



Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America

Charisse Jones , Kumea Shorter-Gooden

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Based on the African American Women's Voices Project, *Shifting* reveals that a large number of African American women feel pressure to compromise their true selves as they navigate America's racial and gender bigotry. Black women "shift" by altering the expectations they have for themselves or their outer appearance. They modify their speech. They shift "White" as they head to work in the morning and "Black" as they come back home each night. They shift inward, internalizing the searing pain of the negative stereotypes that they encounter daily. And sometimes they shift by fighting back.

With deeply moving interviews, poignantly revealed on each page, *Shifting* is a much-needed, clear, and comprehensive portrait of the reality of African American women's lives today.

Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America Details

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Desiree says

While reading this I realized I picked the wrong time to delve into the subject matter and it was quite unintentional. I had borrowed it from the library and it was fast approaching the return date so I had to get a move on and read it.

Now why do I say wrong time? I say this because with all the negativity, bigotry & entitlement that is running rampant this book only served as a reminder and an emphatic confirmation of what African American women have to endure while navigating life in these here United States. I found myself nodding a lot and just downright frustrated with example upon example of injustices and biases against black women.

I also started to wonder more about the term 'shifting'. I understand what the authors were trying to convey in that black women have to take on certain identities in certain settings but my question is don't we all do that in *some form* regardless of race or gender in different environments? Everyone has to code switch in some way or the other so sometimes I thought the term 'shifting' to be slightly problematic.

On the whole, though I wouldn't exactly regard this as informative for me as it served more as confirmation, it was definitely helpful to have this information collated.

Christie says

A lot of this book hit close to home for me, and maybe that is a good thing. It explains a lot of what I have gone/continue to go through as a Black woman in modern society. Good read for gender studies, feminists, and Black/AA Studies students, as well as anyone interested in the psychological effects of 'shifting' to accommodate and 'smooth things over' for others.

Gail says

This book is based on a research project, The African American Women's Voices Project. One author is a psychologist, the other a journalist. A wide demographic is included in the study but the book also cites other authors and research to document the results they found.

The book explores nearly every aspect of a black woman's life: work, school, intimate relationships (especially between black men and women), depression, health, parenting, beauty, language, and the church. The concept behind the title is that in American society, black women have to "shift" psychologically and in other concrete ways (how they speak, how they dress, to whom they defer, for example) in order to survive racism and sexism. Shifting requires an ability to move in and out of various identities and the expected behaviors that accompany them based on the "audience" of the moment. The toll that "shifting" takes can be enormous.

I thought this book was especially skillful at showing how issues that are common to all women can be

particularly burdensome to black women because of their race and the cultural expectations that black women are subjected to. The topic of sexism in black culture is addressed as well, especially in the sections on relationships between black men and women and the "place" that women must accept within the black church.

The breadth of this book along with the research that forms the foundation, make this a great book for exploring the challenges of being a black woman today. This is suitable for both black and white women who want to understand more about what it means to be a black women in America at this point in our history.

Kimberly says

Wow.

That's all I can say after reading this book.

If you've ever received the compliment "Wow, you speak so well....." or "Wow, you're so smart" with an unspoken trail off at the end of the sentence, this book is for you.

If you've ever spoken to someone on the phone and then met them in person, only to have them say in passing "When I talked to you, I thought you were White." This book is for you.

If you've cringed at the hyper sexualization of thin, Black females, the "once a Black male makes over a million dollars, he gets a blond White girl" and know what Black Man's Kryptonite means, this book is for you.

If you've ever thought about having a "Strong Black Family", but the only men that approach you within your social economic group and education background are White men, this book is for you.

This is not a light hearted look into what it means to be African American and female in this modern world. This is a hard, educated look into the modern African American educated culture, the plight of the educated Black Woman, our relationships with the men in our racial group and how we relate to the "outside" world.

I read this book during February, complementing Black History Month. I must say, I have never been more hyper aware of my skin color in my whole life. Additionally, this book pushed my political views on issues regarding natural vs. relaxed hair, skin color and weight. It illuminated me on the inner race racism and backbiting with Black females as we "shift" to look better to members of Other Races. As a person that has experienced an older, Black woman's disgust at my non straight weaved hair, not anorexic, not attempting to pass to be White personality, I know first hand that this is a problem within our culture.

It's time people stop the inner racial self hate, face their anger, and stop trying to mask their skin color. We were born Black. And, unless you have Vitalago, we will die marking that box under "race" that we've done all our lives. This book puts a voice to that indescribable feeling that many of my fellow college educated Black female friends have had to face.

It's not a book on HOW to pass. It's a book on how we unconsciously pass, dancing around interacting with different people from different races with the burden of "setting an example".

If you are African American, educated, and motivated towards an intelligent and thought provoking life,

READ THIS BOOK!

Maya Reid says

I'm sure this work was groundbreaking when it came out, but it felt fairly dated and gender essentialist/heteronormative now. I'd love to see someone take on a similar project with a more modern mindset.

Koko Lewis says

Great information, but no solutions to the issues we face. It is based off a study so it is a long hard read. I definitely saw myself or someone I knew in more than a few stories.

Lori Hylton says

Read this book several years ago and it really spoke to me. But now that I'm at a much different place in my life I wonder if I will feel the same ? So it's on my re-read list. We'll see.

Kibkabe says

"Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America" is an eye-opening nonfiction book supported by countless interviews and a major study along with references to other studies that shows how black women "shift" — change themselves in one or several ways to appease white America and return to their true selves in black America — and the dangerous effects of those actions. The book brought up shifting in various ways, and though it became a somewhat traumatic read realizing the racism weaved into my life, it is a thoroughly investigated book that strikes a chord.

The chapters focus on so many issues such as black women dealing with the myths of promiscuity and criminality, depression from racism in the workplace and classroom, relationships with black men as friends and lovers, etc. The book is dotted with snapshot stories of women describing how institutionalized racism and sexism have affected their lives and how they live with those effects. For example, several of the women straightened their hair to abide by the European beauty standard to keep their jobs while others experienced sexual harassment by black and non-black men and felt they couldn't speak up because they'd lose their jobs due to race.

The one section I thought was lacking was the religion section on how African-American women are mostly Christian and deal with sexism in the black church. Except not all African Americans are divided into the two black church systems in America — African Methodist Episcopal and Baptist. The authors acknowledge this yet only focus on it. In the notes, 87% of the women who answered the surveys said they were Christian. My African-American mother is Muslim, so from that perspective, I know there are other religions we practice largely ignored in black media. These surveys should've been mailed to the religious groups

dedicated to African-American women such as those who practice Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Baha'i, etc. These women appeared ignored by the study simply from the authors' assumptions that African Americans are primarily Christian when in actuality it might not be the truth if these other groups were included.

Also the book focused on African-American women, but other black women see these issues and that perspective may also have been missing. As a black woman who's half first-generation American through my refugee father, I know this perspective as well is ignored by black media with the assumption that black people from Africa, the Caribbean, South America, Europe, and Asia don't understand racism as they live in America or don't see or feel it. From the title, it says "Black Women in America" but seems to only focus on African-American women, so this could be misleading. Again in the notes, 4% of women said they were born outside the U.S., but it's not explained if these are black women originally from another country or black women who had American parentage.

Though the book is almost 15 years old, the issues still resonate today even more so with the #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, and post-Trump women's movements.

Kate says

I gave this 4 stars because the information and findings of the research are very important to understand, Its weakness is in the editing and style of presentation. I understand that this has a target audience of both the black woman and her place and what she experiences in our society and the general public who my have never thought about the sexism or racism that black women have to deal with on a daily basis. With this in mind it has done a good job, though I would have preferred a different format.

As an older woman I can definitely identify with sexism in society and the pervasiveness in the workplace as I experienced this in my working years between 1959 and 2014. Abusive sexism that borders on harassment generally was targeted on the most vulnerable within the workplace. Misogynistic men never tease, harass women who have any power, they do pick on people they know need their job, single Moms, single women who might have a harder time walking away from employment. It has improved over the years from the blatant physical assaults women experienced in the years before the 90s...but for minority women it was definitely more apparent. One of the real failures of feminism is that it did not take up the cause of minority women in the 60s through 90s.

Racism is a factor that most white women don't as easily see either in social settings or in the workplace, often because they are unaware how much they have been influenced by its pervasiveness, and don't recognize that it does shape their first impressions of people of color. It takes a lot of introspection to recognize it within yourself as a majority member. It also take introspection for people of color to see that racism takes a heavy toll within their own communities, when it has been internalized.

This would be an important read for anyone in middle management, because that is the level that does most of the hiring, and where one sees the most prejudice in hiring where the preference too often is on appearance and common interests (sports activities, club memberships, same alma mater etc.) and not on experience or knowledge and education. I can remember clearly when I hired a trainee who I had met in a college where I was taking a continuing education course, she was one of the best students in the class, and was looking for a career change. I was very impressed with her and hired her. She was in her late 30s and quite plump, but had so much raw talent that I knew she would excel. I was lambasted by upper management, how could I hire someone who looked like her, a 'fat' woman, how would that look to clients and on and on. I prevailed and she did end up being one of our best employees. Strangely we did not have a department that interfaced with the general public, but women were generally hired based on their physical attributes rather than their potential. It was a good lesson for me as a woman to realize what the criteria really was, and it stood in contrast to the men hired who often were very unattractive, but felt that they should be surrounded by physically attractive women in the workplace.

This book has the possibility of being a way for people to shift some of their preconceived notions about people often viewed as 'other'.

Kelli says

The life and times of black women in America having to endure dual "isms" against women and African Americans.

Elisa Gusdal says

Enjoyed the discussion with the author at the NOMMO Forum.

Izetta Autumn says

Given the recent torture and sexual assault of Megan Williams, a 20-year old West Virginian who was held captive for several days, while she was repeatedly raped and beaten, and the Dunbar Housing Project sexual assault, I feel it's vitally important to read about the lives of Black Women (and all womyn) in America - especially as so many of us face violence. For me, reading is about good books - but also books that equip me with the ability to live a more full and aware life.

Check out:

<http://www.jumpcut.com/view?id=E44BFB...>

For articles re: Megan Williams and the Dunbar Housing Project crimes:

<http://www.palmbeachpost.com/news/con...>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6...>

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id...>

<http://www.cnn.com/2007/US/09/12/mart...>

<http://www.courttv.com/news/2007/0913...>

<http://www.courttv.com/news/2007/0913...>

<http://whataboutourdaughters.blogspot...>

Anthony smith says

Still reading

BMR, MSW, LSW says

I cannot articulate how deeply this book affected me.

If there were a freshman survey course about me at a university, this would be the first book on the syllabus.

I have so much to unpack and think about after finishing this book. I'd say 60 percent of the stories resonated with me at such a deep level, it was like reading a narrative of my life so far. The other 40 percent of stories I recognized in the lives of other Black women I know.

I don't buy many books anymore, but I am buying this one.

I'd love to read a similar book about the lives of other demographics of women (and men, for that matter) that are similarly disenfranchised by our society.

I very much hope an update to this book is in process, or at least in consideration.

CKE387 says

Deals with the duality of being black and female, encountering problems that neither black men nor white women face or could empathize with.
