I was making a little bit more money—that I never had anything to wear to the office but suits (Weare 63).

This statement made by Turner illustrates an important turn in her purity rating, showing that a requirement to dress in a manner that de-emphasized her gender was necessary in order to avoid any notion of sexual deviancy and remain as gender-neutral as possible in this facet of her identity.

6.1 Comparisons of Moral Foundation Results to Propositions From Schools of Thoughts

In Fitzsimmons, Callan, and Paulsen’s (2013) paper, a comparison was performed on male and female C-suite executives to examine the extent to which perceptions of gender roles were formed during formative periods in their lives. It also examined how these perceptions were reinforced in their professional lives. As described by the comparison performed in the literature review, Turner had similar childhood experiences as the female executives. She did not have their same experience in the accumulation of social capital, however, as well as experience a
difference in the role of their father in childhood in regards to developing key leadership skills. This can be interpreted as a reason for her acceptance of her assigned gender identity as exhibited by her mother. This acceptance of her constrained gender identity might reflect the low emphasis on purity in her interviews. Turner never intentionally worked against her gender identity or was trained to work against it, like many of the female CEO respondents who recalled being treated as boys by their fathers.

The increase in Viola’s purity can also be compared to Cleopatra’s purity in her entrepreneurial identity management. While she never actively combatted the expectations her societal gender roles, Turner was very careful to never over-sexualize herself, as the red dress example shows. Her decreased authority rating is also reminiscent of Cleopatra’s. Turner actively managed her relationships with leaders on the Wall Street by accepting her stereotyped gender role and playing into the perceived gender roles of dominant males. While she didn’t gain legitimacy by distancing herself from her stereotyped gender role, like Cleopatra did with her coins, she did actively manage this role just as Cleopatra did by putting herself and her son on the south wall of the Temple of Hathor at Dendera (Riad 2011). While this was the style of the day, Cleopatra didn’t downplay her role as a mother in regards to spirituality just as Turner didn’t downplay her role as a woman in regards to attaining access to information. By actively recognizing her ability to manage her own identity in regards to specific relationships, as Cleopatra did, Turner actively managed and tolerated the gender bias that was present in her firm.

Turner’s drop in fairness and ingroup ratings are consistent with the low legitimacy perceptions model developed by Vial, Napier, and Brescoll. As gender bias is not restricted to male-female interactions, Turner’s lower ingroup rating seems to be an outcome of the female-female gender bias repeatedly noted in Turner’s interview. The male-female gender bias also
took its toll on Turner, lowering her fairness rating to accommodate the way in which females were called to run errands and buy gifts while experiencing a distinct wage gap. Turner sought to counteract these experiences by pursuing leadership opportunities. This leadership pursuit accounts for a multitude of Turner’s actions towards achieving legitimacy.

6.2 Conclusion

There is a phenomenon still occurring today that are reminiscent of the Rosa Park era that plagued the U.S. before the civil rights movement. These are the same phenomena that Viola Turner experienced in her thirty-six years at North Carolina Mutual, begging the question of why African American women still struggle with this problem. The answer is that we haven’t been asking the right question. The American workplace has changed to allow for diversity within its ranks and that has not been in vain. Today there are twenty-four female CEOs and four African American CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. These strides have left African American women behind because the efforts to diversify have created a new bias rather than curing the culture of our past. As researchers and leaders examine both the quantifiable and real-time evidence of what black men and white females bring to the management table, black females have been largely ignored because they fit into neither of the new identities of diversity: white females and black males. In order to understand this paradox, researchers must examine all forms of identities in a more detailed way using the lens of intersectionality, rather than reducing subjects to identity binaries. By examining this paradox in a more holistic approach through the lens of intersectionality, we will uncover how diversity can be more effectively managed.

In their advancement to management ranks, understanding how complex identity-subjects, such as African American female professionals, navigate relationships with subordinates and superiors, and therefore gain legitimacy, will shed light on how they balance
their power relationships and their identities. Uncovering whether they gain legitimacy through active or passive identity management will help provide a more nuanced understanding of not only the intersection between being black and female but also of the more complex examination of the other social identities, including sexual orientation, that are at play in a subject’s identity and emerge in their cultural interactions.

Viola Turner’s life and shifts in moral foundations exemplify how, even in a predominantly black firm, her gender identity, coupled with her racial identity, created both barriers and opportunities that her black male peers and white female peers did not recognize. Throughout her professional career, Turner entrepreneurially maneuvered the barriers because she actively tailored her identity to the context. Her experiences exemplify the prevalence of barriers to Black females in attaining leadership positions even when racial barriers are held to a minimum by working in an African American firm. The fact that many of the opportunities and barriers manifested in the case have been discussed and examined by other researchers makes Viola Turner’s case study even more important because the problems discussed in modern case studies are the same. This implies that despite greater diversity, as we have come to know it, it seems that the same problems that existed in 1936 are faced today in the modern workplace by African American women.
References


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